

NIETZSCHE AND THE NOBLE IDEAL

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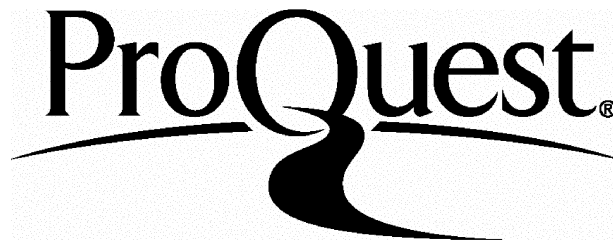
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis will examine Nietzsche's ideal of nobility which helps to form one half of the famous master / slave morality distinction and which comes to the fore so prominently in his later works, particularly in "On the Genealogy of Morals".

What is not often realized is that the noble ideal is not a late fruit of maturity but something which, in the form of a fundamental predilection, can be seen as early as "The Birth of Tragedy", most obviously in Nietzsche's opposition to Socrates. And even by "The Twilight of the Idols" the main points of criticism here remain essentially unaltered which further reinforces the observation.

The significance of this observation, though, lies in taking seriously the image of GM Preface 2 of one's thoughts and values growing with an organic unity, as a tree does, bearing witness to "one will, one health, one soil, one sun" and the similar claim in BGE 6 that "the moral (or immoral) intention in every philosophy have every time constituted the real seed of life out of which the entire plant has grown."

This thesis will attempt to do justice to these claims and to show what it is about nobility which appeals to Nietzsche and also what it is in Nietzsche which generates his commitment to nobility. This will be achieved by considering the master / slave distinction, the ascetic ideal and its self-overcoming, and the need (such as there is) for a new ideal. Not only will this contribute to the understanding of these areas but it should also provides sufficient insight into Nietzsche himself to help interpret his notoriously elusive positive claims and, in particular, to understand just why they are so elusive.

CONTENTS

Page	
2	Abstract of thesis
4	Acknowledgements
5	Abbreviations
6	Part I - Nietzsche's taste for nobility
23	Part II - The need for a new ideal
37	Part III - Nietzsche's new ideal
60	Part IV - A refined, life-enhancing nobility
75	Part V - Love of truth and love of life - Nietzsche's two conflicting drives
80	Bibliography

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ABBREVIATIONS

I use the following abbreviations to refer to Nietzsche's works:

A *The Antichrist*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale in *Twilight of the Idols / The Antichrist*, Penguin 1990.

BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin 1990.

BT *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. S. Whiteside, Penguin 1993.

EH *Ecce Homo*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin 1992.

GM *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc 1998.

GS *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Random House (Vintage) 1974.

TI *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale in *Twilight of the Idols / The Antichrist*, Penguin 1990.

WP *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York: Random House (Vintage) 1968.

Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin 1969

PART I NIETZSCHE'S TASTE FOR NOBILITY

§ 1. The search for a unifying instinct:

Although the noble ideal only comes to prominence in Nietzsche's later works, particularly in the last part of *BGE* and in *GM*, it is possible to see a predilection for what might broadly be described as 'nobility' as early as *BT*. This is not to point to an early version of the noble ideal but rather to identify a fundamental instinct or taste which Nietzsche possessed. In *GM Pref* 2 Nietzsche uses the image of a philosopher's thoughts growing with the organic unity of a tree:

...with the necessity with which a tree bears its fruit our thoughts grow out of us, our values, or yes's and no's and if's and whether's - the whole lot related and connected among themselves, witnesses to one will, one health, one earthly kingdom, one sun.

And the hope in searching for such a fundamental instinct of Nietzsche's is just this - to find an instinct or taste which can be seen as the seed for much of Nietzsche's thought. This is distinct from the task of trying to identify any theses which can be seen to run through a substantial body of his work. The unity Nietzsche describes could be present even if any such theses were lacking and their identification would thus not, on this view, be the final goal for an interpretation of Nietzsche. Such theses would be merely products of, and hence signposts to, the instinct in question. And we might equally insist that matters work the other way round - that there is no way of understanding the instinct independently of the thoughts and feelings which it gives rise to.

Furthermore, that we are aware of the motivatedness of his views is of primary importance as Nietzsche himself tries to caution us.¹ It is one of Nietzsche's most fundamental assertions that there is a tension between how our drives would like the world to be (so that they can function most powerfully and freely) and how the world is. And this means that we must be on guard on two separate grounds when reading Nietzsche - or, better, that Nietzsche counsels us to be on guard in two such ways. The first is to guard against the tendency of philosophers to baptize their prejudices as truths. In other words, some of Nietzsche's views may be errors -

¹ See *BGE* 5.

presumably errors favourable to, and conditioned by, one or more of his drives. And the second is that truth is not of unconditional value and so it may be contrary to our interests and to our pursuit of a rich and fulfilling life to accept some of his views, even if they were true. Conversely it could equally provide reason for accepting some of his erroneous views. And obviously an understanding of what motivates Nietzsche's views is vital on both counts.

This might appear problematic but if it is just as problematic as the idea of self-knowledge then there is no objection. We try to find some way of unifying our disparate thoughts and feelings, perhaps with the idea that there are certain fairly basic drives which we can see as responsible for, or reflected in, the thoughts and feelings which we have. If we then seek to understand a new thought or feeling (perhaps even the thought which contains the best interpretation of ourselves which we have so far reached) then we have recourse to the best model of our basic drives which we have formed so far. Often we will be able to make some sense of the new thought or feeling in this way (we gain a little more knowledge about our basic drives - that is, that under these circumstances they are liable to give rise to this) but sometimes we will not be able to do so and then the model itself comes under pressure. Do we blame the model or our ability to apply it or do we simply ignore the awkward experience? What do we try to change, or, what does change, as a result of the problematic experience? Is what we do, or what happens, a step forward for self-knowledge, for a better life, for both, or for neither? And should we even ask such questions at all?

I take it that this gives some flavour of the sense of intellectual vertigo which Nietzsche can induce once one starts to take seriously the conflict between truth and life, but if we return to the idea of organic unity and development then we can see that it is not only Nietzsche who espouses an organic view of his own work. The Russian symbolist poet, Alexander Blok, uses a similar image to describe the development of his own poetry: "Everything I have written serves as an organic development of what I wrote first - Poems of a Beautiful Lady." And that is as much to say: "You cannot understand my poetry without reference to Poems of a Beautiful Lady, for it is there that it all begins." And the same could equally be said about *BT*.

§ 2. 'The Birth of Tragedy', Aesthetic Values and Nobility:

That the importance of aesthetic values is something fundamental for Nietzsche and not derivative is obvious from *BT*. The aesthetic judgments come first, for example that Euripides represents a decline from the high point of Attic tragedy, and the attempt to provide some kind of explanation follows, but always in a manner which is imbued with the aesthetic experience (or lack of it) which gave rise to the judgment in question. The experience is too alive to be tamed by the attempt to capture it, unlike Kant's definition of disinterested contemplation which not only tames the experience but which points to an experience which can be tamed and hence to an aesthetically impoverished nature. For Nietzsche aesthetic judgment is instinctive in the sense that the aesthetic experience is both primary and powerful - his model is of thoroughly interested contemplation. There is no question of trawling through Euripides' theory of practice in order to decide whether Euripides is superior to Sophocles or Aeschylus. Euripides' inferiority is already established, already given by the aesthetic experiences themselves. This is the starting point and is never in doubt.

If we set along side this Nietzsche's formulation of aesthetic Socratism: "Alles muss verständig sein, um schön zu sein." and "Alles muss bewusst sein, um schön zu sein"² then it is no surprise to find Nietzsche in opposition to it. For when he has offered some explanation for his instinct that Attic tragedy was the pinnacle of ancient Greek art, still this is very far from rendering it "verständlich" in the Socratic sense. Nietzsche is not the first to find Attic tragedy "schön" because he is the first (as he thinks) to provide a remotely adequate characterization of it. The process of rendering a work of art "verständlich" is not a necessary condition for any aesthetic appreciation of it, still less, as Socrates would have it, the process of appreciation itself. Hence Euripides is not, despite espousing and practising aesthetic Socratism, a further step beyond Attic tragedy towards artistic perfection.

In a sense, then, Nietzsche is unabashed about proceeding from his instinct about the superiority of Attic tragedy and in making no secret that this is what he is doing. And here it is hard not to see Nietzsche as acting nobly in his own, later sense. The noble man glorifies his instincts as opposed to denying them and this is borne out³ in the difference between the

² *BT* § 12.

³ *GM II* 23.

Greek gods, who justify this life by living it as humans do, only in broader brush strokes and brighter colours, and the Christian approach which teaches man's original sin and claims that this life is justified only as a bridge to a better future, that it is an ordeal which must be suffered (in the literal sense) for the sake of this better future.

This idea of Nietzsche acting nobly is further reinforced by the presence of a similar opinion about Greek gods in *BT*. "Thus the gods provide a justification for the life of man by living it themselves - the only satisfactory form of theodicy."⁴ And this then suggests that *BT* is best seen as Nietzsche's passion for Attic tragedy producing a whole theory of art which exists for the purpose of placing Attic tragedy at its pinnacle and which scarcely disguises this intention. And if we recall the later passage in *BGE 5* where Nietzsche accuses philosophers of being advocates for their own prejudices, which they call truths, which they pretend to distil from pure, cold reason - the real nature of the process being something they hide even from themselves - then it is clear that Nietzsche at least tries to address this problem by being more open.

§ 3. Socrates and the Noble Man:

This approach to life, that of proceeding from and glorifying one's instincts, lies at the heart of acting nobly and in *BT* this is contrasted with Socrates, with the latter having Nietzsche's taste set against him. Socrates was apparently astonished to find important personages pursuing their calling without correct and certain insight but only out of instinct, and this "nur aus Instinkt", according to Nietzsche, takes us to the heart of the Socratic tendency which represents an inversion of the normal, more productive order of instinct and consciousness:

While in all productive people instinct is the power of creativity and affirmation, and consciousness assumes a critical and dissuasive role, in Socrates instinct becomes the critic, consciousness the creator - a monstrosity *per defectum!* (*BT* § 13)

And, by *GM*, this idea of the reversal of instinct and consciousness has become the idea that asceticism has stood nature on its head, offering a simple explanation as to why Nietzsche thinks a revaluation of values (*Umwertung aller Werte*) is necessary, namely so as to get nature

⁴ *BT* § 3

the right way up again.

It is often feared that the noble valuation opens the door to all kinds of monstrous excesses of behaviour but to insist that this must be the result is to hold Nietzsche guilty of unpalatable crudity, for, as the passage quoted above makes clear, the healthy role for consciousness is to caution the instincts and rein them in if necessary and hence the noble man is the man where instinct predominates, not where instinct runs wild. And Nietzsche emphasizes that one must be strong enough for such freedom in his portrait of Goethe, his favourite archetype for an admirable noble man.⁵ Also revealing is that by *GM* the word Nietzsche uses for noble is "vornehm" rather than "edel" for the former has connotations of being primary in a way which the latter does not. And for Nietzsche instinct is primary as well as noble. By contrast, consciousness is secondary, not only in that Nietzsche thinks it developed much later than other primitive instincts such as to eat, drink and reproduce, but also because it is weaker.

§ 4. The subordinate role of consciousness:

The question, then, is whether Nietzsche is right about the subordinate role for consciousness and even a cursory observation of life suggests that he is. Acquiring mastery of a technique invariably means making the technique instinctive. When we perform best we have no need of conscious thought or conscious effort. This is true of activities such as playing the piano or playing tennis but also of abstract activities such as integration in calculus. We bring in conscious effort when things start to go wrong and if our instincts were infallible then this role for consciousness would become redundant. Indeed, this is precisely where Nietzsche's diagnosis of Socrates originates. The instincts of Socrates' contemporaries were becoming unreliable and falling into disarray and that is why Socrates' teaching caught on. Socrates' success bears testament to a culture in decline, a decadent culture.

This criticism of Socrates suggests a view of consciousness as a corrective and as a teacher - that the will to render everything "verständlich" can undeniably be useful - but why then so stringent an opposition to Socrates? In later works it is Nietzsche's questioning of the value of the Will to Truth and his conclusion that truth is not of unconditional value which lead him into unavoidable confrontation with Socrates, who he sees as the founder of the idea that the

⁵ *TI 'Expeditions of an Untimely Man' 49.*

pursuit of truth is an end in itself (and, what is more, the one end); but this is less obvious in *BT*, though one could try interpreting the following in support of this view:

One man will be enthralled by Socratic delight in knowledge and the delusion that it might heal the eternal wound of existence... (*BT* § 18)

Rather, the source of Nietzsche's objection to Socrates in *BT* is that Socrates' consciousness (this is fairly synonymous with "reason") was over-developed in comparison to his other faculties (no Kantian overtones) and hence that Socrates was defective compared to Nietzsche's model of the productive man. But what authority does Nietzsche's model have? Nietzsche does not elaborate but he doubtless thought that were one to have developed Socrates' other natural drives to the point where his consciousness was again subordinate in its role then one would have had a fuller, richer human being - more like Goethe - and that given a choice one would prefer to be this latter person than Socrates. Or to put it in a different (and also weaker) way: the best life for a human being, the richest, the most fulfilling life is only attainable by someone like Goethe and not someone like Socrates. And this does not falsify the notorious claim that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than an ordinary human being satisfied - it is just better still to be Goethe.

This, then, explains why Nietzsche's attitude to Socrates is less than straightforwardly negative. Nietzsche admires Socrates' audacity in questioning a world of such unparalleled artistic achievement as the world of Attic tragedy but mourns the decline of Greek art which follows in Socrates' wake and because of Socrates. Aesthetic Socratism seeks to make art rationally comprehensible and somehow codify the laws which the artist should follow if he is to manufacture great art; but for Nietzsche this is a doomed task. In times of creation, the artist, Nietzsche claims, obeys thousandfold laws which precisely through the relentlessness and precision of their demands defy codification or identification. That he does not know the demands he operates under in no way prevents him creating great art nor the spectator from appreciating such art, but it does mean that an attempt to work out a conscious set of rules will yield an impoverished theory and likewise impoverished art if this theory is rigorously put into practice, as the case of Euripides shows.

This takes us back to Nietzsche's assertion that Attic tragedy was the pinnacle of Greek art and as I suggested that this is based on his instinct / taste one might wonder why one should pay

heed to Nietzsche's opinion rather than Socrates'. And the answer is the same as for preferring Goethe to Socrates which I gave above, namely that Socrates was a more limited aesthetic spectator than Nietzsche. Socrates' preference for Euripides expresses his limitation and as such Nietzsche's claim is that it was the weakness of many of Socrates' natural drives which gave rise to his judgment, a judgment which would have altered to fall more into line with Nietzsche's had these drives been made stronger.

However, despite such criticism, Nietzsche does regard Socratism as one of the three ways for more nobly furnished natures to be deceived past the burden and heaviness of existence which they suffer under and as a way of consuming energy which would otherwise have been spent in a far more destructive way, weakening "die instinktive Lust zum Leben" to the point of suicide and active pessimism. And this attitude is typical of Nietzsche's rejection of the idea that there is one template of the good life which is meant to serve everyone and which everyone should follow. Nietzsche's opposition to Socrates is not based on asserting a universal template of his own, nor with denying the benefits which Socratism brings. Rather, the problem with Socratism is that it does claim such universality and in the course of doing so threatens to stifle the kinds of life to which it is not conducive and which include those which Nietzsche considers the most valuable - most notably (in *BT*) the Dionysiac spirits capable of producing great tragedy.

However, while in *BT* it is art which is of primary importance and is man's highest metaphysical activity, this diminishes in later works. "Only as an aesthetic phenomenon are existence and the world justified" becomes "only as an aesthetic phenomenon is life tolerable" and, in place of art, life emerges as the reference point for all evaluations. Nietzsche describes the task of *BT* in hindsight as "die Wissenschaft unter der Optik des Künstlers zu sehn, die Kunst aber unter der des Lebens" (*BT 'Attempt at self-criticism' 2*) and insists that this task is still as relevant for him as ever, but we cannot help but see how much more clearly defined this task has become in his later works. Health and sickness are constant concerns in *GM* and they are Nietzsche's tags to mark what is conducive and inimical to the richest, most flourishing forms of life. They are, though, also used in a more ordinary way and it is when these two uses conflict that apparent confusion arises - such as Nietzsche's assertion that some sickness can be beneficial to life.

§ 5. Nobility and natural qualities:

I suggested that there is a broad sense in which Nietzsche might be seen as acting nobly in *BT*, but one must be careful in interpreting this. Mere glorification of an instinct is not sufficient for nobility. Nietzsche's ideal of nobility is that of a refined, healthy, abundant nature and the noble perspective is the one which would be adopted by those who possess some, or many, natural qualities to distinction and who, for the sake of these qualities, are glad to live. Hence someone may lack natural qualities such as beauty, intelligence, fitness, manual dexterity and develop a profound resentment against life for having furnished them so meanly. They may even glorify this instinct and develop a whole philosophy to justify this. But this will not make them noble.

I do not know what a complete list of natural qualities / virtues would look like and Nietzsche certainly does not attempt to provide one, but this does not make the concept of such a quality obscure. Broadly speaking, they are qualities which one would choose to have if one could, qualities which would widen the potential for living a fulfilling life. Or, alternatively, they are the qualities which people living rich and fulfilling lives would possess in order to live such lives.

