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Embracing the Void: Nietzsche's "Zarathustra" and the Political.

James Daniel Stewart
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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EMBRACING THE VOID:
NIETZSCHE'S ZARATHUSTRA
AND THE POLITICAL

A Dissertation

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Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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in

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By
James Daniel Stewart
B.A., Mississippi College, 1994
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1997
December, 2001
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores Nietzsche’s political theory through an analysis of his major work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It is demonstrated that the narrative structure of *Zarathustra* follows from a politically-grounded critique of collective human existence. Nietzsche critiques the state and mass society as inherently repressive. He critiques the concept of the community and friendship as producing *ressentiment* and bad conscience. One of the central metaphors in *Zarathustra* proves to be that of nausea, arising from contempt for the mediocre masses of humanity and the realization of the chaotic and contingent nature of existence. Through nausea, the individual necessarily becomes separated from the masses and is able to begin the process of constructing an individually-actuated selfhood. Nietzsche then discusses the possibility of self-creation, spurred by the confrontation with individual finitude. This project of self-overcoming proceeds through an aesthetic ethics of resistance to repression and acts of protean creation. Nietzsche’s theory of transmuted selfhood is one that embraces multiplicity and contradiction within the consciousness. It is ultimately shown that the model of selfhood presented in *Zarathustra* depends upon resistance and solitude, thus precluding the possibility of constructive political theory in the traditional statist sense. Rather, Nietzsche’s relevance for politics is the imperative to seek new permutations of personal existence.

iv

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CHAPTER I

NIETZSCHE AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

Nietzsche has received a great deal of attention in recent years and has had a profound influence over contemporary scholarship. However, there has been less attention paid to Nietzsche in political theory than in other areas of the humanities. Despite the dearth of literature addressed to Nietzsche's political thought, there is surprisingly little consensus as to its content. Interpretations range from the assertion that Nietzsche was a deeply political thinker concerned with the institutional arrangements of the state to the rival interpretation that Nietzsche had little political interest outside of the internal struggle within the individual soul. Certainly textual support can be found for both of these assertions, with a broad intermediate ground lying in between. The lack of unanimity concerning Nietzsche's political thought is troubling as Nietzsche had a profound impact upon most contemporary political thinkers and has helped to shape postmodern thought.

This project is designed to remedy a serious omission in the political literature on Nietzsche. The ambiguity regarding Nietzsche's political thought is largely an artifact of the strategies and presuppositions of the interpreters of his texts rather than an accurate representation of Nietzsche's political reflections. This project will demonstrate that Nietzsche's political thought is not as fragmented and contradictory as the literature suggests.
Rather, Nietzsche's political and social thought is relatively coherent and follows from his epistemological and ontological project. The misunderstanding of Nietzsche's political thought is largely due to the stubborn neglect by political theorists of Nietzsche's major work, Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

This project will demonstrate that Zarathustra is Nietzsche's most important contribution to political thought and provides the key for interpretation of Nietzsche's thought as a whole. It is only in Zarathustra that Nietzsche, freed from the constraint of conventional philosophical discourse, is able to discuss his own very unconventional theories of philosophical anthropology and the creation of the individual self. It will be shown that Zarathustra bridges Nietzsche's early praise of Homeric societies and the mediating force of tragedy with his later discussions of the transmuted self and the ethic of resistance to societal norms and institutions. Without referring to Zarathustra, it is ultimately impossible to understand Nietzsche in any but a fragmented and superficial fashion.

Furthermore, by concentrating on Zarathustra, it is possible to examine Nietzsche at his own self-proclaimed best. As the culmination of his mature philosophy, Zarathustra represents the opportunity to study Nietzsche's political theory most accurately. As such, studying Nietzsche through an interpretation of his narrative most closely resembles the
interpretive exercise Nietzsche called for in his philosophy. Therefore, this dissertation represents an attempt to meet Nietzsche on his own terms.

It will be shown that Nietzsche constructed *Zarathustra* as a deliberate critique of traditional political institutions and practices. Indeed, it will be demonstrated that Nietzsche chose the narrative format in order to avoid the linguistic and stylistic constraints of conventional philosophical discourse. As such, *Zarathustra* represents a unique challenge: it is Nietzsche at his finest both philosophically and rhetorically. However, it is also Nietzsche at his most problematic and evasive.

I

Not surprisingly, the question of Nietzsche's political theory has engendered a formidable scholarly debate. It is necessary to penetrate the debate and determine the main currents of thought underlying the most influential interpretations of Nietzsche's political theory. This review will demonstrate that the literature on Nietzsche's political thought does indeed suffer from inattention to *Zarathustra*; and will detail the interpretations that will be criticized and elaborated upon by the substantive discussion of *Zarathustra*.

There has been a great amount of work on Nietzsche, but most have been only marginally successful or wrongheaded. This is primarily because they have not sought to understand Nietzsche in his own terms, but try to make Nietzsche conform to traditional models and terminology of
traditional political theory. In attempting to pigeonhole Nietzsche’s political reflections into the categories familiar to conventional state-centered political theory, the radical elements of his political message are simultaneously distorted and emphasized. This phenomenon is illuminated by the tendency of political interpreters of Nietzsche to cluster around two fundamental themes.

Paradoxically, these fall into two antithetical categories, statist and apolitical. Statist interpretations, including Strong and Ansell-Pearson, try to find a positive political theory of the state in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Generally, these interpretations identify new institutions, new social norms, and tend to stress Nietzsche’s affinity with the ancient Greek heroic state. In these interpretations Nietzsche is acknowledged as a critic of the modern nation-state, but they emphasize that Nietzsche envisions a new model of society to replace the flawed political system of modernity. Interestingly, these interpretations tend to stress the early works of Nietzsche and neglect the aphoristic works.

Apolitical interpretations, including Thiele, Heidegger, and Klossowski, argue that Nietzsche does not present a comprehensive political

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theory. Rather, Nietzsche presents a critique of politics and political theory that is so scathing and complete that it is impossible to rejuvenate politics. Generally, these interpreters argue that Nietzsche envisions all human interaction as essentially repressive and given to creating self-replicating mechanisms of oppression. These interpretations stress the destructive aspects of force, the specter of Nihilism, and imply that Nietzsche’s philosophy is either completely inimical to politics or a form of aristocratic individualism. These interpretations rely upon the aphoristic and later works to support their conclusions.

In order to set the stage for the analysis of Zarathustra, it is necessary to explore these interpretations to discern the important controversies that may be answered by this analysis of Zarathustra. In keeping with the central theme of this dissertation, Nietzsche’s theories on the constitution and origin of the concrete self, this literature review will primarily concentrate on this theme as it has been explored in the political literature on Nietzsche. This often takes form of discussion of the enigmatic concept of the Übermensch.


3 Nietzsche’s prose is elegant and readily translates. However, it is simply impossible to translate the vicissitudes of the German language, especially the loaded terms common to philosophical discourse. Indeed, mistranslation of Nietzsche’s key terms has led to
Tracy Strong elaborated one of the first interpretations specifically devoted to Nietzsche's political theory. Strong attributes to Nietzsche a "politics of transfiguration," which has as its goal "the development of beings who do not simply live as human-all-too-human."\(^4\) This striking transfiguration requires "a change in the very stuff of humanity."\(^5\) Strong's argument is based upon an interpretation of Nietzsche's project for humanity that argues for the production of a successor species for man. Man is not only overcome, he is replaced.

Strong contends Nietzsche envisioned that this transfiguration would occur within a political system. He acknowledges Nietzsche's attacks on the state, but contends that "to assert . . . that Nietzsche attacks politics is to miss the key point. This is not a specifically anti-political doctrine."\(^6\) Strong contends that Nietzsche is reacting specifically to the modern nation-state,

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4 Strong, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration, 13.

5 Strong, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration, 260.


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common misconceptions of his philosophy. Accordingly, I have endeavored to leave untranslated those terms which cannot be clearly rendered into English. These include such words as Übermenschen or words whose English equivalents have a different connotation, such as Dekadenz. Words with multiple English equivalents, such as Geist, have been dealt with as accurately as possible, considering the complexity of the text. Except where I quote directly from sources, I render Will zur Macht hyphenated as "will-to-power," following the practice of Bernd Magnus, in order to emphasize the essential unity of phrase which does not come across otherwise. However carefully it is attempted, translation is always an interpretive exercise and fraught with danger. No amount of linguistic knowledge or skill can replace or accurately simulate the raw force of Also Sprach Zarathustra in German.
which is a "concretization of only slave morality." Rather, Nietzsche envisions a state similar to the ancient Greek polis or Homeric heroic societies, which lauded the triumph of the exceptional individual. Although these two models are drastically different from one another, they both have a common element:

For Nietzsche, the development of society which is not its own rationale and therefore does not permit of a nihilistic self-consciousness must come from or at least be co-equal with the appearance of men who do not share the ontological problems of the present men and their society. For Strong, Nietzsche's politics starts with the individual, but must necessarily end with the social. Indeed, these individuals might not arise at all without the presence of the state. This interpretation relies heavily upon Nietzsche's early essay "The Greek State," in which Nietzsche praises heroic society. Such themes can also be detected in The Birth of Tragedy. However, Nietzsche's later works, including Zarathustra, do not seem as optimistic regarding the general theme of the state, much less the creation of an "ideal society."

The most disturbing element of Strong's interpretation, however, is the insistence on the actual transfiguration of humankind. The thesis of this argument might be called into doubt through the reading of some of Nietzsche's later works, specifically The Antichrist.

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7 Strong, "Nietzsche and Politics," 283.
The problem I thus pose is not what shall succeed mankind in the sequence of living beings (man as an end), but what type of man shall be bred, shall be willed, for being higher in value, worthier of life, more certain of a future. Even in the past this higher type has appeared often—but as a fortunate accident, as an exception, never as something willed.8

Through analysis of Zarathustra, a work largely ignored by Strong, it will become clear that Nietzsche is arguing that the concept of the Übermensch is to be used as a guide for willing the exceptional human, not for replacing the species in a concrete, eugenic sense. The exceptional human must arise from self-mastery and self-overcoming. It remains a dubious assertion, or at least unclear, that Nietzsche had a biological or evolutionary model in mind for the production of this individual. Most prominent Nietzsche scholars differ with Strong’s interpretation.

Danto’s examination of the concept of the Übermensch is at odds with Strong’s. “The Übermensch . . . is not the blond giant dominating his lesser fellows. He is merely a joyous, guiltless, free human being, in possession of instinctual drives which do not overpower him.9 Beyond these traits, Nietzsche gives little specific information. Danto concludes that Nietzsche left the idea of the Übermensch “as a variable and not a constant,

to be given a value by those of us who are to achieve it.”11 However, Danto acknowledges that this ambiguity has left the concept open to be interpreted as one advocating “brute exercise of strength,” especially considering some of the illustrations that Nietzsche employs, such as Cesare Borgia.

Dannhauser describes the Übermensch as Nietzsche’s project for the future development of humanity. The Übermensch is both the fulfillment and the transcendence of previously conceived ideals of man. However, he asserts that the concept of the Übermensch is “necessarily vague and ambiguous . . . the superman cannot be fully described because he will be above all a true self. Every superman will be unique.12 Dannhauser concludes that Nietzsche does not give a political solution to achieve the realization of the Übermensch. Nietzsche instead offers an apolitical road to achieving the Übermensch, which Dannhauser refers to as “radical individualism.” This is evident in Nietzsche calling for the potential Übermensch to become “true selves . . . to seek solitude, to flee from public life, to reject established modes of conduct and thought.”13

Keith Ansell-Pearson contends that Nietzsche advocates the “great politics” of aristocratic radicalism in the face of the “petty” politics of

11 Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher, 200.


European nationalism. Ansell-Pearson stresses that the individualism advocated by Nietzsche is an aristocratic, not a liberal, notion. "As he himself tells us, his philosophy 'aims at an ordering of rank, not an individualistic morality.'" Individuals can only attain value by "placing themselves in the service of the culture (which for him means the cultivation of great human beings), and by representing . . . the ascending forces of 'life'". Like Strong, Ansell-Pearson looks to "The Greek State" and The Birth of Tragedy for an articulation of Nietzsche's political theory. "In it we find a clear expression of Nietzsche's political theory, with its emphasis on political life as a means to the production of great human beings and culture."

Ansell-Pearson ultimately argues that Nietzsche's political theory is designed to produce individuals capable of producing new philosophical legislation to bring the masses into line, a postmodern Philosopher King:

Nietzsche’s thinking on politics . . . is best seen as an attempt to understand how the conditions can be cultivated for man to undergo further development and advancement in the epoch of the death of God and the advent of nihilism. His preoccupation with politics is thus neither accidental nor peripheral to his concerns, but can be seen to arise in a very fundamental sense from his teaching on redemption and from his reflections on the destiny of the soul. An important aspect of the attempt to think through the problem of nihilism is the need to develop an understanding of how new values can be created

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14 Ansell-Pearson, An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker, 11.

15 Ansell-Pearson, An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker, 11.

16 Ansell-Pearson, An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker, 63.
and fashioned through the conjunction of philosophical legislation and political power.\textsuperscript{17}

Importantly, Ansell-Pearson argues that this exceptional individual is not a eugenic notion, but an individual accomplishment, citing passages in \textit{Ecce Homo} to this effect. "The Übermensch is not in any way to be conceived along Darwinian lines or as representing a transcendental ideal . . . posited in terms of an infinite future beyond the reach of mere mortals."\textsuperscript{18} However, Ansell-Pearson consistently argues that Nietzsche asserts the Übermensch can only arise within a societal context.

Bruce Detwiler argues that Nietzsche's political significance rests in "aristocratic radicalism." The death of God offered an opportunity to the Dionysian artist-philosopher to emerge and take his rightful place at the forefront of the creation of a new culture.\textsuperscript{19} Detwiler argues that one of Nietzsche's fundamental points is that philosophy is an inherently artistic endeavor, a contention that has profound societal implications. Nietzsche argues that the worth of a philosopher is not found in discovering new truths, but in the creation of new values. This artist philosopher is impelled by the will-to-power to set for himself the artistic goal of a higher humanity.

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\textsuperscript{17} Ansell-Pearson, \textit{Nietzsche contra Rousseau} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 201.

\textsuperscript{18} Keith Ansell-Pearson, \textit{An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker}, 106. Danto makes a similar point, \textit{Nietzsche as Philosopher}, 200.

\end{flushleft}
This search involves a "philosophy of becoming and self-overcoming" and involves "periodically discarding one's intellectual commitments."\(^{20}\) Detwiler concludes that the political implication of Nietzsche's thought involves an aristocratic political order governed by a ruling caste of artist-philosophers.

Mark Warren employs an interesting, albeit questionable, distinction in the analysis of Nietzsche and the political. Rather than discussing Nietzsche's political thought as a whole, he makes a sharp distinction between Nietzsche's political philosophy and his "philosophy of power."\(^{21}\) Warren asserts that Nietzsche's political philosophy does not warrant serious consideration, as it is encompassed within Nietzsche's "philosophy of agency" and his larger critique of Western culture. Nevertheless, Warren ultimately characterizes Nietzsche's politics as "neoaristocratic conservatism."\(^{22}\) Warren undertakes a thorough discussion of various permutations of the will-to-power, and the political ramifications of each. Warren ultimately finds that Nietzsche's philosophy of power leads to a valid and useful "framework for a critically postmodern political


\(^{22}\) Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, 211.
philosophy." Warren's conclusion is somewhat paradoxical, given his bifurcated analysis of Nietzsche's political philosophy. As such, his analysis is rather confusing and overly concretized.

The apolitical interpretations of Nietzsche are exemplified by Leslie Paul Thiele, who offers one of the most perceptive studies of Nietzsche. Thiele focuses upon Nietzsche's "politics of the soul." Thiele contends that Nietzsche viewed the individual self as a multiplicity, composed of an unique composition of drives. This internal regime forms the stage for the politics of the soul. "The individual is a law unto himself, unpredictable and unmanageable." As such, a true individual can never be part of a society, which requires "members" conditioned to conform to societal norms.

"The purpose of the state, according to Nietzsche, ought to be the cultivation of individuals, but this is never the case." The state and society seek to make the individual conform, by their very nature they can not do otherwise. Such would be inimical to their existence:

Ultimately, the strong individual is a product of the struggle with his own isolation. Political affairs are at best a distraction from this task, and at worst its greatest inhibitor. To be antipolitical, as Nietzsche considered himself, is the mark of individuality. For the worthiest

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23 Warren, Nietzsche and Political Thought, 207.

24 Thiele, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul, 38.

25 Thiele, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul, 47.
struggle is not waged within the public realm. True heroism, according to Nietzsche, stakes its agonal thirst within the soul.²⁶

Haar questions whether the Übermensch should be seen as "some sort of highest type of man, the perfect embodiment of the essence of man, or as a species higher than man . . . as some living being other than man."²⁷Haar concludes that the Übermensch is "an attempt at something which is no longer man," yet he is not a myth; he is an "economical exigence of the Will to Power." As such, the Übermensch is as different from man as man is from the animals. The Übermensch does not fulfill humanity, he fulfills that which "in humanity is more originary than humanity," the will-to-power. Thus the Übermensch is the fulfillment of the essence of life, not merely the essence of man.²⁸

Heidegger argues that Nietzsche identifies the essence of contemporary humanity as incapable of correctly relating to "Being," i.e. the will-to-power. Indeed, humanity in its present form is radically estranged from its own essence—a type of ontological inauthenticity similar to Heidegger’s analysis in Sein und Zeit. Heidegger asserts that the Übermensch is more than a new expression of the heroic personality or even an existential attitude, it is a new permutation of ontological relation:

²⁶ Thiele, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul, 47.


With the name *overman* Nietzsche is by no means designating a merely superdimensional human being of the kind that has prevailed hitherto. Nor is he referring to a species of man that will cast off all that is humane, making naked willfulness its law and titanic rage its rule.29

Heidegger asserts that Nietzsche realizes humanity is no longer in proper relation to the “being of Beings,” again understood as the will-to-power. This ontological estrangement is the cause of modern *Dekadenz*.30 The Übermensch is therefore the reawakening of the innate constitution of human ontology, which has become repressed (forgotten) through centuries of doctrinal and philosophical error:

... the overman—taking the word quite literally—is that human being that goes beyond prior humanity solely in order to conduct such humanity for the first time to its essence, an essence that is still unattained, and to place humanity firmly within that essence.31

For Heidegger, Nietzsche understands this ontological problem as a value judgement. “The question asks: Is man, in his essence as man heretofore, prepared to assume dominion over the earth?”32 Nietzsche of course answers in the negative. The question, then, is how to rectify this


30 Nietzsche’s use of the term *Dekadenz* does not correspond to the English “decadence.” Rather, *Dekadenz* connotes decay, both individual and cultural, not hedonism. As such, I have left it untranslated. This concept is discussed fully in Chapter Three.


ontological alienation. The answer, and the problem, is to be found in
transcendence. Heidegger asks of Nietzsche:

Must not prior man be conducted beyond himself, over his prior self,
in order to meet this challenge? If so, the 'over-man,' correctly
thought, cannot be the product of an unbridled and degenerate
fantasy that is plunging headlong into the world.33

Heidegger therefore argues that Nietzsche's political project must
remain ambiguous as he proceeds from an ontologically clouded
perspective. Nietzsche is unable to present a political theory because he is
unable to conceive of an authentic relation to Being. As such, an authentic,
non-repressive model for society eludes Nietzsche.

Daniel Conway's interpretation of Nietzsche's political thought can
be viewed as occupying the middle ground between the statist and
apolitical interpretations. Conway sees Nietzsche's political goal as the
perfection of the human being, not its replacement. This perfection is best
served by the concentration of resources upon those few individuals who
show the possibility of becoming great. "Throughout his productive career,
Nietzsche's political thinking centers around a simple, yet powerful, thesis:
human existence is justified only by the presence of those exemplary
individuals who re-define the horizons of human perfectibility."34

33 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 215-216.

A community of these exemplary creatures does not look like a modern state, with its leveling and normalizing mechanisms. However, there is a community. This is not a community based upon some universal ethical principle or rational systems of legislation, but rather upon a new type of ethics. "[T]he founding labors of the Übermensch create a community of friends in the particularly Nietzschean sense, of fellow travelers who share a common aesthetic sensibility, who mutually elevate one another through conflict and contest."[35]

Conway’s assertion that the Übermensch can participate in a community of friends is an intriguing notion, given the common interpretation of the Übermensch as the quintessential anti-social personality. Indeed, it must be asked whether the Übermensch, given the characteristics described above, could exist in any state, whether composed of equals or inferiors. Alasdair MacIntyre mirrors this concern in his description of the Übermensch:

[T]he man who transcends, finds his good nowhere in the social world to date, but only in that in himself which dictates his new law and his own new table of the virtues . . . [T]he great man cannot enter into relationships mediated by appeal to shared standards or virtues or goods; he is his own only authority and his relationships to others have to be exercises of that authority.[36]

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35 Conway, Nietzsche and the Political, 24.

This question of community raised by Conway retains its legitimacy even if Nietzsche is taken to offer an essentially individualistic, separatist politics. Humans will always have contact with the "other." Perhaps the answer to this question is to be found in Nietzsche's conception of friendship. This concept is scarcely mentioned in Nietzsche's works, and then it is mentioned most prominently in Zarathustra. Nietzsche's conception of friendship is coupled with the idea of contempt; one can only love another if one can have an equal amount of contempt. Therefore, one can only be a friend with an equal.37 Because of these important concerns, the concept of friendship will be analyzed in detail in this dissertation.

This review of the literature is by no means complete. However, it has illuminated many of the main currents within the political interpretations of Nietzsche. An evaluation of these interpretations is difficult. Each is well argued and scholarly. However, the arguments advanced by Strong and Ansell-Pearson seem to have serious problems. It is one thing to argue that Nietzsche envisioned a heroic community, it is quite another to argue that Nietzsche advanced the idea that there should be positive state intervention to produce higher individuals. Thiele is correct in

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37 This conception of friendship obviously parallels Aristotle’s discussion of friendship as found in the Ethics. Conway’s argument is persuasive, more so than the type of community that Strong discusses. Strong and Ansell-Pearson imply that Nietzsche envisioned an activist state with a positive goal of the creation of Übermensch. This is drastically different from a community of like-minded individuals, and will be discussed in Chapter Four.
asserting that this was an ideal Nietzsche did not believe would be implemented, or even possible. Instead, it will be demonstrated that Nietzsche's political theory is centered on the individual quest for self-mastery and ultimately self-creation.38

It is critical to note an enduring trend in Nietzsche literature, especially relevant for political interpretations. The content of these interpretations is largely tied to the texts that are relied upon. The interpretations that cast Nietzsche in a statist light, Strong and Ansell-Pearson, tend to rely upon early texts. Interpretations that emphasize nihilism and solipsism often rely on the Nachlass and the later aphoristic works. This is especially true of Schacht and Heidegger. More pragmatic interpretations like Nehamas and Thiele generally quote from most of Nietzsche's texts but may draw predominately from one period.

Perhaps most striking among all of the political, and indeed most of the philosophical interpretations, is the neglect of Zarathustra. The literature explored above has sought to understand the political implications of Nietzsche while ignoring his most important and profound treatise on the subject: Zarathustra. Scholars have ignored Zarathustra for several reasons, none of which are explicit. Traditionally, political theorists have preferred

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38 This conclusion was foreshadowed as early as Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and is most evident in Nehamas, Nietzsche: Life as Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) and in Thiele, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul.
to deal with straightforward philosophical texts rather than narratives.

Further, it has been assumed that most of the important philosophical and political points advanced in *Zarathustra* are duplicated and more explicitly laid out in *Beyond Good and Evil*. This is a mistaken assumption. Indeed, the narrative structure of *Zarathustra* is in itself an important facet of Nietzsche's political thought which must be taken into account.

The ambiguity that these interpreters have found in Nietzsche's political theory may well flow from their consistent refusal to confront *Zarathustra*. It is in *Zarathustra* that Nietzsche, at the height of his creative and critical powers, brings together many of the disparate strands of his social and political thought. This project will seek to do what has not been done by these previous interpretations: to examine Nietzsche's *magnum opus* to resolve the contradictory impulses identified in Nietzsche's political thought and reveal his underlying political thought. Before moving to a preliminary discussion of this project, a brief discussion of the literature specifically addressing *Zarathustra* is in order.

II.

Jung observed: "*Zarathustra* . . . is a hell of confusion and extraordinarily difficult." This is indeed an understatement, and it seems that the perceived difficulty of *Zarathustra* has contributed to the reluctance

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of Nietzsche scholars to interpret Nietzsche’s masterpiece. Despite the large amount of interest in Nietzsche in recent years, across many disciplines and languages, *Zarathustra* has largely been relegated to the top shelf: a book to be admired but not studied.

Among the interpretations of *Zarathustra*, none has been more influential than the short essay by Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*?” This essay, written several years after Heidegger’s monumental study of Nietzsche, attempts to minimize the radical nature of *Zarathustra* by portraying it as an outgrowth of metaphysical thinking. According to Heidegger, the central theme of *Zarathustra* is the overcoming of the spirit of resentment against human finitude, which Nietzsche is not able to bring to fruition because of his flawed theory of time. Heidegger’s analysis has influenced the interpretations of *Zarathustra* examined below, some to a considerable degree. Because of its importance, a thorough examination and critique of this article is included in this dissertation as an appendix.

There have been only a handful of full-length studies of *Zarathustra* in any language, and only four in English. All of these studies have been written from a philosophical standpoint, with only passing attention to the political or social implications of *Zarathustra*. Indeed, in these studies only

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40 Martin Heidegger “Who is Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*?.”
a few pages are devoted to the political or social implications of Zarathustra. To my knowledge, a political interpretation of Zarathustra has not been completed in any language. In addition, there are very few journal articles relating to Zarathustra, much less from the standpoint of political theory. While this paucity of secondary literature presents some problems, it also presents a rare opportunity for truly original research within the crowded field of Nietzsche studies.

Lampert's study, Nietzsche's Teaching, is of exceptional quality. Lampert analyses each section of Zarathustra in order, giving a detailed analysis of the arguments and symbolism in each section. Lampert is an especially good source for examining the connection between Zarathustra and German literature, especially Goethe. Lampert also draws connections between Zarathustra and Nietzsche's other works. Especially valuable is Lampert's discussion of the theme of education in Zarathustra. Other than the chapter on education, Lampert does not explicitly deal with politics, and this chapter is not written in terms of political analysis.

Specifically, Lampert's study is designed to illuminate Nietzsche's break with the philosophical tradition:

As I will try to show, the main point of the action of Zarathustra is to demonstrate first the need for a new teacher, then the nature of his

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teaching in the discoveries of the will to power and eternal return, and finally the founding of that teaching by Zarathustra himself.\textsuperscript{42}

Alderman’s study, \textit{Nietzsche’s Gift}, is of a similar quality.\textsuperscript{43} Alderman is primarily concerned with Nietzsche’s “masks.” Alderman’s study is topical rather than a direct textual interpretation, focusing on the dramatic format of \textit{Zarathustra}. Alderman examines the themes of transfiguration, will, comedy, and philosophy in terms of drama. This study is useful for understanding the text as a whole, but it offers little related to politics directly. In addition, Alderman explicitly states that his interpretation is primarily guided by Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche. As such, it has an agenda that differs from many contemporary interpretations and studies of Nietzsche.

Stanley Rosen’s analysis of \textit{Zarathustra} is among the most recent and perhaps influential interpretations.\textsuperscript{44} Rosen argues that \textit{Zarathustra} is an inherently political document. “The book is best understood as a philosophical mediation and as a political document . . . it is an incitement to revolution, to the overthrowing of the old order and so to the preparation

\textsuperscript{42} Lampert, \textit{Nietzsche’s Teaching}, 5.


\textsuperscript{44} Stanley Rosen, \textit{The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche’s Zarathustra} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
for a new order.” However, Rosen interprets Nietzsche’s politics in a very concrete sense, presenting a statist analysis of Zarathustra.

In the broadest sense of the term, Nietzsche is not an ontologist or metaphysician but indeed a political thinker. His most comprehensive intention is to transform the collective circumstances of human existence in order to breed a new race of mankind. It is in this radical and comprehensive sense that Nietzsche is a prophet or lawgiver.

Rosen goes on to assert that Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is an elaboration of a political scheme analogous to Plato’s Republic. “Nietzsche’s enterprise is Platonic in that he wishes to create by legislation a new race of human beings.” This argument is troubling, as it virtually ignores the critiques of collective existence that are prominent in Zarathustra. Further, Rosen disregards Nietzsche’s call to solitude and the overcoming of nausea, both of which are central metaphors in Zarathustra. Essentially, Rosen presents a political interpretation that is skewed by a shallow reading of Nietzsche and the stated desire to defend the Enlightenment project from Nietzsche’s critiques.

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46 Rosen, The Mask of Enlightenment, 56.


48 “The decisive problem for the next philosophical generation is to separate justice from pity and shame. This will be possible without a reconstitution of reason that enables us to perceive once more the common root of truth and goodness. That root was once known as philosophy. Nietzsche bears a heavy burden of guilt for the radical deterioration in the second half of the twentieth century of our understanding of the nature of philosophy.” Rosen, The Mask of Enlightenment, 250.
This literature review has pointed to the glaring absence of scholarship on one of the most important philosophical texts to emerge in the last few centuries. The few studies cited above, although of superior quality, have been either too broad in scope or very tightly focused. Because of the problematic nature of Zarathustra, this tendency may arise out of necessity. However, the fact remains that there has been no study focused upon the central theme of Zarathustra: the formation and overcoming of the individual self through the process of self-discovery and self-creation. The above interpretations hint at the project of self-creation or dismiss it, but they do not explore this problem in any depth.

III

This review of the literature has highlighted several problems with previous political interpretations of Nietzsche that will be confronted in this dissertation. Political theorists have failed to understand Nietzsche largely because they do not appreciate the extent of the radical departure that Nietzsche makes from traditional thought. This misunderstanding is doubtless exaggerated as Nietzsche presents some of his most penetrating political reflections in the narrative format of Zarathustra. Although many of the themes found in Zarathustra are elaborated upon in Nietzsche's later works, particularly Beyond Good and Evil and The Genealogy of Morality, the structure of Zarathustra as a progressive narrative is itself an important clue to Nietzsche's political theory.
The most fundamental problem that renders interpretation of Nietzsche by political theorists difficult is Nietzsche's radically different perspective. Indeed, the presuppositions of political theorists coming from a classic or modern tradition are exactly what Nietzsche is reacting against. As such, it is necessary to identify several key departures Nietzsche makes from conventional political thought.

Most fundamentally, Nietzsche abandons the idea of the self as a discrete subject. Therefore, it is impossible to understand the political reflections of Nietzsche if one clings to the idea that the self can be understood or even that the self is a relatively stable element of study. Generally, Nietzsche sees the individual as the product of a social matrix driven by repressive mechanisms beyond the conscious knowledge of the members of the society. Given this, it is impossible to understand the subject outside of this milieu. The self is tangential and therefore indefinable, as the matrix of which it is a part largely determines its actions and reactions.

However, Nietzsche does not see society or politics as natural. Rather, society is an external construct that often acts in its own interest, often against the best interests of the individual. Politics can not be understood in terms of ontology, philosophical anthropology, or even in
terms of the social contract, as they all rely on some stable essence or human nature. Collectivity is seen as a pathology, arising from the need for protection and metaphysical consolation, not from noble sentiments or the desire to pursue the common good. Similarly, the notion of self-preservation leading to collectivity is illusory, as individuals born into the society do not choose to combine: their selves have been created by this collectivity and they cannot opt out. For Nietzsche, society is an abrogation of the will-to-power to others in the form of an abstract collective.

Nietzsche argues that these traditional political theories are often imbued with a creeping metaphysical element; whether an eschatology or notions of teleology; either explicit or implicit. In traditional political theory, society is rarely questioned, it is seen as either part of the natural (divine) order or the product of an unfolding teleology of existence. This tendency is seen in the philosophical anthropology of Plato, and in the dialectic of Hegel. For Nietzsche, all meta-theories of politics are essentially flawed as they rely upon unquestioned concepts of the discrete subject or the fundamental innateness of politics.