(One might think that some such qualities are antagonistic, such as strength and speed, or speed and stamina, whereby to have more of one means to have less of the other. Certainly this is the case as the difference between marathon runners and sprinters makes transparent, but this does not affect the desirability of stamina and speed. The marathon runner would love to have more speed if it could be achieved without loss of stamina and the reverse is true of the sprinter.

Some personal qualities might seem more problematic in their incompatibility, but proverbs such as "Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind" should remind us quite how accommodating we are capable of being to seemingly opposing forces. And if there really is a serious conflict then one can always try locating the quality in question at a higher level of abstraction. One might think that there is no *one* template for female beauty but this does not prevent beauty from being a desirable natural quality.)

I offer the second formulation because Nietzsche insists that potential and danger go together

and this might reasonably affect one's choice. The more manifold and subtle one's conditions of flourishing are, the greater the danger that they will not be met and that one will not be able to meet them. Sometimes Nietzsche seems to suggest that the free spirit can make every vagary of chance redound to his advantage (*GS 303*), but I take it that this improvising power has limits and that it must do. The idea of a rich and abundant, life-affirming man is one thing, but a man-god is quite another. The great improviser is, to some extent, dependent on Chance for the material which he must blend into a beautiful melody and if Chance is particularly cruel then the task may be beyond him. And even if he does achieve a degree of success it will still be the case that he could have done better had Chance been kinder.

§ 6. Slave morality and noble morality:

Nietzsche's fullest exposition of noble morality occurs in *GM I*. The noble mode of valuation is characterized by the "gut : schlecht" antithesis such that any natural virtue / quality possessed to distinction (such as beauty or athleticism or intelligence) is labelled "gut" while the absence or meagre presence of such a virtue is labelled "schlecht". Noble morality is the valuation system of those who possess one or more virtues to distinction for such a way of valuing arises naturally to them. The beautiful person feels an aversion to ugly things and likewise does the athletic person to maladjusted and malco-ordinated things. The quality which they possess to distinction tends to dominate their valuations.

By contrast, slave morality is the valuation system of those who possess no natural virtue to distinction and who are bitter and resentful of those whom nature has furnished more richly. The value antithesis of slave morality is "böse : gut" and "böse" is applied exactly where noble morality applies "gut" - hence the different order in which I have set out the slave morality antithesis. And likewise what noble morality calls "schlecht", slave morality calls "gut". It seeks to re-baptize its natural limitations as virtues and to force everyone to accept this such that (*GM I 14*) cowardice becomes patience, not being able to take revenge becomes not wanting to take revenge and a wretched life becomes an ordeal to be endured for the sake of salvation and other-worldly bliss.

This re-translation of meagre natural provisions into virtues might look like a glorification of instinct in the same way that the beautiful person glorifies beauty in their value judgments, but there are three ways in which it differs. Slave morality is dishonest, dogmatic and inimical to

the flourishing of rich and healthy life. I take each point in turn.

It is dishonest because the natural limitations which slave morality seeks to re-translate are real natural limitations and dressing them up just makes them dressed up natural limitations and perhaps all the more absurd for that. And Nietzsche makes this point with the sheep and the birds of prey (however unfortunate this image may be in other respects). The sheep cannot attack and kill birds of prey and this is not because of their lenient forbearance. Their weakness is not a virtue.

Hence if slave morality is to accomplish its re-translation (one might say its *Umwertung*) then it must succeed in deceiving not only those mealy furnished by nature but also the richer, more fortunate nobles, for these are little short of walking refutations of slave morality's view. The sight of a self-assured, beautiful person makes it difficult for those lacking beauty to forget that beauty is a natural virtue. Hence slave morality needs to be dogmatic in its demands. And this is very different to the beautiful person who, unless through the weakness of a monstrous vanity, has no need for everyone to value beauty as she does. Indeed she will have no difficulty understanding that some do not value beauty, "For," she might think, "were I so ugly then I would not value beauty either."

Slave morality, then, is threatened by the presence of rich, well-furnished people and its strategy is to brand the natural virtues as evil (*böse*) and thus to undermine the healthy person's faith in life to the point where he becomes ashamed of his natural virtues. Such a creative act is reaction through and through and is thus parasitic on the original valuations of the nobles which simply get turned upside-down. And, by opposing the rich presence of natural virtues in favour of their meagre presence or absence, slave morality is obviously inimical to the flourishing of abundant and healthy human life. Indeed this must be Nietzsche's main objection to it, for his insistence that truth is not of unconditional value means that he cannot rest with the first objection that slave morality is dishonest.

Nietzsche makes this clear in *GM III 14* when he says:

That the sick *not* make the healthy sick - and this would be such a softening - that should certainly be the highest viewpoint on earth: - but this would require above all else that the healthy remain *separated* from the sick, guarded even against the sight of

the sick, that they not confuse themselves with the sick.

For the weak and sick:

...walk about among us as bodily reproaches, as warnings to us - as if health, being well-formed, strength, pride, a feeling of power were depraved things in themselves, for which one will someday have to atone, bitterly atone...

And their final triumph is when "die Glücklichen" (the fortunate / happy ones - the German has stronger connotations of luck (the luck of having been born "wohlgeraten") than the English "happy" now has) become so ashamed of their happiness and good fortune that they say: "It is a disgrace to be happy! *there is too much misery!*" And when, for Nietzsche, this life is all that there is, there can be no greater tragedy.

However, although *GM III 14* is undeniably a passionate condemnation of the effects of the weak on the strong (or of the sick on the healthy), it is still not susceptible to the crude interpretations which an incautious reader might put on it. For Nietzsche talks of nothing more drastic than separating the strong from the weak and takes issue with the idea that health, strength, pride and feeling of power are, in themselves, vices. For he believes that the reality of our natural drives is the only reality and that to condemn these drives out of hand is thus to condemn life out of hand. And this is a far cry from saying that if one possesses such qualities then it does not matter how one behaves.

Admittedly Nietzsche does not say much about how one should behave but this is probably for two reasons. Firstly because this is a great deal less interesting than one might think. For the readers Nietzsche has in mind (those capable of going beyond good and evil and hence those who are well grounded in the dictates of a morality of universal prescriptions), very little can be said and what can be said is too uncontroversial to need saying. (NB. Nietzsche's description of Goethe as a man of tolerance as a result of strength). And secondly because Nietzsche sees himself as fighting a battle of primary importance. If asceticism / slave morality is inimical to life in the way in which Nietzsche describes then it threatens to destroy all ways of living in favour of a tendency not to live at all. Dampening all one's natural instincts, being ashamed of them and depriving them of any natural outlet is something which hardly merits the title of 'a way of life' at all.

§ 7. Asceticism and slave morality:

I said asceticism / slave morality and this raises the question as to what difference, if any, there is between them. One might think that noble : slave is like aristocratic : democratic and hence that noble morality is about the rights of the elite few (Nietzsche's higher men) as opposed to the rights of the majority. Certainly this seems to be Nietzsche's view of the significance of Napoleon in *GM I 16* when he says that Napoleon stood for the "Vorrecht der Wenigstens". And hence one might also talk of excellence versus mediocrity.

By contrast, asceticism has nothing directly to do with the mediocre majority but is characterized as the Will to Nothing. The ideal to be attained is the negation of all man's natural drives and this is called 'holy'. However, as stated earlier, the reality of our natural drives is the only reality for Nietzsche and hence pursuit of such an ideal amounts to a Will to Nothing. Where matters are a little confusing is that both asceticism and slave morality are inimical to the kind of healthy, abundant life which noble morality promotes. Furthermore, someone could easily be under the umbrellas of both asceticism and slave morality. Perhaps the difference between the two is best seen in terms of their motivation. Slave morality is an attempt to glorify weakness and mediocrity which Nietzsche sees as born of resentment of natural excellence. By contrast, asceticism as an ideal is an attempt to make sense of either one's own suffering (physical or otherwise), or suffering in the world at large, or both. Hence one could also be an ascetic and not be under the umbrella of slave morality - take someone with a vast array of natural virtues whom life has treated very cruelly such that everyone they have ever loved has died prematurely and painfully. Such a person might well have been noble had life been kinder, even if they now suffer too greatly to care much about mediocrity or excellence.

I take it that there can be no doubt reading *GM I* that Nietzsche's preference lies with the noble mode of valuation, but *GM I 17* makes this entirely explicit when it talks about the age-old battle between noble and slave morality having almost died out, so completely has slave morality triumphed. And Nietzsche's response is to want the battle rejoined and to rejoin it himself:

- Was that the end of it? Was that greatest of all conflicts of ideals thus placed *ad acta* for all time? Or just postponed, postponed for a long time? ... Won't there have to be

a still much more terrible, much more thoroughly prepared flaming up of the old fire some day? Still more: wouldn't precisely *this* be something to desire with all our might? even to will? even to promote? ...

Perhaps one wonders how far Nietzsche would like noble morality to re-assert itself, but Nietzsche leaves this deliberately ambiguous. All he is prepared to say is that "*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*" at least means *not* "Jenseits von Gut und Schlecht" and hence not beyond noble valuation, still less any mode of valuation whatsoever.

§ 8. Asceticism and the man of science:

In *GM III* Nietzsche deals with the question "What do ascetic ideals signify?" in the course of which he claims that the man of science, who pursues truth at any price, is not the best opponent of the ascetic ideal but in fact the purest form of it. Rather, it is the artists who have hitherto been the best such opponents, leading Nietzsche to set up the antagonism in the form of Plato vs Homer, with the former representing the ascetic ideal. And this returns us to Socrates and the attempt to understand Nietzsche's idea of nobility, which, I have suggested, is well displayed by contrasting it to Nietzsche's attitude to Socrates. The question, then, is why Nietzsche considers the man of science to be the purest form of the ascetic ideal.

Nietzsche claims that the man of science is still wedded to the belief that truth is unconditionally valuable and that this is a metaphysical belief - "that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine" (*GS* 344). And he arrives at this by means of considering the man of science's will to truth. Is this the will not to let oneself be deceived or is it the will not to deceive? The former could just be a piece of prudence, provided that it was always disastrous to be deceived, but Nietzsche thinks this so transparently false that he concludes it must be the latter "*and with that we stand on moral ground.*"

However, if we grant Nietzsche that the man of science is the purest form of the Will to Truth, then this still does not explain why he is the purest form of the ascetic ideal. Surely the ascetic ideal is characterized as the Will to Nothing, not the Will to Truth? And if so why is the man of science the purest form of this? Nietzsche thinks that affirming the 'true' world of science is to affirm a different world to the one which our natural drives present to us, but is this really

so disastrously nihilistic? Surely some of the truths discovered will enable us to lead richer, fuller lives even if others are harmful? Indeed what could be a purer form of the Will to Nothing than the life recommended by the ascetic holy man of fasting and contemplation?

One might insist that the man of science carries less metaphysical baggage than the other forms of asceticism but this misses the point if the lighter load means a less stringent asceticism. Rather, Nietzsche's point is about man's sense of importance and self-respect which he sees as diminishing with the march of science. In Homeric times, the hero lived gloriously and by doing so earned his reward in the after-life. As Christianity came to the fore, faith in this life as worth living waned, but man's sense of self-importance remained strong. Man was worthy of eternal salvation, provided he was able and prepared to live the life which God recommended. (Indeed, for Nietzsche, man's self-worth became far too readily available.) But the onset of science (and Nietzsche mentions astronomy in particular) leaves man with the picture of himself as an insignificant speck on an insignificant planet in an immense universe. And hence Nietzsche talks of the man of science finding his last vestige of self-respect in the fact that he is strict enough to bear such a picture of himself.

Such a picture certainly represents a purer form of nihilism and the addition of metaphysical baggage such as a transcendent world in which one is rewarded for enduring this life can now be seen to amount to a lightening of this nihilistic burden. It should also alert us to two types of nihilism which I am not sure that Nietzsche distinguishes clearly. One is a more objective nihilism and one a subjective type. The former would be best exemplified by the holy man who tries to make the activity of his life approximate to nothingness by engaging only in sleep and prayer and the sparsest amount of food and drink possible. And the latter would be embodied by someone who could derive no enjoyment from anything, so overcome was he by the meaninglessness and futility of life.

Admittedly, there is likely to be some relationship between the two - one can imagine the latter person ending up as a monk in a monastery - but Nietzsche does not elaborate. Indeed, the man of science, for all his supposed vestige of self-respect, surely leads a better life in a Nietzschean sense than the holy man or monk who feels certain of his eternal salvation. And *GM III 26* suggests that the stringent asceticism of the man of science is even preferable for Nietzsche to a host of other approaches which he goes on to list in disgust. He even says, "All my reverence to the ascetic ideal, *as long as it is honest!*"

Matters become a little clearer when Nietzsche suggests that the physiological presupposition is the same for science as for the ascetic ideal: "a certain *impoverishment of life* ... the affects become cool, the tempo slowed, dialectic in place of instinct" (*GM III 25*), for this takes us back to Nietzsche's objection to Socrates in *BT*. And the point of insisting on the ascetic ideal being honest (*GM III 26*) is that it is not a suitable ideal for someone like Goethe and it should admit this. Someone like Goethe would flourish better away from the ascetic ideal and would lead a richer life doing so than the ascetic man of science. The second part of this claim might seem to be merely the preference of one with an artistic temperament and of course it is, but Nietzsche does have an argument to offer. He moves from the superiority of Goethe's natural drives to the superior potential for him to lead a richer, more fulfilling life. This is more convincing if Nietzsche means a more varied life but less so if he means a richness of subjective experience. After all, why should it not be the case that the man of science's pursuit of truth offers the greatest subjective wealth of experience?

I take it that Nietzsche is more concerned with richness in the second sense I mentioned, though this can often be influenced by the first and vice versa. (Nietzsche was far from averse to changing his surroundings by moving his place of study from country to country, for example. In fact his insistence that one's best thoughts occur when walking shows his awareness of the obvious interdependence of the two kinds of richness / variety.) Perhaps, indeed, one should not make any subjective / objective distinctions bearing in mind what Nietzsche says elsewhere about such matters, but the distinction is not one which I want to press at all firmly. Rather, the distinction is a way of making the point that if consciousness / reason is much the most powerful and splendid of man's attributes, then Socrates' life may well have been superior in richness to Goethe's.

Nietzsche's argument thus depends on the claim noted earlier, that our consciousness / reason is weak in comparison to our other natural drives, so much so that it is normally our drives which act while our reason serves to curb harmful excess. And it is because of this that, when reason / dialectics becomes the driving force in life, life becomes slower, cooler and less spectacular, both to live and to watch.

§ 9. Anti-natural morality in 'Twilight of the Idols' :

TI Morality as anti-nature' provides a concise account of Nietzsche's objection to the Church and the morality it preaches, which in turn throws light on what a more noble approach is like. The Church attacks the passions with excision and this amounts to castration. It never asks "How can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a desire?" (wie vergeistigt, verschönt, vergöttlicht man eine Begierde) as a more intelligent, more noble approach would do. However, to "exterminate the passions and desires merely in order to do away with their folly and its unpleasant consequences - this itself seems to us today merely an acute form of folly.... to attack the passions at their roots means to attack life at its roots: the practice of the Church is hostile to life..." (*TI Morality as anti-nature' 1*)

Nietzsche's opposition to Church morality (the most prevalent form of asceticism), though, does not mean that he opposes all moralities and in *TI Morality as anti-nature' 4* he distinguishes between healthy moralities and anti-natural (widernatürliche) morality:

All naturalism in morality, that is all *healthy* morality, is dominated by an instinct of life - some commandment of life is fulfilled through a certain canon of 'shall' and 'shall not', some hindrance and hostile element on life's road is thereby removed. *Anti-natural* morality, that is virtually every morality that has hitherto been taught, revered and preached, turns on the contrary precisely against the instincts of life - it is a now secret, now loud and impudent *condemnation* of these instincts.

Nietzsche has already suggested in *TI Morality as anti-nature' 2* that anti-natural morality is chosen by those too weak to impose moderation on their passions and *TI Morality as anti-nature' 5* completes the diagnosis of anti-natural morality. Such a morality speaks negatively of the value of life but Nietzsche insists that it is still life which speaks in and through such valuations:

When we speak of values we do so under the inspiration and from the perspective of life: life itself evaluates through us *when* we establish values... From this it follows that even that *anti-nature of a morality* which conceives God as the contrary concept to and condemnation of life is only a value judgment on the part of life - of *what* life? of *what* kind of life? - But I have already given the answer: of declining, debilitated,

weary, condemned life.

This does not mean that it is only weary, debilitated life which is capable of falling prey to anti-natural morality. Rather, the claim is that anti-natural morality is the "natural" way of valuing for declining life and that it helps to preserve such life. It is a ruse on the part of life to keep suffering, declining life alive. However, it is obviously a vital part of Nietzsche's project that there are those who fall prey to such morality (i.e. asceticism), when they are really fairly healthy specimens, otherwise his writing would become redundant. The healthy would resist asceticism naturally and those who did not would represent unsalvageably declining life and that would be that.

What is worse, if Nietzsche stuck to insisting that the healthy resist asceticism naturally then he would run the risk of including the incurably mediocre in this group. For they are immune to all powerful impulses. There is no danger of them turning out either very well or very badly. The Last Man in *Z* is not hostile to the instincts of life for he is simply unacquainted with them. He knows nothing of love or longing in order to rail bitterly against the fact that he lacks, or has lost, such things. He merely hops around and blinks.