In addition, Nietzsche argues that history cannot be understood as such. It is always to be understood as a hermeneutic exercise of the manipulation of symbols in service of some power relation or another. This

49 Besides Zaratustra, this is seen most prominently in The Genealogy of Morality, in which Nietzsche presents an analysis of the origin of the modern subject and a critique of
view of history destroys the idea of progress in the Kantian and Hegelian mode and brings into question the idea of the natural society that underlies theories of social contract.50 History can be instructive, but it is not possible to draw teleological conclusions from the progression and evolution of power relationships in vastly different contexts.

Nietzsche therefore rejects many of the fundamental presuppositions of political theory. Perhaps most profoundly, Nietzsche argues that it is not necessary to conceive of politics only in connection to a theory of the state. Politics may be a function of power, but it is not necessary to conceive of power only as the relation of a subject to some exterior object. Politics occurs in every conceivable context and situation, down to the functions within the individual consciousness. If political theory is to have any validity, it is necessary to abandon the obsession with the state and rather begin examination of the constituent elements of the individual, the most intimate and understandable arena of politics.

In keeping with these objections, it will be argued in chapter two that Zarathustra offers the possibility of accessing Nietzsche's political thought more directly than an analysis of widely-separated aphorisms or different

the idea of this notion of the independent subject.

50 “The equally stiff and decorous Tartuffery of the old Kant as he lures us on the dialectical bypaths that lead to his 'categorical imperative' — really lead astray and seduce — this spectacle makes us smile, as we are fastidious and find it quite amusing to watch closely the subtle tricks of old moralists and preachers of morals.” Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, §5.
texts. It will be shown that *Zarathustra* is actually a coherent text with an underlying political theory, partly revealed in the structure of its narrative. Indeed, it is the central presupposition of this project that *Zarathustra* represents the major expression of Nietzsche's critical and positive political theory. This assertion is based upon several factors.

The departure point for Nietzsche's philosophy is a thoroughgoing critique of Western philosophy and culture, continuing even to the fundamental elements of language and imagery. Nietzsche employed several "masks" in the attempt to transcend the limits of language, including the aphoristic style and the use of allegory and irony. In order to reach the most profound elements of Nietzsche's thought, it is necessary to penetrate these masks. There is little doubt that *Zarathustra* represents Nietzsche's greatest departure from conventional philosophical writing, consisting of a highly symbolic narrative account of a spiritual and philosophical journey. It would follow that an analysis of this work would be most likely to reach the core of Nietzsche's philosophical and political views.

The structure of this project is largely dictated by an interpretation of Nietzsche's political argument in *Zarathustra*. Nietzsche examines various types of human interaction, critiques them, and then moves on to a more
basic level. In this manner Nietzsche critiques the modern state, then examines the concept of the community, and finally presents an extended discussion of the possibility of new forms of selfhood. This dissertation will follow this structure to analyze Nietzsche's Zarathustrian political theory.

The "plot" of Zarathustra is somewhat disjointed, but it does follow a narrative progression that is vitally important to the political interpretation advanced in this dissertation. Zarathustra's journey can be interpreted as the prototypical example of Nietzsche's theory of self-overcoming. Therefore, the character's actions within the text and the order in which Nietzsche presents them are indicative of the political argument that will be extrapolated from the text. Although this dissertation does not strictly follow Zarathustra in a chronological manner, the order of the chapters in the dissertation is based upon the narrative progression of the text.

Zarathustra begins with a Prologue. Zarathustra is alone in his cave and decides to go down to the people to teach them the wisdom he has accumulated in solitude. This is a direct reversal of Plato's cave analogy: the philosopher has gained knowledge within the cave, and must go down to others who dwell below. Immediately, Zarathustra encounters problems arising from the social nature of ordinary human existence. It is in this

51 As Nietzsche states: "What is profound loves masks; what is most profound hates even image and parable." Beyond Good and Evil, §40.
beginning section that Zarathustra elaborates his critique of collective existence.

Accordingly, the first exegetical chapter, chapter three, will center upon these important critiques and the political implications arising therefrom. "The Cold Monster" will examine Nietzsche's critique of the modern state and mass culture. Nietzsche concludes that the modern state is given to usurping the identities of its members, conditioning them into little more than cogs in the societal machine. The product of this state, symbolized by the "last man," is no longer capable of creative action, much less creative thought. This renders the society stagnant, susceptible to the ravages of nihilism, and ultimately self-destruction. Nietzsche argues that this process is largely unavoidable within any mass society and can therefore not be the home of the "authentic" self.

After his short sojourn in the town, Zarathustra abandons the notion of mass education and leaves civilization. However, in his travels he meets several characters who decide to follow him, to learn what they can. Essentially, this part of the narrative is a discussion of smaller social groups and the concept of friendship. Chapter four, "The Higher Men" will explore Nietzsche's flirtation with the possibility of a community of equals. Frustrated at his failure to teach self-overcoming to those in mass society, Zarathustra attempts to teach this knowledge to those who actually want to learn: a group of disciples. However, this mode of collective existence is
soon abandoned, as its members all too quickly fall into the old traps of repression and bad conscience that plagues the state. Nietzsche argues that the small community of friends is less problematic than mass society, but ultimately not capable of providing the context for the emergence of the creative self.

It is Zarathustra's firm resolve to reclaim solitude that represents a major turning point in the political argument of the narrative and this dissertation. Chapter five, "The Great Nausea," begins discussion of Nietzsche's positive political thought, both within the text and the dissertation. Finding community lacking, Nietzsche moves on to the last level of human existence, the solitary individual. The mechanism by which the individual can sever relations with the herd is that of existential nausea. Through the great nausea, Zarathustra becomes aware of the absence of order to existence and realizes that his quest for authentic humanity can only take place within the individual self. It is only when the individual embraced the horror of the meaninglessness of existence that a new beginning is possible, free from the repression and normalizing mechanisms of the Other. Because of this existential realignment, Zarathustra abandons his disciples and begins a journey of self-discovery.

Chapter six, "The Ethics of Absurdity," discusses Nietzsche's apparently separatist theory of politics. It is only in solitude that the repressive mechanisms endemic to human existence can be mitigated.
Nietzsche elaborates some concrete methods by which the individual can begin this process of self-creation. This chapter centers upon the ethical considerations of the concept of the eternal recurrence. It will be argued that the concept of the eternal recurrence is intended as a guide to action, a type of Nietzschean categorical imperative. Through the confrontation with mortality and finitude the individual is able to begin the process of creating the self as a work of art. This chapter explores Nietzsche's elaboration of an aesthetic ethics arising out of resistance to social norms and culminating in individual self-creation.

Chapter seven, "Metamorphosis: The Transmuted Self," discusses what this exceptional individual may actually resemble. Although Nietzsche's elaboration of self-transcendence and self-creation is highly speculative, it has great theoretical importance. This chapter centers upon the symbol of Noontide, a central metaphor in the narrative. It is argued that noon represents the consciousness ordered by a realization of the primacy of the will-to-power, finally free from the constraints of societal mechanisms.

The conclusion will argue that in Zarathustra Nietzsche offers a comprehensive theory of politics taking all levels of human existence into account, albeit a political theory centered upon the individual self. By following the structure of the narrative, this study stays close to Nietzsche's thought process and allows him to guide the analysis of his most important
work. Rather than imposing preconceived models of political theory upon 
Zarathustra or attempting to extract elements of the narrative to support a
conclusion, it is the purpose of this project to reveal the radical departure
from such interpretive strategies that have plagued previous Nietzsche
interpreters.

Importantly, this study of Zarathustra also reveals why Nietzsche did
not put forth a positive political theory of the state. Indeed, Nietzsche’s lack
of a positive political theory is telling, as it is intentional. Any positive
political theory of collective action is inimical to the model of selfhood that
Nietzsche proposes. Nietzsche’s model of selfhood, as revealed in the
progression of Zarathustra, is one of individual resistance to the social realm
and the socially-created self. Therefore, a Nietzschean political theory is
oxymoronic. Nietzsche’s political relevance is in individual resistance and
self-overcoming, not collective existence.
CHAPTER II

THE HERMENEUTICS OF EXISTENCE

Nietzsche's philosophical texts are unconventional to be sure. They are fragmented, polemic, and occasionally contradictory. *Zarathustra* is radically different from even Nietzsche's usual "style." It contains a main character, Zarathustra, and has a loose plot following his wanderings from solitude through society and back into solitude. However, it is far from being a conventional novel. Much of the text is concerned with Zarathustra's internal dialogue and a series of what could be most accurately termed visions. Further, the text is not linear and is confusing at best. Nietzsche's writing style is not overly complex in *Zarathustra*, but his use of rather obscure imagery, much of which draws from classical and Asian sources, calls for a great effort on the part of the reader. Arguably, the most important element of the text is Nietzsche's shunning of the prepositional model of philosophy in favor of a symbolic and metaphorical presentation.

This chapter will argue that the narrative structure of *Zarathustra* is a conscious attempt to illustrate Nietzsche's thoroughgoing critique of conventional philosophical discourse. The symbolic and metaphorical language Nietzsche employs in the text is an intentional response to the inadequacies of philosophical language; and the fragmented structure of the narrative is a direct result of Nietzsche's epistemological and existential
presuppositions. *Zarathustra*, as a free-flowing narrative, is designed to be representative of the actual operations of the human consciousness, which Nietzsche argues are impossible to depict within the confines of the discursive model employed by conventional philosophy.

There is no doubt that *Zarathustra* is a remarkable work, even more so considering Nietzsche's unique view of the nature of language and communication. Nietzsche actually seems contemptuous of the language of philosophical discourse, writing in *Zarathustra*: "you do not speak: thus you proclaim your wisdom." As a professional philologist, Nietzsche's critique of language is especially compelling. Nietzsche was familiar with both the intricacies and vicissitudes of language; therefore his condemnation of the

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1 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III:4. It is a poor reflection on Anglophone scholarship that a century after Nietzsche's death there is not yet a standard edition of Nietzsche's complete works. The widely-accepted German edition of Nietzsche's works, the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, is only now being issued in English by Stanford University Press. This edition is proceeding at a glacial rate, with only three volumes out of twenty appearing over the past decade. Although good translations of Nietzsche's major published works have been completed, most notably by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, there remains no complete translation of Nietzsche's *Nachlass*; his vast collection of notes, lectures, and personal and professional correspondence. This creates a nightmare for citation as each reader may have different editions, each with different pagination and idiosyncratic translation. Fortunately, a rough consensus on citing Nietzsche's works has developed over the past few years. Where possible, especially in the aphoristic works, it is standard to cite by aphorism or section number rather than by page number. Similarly, it has become standard to cite *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by book number and section number. Thus, the citation "*Zarathustra*, III:8" refers to the eighth section of Book Three, "*Vor Sonnen-Aufgang* (Before Sunrise)." Subdivisions that occur within a section, when specifically delineated by Nietzsche, are also included in citations. I have relied heavily on the translations of both Kaufmann and Hollingdale for assistance, and have placed linguistic and translation concerns within footnotes wherever practicable.
possibility of traditional philosophical language to communicate philosophical insight must be examined carefully.

Nietzsche’s apparent love-hate relationship with language and its relation to philosophical thought renders *Zarathustra* a unique challenge to interpretation, as well as offering the opportunity to explore Nietzsche’s strategy for communicating philosophical knowledge. In order to present a comprehensive analysis of *Zarathustra*, it is therefore necessary to analyze the reasons Nietzsche chose to present his central philosophical work in the form of a narrative laced with obscure symbols and metaphors. This task is informed by Nietzsche’s own reflections on *Zarathustra*, both in terms of the process of its creation and its content.

Nietzsche asserts that even the metaphorical language employed in *Zarathustra* cannot convey the essentially incommunicable experiences within the self. “Precisely in this width of space and this accessibility for what is contradictory, Zarathustra experiences himself as the supreme type of all beings; and once one hears how he defines this, one will refrain from seeking any metaphor for it.”

I do not yet have an objective impression of the whole thing; yet I feel that it presents a not insignificant victory over the “spirit of gravity,” considering how difficult it is to present the problems in it. That the first part comprises a circle of feelings which forms a basis for the

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circle of feelings in the second part, this seems to me to be easily recognizable and a "good job of work" (To talk like a carpenter).\(^3\)

It is important to note that \textit{Zarathustra} was the product of distinct moments of inspiration that occurred during two of his frequent walks, it was not the product of a well-reasoned and outlined philosophical study.\(^4\) Nietzsche refers to the origin of \textit{Zarathustra} almost as if it arose from his unconscious mind: "It was on these two walks that the whole of \textit{Zarathustra} I occurred to me, and especially \textit{Zarathustra} himself as a type: rather, he overtook me."\(^5\) Nietzsche uses the narrative to attempt to communicate inner philosophical and psychological knowledge that transcends the boundaries of rational discourse. In this sense, \textit{Zarathustra} is the quintessential postmodern text: the presentation of the unpresentable.\(^6\) As a

\(^3\) Nietzsche, letter to Peter Gast, August, 1883, in Middleton, \textit{Selected Letters}, 217.

\(^4\) Nietzsche reflected on the amount of personal agony evoked by the remembrance of this process: "When I have looked into my \textit{Zarathustra}, I walk up and down in my room for half an hour, unable to master an unbearable fit of sobbing." \textit{Ecce Homo}, II:4.


\(^6\) "The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself: that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself are looking for. The artist and writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what \textit{will have been done}. Hence the fact that the work and text have the characters of an \textit{event}; hence also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put to work, their realization always began too soon. \textit{Post modern} would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo)." Lyotard, \textit{The Postmodern Condition}, 81.
quasi-dramatic presentation, Zarathustra represents the mnemonic attempt to achieve the integration of the conscious and unconscious within the concrete text that Nietzsche envisions as the ultimate goal of his philosophical project. "This indeed is the secret of the soul: only when the hero has deserted the soul does there approach it in dreams—the superhero." Nietzsche is referring to visionary images, the dialogue of the subconscious mind. Zarathustra represents the attempt to reintegrate Dionysus into the Apollonian realm of philosophy. "A little wisdom is no doubt possible; but I have found this happy certainty in all things: that they prefer—to dance on the feet of chance."8

Nietzsche's critique of traditional philosophy proceeds partly from these observations. The philosopher must have faith in his own internal experiences, it is impossible to substitute the experiences of another. The mind must retain some integrity, even if it is masked and continuously in flux. "You are unfruitful: therefore you lack belief. But he who had to create always had his prophetic dreams and star-auguries—and he believed in belief!"9 Nietzsche incorporated imagery into Zarathustra because it existed in his mind alongside traditionally accepted philosophical elements.

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7 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:13.
8 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:4.
9 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:14.
Through incorporation of these elements, the text becomes intensely personal, agonizingly so. Nietzsche writes of *Zarathustra*:

> Probably I would, from artistic motives, have chosen darker and more somber and garish colors for the first two parts, if I had kept my soul serene and bright this year—for the sake of what happens at the end... The detail contains an incredible amount of personal experience and suffering which is intelligible only to me—there were pages which seemed to me to drip with blood.\(^\text{10}\)

Nietzsche’s writings are so intimate that he begrudges his readers. "If a man draws up the sum of a deep and hidden life, as I have been doing, then the result is meant for the eyes and consciences of only the most select people."\(^\text{11}\) Few will be able to understand *Zarathustra* enough to interpret it in the manner Nietzsche wishes: intensely. Nietzsche envisions *Zarathustra* as a crucible for interpretation, changing the reader permanently. "It is a sort of abyss of the future—something to make one shudder, especially the joy in it. Everything in it is my own, without model, kindred, precursor; a person who has lived in it will return to the world seeing things differently."\(^\text{12}\)

Nietzsche envisions that *Zarathustra* is destined to be misunderstood, partially because it contains so much of his personal experiences and imagery born from his unconscious mind. Nietzsche’s pessimism extends

\(^{10}\) Nietzsche, letter to Peter Gast, August, 1883, in Middleton, *Selected Letters*, 218.

\(^{11}\) Nietzsche, letter to Franz Overbeck, March 31, 1885, in Middleton, *Selected Letters*, 239.

even to his closest personal friend, to whom he writes: "[Zarathustra] . . . is an unintelligible book, because it is based on experiences which I share with nobody. If only I could give you a sense of my solitude! Among the living, as among the dead, I have nobody with whom I have any affinity."\(^{13}\)

Nietzsche seems to indicate that Zarathustra will only make sense to someone who has already broken free of the strictures of conventional philosophy and stands in opposition to concretized truth. In his last productive year, Nietzsche wrote: "Of my Zarathustra, I tend to think that it is the profoundest work in the German tongue, also the most perfect in its language. But for others to feel this will require whole generations to catch up with the inner experiences from which that work could arise."\(^{14}\)

Zarathustra is a work which is always ahead of its time; it must be the right time to each reader for it to be significant.

Nietzsche can certainly be criticized for placing too much faith in the reader. He relies upon the emergence of a competent reader who has internal experiences similar to his own.\(^{15}\) Is Nietzsche, therefore, a type-

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\(^{13}\) Nietzsche, letter to Franz Overbeck, August 5, 1886, in Middleton, Selected Letters, 254.

\(^{14}\) Nietzsche, letter to Karl Knortz, June 21, 1888, in Middleton, Selected Letters, 299.

\(^{15}\) Nietzsche seems to realize this problem, and delights in the problems his writings cause seemingly "sophisticated" readers: "When Dr. Heinrich von Stein once complained very honestly that he didn’t understand a word of my Zarathustra, I told him that this was perfectly in order: having understood six sentences from it—that is, to have really experienced them—would raise one to a higher level of existence than ‘modern’ man could attain. Given this feeling of distance, how could I possibly wish to be read by those
former who seeks to produce like-minded individuals through the clever use of archetypal symbols? If Nietzsche is not attempting to communicate genuine internal philosophical experience, Zarathustra is little more than a catharsis. However, if Nietzsche is correct and philosophical insight is indeed based upon essentially incommunicable internal experience, it must be asked why Nietzsche attempts to write at all, even in the narrative format. Nietzsche seems to be undermining his own critique of traditional philosophy by embracing the myth of philosophical discourse that emphasizes communication and concretization. By concretizing his own internal experience, Nietzsche is violating his own injunctions.

Nietzsche's narrative form may be characterized as an attempt to rehabilitate the discursive form that characterized philosophy in its original Greek form. In this sense, Zarathustra represents an interpretive conversation between the reader and the writer, both on their own footing. Zarathustra then represents the attempt of Nietzsche to present to the reader, on a level as equally as possible, his unique insights gained through internal experiences that can never be described. Zarathustra is therefore an absurd document, proposing to communicate the incommunicable. This absurdity is not lost on Nietzsche; indeed he revels in it. It makes no sense

‘moderns’ whom I know!” Ecce Homo, III:1. Further, Nietzsche’s mockery of Wagner’s inability to understand his works is legendary.
to attempt to divine Nietzsche's "true" philosophy or his philosophical intent: to do so is a betrayal of his message.  

The narrative structure of Zarathustra is therefore the epitome of Nietzsche's philosophical style, as he consciously structured his entire mature philosophical oeuvre to defy cursory reading or superficial interpretation. Even in his first book, The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche avoided the scholarly strictures of meticulous citation and commentary on previous philosophical and philological works, presenting his argument in a series of polemical essays requiring some element of conscious interpretation on the part of the reader. After his rejection by his colleagues in philology and the beginning of his career as an itinerant writer, Nietzsche became even more acutely aware of the role of the reader as an active participant the process of philosophy. "He who knows the reader, does nothing further for the reader. Another century of readers—and the spirit itself will stink. That everyone can read will ruin in the long run not only writing, but thinking as well." 

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16 Nietzsche explicitly speaks to this point in his reevaluation of his own philosophical project: "Ultimately, nobody can get more out of things, including books, than he already knows. For what one lacks access to from experience one will have no ear." Ecce Homo: III:3.

17 "The most recent view that Nietzsche is at bottom a systematic thinker is just as correct, and just as wrong, as the older view that he is an aphoristic literary author." Löwith, Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 13.

18 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:7.
Nietzsche asserted that breaking away from the passive discourse encouraged by conventional philosophical writing was the only possibility for advancing the boundaries of human perception. Creation, as Nietzsche argued consistently from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Ecce Homo*, is the proper goal for human life, and can only progress through the synthesis of all modes of human experience, including the poetic and artistic elements neglected or rejected by philosophy. The manner of philosophical discourse must therefore be open to radical experimentation, not bound to tradition and regimented forms. With philosophy, the text cannot present a secure and definite conclusion; instead the text must be dynamic and provoke interpretation rather than imposing doctrines.19

Nietzsche employed the aphoristic format in a majority of his works for this reason. Radically different from ordinary philosophical texts, *Human All To Human, Daybreak, The Science of Joy*, and *Beyond Good and Evil* are collections of varyingly connected aphorisms and meditations on a multitude of subjects. Although it is not accurate to label Nietzsche’s style

19 "From this perspective, philosophy follows the same movement as the other activities; whereas romantic philosophy still appealed to a formal synthetic identity ensuring a continuous intelligibility of matter (a priori synthesis), modern philosophy tends to elaborate a material of thought in order to capture forces that are not thinkable in themselves. This is Cosmos philosophy, after the manner of Nietzsche. The molecular material has even become so deterritorialized that we can no longer even speak of matters of expression, as we did in romantic territoriality. *Matters of expression are superceded by a material of capture.* The forces to be captured are no longer those of the earth, which still constitute a great expressive Form, but the forces of an immaterial, nonformal, and energetic Cosmos." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 342-343.
in these works as "stream of consciousness," Nietzsche is trying to break free of the bounds imposed by "rational" discourse, which he ultimately attempts to demonstrate is itself an artifact of language. Nietzsche is therefore not writing to advance a set of propositions as the "truth"; rather he is inviting the reader to ask these questions as well:

He who writes in blood and aphorisms does not want to be read, he wants to be learned by heart. In the mountains the shortest route is from peak to peak, but for that you must have long legs. Aphorisms should be peaks, and those to whom they are spoken should be big and tall of stature.

In other words, many may read these works but only a few will understand that the aphorisms are only guideposts along the way. Of course, Nietzsche can be faulted for not giving guidance in this process of interpretation that he claims to be so vital to his philosophical project. If the point of Nietzsche's philosophy is to create a self-critical stance within the mind of the reader, then there may be no actual "point" to his texts beyond the creation of this existential mood. The implication of this interpretation is that the essential element of Nietzsche's philosophy is what occurs within the mind of the reader. Only those who confront the text in this manner have a chance to grasp philosophical insight from Nietzsche's works. Those who seek to find "answers" or "a point" in Nietzsche's philosophy have

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seriously misunderstood his intentions and have demonstrated their own intellectual mediocrity: "it needs greatness of soul for a person to stand my writings at all. I have the good fortune to make all weak and virtuous people embittered against me." As Deleuze and Guattari note:

The aphorism, for example, is very different from the maxim, for a maxim, in a republic of letters, is like an organic State act or sovereign judgement, whereas an aphorism always awaits its meaning from a new external source, a final force that must conquer and subjugate it, utilize it.

Philosophy for Nietzsche is therefore less of a search for truth or essences and more of an interpretive act, an act which permanently changes the reader. This is demonstrated most specifically in Zarathustra. The reader, following Zarathustra's journey of self-discovery, is himself travelling the same road. The character of Zarathustra is therefore the reader by proxy. Philosophical writing in the Zarathustrian mode is an agonal challenge. Reading of a philosophical text should be an intense exercise undertaken seriously. The narrative structure helps the reader achieve this attitude. As Zarathustra says: "of all writings I love only that

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24 "In Nietzsche, values must be interpreted because they are expressions of the strength and the weakness of the will to power. Moreover, in Nietzsche, life itself is an interpretation: in this way, philosophy itself becomes the interpretation of interpretations." Paul Ricoeur, The Conflict of Interpretations (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 12.
which is written with blood. Write with blood: and you will discover that
blood is spirit.”25 This is not a paean to the Völksgeist, but rather a call to an
especially intense, self-searching interpretation of Nietzsche’s texts.
Needless to say, this is a difficult and dangerous task, both for the reader
and the writer.26

Nietzsche is certainly open to criticism for this position. His reliance
upon the reader and his call for a more active encounter with philosophical
texts is necessarily vague. Indeed, Nietzsche’s emphasis upon style could be
blamed for his misappropriation by ideological movements or the
mischaracterization of his thought. With so much open to interpretation,
there is little stability inherent in Nietzsche’s philosophy that would allow
for a thoroughgoing analysis of Nietzsche’s philosophical project.
Nietzsche’s interpretive philosophy can be no other than a hermeneutic
nightmare, but this is what Nietzsche seems to intend. His philosophy is no
less than the attempt to break the cycle of dogmatism that has grown up
around all of the pioneers of philosophy through the ages.

It must be asked whether Nietzsche can actually overcome the
strictures of traditional philosophy he despises. The radical style of
Zarathustra could be seen as a desperate attempt to transcend the linguistic

25 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:7.

26 Nietzsche had his own problems with Zarathustra from the beginning as well.
"Zarathustra had been delayed, to Nietzsche’s great annoyance, by the publication of
500,000 hymn books." Middleton, Selected Letters, 213n.
trap that has rendered philosophy an academic pursuit rather than a practical application of knowledge to the individual life. That Nietzsche must resort to such a non-traditional format as the narrative to convey philosophical insight highlights this proposition. However, if Nietzsche's thought is to be constantly interpreted by each reader, can it be said that there is in fact a philosophy that is genuinely Nietzsche's? As the text is constantly reinterpreted, as Nietzsche's seems to desire, where is the line of demarcation between Nietzsche's philosophy and that of the reader? Nietzsche might argue that this is a false dichotomy, but the problem remains nevertheless. Nietzsche does not provide us with the information necessary to determine which interpretations are more valid, if this type of determination is indeed possible.

The validity of Nietzsche's decentering of philosophy is certainly bold, but it is also questionable. However, Nietzsche's emphasis upon interpretation fits with his emphasis upon action over reactive modes of discourse. Nietzsche does not seek to inform the reader, he seeks to provoke the reader. In this sense, Nietzsche's philosophical style represents the logical extension of his presuppositions regarding the perspectival nature of philosophical insight.

However, it could be argued that Nietzsche's attempt to force the reader to think through philosophical problems independent of the text
represents the call to a type of second-order philosophizing, in which the reader confronts philosophical problems in a manner already framed by another: Nietzsche. If this is the case, Nietzsche has failed in his gamble and is simply setting up a more insidious power relation than traditional philosophy. Nietzsche forces the reader to think through problems; that is to be sure. But these problems have been selected by Nietzsche and framed in a manner that will lead the reader to certain conclusions at the expense of other possibilities. This criticism is difficult to overcome, but Nietzsche may not be claiming such a dramatic break with traditional philosophical writing. Nietzsche's narrative style represents an attempt to prod the reader; it is not a perfect vehicle to convey the necessity for interpretation.

However successful or unsuccessful, Nietzsche's interpretive philosophy stands in radical opposition to traditional philosophical forms. This disjunction is the artifact of a thorough critique of philosophy and its reliance upon language. Further, Nietzsche's own communicative scheme is based upon his critique of traditional epistemological presuppositions, partially stemming from his larger critique of language. It is therefore necessary to examine Nietzsche's criticism of traditional philosophy in order to understand his novel approach to the communication of ideas and his subsequent de-centering of philosophy.
Nietzsche identifies several significant problems with traditional academic philosophy. Both the content and the style of his writings are largely in opposition to these "fundamental errors." The most fundamental problem with philosophy is its reliance upon what could be termed the "tyranny of language."

Language, taken as a tool for communication, is not itself the problem. The difficulty arises when philosophers forget the limitations of language and begin to believe that language can indeed serve as an adequate vehicle for expressing philosophical insights, which are largely abstract and subjective. Language that does not confront the reader with the demand for independent interpretation, typified by the traditional text taken to have an independent and definite meaning, is the prime example of this problem. Philosophy, in its original form, was a discursive discipline, not the presentation of fixed ideas. Philosophy was therefore a fluid pursuit of individual insight, well-suited to the interpretation of a radically-uncertain universe. Non-discursive language, petrified in the form of a text, is insufficient for this task, given the contingent nature and genealogical origin of grammar. It has been forgotten that language is not an objective set of signs with discrete codified meanings; it is rather an organic system of communication that has arisen and developed over centuries as the result of a random and sometimes irrational process.
As a philologist, Nietzsche was acutely aware of the contingent nature of language. Indeed, the first essay of *The Genealogy of Morality* is devoted to the development of the linguistic symbols “good” and “evil,” demonstrating in each a set of attached psychological and moral implications far beyond the seemingly simple definitions commonly attached. Nietzsche views language as a set of symbols that have become more or less detached from their original meanings and have taken on a life of their own.27

Truly, men have given themselves all their good and evil. Truly, they did not take it, they did not find it, it did not descend to them as a voice from heaven. Man first implanted values into things to maintain himself—he created the meaning of things, a human meaning.28

Therefore, although language is a natural expression and outgrowth of human existence, it remains marked by the experiences of its creator, who created the linguistic symbol that is now taken for granted and imbued with an independent meaning apart from the perceiving subject.29 Importantly,

27 “The whole range of available narrative and even stylistic operators is put into play without concern for the unity of the whole, and new operators are tried. The grammar and vocabulary of the literary language are no longer accepted as given; rather, they appear as academic forms, as rituals originating in piety (as Nietzsche said) which prevent the unrepresentable from being put forward.” Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), *The Postmodern Condition*, 80-81.


29 “For if language is the product of the artistic activity of the human subject—the sole author of these metaphors—then it necessarily conceals a ‘natural’ element. Words, expressing through their sounds and rhythms the movements of the psyche, manifest some type of Will to Power and thus reflect not only the essence of things, but also the essence of
philosophers have largely ignored the contingent nature of the symbols they use and therefore open themselves up to an entire array of problems.

Most importantly, language, as a system of symbols long detached from their original meanings, essentially devalues itself. This tendency is especially seen in modern academic philosophy, which has sought to attach more and more stable meanings to words in an attempt to foster a scientific view of reality. Language, as it is called upon to place more and more specific meanings to phenomena, further demonstrates its fundamental inadequacy. In the realm of philosophy this is fatal. The more philosophy calls upon language to explain abstract concepts in concrete terms, the more language reveals its impotence. This insidious process has largely been ignored by philosophy, but it threatens to destroy the philosophical enterprise.

subjectivity. . . . Linguistic fictions disguise their fictive character; language consists of dead fictions become independent of their author through amnesia. Hence, any return to the 'origin' of language, to the metaphoric activity of the artistic Will to Power, is impossible—at least within the ordinary use of the linguistic code. . . . Not only is language intrinsically ill, it is also the carrier of the universal illness: nihilism, the triumph of the reactive forces. . . . But in what sense is language a 'symbol'? It is a symbol in that it is a radically unfaithful replica . . . but it is also a relation of analogy, from which all exact imitation is excluded. . . . Language suffers from a fundamental powerlessness to reveal what it claims to reveal: 'Language, as an organ and symbol of manifestation (i.e., as a symbol of a symbol) can never bring forth the most intimate [basis].'” Haar, Nietzsche and Metaphysics, 69-71.

30 “Modernity, in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality, together with the invention of other realities. What does this 'lack of reality' signify if one tries to free it from a narrowly historicized interpretation? The phase is of course akin to what Nietzsche calls nihilism.” Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, 77.
Philosophers, trapped by the tyranny of language, essentially censor themselves because of the lack of sufficient language. Unable to communicate what cannot be written, the deepest and most personal truths regarding existence and ontology remain unexpressed. Rational philosophical discourse simply cannot come to terms with the most innate features of existence, and must therefore concern itself with shallower pursuits. "Neither in the incomprehensible nor in the irrational can you be at home." As Nietzsche argues:

We no longer esteem ourselves sufficiently when we communicate ourselves. Our true experiences are not at all garrulous. They could not communicate themselves if they tried. That is because they lack the right word. Whatever we have the right words for, that we have already gone beyond. . . . With language the speaker immediately vulgarizes himself.

Philosophical insight becomes petrified through language and the reliance upon the text, a tendency that can be traced to Plato's commitment

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31 "What provokes one to look at all philosophers half-suspiciously, half-mockingly, is not that one discovers again and again how innocent they are—how often and how easily that make mistakes and go astray . . . but that they are not honest enough in their work, although they all make a lot of virtuous noise when the problem of truthfulness is touched even remotely. They all pose as if they had discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic (as opposed to the mystics of every rank, who are more honest and doltish—and talk of 'inspiration'); while at bottom it is an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of 'inspiration'—most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract—that they defend with reasons they have sought after the fact." Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, §5.