Furthermore, that asceticism is both a danger and almost a natural phase for an ardent spirit is something Nietzsche shows awareness of in *BGE 31*. Youth, in its passionate desire to revere, falsifies men and things so as to vent itself on them but finally, tormented with disappointments (the constant collapse of its passionate delusions), it turns angrily on itself - "how it impatiently rends itself, how it takes revenge for its long self-delusion, as if it had blinded itself deliberately!" However, as Nietzsche insists with maturity, "A decade later: and one grasps that all this too - was still youth!"

PART II THE NEED FOR A NEW IDEAL

§ 1. The ascetic ideal:

In *GM I*, Nietzsche describes the conflict between noble morality and slave morality and insists that slave morality has almost triumphed completely. *GM I 16* makes it the sign of a higher, more spiritual nature that one is still a battleground for these two rival valuations and *GM I 17* has Nietzsche trying to fan the flames of a conflict which has almost died out.

GM III sees Nietzsche consider, amongst other things, the priestly form of the ascetic ideal and this raises the question how the first and third essays are meant to relate to each other. For, as we saw earlier, asceticism and slave morality are not one and the same. I suggest that it is the priestly form of the ascetic ideal which Nietzsche is most concerned with in *GM III* and that it is the ascetic priest who takes advantage of the herd *ressentiment* of the majority (the driving force behind slave morality) to create his own flock of sheep of which he is the master. For we noted that both asceticism and slave morality are opposed to the life-affirming noble and this enables the ascetic priest to interpret this antipathy in terms of the ascetic ideal, thus giving his flock a transcendent justification for their *ressentiment*.

Couple this with the fact that many of the ascetic priest's flock are also suffering as a result of desires which they cannot satisfy or physical ailments which they cannot cure and the ascetic priest has a winning formula. He tells them that they are to blame for their suffering, specifically for their sinfully active drives, and that the *ressentiment* they feel for the nobles is a sign of their awareness of this. They are righteous in their indignation at the noble but wrong to think that they are completely free of such sin themselves. And thus the *ressentiment* of the herd gets used both against the noble and against themselves. And the dispenser of this cocktail becomes increasingly powerful and indispensable. Hence Nietzsche describes the ascetic ideal as both the priest's best tool of, and ultimate permit for, power. (*GM III 1*)

The irony is that the priestly prescription does not improve the health of his flock. It does nothing to address the root of the flock's suffering or of any individual's within it. In fact it harms the flock's health still further and Nietzsche has the whipping up of a frenzied sense of guilt and self-loathing particularly in mind. Sinfulness, as Nietzsche points out, is just the priest's interpretation (for his own purposes of power and driven by his hatred of life) of a

natural physiological distemper. (*GM III 16*)

§ 2. The need for a new ideal:

If we return to the need for a new ideal, then several questions present themselves in response to Nietzsche's claim, in *GM III*, that the ascetic ideal is on the point of perishing at its own hand, when it draws its strongest conclusion against itself. Nietzsche believes that Christianity as theodicy perished as a result of the truthfulness which it cultivated (Thou shalt not lie) when man could no longer allow himself the lie of belief in God. And likewise Christian morality is on the verge of perishing as it finally asks about the value of truth and concludes that truth is not unconditionally valuable. And as the purest form of the ascetic ideal is, for Nietzsche, the Will to Truth, the conclusion that truth is not unconditionally valuable means the end of the ascetic ideal.

The first question is whether Nietzsche is right about the imminent demise of the ascetic ideal. The second is whether we need a new ideal and the third is who this 'we' is meant to consist of. I postpone discussion of the nature, attainability and desirability of Nietzsche's new ideal until Part III.

If one considers the second question, then one might well decide, in light of Nietzsche's comments on the ascetic ideal, that we do need a new ideal even if the ascetic ideal is not in the process of perishing at its own hand. Certainly *GM II* is capable of providing this thought, for if we accept Nietzsche's diagnosis then the ascetic ideal amounts to wild, demented error. Suddenly forced to live within the constraints of a 'society' (for Nietzsche states that there was no gradual, organic transition from natural freedom to communal life), man suffered as a result of those very natural instincts which were so essential to his survival in the wild. However, he suffered only because he no longer had an outlet for these instincts and not, as he concluded in the pain and despair of suffering, because the instincts were bad in themselves. And the outlet which he did find - that of venting these instincts on himself - was a painful disaster: "This is a kind of madness of the will in psychic (seelischen) cruelty that has absolutely no equal." (*GM II 22*)

The alternative Nietzsche offers is the attempt to retwin good conscience with one's natural instincts and to ally bad conscience with everything which the ascetic ideal has pronounced to

be holy and divine:

A reverse attempt would *in itself* be possible - but who is strong enough for it? - namely to wed to bad conscience the *unnatural* inclinations, all those aspirations to the beyond, to that which is contrary to the senses, contrary to the instincts, contrary to nature, contrary to the animal - in short the previous ideals which are all ideals hostile to life, ideals of those who libel the world. (*GM II 24*)

And if we now ask who the 'we' is which needs a new ideal then the answer is none other than all mankind, as *GM III 28* makes clear:

If one disregards the ascetic ideal: man, the *animal* man, has until now had no meaning. His existence on earth contained no goal; 'to what end man at all?' ('wozu Mensch überhaupt?') - was a question without answer; the *will* for man and earth was lacking...

The ascetic ideal is then said to have saved man in this respect by providing him with a sense (any sense is better than none at all), albeit a disastrous one.

§ 3. Suffering and the ascetic ideal:

However, *GM III 28* not only mentions the existential question "'wozu Mensch?'" but also the question "'wozu leiden?'" and seems to conflate the two in a confusing way. Man's problem, expressed in the first question is that he feels like a leaf in the wind, "ein Spielball des Unsinnns" and that his will is therefore in danger of not taking itself seriously enough to bother willing at all: "...hinter jedem grossen Menschen-Schicksale klang als Refrain ein noch grösseres 'Umsonst'... er litt am Probleme seines Sinns". But how does the second question relate to this?

Nietzsche continues:

Er litt auch sonst, er war in der Hauptsache ein *krankhaftes* Tier (so we have ordinary suffering on top of suffering about the sense of existence, but would either or both of these evaporate if man ceased to be sick?) : aber *nicht* das Leiden selbst war sein

Problem, sondern dass die Antwort fehlte für den Schrei der Frage: 'Wozu leiden?' Der Mensch, das tapferste und leidgewohnteste Tier, verneint an sich *nicht* das Leiden; er *will* es, er sucht es selbst auf, vorausgesetzt, dass man ihm einen *Sinn* dafür aufzeigt, ein *Dazu* des Leidens. Die Sinnlosigkeit des Leidens, *nicht* das Leiden, war der Fluch, der bisher über der Menschheit ausgebreitet lag.

This must mean ordinary, non-existential suffering (for it is obvious that suffering about the sense of existence is *senseless*, for this is its nature) and the problem Nietzsche has in mind is the doubt which suffering casts on the desirability of existence. However, there are two kinds of suffering on this level and it is not clear which Nietzsche has in mind and whether he distinguishes between the two. The first is suffering where one has no idea why one is suffering and therefore does not know how to remedy the situation. And the second is where one possesses such understanding but is still powerless, or constantly thwarted in one's attempts, to remedy the situation. And presumably the suffering sheep, to whom the ascetic priest speaks, suffers in the first of these ways.

This might suggest that man only needs an ideal as a sense for his suffering if he fails to understand why he suffers. The decline of the ascetic ideal would then be a result of man coming to understand his suffering better, to the point, in fact, where he needs no ideal at all. This is clearly not Nietzsche's view, for Nietzsche's worry is that the nihilism (and its final danger of mass suicide) which the ascetic ideal saved man from will again loom large as the ascetic ideal perishes. Man's will needs a purpose and hence a new ideal in place of the ascetic one.

The question is why Nietzsche views the problem in this way and whether he is right to do so. For if we take the suffering sheep who suffers in the first way then the ascetic ideal seems to accomplish two things for him. It explains why he suffers (the false explanation that his suffering is punishment for his sins) and it gives his suffering a sense - that through suffering he is to be purged and redeemed for a better life beyond this one. And if the real problem with suffering is its inexplicability, not its senselessness and purposelessness, then the ascetic ideal, which catered for both elements, would not need to be replaced provided that the first requirement of explicability was met. Nietzsche's commitment to the need for a new ideal would then be a misunderstanding of the role which the ascetic ideal actually played. If one suffers and understands one's suffering then one tries to remedy the situation; and if, and while,

that is beyond one's power, one endures things as stoically and with as little self-laceration as possible. But why might this require an ideal?

GM III 28 describes man as the bravest animal and the one most used to suffering, but Nietzsche also makes the perplexing claim that man will actively seek out suffering, provided that he has a sense for doing so. Certainly man is capable of enduring great suffering and pain if he has a purpose for doing so (the victim of torture who holds out for the sake of his friends or fatherland) but does he really desire and seek it? Perhaps he seeks suffering so as to try his strength, to test his commitment to that which he suffers for, but if he does so, does he not have Nietzsche's own words set against him? "And if someone goes through fire for his teaching - what does that prove? Truly, it is more when one's own teaching comes out of one's own burning!" (*Z II 4 'Of the priests'*)

This tension can be dissolved by taking *Z II 4* to be concerned with truth. That someone will suffer for their teaching does not prove the truth of their teaching - rather, it is more likely that their teaching will be true if it has come from the flames of their own internal conflict. *Z II 8* supports this with the cruelly savage "Geist ist das Leben, das selber ins Leben schneidet; an der eignen Qual mehrt es sich das eigne Wissen - wusstet ihr das schon?" But this still leaves the problem of man willing suffering. Even if the man whose life cuts into itself so as to increase its knowledge (or is knowledge a by-product, not the goal?) can be said to will suffering, this is surely not the case with modern man at large. And, in this case, is an ideal meant to be needed by man inasmuch as he suffers, or by man inasmuch as he wills and seeks out suffering provided that he can find a sense in doing so? If the former then there is an obvious and very large sphere for the new ideal to apply to but no obvious reason why an ideal is needed and if the latter, then there is a clear need for an ideal but only at the expense of a sphere of applicability in danger of dwindling to nothing.

Two avenues present themselves. Either to understand why Nietzsche thinks that man wills and seeks out suffering or else to conclude that this is not what Nietzsche really means and that the most he means is that man is capable of enduring suffering which would otherwise destroy him, provided that he finds a sense for doing so. I will show that Nietzsche is in fact serious about man willing suffering, but I will do so by pursuing the second option first and explaining why Nietzsche wants more than this.

§ 4. Suffering which we do not seek:

If we take ordinary suffering then there seems no difficulty in saying that it often has a sense, although the diversity of senses which it can have suggest that there is no ideal at work behind it. The person who suffers torture may do so to preserve the safety of another and the heroin addict trying to kick the habit endures his privation for the sake of a better future (or even *a* future) which he will be around to enjoy. Perhaps, indeed, his goal is more specific. And some suffering one simply endures without having a sense for, or giving a sense to it, as it is just not serious enough to bother much about. And in face of this variety of senses for suffering, Nietzsche's claim that man needs a new ideal to replace the ascetic ideal looks rather suspect. Are the people in the examples I gave still all under the umbrella of asceticism? Surely not; but then it is transparently the case that they *can* manage without a new ideal unless they are already paying homage to it without realizing it and Nietzsche offers nothing to suggest that this is the case. Hence Nietzsche's claim that man needs a new ideal reduces, at best, to the claim that man should have a new ideal because this will be beneficial in some way. And Nietzsche insists that man needs this new ideal because he does not want to see mankind give up on *all* ideals as a result of the failure of the ascetic ideal - man's only significant ideal to date.

If there is one kind of suffering which might be thought to require an ideal, though, then it is suffering as a result of something which we understand but cannot change. One of Nietzsche's concerns in *Z II 'Of redemption'* is with the will gnashing its teeth as a result of something painful in the past which it cannot change, for the will *cannot* will backwards. This is a metaphysical impossibility and not merely a very strong case of practical improbability and powerlessness which might merit the title of impossibility. But if we think that such suffering might require an ideal then why not include cases of extreme practical impotence as well, for surely the psychological impact is much the same? And then where does one draw the line?

Indeed, even supposing that some suffering of the above form does need an ideal in order to be endured, still what could possibly do the job better than belief in an after-life as countenanced by the Christian form of the ascetic ideal? Admittedly Nietzsche objects to the orientation of Christianity's Will, it being the Will to Nothing, but, having removed the idea of suffering as punishment, he does not offer a more life-enhancing after-life. What is more, surely the demise of the idea that suffering is punishment leaves us with the grim truth that a

great deal of suffering is senseless and that this is why it is so horrible? In a world where lives are constantly being disabled and destroyed there is no substitute for the one thing which no one can buy - luck.

I take it that such a picture of man's predicament harks straight back to the image of the leaf in the wind and is something which Nietzsche wants to oppose. However I do not see that Nietzsche's new ideal can provide a sense for a great deal of suffering even if it tries to. And perhaps it should not try. Perhaps the questions "Wozu Mensch?" and "Wozu leiden?" are distinct and it is only the first which needs an ideal to answer it. The ascetic ideal would then be an attempt to answer the first question in terms of the second, or a mistaken view that the two questions were essentially the same. I will suggest later that something like this view is true of the *amor fati* of *GS* but that Nietzsche's drive for knowledge subsequently destroys this. This creates a later form of *amor fati* which is substantially less attractive and provides us with a graphic illustration of how the pursuit of truth can be inimical to a healthy, flourishing life in just the way in which Nietzsche cautions.

§ 5. The energy harnessed by the ascetic ideal:

GM III 28 suggested that the senselessness of suffering lay behind the ascetic ideal but pursuit of this line did not seem to suggest a need for a new ideal. However, in *GM III 27*, Nietzsche speaks of the self-overcoming of the ascetic ideal as "das furchtbarste, fragwürdigste und vielleicht auch hoffnungsreichste aller Schauspiele" and if we remember that in *BT §15* Nietzsche approved of Socratism as an outlet for a vast amount of energy which, if left in the form of individual goals, would have led to mass wars and ultimately to suicidal nihilism, then Nietzsche's motivation becomes easier to see. The demise of the ascetic ideal will release a vast quantity of energy which, unless channelled, could prove very destructive and dangerous - hence the "furchtbar" and "fragwürdig". However, such a vast amount of energy also has great potential (hence the "hoffnungsreich") if focused on an ideal. With such a tension in one's bow one can shoot for the most distant targets (*BGE Pref*) and plant the seed of man's highest hope (*Z Prologue 5*).

Nietzsche's commitment to this project can be seen clearly in his description of the Last Man (der letzte Mensch). The Last Man represents a soil grown poor from which no great tree can spring and Nietzsche holds up this unedifying creature as the future of a mankind without

ideals and lets it condemn itself:

'What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?' thus asks the Last Man and blinks.

The earth has become small and upon it hops the Last Man, who makes everything small. His race is as inexterminable as the flea; the Last Man lives longest.

'We have discovered happiness,' say the Last Men and blink. (*Z Prologue 5*)

§ 6. Man's will and the need for a single goal:

In *GM III 1* Nietzsche claims that the significance of ascetic ideals for man reveals a fundamental fact about man's will - "its *horror vacui*: it needs a goal, - and it would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will." And this raises several questions: why does man's will need a goal and does it need *one, single* goal? And then, does this apply individually or to all mankind? For each individual life could quite well require a single goal (the obedience in one direction of *BGE 188*) without these goals all being the same. And it is surely only if mankind in its entirety needs *one single* goal, that mankind can be said to need a new ideal when the ascetic ideal perishes.

GM III 1 does not provide unambiguous answers to either of these questions for Nietzsche does not state that a new ideal is needed, nor that mankind needs *one* goal. However, *GM III 23* does make it clear that the power of the ascetic ideal stems from the fact that it has one goal which it interprets everything in light of ("es legt sich Zeiten, Völker, Menschen unerbittlich auf dieses eine Ziel hin aus") and Nietzsche then asks where the opponent of this ideal is:

...where is the opposing will in which an *opposing ideal* expresses itself? ... Where is the *counterpart* to this closed system of will, goal and interpretation? Why is the counterpart *lacking*? ... Where is the *other "one goal"*?

And this suggests that what is required is the one opposing ideal to the ascetic ideal and *GM II 24* reinforces this by claiming that Zarathustra will redeem mankind from the curse of the ascetic ideal and will give the Earth back its goal.

Why, though, does man's will need a goal? And why does it have a horror of the void? I offer an interpretation of these claims but insist that they still fall short of substantiating the claim that mankind needs a single goal.

§ 7. The *activity* of man's will:

As I said above, *GM III I* merely states of man's will that it requires a goal ("er braucht ein Ziel") and does not emphasize the "ein" in such a way as to make this mean a single goal. And as it is (although Nietzsche *does* want more than this) this makes the simple point that in order to will, one must will something, and hence that every act of willing requires a goal. The claim that man's will has a horror of the void, I take to mean that man's will is essentially, restlessly active. No sooner is one goal achieved than another is required, set and pursued and nothing ever seems to be enough to quell this activity and to give the will peace. (This is a Schopenhauerian view in terms of description even if not in terms of evaluation). Thus, if the will finds itself without a goal then it faces a situation where it cannot be active and where it must, by its nature, be so - that restless boredom which we have all experienced at some stage to some degree.

According to Nietzsche, it is an acute form of this situation which the active man, recently brought into the confines of a community, experiences. His natural instincts on which he relied and which he was free to follow in the wild have become a burden to him in the comparatively peaceful social community in which he now lives. They no longer have an outlet and yet they demand an outlet. He craves activity and yet the paths which he is inclined to pursue are barred by societal conventions and the punishment which attends their infringement. His existence is blighted by a need for activity far greater than he can meet and this pent-up energy is experienced as suffering. How tempting, then, to put an end to himself, offering both an activity for his will and an end to his suffering!