32 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:2.

to paper of Socrates' dialogues. Through the creation of an independent text, philosophers have created an external signifier which stands in opposition to the reader. Haar notes:

The essence of Nietzsche's distrust is rather that language tends inevitably to vulgarize, to make herd-like. The dominant language is always reactive—simultaneously reducer and castrater as well as protector of the weak against "dangerous" impulses and the emergence of explosive differences. Language becomes the means to this end thanks to the invention of logical, grammatical, and metaphysical categories that effect the triumph of reactive forces.

Language, then, is innately political. It is formed through once concrete and identifiable power relations, which over time become obscured or forgotten. At the same time, it is forgotten that linguistic communication is an essentially interpretive endeavor attempting to explain or define an innately mutable existence. Language is a power relation, operating in furtherance of the creeping marginalization of philosophy. The failure of language to communicate philosophical insight is not seen as the failure of language, but rather as the failure of philosophy. Philosophy, by becoming

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34 "The purifying, consecrating influence of literature, the destruction of the passions through knowledge and the word; the idea of literature as the highway to understanding, to forgiveness, and to love; the saving power of speech; the literary spirit as the noblest manifestation of the human spirit altogether; the literary man as man fulfilled, as saint. . . . But in Nietzsche's terminology, as announced in The Birth of Tragedy, this precisely was the character of Socrates, Socratic man, as prototype and protagonist of 'the Decadence,' in the sense of the intellect subduing, disorienting, and dissolving life, unloving of its imperfection, sterilized to its mystery . . . those who attribute to local, temporal conditions the ills inherent in life itself, and, in their zeal to correct, discompose the life they would save." Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Creative Mythology (New York: Penguin, 1968), 377.

35 Haar, Nietzsche and Metaphysics, 74.
tied to language, has chosen a medium through which it can never fulfill its goals.

As Klossowski states: "Nietzsche says that we have no language to express what is in becoming. Thought is always the result of a momentary relation of power between impulses, principally between those that dominate and those that resist."36 Words demand meanings; there is no vocabulary for flux or that is capable of recognizing the epistemological uncertainty inherent in the Nietzschean outlook. Jaspers notes "Nietzsche recognizes the reason why the essential—the truth itself—is incommunicable: Only that which can be said can be communicated; only the intelligible can be said, but what is intelligible is always interpretative. . . . What is said, as such, has already ceased to be true."37

Rather than accepting the incommunicability of philosophy through language, philosophy still clings to language as the only valid communicative form. It is this insistence that has led to the stagnation of philosophy and its tendency towards increasing concretization. Because of the limits of language, philosophy has become dominated by the demand to produce acceptable, fundamental precepts, in other words, "truth." Nietzsche terms this tendency the "will-to-truth."

36 Klossowski, Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle, 49-50.

Nietzsche argues that this fundamental need for philosophical stability is not completely the fault of language. Humans must have a belief in stability; the will-to-truth is a psychological precondition for society.\(^{38}\) The concretizing effect of language and its disastrous implications for philosophy are but one outgrowth of this innate need. Essentially, Nietzsche argues that language, philosophy, even societal institutions are the handmaidens of the will-to-truth, fostering a belief in the stability of existence. Specifically, philosophy has become chained to several fundamental errors that have delivered it into the hand of dogma and Dekadenz.

We must draw up a list of these illusions, just as Nietzsche . . . listed the "four great errors" . . . First of all there is the *illusion of transcendence*, which, perhaps, comes before all others (in its double aspect of making immanence immanent to something and of rediscovering a transcendence within immanence itself); then the *illusion of universals* when concepts are confused with the plane. . . . Then there is the *illusion of the eternal* when it is forgotten that concepts must be created . . . the *illusion of discursiveness* when propositions are confused with concepts. It would be wrong to think that all of these illusions logically entail one another like propositions, but they resonate or reverberate and form a thick fog around the plane.\(^{39}\)

\(^{38}\) "Judgements concerning truth and falsehood are at bottom assertions of belief. Assertions of belief are, in turn, valuations. Valuations, in their turn, express covert conditions of preservation and growth. Nietzsche argues further that all organs of knowledge and our senses as well are, without exceptions, developed in terms of preservation and growth. And then, perhaps, Nietzsche's most striking observation surfaces: he argues that stability, security, predictability, permanence, are *preconditions* for every living being. Doubt concerning essential values is impermissible. Something must be held to be true—that is our common weal." Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1978), 193.

The errors of philosophy, grave though they are, are essentially driven by the need for stability and the longing for transcendence. These tendencies are essentially unhealthy as they repress the questioning necessary to open human perception beyond tradition and to challenge the will-to-truth. Philosophical errors fostered by the will-to-truth hamstring philosophy and deliver it into the hands of the hypocritical:

There have always been many sickly people among those who invent fables and long for God: they have a raging hate for the enlightened man and for that youngest of virtues, which is called honesty. They are always looking back to the dark ages: then, indeed, illusion and faith were a different matter; raving of the reason was likeness to God, and doubt was sin.... That is why they hearken to preachers of death and themselves preach afterworlds.40

Thus, the positing of an external signifier, whether God, Absolute Reason, or the Forms, is the product of intellectual laziness or dishonesty. "Weariness, which wants to reach the Ultimate with a single leap, with a death-leap, a poor ignorant weariness, which no longer desires even to desire: that created all gods and afterworlds."41 Nietzsche's dictum "God is dead" is more than an expression of theological inadequacy, it extends to the failure of all the external signifiers to which humans have attached themselves. Science, theology, metaphysics, even history are all entrapped by the tyranny of language. All of this is a manifestation of the will-to-

40 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:3.
41 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:3.
truth.\textsuperscript{42} “But that ‘other world’, that inhuman, dehumanized world which is a heavenly Nothing, is well hidden from men; and the belly of being does not speak to man, except as man.”\textsuperscript{43} Nietzsche argues that the “other world” is silent, we mistake our concrete consciousness for the transcendent.

“God is a supposition: but I want your supposing to be bounded by conceivability.”\textsuperscript{44} However, the will-to-truth refuses to allow for the possibility of philosophical error, leading even to the concretization of the

Beyond: Could you conceive a god?—But may the will-to-truth mean this to you: that everything shall be transformed into the humanly-conceivable, the humanly-evident, the humanly-palpable! You should follow your own senses to the end! And you yourselves should create what you have hitherto called the World: the World should be formed in your image by your reason, your will, and your love!\textsuperscript{45}

Nietzsche asserts that rather than a concrete independent reality, the world is an undifferentiated field of force. The world is not a totality of entities and things, as these cannot be understood independently, much less together. Hearkening back to Heraclitus, Nietzsche emphasizes the

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\item \textsuperscript{42} “Nietzsche’s godlessness is the most extreme expression of his \textit{total break} with traditional historical substance insofar as the language of this latter lays claim to universal validity. All human ideals seem to him to have come to nothing: He wishes to reject morality and surrender reason and humanity. He views truth as a universal lie; previous philosophy as an established deception; Christianity as the triumph of the misfits and the failures, the weak and the impotent; there is nothing holy or valid that he does not condemn.” Jaspers, \textit{Nietzsche}, 441.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, I:3.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, II:2.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, II:2.
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contingent nature of existence. However, because of the vast array of societal and philosophical crutches that have been constructed to reassure humans of the essential stability of existence, this epistemological insight is incomprehensible to most people:

When water is planked over so that it can be walked upon, when gangway and railings span the stream: truly, he that says “everything is in flux” is not believed. On the contrary, even simpletons contradict him. . . . “Over the stream everything is firmly fixed, all the values of things, the bridges, concepts, all ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’: all are firmly fixed!”46

The will-to-truth therefore fosters the needed belief in stability to insure the continued existence of prevailing power mechanisms. However, just as language eventually becomes devalued as its inadequacy is demonstrated, the will-to-truth simply cannot repress the chaotic nature of reality. Nietzsche continues:

“Fundamentally, everything stands still” — that is a proper winter doctrine, a fine thing for unfruitful seasons, a fine consolation for hibernators and stay-at-homes . . . the thawing wind, however, preaches to the contrary. The thawing wind . . . a destroyer that breaks ice with its angry horns! Ice, however — breaks gangways! O my brothers, is everything not now in flux? Have not all railings and gangways fallen into the water and come to nothing? Who can still cling to “good” and “evil”? “Woe to us! Hail to us! The thawing wind is blowing!”47

For Nietzsche, it makes no sense to speak of the universe as such, as the Umwelt is inextricably connected to the observer. The individual is a

46 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, III:12.8.

47 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, III:12.8.
part of the universe he seeks to observe. This makes independent or empirical research an impossible task. All knowledge, whatever it purports to be, is by necessity individual knowledge. By extension, therefore, knowledge is always perspectival and contingent. Since the individual and the universe are tied together, knowledge is an uncertain task. Deleuze and Guattari note: “As Nietzsche succeeded in making us understand, thought is creation, not will to truth.”

However, the exigencies of the will-to-truth preclude the acknowledgement of the perspectival reality of knowledge. As such, the “truth” advanced by philosophy is no more than a widely-accepted interpretation, although it is bolstered by an entire societal apparatus devoted to fostering its legitimacy. This does not, however, change the underlying epistemological uncertainty that spurs the will-to-truth. Stripped of its legitimating mechanisms, “truth” is shown to be a selective and reductionist notion devoted to suppressing questioning of the prevailing conceptual power structure, the primacy of reason. In the modernist mindset, philosophy has become devoted to fostering the illusion of metaphysical and epistemological stability necessary to maintain the

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46 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 54.
modern ideology of progress. As Nietzsche notes: "Hitherto all knowledge has grown up beside bad conscience!"\textsuperscript{49}

Despite its ideological manipulation, Nietzsche does not seek to destroy the notion of "truth," but to inform us of its misuse as an ideological and metaphysical tool. Nietzsche argues that inasmuch as we seek to posit truths which are eternally stable and reliable, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment at best, manipulation at worst.\textsuperscript{50} The "true world" fostered by the will-to-truth is nothing more than a mythological construct.\textsuperscript{51}

Nietzsche, although he is a perspectivist, does not deny the value of knowledge. Some perspectives or interpretations are indeed more persuasive or reliable than others. This attitude of interpretation and evaluation is healthy and useful. However, by attaching the linguistic symbol of "truth" to an interpretation, the entire meaning of the interpretive argument is changed and a whole variety of power mechanisms come into play to support the validity of that particular interpretation.

\textsuperscript{49} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, III:127.

\textsuperscript{50} "Expressed exotically, Nietzsche's understanding of truth is a fluidly protean, quasi-aesthetic, mytho-poietic ideal of nonexclusive truth. Expressed simply, simplistically, we may also say that for Nietzsche there is no truth. The only truth is the lie of truth and the truth seeker is condemned to such a lie, where at its best one has the truth that there is no truth." Babette E. Babich, \textit{Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994),15.

\textsuperscript{51} "Nietzsche reveals so-called ideal being as a 'realm' that is exterior and superior to human volition. Prohibition and condemnation come down to man from this realm of the outside and up-above. But this 'realm' is, after all, 'nothing.' It emerges only from the weakness of the slave morality, which projects itself into the heavens. The task of the
Nietzsche counters that absolute knowledge is oxymoronic. Since reality itself is not stable, knowledge must be supple by definition. However, metaphysics and science can never accept or even acknowledge the chaotic state of the universe. Philosophy is therefore delivered into hands of the ideology of truth, the tyranny of the will-to-truth:

Into the bondage of false values and false scriptures! Ah, that someone would redeem them from their Redeemer! Once, as the sea tossed them about, they thought they had landed upon an island; but behold, it was a sleeping monster! False values and false scriptures: they are the worst monsters for mortal men—fate sleeps and waits long within them. But at last it comes and awakes and eats and devours all that have built their huts upon it.\(^5^2\)

Inasmuch as truth is an ideological tool, philosophy has become the servant of the prevailing power structure. Devoted to the search for truth, philosophy cannot become anything but. Even philosophy that is apparently critical never really attacks the presuppositions that underlie the will-to-truth: “You have served the people and the people’s superstitions, all you famous philosophers!—you have not served truth! And it is precisely for that reason that they paid you reverence.”\(^5^3\)

Caught in the trap of the will-to-truth and its attendant institutional structures, philosophy has receded further into the absurdity of concretizing philological and genealogical method is to reveal this ideal source as a nothingness.” Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 443.


\(^5^3\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II:8.
"truth." The "philosophical embarrassment" of the dialectic is perhaps the ultimate expression of the will-to-truth. It seeks to concretize reality in an all-encompassing formula, and devalues or absorbs all that is not in accord with its precepts. The dialectic, which purports to eliminate all but the essential in its quest for absolute truth, has become a parody. Taken to its logical concussion, the dialectic becomes an overtly reductionist mechanism for further repressing the possibility for instability.54

Theological worldviews are even more constrictive, as they do not generally allow for reinterpretation or the advancement of new hypotheses. Theology, when coupled with philosophy in the guise of metaphysics, takes the will-to-truth to a new level. Rather than a "search-for-truth", truth is taken as already revealed, preventing the need for further exploration. The fear of instability leads to the exclusion of entire sections of human experience and the disallowing of unacceptable interpretations. As Nietzsche states: "Churches they call their sweet-smelling caves... Who created such caves and penitential steps? Was it not those who wanted to hide themselves and were ashamed before the clear sky?"55

54 "According to Nietzsche’s self-understanding, this real dialectic may be characterized as follows: (1) the movement is not an arbitrary and undirected process, it is self-related. Nietzsche calls it 'overcoming (Überwindung).’ (2) Due to its connection with the possible Existenz which inspires life, this thinking is substantial and quite distinct from intellectual arbitrariness. (3) It is constructive in its purpose, though by its very nature it is in constant danger of sinking into negation. (4) It has direction but no terminus, and the ground that is lost is never regained; its substantiality consists simply in its being-on-the-way.” Jaspers, Nietzsche, 390.

55 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:4.
Coupled with theological elements, philosophy is exceptionally selective as to the manner in which it will sanction knowledge. The will-to-truth, as an ideology that actually operates to repress serious questioning, has hampered philosophy and made moral or political theory impotent and bound to prevailing power structures. Philosophy, in the guise if the will-to-truth, is hypocritical: “And let this be called by me immaculate perception of all things: “that I desire nothing of things, except that I may lie down before them like a mirror with a hundred eyes.” Oh, you sentimental hypocrites, you lustful men!”56 The ultimate outcome of the will-to-truth is complacency, the enemy of knowledge. The role of the philosopher is to reassure and to console, not to question and provoke:

His wisdom is: stay awake in order to sleep well. . . . Now it is clear to me that what people were once seeking above all when they sought the teachers of virtue. They sought good sleep and opium virtues to bring it about! To all of these lauded wise men of the academic chairs, wisdom meant sleep without dreams: they knew no better meaning of life.57

For Nietzsche, it is necessary to realize that all symbolizations, whether linguistic or moral, are necessarily mutable. “For all things are baptized at the fount of eternity and beyond good and evil; good and evil themselves, however, are only intervening shadows and damp afflictions

56 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:15.
57 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:2.
and passing clouds."58 Philosophy, however, is unable or unwilling to accept the essential instability of existence and clings to pipe dreams of a comprehensible universe.59 The drive to find the truth, the will-to-truth devalues contradiction and leads to the petrifaction of ideas into "concepts" and "doctrines."60 It is this concretization that Nietzsche reacts against through his de-centering of philosophy and critique of truth. Nietzsche does not seek to destroy philosophical errors or deny transcendence in order to collapse societal mechanisms; he seeks to cause people to question for themselves the foundations of truth.61 Haar notes: "Nietzsche's style aims finally at destroying, or at least checking, all logical and, especially,

58 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:4.

59 "Without knowledge of what knowledge is, the possibility of absolute truth becomes a metaphysical fantasy—a 'fable' in Nietzsche's words." Babich, Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science, 78.

60 "Our logical and psychological categories derive their falsehood precisely from this 'will to find out the truth,' i.e., what is fixed, stable, identical, and noncontradictory. But by devaluing contradiction, we bring into evidence a moral prejudice at the very basis of knowledge. This prejudice can be summed up as follows: what is always stable, always identical, is not only True, but also Good, and in a twofold way: knowledge claims to bring salvation and is itself haunted by an ideal of ethical honesty. It is as shameful to deceive as it is to be deceived, and the true has more ethical/value than the false. If the will to know the true is the will to be good and to be saved, this will is, then, a way of negating 'life.'" Haar, Nietzsche and Metaphysics, 16-17.

61 "Nietzsche does not mean to sacrifice God for the sake of Nothing, for while recognizing the deadly truth that God died he aims at transforming it into a life-inspiring one or rather to discover in the depth of the deadly truth its opposite. Sacrificing God for the sake of Nothing would be an extreme form of world-denial or of pessimism." Leo Strauss, "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil" in Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 180.
dialectical 'seriousness,' the goal of which is always to establish identities or
to reveal the one absolute Identity.’’62

Nietzsche argues in Zarathustra that it is necessary to break free of
herd philosophy the will-to-truth, which necessarily denigrates individual
insight: “And we believe in the people and its ‘wisdom’ as if there were a
special secret entrance to knowledge which is blocked to him who has
learned anything.’’63 Philosophical knowledge can only be valuable if it is
gained outside of traditional philosophy, in the agonal sphere of individual
contemplation and activity:

They wrote letters of blood on the path they followed, and their folly
taught that truth is proved by blood. But blood is the worst witness
of truth; blood poisons and transforms the purest teaching to
delusion and hatred of the heart. 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.64

It is only through this separation that real knowledge can be
obtained. Therefore, as Magnus notes, Nietzsche’s critique of philosophy is
much more than a critique of the inadequacy of language, it is an
indictment: “Nietzsche’s critique is certainly not restricted to nor motivated
by linguistic considerations alone. Such considerations play a role, to be

62 Haar, Nietzsche and Metaphysics, 4.

63 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:17.

64 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:4.
sure. But the habits which Nietzsche would have us transform are habits of living.”65

II.

Nietzsche therefore argues that the degeneration of academic philosophy into ideology is inescapable, as authentic philosophical knowledge is only to be gained by intense individual reflection and activity. It is foolish to expect to gain philosophical insight from abstract speculation or rumination on texts, as this is merely the reflection upon another’s insight. As Nietzsche writes: “it is not an easy thing to understand unfamiliar blood: I hate the idling reader.”66 The task of philosophical reading in its passive, conventional sense is impossible. Communication of essential philosophical insight simply cannot be accomplished through traditional linguistic or communicative forms.

Communication of philosophy through a text is essentially the production of a semblance of individually-gained knowledge, expressed symbolically through linguistic forms. The further philosophy moves away from its individual and discursive roots, the less effective it becomes and the more danger it faces of becoming vulgarized. As individual philosophical


66 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I.7. The interpreter, as opposed to the “reader” is an active participant in the text, he makes it a part of himself.
insights become interpreted and reinterpreted, the reader is faced with a difficult problem: the existence of the original, rigidly constructed text.

The text, and by extension the writer, becomes an external signifier that stands in opposition to the reader. It is essentially impossible to escape the tendency of the experience of philosophical interpretation to degenerate into a repressive power relationship. Nietzsche is therefore faced with the challenge of constructing a new type of philosophical discourse that will not degenerate into an external signifier. Thus, he must deal with language and therefore symbol.

Nietzsche is open to criticism on this point. He can certainly not be naïve enough to assert that he is capable of producing a new milieu of symbolic discourse that will not fall into the traps he identifies and criticizes. Nietzsche's main critique of traditional philosophy is that it tends to concretize symbols and cause them to become detached from their original meaning, while at the same time legitimating their practical force. If Nietzsche is correct and symbols arise out of the concrete experience of individuals, he is falling prey to this same problem. Nietzsche is certainly concretizing philosophical experience in the guise of a symbolic discourse,

67 As Foucault notes: "For Nietzsche, it was not a matter of knowing what good and evil were in themselves, but of who was being designated, or rather who was speaking when one said Agathos to designate oneself and Deilos to designate others. For it is there, in the holder of the discourse and, more profoundly still, in the possessor of the word, that language is gathered together in its entirety." The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Vintage, 1970), 305.
even if he is up front about this fact. However, he does not fully heed his own imperative to avoid the tyranny of language. If Nietzsche's metaphorical discourse is to remain attached to the original experiences that engendered them, it is necessary for him to insure that these symbols are capable of representing the internal experiences they represent without become vulgarized.

In order to overcome this criticism, Nietzsche must argue that the symbols in *Zarathustra* are not the type of symbols that can be the substrate for a new philosophical language. Unlike mythological experience, these symbols are not intended to explain the world or universals. They are rhetorical tools designed to evoke in the mind of the reader a semblance of Nietzsche's internal philosophical experience. As Jaspers notes:

> The fact that he used an abundance of symbols, especially in *Zarathustra*, must not mislead us. These do not have the weight of symbols that are really believed; they represent a less formal language and, in their intention and effect, never anything more. In his youth, Nietzsche as a classical philologist often spoke of myths, but in later life he seldom so much as used the word.  

Thus, Nietzsche's symbolic language is not a mythical discourse designed to replace traditional language. Nietzsche is attempting to transcend the strictures of language as much as possible, not to reform it.  

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69 “Still, although he never mentions an intentional creation or replacement of myths, he sees with increasing clarity a new, virtually mythical reality: the dynamic presence of landscape and weather, of nature and life, and of the entire infra-human world.” Jaspers, *Nietzsche*, 371.
Nietzsche’s version of interpretive philosophy demands a communicative form which is capable of that which both myth and language are incapable: the elaboration of internal thought patterns and cognitive structures which are at the same time irrational and inextricably connected to the individual’s personal experiences.

How can one hope to communicate philosophical ideas in the form of discourse bounded by an artificial ordering principle—reason? If the philosopher is to reach the mind of the reader, it must be in terms that the human consciousness will intuitively recognize. This will necessarily render the text confusing and even self-contradictory.\textsuperscript{70} However, contradiction is valuable to uncovering philosophical errors, as it is innately part of the human cognitive experience.\textsuperscript{71} A coherent, non-contradictory text is by definition contrived. As Nietzsche notes: “With all things one thing is

\textsuperscript{70} “Of course, self-contradictions within a text are inevitable from Nietzsche’s point of view, and he makes no claim to being exempt. The inevitability of contradiction justifies Nietzsche’s refutation of the ‘internalist’ perspective’s attempt to establish norms of rational acceptability based on coherence, simplicity, common sense, or other contextually accepted standards. . . . For Nietzsche, the conditions of rational acceptability have been culturally produced and always stand in danger of immanent contradiction.” John McGowan, \textit{Postmodernism and Its Critics} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 74.

\textsuperscript{71} “Man’s ‘sickness’ is shown by the fact that human development rests upon radical errors. Man became ‘human’ only through illusion and folly. Consequently, man is ‘a highly mendacious, artificial, and opaque animal.’ The disease of humanity, ‘in contrast to the condition of the animals, all of whose instincts are adapted to very specific tasks,’ is expressed by the fact that man, being a mere bundle of unfulfilled possibilities of ‘indeterminate nature,’ ‘abounds in contradictory evaluations and, consequently, in contradictory desires.’ What makes man sick is precisely that which constitutes his value. The sickness itself becomes the \textit{bearer or value}.” Jaspers, \textit{Nietzsche}, 130.
impossible—rationality!” Traditional philosophy ignores the fact that there are at least two participants in the task of philosophy: the writer and the reader. The original action, the creation of the text, is only the first step. The interpretation of the text is of equal importance. Conventional philosophical discourse ignores the subjective role of the reader as interpreter, as Deleuze and Guattari note: “signifier enthusiasts take an oversimplified situation as their implicit model: word and thing. From the word they extract the signifier, and from the thing a signified in conformity with the word, and therefore subjugated to the signifier.”

Traditional philosophical writing is therefore somewhat naïve, as it assumes that the text is imbued with objective meaning separate from the reader. Nietzsche realizes this fallacy and attempts to find a solution. By acknowledging the reader as the actual site of philosophy, Nietzsche is able to mitigate the problem of the text as a signifier and the problem of symbolism. However, Nietzsche also places a great deal of emphasis upon the act of reading. It is ultimately the responsibility of the reader to confront the text and engage in the act of serious interpretation.

In this sense, the narrative format of Zarathustra is the natural next step in Nietzsche’s desire to confound the casual reader. It is simply not possible to approach Zarathustra as a traditional philosophical text.

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72 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:4.
Nietzsche demands serious attention on the part of the reader: “It disgusts me to think of Zarathustra going into the world as a piece of literary entertainment; who will be serious enough for it! . . . [N]ow nobody can save me from being cast among the writers of belles lettres. Hell!”

Zarathustra is not to be read as a diversion, it is to become a diversion.

Most fundamentally, Nietzsche envisioned the narrative form employed in Zarathustra to be the only method available to convey his own internal experiences. Because the narrative by its very nature demands interpretation rather than merely comprehension, it is qualitatively different from the ordinary philosophical text. Rational, logical thought is an inaccurate representation of the operation of the human mind. Humans do not think in the manner of carefully-constructed, tightly argued texts. Human thought is more organic, composed of images and feelings not rationally tied together. Nietzsche argues that discourse must be freed from the creeping reductionism inherent in philosophical language. As Foucault notes:

And now, in this philosophical-philological space opened up for us by Nietzsche, language wells up in an enigmatic multiplicity that must be mastered. There appear, like so many projects (or chimeras, who can tell as yet?), the themes of a universal formulation of all discourse, or the themes of an internal exegesis of the world which would at the same time be its total demystification, or those of a

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73 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 66.

74 Nietzsche, Letter to Peter Gast, April 6, 1883, in Middleton, Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche, 212.
general theory of signs; or again, the themes (historically probably the first) of a transformation without residuum, of a total reabsorption of all forms of discourse into a single word, of all books into a single page, of the whole world into one book.\textsuperscript{75}

The creation of the narrative is itself an act of critical judgement and aesthetic creation.\textsuperscript{76} Through this creative act Nietzsche hopes to transcend the logical requirements of language and communicate internal images through a communicative systems of metaphor and symbol that are not tied to the exigencies of the will-to-truth. Nietzsche speaks of the process by which he chose the narrative format for his most important philosophical work in these terms:

Has anyone at the end of the nineteenth century a clear idea of what poets of strong ages call \textit{inspiration}? . . . in the sense that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and subtlety, something becomes \textit{visible}, audible, something that shakes one to the last depths and throws one down—that merely describes the facts. One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form—I never had any choice.\textsuperscript{77}

In \textit{Ecce Homo} Nietzsche describes the metaphorical language of \textit{Zarathustra} as a complex web of image and that which it supposedly represents:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{75} Foucault, \textit{The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences}, 305.

\textsuperscript{76} "The world is not the mere appearance of the will-to-power, for as we know, the distinction between a phenomenal 'apparent' world and a transcendent 'real' world is rejected by Nietzsche. But more than that. The very positing of a distinction between 'real' and 'apparent' is part of the problem, not a contribution to the solution. The positing of that distinction is a symptom of decadence, of the decline of life. The world is no illusion." Magnus, \textit{Nietzsche's Existential Imperative}, 22.

\textsuperscript{77} Nietzsche, \textit{Ecce Homo}, "Zarathustra", §3.
\end{quote}
The involuntariness of image and metaphor is strangest of all; one no longer has any notion of what is an image or a metaphor: everything offers itself as the nearest, most obvious, simplest expression. It actually seems, to allude to something Zarathustra says, as if the things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors.\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{Ecce Homo}, “Zarathustra”, §3.}

In \textit{Zarathustra} Nietzsche hopes to use metaphorical language to express the essentially inexpressible: internal experience. Nietzsche argues that imagery, metaphor, and symbols unadulterated by the conceptual constraints of grammar can communicate philosophical insight more accurately than language. Essentially, Nietzsche uses a convergence of imagery to inspire in the mind of the interpreter a semblance of Nietzsche’s own internal experience. “There is no wisdom, no investigation of the soul, no art of speech before Zarathustra: what is nearest and most everyday, here speaks unheard-of things. Epigrams trembling with passion, eloquence become music, lightning bolts hurled forward into hitherto unfathomed futures.”\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{Ecce Homo}, “Zarathustra”, §6.}

Nietzsche describes the metaphorical language employed in \textit{Zarathustra} as beyond the capacity of normal language. “The most powerful capacity for metaphors that has existed so far is poor and mere child’s play compared with this return of language to the nature of
imagery.”

Nietzsche creates concepts, to be sure, but not mythological ones designed to be adopted by others or developed into dogma. Through this attack on language, Nietzsche repudiates analytic and speculative philosophy as incapable of reaching authentic knowledge. Instead, one must actively engage philosophical problems directly, not through the writings of others:

For this is the truth: I have left the house of scholars and slammed the door behind me. Too long did my soul sit hungry at their table; I have not been schooled, as they have, to crack knowledge as one cracks nuts . . . they sit cool in the cool shade: they want to be mere spectators in everything and they care not to sit where the sun burns upon the steps. Like those who stand in the street and stare at the people passing by, so they too wait and stare at thoughts that others have thought.

Similarly, it is impossible to use the methods of discourse favored by these modes: dialectics, empiricism, and mysticism. A new mode of communication must be advanced: self-communication. Only discourse taking place within the self can be of success, as it alone can recognize the

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81 “It might be thought that Nietzsche renounces concepts. However, he creates immense and intense concepts (‘forces,’ ‘value,’ ‘becoming,’ ‘life;’ and repulsive concepts like ressentiment and ‘bad conscience’), just as he lays out a new plane of imminence (infinite movements of the will to power and eternal return) that completely changes the image of thought (criticism of the will to truth). . . . But in Nietzsche, the conceptual personae involved never remain implicit. It is true that their manifestation for themselves gives rise to an ambiguity that leads many readers to see Nietzsche as a poet, thaumaturge, or creator of myths. But conceptual personae, in Nietzsche and elsewhere, are not mythical personifications or historical persons or literary or novelistic heroes.” Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy? 65.

82 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:16.
fact that the individual cannot seek understanding outside of interpretation. Internal dialogue can only be communicated through imagery, but it is in the end the most effective type of communication as it is the most intimate. Nietzsche’s self-communication takes the form of anamnetic meditation. Nietzsche is therefore writing for himself, but the fact that he chooses to publish his works demonstrates that Nietzsche’s internal dialogue is to be shared.\textsuperscript{83}

Nietzsche argues that in order to foster this internal interpretive dialogue, it is necessary to return to the most concrete, fundamental experiences. “Truly, all being is hard to demonstrate; it is hard to make it speak. Yet tell me, brothers, is not the most wonderful of all things most clearly demonstrated?”\textsuperscript{84} It makes more sense to interrogate existence that is the closest to us and the most comprehensible, our concrete consciousness. However, we have fooled ourselves by buying into the myth of transcendence. This leads to a rank ordering of types of insight, ranking

\textsuperscript{83} It is reported that Nietzsche actually tried to get the few copies of his published works back before his breakdown in 1888. If so, this would strengthen my point. However, I cannot find definitive evidence for this outside of the secondary literature, and so have reserved judgement on this matter. Nietzsche, at the end of his career, states: “I am one thing, my writings are another matter. . . . Some day institutions will be needed in which men live and teach as I conceive of living and teaching; it might even happen that a few chairs will then be set aside for the interpretation of Zarathustra. But it then would contradict my character entirely if I expected ears and hands for my truths today: that today doesn’t hear me and doesn’t accept my ideas is not only understandable, it even seems right to me. I don’t want to be confounded with others—not even by myself.” . . . My triumph is precisely the opposite of Schopenhauer’s: I say, ‘non legor, non legar. (I am not read, I will not be read.”’ Ecce Homo, III:1.

\textsuperscript{84} Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:3.
externally-actuated form of insight, often concretized in "authoritative" texts, as superior to the experiences of the individual consciousness in relation to the cosmos. This has led to the neglect of internal experience as a ground for knowledge:

Once the soul looked contemptuously upon the body: and then this contempt was the supreme good—the soul wanted the body lean, monstrous, emaciated. So the soul thought to escape from the body and from the earth.... But tell me, brothers: what does your body say about your soul? Is not your soul poverty and dirt and miserable escape?85

The narrative format may offer an answer, as it requires the conscious act of interpretation, unlike the philosophical format that is not honest in its need for interpretation. *Zarathustra* does not have a meaning as such, and the reader does not expect to find one outside of the individual interpretation. The reader expects to have to interpret the text, as opposed to reading for the philosopher's intended meaning.

Nietzsche refers to this type of interpretive endeavor as "being-masked." The mask is a necessity because of the inexpressibility of knowledge; one must take on the mask in order to experience existence from a different perspective. As Jaspers notes:

The necessity of being masked throws its shadow on the meaning of a work: No thoughts that go into a work can convey the truth itself. The lack of authenticity in everything determinate results in the ambiguity of the authentic; incommunicability produces the

85 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, Prologue §3.
loneliness that hides behind masks. The work of a thinker who has allowed this boundary-experience to permeate his very being is identifiable, as it were, by stigmata.86

The metaphor of the mask suggests a much deeper level of engagement than mere reading. Being masked necessarily destroys the impulse to the will-to-truth, representing a conscious choice to expand the level of perception and engage in an interpretive endeavor. The mask operates on a more primal level than speech, it signifies a change in perception on the level of consciousness itself. Klossowski states:

The mask, which forms a determined physiognomy all the same, even when it hides its absence, belongs to external interpretation, but corresponds to an internal desire of suggestion. Even more, it reveals that the person who appears to wear the mask must also have decided on such-and-such a face with regard to “himself” . . . Just as the mask hides the absence of a determinate physiognomy—and thus conceals Chaos, the richness of Chaos—so the gesture that accompanies the mask (the histrionic gesture) is strictly related to the designation of the lived emotion before it is signified by speech.87

Unlike language, the idea of the mask retains an innate authenticity. Since the mask becomes a part of the interpreter, it is in each case genuine.88 However, this is not to imply some sort of passive adoption of a different perspective. The adoption of masks is a constant flux of identity, in keeping with the reality of internal experience. Much as internal dialogue is

86 Jaspers, Nietzsche, 409.

87 Klossowski, Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle, 224.

88 “Nietzsche distinguishes the mask, of which he approves, from histrionics, in which all genuineness is lost.” Jaspers, Nietzsche, 406.
fragmented and irrational, Nietzsche constructs his works faithful to the disjointed character of the mind. Haar notes: "the fragmented, aphoristic, and bursting character of the text corresponds to Nietzsche's own grasp of the world: it is a world scattered to pieces, teeming with explosions . . . a world made of moving and light surfaces where the incessant shifting of masks is named laughter, dance, game." 89

A vital element in Nietzsche's interpretive philosophy is the act of critique. Critique is a creative act that places the reader in opposition to the text or the philosophy at hand. 90 Eventually, Nietzsche calls upon the individual to turn the critique inward and investigate the possibilities of personal metamorphosis, which will be discussed at length in Chapter Seven. This takes the form of an enduring interpretation of the manifestations of the will-to-power as it manifests within the self, which are at bottom the internal experiences Nietzsche discusses:

The world is a process of becoming, conceived as a unity. It is will-to-power in the sense that will-to-power is its intelligible character.

89 Haar, Nietzsche and Metaphysics, 4.

90 "Nietzsche contrasts the activity of critique with revenge, grudge or re-sentiment. Zarathustra will be followed from one end of the book to the other by his ape, his 'buffoon', his 'demon'; but the ape is as different from Zarathustra as revenge and re-sentiment are from critique itself. To be confused with his ape; this is what Zarathustra feels as one of the frightful temptations held out to him . . . . Critique is not a re-action of re-sentiment but the active expression of an active mode of existence; attack and not revenge, the natural aggression of a way of being, the divine wickedness without which perfection could not be imagined . . . . This way of being is that of the philosopher precisely because he intends to wield the differential element as critic and therefore as a hammer." Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 3.
We presumably can see will-to-power expressing itself in and as everything if we modify our perspective, if we abandon traditional habits of thought and speech. Will-to-power is therefore to be understood only as existing in and through "its" manifestations.91

By relocating the site of philosophy to the critique of internal manifestations of the will-to-power, Nietzsche brings his thought full circle. All of existence is seen to be an interpretation of the will-to-power in its varied permutations. Philosophy, therefore, is nothing if it is not the interpretation of these interpretations.92 Ricoeur states:

Where positivism says, There are only facts, Nietzsche says, There are no facts, only interpretations. In extending the critique to so-called internal experience, Nietzsche destroys in its principle the exceptional character of the cogito with respect to the doubt that Descartes directed to the distinction between the world of dreams and the world of waking. To assume the phenomenality of the internal world is, in addition, to align the connection of inner experience with external "causation," which is also an illusion that conceals the play of forces under the artifice of order. It is, as well, to posit an entirely arbitrary fiction called "thinking," apart from the bristling multiplicity of instincts. And finally, it is to imagine a "substratum of subject," in which the acts of thought would have their origin.93

Perpetual critique of this kind leads to a philosophical project that is never complete. As each reader confronts the text, the imagery is

91 Magnus, Nietzsche's Existential Imperative, 22.

92 "Indeed [one] will doubt whether a philosopher could possibly have 'ultimate and real' opinions, whether behind every one of his caves there is not, must not be, another deeper cave—a more comprehensive, stranger, richer world beyond the surface, an abysmally deep ground behind every ground, under every attempt to furnish 'grounds.' . . . Every philosophy also conceals a philosophy; every opinion is also a hideout, every word also a mask." Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, § 289.

reconstituted according to the experiences of the reader and is interpreted accordingly. Jaspers confirms this point, "But at the same time we find here a philosophy that exists only in Nietzsche and cannot be transmitted, one that speaks without disclosing the way and that is without being a model."94

This interpretation argues that *Zarathustra* represents Nietzsche’s conscious attempt to remedy the seeming impossibility of philosophical communication.95 The first sections of *Zarathustra*, concerning the state and community, are largely critical. The symbolic language in these sections is negative, consisting of metaphors of destruction of the self and immersion in the dehumanizing social matrix. On the contrary, Nietzsche’s metaphors concerning the possibility of self-creation are much more positive, if more problematic. It is therefore necessary to look to the structure and images of *Zarathustra* itself to determine the insights that can be gained through


95 In his autobiography, Nietzsche writes of this problem: “To communicate a state, an inward tension of pathos, by means of signs, including the tempo of these signs—that is the meaning of every style; and considering that the multiplicity of inward states is exceptionally large in my case, I have many stylistic possibilities—the most multifarious art of style that has ever been at the disposal of one man. Good is any style that really communicates an inward state, that makes no mistake about the signs, the tempo of the signs, the gestures—all the laws about how long periods are concerned with the art of gestures. Here my instinct is infallible. Good style *in itself*—a pure folly, mere ‘idealism,’ on a level with the ‘beautiful in itself,’ the ‘good in itself,’ the ‘thing in itself.’ Always presupposing that there are ears—that there are those capable and worthy of the same pathos, that there is no lack of those to whom one may communicate oneself.—My *Zarathustra*, for example, is still looking for those—alas, it will have to keep looking for some time yet! . . . And until then there will be nobody to understand the art that has been squandered here: nobody ever was in a position to squander more new, unheard-of artistic devices that has actually been created only for this purpose.” Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, III:4.
careful interpretation, and which reveal themselves to be manifestly political.

The overarching purpose of *Zarathustra* is to evoke a hyperaware self-critical awareness, and through this existential stance to provoke the possibility of personal transmutation. However, Nietzsche asserts that the self is largely made through collective forces and social interaction; political forces that exist independently from the individual but are internalized. Since the self is therefore largely socially-created, it must be deconstructed in order to reveal the substrate of the individual self. This project is demonstrated specifically through the narrative progression in *Zarathustra*. As the most influential actor of social creation, the state receives Nietzsche's most virulent attack.
CHAPTER III

THE COLD MONSTER: THE STATE AND MASS CULTURE

Nietzsche's political analysis in *Zarathustra* does not proceed in a linear fashion; nevertheless it is a clearly-defined argument. Within the course of the narrative, Zarathustra moves from solitude to society and back to solitude. This begins within the Prologue when Zarathustra leaves the solitude of his cave and goes down to human society below. He encounters a town, where he attempts to teach the inhabitants the knowledge he has accumulated through his years of solitary introspection. The fact that he chooses to leave the town is also important, as it indicates that Nietzsche does not view collective existence as the end of Zarathustra's journey, but rather as a necessary part of his journey towards personal insight and growth.

Implied in this narrative progression is Nietzsche's rejection of collective forms of existence and his call to a self-actualized mode of being. In *Zarathustra* Nietzsche criticizes the various levels of human collective existence from the greatest level of aggregation down to the most basic levels of association. Nietzsche identifies two major elements of collective existence for his critique: the state and mass culture. However, Nietzsche does not make fine distinctions between these two; they are seen as interdependent and symbiotic.
For Nietzsche, the most fundamental element of collective existence is *Kultur* (culture), understood as the symbolic underpinnings of a given society. The culture of a society need not be concretely institutionalized in terms of political power, but these symbolic associations invariably become concretized as they are prime resources for political manipulation. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember that culture exists independent of prevailing political forms. Importantly, Nietzsche argues that modern culture is no longer a creative factor, but is largely a product of and a tool of the modern state. As such, Nietzsche largely offers a critique of "mass" culture, which is therefore the handmaiden of the state. It is therefore proper to examine Nietzsche’s critique of the state first.

Nietzsche’s concept of the state is directly connected to the idea of institutionalized power.\(^1\) Nietzsche treats the state separately from mass culture in part due to his ongoing genealogical analysis of the modes of human association. Nietzsche examines the origins of institutionalized government as early as *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the correspondence between the character of a culture and the governmental structures that grow out of it remains an enduring theme, culminating in the essays that

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\(^1\) It is clear that Nietzsche is not speaking only of Prussian nationalism, although it is a prime example of the spirit underlying the runaway bureaucratic state. As Nietzsche argues in *Daybreak*: “How degenerate in its taste, how slavish before dignities, classes, decorations, pomp and splendor, must a people have been when it evaluated the *Schlichte* [the simple] as the *Schlechte* [the bad], the simple man the bad man! The moral arrogance of the Germans should always be confronted with this little word ‘schlecht’: nothing further is needed.” §231.
form *The Genealogy of Morality*. Throughout his work Nietzsche continuously emphasizes the essential separation that necessarily grows between the people and their government as the institutions of government grow more and more detached from the culture underlying the society. The most essential of the institutions is the “law,” which Nietzsche argues is a mythological construct which derives its legitimacy from the society’s belief in its transcendent rectitude. Although it is a state construct, the law gains an epistemological independence that becomes unquestioned by the masses.²

This separation of the people and the state is exacerbated by the tendency of societies to concretize existing power relations into stable institutions. Originally, these state institutions reflect the cultural prejudices and presuppositions underlying a society. However, the nature of institutions undercuts the essential fluidity of human culture and society. The symbols that support state institutions lose their original meanings and are simply taken for granted. Furthermore, the state actively seeks to promulgate its legitimacy by co-opting religious, cultural, and ethnic

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² “There are moralities which are meant to justify their creator before others. . . . This morality is used by its creator to forget, that one to have others forget him or something about him. Some moralists want to vent their power and creative whims on humanity; some others, perhaps including Kant, suggest with their morality: ‘What deserves respect in me is that I can obey—and you *ought* not to be different from me.’ — In short, moralities are also merely a *sign language of the affects.*” Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §187.
symbols. The state structure that emerges from this process is an essentially independent political actor with its own agenda and sense of survival.3

This conclusion foreshadows Max Weber’s analysis of the bureaucratic state, which is in sympathy with Nietzsche’s critique of the institutionalized state. Nietzsche’s views on the origin and operation of the state also mirrors the methodological debate within the field of comparative politics, which has for some time been struggling with whether political culture or political structures are predominant in determining political change. Nietzsche’s analysis suggests that political culture, or mass society, provides the superstructure of symbols and constraints that ultimately determine the type of political structures that can be institutionalized. In the Nietzschean sense, culture begets structure, and structure then shapes culture.

Nietzsche therefore envisions the “state” as a relatively fixed constellation of concrete power relations that exists independently from the essentially psychological normalizing mechanisms of mass culture, upon and from which the state was originally founded. This concretization of power relations in the state, because it now has an independent stable existence, is self-replicating and resistant to change. As such, the state becomes a radically disconnected political actor that seeks to usurp the

3 Nietzsche refers to the belief in the validity and independence of the state as “insanity” and a form of “pathological estrangement.” Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, §256.
original normalizing mechanisms of mass culture in order to retain and maximize its own power within the confines of the society as a whole. As the culture of a society changes over time, the state structures are threatened and become more deeply entrenched, causing a rupture which undermines the legitimacy of the state.\textsuperscript{4} As Nietzsche later argues: “Our institutions are no good anymore: on that there is universal agreement. However, it is not their fault but ours. Once we have lost all the instincts out of which institutions grow, we lose institutions altogether because we are no longer good for them.”\textsuperscript{5}

The state is, then, an artifact of preceding generations. It is a creature of myth, but one with very real power and the willingness to destroy in order to maintain its existence. Indeed, the state is the true opiate of the masses, cultivating a sense of dependence not unlike addiction. Unfortunately for its citizens, the state has through the generations

\textsuperscript{4} “How the tradition has arisen is here a matter of indifference, and has in any event nothing to do with good and evil or with any kind of immanent categorical imperative, it is above all directed at the preservation of a community, a people; every superstitious usage which has arisen on the basis of some chance event mistakenly interpreted enforces a tradition which is in accordance with custom to follow; for to sever oneself from it is dangerous, and even more injurious to the community than to the individual. ... Every tradition now continually grows more venerable the farther away its origin lies and the more this origin is forgotten; the respect paid to it increases from generation to generation, the tradition at last becomes holy and evokes awe and reverence; and thus the morality of piety is in any event a much older morality than that which demands unegoistic actions.” Nietzsche, \textit{Human all too Human}, § 96.

\textsuperscript{5} Nietzsche, \textit{The Twilight of the Idols}, 9:39.
conditioned them to be an unquestioning audience to this political theatre of symbols and noise:

The State, Zarathustra teaches, is to be held in suspicion, for its claim to speak for all can only be maintained by its concealing its origins in the act of creation. . . . The people, those gathered like a herd in the market-place, have little appreciation of greatness and creativeness, they have only a taste for good actors.6

Nietzsche's contempt for the state, therefore, is based upon his conviction that the state is the most ruthlessly efficient destroyer of human potentiality possible. "I call it the state where everyone, good and bad, drinks poison: the state where everyone, good and bad, loses himself: the state where universal slow suicide is called—life."7 The state not only quashes individual initiative and creativity, but it actively seeks to cause its citizens to internalize the values of conformity and quiescence. Reared and trapped within the confines of the state, individuals are infantilized and have become the vassals of an oppressor more concrete than religion and more cruelly repressive. Nietzsche writes, "there are still peoples and herds somewhere, but not with us, brothers: here there are states. The state? What is that? Well then! Now open your ears, for I shall now speak to you of the death of peoples. The state is the coldest of all cold monsters."8

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6 Ansell-Pearson, Nietzsche Contra Rousseau, 163.
7 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:11.
8 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:11.
Nietzsche attacks the central myth that supports the state, whether its theoretical justification is founded in consent or divine right. This is the myth that the state actually represents or is in some way constitutive of the people, rather than being a mechanism designed to preserve prevailing power relations:

Coldly it lies, too; and this lie creeps from its mouth: “I, the state, am the people.” It is a lie! It was creators who created peoples and hung a faith and a love over them: thus they served life. It is destroyers who set snares for many and call it the state: they hang a sword and a hundred desires over them.9

The modern state is the legacy of its founders, and the modern manifestation of these relationships as embodied in institutions is still manipulated by those in power. However the rulers of the state, as products of it, are themselves constrained within the institutional structures they claim to control. Indeed, the leaders of modern society are often the most corrupted by the mythology surrounding the state. As great actors, they are master manipulators but do not possess creative energy which would allow them to supercede their subservient status.

This corruption of leadership is a symptom of the state, but also leads to the increasing vanity of the masses. The ethos of conformity becomes a positive virtue, further ensuring mediocrity and the repression of the individual:

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9 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:11.
There is no harder misfortune in all human destiny than when the powerful of the earth are not also the first men. Then everything becomes false and awry and monstrous. And when they are even the last men and more beast than man, then the value of the rabble rises higher and higher and at last the rabble-virtue says: Behold, I alone am virtue!\(^{10}\)

Nietzsche therefore consistently refers to the state as the triumph of the "superfluous," essentially meaning complacent, dependent mediocrity.\(^{11}\)

The state creates willing subjects, draws them in, and then uses their labor and devotion to promulgate itself into the next generation. "Many too many are born: the state was invented for the superfluous! Just see how it lures them, the many-too-many! How it devours them, and chews them, and re-chews them!"\(^{12}\)

Just look at these superfluous people! They steal for themselves the works of inventors and the treasures of the wise: they call their theft culture—and they turn everything to sickness and calamity. Just look at these superfluous people! They are always ill, they their bile and call it a newspaper. They devour one another and cannot even digest themselves.\(^{13}\)

It is difficult to believe that vital, creative individuals could arise out of this mire, as Nietzsche seems to hope. Zarathustra himself laments the difficulty of this hope: “I myself, to be sure—I have never yet seen a great

\(^{10}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, IV:3.

\(^{11}\) "Superfluous" could also be rendered as "parasites"; or perhaps more poetically "co-dependent vampires."

\(^{12}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I:11.

\(^{13}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I:11.
man. The eye of the subtlest is crude today for what is great. It is the
kingdom of the mob. . . . Today belongs to the mob: who still knows what is
great, what small! Who could successfully seeks greatness there! Only a
fool: a fool would succeed."14 Nietzsche’s critiques of the state are therefore
not designed to provide practical reforms that would make collective
institutionalized existence less repressive.15 Nietzsche instead turns to a
critique of the individual created by the confluence of mass culture and state
action. Because of the culture of conformity, these individuals seek to
corrupt others with their own Dekadenz in furtherance of the state:

What is this man? A heap of diseases that reach out into the world
through the spirit: there they want to catch their prey. What is this
man? A knot of savage serpents that are seldom at peace among
themselves—thus they go forth alone to seek prey in the world.16

Politics and society in the classical sense is inimical to the state.

Whereas Plato and Aristotle linked the polis and the just individual,

Nietzsche argues that the modern state and perhaps society in general are
inevitably coercive and therefore destructive of the individual self. Healthy
individuals, and by extension healthy cultures, intuitively recognize the

14 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:5.

15 Several Nietzsche interpreters make the opposite argument, particularly Strong and
Ansell-Pearson. However, I argue that if Nietzsche wanted to present a political theory of
the state he would have simply done so. Rather, Nietzsche consistently focuses on the
status of the individual and presents his positive thought accordingly. Nietzsche critiques
the state unmercifully, but reserves his recommendations and hope for the future for the
individual.

pathological nature of the institutionalized state. "Where a people still exists, there the people do not understand the state and hate it as the evil eye and sin against custom and law."17 Because it is no longer connected to the fundamental elements of its indigenous culture or the citizens currently comprising the populace, the state is actually an impediment to the search for justice or positive political change, contrary to the prevailing statist myth. This is primarily due to the desire of the state to prevent its citizens from venturing outside of accepted parameters.

The state proffers pre-existing collective social identities that usurp the innate identities of its citizens. This is carried out largely through the use of political myths such as nationalism, the belief in equality, or cultural and ethnic superiority. Group identity subsumes all and leads to needless (valueless) conflict with little opportunity for personal glory. This conflict serves to strengthen ties to the institutions of the state while preventing either meaningful interpersonal relationships or a meaningful dialogue with the self.18

Nietzsche argues that the most pernicious political myth arising from this disconnection is that of human equality. Nietzsche does not seem to

17 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:11.

18 "To be moral, to act in accordance with custom, to be ethical means to practice obedience towards a law or tradition established from of old. Whether one subjects oneself with effort or gladly and willingly makes no difference, it is enough that one does it. He is called "good" who doers what is customary as if by nature, as a result of a long inheritance, that is to say easily and gladly." Nietzsche, Human all too Human §96.
imply that humans should necessarily be ranked or that human life is meaningless apart from greatness. Rather, Nietzsche objects that the myth of equality has been manipulated by those in power to prevent the emergence of creativity or greatness within a society. Partially motivated by bad conscience, leaders promulgate the notion of equality in order to disguise their own mediocrity: "Thus do I speak to you in parables, you who make the soul giddy, you preachers of equality! You are tarantulas and dealers in hidden revengefulness!" 19 This is the hypocrisy of those who preach equality; they seek to level others so they no longer feel inadequate.

Indeed, the state relies on the institutionalized belief in equality to regulate human behavior. As the generations progress, this belief becomes less questioned until it has become a quasi-religious dogma. However, the belief in equality remains in some sense attached to the feelings of guilt and inadequacy from which it sprang:

You preachers of equality, thus from you the mad tyranny of impotence cries for "equality": thus your most secret tyranny of appetite disguises itself in words of virtue. Soured self-conceit, repressed envy, perhaps your fathers' self-conceit and envy: they burst from you as a flame and madness of revenge.20

Nietzsche’s critique is not aimed at putting individuals in their place or setting up a new class structure. However, Nietzsche seeks to inform the

19 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:7.
20 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:7.
individual that the belief in equality is no more than a myth. Because his goal is to emancipate the individual from the psychological grip of mass culture and the confines of the state, he must destroy the fundamental errors underlying their grip on the person. “I do not want to be confused with these preachers of equality, nor taken for one of them. For justice speaks thus to me: “Men are not equal.” And they should not become so, either! For what were my love of the Übermensch if I spoke otherwise?”

The state and mass culture, however, are composed of these overly normalized individuals who are not able to recognize, or chose not to perceive, the mythological basis underlying governmental institutions. Because of this, the state is preoccupied with petty questions, and, at the same time, prohibits individuals from taking positions or asking questions injurious to the status quo. As such, the search for knowledge is stunted:

The marketplace is full of solemn buffoons—and the people boast of their great men! These are their heroes of the hour. But the hour presses them: so they press you. And from you too they require a Yes or a No. And woe to you if you want to set your chair between For and Against. Do not be jealous, lover of truth, because of these inflexible men! Truth has never yet clung to the arm of an inflexible man.

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21 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:7.

22 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:12.
The ultimate product of mass culture is the paragon of collective being, referred to by Zarathustra as the “Ultimate Man.”\textsuperscript{23} The defining characteristic of the Ultimate Man is smug self-satisfaction. This inertia, linked with pride, leads to a lack of self-critical ability. “The time of the most contemptible man is coming, the man who can no longer despise himself. Behold! I shall show you the \textit{Ultimate Man}.”\textsuperscript{24} The Ultimate Man may be afflicted by bad conscience or existential guilt, but is not able to conceive of different possibilities. This narcissism inevitably extends into arrogance: “They have something of which they are proud. What is it called that makes them proud? They call it culture, it distinguishes them from goatherds.”\textsuperscript{25}

Nietzsche, however, speaks with great contempt for the Ultimate Man, which he considers to be a pitiful waste of human existence. Society has become a vehicle for the continuance of physical comfort, at the expense of the struggle that produced greatness in heroic societies. “‘We have discovered happiness,’” say the Ultimate Men and blink. They have left the

\textsuperscript{23} This phrase has been popularly translated as the “last man”, although this does not have the connotation that I believe Nietzsche intends. The “Last Man” connotes that human development is at an end. However, Nietzsche wants to transcend the metaphor of human progress altogether with his philosophy of overcoming. Hence, the “Ultimate Man” is the pinnacle of social development, the social man \textit{par excellence}.

\textsuperscript{24} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, Prologue §5.

\textsuperscript{25} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, Prologue §5.
places where living was hard: for one needs warmth. One still loves one’s
neighbor and rubs oneself against him: for one needs warmth.”

Society has become an uninspired herd, dedicated to the lowest
common denominator. Rather than seeking cultural advancement, the state
serves as a soporific, ensuring its citizens that they have reached the
pinnacle of societal development. “A little poison now and then: that
produces pleasant dreams. And a lot of poison at last, for a pleasant
death.” In turn, the citizens become lazy and easily led:

They still work, for work is entertainment. But they take care that the
entertainment does not exhaust them. Nobody grows rich or poor
anymore: both are too much of a burden. Who still wants to rule?
Who obey? Both are too much of a burden. No herdsman and one
herd. Everyone wants the same thing, everyone is the same: whoever
thinks otherwise goes voluntarily into the asylum.

The myth of progress is also bound up with the state, imbuing a
teleology to social existence that is manifestly contrived. As such, the state
is invested with legitimacy arising from the perception of inevitable social
evolution or the increasing rationalization of human life. As long as
individuals accept the state as a rational construct or an inevitable product

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26 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, Prologue §5. In this sense Nietzsche agrees with Hobbes that
people cluster together out of fear and convenience.


29 It is possible to read this as an implicit critique of Hegel, who envisioned the state as the
embodiment of perfect reason and therefore the ultimate goal of societal evolution.
of the laws of history, rather than the embodiment of concrete and identifiable power relations, they have little interest in resistance.

"Formerly all the world was mad," the most acute of them say and blink. They are clever and know everything that has ever happened: so their mockery is endless. They still quarrel, but soon reconcile—otherwise indigestion would result. They have their little pleasure by day and their little pleasure by night: but they respect health. "We have discovered happiness," say the Ultimate Men and blink. 30

Laziness, complacency, and social pressure keep people from straying too far. This leads to mediocrity and stagnation. This misreading of history, or the manipulation of history into justification of the state, is an impediment to the individual’s possibility of self-overcoming (Selbstüberwindung) 31 "Thus all that is past is handed over: for the mob could one day become master, and all time be drowned in shallow waters. Therefore, O my brothers, is a new nobility needed: to oppose all mob-rule and all despotism and to write anew upon new law-tables the word: 'Noble.'" 32

Perhaps the most telling episode in Zarathustra concerning the psychological imperatives of mass culture occurs after Zarathustra’s critique of the Ultimate Man. The crowd actually begins to call for Zarathustra to

30 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §5.

31 Nietzsche specifically deals with this question in his early essay The Use and Abuse of History for Life.

32 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:12.11.
bring them this paragon of social being, demonstrating their predisposition to mediocrity:

"Give us this Ultimate Man, O Zarathustra"—they cried—"make us into this Ultimate Man. You can have the Übermensch." And all the people laughed and shouted. But Zarathustra grew sad and spoke to his heart: They do not understand me: I am not the mouth for these ears. Perhaps I lived too long in the mountains, listened too much to the trees and the streams: now I speak to them as goatherds.33

Thus, the masses actively aspire to this pitiable condition, they no longer desire self-advancement. Indeed, the possibility of such contemplation is seen as undesirable, if not criminal or insane. The state, by robbing the desire for individual improvement from its citizens, has triumphed. Zarathustra realizes that he cannot speak to the masses as a leader. This is not the type of quest that he is proposing, a new power relationship. Nussbaum mirrors this point:

[Nietzsche's] description of the so-called "last man" in Zarathustra predicts for the future of human morality in European bourgeois democracy the extinction of recognizable humanity, precisely through the extinction of the Platonic longing for self-transcendence. "The time of the most despicable man is coming," says Zarathustra, "he that is no longer able to despise himself." As one might expect, Zarathustra's audience, much like some of Plato's contemporary critics, ignored the fact that his speech was a praise of the "great longing" and called out, "Give us this last man."34

The psychological condition of the Ultimate Man demonstrates the essential Dekadenz of society as fostered by the state. For Nietzsche, the

33 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §5.
state offers an inversion of essentially healthy values and a replacement doctrine of obedience and salvation through adherence to statist dogma. These inverted values are imimical to any type of authentic human life, leading instead to the inevitable eclipse of the self and the destruction of human possibility: “Everything about it is false, it bites with stolen teeth. Even its belly is false. Confusion of the language of good and evil; I offer you this sign as the sign of the state. Truly, this sign indicates the will to death! Truly it beckons to the preachers of death!”

Ultimately, the state has usurped the language of morality and incorporated religious and psychological models of guilt into its matrix of normalizing mechanisms. Nietzsche ultimately concludes that mass culture and the state are no more than parasites, draining the vitality of its citizens to create mere shadows of the potential individual:

Parasite: that is a worm, a creeping, supple worm, that wants to grow fat on your sick, sore places. And it is its art to divine the weary spots in climbing souls: it builds its loathsome nest in your grief and dejection, in your tender modesty. Where the strong man is too weak, where the noble man is too gentle, there it builds its loathsome nest... For the soul which possesses the longest ladder and can descend the deepest: how should the most parasites not sit upon it?

Nietzsche’s analysis of the state is open to criticism on several levels. He does not take into account any of the positive actions that the state could

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35 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:11.

36 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:12.19.
take even to foster the goal of the transmuted individual. Nietzsche seems to dismiss out of hand the possibility of rehabilitating state structures to become less repressive or even constructive. He refuses to even entertain state action on behalf of the individual, instead arguing that mass existence is necessarily corrupting. If the state is so repressive, how was Nietzsche able to transcend this repression enough to critique the problem of mass existence? The state can therefore not be as repressive as Nietzsche argues, his analysis seems exaggerated and somewhat contrived.

More fundamentally, Nietzsche seems to imbue the state with too much intentionality. Although he defines the state in terms of a collection of mythological elements, he treats the state as if it were an independent political actor acting in a self-conscious manner. The state could not then be a vague collection of mythological elements; indeed it is even more than an aggregation of concrete power relations. For Nietzsche to be correct, he must demonstrate that there is a conscious element to the operations of the state that is identifiable. Nietzsche never attempts to provide a framework for this analysis, although he implies that mass culture is nothing but the symbolic legitimization of the ascendancy of the dominant power structure.

Nietzsche is partially able to address these criticisms by pointing to the individuals that compose society rather than centering upon state actions. The state does not really have intentionality, but its citizens act as thought it does. In the vacuum left by the collapse of theological
interpretation of reality, individuals have instead made the state their external signifier and thereby imbue the state with the semblance of intentionality.

I.

The greatest success of the state has therefore also been its most brilliantly insidious: the state has replaced the deceased idol of God as the ultimate object of bad conscience. "Once spirit was God, then it became man, and now it is even becoming the mob." The location of perfect reason within the dictates of the *vox populi* or the bureaucratic state has made government a type of "religionized secularity," fostering the cult of the state. It is in *Zarathustra* that Nietzsche fully explores this fascinating proposition. "The New Idol" is the metaphorical phrase that Nietzsche uses in his most specific and complete critique of the psychological mode underlying the state. The title of this section foreshadows Nietzsche's analysis in *The Genealogy of Morality*, in which he later provides a detailed analysis of the mechanism of bad conscience as it operates in regards to morality.

Bad conscience is the internalization of the desire to punish, which in modern society has been co-opted by the state through increasing levels of restriction on both individual action and thought. This tendency has been

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exacerbated by the presence of Christianity, which stresses the essential wretchedness of the soul as well as the unredeemable corruption of the world. Caught between a society that restricts cruelty and the irrepressible desire to express this same cruelty, the self has no choice but to turn this impulse upon itself. Because the external signifier, God, is posited as infinitely larger and more perfect than the individual, and it is taught that the soul cannot be redeemed other than through the sacrifice of this perfect God, the individual has no hope to alleviate this existential guilt.

Nietzsche therefore argues that bad conscience is also partially the outcome of the degeneration of one of the most integral characteristics of the mediating process within the psyche: forgetfulness. Nietzsche does not mean mere thoughtlessness or some form of dementia. For Nietzsche, forgetfulness is necessary for health; it is a type of mental hygiene. Forgetfulness allows for peace, no happiness would be possible without it. Nietzsche’s concept of forgetfulness is similar in application to Freud’s concept of the unconscious mind, which also results in a type of mental economy operating to preserve sanity. Nietzsche expresses a similar sentiment in his earlier work:

The Greeks gradually learned to organize the chaos by following the Delphic teaching and thinking back to themselves, that is, to their real needs, and letting their pseudo-needs die out. Thus they again took

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38 Nietzsche offers an extended analysis of forgetfulness, or “mental parsimony,” in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. This analysis undoubtedly influenced psychoanalytic theories of repression and sublimation.
possession of themselves; ... This is a parable for each of us: he must organize the chaos within him by thinking back to his real needs.  

The task of making man into this reliable creature, "answerable for his own future," has been accomplished through the customs of society.  

The "conscience" of man is socially constructed and designed to preserve the prevailing social order; it does not emanate from some divine source outside of convention. The repression of the self by society ultimately leads to a form of self-loathing: bad conscience. "All instincts which are not discharged outwardly turn inwards—this is what I call the internalization of man: with it there now evolves in man what will later be called his 'soul.'"  