It is by some scenario similar to this that the problem of suicidal nihilism seems to loom for man and Nietzsche's view about bad conscience is that it developed as a spiritualization of this predicament. By finding a purpose in being cruel to himself to the point of eventually finding himself eternally and utterly unworthy before a supreme being, God, man arrived at a way to avoid ending his life, or rather, the life in him found a way of prolonging its own activity. Instead of setting itself the accomplishable goal of destroying itself by suicide, it set itself the

unattainable goal of striving to embody the absence of all its natural qualities which it called its ideal. Hence Nietzsche talks of worshipping nothingness, for the reality of our natural drives is, for him, the only reality. And *GM II 22* suggests that this is Nietzsche's position, that it is man's active, animal nature which lies at the heart of the problem:

..his *will* to erect an ideal ... in order, in the face of the same, to be tangibly certain of his absolute unworthiness. Oh, this insane, sad beast, man! What ideas occur to it, what anti-nature, what paroxysms of nonsense; what *bestiality of idea* immediately breaks forth when it is hindered only a little from being a *beast of deed* (*Bestie der Tat*)!

Hence, when Nietzsche says that man would rather will nothingness than not will, what he is trying to explain is how the ascetic ideal ever arrived at a position of such dominance. And considering the claims which he makes about it (that it is "widernatürlich" and a Will to Nothing, claims which are decidedly unpalatable), it is vitally important for him to explain how this has been achieved. For if he fails to do this convincingly, then one will naturally be inclined to conclude that his diagnosis of the ascetic ideal is itself mistaken. For any claim about the nature of the ascetic ideal must allow for an explanation of the empirical fact that the ascetic ideal is, and has been, remarkably prevalent in mankind's history. And if one accepts something like the account of Nietzsche's view just given, then one also surely accepts another of Nietzsche's claims: "The truth is hard."

§ 8. The Last Man:

"Der letzte Mensch", on this interpretation, is a man whose will no longer deserves its title. Gone is the restlessness, the insatiability which Schopenhauer described and railed against so famously and which Nietzsche, by contrast, affirms. The last man blinks a great deal and we get the impression that this is, near enough, the summit of his activity. Hence, rather than the point of the last man being, as Ridley would have it⁶, that he does not care enough about ideals *in toto* even to be perturbed at the demise of the ascetic ideal, the point of the Last Man is that he is an end without being a goal. He is scarcely alive in any meaningful sense of the word, for in him the human will has cooled to near inertia. He has no power to be anything worth

⁶ Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience* pp 148-9

being or achieve anything worth achieving. With him the drama of humanity peters out into a pitiable nothingness. And for this reason even the blond beast, with all his terrible excesses, is preferable to the last man for Nietzsche, for at least in him mankind still has potential. He is the starting point for the cultivation of man whereas the last man marks the end of the cultivation process and at the same time signals that it has gone horribly, irrevocably wrong.

In this respect, in his affirmation of the restlessness and insatiability of the human will (or of our respective natural drives) and his opposition to contentment ("Is life not a hundred times too short to be - bored in it?" (*BGE* 227)), Nietzsche is much more a traditional artist than he is a philosopher. For what artist has ever been contented? The nature of inspiration precludes this. (See A. Blok's "The Artist" for example.) No wonder, then, that Nietzsche is so appealing to those of artistic temperament and perhaps to all strong wills, though this is certainly not to say that he is thereby understood. And that Nietzsche felt himself different to traditional philosophers in this respect is well illustrated by *Z II "Von den berühmten Weisen"* and, in particular:

Ihr seid mir laue: aber kalt strömt jede tiefe Erkenntnis. Eiskalt sind die innersten Brunnen des Geistes: ein Labsal heißen Händen und Handelnden.

Ehrbar steht ihr mir da und steif und mit geradem Rücken, ihr Berühmten Weisen! - euch treibt kein starker Wind und Wille.

§ 9. A life without ideals:

However, the interpretation I have so far given does not substantiate Nietzsche's claim that man needs a new ideal. A man's will needs goals in order to be active and, in the absence of sufficient goals to keep him active and unfrustrated, the ascetic ideal offers a goal which he can always pursue and which can never be wholly achieved. But what if a man were to find sufficient goals (unassociated with any ideal) to keep himself actively occupied? Why would he then need an ideal at all? Indeed, why not insist that, with the demise of the ascetic ideal, the task for each individual is to find his obedience in one direction, to find the activity which he can pursue which makes his life affirmable?

Nietzsche's response, I think, would be that the ascetic ideal answered the question "Wozu Mensch?" and that its demise creates the need for a new answer. However, it is fairly obvious that Nietzsche's claims about a new ideal being needed in order to avert mass nihilism and the ensuing mass suicide are far too strong. Ridley notes⁷ that part of this was probably Nietzsche trying to persuade us that we really do need a new ideal; but the problem is not merely that we do not share this view, but that Nietzsche's other views do not seem to explain why he himself held this view. Zarathustra notes the hour of great contempt where one becomes dissatisfied with one's happiness, virtue and reason and says "But my happiness should justify existence itself!" (*Z Prologue 3*) And this suggests that a healthy approach to the question "Wozu Mensch?" is to try to lead a life where this very question asserts itself less often and less forcefully, where one is simply too occupied and fulfilled to give the question any thought and where one's happiness is so intense that it seems to justify everything. Or to put it the other way round: that the question "Wozu Mensch?" occurs at all is a bad sign, a sign of an unfulfilled, or in some way unfulfilling life. It is a symptom which needs interpreting, a potential prompt to action, not something to be taken seriously itself. For if one takes it seriously, then one makes the condition it is symptomatic of even worse. Hence the idea of the existential itch.

This is not Nietzsche's view, though, even in *Z*, for Zarathustra talks of teaching man to follow consciously (and to desire to follow) the path which he has hitherto followed blindly, that is, the path of natural existence. With his belief that this life is all there is, Nietzsche has immense faith in the task of making the most of one's life. Whether the ideal of life-affirmation which he offers is the best, or even a good, way of doing this is something I discuss in Part III.

§ 10. Suffering which we seek:

I now return to the suggestion of § 3. of explaining the need for a new ideal in terms of the strong will (which I have just outlined in contrast to the inert will of the Last Man) and its need for suffering. Nietzsche says that man is the bravest animal and the one most used to suffering ("das tapferste und leidgewohnteste Tier") and then offers in support of this the alleged fact that man will seek out suffering, provided he has a sense for doing so. (*GM III 28*)

⁷ Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience* p 149

Hence not only is suffering not an objection (never mind *the* objection) to existence, it is even something man is prepared to will. A strong will grows bored with the ease with which it achieves its goals. "All this power," it sighs, "And so little to use it on. Why is everything so easy? 'Was mich nicht umbringt, macht mich stärker.'" Those are grand words, as every warrior knows. They have been true before - let them be true again, for I must grow stronger! And I need adversity, for I love victory and triumph and to that extent I *will* suffering. This life is Will to Power ... well then, vive la guerre!"

But even this does not suffice to create a need for a new ideal, for sufficiently demanding goals, unassociated with any ideal, would presumably suffice. Perhaps, though, the ascetic ideal has spoilt one's taste for ordinary worldly goals which simply look too easy in comparison (the ascetic ideal, is, after all, unattainable as well as being a protracted war against everything which comes naturally). And Nietzsche's approach to this predicament would then be to offer his counter ideal rather than counselling that we relearn to value such goals.

The problem with this is that part of what Nietzsche does say is that we should learn to value such goals again - *EH* sees Nietzsche emphasizing the importance of climate, surroundings, nourishment against the traditional trivializing of such things - and hence his new ideal must be offered on top of this. But one might well think that taking life seriously means giving up on all ideals as I suggested earlier. And that this is *not* Nietzsche's view does not make it any easier to understand.

§ 11. Conclusion:

Undoubtedly, Nietzsche thought that the heights which mankind was capable of scaling were only attainable with an ideal and this point is not difficult to see. Nietzsche's remarks about the ascetic ideal in *GM III 23* reveal his awareness of the immense power that its closed system of interpretation possesses and the idea of such power harnessed to a different ideal, to a Will to Life (to put it crudely) rather than a Will to Nothing, must have seemed very attractive.

However, the seduction of such potential sits uneasily with the idea that the ascetic ideal is inimical to the quality of individual lives, for the motivation for a new ideal seems to be the enhancement of mankind and for Nietzsche this means the summit of mankind and making this

higher. But Nietzsche (to my knowledge) offers no argument that the mass of mankind, on whom the ideal must depend for most of its power, would benefit in the experiential richness of their lives from such an ideal. And, as we saw earlier, the reality of the present day shows that there are a considerable number of people who do not need an ideal in the encompassing sense which Nietzsche reserves for it.

This might suggest that Nietzsche is only concerned with addressing an elite few, but why then the claim that the ascetic ideal saved man's will and that another ideal will be therefore be required to replace this - even if we think this need for a new ideal to be non-existent? Indeed, I take Nietzsche's claims about the need for a sense for suffering to be addressed to mankind in general, as he makes clear in *GM II 28*: "Die Sinnlosigkeit des Leidens, *nicht* das Leiden, war der Fluch, der bisher über der Menscheit ausgebreitet lag (my underlining)".

I conclude, then, that Nietzsche does think that mankind needs a new ideal but that he exaggerates the strength of this need. And, in the absence of a suitable need, he offers little by way of argument that mankind would benefit from a new ideal. Indeed, the project of offering mankind a new ideal sits uncomfortably with the emphasis Nietzsche places on the quality of an individual's life.

PART III NIETZSCHE'S NEW IDEAL

§ 1. Eternal recurrence as Nietzsche's counter ideal to the ascetic ideal:

Maudemarie Clark claims that affirming eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's counter ideal to the ascetic ideal and that this is to ask oneself, uncritically, whether one would be prepared to live one's life again the same way. A joyful reaction is then indicative of an affirmative attitude towards one's life (provided that one is honest with oneself), but this is not to be thought of as precluding one from preferring certain aspects of one's life to have been different if one were given the choice.

Clark's claims can be separated as follows: Nietzsche believed that a counter ideal to the ascetic ideal was needed; eternal recurrence is, in some sense, this counter ideal; and this 'in some sense' is affirmation of eternal recurrence where this is understood uncritically. And the point of this division should be obvious, namely to shield Clark's first two claims from any doubt regarding the third.

I have already argued that Clark's first claim is broadly correct and she herself offers seemingly irrefutable evidence in favour of the second. This evidence comes from *EH*, a book, we must remember, which Nietzsche wrote for the express purpose of trying to explain himself as *EH Pref 1* makes explicit. Hence we must take it as Nietzsche's considered view that the ascetic ideal owed its power not to God being active behind the priests but "because hitherto it has been the only ideal, because it had no competitors. ... What was lacking above all was a counter-ideal - until the advent of Zarathustra." (*EH GM*) (See also *GM II 24 & 25*, *GM III 23*.) Moreover, Nietzsche unambiguously describes the thought of eternal recurrence as the fundamental conception of Zarathustra: "The basic conception of the work, the *idea of eternal recurrence*, the highest formula of affirmation that can possibly be attained..." (*EH Z 1*)

BGE 56 also makes this explicit when it talks of having one's eyes opened to 'the opposite ideal', the ideal of the most life-affirming man. I quote the passage in full:

He who, prompted by some enigmatic desire, has, like me, long endeavoured to think pessimism through to the bottom and to redeem it from the half-Christian, half-German

simplicity and narrowness with which it finally presented itself in this century, namely in the form of the Schopenhauerian philosophy; he who has really gazed with an Asiatic and more than Asiatic eye down into the most world-denying of all possible modes of thought - beyond good and evil and no longer, like Buddha and Schopenhauer, under the spell and illusion of morality - perhaps by that very act, and without really intending to, may have had his eyes opened to the opposite ideal: to the ideal of the most exuberant, most living and most world-affirming man, who has not only learned to get on and treat with all that was and is but who wants to have it again *as it was and is* to all eternity, insatiably calling out *da capo* not only to himself but to the whole piece and play, and not only to a play but fundamentally to him who needs precisely this play - and who makes it necessary: because he needs himself again and again - and makes himself necessary - What? And would not this be - *circulus vitiosus deus?*

In light of such evidence, one must conclude that *Z* is meant to present the counter ideal to the ascetic ideal and that the thought of eternal recurrence, as a formula for life affirmation, lies at the heart of *Z*. In order to argue other than this one must either interpret away passages such as *EH GM*, *EH Z 1*, *BGE 56* or else confine oneself to suggesting that it would be better if Nietzsche had thought otherwise, or perhaps that other works of his provide material for a different counter ideal. And the first approach, at least, looks distinctly unpromising.

§ 2. Clark's interpretation of eternal recurrence:

What, then, should we make of Clark's interpretation of the eternal recurrence? She says:

Affirming eternal recurrence in no way depends upon believing recurrence to be true, probable, or even logically possible. It requires the willingness to live one's life again, not the belief that one will, even as a mere possibility. (*Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy p.254*)

But this formulation sounds far removed from Nietzsche's insistence that the thought of eternal recurrence is the most abysmal thought. This need not tell against Clark, ultimately, for the problem with interpreting and summarizing is that the result tends to be rather inert, particularly compared with Nietzsche's original prose. But we should at least wonder how such

an interpretation *could* explain how the thought of eternal recurrence might be the most abysmal thought.

A good example of an abysmal thought is Ivan's rebellion in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. For Ivan, some suffering is so horrible that nothing can redeem it, even some divine plan which results in the eternal salvation of everyone who ever lived. (In other words, no sense is adequate for some suffering.) The suffering of young children, who know nothing of good and evil, is too terrible to be redeemed and justified by anything and Ivan rejects God's world as a result - and his own possible salvation with it. This is his rebellion.

This summary loses all the force of Dostoevsky's original (and that is a *great deal* of force to lose), but I take it that it is still an adequate summary. The question is whether Clark's interpretation of the thought of eternal recurrence is of a similar status and hence whether it meets what I want to stipulate as the first criterion for an interpretation of eternal recurrence: to make vivid, or at least comprehensible, why the thought of eternal recurrence is the most abysmal thought.

§ 3. The most abysmal thought:

I take it that Clark's answer as to why the thought of eternal recurrence is the most abysmal thought is that, understood uncritically, it increases infinitely the amount of joy and suffering which one's life contains. But, although this might be an unpleasant thought, it surely need not be, whereas Nietzsche seems to have intended the thought of eternal recurrence to be a thought which it almost kills one to have (Zarathustra is stricken terribly by it), but which one somehow learns or manages to regard as another incentive to live.

To make this clear, imagine a slightly more edifying version of Nietzsche's Last Man, someone who lives a very sheltered life in a small, contented community and who, as a result of good fortune and the deliberate care of those nearest and dearest to him, manages to live in almost complete ignorance of suffering in the world at large. Anything unpleasant which can be kept from him is kept from him and anything very unpleasant which would be hard to keep from him simply does not happen or has not happened yet. Surely such a person would have no difficulty in affirming Clark's version of eternal recurrence and yet such a life is surely not the kind which Nietzsche wants to promote.

One might insist that the fact that Nietzsche does not rule out such a life does not mean that he wants to promote it; but this rather misses the point. For the real question is whether anyone such as I have outlined above could think the thought of eternal recurrence at all. Nietzsche emphasizes it as an abysmal thought ("abgründlich") and hence as one which comes from the depths. And it is suffering which, Nietzsche insists, creates such depths and makes us profound. Hence the thought of eternal recurrence, as Nietzsche intends it, is not a thought which is accessible to everyone.

This point is reinforced by the fact that the recurrence demon of *GS 341* creeps into our loneliest loneliness (die einsamste Einsamkeit) and this is not a mood which the person in my example is acquainted with. *Z* makes this clearer still, for the thought of recurrence comes when Zarathustra is being taunted by the Spirit of Gravity and his attack (by means of the thought of eternal recurrence) reveals the nature of what he attacks:

Courage also destroys giddiness at abysses: and where does man not stand at an abyss?
Is seeing itself not - seeing abysses?

Courage is the best destroyer: courage also destroys pity. Pity, however, is the deepest abyss: as deeply as man looks into life, so deeply does he look also into suffering. (*Z III 'Of the Vision and the Riddle' 1*)

Hence the loneliest loneliness, in which the thought of eternal recurrence occurs, is where one sees deeply into the world and the suffering in it, where one suffers with the world and at the world and is ready to die of pity. And it is a form of this feeling which Ivan wrestles with in *Brothers Karamazov* as he refuses to affirm the suffering of children in the world.

However, if one wants an artistic expression of the loneliest loneliness without the force of a struggle against it then Wilfred Owen's "*Futility*" is an excellent example of being rendered helpless and hopeless with pity. And this squares well with the way Zarathustra describes his oppression by the Spirit of Gravity:

I climbed, I climbed, I dreamed, I thought, but everything oppressed me. I was like a sick man wearied by his sore torment and reawakened from sleep by a worse dream. (*Z III 'Of the Vision and the Riddle' 1*)

§ 4. Why eternal recurrence is the *most* abysmal thought:

The question, then, is how the thought of eternal recurrence manages to be more abysmal than anything the Spirit of Gravity can muster and this must be because it removes not only the consolation of a better life beyond this one, but also the consolation that human existence, the cruellest of all misfortunes, will one day cease entirely. For this will never happen with recurrence and the whole wretched drama of human history will repeat itself to eternity in exactly the same way.

This also explains why accepting eternal recurrence and hence asking oneself "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" (*GS 341*) would lie on one's actions as the greatest weight, for it would make life a profoundly serious business. Any happiness or fulfilment would then only be found in this life and if one became weary and found living too hard, then eternal recurrence would remind us that it *does* matter how we live, for we will be dragged out of our grave to reenact the play to all eternity.

I take it that *GS 341* makes it clear that accepting recurrence does place the greatest weight on one's actions and that Nietzsche then considers two reactions to this: "If this thought gained possession of you it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you." And then he finishes the section by saying "Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?" And presumably this last sentence refers to the case where one is changed by the thought of recurrence. Hence, if the thought does not crush one, then one starts out on the road whose limit is desiring nothing more than the exact recurrence of everything. And this means that one tries to lead a life which enables one to affirm recurrence, which is not to say either that one succeeds or that whether one succeeds is wholly in one's power. And this is therefore a picture where recurrence both evaluates and guides our actions, as one would expect from an ideal.

Clark insists that affirming eternal recurrence is not incompatible with preferring some aspects of one's life, or of human history, to have been different, if given the choice - it is just that one is not given the choice by the demon.⁸ This sits uneasily with the last sentence of *GS 341* and

⁸ Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* p 279

with *BGE 56*, but in a sense Clark is right. The ideal of the most life-affirming man is that of the person who desires everything to be the same, both forwards and backwards, and who craves nothing more than this - but one can quite well be guided by such an ideal without ever attaining it. Hence most people (if not everyone) might well find that they fell short of wholesale life affirmation when considering the life they had lived. They would have affirmed eternal recurrence in the sense of taking it to heart as an ideal, but not in the sense of having achieved a living embodiment of it.

§ 5. The attainability and desirability of eternal recurrence:

I take it, then, that eternal recurrence functions as an ideal to guide one's actions and that one attains it if one lives a life such that one craves nothing more than the exact recurrence of everything. The question is whether such an ideal is attainable and, indeed, whether it is desirable.

Perhaps it is a poor objection to an ideal that it is unattainable. Presumably what matters is the direction in which it orients us, though were it to seem too unattainable, too distant and unreachable, then it might lose motivational force. One must remember, though, that the ascetic ideal is also unattainable and that this has not prevented it from being influential and, in some cases, very nearly embodied.

More interesting is whether eternal recurrence is desirable, for, if it is not, then unattainability will cease to be an issue of any consequence. And, indeed, how could craving nothing more than eternal recurrence be desirable? How could one look at human history, at the Holocaust and the First World War, at famine and plagues such as the Black Death and desire nothing more than an exact repeat? How could one desire nothing more than transience and phonated and growth and bloom and death? How could one not have an imagination which soared beyond what one had attained and could ever attain? In short, "Ah, that a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?" (R. Browning).

In *Z II 'Of Redemption'* Zarathustra talks of the redemption of the will and of freeing it from its prison of powerlessness against Time and Time's "Es war", and one might hope that this might help to explain the desirability of eternal recurrence. Instead of taking revenge on everything for its impotence, to the point of slandering all existence ("Alles vergeht, darum ist

alles wert zu vergchn"), the will becomes creative and says to Time's "Es war": "aber so wollte ich es!... Aber so will ich es! So werde ich's wollen!"

However, this sounds about as sensible as the desirability of eternal recurrence. Most of what has ever happened we did not will and some (at least) of this we would not have willed, even if we had had the power to do so. Moreover, a feeling of rebellion against Time's "Es war" can also be creative. Many of Shakespeare's sonnets (eg 16. But wherefore do you not a mightier way / Make war upon this bloody tyrant, Time? and 18. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?) read as a war against Time and transience and are hardly the poorer for it.

§ 6. Blessings in disguise:

With this in mind, I take it that Nietzsche's point concerns the difference between using the rage at Time's "Es war" destructively and using it constructively. Using it destructively amounts to wallowing in one's own impotence to the point where eventually everything is made to suffer for this "Ohnmacht", whereas using it constructively means doing something with it actively, outwardly and positively. An example of the latter process would be where some mishap which we suffered acted as a spur to do something of which we were subsequently proud, and not only proud, but so proud that we felt grateful to the spur which we acted on and hence to the original mishap, such that we ended by blessing what we had once cursed. (Take the sportsman whose recovery from a career threatening injury gives him a determination and resilience which turn him into a champion.)

This thought, in its widest scope, is surely what lies behind Nietzsche's counter ideal to the ascetic ideal. Hence Zarathustra urges: "But everything that suffers wants to live, that it may grow ripe and merry and passionate..." (*Z IV The Intoxicated Song' 9*) As opposed to everything which suffers wanting to die or seeing its suffering as punishment, it should strive that much harder for the future and hence away from itself ("I want heirs," thus speaks everything that suffers, 'I want children, I do not want *myself*.') By contrast, "Lust" wants itself to all eternity and hence wants everything which was necessary for it to all eternity:

Did you ever say Yes to one joy? O my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe as well.
All things are chained and entwined together, all things are in love;
if ever you wanted one moment twice, if ever you said: 'You please me, happiness,

instant, moment!' then you wanted *everything* to return!
you wanted everything anew, everything eternal, everything chained, entwined together,
everything in love, O that is how you *loved* the world... (Z IV 'The Intoxicated Song'
10):

However, that one struggles with one's suffering in the right way is no guarantee that one will be rid of it or that one will subsequently be able to affirm it. Nietzsche counsels against being bitter towards life on account of one's suffering and this is sound advice if one can heed it, but there is a world of difference between a blessing in disguise (eg the sportsman's injury above) and making the best of a bad lot. And in many cases simply doing the latter is heroic enough without trying to love and bless one's fate.

This, then, tells against the general attainability of Nietzsche's ideal but why, as we asked earlier, might anyone ever desire nothing more than the exact repetition of everything? And the above quoted passage from *Z* suggests a case where this might occur, at least for a moment.

§ 7. A single joy which justifies all existence:

Zarathustra claims that if we ever said yes to a single pleasure, then we simultaneously said "Yes" to all woe, indeed to everything. And *WP 1032* is still more explicit:

If we affirm one moment, we thus affirm not only ourselves but all existence. For nothing is self-sufficient, neither in ourselves nor in things; and if our soul has trembled with happiness and sounded like a harp string just once, all eternity was needed to produce this one event - and in this single moment of affirmation all eternity was called good, redeemed, justified and affirmed.

The first response to this is simply to deny the existence of such a phenomenon. Surely the most intense pleasures are the ones where we forget about everything except the pleasure itself and hence where we forget about the rest of existence rather than feel that it is justified? Indeed, if one thinks that were one reminded about some of the horrors of human history then this would destroy the enjoyment of the pleasure, then it is hard to see how the enjoyment of the pleasure constitutes a justification, even for that moment, of all existence.

The second response is to claim that even were there pleasures which, for their duration, justified existence, then there must equally be pains which, for their duration, refuted existence. Perhaps in mad joy I once blessed all existence but equally perhaps, on another occasion, I cursed it in mad despair. So what? The mad moment passes and sobriety returns and I neither love nor hate existence in its entirety.

However, why does Nietzsche even think that a moment of joy in which existence seems justified cries out for the recurrence of everything? Surely the eternity in question applies to the duration of the joy itself - one says that one wants the moment to last forever - and not to the recurrence of everything? And when the moment passes surely we turn our eyes towards a future pleasure which we hope will be richer and longer than the one we have just experienced? What is more, is it not a sign of decadence if one does not do this, a self-satisfied contentment of the very kind which Nietzsche opposes? Our sadness at the passing of one joy is our strength to pursue a new one, not something requiring the consolation of eternal recurrence. It is only when the best part of our life is spent that we have need of such consolation, when we are forced to survive on memories rather than life. And that is a time when the line of our life is no longer ascending and hence a time of decadence and decay.

§ 8. A convalescent's pleasure:

More serious still is the objection that the joy Nietzsche has in mind is the convalescent's joy and therefore that it is a pleasure born of sickness and one which falls a long way short of constituting a sensible judgment. I suggested earlier that the purest forms of joy are entirely self-contained, consisting of nothing more than distilled intensity and this raises the worry that it is the suffering endured throughout a long privation which creates the mad joy which seems to justify existence. So glad is one to be rid of the suffering that one even thinks that it was worth having the suffering (or illness) just so as to experience the joy of being rid of it. However, this convalescent pleasure soon vanishes and does not give way to sober gratitude. One realizes, if one asks oneself the question, that it would have been better not to have been ill or to have suffered, but generally one simply tries to forget.

Nietzsche must want something more than this, namely the blessing in disguise mentioned earlier. But when the ugliest man claims that Zarathustra has taught him to love the Earth and to be glad, for the sake of the one day he has just lived, for the whole of his life, this sounds

rather like the convalescent pleasure I have just described, particularly when one considers that the ugliest man has probably not lived a life to date which one would envy him for.

Hence, when I spoke earlier of leaving the perspective of cursing a mishap and entering the perspective of blessing it, this must be understood as a blessing in disguise and not as a convalescent pleasure. Not only must we leave the perspective of cursing the mishap, but this latter perspective should continue to predominate even as the feeling of gratitude subsides, such that one can say soberly and with hindsight that one 'willed' it. Otherwise the mad joy which the release from a long period of privation can occasion would justify the suffering if it was mad enough to claim that it did so. And this would just be madness.

§ 9. Obedience in one direction:

If one takes this idea of redemption of the will and adds it to the obedience in one direction of *BGE 188* from which there "has always emerged in the long run something for the sake of which it is worthwhile to live on earth, for example virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality - something transfiguring, refined, mad and divine", then a good life would be one where any suffering was redeemed (in the strict 'blessing in disguise' sense) in terms of the one thing which one paid one's obedience to. Perhaps one would even insist that the good life required a certain amount of suffering in this sense. But this surely only serves to make it clear how unlikely one is to be able to lead such a life, though this is not to say that one does not try. After all, no doubt one must battle adversity and no doubt one receives compensation of some kind if one is resourceful enough, but is it often anything more than this? And even if the payback is more than adequate, perhaps one still feels that one could (if life had been kinder) have trodden an easier or more interesting or more pleasurable path to a similar goal. One can affirm the path which one has trodden without admitting that one would have preferred to have trodden others. In fact one simply has no imagination (or refuses to use it) if one claims otherwise. And likewise, one can affirm one's path (to the extent of not being bitter about it or even of calling it good) without desiring the exact recurrence of everything.

This brings us back to the question why Nietzsche's most life-affirming man, who wants everything the same way, is any kind of ideal. I have just suggested that it would be difficult and improbable enough for an individual to 'will' all the suffering in his life in Zarathustra's

sense, but to take on all the suffering in the history of humanity and to desire nothing more than this just seems absurd. Nonetheless, Nietzsche does claim otherwise and one wonders why. He talks of seeking to love what is necessary (*amor fati*) and of aiming one day only to be a yes-sayer. Now admittedly this might be a good direction for a hardened ascetic to take, for someone who can find little to love in life, but this does not justify the limit as an ideal. For not only does a complete yes-saying to the past seem both monstrous and impossible, it also, crucially for Nietzsche, embodies the assumption that such a life would be the best form of human life. And this assumption is utterly unproven.

§ 10. Transience and eternal recurrence:

One should also note that the so-called 'classic' objections to existence are largely or completely ignored by Nietzsche. Natural disasters, illness, man's inhumanity to man and transience all receive little attention. *WP 1065* suggests that eternal recurrence is meant to deal with the problem of transience:

A certain emperor always bore in mind the transitoriness of all things so as not to take them too seriously and to live at peace among them. To me, on the contrary, everything seems far too valuable to be so fleeting: I seek an eternity for everything: ought one to pour the most precious salves and wines into the sea? - My consolation is that everything that has been is eternal: the sea will cast it up again.

However, this meets the objection I made earlier. The problem of the fleetingness of valuable experiences is that they will not be replaced by other equally valuable, or more valuable, experiences. It is not a problem with fleetingness itself. Rather, the problem lies with our nature as finite, mortal beings. And hence the kind of eternity which we crave (as in the case of the pleasurable moment) is eternity of duration (without decay), not of recurrence. We want there never to be a time where the possibility for future valuable experiences ceases. Indeed, the romantic poet's horror of old age (the characteristic desire to burn out rather than fade away) represents the realization that for him this point will be achieved within life and well within it.

If one limits *WP 1065* to the need for consolation for the transience of human existence (or at least the existence of some human beings) then one can see where eternal recurrence fits in,

for it is the only consolation which Nietzsche has not rejected with his insistence that this life is the only reality. However, this does not show that any consolation is required. Perhaps the most valuable form of human life needs no consolation or perhaps it requires a false consolation. I will argue later that Nietzsche is torn between the truth about this life and the task (motivated by the truth that this life is all there is) of making the most of it.

§ 11. Eternal recurrence and the Übermensch:

One can bring home this point about transience by considering eternal recurrence as the pinnacle of life-affirmation attained by the Übermensch and to interpret the Übermensch by means of an aesthetic parallel. If one goes through the complete works of a poet, for example, then one encounters many comparatively mediocre poems (to say nothing of all the poems which the poet wrote and subsequently destroyed); but, if one is dealing with a great poet, one also finds one or several great poems. And these, one tends to feel, are ample justification for all the other poems which the poet wrote. The other poems were but a bridge to the few great poems and find their sense and justification in being so. And one can apply a similar perspective to the history of poetry such that all the poor and mediocre poems ever written were just a bridge to the very much fewer great poems and that this, again, is ample justification for them.

The Übermensch, I suggest, takes this aesthetic parallel over into life such that the Übermensch is the man who is so splendid and super-abundant that the whole of human history can be understood as being a bridge to, and being redeemed by, him alone. (Hence the Übermensch would be the exact opposite of Christ, who died, rather than lived, so as to redeem mankind.) And so valuable does the Übermensch feel himself to be that he can imagine no existence better than his and therefore his approach to dealing with his own transience is to desire himself (and the whole history of mankind which he redeems and which 'created' him) to repeat itself to all eternity.

Such an ideal might just appeal to the elusive Übermensch but it is unlikely to appeal to anyone else. Presumably the majority are simply the manure and ground from which the Übermensch will grow and this cannot be thrilling news for them. And this interpretation thus ridicules Nietzsche's project of providing a new ideal for mankind.

Moreover, why does the Übermensch desire nothing more than an exact recurrence of human history and all its horrors? Perhaps the only way he can recur *is* if everything is really as interconnected as Nietzsche sometimes suggests, but why should this affect what he most desires? Presumably because he believes that *only* exact recurrence is possible if his life is to recur and this makes the assumption about truth which I mentioned earlier.

§ 12. Human relationships and eternal recurrence - an emotional deficiency:

However, even leaving this point aside, there is something very unappealing about taking the aesthetic approach over into life in the way I described. After all, valuing excellence within the spheres of human activities need not entail applying this ruthlessly to life itself. One chooses whether one dances, plays an instrument, writes poetry, but one does not choose to live. Perhaps excelling at some activity helps one to affirm life, but the majority of people surely find a large part of their purpose for living in terms of the emotional relationships which they form with a few select others, and Nietzsche seems to ignore this. And hence the objection that Nietzsche is inhumane.

Moreover, one sometimes senses that Nietzsche is aware of this in his writing. He emphasizes the idea of the productive man where instinct dominates over dialectics and his writing has an emotive power unmatched by other philosophers. However, it remains primarily intellectual and *BGE 296* provides a good example of this, for in tone it reads like a poet's lament at lost youth (in all its fervent foolishness) and yet it is not a lament at lost feelings but lost thoughts. But what kind of life is it where one's most powerful experiences are thoughts rather than feelings? Surely a rather empty one? - and one is inclined to think that herein lies the root of Nietzsche's problem with existence.

This approach becomes easier to understand if one compares Nietzsche with Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, whose return to life from the private hell of his inner and outer solitude occurs through love and a rejection of dialectics. And then Nietzsche starts to look like a more refined Raskolnikov, perhaps even a self-conscious one:

Can an *ass* be tragic? - To be crushed by a burden one can neither bear nor throw off?
... The case of the philosopher. (*TI Maxims and Arrows 11*)



Admittedly this is mere speculation but it does help to explain why we are unlikely to see Zarathustra as living a life which we would want to live or would term desirable and this is important to the extent that Zarathustra's teaching of the eternal recurrence is offered as a counter ideal to the ascetic ideal. Furthermore, Nietzsche seems to acknowledge that there is a sense in which one can get beyond good and evil without any counter ideal, for he says: "That which is done out of love always takes place beyond good and evil." (*BGE 153*)

§ 13. Eternal recurrence as a *counterweight*:

One option for dealing with eternal recurrence when our emotive side recoils at it (i.e. when we side with Shakespeare in mourning the ravages which time will carve on the beauty of the one we love as opposed to somehow affirming this and desiring its repetition) is to suggest that it is offered as a counter ideal to the ascetic ideal more literally - that is, as a *counterweight*. The idea then would be that each individual has to find an equilibrium point between supreme life affirmation and supreme life denial, this coupled with the claim that the equilibrium point has hitherto been found far too near the latter extreme as a result of the absence of the counter ideal which Zarathustra offers. And this would leave open the possibility that the best form of life for a given individual might require that he move closer towards the ascetic ideal than he had done so hitherto even if Nietzsche thought that there were no such individuals currently alive.