Nietzsche determines that the triumph of "slave morality" in the modern age has left society incapable of responding to the challenge of nihilism engendered by the collapse of the modern worldview, primarily because the individual is caught up in the personal torments of "bad conscience," rendering him incapable of realizing his true potential. For Nietzsche, modern society is missing the ability to produce a culture based upon positive, aesthetic values rather than the repression of natural, healthy drives.

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40 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 39.  

41 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 61.
Nietzsche concludes that the transfer of bad conscience to the state is largely a function of the inherent unreliability of the masses, which renders them easy to manipulate. Herd morality, the *vox populi*, is really nothing other than the echoes of previous state teachings, inculcated over the generations by governmental institutions. Despite the state's protestations to the contrary, political truth has become little more than a rhetorical exercise in which leaders placate the masses by appealing to their vanity:

In the world even the best things are worthless apart from him who first presents them: people call these presenters "great men." The people have little idea of greatness, that is to say: creativeness. But they have a taste for all presenters and actors of great things. The world revolves around the inventor of new values: imperceptibly it revolves. But the people and the glory revolve around the actor: that is "the way of the world."\(^\text{42}\)

Because of its lack of creativity and therefore its philosophical impotence, mass culture cannot hope to resist. "Does this present not belong to the mob? The mob, however, does not know what is great or small, what is straight and honest: it is innocently crooked, it always lies."\(^\text{43}\) The masses do not wish to seek truth, and are inevitably resistant to social criticism. "Who could overturn with reasons what the mob has once learned to believe without reasons? In the marketplace, one convinces with

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\(^{42}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I:12. Nietzsche argues that greatness is creativity, but the herd sees greatness as persuasive power. Therefore, the people shun substance in favor of presentation (example: Hitler).

gestures. However reasons make the mob distrustful."\textsuperscript{44} Instead, the masses have made as their external signifier the voice of the state, as embodied in such institutions as the law.

"There is nothing greater on earth that I, the regulating finger of God"—thus the monster bellows. And not only the long-eared and short-sighted sink to their knees! Ah, it whispers its dismal lies to you too, you great souls! Ah, it divines the abundant hearts that like to squander themselves! Yes, it divines you too, you conquerors of the old God! You grow weary in battle and now your weariness serves the new idol!\textsuperscript{45}

As an external signifier, the state acts in the same manner as the monotheistic God who inspired bad conscience. Individuals, unsure of how to express or alleviate their existential guilt and feelings of inadequacy, transfer these feelings from God to the state. The state is all too willing to accept this devotion from its citizens:

It would like to range heroes and honorable men about it, this new idol! It likes to sun itself in the sunshine of good consciences—this cold monster! It will give you everything if you worship it, this new idol: thus it buys for itself the luster of your virtues and the glance of your proud eyes. It wants to use you to lure the many-too-many. Yes, a cunning device of Hell has been devised, a horse of death jingling with the trappings of divine honors! Yes, a death for many has been devised that glorifies itself as life: truly, a heart-felt service to all preachers of death.\textsuperscript{46}

Thus, the essentially empty institutions of the state derive a measure of legitimacy otherwise unattainable from this development. Trapped in

\textsuperscript{44} Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:13.9.

\textsuperscript{45} Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:11.

\textsuperscript{46} Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:11.
bad conscience, the individual is unable to escape the debt owed to the state and can never forget this supposed obligation. Therefore, in a sense, the individual internalizes and perpetuates his own serfdom. "To overthrow—to him that means to prove. To drive frantic—to him that means: to convince. And blood is to him the best of all arguments. A truth that penetrates only sensitive ears he calls a lie and a thing of nothing. Truly, he believes only in gods who make a great noise in the world!"47

Thus, the analysis of existential debt ultimately leads to Nietzsche's conclusion that the State has become the signifier of eternal bad conscience. This has occurred through the evolution of debt into a type of subconscious memory, passed down through generations as encouraged by the state. As Deleuze and Guattari note:

Nietzsche says: it is a matter of an active faculty of forgetting (oubli), by means of a repression of biological memory, must create an other memory, one that is collective, a memory of words (paroles) and no longer a memory of things, a memory of signs and no longer of effects. This organization, which traces its signs directly on the body, constitutes a system of cruelty, a terrible alphabet.48

Deleuze and Guattari go on to confirm Nietzsche's genealogical analysis of the usurpation of ancient signifiers of bad conscience by the institutions of the state. However, unlike religion, the state also has the

47 Nietzsche, _Zarathustra_, 1:12.

48 Deleuze and Guattari, _Anti-Oedipus_, trans. Robery Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983), 145.
monopoly on force, rendering the reign of the state virtually unassailable.

Through symbolic appropriation, the state incorporates all that it can into its own sphere, constantly seeking to totalize the political arena within its institutional confines. This totalization causes the state to replace the infinitely larger deity as the perfect object of bad conscience:

And Nietzsche suggests how this new socius proceeds: a terror without precedent, in comparison with which ancient forms of cruelty, the forms of primitive regimentation and punishment, are nothing. A concerted destruction of all the primitive codings, or worse yet, their derisory perversion, their reduction to the condition of secondary parts in the new machine, and the new apparatus of repression. All that constituted the essential element of the primitive inscription machine—the blocks of mobile, open finite debts, "the parcels of destiny"—finds itself taken into an immense machinery that renders the debt infinite and no longer forms anything but one and the same crushing fate.... The earth becomes a madhouse.49

As Nietzsche argues, "the good have to crucify him who devises his own virtue!"50 Mass culture, crippled through its own repressive mechanisms, cannot create, and therefore must prevent any act of creation on the part of the individual. Convinced that it is the embodiment of transcendental reason, the state feels justified in quelling creative action, especially in the realm of politics. The political gadfly is therefore viewed as a traitorous enemy, who must be destroyed to preserve the stability of the state:


They hate the creator most: him who breaks the law-tables and the old values, the breaker—they call him the law-breaker. For the good—cannot create they are always the beginning of the end: they crucify him who writes new values on law-tables, they sacrifice the future to themselves—they crucify the whole human future! The good—have always been the beginning of the end.51

Mass culture and its progeny, the state, rely upon this culture of repression for their survival. This is especially true for theories of the organic or Völkish State with which Nietzsche was all too familiar. This is also an implicit critique of German Idealism as expressed in the political theory of Kant and Hegel, in which the state is seen as the teleological outcome of human existence. Under these theories, the purpose of human existence is the attainment of an ideal collective consciousness.52

This idealistic thought imbues the state with a transcendental, even mystic, character, placing it in the position high above mere mortals that God previously held. The state is therefore an even better object for bad conscience than God, as it is made a part of the phenomenal and pneumenal realms, a concrete object rather than an abstract one. Because of its tendency towards totalization and repression, Nietzsche concludes that the state and the mentality underlying it are the principal impediment to human development. In the name of the public good, mass culture has condemned itself to mediocrity:


52 Marx carried this line of thought to its fruition. It is therefore possible to read Nietzsche as an implicit critique of Marx.
Oh my brothers! With whom does the greatest danger for the whole human future lie? Is it not with the good and just? With those who say and feel in their hearts: "We already know what is good and just, we possess it too; woe to those who are still searching for it!" And whatever harm the wicked may do, the harm the good do is the most harmful.\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, III:12:26.}

Indeed, the mentality of the Ultimate Man reveals an uneasy truth about human society. The state, repressive though it may be, has not so much conquered humanity as it was encouraged to conquer by the masses. Centuries of embedded power mechanisms and normalizing practices have created a culture in which the highest desire of the common man is \textit{to be led, not to lead}.\footnote{Foucault terms this "internal fascism."} Virtue is not to be found in creativity, but in obedience and duty. The noise of the state and society drowns out the internal conversation of the self.

What would Nietzsche have us do? Nietzsche argues that it is not possible to separate the culture from the institutional practices that arose from it; this symbiotic relationship is too firmly embedded within the state and the individual mind. The modern state is indeed modern man writ large; both are irretrievably \textit{Dekadent}. However, because this cycle of institutionalization of concrete practices has occurred throughout history, it is also not possible to reform politics in its modern sense. For Nietzsche, there is only one possibility: separation.
It can be argued that Nietzsche's critique of the state is overly simplistic. Nietzsche may be too drastic in his assessment of the repression fostered by the state. If Nietzsche is correct, the state possesses repressive power that is unmatched in the history of existence. Such a state, legitimated by bad conscience, would be so psychologically powerful as to destroy the possibility of free will. The individual, socially-created and hampered by internalized repression, would have no possibility of resistance. Indeed, the desire to resist would be a foreign thought to such an individual, much less the inclination to separate from the comfort of the state and begin the painful process of self-overcoming.55

II.

In order to counter this criticism, Nietzsche reverses the myth of the state in a fundamental manner. As opposed to the statist myth fostered by bad conscience, Nietzsche asserts that the state has no independent existence; it is a merely a collection of self-replicating power relations. As such, the state can be dismissed by the individual as an object of knowledge.

55 "Selbstüberwindung" or 'self-overcoming' is related to Nietzsche's other notions of Sublimierung or 'sublimation', Vergeistigung or 'spiritualization' and Selbstaufhebung-Aufhebung being a term that defies translation by a single English word: as Kaufmann observes, Nietzsche uses it with its Hegelian sense in mind of a dialectical process involving 'a simultaneous preserving, canceling, and lifting up.' However, in Nietzsche's usage the lifting-up is not necessarily to something higher. Unlike Hegel's Geist, whose dialectical movement is progressive and hierarchical, Nietzsche's basic force, the will to power—at least when human consciousness enters the process—can degenerate: man has evolved from the ape, but may also degenerate back into the ape.” Robert Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).157-158.
or as a signifier for truth. In her analysis of the political implications of existentialism, Hazel Barnes mirrors Nietzsche's critique of the state:

Existentialist writers agree in rejecting any society in which some men are sacrificed either for a privileged minority or for a mystic State. They disagree with regard to the extent to which they are willing to compromise in order to achieve a classless society, but they are alike in condemning either fascism, unrestrained capitalism, or a communism which sets a mystical Whole above existing individuals. They oppose the view of a Serious World in which one is born with a particular place prepared for him and in which social values are pre-established and not to be questioned. They are against the principle of sacrificing persons to abstractions. The State is nothing but the individuals who compose it.\(^{56}\)

However, Nietzsche argues that collectivities are not inclined to allow the myths that they rely upon to be deconstructed. Further, individuals, insofar as they are socially constructed beings, are not inclined to respond to critiques of the state they revere. Nevertheless, individuals can recognize the holes in the statist myth, especially as the state continues to extend its monopoly over the political realm.

Nietzsche paradoxically argues that the totalizing impulse of the state actually leads towards an individually based impulse to resist.\(^{57}\) In a sense, external coercion fosters an individual compulsion to explore the forbidden

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\(^{56}\) Hazel Barnes, *Humanistic Existentialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 75.

\(^{57}\) Nietzsche's argument on this point foreshadows Heidegger's discussion of the call to authenticity. Because of the importance of this point to Nietzsche's political thought, it is thoroughly discussed in Chapter Six and the Appendix.
facets of one's own nature. This begins though the individual's confrontation with the normalizing effect of mass culture.

Collective existence as found in the state paradoxically leads toward individual existence by fostering the sense of revulsion at the masses. This revulsion is essentially instigated by a realization of the hypocrisy of modern virtue. To individuals, who have the inescapable impulse to exercise their will-to-power through acts of creation, the reactive slave mentality of the herd can do no less than inspire derision:

Alas, how ill the word "virtue" sounds in their mouths! And when the say: "I am just," it always sounds like: "I am revenged." They want to scratch out the eyes of their enemies with their virtue; and they raise themselves only in order to lower others. And again, there are those who sit in their swamp and speak thus from the rushes: "Virtue—that means to sit quietly in the swamp".58

It becomes apparent that the masses seek nothing less than the appearance of virtue, even as the mob defines it. Whether the masses conform out of a sense of duty or even out of coercion, there is no real conviction behind their actions. The desire to punish dissent has become an outlet to vent frustration: "mistrust all in whom the urge to punish is strong!"59 Because the institutions of the modern state are essentially hollow, political activity has become blind obsequience, and fear of chaos

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58 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:5.

59 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:7.
prevents the individual from seriously questioning the strictures of the culture.

And again, there are those who like posing and think: Virtue is a sort of pose. Their knees are always worshipping and their hands are glorifications of virtue, but their heart knows nothing of it. And again, there are those who hold it a virtue to say: "Virtue is necessary"; but fundamentally they believe only that the police are necessary.60

Despite these powerful mechanisms of normalization, the individual necessarily recognizes the artificiality of the state and the cherished institutions of society. This leads to existential guilt that can break one free of society and cause one to recognize the need for self-exploration. The vast majority of individuals simply repress this realization out of fear or guilt. However, for the few that choose to heed this internal call and recognize the need for the transvaluation of their own values; a metamorphosis of the self must begin which will necessarily lead them away from the institutions of society and which for them have now irretrievably collapsed.61

60 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II:5.

61 "Every choice human being strives instinctively for a citadel and a secrecy where he is saved from the crowd, the many, the great majority—where he may forget 'men who are the rule,' being their exception—excepting only the one case in which he is pushed straight to such men by a still stronger instinct, as a seeker after knowledge in the great and exceptional sense. Anyone who, in intercourse with men, does not occasionally glisten in all the colors of distress, green and gray with disgust, satiety, sympathy, gloomishness, and loneliness, is certainly not a man of elevated tastes; supposing, however, that he does not take all this burden and disgust upon himself voluntarily, that he persistently avoids it, and remains, as I said, quietly and proudly hidden in his citadel, one thing is certain: he was not made, he was not predestined, for knowledge. If he were, he would one day have to say to himself: 'The devil take my good taste! But the rule is more interesting than the exception—than myself, the exception!' And he would go down, and above all, he would go 'inside.'" Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §26.
The argument in *Zarathustra* implies that it is therefore necessary for the individual to suffer collective existence in order to begin the quest for autocreated selfhood. "Human society is a trial: thus I teach—a long trial; and what it tries to find is the commander. A trial, O my brothers, and *not* a 'contract.' Break, break this word of the softhearted and the half-and-half."\(^{62}\)

This is not to be understood, as statist interpreters have, that Nietzsche is calling for a reform or replacement of state institutions.\(^{63}\) "Go your own ways! And let the people and peoples go theirs—dark ways, truly, on which not a single hope flashes any more."\(^{64}\) Nietzsche, although espousing limited praise of pre-Socratic "heroic" societies, has little use for the modern state, which he consistently derides. Even Nietzsche's apparent praise of pre-Socratic heroic societies confirms this point, despite the protestations of Strong, Ansell-Pearson, and Conway. It is only in his early works that Nietzsche praises heroic societies as a model of human existence. However, it is often ignored by political theorists that Nietzsche uncovered the "tragic flaw" of Greek political society: the third archetype in the *Birth of*


\(^{63}\) As Voegelin argues: "Nietzsche's transvaluation of values . . . is a conscious attempt to transcend the crisis and to find a firm ground for the erection of a new and stable order of values. The ground cannot be found by developing one more utopia of a new society, but only by creating in one's own personality—with the means at hand, and with precarious chances of success—a new order beyond the crisis." Eric Voegelin, (1944), "Nietzsche, the Crisis, and the War", *Journal of Politics* 6 (1944). 184-185.

\(^{64}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III:12.21.
Tragedy: Socrates. Nietzsche argues that the impulse to rationalize life is so ingrained in humankind that not even the essentially healthy Greek model of politics was able to escape the assault by Socrates and his followers. By extension, while it may be possible to recreate a heroic society, it will inevitably become bureaucratic and therefore succumb to Dekadenz. As Jaspers notes:

Nietzsche approves the state when he looks upon the movements of peoples and when he sees culture and individual creativity as possible and only in and through it. But he rejects the state as the ruin of man when it functions as a solidifying force in favor of mass and mediocrity and when it is no longer concerned about the unique and unmatched but only about the replaceable “superfluous ones.”

Ultimately, it becomes clear in Zarathustra that Nietzsche is not interested in “humankind”; it is precisely the aggregation of individuals that has led to the sorry state of humanity. Rather, Nietzsche is primarily concerned with the fate of the individual struggling against drowning in the totalizing field of power that is the “cold monster” of the state. The great political imperative of Zarathustra is summed in Nietzsche’s exhortation:

“Flee, my friend, into your solitude! I see you deafened by the uproar of the great men and pricked by the stings of the small ones.”

Essentially, Nietzsche argues that individuals have been conditioned to drag down or demonize those that seek to rise above the lowest common

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65 Jaspers, Nietzsche, 256.

66 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:12.
denominator. The quasi-religious devotion of the masses to the state ensures that they will assist this normalization protocol. However, the masses also harbor a secret jealously against the individual who defies convention, hearkening back to their own repressed knowledge of the emptiness of the state: "Flee, my friend, into your solitude: I see you stung by poisonous flies. Flee to where the raw, rough breeze blows! Flee into your solitude! You have lived too near the small and pitiable men. Flee from their hidden vengeance! Towards you they are nothing but vengeance."67

The masses therefore try to drag down the exceptional individual and they are dangerous; not necessarily from any great action, but from constant noise: "No longer lift your arm against them! They are innumerable and it is not your destiny to be a fly-swatter. Innumerable are these small and pitiable men; and raindrops and weeds have already brought about the destruction of many a proud building."68 Essentially the masses suffer from frustrated will-to-power, they naturally must seek to drive down those who rise above:

I see you wearied by poisonous flies, I see you bloodily torn in a hundred places; and your pride refuses even to be angry. They want blood from you in all innocence, their bloodless souls thirst for blood—and therefore they sting in all innocence. But you, profound

67 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:12.
68 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:12.
man, you suffer to profoundly even from small wounds; and before you have recovered, the same poison-worm is again crawling over your hand.69

This "innocence" Nietzsche discusses is not a conscious process, but driven by herd mentality, as is all the state and its apparatus.

Normalization operates as the political subconscious of the state and mass culture: all impulses are directed towards it but only a few are recognized. It is impossible to determine which of the institutions and interactions necessarily to collective existence are harmful. For Nietzsche, aggregated existence in a societal sense is necessarily and inherently contaminated, and will continue to infect the individual with its Dekadenz.

Nietzsche sees hope only in the separation of politics from this type of collective existence. Indeed, the authentic human being cannot tolerate the company of the masses and the contempt they provoke. This is not only because the masses represent the worst of humanity, but the pathological nature of repressive society may prove detrimental to the struggling free spirit.

Their idol, that cold monster, smells unpleasant to me: all of them, all these idolaters, smell unpleasant to me. My brothers, so you want to suffocate in the fumes of their animal mouths and appetites? Better to break to windows and leap into the open air! Avoid this bad odor! Leave the idolatry of the superfluous! Avoid this bad odor! Leave the smoke of these human sacrifices!70


70 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I:11.
The great opiate of mass existence, materialism, must also be confronted. The great effort expended in the struggle for material possessions and success exhausts the individual and clouds his perspective, rendering him more susceptible to societal pressures.

Just look at these superfluous people! They acquire wealth and make themselves poorer with it. They desire power and especially the lever of power, plenty of money—these impotent power! See them clamber, these nimble apes! They clamber over one another and so scuffle into the mud and the abyss. They all strive towards the throne: it is a madness they have—as if happiness sat upon the throne! Often filth sits upon the throne—and often the throne upon filth, too.\textsuperscript{71}

Nietzsche is certainly not advocating an ascetic lifestyle, but warns the individual against becoming entwined in societal priorities: “Many places—the odor of tranquil seas blowing about them—are still empty for solitaries and solitary couples. A free life still remains for great souls. Truly, he who possesses little is so much the less possessed: praised be a moderate poverty!”\textsuperscript{72}

In effect, Nietzsche warns the individual to avoid interaction with mass existence like the plague that it is. It is only in solitude that the individual can avoid the temptations and normalizing mechanisms of mass culture. “Where solitude ceases, there the marketplace begins; and where

\textsuperscript{71} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, I:11.

\textsuperscript{72} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, I:11.
the marketplace begins, there begins the uproar of the great actors and the buzzing of poisonous flies."\textsuperscript{73}

This extreme freedom from society is necessarily harsh. To what extent this appeal to separate from others is to be carried out will be examined in Chapters Four and Five. However, Nietzsche is without doubt advocating a negative definition of freedom.\textsuperscript{74} The individual can only be free to explore his or herself when there is an absence of restraints, especially the type of arbitrary and capricious restraints that abound in modern society.

The most spacious soul, which can run and stray and roam the furthest into itself; the most necessary soul, which out of joy hurls itself into chance—the existing soul which plunges into becoming; the possessing soul which \textit{wants} to partake in desire and longing—the soul fleeing from itself which retrieves itself in the widest sphere; the wisest soul, to which foolishness speaks sweetest—the soul that loves itself the most, in which all things have their current and counter-current and ebb and flow—oh how should not \textit{the highest soul} possess the worst parasites?\textsuperscript{75}

It is only when the institutions that form modern society collapse in the individual consciousness that the individual is truly free. As Deleuze and Guattari note: "The breakup of the institutional structures that mask the society into a plurality of experimental spheres finally revealing the true

\textsuperscript{73} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, I:12.

\textsuperscript{74} "Postmodernism inherits from Nietzsche an extreme version of negative freedom, the association of freedom with detachment from determinative wholes." McGowan, \textit{Postmodernism and Its Critics}, 71.

\textsuperscript{75} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, III:12.19.
face of modernity—an ultimate phase that Nietzsche saw as the end result of the evolution of societies."

This is not a process of self-aggrandizement; it is a painfully slow process of withdrawal from what one has been taught to value towards a new set of self-created goals. "The experience of all deep wells in slow: they must wait long until they know what has fallen into their depths. All great things occur away from glory and the marketplace: the inventors of all new values have always lived away from glory and the marketplace." This individual, finally free from the noise of society, can set about retrieving an authentic selfhood. "Only there, where the state ceases, does the man who is not superfluous begin: does the song of the necessary man, the unique and irreplaceable melody, begin. There, where the state ceases—look there, brothers?"

Is Nietzsche arguing that human life can only be valuable if it is lived alone? The narrative of Zarathustra suggests that this is not his assertion. Nietzsche’s pessimism over the state stems in part from the essential divide between the imperatives of mass culture and the imperatives of the individual. Rather than embracing Zarathustra’s individually-centered

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76 Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, 368.

77 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:12.

78 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:11.
teachings, the town sees it as a threat and drives Zarathustra out. This is not a failure of Zarathustra as a teacher but rather of the utter impossibility of educating the public to transcend themselves. This realization leads to the political discussion of the next level of society, the small, voluntarily related group.

Nietzsche's critique of the state is certainly harsh, and it essentially precludes the possibility of an authentic collective existence. He does not offer any concrete suggestions to rehabilitate mass existence; indeed he seems ready to write off the state as inherently destructive. However, Nietzsche's critique of the state as the incarnation of unhealthy, reactive drives does fit within his rhetorical scheme.

Nietzsche does not offer any empirical examples of the corrupt state as he is actually producing ideal types for political analysis. The repressive state, with the attendant problems of bad conscience and normalization, is an ideal type that encompasses a collection of tendencies found in all governmental schemes. Likewise, the symbol of the Ultimate Man represents a collection of traits found in the smug, self-congratulating denizen of mass culture. Indeed, the symbol of the struggling, resisting individual is an ideal type for the person reacting against these repressive institutions and traits that seeks a more active attitude towards personal existence.
Taken in this manner, Nietzsche's critique of the state is not to be taken as seriously as the rhetoric suggests, but is meant no less harshly. By positing these ideal types, Nietzsche hopes to spur the individual towards the contemplation of the very real problems of collective existence that often prove psychologically damaging to the individual. Nietzsche can be validly taken to task for the oversimplification of his critique of the state, but it is important to remember that this critique is only a means to an end. Nietzsche does not intend to present a positive political theory of the state, he therefore needs the ideal type of the repressive state to react against in the elaboration of his positive theory.
CHAPTER IV

THE HIGHER MEN: FRIENDSHIP AND THE COMMUNITY

Nietzsche’s criticism of the state occurs during Zarathustra’s sojourn within the town, mostly found in the Prologue and Book One. Nietzsche’s discussions of the state are overwhelmingly critical, giving credence to the assertion that Nietzsche does not wish to rehabilitate the state or modern society. However, the next section of Zarathustra is devoted to an extended narrative of Zarathustra’s relations with several characters who seek to learn from him. This represents an important development in the narrative and Nietzsche’s political thought, as he spends a great deal of time exploring the possibility of a community of superior individuals.

This is somewhat surprising, as despite Nietzsche’s criticism of the state and his disgust at modern man, it is clear that one of Zarathustra’s primary goals is to educate others about his project of self-overcoming. Indeed, Zarathustra decides to leave his solitude specifically for this reason: “I am weary of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey; I need outstretched hands to receive it . . . To this end, I must descend into the depths . . . I must go down—as men, to whom I want to descend, call it.”

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1 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §1.
It is necessary to determine to what extent Zarathustra’s teachings may be meant to apply to a societal context. This chapter will explore Zarathustra’s attempt to communicate his findings to others, and why a text that emphasizes solitude and self-exploration begins with phrases like “the cup wants to be empty again, and Zarathustra wants to be man again.”

Ultimately, however, Zarathustra’s social experiment ends in failure and he once again seeks solitude, away from his friends and disciples. It is the development of Zarathustra’s goal from one of education to apparent solipsism that is important to this political analysis.

It is poetic that Zarathustra’s first proper “disciple” is a dead man, the tightrope walker. The tightrope walker appears after Zarathustra admits his failure to reach the masses, explored above, when they call for the Ultimate Man. The imagery of the tightrope walker further illuminates the horizontal nature of the consciousness, explored in a later chapter, as well as the dire peril of self-overcoming. “He had emerged from a little door and was proceeding across the rope, which was stretched between two towers and thus hung over the people and the market square.”

The two towers hark back to Zarathustra’s earlier speech referring to man stretched between animal and the Übermensch. The people below, the masses, are the

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abyss. Mired in the torment of societal bad conscience, they lust to express their repressed vengeance upon the exceptional individual.

Behold the good and the just! Whom do they hate most? Him who smashes their tables of values, the breaker, the lawbreaker—but he is the creator. Behold the faithful of all faiths! Whom do they hate the most? Him who smashes their tables of values, the breaker, the lawbreaker—but he is the creator.4

The buffoon that leads to the death of the tightrope walker represents the problem of social consciousness, which is inextricably tied to bad conscience.5 He speaks to the tightrope walker: “You belong in the tower, you should be locked up, you are blocking the way of a man better than yourself!”6 The buffoon is mocking the tightrope walker, suggesting that he has come from the mediocrity of the state, should remain locked in the tower of herd existence. The buffoon jumps over the tightrope walker, causing him to fall to the marketplace below.

This is a further elaboration of Nietzsche’s assertion that the state cannot allow its members to transcend the herd, those who try must be discredited or destroyed. Is, then, the tightrope walker an example of failed transmutation? He has attempted to overcome societal identities and the

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4 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §9.

5 The buffoon or “dwarf” has been identified as symbolizing a veritable laundry list of psychological manifestations by various commentators. However, Nietzsche employs metaphors such as the dwarf consistently in his work, usually symbolizing socially-based self-doubt. See for example The Science of Joy §332. All such mockery is Schadenfreude.

6 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §6.
herd, but has been stupefied by the incessant droning of bad conscience, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, Zarathustra does not react to the tightrope walker as a failure or with the condescension given to the Ultimate Man. Rather, Zarathustra reacts to the tightrope walker’s fall without pity, but as an honorable individual worthy of Zarathustra’s most fundamental knowledge. The tightrope walker bemoans his fate as a failure, seeing it as an existential failure. Zarathustra’s first disciple is the recipient of the most chilling speech in the entire text.

"On my honor, friend," replied Zarathustra, "all you have spoken of does not exist: there is no Devil and no Hell. Your soul will be dead even before your body: Therefore there is nothing more to fear!" The man looked up mistrustfully. "If you are speaking the truth," he said then, "I leave nothing when I leave life. I am not much more than an animal which has been taught to dance by blows and starvation."7

Nietzsche here is attempting to demonstrate the essential nobility of life, even apart from institutions of social acceptance or religious salvation. The social realm seeks to define individual worth in terms of empty affirmations. Rather, Zarathustra asserts that all of these constructs are essentially meaningless. In effect, through the attempt to overcome the tightrope walker has demonstrated his initial socially-constructed status to be inauthentic. His failure to complete this task is not important.

"Not so," said Zarathustra, "you have made danger your calling, there is nothing despicable in that. Now you perish through your calling: so I will bury you with my own hands." When Zarathustra

7 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §6.
had said this the dying man said nothing more; but he motioned with his hand, as if he sought Zarathustra’s hand to thank him.\textsuperscript{8}

The honorable death of this man encourages Zarathustra and causes him to reaffirm his task as education. However, Zarathustra’s limited success with the tightrope walker has led him to believe that his teachings are best suited to the individuals who have already heard the internal call to self-exploration.\textsuperscript{9} Society is not willing to allow his teachings, and the people who compose mass society are ill-suited to the task. Zarathustra laments, “I want to teach men the meaning of their existence: which is the \textit{Übermensch}, the lightning from the dark cloud man. But I am still distant from them, and my meaning does not speak to their minds. To men, I am still a cross between a fool and a corpse.”\textsuperscript{10}

The buffoon, again representing societal bad conscience, warns Zarathustra away. The bad conscience of the society still threatens to subsume Zarathustra:

\textbf{The good and the just hate you and call you their enemy and despiser; the faithful of the true faith hate you, and they call you a danger to the people. It was lucky for you that they laughed at you: and truly you spoke like a buffoon. It was lucky for you that you made company with the dead dog; by so abasing yourself you have}

\textsuperscript{8} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, Prologue §6.

\textsuperscript{9} This mechanism, nausea, arises from disgust at the \textit{Dekadenz} of society and the realization of individual finitude. This is the subject of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{10} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, Prologue §7.
saved yourself for today. But leave this town—or tomorrow I shall jump over you, a living man over a dead one.\textsuperscript{11}

Zarathustra’s harrowing experience with the town and the buffoon certainly gives him pause, and enlightens him to the essential nature of social existence. Zarathustra’s frustration with the inhabitants of mass society leads him to the realization that the state will not, indeed cannot, allow his teaching. Furthermore, the inhabitants of the state are so normalized into mass culture that they are incapable of understanding his teaching. They are only receptive to presentation and myth: “Must one first shatter their ears to teach them to hear with their eyes? Must one rumble like drums and Lenten preachers? Or do they believe only those who stammer?”\textsuperscript{12}

I

Nietzsche therefore argues that his philosophy has no place among the masses. Rather, it is necessary to examine a smaller social milieu. Zarathustra, frustrated and depressed by his failure in the town must rethink his task. “But at length he opened his eyes: in surprise Zarathustra gazed into the forest and in the stillness, in surprise he gazed into himself. Then he arose quickly, like a seafarer who suddenly sees land, and rejoiced:

\textsuperscript{11} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, Prologue §8.

\textsuperscript{12} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, Prologue §5.
for he beheld a new truth."¹³ This new truth is that it is only possible for Zarathustra to teach those who wish, and are capable, of learning his message.

Zarathustra exclaims, "a light has dawned for me: I need companions, living ones, not dead companions and corpses which I carry with me wherever I wish."¹⁴ The "dead" represent the social beings prevalent in mass society, who rely on the interpretation of reality by others long gone. Concern for the state and others is a burden that must be shed; but bad conscience, like the buffoon, dogs our steps. It is the hardest to overcome. Zarathustra instead allows those who wish to learn to come to him rather than seeking them out:

But I need living companions who follow me because they want to follow themselves—and who want to go where I want to go. A light has dawned for me: Zarathustra shall not speak to the people but to companions! Zarathustra shall not be herdsman and dog to the herd! To lure many away from the herd—that is why I have come. The people and the herd will be angry with me: the herdsmen shall call Zarathustra a robber.¹⁵

By casting Zarathustra’s new role as a fellow-traveler rather than as a traditional teacher, a subtle shift in Nietzsche’s political thought can be detected. Unlike the institutionalization characteristic of the state, Nietzsche’s political thought is not a replacement model for social existence.

¹³ Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §9.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §9.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §9.
If Nietzsche is indeed proposing a community, it is a radically decentralized one, hopefully free of the constraints of bad conscience. Zarathustra, inasmuch as he is the herald of internal control and self-creation, does not seek to impose himself on others. As Nietzsche writes: "the creator seeks companions, not corpses or herds or believers. The creator seeks fellow-creators, those who inscribe new values on new tables."  