Such a view is hard to adjudicate, though, simply because Nietzsche obviously thought that everyone was far too burdened with asceticism and hence that everyone should move in the direction which he suggests. Moreover, it may be (as I suggested earlier concerning the battle between noble and slave moralities) that the importance of shifting mankind in this direction justifies an all out attack, thus explaining why Nietzsche does not make his position on this question less ambiguous.

Whatever Nietzsche's position on this point might be, I take it that no one will either be able, or will want, to go a great distance down the road to affirming eternal recurrence. As I said earlier, making the most of one's life and learning to be grateful even in the face of considerable adversity is one thing, but wholesale affirmation of eternal recurrence is quite another.

§ 14. Life-enhancement, life-affirmation and eternal recurrence:

May considers and rejects affirming eternal recurrence as Nietzsche's counter ideal to the ascetic ideal as it is "neither necessary nor unique to the life enhancer and cannot, therefore, be a useful 'counter ideal' for his ethic of life enhancement."⁹

He notes that the life-denying nature of the ascetic ideal both says 'no' to the temporal, phenomenal world and to all our natural drives and, in doing so, detracts from our ability to lead a fulfilling life in this, the only, reality. However, May thinks that it is only the detraction which Nietzsche objects to and that his real interest lies in promoting life enhancement. And then, because Nietzsche does not distinguish clearly between saying 'no' and detraction, May thinks that he likewise does not distinguish clearly between saying 'yes' (affirmation) and life-enhancement and hence that he rules out the possibility that saying 'no' to features of this life might, in fact, be life-enhancing. In short, he simply assumes that affirmation and enhancement go together, as do denial and detraction.

This is both a powerful and an interesting claim and May uses it as his first objection when he says that "a capacity for life-enhancement - i.e. for creating forms that express sublimated power and that invite love of life - does not require a predisposition on the part of the creator to affirm everything about his life and the world, a fact evidenced by the frequent association of depression and genius."¹⁰ This, though, is altogether too quick, for not all forms which express sublimated power and which are created by genius invite love of life, or at least they do not obviously do so. Take Owen's "*Futility*" again and its distilled despair. Surely Nietzsche has room to claim that work produced from despair or, more generally, from revenge against life, shows in the work and constitutes an objection to the work itself? (See *EH II 10*.) Indeed, even if the work produced by the artist invites love of life, it might still constitute an objection to the artist that he is incapable of affirming his own despair if this is necessary for his productivity - and it might not be.

In order, therefore, for May's objection to bite, he needs to show three things. Firstly, that there are artists who produced life-enhancing forms who also suffered great depression,

⁹ Simon May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on Morality* p 119

¹⁰ Simon May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on Morality* p 119

secondly, that this depression was, at least in part, necessary for the creation of these life-enhancing forms and thirdly, that the artists' failure to affirm the suffering of these depressions was not a sign of weakness and decadence and hence an objection to them, even if not to their life-enhancing work.

May, then, has considerably more work to do on this objection and his failure to develop it sufficiently points to two implicit assumptions. Firstly that artists and the work they produce are always life-enhancing and secondly that depression is a sign of an incompletely affirmed life. I have suggested what is wrong with the first assumption and the second assumption is also too strong. There is nothing about the idea of affirming suffering in the form of a blessing in disguise I discussed earlier (which is not to say that Nietzsche does not want more than this) which means that one has to affirm the suffering while one is going through it. Doubtless, while one is depressed one does not affirm one's depression and it is unclear how one could and still be properly depressed. But this is no necessary obstacle to it being part of a life which one is prepared to affirm.

In fact, the association of depression and genius presents no problem for Nietzsche and is something which he can easily explain by means of the Dionysiac state. So intense is the state of inspiration for the artist that its passing leaves him depressed and only a new fit of inspiration can remedy this. (See Alexander Blok's "*The Artist*".) The artist finds his life structured around the need for an inspiration-fix and in this sense he is an inspiration addict.

This need not be Nietzsche's ideal artist, but even the inspiration addict need not be unable to affirm eternal recurrence because of his boredom and depression. If his moments of inspiration are sufficiently intense and frequent then these might more than compensate for the periods of depression. May argues that not merely the artist's depression but all the things which he is depressed at must also recur and that this removes the possibility of affirming eternal recurrence. However, this is really not a problem with depression at all, but the old thorny problem of desiring the exact repetition of all human history. And clearly there is no need for depression here, even if the repetition were confined to events and circumstances which one was aware of. May is quite right that we are not inclined to go very far down the path towards affirming and desiring nothing more than eternal recurrence, but this has very little to do with artists and depression.

§ 15. May's concern:

However, May does have his finger on a worry and this is that there are great works of art born from and expressing regret and grief at transience and death. And as both of these are necessary, eternal recurrence and *amor fati* exhort us to affirm them and love them, but this does not seem to be possible. Shakespeare mourns the ravages which time will commit on the beauty of the one he loves and he grieves *because* he loves. And this suggests that the love and the grief go together - the more one loves, the more one grieves.

If this is right, then one might try claiming that such works of art do not, in fact, invite love of life, but this looks distinctly unpromising. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" is haunted by transience but is still a memorable affirmation of human love. Hence Nietzsche must be reduced to claiming that the inability to affirm and love such necessary features of life as transience and death constitutes a weakness in the artist and the work of art, even if both are still, overall, more life-enhancing than life-denying.

The question, then, is whether Nietzsche is right to claim this and then whether strength and weakness are the right things to be considering. For I take it that there is a sense in which the inability to affirm and love everything is a sign of weakness - namely, that the less one can affirm and love the more vulnerable one is to the vagaries of chance, whereas the person who can love and affirm everything is invulnerable to such things. However, this does not show that to be invulnerable in this way is a desirable form of human life, even were it attainable. Indeed, it surely is not.

One can bring home this undesirability in two ways. The first is to question the idea of loving everything, for is it not part of loving to select and value one thing (or some few things) more than others, even if only because of the relationship which one stands in relative to it? (One values one's lover more than a stranger, even if that stranger is someone who, if circumstances had been different, could also have been one's much valued partner.) And how, then, could one love everything about human history and it still be love, for what would one be preferring it relative to? Nietzsche might answer "all other possible histories", but, as already noted, this is likely to be incompatible with how one feels if one loves one person in this life. And Nietzsche's preference then expresses emotional lack rather than emotional abundance.

The second way is to cast doubt on the kind of strength Nietzsche has in mind and this follows on from the point I just made about *amor fati* and eternal recurrence being symptomatic of a lack of the kind of emotional fulfilment for which we have (at least if we are remotely cultivated) a real need. Dostoevsky has Raskolnikov contemplate suicide and, when Raskolnikov does not follow this through (unlike Svidrigailov), he raises the question as to whether Raskolnikov's failure constitutes weakness. I suggest that in Nietzsche's sense it does, but that Dostoevsky has a better answer. He insists (or rather has Porfiry and Svidrigailov insist) that Raskolnikov does not commit suicide because he is still too much in love with life (and, in particular, with several people in it) and that this constitutes his strength with which he will endure and redeem his future. And in thinking (or feeling) this way, Dostoevsky puts himself firmly in line with the characteristic artist's penchant for love as that which makes life both enduring and worthwhile. Indeed, the most curious thing about Nietzsche is that he almost seems to agree with this in passages such as the following:

... *true* life as collective continuation of life through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality. ... All this is contained in the word Dionysos ... The profoundest instinct of life, the instinct for the future of life, for the eternity of life is in this word experienced religiously - the actual road to life, procreation, as the *sacred road*. (*TI What I owe to the Ancients' 4*)

(Remember that for Nietzsche "Die Vergeistigung der Geschlechtlichkeit heisst Liebe".) And this paints the picture of Nietzsche which I have already sketched earlier - that of someone trying to affirm life in the absence of the very thing which would make it affirmable and who needs to forget this in order for life to be more tolerable. This, though, he cannot quite do and yet the emotional void is not filled either. And the portrait of Nietzsche as the tragic philosopher acquires a new and deeper resonance.

One last resort for trying to solve the seeming incompatibility of love and transience would be to suggest that love and grief at transience might form an exquisite cocktail of pleasure and pain, exquisite enough to make transience desirable and any non-transient form of existence too dull by comparison. Such a world-view might well be called a tragic one.

This approach might cater for transience and death in general (though it is far from clear that the desire to experience life in this way would be something anyone would want to possess or

pursue) but it would not solve the problem of eternal recurrence, for this demands the desire for the exact repetition of everything. And one could quite well be reconciled to transience and death in general and yet still reject large parts of one's past life and past history. In fact, a good part of the problem of suffering and death is that much of it is senseless or premature and *amor fati* and eternal recurrence do not seem capable of changing this.

§ 16. *Amor fati* and eternal recurrence:

One might then wonder whether *amor fati* and eternal recurrence were meant to be equivalent, for this would leave *amor fati* to deal with the necessary generalities of transience and death while eternal recurrence dealt with all the particular forms these assume. However, Nietzsche clearly intended them to amount to the same:

My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity. Not merely to endure that which happens of necessity, still less to dissemble it - all idealism is untruthfulness in the face of necessity - but to *love* it ... (*EH II 10*)

This is unambiguous enough, but there is a tension between the formulations of *amor fati* in *GS 276* and *EH II 10*. Affirming eternal recurrence is usually taken to require looking at the reality of life, nature and human history and somehow affirming it and loving it, and while *EH II 10* confirms this view of *amor fati*, *GS 276* seems to countenance a conscious looking away:

I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. *Looking away* shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.

And this is very different from facing up to, and loving, everything necessary. It also seems not to be a path which Nietzsche himself pursued later on in his works, for *GM* is an acknowledged polemic against slave morality and the ascetic ideal and *A* is a "curse on Christianity." *GS 321* urges, in line with *GS 276*, that one should not darken one's own light through direct battles but should make one's own image the brighter:

Let us colour our own example ever more brilliantly. Let our brilliance make them

look dark. No, let us not become darker ourselves on their account, like all those who punish others and feel dissatisfied. Let us sooner step aside. Let us look away.

And yet GM ignores this advice and is noticeably the darker for it.

§ 17. Artists and affirming eternal recurrence:

May's second objection to eternal recurrence as the counter ideal also touches on this point, for he claims that artists (Nietzsche's paradigmatic life-enhancers, according to May) could not affirm eternal recurrence because this would mean facing reality and yet, by Nietzsche's own admission (*GM III 4*), they are incapable of doing this if they are to remain creative. Hence affirming eternal recurrence cannot be the ideal for life-enhancement.

This, though, seems a misreading of *GM III 4*. May has in mind: "Ein vollkommener und ganzer Künstler ist in alle Ewigkeit von dem 'Realen', dem Wirklichen abgetrennt"; but this continues:

...andererseits versteht man es, wie er an dieser ewigen 'Unrealität' und Falschheit seines innersten Daseins mitunter bis zur Verzweiflung müde werden kann - und dass er dann wohl den Versuch macht, einmal in das gerade ihm Verbotenste, ins Wirkliche überzugreifen, wirklich zu *sein*.

And what Nietzsche means is not that the artist should not look at reality - for how could he depict any convincing characters without doing so? - but that his nature is unreal and that his art suffers when he tries to *be* something real. In particular, he must not confuse himself with the characters he creates. Nietzsche insists that Goethe could not have created Faust if he *were* Faust and likewise that Homer could not have created Achilles if he *were* Achilles. And Wagner's error with Parsifal, Nietzsche thinks, is to have confused himself with Parsifal such that in his later life he came to embrace asceticism himself. Moreover, Nietzsche makes it clear just how much of the reality of the contrasts of the Middle-Ages-soul (Seelen-Kontrasten) Wagner had to absorb in order to create Parsifal.

This destroys May's second objection, but one could also have noted that in *GS 299* Nietzsche has no objection to the use of art to falsify reality but seems rather to want to extend this

artists' power further into life. Hence:

How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not?
And I rather think that in themselves they never are. Here we could learn something
from physicians ... but even more from artists who are really continually trying to bring
off such inventions and feats.

and the next step:

... but we want to be the poets of our life - first of all in the smallest, most everyday
matters.

But if *GS* (*Book 5* aside) seems content with using the artists' power to make things attractive
and desirable, then *GM* once again sees Nietzsche probing the dark and more questionable
sides of man's existence and man's past and it is tempting to understand this (though only for
illustrative purposes) in terms of the two divinities of *BT* - with Apollo dominating *GS* while
Dionysos dominates *GM*. Certainly in *Book 4* of *GS* Nietzsche seems most willing to rest
contented with creation and contemplation of the beautiful, but even here *GS 309* tells of the
other force which drives him:

'This penchant and passion for what is true, real, non-apparent, certain - how it
aggravates me! Why does this gloomy and restless fellow keep following and driving
me? ...'

And it is this drive for truth which, I suggest, is responsible for the darker tone of Nietzsche's
later writing.

§ 18. Nietzsche's later version of *amor fati*:

I do not want to push this idea of the Apollonian nature of *GS* very far, for Apollo drops out
of Nietzsche's later writing as an explicit force, but the idea of Dionysos is something which
Nietzsche repeatedly draws our attention to. *BGE 295* makes Nietzsche's status as follower
of Dionysos about as clear as one could wish and *WP 1041* reinforces this while setting out
Nietzsche's later version of *amor fati*. And what is certain is that this *amor fati* is a much

sterner proposition than that of *GS 276*, for it is:

a Dionysiac affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception or selection ... It is part of this state to perceive not merely the necessity of those sides of existence hitherto denied, but their desirability; and not merely their desirability merely in relation to the sides hitherto affirmed (perhaps as their complement or precondition) but for their own sake, as the more powerful, more fruitful, *truer* (NB the point I made about truth above) sides of existence, in which its will finds clearer expression.

And here there seems no possibility of 'looking away' (*Wegsehen*). And *WP 852* reiterates this line:

It is a sign of one's *feeling of power and well-being* how far one can acknowledge the terrifying and questionable character of things; and *whether* one needs some sort of 'solution' at the end.

One might well think that Nietzsche's conception of tragedy must lie at the heart of this Dionysiac affirmation and *WP 853* and *WP 1052* confirm this. Hence presumably the idea behind this sterner version of *amor fati* is that one should admit that there is no solution to the problem of the purpose of existence and should have the power not to be crushed by this. Or rather, one finds one's purpose in stripping away the purposes which others have imposed on the terrible nature of existence as *BGE 230* suggests. And if this is right, then we should remember just how much this later *amor fati* is Nietzsche's *own, personal* ideal.

This becomes clearer if we consider the idea of *amor fati* as a test of strength along the lines of *WP 852*, for why is affirming all aspects of human history and existence the ultimate test of strength? Why not the problem of a worse human history? What of an individual who surveyed the whole of human history and felt about it the way someone who loves tragedy does about a Jane Austen novel - that it was too flimsy and neat - and who craved something more questionable and profound? Nietzsche may have thought that, due to the causal interrelatedness of all events, if anything recurred, everything would recur, but this surely has little to do with what someone would most crave. And May is spot on when making this objection. For Nietzsche's assumption does seem to be that to be most superabundant with life would be to crave a future identical to the past and this *is*, as May insists, an extremely

dubious psychological proposition. Such an individual might want to make things better or worse (as I suggest), though May, very reasonably, thinks that he would want to make them better. As I insisted above, the problem of affirming the truth about human existence and desiring nothing more than this is the problem of the pursuit of knowledge, particularly psychological insight in Nietzsche's case, which *BGE 230* struggles with. It is no longer about pursuit of the most fulfilling life or about the most superabundant man and what he would believe and desire. It is simply about Nietzsche.

PART IV A REFINED, LIFE-ENHANCING, NOBILITY

§ 1. 'How one becomes what one is':

May's candidate for Nietzsche's counter ideal to the ascetic ideal is how one becomes what one is, for he thinks that this best fits Nietzsche's demand for life-enhancement. However, despite the criticisms which he offers of affirming eternal recurrence as a counter ideal, he offers nothing to rebut the textual evidence (*BGE 56, GM III 23, GM II 24,25, EH GM*) that Nietzsche considered affirming and desiring eternal recurrence to be the fundamental conception of Z and Z to teach the opposite ideal to the ascetic ideal.

In this respect one must agree with Clark, though not with her rejection of the *Übermensch*, for this is part and parcel of Zarathustra. Clark suggests that Zarathustra initially preaches the *Übermensch* out of revenge against the small man, but that he subsequently abandons this in favour of teaching affirmation of eternal recurrence. However, the reason why Zarathustra stops preaching the *Übermensch* is that he grows strong enough to realize that he must *become* the *Übermensch* and, by doing so, affirm eternal recurrence. Hence we find Nietzsche saying, when trying to elucidate the concept of Dionysos:

The psychological problem in the type of Zarathustra is how he, who to an unheard-of degree says No, *does* No to everything to which one has hitherto said Yes, can none the less be the opposite of a spirit of denial; ... how he, who has the harshest, the most fearful insight into reality, who has though the 'most abysmal thought', none the less finds in it no objection to existence, nor even to the eternal recurrence of existence - rather one more reason *to be himself* the eternal Yes to all things, 'the tremendous unbounded Yes and Amen' ... (*EH Z 6*)

In the face of such evidence, May's claim that "wie man wird, was man ist" is Nietzsche's counter ideal will only prove true if it turns out to amount to much the same as Zarathustra and eternal recurrence - and May clearly does not think that it does, for he offers it as a better alternative to the options which he has rejected.