Zarathustra has fully purged himself of the delusion that mass society will listen to him, and in doing so has also purged himself of the desire to speak to the masses. "I will not be herdsman or gravedigger. I will not speak again to the people: I have spoken to a dead man for the last time." Nietzsche’s language in this respect could not be stronger; his message is meant for a few select individuals who have come to the realization of societal Dekadenz on their own, and seek a new path. Nevertheless, there are a few individuals in the town who hear Zarathustra’s message and decide to follow him. However, Nietzsche will have none of this.

When Zarathustra had taken leave of the town ... there followed him many who called themselves his disciples and escorted him. Thus

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they came to a crossroad: there Zarathustra told them that from then on he wanted to go alone; for he was a friend of going-alone.\textsuperscript{18}

Zarathustra therefore dismisses the first group of individuals who seek to follow him, a point that is often overlooked. Zarathustra realizes that they are not yet ready and must do some serious work on themselves first. Zarathustra then goes into a discourse on the importance of internal symbolism in the act of self-creation. The implication of this episode is that the masses, accustomed to the noise of the "great actors" in the marketplace, are simply following Zarathustra with the same misguided devotion they offer to politicians. The followers Zarathustra seeks will follow him because of their own internal imperative, discovered from aesthetic reflection upon themselves. In this sense, Nietzsche distinguishes himself from traditional leaders and educators. Zarathustra does not impose his teaching upon others, but seeks to instruct them when they are ready to hear his message. It is only much later in the text that Zarathustra invites a few individuals, called the "Higher Men", to learn from him. The dynamics of this group form Nietzsche's examination and critique of the small social group. In essence, this group of Higher Men forms a uniquely Nietzschean community.

Nietzsche's analysis is this regard can be critiqued as undeniably elitist, even down to the characterization of Zarathustra's followers as

\textsuperscript{18} Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:22.1.
"higher" men. It must be asked why Nietzsche chooses to present his
discussion in these terms. Although Nietzsche denies that he is elaborating
criteria for a new rank-ordering of humanity, his discussion of the Higher
Men certainly has this connotation. It is necessary to probe beyond the
apparently elitist framework of Zarathustra's followers to grasp the
philosophical justification for Nietzsche's apparently utopian vision of the
community of the Higher Men.

II.

A "community" is by definition a group that shares some common aspect. In the case of the Higher Men, it is their desire to learn self-overcoming. This community has arisen out of the need to escape the corrupting elements of the state and the normalizing effects of others. "The earth is full of the superfluous, life has been corrupted by the many-too-many." 19 If there is to be any hope for individual recovery, it must occur outside of this corrupted context and within a new, non-institutionalized environment.

Nietzsche discusses the ideal of a healthy community liberally in his early works, especially "The Greek State", "Homer on Competition", and the Birth of Tragedy. In these works, Nietzsche praises ancient Greek society as essentially healthy, fostering constructive values and reinforcing

19 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:9.
the positive traits of the individual. While Nietzsche never loses his admiration of the pre-Socratic Greeks, it will be shown that the Higher Men do not represent a reestablishment of Homeric society.

The Greek mode of society as described by Nietzsche is composed of various practices designed to produce complete individuals. Throughout his productive career, Nietzsche looked back to the Greeks as an example of a healthy community. Beginning with his early essays on Greek society, Nietzsche asserted that the community must provide outlets for creativity and competition without coupling these with repression and normalizing mechanisms. Nietzsche praised Greek political theory as the "profound secret study of the connection between state and genius." Although Nietzsche's thought is grounded along drastically different grounds than the ancients, he admires their focus upon individual greatness within the social realm. "Hellenic popular teaching commands that every talent must develop through struggle: whereas modern educators fear nothing more than the unleashing of so-called ambition." Nietzsche's model embraces the political elements of the heroic Greek model, even while denying its epistemological foundations.


However, Nietzsche is not naïve enough to assert that society should return to the Greek model. We must accept the circumstances of the current age, but we do not have to internalize them. It is up to individuals to move past their circumstances and work for a new type of self and community in the here and now. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to reconceptualize politics. The focus of politics must shift from concern over the institutional arrangements of government, which has characterized traditional political theory. The primary concern of politics should instead be the individual self. This new politics is concerned with the production of individuals who can relate to each other in a manner that is healthier than is possible in state-centered modern politics.

This argument, however, points to a fundamental tension in the theory of community. The causal lines between the sovereign individual and the healthy community are not clear. The heroic Greek model insisted that the positive task of the community was to produce complete individuals; it was doubted that individuals could become complete on their own. Nietzsche initially seems to be sympathetic to this assertion, but his radically individualistic outlook causes him to eschew even the heroic paradigm. Nietzsche is primarily concerned with separation from the modern idea of the state, and as such de-emphasizes the positive role of society in the completion of the individual self. The implication of this line of thought is that the new version of community can only arise from
individuals who have been able to complete themselves through some form of aesthetic ethics. External processes can not create such a community, it must arise endogenously from within its future members.

This leads to a further tension in this line of thought. Nietzsche presents a model of selfhood that is predicated upon resistance to societal norms. In essence, societal repression leads to selfhood. Is it possible, then, for a sovereign individual to emerge from a context of a non-repressive society or a context of no social interaction at all? This is a problematic and profound question. Nietzsche does not present a model of selfhood apart from social creation, except as an ethic of resistance. A possible conclusion is that there can be no selfhood apart from that initially created by the social realm. Without the social, therefore, there can be no resistance, and thus no self-creation.

The community of the Higher Men apparently mitigates these concerns. These individuals have already separated from larger aggregations of individuals. Further, it is clear that this community is not designed to replicate itself. This is not the prelude to the formation of a revolutionary cadre of exceptional humans. At no time does Nietzsche

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22 Although not evangelical, the Higher Men are certainly revolutionary in their epistemological perspective: "The revolutionary pole of group fantasy becomes visible, on the contrary, in the power to experience institutions themselves as mortal, to destroy them or change them according to the articulations of desire and the social field, by making the death instinct into a veritable institutional creativity. For that is precisely the criterion—at least the formal criterion—that distinguishes the revolutionary institutions from the enormous inertia which the law communicates to institutions in an established order. As
discuss with the Higher Men any obligation to return to society and liberate it from repression. Rather, the Higher Men must resist the urge to help others, as this will only subject them once again to the dangers of mass society.

Unlike any type of society or state, the community of Higher Men is an association of fellow-travelers, self-selected members. They were not born into customs or norms of the group. Rather, the Zarathustrian community is a totally new associative form, with no predetermined roles for its members or fixed patterns of association. This community is therefore not imbued with inherited bad conscience and should offer a conducive environment for self-exploration and overcoming.

It is important to note that the Higher Men are not identical to, or perhaps even unrelated, to the Übermensch. The Higher Men are superior human beings insofar as they have realized the need to separate from the herd and seek self-overcoming. As Schutte notes:

The idea of the Übermensch results from an aesthetic-ontological conception of the will to power... On the other hand, the category of the 'higher man' results primarily from a psychological-political interpretation of the will to power. Both types, however, have affinities toward one another. Nietzsche emphasizes the psychological superiority of the Übermensch with respect to human

Nietzsche says; churches, armies, States— which of all these dogs wants to die?” Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, 63. However, unlike Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis, the Higher Men never attain a group consciousness necessary for a revolutionary movement. The revolution remains internal and individual.
beings as well as the aesthetic superiority of the higher man with respect to the herd.23

The Higher Man thus feels the need to separate from the masses, though perhaps not for the right reason. Rebellion against political practices or even intellectualized oppression do not lead to the mentality necessary for self-overcoming. Rather, they lead to a reformist attitude and the establishment of new political institutions. Nietzsche seems to want to transcend practical politics altogether and move towards a mode of existence fundamentally different from those of traditional collective existence. Zarathustra seeks to educate the Higher Men to overcome themselves in aesthetic terms, rather than in practico-political terms.

This type of transformation is foreign to the Higher Men, who seem to misunderstand Zarathustra’s message. The Higher Men, conditioned by society, do not have a perspective suited to Zarathustra’s message. They must learn to supercede their identities through creative action, not solemn contemplation:

You Higher Men, the worst thing about you is: none of you has learned to dance as a man ought to dance—to dance beyond yourselves . . . lift up your hearts, you fine dancers, high! Higher! And do not forget to laugh well. This laughter crown, this rose-wreath crown: to you, my brothers, do I throw this crown! I have canonized laughter; you Higher Men, learn—to laugh!24


24 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:13.20.
In order for an aesthetic transformation to occur, the individual must confront the unpleasant truths that are varnished over by societal myths. Nietzsche identifies a tension that occurs within the Higher Men which threatens the possibility of their self-overcoming. There is a conflict within each individual — fear and vision; ambition and complacency. These dual impulses must be confronted and overcome in order to progress with self-creation. However, Nietzsche argues that this conflict holds even the superior individual to others.

It is not the height, but the abyss that is terrible! The abyss where the glance plunges downward and the hand grasps upward. There the heart grows giddy through its twofold will. Ah, friends, have you, too, divined my heart's twofold will? That my glance plunges into the heights and that my hand wants to hold on to the depths and lean there — that, that is my abyss and my danger. My will clings to mankind, I bind myself to mankind with fetters, because I am drawn up to the Übermensch for my other will wants to draw me up to the Übermensch.25

This internal conflict is dangerous as it is easy for the struggling individual to fall back into the morass of social existence. This type of self-exploration is certainly not a superficial exercise, and the potential Übermensch call easily be seduced into abandoning this difficult and painful quest. Indeed, this is why Zarathustra's experience with the community is a disappointing failure. The knowledge he seeks to communicate to the Higher Men proves to be incommunicable without

resorting to the type of repressive mechanisms that characterize the state and mass culture. Indeed, Zarathustra is unable to explain any concrete methods of self-overcoming to the Higher Men, these are saved for Zarathustra’s dialogues with himself and his animals.

III

Rather than being an affirmation of community, Zarathustra becomes a condemnation of the possibility of communal action, even in a small, non-foundational context. Zarathustra has failed to teach those who wish to learn, in an environment outside of the state. The failure of Zarathustra to teach the Higher Men represents the realization of the ultimate impossibility of collective self-overcoming. Nietzsche implies that even in this most ideal setting, the problems of aggregated existence continue to impede Zarathustra’s message.

This tendency is demonstrated vividly in the Higher Men. The desire of the Higher Men to follow Zarathustra is ultimately corrupted into the desire to be like Zarathustra. This runs the very real risk of degenerating into a dogma, and is a betrayal of Nietzsche’s individualistic project. Zarathustra may be an ideal type for self-overcoming, but he is not a type-setter. However, societal conditioning has set the stage for the desire to replicate Zarathustra, and the herd mentality inherent even in a small community contributes to this tendency.
Each disciple only hears a portion of Zarathustra’s message and ultimately exaggerates this. Zarathustra realizes that none of the Higher Men are fully separated from others, as demonstrated by their desire to copy him. By copying Zarathustra, the Higher Men have simply constructed a new cycle of power relations, superimposing Zarathustra’s will over their own. The inability of the Higher Men to realize Zarathustra’s message as an individually-actuated journey is indicative of their failure to fully overcome the mechanisms of collective existence:

I need pure, smooth mirrors for my teaching; upon your surface even my own reflection is distorted. Many a burden, many a memory weighs down your shoulders; many an evil buffoon crouches in your corners. And there is hidden mob in you, too. And although you are of a higher type, much in you is crooked and malformed. There is no smith in the world who could hammer you straight and into shape for me.26

By following Zarathustra rather than accompanying him the Higher Men are little more than the parasites Zarathustra decries in his critique of the state. The Higher Men have come to the realization of the emptiness of the state and the hollowness of social existence, this is what makes them “Higher Men.” However, they have not been able to realize that Zarathustra is not to be followed. He may be the voice in the wilderness, but he cannot instruct others how to overcome themselves.

26 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:11.
The Higher Men seek an easy answer, an easy way to expunge their existential pain. They therefore willingly allow their wills to be supplanted by Zarathustra. This mirrors Zarathustra's critique of the denizens of the state: "some of them will, but most of them are only willed. Some of them are genuine, but most of them are bad actors."\(^{27}\) The Higher Men, inasmuch as they desire self-overcoming, are pointed in the right direction. However, their inherent weakness and desire for comfort eventually overcome them. They eventually show themselves to be no better than the Ultimate Man. In this sense, the Higher Men represent the failed Übermensch, who began the journey but backslide into collective existence. They simply have not been able to exert their wills over that of their teacher: "Oh, that you understood my saying: 'Always do what you will—but first be such as can will.'"\(^{28}\) Because Zarathustra (and indeed anyone) is unique, it is impossible for his disciples to measure up. In setting themselves up as disciples of Zarathustra rather than as companions on the journey to self-overcoming, they have doomed themselves to failure:

The higher the type, the less often does a thing succeed. You Higher Men here, are you not all—failures? Be of good courage, what does it matter! How much is still possible! Learn to laugh at yourselves as a man ought to laugh! . . . And truly, how much has already succeeded! How rich this earth is in good little perfect things, in well-constituted things! . . . Perfect things teach hope.\(^{29}\)

\(^{27}\) Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:5.2.

\(^{28}\) Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:5.3.

\(^{29}\) Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:13.15.
Rather than heeding Zarathustra's call to treat the failure to copy him as a victory for themselves, the Higher Men seem ready to abandon their quest and found a new mode of collective existence around Zarathustra. Thus, each Higher Man is necessarily a parody of Zarathustra rather than an authentic follower. Following from Nietzsche's critique of mass culture, Nietzsche argues that Zarathustra becomes an external signifier to this community and ultimately becomes the object for bad conscience. Nevertheless, Zarathustra remains ambivalent concerning the Higher Men.

As Deleuze notes:

[Each character of the higher man has the two aspects in differing proportions; representing both reactive forces and their triumph, species activity and its product. We must take this double aspect into account in order to understand why Zarathustra treats the higher man in two ways: sometimes as an enemy who will consider any trap, any infamy, in order to divert Zarathustra from his path and sometimes as a host, almost a companion who is engaged in an enterprise close to that of Zarathustra himself.]

Zarathustra realizes that the Higher Men are the closest people he has encountered to his goal, and does not wish to see them fail. Deleuze continues:

Consider the way in which the higher men are presented: their despair, their disgust, their cry of distress and their "unhappy consciousness". They all know and feel the abortive character of the goal that they attain, the failed nature of the product that they are. . . .

30 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 166.
The shadow has lost its goal, not because it has reached it but because the goal which it has reached is itself a lost goal.\textsuperscript{31}

It is in this sense that the Higher Men represent more than Zarathustra’s failure, they are also potentially his undoing. Indeed, Zarathustra fears that his desire to communicate his knowledge to others will ultimately be his undoing. “It is difficult to live among men because keeping silent is so difficult. Especially for a babbler.”\textsuperscript{32} Zarathustra identifies his greatest temptation towards others as pity. His pity for the masses in society draws him to the town, and his pity for the Higher Men leads him to tolerate these poor disciples. However, if Zarathustra is to succeed in his own self-overcoming, he cannot drown in the pity that he feels for these abortive Übermensch.\textsuperscript{33}

Indeed, Zarathustra’s speeches to the Higher Men can easily be read as a caution to Zarathustra himself. He cannot afford to attach himself to the Higher Men, or he will destroy them as well as their teacher. Zarathustra argues that all great individuals necessarily inspire bad conscience in others:

\textsuperscript{31} Deleuze, \textit{Nietzsche and Philosophy}, 168.

\textsuperscript{32} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, II:20.

\textsuperscript{33} “The overcoming of pity I count among the noble virtues: as ‘Zarathustra’s temptation’ I invented a situation in which a great cry of distress reaches him, as pity tries to attack him like a final sin that would entice him away from himself. To remain the master at this point, to keep the eminence of one’s task undefiled by the many lower and more myopic impulses that are at work in so-called selfless actions, that is the test, perhaps the ultimate test, which a Zarathustra must pass—his real proof of strength.” Nietzsche, \textit{Ecce Homo}, I:4.
Yes, my friend, you are the bad conscience of your neighbors: for they are unworthy of you. Thus they hate you and would dearly like to drain your blood. Your neighbors will always be poisonous flies: that about you which is great, that itself must make them more poisonous and ever more fly-like.34

Eventually, those who suffer from bad conscience begin to doubt the greatness of their external signifier, deconstructing the original positive power relation and replacing it with one of ressentiment and suspicion. A young man on the mountainside says to Zarathustra: “Behold, what have I been since you appeared among us? It is envy of you which has destroyed me!”35 This demonstrates the tendency of the individual actively to seek out a signifier for bad conscience. It is therefore only through the destruction of the signifier that the individual can alleviate this existential envy:

They think about you a great deal with their narrow souls—you are always suspicious to them. Everything that is thought about a great deal is finally thought suspicious. They punish you for your virtues. Fundamentally they forgive you only for—your mistakes.... Before you, they feel themselves small, and their baseness glimmers and glows against you in hidden vengeance. Have you not noticed how often they become silent when you approached them, and how their strength left them like smoke from a dying fire?36

This highlights part of the reason that all human forms of collective existence will eventually degenerate into bad conscience and normalization.

34 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:12. The state has become the modern focus for bad conscience, but the potential Übermensch stands to be an even more problematic object of bad conscience, as he is more personal and imminently confrontational.

35 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:8.

36 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:12.
Through his genealogical analyses Nietzsche has come to realize that collectivities, in whatever form, must necessarily create evaluative criteria:

Zarathustra has found no greater power on earth than good and evil. No people could live without evaluating; but if it wishes to maintain itself it must not evaluate as its neighbor evaluates. Much that seemed good to one people seemed shame and disgrace to another: thus I found. I found that much that was called evil in one place was in another decked with royal honors. One neighbor never understood another: his soul was always amazed at his neighbor’s madness and wickedness.37

Zarathustra sees this dynamic forming among the Higher Men and himself, exactly the tendencies that Zarathustra urges the individual to avoid. This will lead his disciples to Dekadenz and destroy any possibility of their own self-overcoming. “They are a poor, sick, mob type: they look upon this life with an ill will, they have an evil eye for this earth. . . . They have heavy feet and sultry hearts—they do not know how to dance. How could the earth be light to such men!”38

It is therefore clear that Zarathustra must abandon his disciples if he is to have any hope, either for them or himself. The last section of Zarathustra’s dealings with the Higher Men, “The Last Supper,” is more than a parody of Christ and his disciples. Nietzsche seeks to demonstrate that the only true follower of Zarathustra cannot be a disciple, and must actively oppose his teacher.

37 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:15.

38 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:13.16.
Unlike Christ, Zarathustra will not be a sacrifice for his followers. He will maintain his integrity and will neither be held back by others nor drag them down. By removing himself as a signifier for bad conscience, he achieves something Christ could not do. Zarathustra does not urge his followers to supplant their identities for his. He will not become a preacher of death, the tool of dogmatists. Zarathustra’s message is a teaching-not-to-learn, essentially an anti-education. Zarathustra laments: "they take from me: but do I yet touch their souls? A gulf stands between giving and receiving; and the smallest gulf must be bridged at last."39 This gulf is bridged by Zarathustra giving the Higher Men the only thing that can save them: solitude.

It is through this pessimistic assessment of the Higher Men that Nietzsche abandons his early optimism regarding the revival of community in the Greek model. Heroic society is simply not possible, "the hero is to them an affliction and a terror."40 Greatness and supranormality are simply not tolerated in a collective context; even the much-venerated Greeks executed Socrates. The mechanisms of society are simply too strong for the individual to bear, and the exigencies of the will-to-power insure that new power relations will form in whatever new context is developed.

39 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:9.
40 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:8.
A community of exceptional individuals can therefore never replicate itself. Any community will eventually degenerate into mass society and become the breeding ground for mediocrity and repression. Nietzsche argues it is necessary to become separate even from a community of the most tolerant individuals in order to achieve a lasting and meaningful selfhood:

My children are still green in their first spring, standing close together and shaken in common by the winds, the trees of my garden and my best soil. . . . Where such trees stand together, there the blissful islands are! But one day I will uproot them and set each one up by itself, that it may learn solitude and defiance and foresight. Then it shall stand by the sea, gnarled and twisted and with supple hardness, a living lighthouse of unconquerable life.\(^{41}\)

IV.

Does this separation from others, however, preclude the most basic of human associations, friendship? Zarathustra explicitly states: “I do not teach you the neighbor but the friend.”\(^{42}\) This possibility of interpersonal connection on the most basic level may salvage collective existence albeit at a limited level. Nietzsche’s conception of friendship is largely based upon a theory of power. As Nietzsche argues, it is not possible to be a friend to someone of unequal ability or power. This would be no more than an oppressive relationship:

\(^{41}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III:3.

\(^{42}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I:16.
Are you pure air and solitude and bread and medicine to your friend? Many a one cannot deliver himself from his own chains and yet he is his friend's deliverer. Are you a slave? If so, you cannot be a friend. Are you a tyrant? If so, you cannot have friends.\textsuperscript{43}

The ideal friendship would be an adversarial relationship in which each individual challenges the other to higher and higher forms of self-creation and overcoming. This is the true ideal behind the heroic community, which was lost through societal corruption. "If you want a friend, you must also be willing to wage war for him: and to wage war, you must be capable of being an enemy. You should honor even the enemy in your friend. . . . In your friend you should possess your best enemy."\textsuperscript{44}

Nietzsche, however, retains his pessimistic attitude. The conditions necessary for an authentic friendship are rare, and the desire to be with others is most likely to lead to ruin. Generally, individuals seek others for support and consolation. In this sense, friendship represents failure to communicate adequately with the self. "Our faith in others betrays wherein we would dearly like to have faith in ourselves. Our longing for a friend is our betrayer."\textsuperscript{45} The friend is therefore our own projected bad conscience, the creation of our need for an external signifier. Stripped of God, the state,

\textsuperscript{43} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, l:14. This conception of friendship has obvious parallels with Aristotle.

\textsuperscript{44} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, l:14.

\textsuperscript{45} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, l:14.
and the community, the friend remains the last temptation on the road to self-overcoming:

Have you ever watched your friend asleep— to discover what he looked like? Yet your friend’s face is something else beside. It is your own face, in a rough and imperfect mirror. . . . Were you not startled to see what he looked like? O my friend, man is something that must be overcome.46

Even more insidious is the fact that individuals perceive the “Other” in an objective manner, lending undue concreteness to the presence and identity of others. The unformed self is easily drawn into this inviting circle and runs the risk of losing himself in the formation of collective identity.

You crowd together with your neighbors and have beautiful words for it. But I tell you: Your love for your neighbor is your bad love of yourselves. You flee to your neighbor away from yourselves and would like to make a virtue of it: but I see through your “selflessness.” The “you” is older than the “I”; the “You” has been consecrated, but not yet the “I”: so man crowds towards his neighbor. . . . You cannot endure to be alone with yourselves and do not love yourselves enough: now you want to mislead your neighbor into love and gild yourselves with his mistake. I wish rather that you could not endure to be with any kind of neighbor or with your neighbor’s neighbor; then you would have to create your friend and his overflowing heart out of yourselves.47

Rather than solitude becoming a possibility for self-growth, the individual actually feels guilty about being alone. The individual feels that being alone is a reflection of personal failure or inadequacy, rather than as a triumph of the liberated self. “One man runs to his neighbor because he is

46 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:14.

47 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:16.
looking for himself, and another because he wants to lose himself. Your bad love of yourselves makes solitude a prison to you."\textsuperscript{48}

Rather than affirming friendship, Nietzsche ultimately condemns it as yet another form of bad conscience. "Do I exhort you to love of your neighbor? I exhort you rather to flight from your neighbor and to love of the most distant!"\textsuperscript{49} Any dealings with others, even on the most primal level, is necessarily repressive and ultimately dangerous. The path to self-overcoming must be a lonely one. As Schutte argues, this conclusion is the logical outcome of Nietzsche's political analysis. "Nietzsche seems to have thought that as long as social conditions remain what they are—i.e. modeled upon a structure of domination—the person who seeks to go beyond good and evil must enter the path of solitude, leaving all social relationships behind."\textsuperscript{50}

Zarathustra's time with the higher men has served only to muddy the waters and delay his progress. He must ultimately leave the company of all other humans if he is to complete his quest. Zarathustra does not leave the company of others with sorrow or regret, but with an attitude of relief and liberation. It is telling that the animals reappear only when Zarathustra leaves the others:

\textsuperscript{48} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, I:16.

\textsuperscript{49} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, I:16.

\textsuperscript{50} Ofelia Schutte, \textit{Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks}, 127.
And Zarathustra said again: “I love you, my animals!” But the eagle and the serpent pressed around him when he said these words, and looked up at him. All three stood silently together in this attitude, and sniffed and breathed in the good air together. For the air here outside was better than with the Higher Men.\(^1\)

Zarathustra then leaves without fanfare. “But that night he went away alone and forsook his friends.”\(^2\) The Higher Men, it seems, are left to sink or swim according to their own abilities and inclinations. Nietzsche is sure, however, that they will be better off without Zarathustra. It has become apparent that his example will overshadow the Higher Men and lead to nothing but repression.

There is another, more nuanced reason that Nietzsche abandons the possibility of the community of Higher Men. Zarathustra’s project of self-overcoming is essentially an internal aesthetic process. Zarathustra realizes that it is simply impossible to communicate this experience, either to a small group of like-minded individuals or even to a friend. Zarathustra asks himself, “why does Zarathustra speak to his pupils differently—than to himself?”\(^3\) It is because he must, there is no other way. This, as much as the concrete problems of collective existence, dooms the community to

\(^{1}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, IV:14.1.

\(^{2}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II:22. This is the end of Part II, and of Zarathustra’s dealings with others. He must return to his solitude, and his internal conversation, in order to fully comprehend the enormity of his repressed knowledge of the void.

\(^{3}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II:20.
failure. In order to have the individual experience of self-overcoming and self-creation, Zarathustra must return to his solitude.

In conclusion, the problems of communicating Zarathustra's theory of self-exploration to others prove insurmountable. The remainder of the narrative is devoted to the concrete experience of individual self-overcoming and self-creation that is the core of Nietzsche's positive theory. Having dismissed the possibility of collective existence as inherently repressive, Nietzsche articulates an alternative vision of individual existence that seeks to locate sovereignty squarely within the individual consciousness and the responsibility for personal growth within the province of the individual self.

Nietzsche has often been accused of fostering a solipsistic view of politics, and this analysis seems to support this criticism. Nietzsche's critique of the state precluded mass existence, and his critique of the community precludes even small-scale voluntary association. Nietzsche seems to destroy the possibility for any type of human association that is not repressive. Even the most primal of human relationships, the one-on-one friendship, is discarded by Nietzsche as essentially destructive to the self. Again, Nietzsche can be accused of exaggeration. Are we to believe that the only possibility for self-overcoming is to abandon all forms of interpersonal association?
Nietzsche certainly does not offer any positive guidance for reforming the community or rehabilitating personal relationships. If Nietzsche is to be taken seriously, the only hope for the individual seeking to overcome himself is to separate from other humans totally. Nietzsche does not even elaborate whether it is possible for the transmuted individual to someday rejoin society or whether he must remain apart perpetually.

However, if Nietzsche is taken to be offering an ideal type, that of the Higher Man, his critique of community becomes more plausible. As with the state, it is necessary to avoid concretizing Nietzsche's concepts. The Higher Men are essentially ideal types of individuals who are likely to attempt the process of self-overcoming. The fact that they fail is illuminating, as they are attempting this necessarily individual process within a social context, which allows power mechanisms to form. Nietzsche's discussion of the Higher Men is a thought experiment designed to test whether it is possible to create a non-repressive context for self-overcoming in a collective environment. Nietzsche's intent is not to destroy the possibility for collective existence, but to illuminate the problems inherent in even small groups. The Higher Men are therefore a warning to the individual to beware the influence of others, no matter how well-intentioned.
CHAPTER V

THE GREAT NAUSEA

Zarathustra’s decision to return to solitude is the turning point of the text. Indeed, it marks the beginning of Nietzsche’s articulation of his positive thought of authentic selfhood. In the first sections of *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche provides the critical substrate on which to build his theory of selfhood: the pathological character of the state and mass existence, the danger of conformity, and the impossibility of reforming collective existence. Zarathustra returns to solitude and faces his greatest challenge, which proves to be a confrontation with nausea.

Nausea is featured prominently in *Zarathustra*, indeed it is one of the central metaphors found in the narrative. Nietzsche’s concept of nausea represents an important element of a profound account of human existence within a seemingly chaotic and hostile universe. In addition, the discussion of nausea represents the turning point in the narrative of *Zarathustra*, representing the bridge between Nietzsche’s critique of society and the

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1 Existential nausea has become a philosophical tradition in the postmodern era. This concept has appeared most vividly in the works of Sartre, although it is found prominently in Dostoevsky and Kundera as well. In addition, there is a similar concept found in phenomenological thought, especially in Heidegger’s concept of thrownness and facticity. For all of these authors, “nausea” is a profoundly disturbing state of uneasiness that follows a radical reorientation of the self towards the universe or existence as a whole. Existential nausea is more than the sense of tension experienced by Hegel’s “homeless spirit” in search of philosophical truth. Nausea represents the destruction of preexisting meaning and the calling into question of both the individual’s existence and the existential and ontological status of the universe. Nausea is therefore a violent and painful process, but one that can lead to the positive reevaluation of existence and self-worth.
articulation of his theory of the transmuted self. Therefore, Nietzsche's concept of nausea is vitally important to the understanding of his thought as a whole. This chapter will examine the concept of nausea that Nietzsche introduces in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as well as its essential relevance to the understanding of one of Nietzsche's most controversial "doctrines": the eternal recurrence of the same.

Nausea is an integral metaphor of *Zarathustra*, as well as one of the enduring themes of Nietzsche's philosophy. Twice within the narrative Zarathustra is recognized as the man without nausea, once at the beginning of the text and again towards the end, yet he suffers this affliction in the center. Therefore, an important development in the narrative can be observed. Initially, Zarathustra is without nausea:

Yes, I recognize Zarathustra. His eyes are clear, and disgust does not lurk around his mouth. Does he not move along like a dancer? How changed Zarathustra is! Zarathustra has become—a child, an awakened-one: what do you want now with the sleepers? You lived in solitude as in the sea, and the sea bore you up. Alas, do you want to go ashore? Alas, do you again want to drag your body yourself?²

At the end of the narrative, Zarathustra is again recognized as the man without nausea. However, he is also recognized as the one who has conquered nausea. “This is the man without nausea, this is Zarathustra himself, the overcomer of the great nausea”³ Indeed, nausea represents the

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turning point in Zarathustra, after which the entire tone of the work changes. After Zarathustra experiences nausea, the text changes from linear imagery such as going-over and downgoing, to metaphors of circularity as seen in the movements of the animals and the return of the same. The overcoming of nausea is therefore undoubtedly a central element in Zarathustra, and one that has been largely ignored. Nietzsche discusses nausea in other works, but not nearly to the extent that he does in Zarathustra. Nevertheless, the idea of nausea figures centrally both in Nietzsche’s critical and positive thought, as will be demonstrated.

For Nietzsche, nausea has two interrelated causes. The first cause of nausea is particularly Nietzschean, and arises from contempt for those who have not allowed themselves to realize their existential and ontological condition. These masses live according to myth and dogma, too frightened to allow themselves to experience the painful and potentially destructive experience of self-reflection and existential nausea. These people thus lead lives of self-satisfied mediocrity, and are referred to by Nietzsche as “superfluous.” However, even more nauseating to the exceptional individual is the realization that the superfluous man is ontologically equal to himself within the context of the meaningless universe. Thus, “social nausea” is essentially reactive, caused by external social factors that are not necessarily internalized into the individual consciousness.
The second cause of nausea is similar to that discussed by the existentialists, particularly Sartre. Existential nausea, or the "Great Nausea," is the abject horror that arises from contemplation of the meaningless of existence. This occurs at a specific moment in time in which the individual is open to the realization of this deeply disturbing ontological and existential possibility. This specific existential mood is fostered by the first, socially-actuated nausea which allows the individual to separate from the herd and become open to new existential possibilities. However, existential nausea is much more personal, arising out of contemplation of the individual's own finitude, not reflection upon the abstract concept of death. Because of its innateness, existential nausea is not reactive but rather active, spurring the individual toward the possibility of self-creation.