§ 2. What it means to 'become what one is':

An initial thought is that "wie man wird, was man ist" might well be the opposite of the ascetic ideal, for, if the latter involves striving to be other (and, what is more, the opposite, the absence) of what one is, of the reality of one's natural drives, then this might well be thought of as being "wie man wird, was man nicht ist" and hence a literal opposite of "wie man wird, was man ist".

However, Nietzsche clearly intends "wie man wird, was man ist" to be more than a saying 'yes' to our natural drives and thus to letting ourselves go. Indeed, in one sense, nothing could be more contrary to Nietzsche's intention than such a lack of self-discipline. Nietzsche even praises the ascetic ideal for its cultivation of self-discipline (which he wants to harness) - it is just that he thinks that the ascetic ideal has used this in the most disastrous way possible. Rather, 'becoming what one is' means to have a dominating instinct grow (for the most part unconsciously, though certainly not therefore without motivational force) to the point where it gives unity to the life one has lived. And while it grows unconsciously, this instinct assembles the various attributes which it will need for its great task without thereby betraying too far in advance *what* this task is, in case the enormity of this paralyses the development necessary for it.

Nietzsche elucidates this in *EH II 9* - the task which emerges from his life being the "Umwertung aller Werte" - and he marvels at the unconscious wisdom which prepared itself so painstakingly in him, even emphasizing that in order to become what one is, one must not have a clue what one is:

For assuming that the task, the vocation, the *destiny* of the task exceeds the average measure by a significant degree, there would be no greater danger than to catch sight of oneself *with* this task. That one becomes what one is presupposes that one does not have the remotest idea *what* one is. (*EH II 9*)

But if one must not know what one is, in order to become what one is, then how can becoming what one is offer any useful guidance as an ideal? Perhaps it is a sign of a life well-lived that one can look back on, and make sense of, it in this way, but, by then, it may well be too late.

§ 3. No protection against asceticism:

Another worry about 'becoming what one is' is how little protection it offers against asceticism. Surely someone whose dominating instinct was hatred of life or great pity for suffering could tell a similar story in shape (though not content) as to how they became what they were and yet be thoroughly ascetic? Indeed, the evangelist's idea, that the rest of his life was God's way of preparing him for the great task of spreading God's word which he now embarks upon, and of which he earlier had no inkling, is far from unheard of. Indeed, is Nietzsche not consciously describing his life in this way so as to provoke this very kind of comparison and so as to dispel the idea that there is any divine being functioning behind such 'callings'?

May notes *GS 335* where Nietzsche says: "Wir aber wollen *die werden, die wir sind* - die Neuen, die Einmaligen, die Unvergleichbaren, die Sich-selber-Gesetzgebenden, die Sich-selber-Schaffenden" in support of his thesis, but does this amount to much more than Nietzsche urging himself to remain true to himself and not lapse back into what he sees as the complacent ignorance of the majority? Admittedly, the following offers some support for May:

... it is selfish to experience one's own judgment as a universal law; and this selfishness is blind, petty and frugal because it betrays that you have not yet discovered yourself nor created for yourself an ideal of your own, your very own - for that could never be somebody else's and much less that of all, all! (*GS 335*)

But the emphasis here is on creating one's own ideal and thereby becoming an individual (and Nietzsche insists that we *are* all incomparably individual) rather than on becoming what one is. Indeed, Nietzsche seems to assume that 'becoming what one is' means creating one's *own* ideal and in this sense 'becoming what one is' stands opposed to becoming what everyone else is, in other words, the herd.

That the emphasis of *GS 335* is on the demands of intellectual conscience, on urging people not to rest blandly content with their 'truths' and indeed finally on encouraging people to see 'moralizing' as nauseous and beneath them, tells against the idea that 'becoming what one is' is Nietzsche's counter ideal (after all, if it were his counter ideal, then surely he would give it a little more space and emphasis?), but the decisive point lies again with the lack of protection the recommendations of *GS 335* offer against asceticism. For the ascetic priest has gone

further towards creating his own ideal than the contented herd animal; indeed, one must imagine that he possesses substantial psychological refinement in order to try to persuade others to fall into line with his judgments, and yet this does not mean that Nietzsche approves of him.

Indeed, one could imagine the ascetic priest pushing his honesty, as Nietzsche urges, to the point where he no longer believes in the truth of his own claims but where he finds this one more incentive to try to persuade others to his point of view. *GS 335* is about becoming an individual through realizing that all one's actions are incomparably individual. This, in turn, spoils the moralistic way of talking about actions as Nietzsche so ably describes. What this does not mean is that one's actions will suddenly diverge wildly from the dictates of morality. Nor does it mean that Nietzsche has nothing to say about the kind of individuals who are desirable. That he does not discuss the latter in *GS 335* merely shows what I have been insisting - that this passage is not concerned with providing a counter ideal to the ascetic ideal.

Nietzsche finishes *GS 335* by praising the honesty which he believes will overcome morality, but one must remember that Nietzsche's primary objection to the ascetic ideal, and to the morality of universal prescriptions which is part of it, is not that it is mendacious or false, but that it is life-denying. (Nietzsche hints at this in *GS 335* when he says, "Let us leave such chatter to those who have nothing else to do but drag the past a few steps further through time and who never live in the present - which is to say the many, the great majority.") Hence, even if the ascetic ideal does survive a truthful look at itself, this does not remove the need for a counter ideal. And this counter ideal is to be found in *Z*, as *GM II 24 & 25* make clear.

One would hope, then, that May could find support for 'becoming what one is' in *Z*, but he can find only one such reference and this is little more than a throw away comment in *Part IV*, a part which was only added later and originally was not part of the plan of *Z*. Furthermore, if one looks at the amount of space devoted to the Übermensch and affirming eternal recurrence in *Z*, then one finds what I have already claimed, namely, that 'becoming what one is' is not Nietzsche's counter ideal. Eternal recurrence, for example, merits both the *Seven Seals* of *Part III* and *The Intoxicated Song* of *Part IV*. I suggested at the outset that May must propose 'becoming what one is' as a counter ideal better suited to life-enhancement, rather than as Nietzsche's counter ideal, and we can now include one criterion which a counter ideal must meet in order to qualify in this way and on which May's arguments have so far foundered -

that a counter ideal to the ascetic ideal must be *counter* to asceticism by being opposed to it as the "gegnerisches Ideal" of *GM III 23* emphasizes.

§ 4. Life-enhancement and 'how one becomes what one is':

May chooses 'how one becomes what one is' as the candidate which best fits May's three criteria of life-enhancement (these supposedly modelling Nietzsche's thought) - those of power, sublimation of power and form-creation. The first two are uncontentious enough and May makes the fairly simple but still very important point that sublimation enables us to house a far greater range of (even opposing) drives than would otherwise be the case and to prevent the violence of these drives annihilating or paralysing us (and, one might well add, others - for Nietzsche is not committed to indifference or hostility here even if his motivations are decidedly 'immoral'). However, because May recognizes that the first two criteria still leave room for values and practices structured by the ascetic ideal, he introduces the third criterion - form creation that invites love of world and life - so as to exclude this possibility.

One might, though, think that the first two criteria needed supplementing anyway and that form creation is a good criterion for doing so, without thereby accepting that such forms must invite love of world and life. Surely Nietzsche could be said to recommend power, sublimation of power and form creation (unqualified) as a general prescription regardless of ascetic or non-ascetic motivation? May notes the creation of values, of works of art and of a character with style as the three kinds of form creation, though he dresses them up, additionally, in the finery of inviting love of world and life. But surely Nietzsche's enemies (with all the praise which this carries from Nietzsche, for they must be worthy enemies) are precisely those who seek power, sublimation of power and form creation but are also ascetically motivated? Hence the distinction should really be carried out one level higher than the one on which May operates.

This might seem a trivial or pedantic objection; after all, inasmuch as Nietzsche is anti-ascetic he is, in some sense, in favour of forms of creation which invite love of world and life, so May is hardly mistaken as to the substance of Nietzsche's thought. However, by making the distinction at the level he does, May seems to suggest (perhaps unintentionally) that asceticism is not capable of form-creation. At the very least he leaves this open as a possibility when it should be firmly closed. Kant and Socrates fulfil all three criteria of power, sublimation of power and form creation and yet are two of Nietzsche's favoured opponents. Indeed, it was

Plato, according to Nietzsche, who set the ascetic ball rolling with his claim that truth is divine.

What is more, the same could be true of works of art. They could be form creations expressing sublimated power but still motivated by asceticism and hence inimical to flourishing life. After all, Nietzsche is not committed to insisting, despite his claim that artists are the closest one can find (at least up until Nietzsche's time) to an opposite of the ascetic ideal, that the works of art which artists produce are all life-enhancing. Artists are presumably paradigmatically unascetic in that they tend to go with, rather than against, their natural instincts, particularly their sexuality, but if they happen to be overcome with feelings of grief and revenge, then this hardly suggests a recipe for life-enhancing art. Nietzsche suggests in *GM* that artists have never stood independently, have never created values, and this reinforces the picture of the artist as a refined machine which takes its input, magnifies it, sublimates it and imprisons it in form, but where the nature of the product is still crucially dependent on the input which the machine receives. Perhaps this process of imposing his power on his input enables the artist to affirm life even in dire circumstances, but this is very different to suggesting that the product is life-enhancing.

§ 5. The meaning of 'life-enhancing':

I use the term life-enhancing, as May does, but what does it mean? May distinguishes between life-enhancement and life affirmation but it is still natural to say that Christianity is life-enhancing for some (at least) of those who believe in it and yet Christianity has Nietzsche's taste firmly set against it. However, when Nietzsche talks about the ascetic ideal being inimical to life, he means inimical to healthy flourishing life and not to all life, for it is part of his account of asceticism's origin and spread that it is a last ditch ruse on the part of nature to keep sick and weary life alive.

One might think, then, that Nietzsche's concern was for the health and future of the human species but this would be to miss how strongly Nietzsche's idea of life-enhancement emphasizes qualitative excellence. I take it that it is a straightforward empirical fact that the human species is advanced more by a few exceptional individuals than by the vast majority, but Nietzsche seems to value such exceptional individuals for themselves and to leave it to the majority to value the legacies of these individuals. For Nietzsche, mankind is valuable only as a means to creating a few exceptional individuals (see the idea of the *Übermensch*) and it

is from this perspective that life-enhancing must be understood.

One might note that a species can become powerful and dominant other than through the quality of the individuals it creates - namely by virtue of organized number - but despite his talk of life being Will to Power, it is clear that this empowerment of a species by virtue of grouping together into larger power blocks (surely one of nature's most prevalent strategies) at the expense of the quality of the individual is something Nietzsche strenuously opposes. Army ants may be very effective predators, but Nietzsche's preference is undoubtedly for the eagle.

However, in case this still leaves doubt as to the basis of Nietzsche's preference, then consider the richness of life which Goethe contained and experienced compared to that of an ordinary person. A species could attain phenomenal dominance and power and yet the life experience of each of its individuals be utterly sparse and meagre. Indeed, as Nietzsche's "letzte Mensch" shows, this is the disaster which he most fears and in direct opposition to which Zarathustra teaches the Übermensch.

§ 6. Conclusion:

I conclude that May does not establish 'how one becomes what one is' as a suitable ideal for life-enhancement in Nietzsche's sense. An understanding of what Nietzsche means by life-enhancing not only does not point to 'how one becomes what one is' but points clearly to something else, namely the Übermensch of Z. This, as I suggested earlier, is unlikely to attract many devotees as an ideal in itself, but as a counter weight to asceticism and a tonic for an overly-ascetic organism it is far from being without value.

§ 7. Ridley and the Noble:

In *Nietzsche's Conscience*¹¹, Ridley discusses *GS 290* - Nietzsche's much quoted claim that "Eins ist Not", that is, that a human being should attain satisfaction with himself and that the strong do this by imposing the rigour of a single taste on their character. Ridley's interest here is in interpreting Nietzsche's suggestion in *GM II 24* of wedding bad conscience to all one's

¹¹ Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience - The Noble § III*

unnatural inclinations in opposition to asceticism. Quite rightly he interprets Nietzsche as suggesting using bad conscience against one's unnatural inclinations, but is this really so hard to understand? The ascetic priest teaches that one should be proud of one's unnatural inclinations (towards God, salvation etc) and ashamed of one's natural ones (notably sexuality and cruelty) and Nietzsche counsels the reverse. One should spiritualize (*vergeistigen*) and beautify (*verschönen*) one's natural inclinations and be ashamed of one's unnatural ones.

The point of this, though, is not mere aestheticizing and "*vergeistigen*" should alert us to this. Nietzsche's quandary is how to have the best of the worlds of both the noble and the slave. He wants the power and cheerfulness (*Heiterkeit*) that goes with the noble but without the horror of the excesses which the original noble so notoriously commits. And he wants the cleverness and increased subtlety of the slave but without the *ressentiment* and sense of gloomy oppressedness and without the weakness. And this in fact amounts to nothing more contentious than an ideal of refined health and strength, with the point of the refinement being twofold. Firstly, to make the individual in question less crude and more interesting (and also richer in experiential quality) and secondly, to make his acts less barbaric and less messy. Thus it is not merely a question of discharging the instincts in the same old way but more elegantly; rather it is a matter of finding a different, more refined, more spiritual outlet.

Admittedly, discharging one's instincts in the old destructive way, only more elegantly, would constitute an improvement in Nietzsche's eyes but this hardly need mean a substantial one. An ugly action with a little make-up on is still an ugly action, even if it does look marginally better.

§ 8. Aestheticization and nobility:

Ridley raises the problem of the person who performs a series of vile and spiteful acts and lies about them, but manages, through rigorous practice, to interpret his behaviour as sublime. He then asks, "Does my self-exculpatory self-aestheticization somehow make me more noble? Is my soul *really* more beautiful now for the work that I've done on it?" But it is hard to know what to make of this objection. Nietzsche does not mention nobility explicitly in *GS 290* and he certainly does not insist that attaining satisfaction with oneself is a sufficient condition for attaining the status of refined nobility. And as to the question as to whether Ridley's soul is more beautiful for the self-exculpatory work done on it, one simply replies that it need not be -

belief does not make beautiful.

Ridley's solution to the problem he creates is to bring in truthfulness ("For if the one 'needful' thing is to give style to one's character *truthfully*, the spectre of self-serving self-*deception* recedes"¹²). But if what matters is making something which merits the title of a work of art out of one's character, then the problem of self-serving self-deception recedes (if, indeed, it ever arose), for one must serve art and not oneself. And this would surely extend to dictating the kinds of acts which one was allowed to commit, thus leaving the problem as one of art vs morality. Though even here one must remember that attaining satisfaction with oneself is only a general, not an exhaustive, recommendation.

Furthermore, giving style to one's character is not simply about dressing up what is already there. Nietzsche is not committed to the view (nor did he think) that a good approach for Ridley's person who commits vile and spiteful acts and then lies about them is to deceive himself into self-exculpatory satisfaction. *GS 290* specifically licenses efforts to get rid of bits of nature and bring in new ones: "Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed - both times through long practice and daily work at it." Nor indeed does Nietzsche's desire to be rid of concepts such as moral guilt and sin mean that he wants to eradicate shame. *GS 335* urges us to become "die Neuen, die Einmaligen, die Unvergleichbaren, die Sich-selber-Gesetzgebenden, die Sich-selber-Schaffenden" and if one sets oneself standards then failure to live up to them will make one ashamed and the more so, the more one cares about the standards in question. This feeling can be used destructively (excessive self-recrimination) or productively (one takes pains to do better in future, even at a different activity) and still be free of any moral overtones. One does not believe that one has sinned or transgressed any moral law.

§ 9. The *activity* of attaining satisfaction with oneself:

What Ridley fails to emphasize is Nietzsche's real motivation for claiming that man must attain satisfaction with himself and this is what leads him astray. Nietzsche emphasizes *erreiche* and this already suggests activity rather than a state of being satisfied. (One recalls Nietzsche drawing attention to Goethe's realization, via Napoleon, that there is also a productivity of

¹² Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience* p 137

action.) He then goes on to say that the dissatisfied man "is continually ready for revenge, and we others will be his victims, if only by having to endure his ugly sight. For the sight of what is ugly makes one bad and gloomy" So not only is the dissatisfied man ugly to look at, but his dissatisfaction makes him ready for revenge. And this raises the possibility that the person who commits vile and spiteful acts would cease to do so if only he could somehow attain satisfaction with himself or were sufficiently *active* in trying to do so.

One might even think, then, that the point of attaining satisfaction with oneself was to become well-disposed towards life. Instead of being inactive and wallowing in dissatisfaction one should be actively and creatively seeking self-satisfaction (or something which will provide it). Even if dissatisfaction is the source of the activity and satisfaction fleetingly achieved, then, in being active, the dissatisfied person ceases to be a burden to himself and others. Certainly this seems to be Nietzsche's line in the passage which follows *GS 290*:

Genoa. - ... this region is studded with the images of bold and autocratic human beings. They have *lived* and wished to live on: that is what they are telling me with their houses, built and adorned to last for centuries and not for a fleeting hour; they were well-disposed towards life, however ill-disposed they often may have been towards themselves. ... This whole region is overgrown with this magnificent, insatiable selfishness of the lust for possessions and spoils ...

Indeed, Nietzsche's objection to the ascetic priest's way of giving style to his character must be founded on the fact that the ascetic is constantly dissatisfied with himself, believing himself originally sinful and solely responsible and guilty for all his acts or omissions. For, with his critique of truth and his insistence that truth can be inimical to life, Nietzsche cannot object to the ascetic priest on the ground (which he certainly holds, eg *GM III 15* "Das ist kühn genug, falsch genug") that the style he gives to his character is based on a false understanding of the reality of man's natural drives. More evidence still, that Ridley is on the wrong lines with the need for giving style to one's character truthfully.

Nietzsche makes this point about the dissatisfaction of the ascetic and others like him and contrasts this with his own approach in *GS 56*:

If these people who crave distress felt the strength inside themselves to do something

for themselves internally, then they would also know how to create for themselves, internally, their very own authentic distress. Then their inventions might be more refined and their satisfactions might sound like good music, while at present they fill the world with their clamour about distress and all too often introduce into it the *feeling of distress*. They do not know how to begin with themselves - and therefore paint the distress of others on the wall; they always need others! And continually others! - Pardon me, my friends, I have ventured to paint my *happiness* on the wall.

§ 10. The character-artist:

Undoubtedly Nietzsche thinks that one must know one's nature well enough in order to give style to it - as the first few lines of GS 290 state explicitly: "... who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature ..." - but Ridley is wrong to see giving style to one's character as based on the need to falsify one's image of oneself so that one does not perish in the face of it. He says, "One might regard the stylish results of one's art with satisfaction, no doubt, but, if one has been truthful, one will not be misled by those results into thinking that one 'really' is as one portrays oneself to oneself as being."¹³ But Nietzsche's motivation is undeniably aesthetic, hence his emphasis on unity: "Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste!" And that one's finished, stylized character is meant to be an aesthetic product does not mean that the product is illusory or founded on error. Rather, just as an architect must have knowledge of the site he is to build on and the materials which he is to use so as to think up a design which will maximize their potential, so the character artist needs knowledge of his nature. And the character he creates is no less real than the final building of the architect's design, it is just that the character-artist is both the architect and the builder - and the material too.

In fact, the motivation is the same for giving style to one's character as for building beautiful buildings. Just as Nietzsche prefers the houses in Genoa "gebaut und geschmückt für Jahrhunderte" to those built and decorated "für die flüchtige Stunde" (the latter, doubtless, being modern houses) so he would prefer to live in a world where people gave style to their characters in a grand sense. Such a world would be more beautiful and more inspiring. (See, eg, GS 288.) Furthermore, with his emphasis on individuality, giving style to one's character

¹³ Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience* pp 137-8

is not only about becoming an individual in the required Nietzschean sense, it is also something which one can do as a comparatively isolated individual and without external resources, thus allowing one to continue and flourish in the good solitude.

Ridley also does not distinguish between truthfulness about the nature and extent of our natural drives and truthfulness about the universe and our existence in it. For it is only the former knowledge (at least some degree of it) which Nietzsche requires the character-artist to have and not the latter, a point which the architect analogy again makes clear. One is not prevented by a false world-view from creating beautiful and impressive buildings, indeed, perhaps one is even aided by it. And Nietzsche makes this point in *BGE Pref*:

Let us hope that dogmatic philosophy was only a promise across millennia: as, in a still earlier age, was astrology, in the service of which more labour, money, ingenuity and patience has perhaps been expended than for any real science hitherto - we owe to it and to its 'supra-terrestrial' claims the grand style of architecture in Asia and Egypt.

The point, then, of giving style to one's character is not to provide an Apollonian veil of illusion for the terrible (albeit empirical and not metaphysical) Dionysiac truth about the nature of oneself and existence, but simply to make oneself less ugly and hence more inspiring to oneself and others. Ridley admits that his interpretation sits uneasily with the tone of *GS 290* and this is because *GS* and *GM* are very different in tone. Nietzsche's *amor fati* in *GS* licenses a 'looking away' (*Wegsehen*) from ugliness and those who accuse, while his later version of *amor fati* involves a wholesale embracing of these, this somehow being made possible by means of tragic cruelty. And *GM* certainly sees Nietzsche getting to grips with those who accuse and thus darkening his light, so it is not surprising that Ridley's interpretation of *GM* sits uneasily with *GS 290*.

§ 11. Constructive and destructive - *GS* and *GM*:

I suggest that works such as *GM* are really primarily destructive (*GM* is avowedly polemic as is *A*) and that one must look elsewhere for Nietzsche's more constructive views, doubtless to *Z*, as Nietzsche often urges. But if Nietzsche's more constructive views are to be found earlier than *GM*, then why did he not follow his own counsel? Did he tire of 'looking away' or did

he find himself unable to do so? *BGE 227* suggests the latter - "Honesty, granted that this is our virtue from which we cannot get free ..." - thus presenting the picture of Nietzsche being slowly impaled on his own virtue. Aware that truth can be inimical to life, he still feels compelled to pursue it, even in the face of uncertainty as to its purpose or use. And *BGE 230* reflects this growing feeling of unease:

For to translate man back into nature; to master the many vain and fanciful interpretations and secondary meanings which have been hitherto scribbled and daubed over that eternal basic text *homo natura*; to confront man henceforth with man in the way in which, hardened by the discipline of science, man today confronts the *rest* of nature ... - that may be a strange and extravagant task but it is a *task* - who would deny that? Why did we choose it, this extravagant task? Or to ask the question differently, "Why knowledge at all?" - Everyone will ask us about that. And we, thus pressed, we who have asked ourselves the same question a hundred times, we have found and can find no better answer...

Moreover, *BGE 227*, where Nietzsche advocates the tireless perfecting of his virtue of honesty, is the very opposite of creating a mask or Apollonian veil. He talks of mobilizing all his resources, even his 'devils', in the service of his 'god' and this is just the non-transcendent and individual ideal which Ridley sees Nietzsche as having difficulty attaining or living with. Indeed, as Nehamas might say, it is Nietzsche's works which bear testament to the quality of this virtue. And Nietzsche himself says as much in *BGE 227*: "...May its (his honesty) brightness one day overspread this ageing culture and its dull, gloomy seriousness like a gilded, azure, mocking evening glow."

The only problem for Nietzsche is that his later works such as *BGE* and *GM* are nothing like a gilded, azure, mocking evening glow. Perhaps they hit harder than earlier works (eg *GS*) but if their initial effect justifies this then one is still less than eager to return to them. Compared to *Book 4* of *GS* they are dark and dispiriting and one is sometimes inclined to wonder whether it was worth leaving asceticism behind in order to end up in such a state.

Doubtless this is why Nietzsche always refers us back to *Z* as a high point, conscious that he himself has descended from this height:

At this point there is only one thing fitting for me, to be silent: otherwise I would be laying a hand on that which only a younger one is free to choose, a 'more future one', a stronger one than I am - which only *Zarathrustra* is free to choose, *Zarathrustra the godless* ... (*GM II 25*)

And similarly in *GM I 12* we find him asking for *one* glimpse of "something perfect, completely formed, happy, powerful, triumphant, in which there is still something to fear! Of a human being who justifies man *himself*" - presumably because he is not this man himself.

Certainly *GM I 11 & 12* see Nietzsche disgusted with man in a way which he manages to avoid in *Z*. The end of *GM I 11* is dirtied by its content, whereas Nietzsche's description of the Last Man in *Z* maintains a condescending distance which keeps it clean. Nietzsche seems to be suffering in later works and we can feel this in the prose. *BGE 282* is more explicit still:

He who has the desires of an elevated, fastidious soul, and rarely finds his table laid and his food ready, will be in great danger at all times: but today the danger he is in has become extraordinary. ... We have all no doubt eaten at tables where we did not belong; and precisely the most spiritual of us who are most difficult to feed know that dangerous dyspepsia which comes from a sudden insight and disappointment about our food and table-companions - the *after-dinner nausea*.

§ 12. A refined nobility:

All this, though, presents no objection to the ideal of a refined nobility. Admittedly if one pursues this and noone else does then one ends up lonely (or solitary, if one thinks solitude need not include loneliness) but this in itself is no objection to the ideal if the ideal itself is worth pursuing, though doubtless it is more than a little frustrating. Nor does it make the ideal particularly hard to understand. One refines and spiritualizes one's natural desires (ultimately under the discipline of one taste) to the point where the refinement becomes instinctive and a cruder expression of the drive would require effort and feel unnatural. And one's refinement lies in the way one cultivates one's drives so as to use or express them and not so as to bury them or excise them. And in this sense Nietzsche is very definitely a realist as (*TI What I Owe to the Ancients' 2*) makes clear:

Courage in face of reality ultimately distinguishes such natures as Thucydides and Plato: Plato is a coward in face of reality - consequently he flees into the ideal; Thucydides has *himself* under control - consequently he retains control over things ...

Nietzsche's archetype for the ideal of refined nobility is Goethe and *TI 'Expeditions of an Untimely Man' 49* reveals as much as Nietzsche ever does about what such a character would be like:

Goethe conceived of a strong, highly cultured human being, skilled in all physical accomplishments, who, keeping himself in check and having reverence for himself, dares to allow himself the whole compass and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom; a man of tolerance, not out of weakness, but out of strength, because he knows how to employ to his advantage what would destroy an average nature; a man to whom nothing is forbidden except it be *weakness*, whether that weakness be called vice or virtue ...

PART V LOVE OF TRUTH AND LOVE OF LIFE - NIETZSCHE'S TWO CONFLICTING DRIVES

§ 1. Truth and the ascetic priest:

Nietzsche casts all manner of invective at the ascetic priest in the course of making a whole host of claims about the ascetic priest's psychology and about asceticism in general. But suppose the ascetic priest simply agrees. He admits that asceticism is no recipe for a flourishing, fulfilling life - in fact that is the whole point, for such a life is a temptation away from the one true path which he is both aware of and teaches. And that this path is the one true path, that life is something to be denied, is something which will be revealed after death and revealed in such a way that none will doubt it and those who lived other than the one true way will be thoroughly wretched and will curse their misguided life and ignorance and those who lived the true way will be rewarded with bliss. What is Nietzsche's reply?

Nietzsche does not argue that such claims are nonsensical or unintelligible. Indeed, as he makes clear with the Greeks, one can have a view of the after-life which glorifies this life and presumably one could come to believe such a view just as well as one could come to believe the ascetic priest's and presumably both would have very noticeable, albeit very different, effects on how one lived one's life. And this suggests that talk of an after-life is at least meaningful. The question then is whether Nietzsche thought that the ascetic priest's assessment of the value of life (that it should be denied) was unverifiable and that in the absence of such verification a better option was to affirm life, or whether he thought something stronger.

In *TI 'Morality as Anti-Nature' 5* Nietzsche says:

... a condemnation of life by the living is after all no more than the symptom of a certain kind of life: the question whether the condemnation is just or unjust has not been raised at all.

And this suggests something stronger than unverifiability for the question is said not to be raised at all. However, he then goes on to suggest that the problem is inaccessible to us because we lack any standpoint outside of life:

One would have to be situated *outside* life, and on the other hand know it as thoroughly as any, as many, as all who have experienced it, to be permitted to touch on the problem of the *value* of life at all ...

And this suggests mere unverifiability again. Nietzsche needs something stronger than "we lack ..." in order to support his symptom claim - namely, that there is no standpoint outside life for us and never will be. And if this is the case, then the ascetic in the example I gave can only be justifiably dismissed if this life is all that there is, and this, of course, is just what the ascetic denies.

What Nietzsche does succeed in showing is that the ascetic (or purely moral) life is not the good life. It is not just that happiness does not track moral worth, such that some sinners are happier than some saints; rather it is what one would expect from this (though which need not follow), namely that one damages one's life by excessive homage to the ascetic ideal and that one would be subjectively happier, more fulfilled etc by moving towards Nietzsche's counter ideal. If this life is all that there is then the ascetic (as my ascetic would agree) is utterly and hideously mistaken about how to live it.

Of course, if this life is not all that there is, then the ascetic may still be mistaken as to how to live it, but Nietzsche never makes this point, doubtless because he was convinced, or at least profoundly haunted by the thought, that this life is all there is. One often wonders why Nietzsche does not offer a life-enhancing transcendent world (more like the Greek gods) as an antidote to asceticism. Both would presumably be equally hard to verify and the life-enhancing transcendent world would have the natural appeal of not being promoted by a cankerous, dissatisfied, poisonous character like the ascetic priest. And surely the answer is that Nietzsche just could not believe in such things.

§ 2. Truth and life-enhancement:

Nietzsche thus emerges as torn between two convictions (one might say truths) - that this life is all that there is (one is born, matures, grows old and dies) and that believing in one's non-recurring, entirely non-transcendent life is inimical to (or at least not the best option for) pursuing a maximally fulfilling life, the latter explaining his flirtations with a proof of eternal recurrence as a cosmological doctrine. Certainly, Nietzsche eschews an obvious strategy for

encouraging people to take life and the fulfilment of it seriously, namely, the finality of death. As *GS 278* says:

It makes me happy that men do not want at all to think the thought of death! I should like very much to do something that would make the thought of life even a hundred times more appealing to them.

And the thought of eternal recurrence is meant to do just this - "willst du dies einmal und noch unzählige Male?" People are quite right not to think about death, Nietzsche thinks, (in contrast to Christianity's attitude on this point), but they should think more seriously about life and how to live it.

I take it, then, that Nietzsche's quest for truth is both at the root of his faith in life and demand for life-enhancement (if this life is all there is, then it is readily intelligible how this leads to the thought that one had best get on and make something of it) and also at odds with it, for there may be truths, including the one which provides the justification for this very project, which one is best off not knowing. But what if one knows them already? - then one must forget them and forget that one forgot them, assuming this is possible.

I suggested earlier that Nietzsche was simply unable to believe in transcendent worlds, but that this did not touch the question of whether such beliefs were life-enhancing. However, in *Z I 'Of the Afterworldsmen'* he asserts something stronger: "It was suffering and impotence - that created all afterworlds; and that brief moment of happiness that only the greatest sufferer experiences." And this implies that were one to become physically and spiritually stronger and healthier, then the temptation to believe in such other-worlds would vanish. One might think that this sits uneasily with what Nietzsche says about the Greek gods in *GM II 23*, but it need not. The Greek gods could be both orientated in the right direction (that of life-enhancement) but still be fantasies which the Übermensch would have no need of. All the Übermensch is capable of regretting at all is that his life and the whole of existence is a one-off and that is why the demon's proposal is the most divine thing he has ever heard. For him there is nothing more divine than his existence and the only thing capable of improving matters is its eternal recurrence:

Never yet did I find the woman by whom I wanted children, unless it be this woman,

whom I love: for I love you, O Eternity! (*Z III The Seven Seals*)

However, as May notes, the fact that, for Nietzsche, if anything recurs, everything must recur is surely something that a craving would be impervious to. Hence the most life-affirming man who craves nothing more than the eternal recurrence of everything does so because he loves the whole network of causes for themselves. Even if it were possible for his life to recur, but on the basis of various features of human history being different (say, without the Holocaust), still he would choose the exact recurrence of everything. He loves nothing more than the truth about life, in other words, *amor fati*.

But if one really loved nothing more than truth, then why not prefer the truth of one's non-recurring life? This question has perplexed some commentators (eg May) and this is surely because Nietzsche's motivation is confused here. It is his love of truth which motivates the ideal of the most life-affirming man, but his love of life which motivates the desire for recurrence. The ideal of desiring nothing more than eternal recurrence is thus an uneasy compromise between Nietzsche's two dominant wills (see Nietzsche's love of Wisdom and Life in *Z*): the will to truth and the will to lead a rich, fulfilling life. And, of course, these two wills are not entirely separate, for it is his truthfulness which urges him to live fully and yet a good part of what it means for him to live fully is to pursue truth. No wonder, then, that matters are complicated.

§ 3. Truth and eternal recurrence:

Nietzsche's ideal is thus confused, *unless* everything will recur exactly as before and modern discussion of Nietzsche's cosmological proofs seem to show that they fail. However, even were they to succeed, Nietzsche's ideal might still seem rather misplaced. If one's life is to recur then there is sense in urging one to live it well and fully, but why also truly? Why not live desiring that there will be improvements (at least in the lives of others) in each successive cycle? Indeed, why not desire successive cycles where the experiential intensity is turned up so that everything becomes richer and fuller?

Again, Nietzsche's answer must be that the future simply will not be like that and that realization of this, as a matter of psychological fact, inhibits such desires. But then why arrive at such a realization? This is the crux of the matter and I think that Nietzsche assumes that

if one is sufficiently a 'higher man' then one will arrive at such a realization. And this is a very plausible assumption or at least a very plausible diagnosis of the modern 'higher man', if any can still be said to exist. Pursuit of a fulfilling life (even if this is far from being one which runs counter to the negative demands of morality) both requires and teaches us many truths, a good number of which are decidedly unpleasant. As Nietzsche so memorably puts it:

Geist ist das Leben, das selber ins Leben schneidet; an der eignen Qual mehrt es sich das eigne Wissen, - wusstet ihr das schon? (*Z II Von den berühmten Weisen*)

§ 4. Conclusion - man as the tragic animal:

If this is right, then the picture of man which emerges from between the lines merits the title of 'tragic'. Man is the animal who, through consciousness, memory and knowledge has power and potential vastly in excess of the other animals, but who pays a terrible price for the knowledge which gives him such power. And Nietzsche's approach to this situation is not a return to 'blissful ignorance' but a step onward to the stage where man is strong enough to love his fate. That such a stage is ever (or at least in the remote future) likely to be forthcoming one is inclined to be very sceptical about, and, what is more, Nietzsche's need for eternal recurrence suggests just this - the eternal recurrence as the ineliminable residue of a need to defeat one's own mortality.

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