In keeping with Nietzsche's presentation of the two varieties of nausea, it is proper to examine social nausea first. Nietzsche's contempt for the mundane is well known. However, the extent of his revulsion at modern society cannot be overestimated. Nietzsche's social nausea is more nuanced than simple disappointment at the mediocrity of modern society; it extends to an ontological level. Nietzsche is nauseated by the fact that the lowest of the rabble is ontologically equal to those with the greatest nobility of spirit.
I had seen them both naked, the greatest man and the smallest man: all too similar to one another, even the greatest all too human! The greatest too small!—that was my disgust at man! And eternal recurrence even for the smallest! That was my disgust at all existence! Alas! Nausea! Nausea! Nausea!4

This type of nausea is presented as a great challenge to Zarathustra. His realization of the contemptibleness of humanity causes him to ruminate on the status of the masses in relation to his own existence. In essence, Zarathustra must determine the existential status of the exceptional individual in relation to that of the masses. This takes the form of an analysis of collective existence as a type of morass in which individuals lose their identities in contact with the masses:

But once I asked, and my question almost stifled me: What, does life have need of the rabble, too? Are poisoned wells necessary, and stinking fires and dirty dreams and maggots in the bread of life? Not my hate but my nausea hungrily devoured my life! Alas, I often grew weary of the spirit when I found the rabble, too, had been gifted with spirit! And I turned my back upon the rulers when I saw what they now called ruling: bartering and haggling for power—with the rabble.5

Zarathustra's disgust is centered on the pettiness of humanity.6

Individuals are no longer concerned with the betterment of themselves or

4 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:13.2. Hollingdale renders this as "disgust."

5 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:6.

6 "Boundless and constantly recurring is Nietzsche's sorrow over men as they really are: 'What arouses our repugnance today? . . . That such vermin as human beings can predominate and multiply' . . . Not one of them is a complete being: 'It is always the same: fragments and limbs and revolting monstrosities—but no men!' They ruin everything with their talk and betray everything. . . . The paroxysm of disgust with man receives symbolic expression in the frightful sentence: 'It is doubtful that a world-traveler has anywhere in the world discovered an uglier region than the human face.'" Jaspers, Nietzsche, 125.
the discovery of an authentic selfhood. Rather, individuals are concerned almost totally with their acceptance by the mob. Political power is similarly centered on this lowest common denominator. Social nausea is therefore a further confirmation of Nietzsche's earlier critique of the state and mass culture, but the emphasis is now shifted to the reaction of the exceptional individual to these normalizing mechanisms. This is why the rule of the mob is especially nauseating to Zarathustra, as it represents the triumph of the reactive forces at the expense of the active individual:

For today the petty people have become lord and master: they all preach submission and acquiescence and prudence and diligence and consideration and the long et cetera of petty virtues. What is womanish, what stems from slavishness and especially from the mob's hotchpotch: that now wants to become master of mankind's entire destiny—oh, nausea! Nausea! Nausea!7

This nausea at the masses causes a great sense of hopelessness in Zarathustra, he realizes that society and the Ultimate Men who populate it are unredeemable. The mob does not seek personal growth; it longs only for solace and flattery. "The great nausea at man—it choked me and had crept into my throat: and what the prophet prophesied: 'it is all one, nothing is worthwhile, knowledge chokes.'"8 Zarathustra realizes that the masses ultimately pollute everything and corrupt the individual with their Dekadenz.

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7 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:13.3.
8 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:13.2.
I once vowed to renounce all nausea; then you transformed my kindred and neighbors into abscesses. Alas, where did my noblest vow flee then? Once, as a blind man, I walked on happy paths; then you threw filth in the blind man's path: and now the old footpath disgusts him. And when I achieved my most difficult task and celebrated the victory of my overcomings: then you made those whom I loved cry out that I hurt them most. Truly, all that was your doing: you embittered my finest honey and the industry of my finest bees.9

Nietzsche emphasizes that nausea cannot be overcome through mere contemplation, “and truly, if man should gain the whole world and learn this one thing, rumination: what would it profit him! He would not be free from his affliction . . . nausea. Who today has not his heart, mouth, and eyes filled with nausea?”10 Nausea must be confronted for what it is and acted upon. Through this confrontation with social nausea, it is realized that the features of humanity that inspire disgust are essential traits of collective human existence.11 Collective existence leads inexorably to the type of sedated existence typified by the rule of the mob: "Much about your good people nauseates me, and it is not their evil I mean. . . . Truly, I wish their

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9 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:11.

10 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:8.

11 "Ressentiment, bad conscience and nihilism are not psychological traits but the foundation of humanity in man. They are the principle of human being as such. Man, 'skin disease' of the Earth, reaction of the Earth. . . . It is in this sense that Zarathustra speaks of his 'great contempt' for man and his 'great disgust'. Another sensibility, another becoming—would they still be man's?” Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 64-65.
madness were called truth or loyalty or justice: but they possess their virtue in order to live long and in a miserable ease."

Mass society prevents the existential analysis necessary for personal growth through a retreat into transcendental fantasy. Nietzsche argues against this escapism into metaphysical consolation brought about by feelings of hopelessness at the realization of meaninglessness. "For truly, there is also a wisdom that blossoms in darkness, a night-shade wisdom, which is always sighing: 'all is vain!'... such is the nature of cowardly souls." This tendency causes those who seek insight beyond the herd to lapse into guilt or despair.

And I saw a great sadness come over mankind. The best grew weary of their works. A teaching went forth, a belief ran beside it: Everything is empty, everything is one, everything is past!... We have harvested, it is true; but why did all our fruits turn rotten and brown? What fell from the wicked moon last night? All our work has been in vain, our wine has become poison, an evil eye has scorched our fields and our hearts... we have grown too weary even to die; now we are still awake and we live on— in sepulchres!

Within the realm of the mob, those who seek personal growth or question the principles underlying mass culture are in some way


13 Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, III:10.

14 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:19. Nietzsche is explicitly responding to Ecclesiastes 1: 2-11, "Vanity of vanities... All is vanity! What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?... The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises.... All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full.... What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.... The people of long ago are not remembered, nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by those who come after them." Properly confronted, this angst is liberating.
condemned. Because of the institutionalized belief in metaphysics or even in progress, it is essentially impossible to move beyond bad conscience and mob existence:

Today I saw a sublime man, a penitent of the spirit: oh, how my soul laughed at his ugliness! . . . As yet he has not learned of laughter and beauty. This huntsman returned gloomily from the forest of knowledge. . . . There is still contempt in his eye, and disgust lurks about his mouth. He rests now, to be sure, but he has never yet lain down in the sunlight.\textsuperscript{15}

However, mere disgust at humanity is not enough; it is necessary to confront the source of this loathing, both within the society and one’s own self, in order to progress beyond disgust toward a self worthy of affirmation. “I love the great despisers. Man, however, is something that must be overcome.”\textsuperscript{16} Although many may realize the necessity of this, few have the fortitude to actually complete the process of overcoming. “To be sure, there are sour apples whose fate is to wait until the last day of autumn: and they become at the same time ripe, yellow, and shriveled. . . . It is cowardice that keeps him fastened to his branch.”\textsuperscript{17} In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche further emphasizes the nausea arising from the denigration of man through modern idealistic dogma, a manifestation of this cowardice:

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\textsuperscript{15} Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:13.
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\textsuperscript{16} Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:7.
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\textsuperscript{17} Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:21.
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The comprehensive denigration of man down to what today appears to the socialist idiots and flatheads as their "man of the future"—as their ideal—this denigration and diminution of man into the perfect herd animal (or, as they say, to the man of the "free society"), this animalization of the man into the dwarf animal of equal rights and claims, is possible, there is no doubt of it. Anyone who has once thought through this possibility to the end knows one kind of nausea that other men do not know—but perhaps also a new task!\textsuperscript{18}

The type of escapism fostered by mass culture prevents the individual from confronting the really hard questions of existence, which might lead to the realization of the fictional character of such institutions. However, once nausea is confronted, the individual is open to question society and perceive it without the interference of inherited presuppositions.

Then, the individual can reevaluate himself:

The hour when you say: "what good is my happiness? It is poverty and dirt and a miserable escape. But my happiness should justify existence itself!" The hour when you say: "what good is my reason? Does it long for knowledge as the lion for its food?" It is poverty and dirt and a miserable escape!" The hour when you say: "What good is my virtue? It has not yet driven me mad! How tired I am of my good and evil! It is all poverty and dirt and miserable escape!" The hour when you say: "What good is my justice? I do not see that I am fire and hot coals. But the just man is fire and hot coals!" The hour when you say: "What good is my pity? Is not pity the cross upon which he who loves man is nailed? But my pity is no crucifixion!" . . . In truth, man is a polluted river. One must be a sea to receive this polluted river and not become defiled. Behold, I teach you the Übermensch: he is this sea, in him your great contempt can go under. What is the greatest thing you can experience? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness becomes loathsome, and your reason and virtue as well.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, V:203.

\textsuperscript{19} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, Prologue §3. This is the calling for the great nausea and thus the separation from the herd.
This "hour of the great contempt" is the culmination of social nausea. Once the individual realizes that all of the desires implanted by society are meaningless it is possible to abandon societal expectations and look within. It is only then that the individual is able to begin contemplation of the self in an authentic non-foundational context. Thus social nausea leads to the desire to separate from the herd. Although social nausea is primarily reactive, it is through the culmination of contempt that social nausea is capable of becoming creative and therefore constructive. "There is wisdom in the fact that much in the world smells ill: nausea itself creates wings and water-divining powers! Even in the best there is something to excite nausea; and even the best is something that must be overcome!"  

Social nausea therefore creates a substrate for the individual to react against and to inspire further action. The revolutionary spirit is alive in this concept, albeit on an individual basis. In Ecce Homo, Nietzsche argues that the experience of nausea in Zarathustra demonstrates "what alone 'man' can be for him — not an object of love or, worse, pity — Zarathustra has mastered the great nausea over man, too: man is for him an un-form, a material, an ugly stone that needs a sculptor."  

Social nausea is therefore only reactive in the sense that it causes the initial rupture with society and realigns the

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individual’s expectations away from societal objectives. Indeed, the very prospect of social intercourse becomes deeply disturbing:

Now we are avoiding the mob, all these ranters and scribbling-bluebottles, the stench of shopkeepers, the struggles of ambition, the foul breath: faugh, to live among the mob, faugh, to pretend to be the first among the mob! Nausea! Nausea! Nausea!22

Social nausea is constructive in that it creates a void that must be addressed by the individual. Nausea destroys the superstructure that has grown up to support the myth of stability and transcendence. Social nausea sets the stage for a much more complete sense of nausea that calls into question the entirety of the individual’s previous interpretation of reality:

To all of you, whatever honors you may bestow upon yourselves with words, whether you call yourselves “the free spirits” or “the truthful” or “the penitents of the spirit” or the “unfettered” or “the great desirers”, to all of you, like me, suffer from the great nausea, for whom the old God has died and no new God lies in cradles and swaddling clothes—to all of you is my evil spirit and sorcery-devil well-disposed.23

Social nausea is therefore important from several Nietzschean perspectives. In order for the individual to begin the process of self-creation, it is necessary to abandon traditional ways of interpreting existence. As Nietzsche is all too aware, these interpretive schemes, and the comfort they provide, are exceptionally difficult for the individual to escape. It is only during the most painful episodes of human existence, such as the

22 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:3.
23 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:14.2.
confrontation with personal mortality and by extension the void, that it is possible to see these myths for what they are: comforting stories. Without social nausea and the release from societal myths, it is impossible to move to the more comprehensive level of nausea, existential nausea.

II

Existential nausea is much more disturbing than social nausea, as it calls into question the basis for individual existence on the most personal level. Nietzsche hopes that this questioning of the individual’s existential status can lead to a transmutation of the self to a higher level. Nietzsche argues this point consistently in his work; indeed the concept of existential nausea is foreshadowed by Nietzsche’s description of the Dionysian man in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

In this sense the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have gained knowledge, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of balance. Knowledge kills action; action requires the veil of illusion . . . true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, outweighs any motive for action.24

By embracing the Dionysian ethic of the eternal flux of existence, the ancient Greeks were able to integrate a healthier ideal into their tragic model of life. The Dionysian mythology was explicitly structured to support the

24 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, VIII:7. Nietzsche then argues that the only possibility for Dionysian man to transcend this impasse is through the creative power of art.
conclusion that life was meaningless outside of individual action. 25 Conversely, modernity explicitly denies the ascendancy of chance, leading to a static worldview incapable of dealing with the vicissitudes of life. 26 It is only through the destruction of the modern worldview that Nietzsche hopes to free us from the essentially unhealthy ideology of progress that has become melded to the modern mindset. Through the separation from society and its psychological imperatives, the first stage of nausea has freed the individual from the institutional manifestations of bad conscience and transcendental solace.

In this sense, nausea represents the moment at which the individual realizes the shortcomings of the myths built up over time by others and then adopted by the self to filter out the horror of meaninglessness. The destruction of the idea of a divine plan and its secular counterpart the human community is necessary before the individual is able to move forward. However, it is then necessary for the individual to free himself from a far more embedded myth: the illusion of the innate rationality of the

25 "Ariadne, the Labyrinth, the Minotaur, Theseus, and Dionysus—this whole area of mythology is repeatedly alluded to with all its mysterious ambiguity when he wishes to suggest the last secret of the truth: that the truth is death, or that it is something else desired with the passion for truth that will, in turn, end in death." Jaspers, Nietzsche, 225.

26 "Nihilism, the experience of the exhaustion of meaning, amounts to a great weariness, a ‘great disgust,’ on the part of man, and directed at him as well. Nothing is worth much anymore, everything comes down to the same thing, everything is equalized. Everything is the same and equivalent: the true and the false, the good and the bad. Everything is outdated, used up, old, dilapidated, dying: an undefined agony of meaning, and unending twilight: not a definite annihilation of significations, but their indefinite collapse.” Haar, Nietzsche and Metaphysics, 11.
universe. Underlying theological and secular accounts of existence is the idea that the universe in some way makes sense. The idea of the ordered cosmos must be accepted for what it is: a projection of the fear of lack of control onto a chaotic and sometimes hostile universe. This fear of meaninglessness and death is certainly not unnatural, as Tillich states, "everything finite is innately anxious that its substance will be lost."28

Nietzsche hopes to turn this anxiety toward a constructive purpose. First, it is necessary for the individual to entertain the notion that the universe is indeed meaningless, and that there is no external ordering outside of the actions of the concrete will. As Camus states, "only power without purpose, only Heraclitus' 'chance,' is eternal."29 Paradoxically, Nietzsche argues that the realization of the meaninglessness of existence and its acceptance leads to a greater sense of individual freedom. Without external constraints, it is possible to seek new permutations of selfhood.

27 "When one gives up the moral universal that makes its demands with logically inflexible unconditionality, no return is possible. One is threatened by the possibility of sinking into a limitless void. The loss of the resistance afforded by immutable moral laws may as easily be followed by abandonment to caprice and accident as by emergence from the source of an authentic and historically unique possibility." Jaspers, Nietzsche, 155.


Existential nausea is therefore not reactive, it is instead the impetus to action. "My abyss speaks, I have turned my ultimate depth into the light!"  

Through confrontation with the abyss of meaninglessness, the individual is able to move beyond contempt and despair towards constructive action. Thus, nausea does not represent destruction. If one can embrace the void, the opportunity opens for self-overcoming. Existential nausea represents the complete stripping away of all previous orderings of the consciousness to reveal its underlying structure: the permutations of the will-to-power, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Only through the confrontation with and overcoming of existential nausea can the individual finally obtain the innocence necessary to begin the process of self-creation free from external interference. As Nietzsche writes: "the highest must arise to its height from the deepest." Thus, the reaction to nausea that affirms life is as natural as the nausea which arose from contemplating its wretchedness. Nietzsche praises nausea as a positive good: "O my soul, I taught you the great contempt that comes not as the


31 "When one has overcome, when one has come to face the dwarfing fear of the abyss, one can dance around it, one can laugh at it. Then one looks deep into life, then it becomes possible to embrace the end of, the edge of life — superficial now out of profundity — absorbing the abyss that looks into one and, so transfigured by the lightness of light, by the gold of existence, one is 'a transformed being, surrounded with light, laughing! Never yet on earth had any man laughed as he laughed!' This is 'not human' but Dionysian laughter." Babich, Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science, 293.

32 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:1.
gnawing of a worm, the great loving contempt which loves most where it despises most.”

Magnus notes:

“. . . there is nothing in the nature of things which justifies nausea, justifies the estimate that life is a wretched state-of-affairs, anymore than there is anything in the nature of things which justifies joy, exultation, and the estimate that life is consummate celebration.”

This attitude that nausea is a constructive reaction to life is dependent upon the courage of the individual. This attitude is aggressive in its self­valuation, even as it destroys external ordering. “For courage is the best destroyer—courage that attacks: for in every attack there is a triumphant shout.”

Mere acknowledgment the abyss is insufficient; one must gaze into it with full recognition of the existential implications. The horror of the stripping away of metaphysical consolation is enough to destroy even the most dauntless individual; indeed this is what fostered the diverse systems of metaphysical consolation that have been institutionalized over the millennia. As Nietzsche states, “he who sees the abyss, but with eagle’s eyes—he who grasps the abyss with an eagle’s claws: he possesses courage.”

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33 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:14.

34 Magnus, Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative, 174.

35 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:2.1.

36 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:13.4.
The individual must make the reality of the abyss a part of the self, in order to prevent re-concretization of newly formed insights. Through nausea the great myths of traditional metanarratives are destroyed, but they are not replaced with anything capable of taking their place. Nausea, therefore, is the internalization of the abyss. Through nausea, the individual is separated fully from not only previous ordering but from the notion of the possibility of external ordering. After gazing into the abyss, there is no possibility for redemption apart from internal ordering of consciousness. Once this step is taken, there can be no return. As Nietzsche writes, “courage also destroys giddiness at abysses: and where does man not stand at an abyss? Is seeing itself not—an abyss?”

Taken together, these forms of nausea lead to the separation of the "self" from the "other." Nausea represents a fundamental turning point in an individual's life. People who have experienced the profound shock of existential nausea may re-emerge into the comfort of familiar systems of existential consolation. The other choice concerns Nietzsche. This is to confront the void and search for a new justification for existence based upon the creative self. This latter choice is ultimately more dangerous, but to Nietzsche much more rewarding. Nietzsche concludes that finitude is the

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great demarcation for individuality, and therefore nausea is the herald of self-overcoming.38

The experience of nausea is inextricably necessary for self-overcoming in the Nietzschean sense. The discussion of self-overcoming is dependant upon a specific understanding of what Nietzsche means by this problematic project. It is instructive to examine the first instance in Zarathustra in which Nietzsche discusses the overcoming of man: “Ich lehre euch den Übermensch. Der Mensch ist Etwas, das überwunden werden soll.”39 This is generally translated as “I teach you the overman. Man is something that should be overcome.”40

Employing a somewhat different translation, it is possible to get a sense of the pathos of distance that Nietzsche is emphasizing: “mankind is

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38 “And, generally speaking, the experience of individuality in modern culture is bound up with that of death: from Hölderlein’s Empedocles to Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, and on to Freudian man, an obstinate relation to death prescribes to the universal its singular face, and lends to each individual the power of being heard forever; the individual owes to death a meaning that does not cease with him. The division that it traces and the finitude whose mark it imposes link, paradoxically, the universality of language and the precarious, irreplaceable form of the individual. The sense-perceptible, which cannot be exhausted by description, and which so many centuries have wished to dissipate, finds at last in death the law of its discourse; it is death that fixes the stone that we can touch, the return of time, the fine, innocent earth beneath the grass of words. In a space articulated by language, it reveals the profusion of bodies and their simple order.” Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1994), 197.

39 *Zarathustra*, Prologue §3.

40 Translated by Hollingdale, (London: Penguin, 1961). Kaufmann renders the passage “man is something that shall be overcome,” thus blunting the imperative tone of the passage even more so than Hollingdale, and implying a teleology.
something that must be overcome."** In this sense, Nietzsche is illuminating the need to overcome those parts of the individual self that are grounded in "mankind." As Jaspers notes, "Nietzsche's longing for the genuine man, while giving rise to his contempt, is nevertheless the force that moves and consumes him."** Thus, it is through nausea and the collapse of everyday meaning that the transmuted self is possible. This overcoming of existential nausea is only possible by confronting and accepting the individual's own finite existence, thus making death no more than the crowning achievement of a well-constructed life.

I shall show you the consummating death, which shall be a spur and a promise to living. The man consummating his life dies his death triumphantly, surrounded by men filled with hope and making solemn vows. Thus one should learn to die; and there should be no festivals at which such a dying man does not consecrate the oaths of the living.**

When the individual recognizes that death is not the passage to the next life or a socially-redeeming sacrifice, death becomes the limit of perception against which one can project a clearly-delimited endpoint for self-creation. Properly understood, therefore, the realization of the meaninglessness of existence is an invitation to an unheard of existential

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** Translation and italics mine.


freedom. "Free for death and free in death, one who solemnly says No when there is no longer time for Yes: thus he understands life and death."\textsuperscript{44}

Nausea represents the birth pangs of the Übermensch. It is a necessary, and dangerous, passage the individual must journey through in order to become the child as discussed in the "Three Metamorphoses" and create himself. The great nausea is no less than the embracing of the void, something not to be feared but to be welcomed as the next stage for individual existence. Zarathustra cries, "Ah! You are coming—I hear you! My abyss speaks, I have turned my ultimate depth into the light! Ah! Come here! Give me your hand... nausea, nausea, nausea—woe is me!"\textsuperscript{45}

Although nausea begins as a reactive impulse against the loathsomeness of society and the masses, it ultimately becomes the affirmation of individual existence. Nausea is capable of destroying the impediments to individual self-creation, but it does not provide a structure or any guidance to re-order the consciousness. Nietzsche is acutely aware of the problems inherent in positive theory, and does not want to present a scheme for ordering the consciousness that might degenerate into dogma. Therefore, he articulates an alternative that is both individually-actuated and not concretizable. This leads to the formation of an imperative for

\textsuperscript{44} Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:21.

\textsuperscript{45} Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:13.1-2.
action that ultimately arises from Nietzsche's emphasis upon the primacy of individual interpretation of existence: eternal recurrence.

III.

Nausea is not caused by the realization of the eternal recurrence: the concept of the eternal return instead arises from the vacuum left by the collapse of everyday systems of consolation. The articulation of the eternal recurrence is a response to the realization of the inherent meaninglessness of existence. Indeed, the overcoming of nausea and the realization of the eternal recurrence is the principal precondition for the aesthetic ethics capable of producing the Übermensch. This section will discuss the political implication of the eternal recurrence for Nietzsche's project of individual creation.

Importantly, Zarathustra does not come to the realization of the eternal recurrence on his own. The eternal recurrence is instead articulated first by his animal companions, the eagle and the serpent. This has caused some to interpret the eternal recurrence as not arising from within the self, but rather as an external transcendental construct or metaphysical

46 “Zarathustra cannot articulate recurrence because he is overcome by nausea, to be sure. But remember Nietzsche's point that estimates of life are, in a very important sense, clues to the estimator, insights into the being of the assessor. So if the thought of eternal recurrence nauseates, as it does Zarathustra, that is because Zarathustra cannot will the eternal recurrence of the moment without devaluing it, and hence life, in the extreme. That Zarathustra must overcome his nausea is evidence of his decadence—recall Nietzsche’s pithy observation that to have to fight instinct is itself a symptom of decadence." Magnus, Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative, 173.
However, Nietzsche’s presentation of the animals as the heralds of this knowledge is a further outgrowth of his interpretive philosophy. Nietzsche constructs the narrative in this way for rhetorical effect and to separate the reader from the text. As Ansell-Pearson notes:

It is thus not Zarathustra but his animals who relate the final version of doctrine of eternal return and who inform him that his down-going is over and has reached its end. The reason for this, I would argue, is that Zarathustra cannot himself declare that his down-going is at an end because, in order for him to become what he is, we must become those that we are too. In other words, his testing and recognition is dependant on our testing and recognition.

The animals do not represent exterior forces or entities. Rather, the animals represent parts of Zarathustra’s consciousness, analogous to the unconscious. In this interpretation, the animals represent knowledge that has been repressed by the conscious mind, which Nietzsche has argued is largely a social creation. This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that the

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47 Heidegger is the most significant of these interpreters. Please see the appendix for an extended discussion.

48 Ansell-Pearson, Nietzsche Contra Rousseau, 183.

49 “... they symbolize the re-united powers which are to open the way to the New Age.” Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Pantheon, 1963).

50 “From the perspective of the principle which conditions it, the eternal return depends upon a transmutation but, from the perspective of its unconditioned principle, transmutation depends more profoundly on the eternal return.... This is why Zarathustra is always in an inferior position in relation to the eternal return and the Overman. He is the cause of the eternal return, but a cause which delays producing its effect. A prophet who hesitates to deliver his message, who knows the vertigo and the temptation of the negative, who must be encouraged by his animals. Father of the Overman, but a father whose products are ripe before he is ripe for his products, a lion who still lacks a final metamorphosis. In fact the eternal return and the Overman are at the crossing of two genealogies, of two unequal genetic lines.” Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 192.
animals are never present when other characters are present in the narrative. The animals only appear when Zarathustra is alone, engaged in an internal dialogue. When there are no other people around, either as objects of bad conscience or seeking to impose their will, Zarathustra is able to listen to his own instinctual knowledge that has been blocked by the repressive metanarratives of society.

Thus, because we often ignore these parts of our consciousness in the presence of others, it is only when the individual is stripped of the "all-too-human" parts of the consciousness that the repressed features again appear, represented by the animals. This cannot occur in the presence of others, in Heideggerian terms, the chattering of das Man shuts out the internal voice. 51 Zarathustra himself is uneasy about hearing this repressed voice: "Thus I spoke, and I spoke more and more softly: for I was afraid of my own thoughts and reservations." 52 The animals elaborate the eternal recurrence as the expression of perpetual becoming; the validation of dance, play, and masks, which Nietzsche argues are the very operation of the consciousness.

51 "In and through the eternal return negation as a quality of the will to power transmutes itself into affirmation, it becomes an affirmation of negation itself; it becomes a power of affirming, an affirmative power. This is what Nietzsche presents as Zarathustra's cure and Dionysus' secret. "Nihilism vanquished itself" thanks to the eternal return. . . . It is no longer a question of the simple thought of the eternal return eliminating from willing everything that falls outside this thought but rather, of the eternal return making something come into being which cannot do so without changing nature. It is no longer a question of selective thought but of selective being; for the eternal return is being and being is selection." Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 71.

52 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:2:2.
"Oh Zarathustra," said the animals then, "all things themselves dance for those that think as we do: they come and offer their hand and laugh and flee—and return. Everything goes, everything returns; the wheel of existence rolls eternally. Everything dies, everything blossoms anew; the year of existence runs eternally. . . . Existence begins in every instant; the ball There rolls around every Here. The middle is everywhere. The path of eternity is crooked."\textsuperscript{53}

The awakening to the eternal recurrence is not therefore the elaboration of a new cosmological scheme, it is even more profound. The eternal recurrence is instead an anthropomorphic explanation of existence, the highest expression of philosophical anthropology. As Magnus states:

The doctrine of eternal recurrence, in its principal sense, is offered as Nietzsche's principle illustration of the attitude of Übermenschheit. It is the being-in-the-world of the Übermensch. I do not mean to say that it is one possible attitude among many. It is the attitude simpliciter Nietzsche wishes to portray as necessary to overcome passive nihilism.\textsuperscript{54}

The eternal recurrence is a validation of existence as it is perceived by the concrete human mind, with all of its visionary and disconnected elements. Through the embracing of the eternal recurrence, the individual is disconnected from previous temporal perception, time ceases to have an ontological or existential meaning:

What has happened to me? Listen! Has time flown away? Do I not fall? Have I not fallen—listen! Into the well of eternity? What is happening to me? Still! It is stinging me—alas—in the heart? . . . When will you drink this drop of dew that has fallen upon all earthly things—when will you drink this strange soul—when, well of

\textsuperscript{53} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, III:13.2.

\textsuperscript{54} Magnus, \textit{Nietzsche's Existential Imperative}, 140.
eternity! Serene and terrible noontide abyss! When will you drink my soul back into yourself?55

The key metaphor within the “doctrine” of the eternal recurrence is not the recurrence itself, but rather the concept of the “Moment.”56 Through the destruction of the traditional narrative of temporality, Nietzsche articulates a new narrative of temporality centered solely upon the Moment. There is no other temporal category. “Behold this moment! . . . From this gateway Moment a long, eternal lane runs back: an eternity lies behind us. . . . Must not all things that can happen have already happened, been done, run past?”57

The eternal recurrence is therefore not of every concrete action, choice, and event; but rather of this one Moment, the eternal repetition of the Now. It is a mistake of bad conscience to assign values to the past or future, these are invalid temporal categories that distract the individual from the only unit of time that exists: the Now.

55 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:10.

56 “The one thing that casts no shadow is the moment, and it is the moment that is to be affirmed in life, in what is as it is because it is, in the thought of the Eternal Return. In this way, Nietzsche could explain that Zarathustra’s ideal was an individual who saw flux and death and birth and life—all as realities, as many realities, as the Real. The only human redemption possible must be attained through this aesthetic sight of the Real. This vision teaches how one is to go under, and how one overcomes oneself, because it teaches the ineluctability (it teaches the fierce creator’s or artist’s joy) of death in life. Yet . . . it would be wrong to claim that the redemptive world- and life-affirming power of this thought is meant for everyone.” Babich, Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Science, 296.

57 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:2:2.
And are not all things bound fast together in such a way that this moment draws after it all future things? Therefore—draws itself too? For all things that can run must also run once again forward along this long lane... must we not all have been here before... and must we not return and run down that other lane out before us, down that long, terrible lane—must we not return eternally?\(^58\)

All things reoccur because all things are within the Moment. This assertion destroys the idea of Being. Everything is in flux, there is no such thing as stable existence. Because time has no meaning outside of perception, and the Moment is the only unit of time that can be concretely perceived, past and future are illusion. The Moment, as it eternally reoccurs, must be eternally reinterpreted by the individual. This constant interpretation leads to continuous change. There is no being, only becoming. “Behold, we know what you teach: that all things recur eternally and we ourselves with them... You teach that there is a great year of Becoming, a colossus of a year: this year must, like an hour-glass, turn itself over again and again.”\(^59\)

Nietzsche’s analysis of time is open to criticism if it is taken to be a concrete view of temporality. Many Nietzsche interpreters, Heidegger and Jaspers included, have taken the view that Nietzsche’s espousal of the eternal recurrence is a back-door attempt to introduce metaphysical or transcendental elements into an essentially materialist philosophy.

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However, Nietzsche's concept of the eternal recurrence is not presented as an actual model of the behavior of time. Nietzsche presents the eternal recurrence in a metaphorical manner, likening it directly to the ancient concept of the eternal chain of Being. The eternal recurrence is meant as an illustrative device to induce a sense of reverence at each passing moment, and to emphasize the importance of the present over the projections of past and future.

However, Nietzsche's concept of the eternal recurrence is problematic as it clouds the distinction between Being and Becoming. If all that exists is the Moment, then it is difficult to imply that becoming is predominant, as an eternal Now implies a sense of stability or even stagnation. Further, without projecting the self into the future or reflecting upon the past, it is difficult to conceive of the possibility of a project of self-overcoming. If all that exists is the now, what is to be overcome?

These critiques ignore one of the essential precepts of Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche is not concerned with the distinction between Being and Becoming because Nietzsche views it as a false dichotomy. Being is a

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60 “The analogy here is with Kant. In this instance we are admonished to behave as if recurrence were true.” Magnus, *Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative*, 140.

61 “…Nietzsche appears to be committed to a form of naturalism whose basis is the belief that humans are naturally kronophobic. We are kronophobes, despisers of time.” Magnus, *Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative*, 189. The elaboration of the eternal return by Nietzsche is his constructive attempt to transcend this deep-seated antipathy towards the passing of time. Heidegger argues that this antipathy is the underlying cause of *ressentiment*, but this is incorrect. See the appendix for an extended discussion.
static concept which ignores the fundamental flux of existence. Indeed, the category "Being" arose as a psychological necessity akin to the will-to-truth. Nietzsche destroys traditional temporal categories because he wants to emphasize the contingent nature of existence inherent in the concept of becoming. In this sense, the metaphors of the eternal recurrence and Becoming represent an active approach towards the passing of time rather than the essentially reactive, static approach of teleology and the paean to Being.

IV.

By centering his positive philosophy within the Moment, Nietzsche makes an important and radical philosophical leap. Existence has no meaning, no independent ontological status. Only the individual concrete consciousness has any ontological status, as it perceives within the Moment. In this sense, the world is indeed interpretation, and it is completely so. This is why it is only when Zarathustra is alone that he can realize the eternal recurrence. This type of ontological leap simply cannot be made within a societal context, it must be willed through a process of self-overcoming, the first stage of which is the overcoming of nausea. Thus, the announcement of the eternal return by the animals amounts to the final acceptance of the nagging internal truth that most people repress. The concrete individual will is all that exists; the world, society, history, even
other people are all a sham. They all depend upon the individual’s
perception in the Moment. It is necessary to overcome all resistance to this
fundamental reality. As Ansell-Pearson argues:

This point on the eternal return can only be appreciated if it is
recognized that what is willed in the experience of return is no the
literal contents on the moment but the very momentariness of the
moment, that is, time’s desire and time’s perishing. This notion of the
“same” in the thought of the eternal return provides the criterion for
judging whether one’s actions are motivated by innocence and
forgetfulness or by guilt and revenge. As a thought-experiment, the
eternal return asks us how well-disposed towards life we would have
to feel in order to desire nothing more passionately and intensely
than its eternal confirmation and seal.

This knowledge is exceptionally dangerous. The ethical implications
of the recognition of the full implications of the eternal return are
momentous. In the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche identifies the
overcoming of the great nausea as a pivotal event for humanity, through
which humanity may will its own destruction:

What is to be feared, what has a more calamitous effect than any
other calamity, is that man should inspire not profound fear but
profound nausea; also not great fear but great pity. Suppose these
two were to some day unite, they would inevitably give rise to the
uncanniest monsters: the “last will” of man, his will to nothingness,
nihilism.

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62 "Zarathustra invited human beings to reflect on good and evil so that they come to know
and will that which has formed them, instead of accepting it as a blind fate and a dreadful
chance over which they have no control. They must be taught to overcome even that which
they feel not impotent in the face of, and which they can only rage in anger and frustration


Nietzsche's implication is that this knowledge is too dangerous for the whole of humanity, it can only be appreciated by the individual who has conquered nausea. By embracing this instinctual knowledge there is a foundation upon which it is possible to create a new self through a process which is inner-directed and not based in collective narratives. As Bernd Magnus has argued, the eternal recurrence offers a metaphor for the abandonment of the illusion of progress and the embracing of a new existential imperative. The new task at hand is the struggle to order the disparate elements of the consciousness illuminated through the confrontation with nausea into a dynamic, integrated self.

The first step along this journey is to embrace the eternal recurrence as a guide for action. It is necessary to live properly in the Moment, as it is indeed the fullness of time. The embracing of the Moment destroys the need for metaphysical consolation and provides the existential courage necessary to live in a meaningless universe. "Courage, however, is the best destroyer, courage that attacks: it destroys even death, for it says: 'Was that life? Well then! Once more!' But there is a great triumphant shout in such a saying. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."65

The governing psychological imperative behind the attitude of the Übermensch is the inclination towards life as expressed in the doctrine of

65 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:2.1.
the eternal return. The recurrence of everything, including the smallest things, seems at first impossible for Zarathustra to accept. The return is exactly the same—not that the best part returns or that all except the worst returns, but all returns—this is difficult for Zarathustra to acknowledge. The recurrence of the men farthest removed from the overman especially troubles Zarathustra, and he becomes nauseous. "All too small, even the greatest man!—that was my disgust at man! And the eternal return of the smallest man!—that was my disgust at all existence!"66 How is man to be overcome if he returns eternally? Nevertheless, Zarathustra eventually accepts the doctrine of eternal return of these small men without nausea, seeing the promise of affirmation of one’s life. "But joys all want eternity—Want deep profound eternity."67

The doctrine of eternal recurrence offers an interesting perspective on the idea of progress. In a cyclical existence, no final forms can be attained or retained, everything is in a state of flux. "O my soul, I have taught you to say ‘today’ as ‘one upon a time’ and ‘formerly,’ and to dance your measure over every Here and There and Yonder."68 The perspective offered by the eternal return teaches that there is no need for regret or anxiety; the moment is all that is meaningful. "Oh, how could I not be ardent for eternity, for the

66 Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, III:13.2.
67 Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, III:15.3.
68 Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, III:14.
marriage ring of rings—the ring of the return? . . . For I love you, O eternity!"\textsuperscript{69}

In this view, eternal recurrence is a metaphor, intending to urge the reader to live his life as if it will repeat eternally. There is textual evidence to support this interpretation. "Courage, however, is the best slayer, courage which attacks: it slays even death itself; for it says: \textit{Was that life?} Well! Once more."\textsuperscript{70} In \textit{Ecce Homo}, Nietzsche refers to the eternal return as the "highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable."\textsuperscript{71} In \textit{The Science of Joy}, Nietzsche offers an especially revealing example of how the eternal return could be employed as a principle of affirmation.

What, if some day or night a demon were to . . . say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it . . . The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!" Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you one experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine." If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life \textit{to crave nothing more fervently} than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{69} Nietzsche, \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra}, III:16.3.

\textsuperscript{70} Nietzsche, \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra}, III:2.1.

\textsuperscript{71} Nietzsche, \textit{Ecce Homo}, 751.

\textsuperscript{72} Friedrich Nietzsche, \textit{The Science of Joy}, § 341.

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The imperative of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence therefore is to carefully examine one's actions and abandon ideas of progress. The eternal return is a doctrine of immanence, not transcendence. The commandment of Nietzsche's imperative is to seize the moment and take joy in existence. Thus, the doctrine of eternal return is a central, guiding metaphor of Nietzsche's politics of the self. Rather than concern for humanity as a whole or the contemplation of "the good" of the community, Nietzsche's Übermensch is concerned with his own life and the perfection of it. As Deleuze notes:

As an ethical thought the eternal return is the new formulation of the practical synthesis: whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return . . . Laziness, stupidity, baseness, cowardice or spitefulness that would will its own eternal return would no longer be the same laziness, stupidity, etc. How does eternal return perform the selection here? It is the thought of the eternal return that selects. It makes willing something whole. The thought of the eternal return eliminates from willing everything which falls outside the eternal return, it makes willing a creation, it brings about the equation "willing = creating".73

Through the embracing of the Moment and the eternal recurrence, Zarathustra's original social nausea is addressed. Although the rabble are ontologically equal to the exceptional individual, they are not existentially equal. The essential difference is action. The exceptional individual, spurred by nausea, becomes a creative force separated from ressentiment

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73 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 68-69.
and societal bad conscience. Nausea has redeemed the individual by
separating him from the masses and preparing him for the project of
transmutation. The exceptional individual is no longer “all-too-human,” but
the process of overcoming has only begun. “I am a railing beside the
stream: he who can grasp me, let him grasp me! I am not, however, your
crutch.”74

CHAPTER VI

THE ETHICS OF ABSURDITY

It follows from Nietzsche's argument thus far that once nausea has been confronted and the nature of the universe is called into question there can be no possibility of either teaching or even sharing in the quest for self. Rather, there is a need to concentrate upon the individual self outside of any collective context. Unlike Nietzsche's analysis of nausea, the discussion of self-overcoming and self-creation occurs in several places within the narrative, generally arising after criticism of collective existence.

Nietzsche seems to have a relatively coherent theory of the authentic individual selfhood, however this project is far from clearly defined. Zarathustra himself asks in desperation, "For what, then, is it—high time?"¹ Without doubt, it is a project arising from within the self; an individual imperative:

Thus in symbols everything called to me: "it is time!" But I—did not hear: until at last my abyss stirred and my thought bit me. Alas, abysmal thought that is my thought! When shall I find the strength to hear you boring and no longer tremble? My heart rises to my throat when I hear you boring! Even your silence threatens to choke me, you abysmal, silent thought!²

Nietzsche does not delineate a formula for self-overcoming, this would be nothing more than the creation of a new dogma to supplant the

¹ Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:18.
² Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:3.
old. However, Nietzsche offers several important points concerning the problems underlying the project of self-overcoming that must be addressed by individuals.

First, it is necessary to recognize that individuals begin as socially-created beings. "Peoples were the creators at first; only later were individuals creators. Indeed, the individual himself is still the latest creation." For Nietzsche, the herd creature is not properly an individual, rather part of a group identity. As seen in his discussion of nausea, it is only through the confrontation with finitude that the individual is created, and even then this process is far from certain. Society actively seeks to repress individuation, as this necessarily frustrates group identities and threatens the stability of the herd: "Joy in the herd is older than joy in the Ego: and as long as the good conscience is called herd, only the bad conscience says: "I". Truly, the cunning, loveless Ego . . . that is not the origin of the herd, but the herd's destruction."

Nietzsche argues that these herd creatures are not true individuals; indeed this social creature is not properly human: "is there not still lacking—humanity itself?" Individuals within the social matrix have repressed their will-to-power to such an extent that they have become the

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3 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, I:15.
4 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, I:15.
5 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, I:15.
perfect expressions of bad conscience and self-loathing. Unable to express
their own inclinations and overcome themselves, they fall too easily into the
traps examined earlier:

These are the dreadful creatures who carry a beast of prey around
within them, and have no choice except lusts or self-mortification. . . .
They have not yet even become men, these dreadful creatures. . . .
These are the consumptives of the soul: they are hardly born before
they begin to die and to long for doctrines of weariness and
renunciation.6

It is the pitiful state of humanity that causes Nietzsche to condemn
mass society in the strongest possible terms: "the earth . . . has a skin: and
this skin has diseases. One of these diseases, for example, is called 'Man'."7
Nietzsche's main complaint is that people within collective existence
become intellectually lazy and refuse to ask questions concerning their own
existential and ontological status. Without provocation, it never even occurs
to herd individuals to ask whether they have achieved their potential:

Have you ever spoken thus? Have you ever cried thus? Ah, had I
only heard you crying thus! It is not your sin, but your moderation
that cries to heaven, your very meanness in sinning cries to heaven!
Where is the lightning to lick you with its tongue? Where is the
madness, with which you should be cleansed? Behold, I teach you
the Übermensch: he is this lightning, he is this madness!8

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6 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:9.
7 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:18.
8 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §3. Lightning and madness are metaphors for Dionysian ecstasy.
Nietzsche’s positive theory as contained in *Zarathustra* is an attempt to delineate the conditions necessary for this transformation of herd creature to self-creating individual. Nietzsche, however, does not articulate this in terms of a political theory of collective existence. It is also clear that Nietzsche does not call for a new ethics in the classical sense of a method of living with others. Indeed, he explicitly recognizes that all ethical systems are no more than sets of rationalizations for the mediocrity of mass culture.

Nietzsche’s call is to the individual to create a new aesthetic ethics based upon resistance to these social norms and centering upon self-overcoming. Nietzsche’s aesthetic ethics is therefore necessarily revolutionary and individualistic. In order for this process to begin, Nietzsche argues that it is necessary to retreat into solitude so as to overcome the socially-created elements within the self.

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This call to solitude is not easily accepted by the collective.9 For a society grounded in normalization and group identity, separation represents the ultimate rebellion against authority. “He who seeks may easily get lost

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9 Indeed, Nietzsche emphasizes in his reevaluation of *Zarathustra* that the turn to solitude is the most important theme of this work. “My whole *Zarathustra* is a dithyramb on solitude or, if I have been understood, on *cleanliness*. — Fortunately not on *pure foolishness*. — Those who have eyes for colors will compare it to a diamond. — *Nausea* over man, over the ‘rabble,’ was always my greatest danger. — Do you want to hear the words in which *Zarathustra* speaks of the redemption from nausea?” Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 1:8.
himself. It is a crime to go apart and be alone”—thus speaks the herd.”

Indeed, group identities are so ingrained that the individual who actively seeks to separate from the herd experiences feelings of guilt. "The voice of the herd will still ring within you. And when you say: 'We have no longer the same conscience, you and I', it will be a lament and a grief. For see, it is still this same conscience that causes your grief: and the last glimmer of this conscience still glows in your affliction." However, once nausea is confronted the act of separation becomes a necessity, as the individual realizes that adhering to a morality and political state that causes the self to wither away is in the individual's worst interest.

The individual must begin the process of self-exploration, necessarily a dangerous task. Because of the inevitable power relations that form in any collective context, Nietzsche emphasizes that this project can only begin in solitude. Furthermore, Nietzsche emphasizes that it is only in solitude that nausea can ultimately be overcome without backsliding into metaphysical solace. "How did I free myself from nausea? . . . Did my nausea itself create wings and water-divining powers for me? Truly, I had to fly to the most

10 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:17.

11 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:17.

12 "Instinctively to choose what is harmful for oneself, to feel attracted by 'disinterested' motives, that is virtually the formula of Dekadenz." Nietzsche, The Twilight of the Idols, 9:35.
extreme height to find again the fountain of delight! ... And here there is
life at which no rabble drinks with me!"13

The separation of the individual from society is therefore the first
step towards self-overcoming. It is the socially-created parts of the self that
must be overcome first, as these are inculcated from the cradle and
reinforced by the institutions of collective existence. Because of this, the
individual is unknown even to himself:

And truly, to learn to love oneself is no commandment for today or
tomorrow. Rather is this art the finest, subtlest, ultimate, and most
patient of all. For all his possessions are well concealed from the
possessor; and of all treasure pits, one's own is the last to be dug. . . .
Almost in the cradle we are presented with heavy words and values:
this dowry calls itself "good" and "evil". For its sake we are forgiven
for being alive.14

It is necessary for the individual to seek solitude to differentiate the
elements of the consciousness that are socially-created repressive
mechanisms from the healthy instincts and drives that constitute the
genuine self. In essence, the individual must deconstruct the self to reveal
the multiple and conflicting identities that constitute the consciousness.
Nietzsche emphasizes that this process is not a reactive one, but is instead a
creative process arising from the vacuum left by the overcoming of nausea
and the need for a self-actuated identity.

13 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:6.

14 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:11.
You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame: how could you become new, if you had not first become ashes? Solitary man, you are going the way of your creator: you want to create yourself a god from your seven devils! Solitary man, you are going the way of the lover: you love yourself and for that reason you despise yourself as only lovers can despise. The lover wants to create, because he despises.\textsuperscript{15}

Nietzsche argues that the movement into solitude represents no less than the return to the care for the self. In \textit{Zarathustra}, Nietzsche treats solitude as a companion, which was abandoned and must be regained. The return to solitude is an existential necessity for the exceptional individual.

O solitude! Solitude, my home. . . . Now shake your finger at me as mothers do, now smile at me as mothers smile, now say . . . “Who departing cried: I have sat too long with Solitude, I have unlearned how to be silent! You have surely learned that—now? O Zarathustra, I know all: and that you were lonelier among the crowd, you solitary, than you ever were with me . . . loneliness is one thing, solitude another.”\textsuperscript{16}

Unlike the noise found in collective existence, solitude and reflection upon the self allows for uncontaminated insight. “Solitude, my home! How blissfully and tenderly does your voice speak to me! We do not question one another, we do not complain to one another, we go together through open doors. For with you all is open and clear; and here even the hours run on lighter feet.”\textsuperscript{17} Paradoxically, Nietzsche’s greatest ethical imperative is that in order for the individual to reach his potential, it is necessary to be

\textsuperscript{15} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, I:17.


\textsuperscript{17} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, III:9.
existentially self-sufficient. "Go apart and be alone with your love and your creating." 18

Solitude and self-reflection lead to the only valid philosophical insight available: the internal manifestations of the will-to-power as it is constantly interpreted by and within the individual self. The internal conversation of these manifestations lead to a healthy understanding of individual existence in all of its mutability. Nietzsche emphasizes that this type of knowledge can only be gained outside of a collective context. "Here [in solitude], the words and word-chests of all existence spring open to me: all existence here wants to become words, all becoming here wants to learn speech from me. Down there, however—all speech is in vain! There best wisdom is to forget and pass by." 19 Solitude therefore represents the best environment for the individual to seek knowledge of the self. "So let us live above them like strong winds, neighbors of eagles... neighbors of the sun: that is how strong winds live." 20

Solitude calls for a great degree of self-direction, and is not to be undertaken by the faint of heart. "I make for my own goal, I go my way; I

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18 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:17.

19 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:9.

20 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:6.

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shall leap over the hesitating and the indolent."²¹ The individual must have a deep commitment to self-overcoming, as it necessarily entails isolation and suffering. "But do you want to go the way to your affliction, which is the way to yourself? If so, show me your strength for it and your right to it! Are you a new strength and a new right? A first motion? A self-propelling wheel? Can you also compel stars to revolve around you?"²²

The exigencies of solitude dictate a new ethics centered on the self. Indeed, Nietzsche argues that the care for the self is to be the new goal for human life, beyond any other concerns. "Ah, my friends! That your Self be in the action, as the mother is in the child: let that be your maxim of virtue!"²³ However it begins, self-overcoming is a protean task, without prototype. It is also necessarily a process, not an event. As Nietzsche writes, "this, however, is my teaching: He who wants to learn to fly one day must first learn to stand and to walk and to run and to climb and to dance—you cannot learn to fly by flying."²⁴ Self-overcoming is not a process that can be defined or described as it arises from essentially unique internal experiences and the individual manifestations of the will-to-power. However, Nietzsche


²³ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II:5.

consistently argues that the diverse paths to self-overcoming can only be realized apart from others, who merely cloud perspectives:

I came to my truth by diverse paths and in diverse ways: it was not upon a single ladder that I climbed to the height where my eyes survey my distances. And I have asked the way only unwillingly—that has always offended my taste! I have rather questioned and attempted the ways themselves. All my progress has been an attempting and a questioning—and truly, one has to learn how to answer such questioning!25

The return to solitude, therefore, represents the full-circle of Zarathustra's journey. With nausea confronted and solitude regained, the process of self-overcoming can now begin in earnest. Nietzsche's language echoes that of the beginning of the narrative, in which Zarathustra goes down to men. After the confrontation with nausea, Zarathustra realizes that he must do down into himself. "I stand before my highest mountain and my longest wandering: therefore I must first descend deeper than I have ever descended—deeper into pain than I have ever descended, down to its blackest stream!"26 This type of self-examination is inimical to social existence, which seeks to impose socially-sanctioned identities on individuals and suppresses the desire to question and explore. The individual must revalue his interpretation of existence to affirm the self.

25 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:11.

26 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:1. In order to progress further, Zarathustra must delve further into his unconscious self.
rather than to repress individual identity. This calls for a degree of focus that can only occur outside of the distraction of others:

One must learn to love oneself with a sound and healthy love, so that one may endure it with oneself and not go roaming about—thus do I teach. Such roaming about calls itself "love of one's neighbor": these words have been up to now the best for lying and dissembling, and especially for those who were oppressive to everybody.27

Nietzsche does not deny the difficulty of separation and the pain of self-examination. Indeed, Zarathustra affirms that the critique of the self is much more excruciating than the critiques of collective existence. Nevertheless, the exceptional individual must embrace this pain as leading to the possibility of the transmuted self that is the ultimate goal of self-overcoming. "Alas, I have to climb my most difficult path! Alas, I have started upon my loneliest wandering! But a man of my sort does not avoid such an hour: the hour that says to him: 'Only now so you tread your path of greatness! Summit and abyss— they are now united in one!'"28

Nietzsche's description of the return to solitude emphasizes patience. The individual, long oppressed by external forces, must await the return of the authentic self. "Truly, I too have learned to wait, I have learned it from the very heart, but only to wait for myself. And above all I have learned to stand and to walk and to run and to jump and to climb and to dance."29

27 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:11.
28 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:1.
29 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:11.
Essentially, the return to solitude is the return to the self, finally free of collective identities and external mechanisms of repression. "It is returning, at last it is coming home to me—my own Self and those parts of it that have long been abroad and scattered among all things and accidents. . . . I stand now before my last summit and before the deed that has been deferred the longest."  

Is this not the type of solipsism of which Nietzsche is always accused? Nietzsche has Zarathustra return to his cave, a reversal of Plato's cave myth and an implicit critique of Plato's Republic. For Zarathustra, truth is found inside of the cave, not outside. Furthermore, the philosopher does not return into the cave to educate others to the truth; he flees others in order to avoid their pollution of his own truth. Zarathustra reflects upon his time with men in terms of disgust: "I sat among them disguised, ready to misunderstand myself so that I might endure them, and glad to tell myself: 'You fool, you do not know men'."  

For Nietzsche, one should not come to know men; this is an avoidance of the task at hand. The rabble, not possessing their own authentic identities, represent only a semblance of humanity. As such, the seeking individual is forced to mask himself against the ressentiment of the masses. "And do I not have to hide myself, like one

30 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:1.
31 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:9.
who has swallowed gold, so that my soul shall not be slit open? Do I not have to wear stilts, so that they may not notice my long legs—all these envious and injurious people around me?”

It is telling that Nietzsche consistently uses the language of ascent when referring to solitude, as the removal of the Other is the beginning of self-overcoming and the creation of an authentic selfhood. “When I am aloft, I always find myself alone. No one speaks to me, the frost of solitude makes me tremble.” The descent to men represents Zarathustra’s error, which is redeemed through his return to solitude. Nietzsche concludes that it is only in solitude that the individual can begin the process of organizing the self along the lines of the will-to-power. However, it is necessary to examine the individual’s motive for seeking solitude. It must not be a retreat, but rather an active and positive decision. “For one person, solitude is the escape of an invalid; for another, solitude is escape from the invalids.” However this process of self-overcoming begins, Nietzsche is imperative that it must take place. “There are diverse paths and ways to overcoming; just look to it!” The reason that it is so imperative that the individual seek solitude is to become free of the noise of others, so as to

33 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:8.
34 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:6.
35 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:12.4.
listen to the voices of the self: "Life wants to raise itself on high with pillars and steps; it wants to gaze into the far distance and out upon joyful splendor—\textit{that is why it needs height}. . . Life wants to climb and in climbing overcome itself."\textsuperscript{36}

II.

Through the call to solitude, Nietzsche urges that the individual must revalue the will-to-truth as the will-to-self. Both of these are manifestations of the will-to-power, but they are antithetical. The will-to-truth is a repressive societal impulse, while the will-to-self is a validation of the individual self as the signifier of authentic identity. Nietzsche argues that the view of the self as a discrete subject is a dangerous philosophical error that arises from an interpretation of the individual consciousness distorted by a prejudice towards consistency. The will-to-truth, representative of the impulse to concretize reality, has extended to the analysis of the individual, implying a stability to the human psyche. However, Nietzsche's concept of the will runs counter to this traditional view. Haar notes:

\textit{What the individual calls his \textquoteleft\textquoteleft will\textquoteright\textquoteright\ is a plurality of instincts and impulses in constant battle with one another to gain the upper hand. . . what language designates by the word \textquoteleft\textquoteleft will\textquoteright\textquoteright\ is in reality only a complex and belated feeling, which accompanies the victory of one impulse over others, or the translation into conscious terms of the temporary state of equilibrium that has obtained among the competing impulses.}\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, II:7.

\textsuperscript{37} Haar, \textit{Nietzsche and Metaphysics}, 6-7.
The will, as the primary constituent of the human self, cannot be understood as an element of a stable consciousness. This is because the will is active; it is constantly extended to both the internal and external realms. As such, it defies the stability imputed to it by traditional philosophical and psychological theories. The will is not quantifiable; it is the essence of change. For Nietzsche, therefore, freedom is understood as the act of willing.

All feeling suffers in me and is in prison: but my willing always comes to me as my liberator and bringer of joy. Willing liberates: that is the true doctrine of will and freedom. . . . In knowing and understanding, too, I feel only my will's delight in begetting and becoming; and if there be innocence in my knowledge it is because will to begetting is in it.38

The will is the essence of activity and the opposite of reaction.

"Willing liberates: for willing is creating: thus I teach. And you should learn only for creating!"39 Freedom is therefore creation, understood as an act of will. The very essence of creation is change, and the self must necessarily be understood as under perpetual transformation. In this sense, it is impossible to speak of the self as a discrete subject or identifiable identity.

Self-overcoming, in its most fundamental sense, is the recognition that there is no self; rather what we falsely identify as the discrete self is a

38 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:2.

39 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:12.16.
constant flux of impulses, perspectives, and interpretations. The desire for
stability within the self is the last vestige and the most fundamental
manifestation of the impulse toward concretization, as has become
evidenced by the victory of the will-to-truth. Nietzsche calls for self-
overcoming in the sense of the return to a healthy interpretation as the self
as the site for creation through the exercise of the will-to-power.40

Individuals liberated from the tyranny of morality and custom
through the realization of solitude must resist the impulse to stability. The
will is necessarily mutable, and this fickleness must be accepted and
embraced. Indeed, the desire to concretize the self as a fixed identity is the
symptom of a reactive herd mentality. Morrison notes, "the real battle for
power is within the individual. As Nietzsche says man is a war, which is a
'war within oneself', and the basic weapons in this war are "self-control

40 "Selbstüberwindung" or 'self-overcoming' is related to Nietzsche's other notions of
Sublimierung or 'sublimation', Vergeistigung or 'spiritualization' and Selbstauhebung-Aufhebung being a term that defies translation by a single English word: as Kaufmann
observes, Nietzsche uses it with its Hegelian sense in mind of a dialectical process involving
'a simultaneous preserving, canceling, and lifting up.' However, in Nietzsche's usage the
lifting-up is not necessarily to something higher. Unlike Hegel's Geist, whose dialectical
movement is progressive and hierarchical, Nietzsche's basic force, the will to power—at
least when human consciousness enters the process—can degenerate: man has evolved
from the ape, but may also degenerate back into the ape." "Nietzsche says that the 'task of
wakefulness itself', and that to this end the practices of self-observation and 'Learning to
see' would be necessary foundations. . . . What Nietzsche calls his 'immediate urgent task',
is the task of applying self-observation as a means of developing a measured and sustained
critical awareness of what is actually happening within and without, as well as being a
means of restraining and overcoming the unruly passion, such as 'wrath . . . choler . . .
revengefulness . . . lusts', in order to 'prevent their becoming devastating torrents.' It is
only then that one can 'sow the seeds of good spiritual works in the soil of the subdued
passions.'" Morrison, Nietzsche and Buddhism, 157-158.
[and] self-outwitting.""\textsuperscript{41} Self-overcoming thus entails a recognition of the plurality of the consciousness and the futility of either finding or creating a stable ego.

The existence of disparate elements within the self has been recognized since Plato. However, the method by which these elements are ordered or integrated has greatly differed. The ancient view of the self, typified by Plato and Aristotle, emphasized the existence of rational and irrational elements within the soul. These elements were organized by the faculty of reason. The Christian model emphasized the incomplete nature of the self, and relied upon the intervention of the divine to order the self correctly and prevent the rule of sinful impulses. The Enlightenment attempted to synthesize these models into a model of reasoned self-interest, in which humans were seen as flawed in their selfish behavior, but ultimately capable of redemption through the correct application of reason and positive law.

All of these schemes call for the destruction of the individual will through the release of the self to either divine will or perfect reason. The self is seen as somehow flawed as it resists stability and defies order. For Nietzsche, the denial of the unstable nature of the self is actually a denial of the only stable element of human nature: change. This leads to repression of

\textsuperscript{41} Morrison, \textit{Nietzsche and Buddhism}, 171.
perfectly natural elements of the consciousness that are inimical to order
and reason. The “irrational” parts of the self are repressed rather than being
confronted and understood for what they are. In addition, the will is seen as
suspect, as it is not innately rational and proceeds under the auspices of self-
actuation rather than on behalf of reason or divine imperatives. Because the
self is surrendered to the control of an outside signifier, this is not an
authentic interpretation of selfhood. “Good men never tell the truth; to be
good in that way is a sickness of spirit. They yield, these good men, they
acquiesce, their hearts imitate, they obey from the heart: but he who obeys
does not listen to himself.” An authentic perspective of the self does not
give in to these external signifiers to alleviate the anxiety that arises from the
realization of the unstable self. It is necessary to resist the urge to concretize
the self and to recognize this impulse for the escapism that it represents:

Genuine—that is what I call him who goes into godforsaken deserts
and has broken his venerating heart. In the yellow sand and burned
by the sun, perhaps he blinks thirstily at the islands filled with
springs where living creatures rest beneath shady trees. But his thirst
does not persuade him to become like these comfortable creatures: for
where there are oases there are also idols.

For Nietzsche, elements are not automatically privileged, but are
ranked through experimentation and the aesthetic sense. The creation of

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42 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:12.7.
43 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:8.
the self is the ultimate expression of action, and it is to be undertaken from a position of strength. As Morrison notes:

Nietzsche concludes that: “the wish to preserve oneself is a condition of distress” and those motivated by such are, according to his premise, the “weak” not the “strong”. Nietzsche’s “strong” — the “lucky hits”, “geniuses”, etc. — are always singular and rare and embody a fuller expression of his notion of life than those who surround them. They are the “sovereign individuals . . . liberated . . . from the morality of custom” [i.e. the group’s mores], who are “autonomous” and “independent” and who “aspire after a secret citadel where [they are] . . . set free from the crowd, the many, the majority”. For them life itself is art: they are both artist and the work of art.  

The parts of the consciousness are ultimately ordered through the will; However in keeping with this aesthetic sense this ordering is not necessarily consistent. “Every soul is a world of its own . . . appearance lies most beautifully among the most alike; for the smallest gap is the most difficult to bridge. For me—how could there be an outside-of-me? There is no outside!” Nietzsche therefore offers the view that the individual consciousness is the site of “reality,” not an independent reason or a concrete world. Nietzsche argues that all of reality is interpretation, including the internal self. Therefore, one cannot become complacent with the self; it must be remade constantly or the individual will succumb to stagnation and Dekadenz.

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44 Morrison, Nietzsche and Buddhism, 85.

45 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, III:13.2
But you behave in all things in too familiar a way with the spirit; and you have made of wisdom a poorhouse and hospital for bad poets. You are no eagles: so neither do you know the spirit's joy in terror. And he who is not a bird shall not make his home above abysses.46

Zarathustra withdraws from humanity in order to accomplish this reevaluation and reinterpretation of the self. Away from distractions that tend to pigeonhole the individual, it is possible to analyze the most essential characteristic of the creative personality, the will. "So that no one might see down into my profundity and ultimate will—that is why I devised my long, luminous silence."47 Nietzsche's ethical project is centered upon redeeming the will from a reactive enslavement to custom and morality into an affirmative will arising from an aesthetic ethos of creation. "To redeem that past of mankind and to transform every 'it was', until the will says: 'But I willed it thus! So shall I will it'—this did I call redemption."48

The creative individual must realign the will according to the goal of self-overcoming and self-interpretation, entailing a great deal of psychic pain. "This is the will of those of noble soul: they desire nothing gratis, least of all life. He who is of the mob wants to live gratis; we others, however, to whom life has given itself—we are always considering what we can give life

46 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:8.
48 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:123.
This partially arises from the fact that the self must be continuously overcome, there is no end to this project. The desire for an endpoint to self-overcoming is a symptom of *Dekadenz*. “Oh my Will! My essential, my necessity, dispeller of need! Preserve me from all petty victories!”\(^\text{50}\) It is necessary for the individual to acknowledge the ultimate impossibility of complete self-overcoming. This allows the individual to escape the trap of *ressentiment* against the self through regret and grief over lost time:

Willing liberates: but what is it that fastens in fetters even the liberator? “It was”: that is what the will’s teeth-gnashing and most lonely affliction is called. Powerless against that which has been done, the will is an angry spectator of all things past. The will cannot will backwards; that it cannot break time and time’s desire—that is the will’s most lonely affliction.\(^\text{51}\)

Nietzsche argues that will-to-power is the essential characteristic of all living existence. “Only where life is, there is also will: not will-to-life, but ... will-to-power! The living creature values many things higher than life itself; yet out of this evaluation itself speaks — the will-to-power!”\(^\text{52}\)

However, individuals are ranked by Nietzsche according to the purpose for which they employ the will, and to what conscious effect. It is true that the

\(^{49}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III:12.5.

\(^{50}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III:12.30.


\(^{52}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II:12.
individual is largely a prisoner of factors beyond its control; it is socially-created and historically defined. Nietzsche is not naïve enough to argue that all societal mechanisms can be overcome. However, the individual is able to become conscious of the primacy of the will and act accordingly.

I know how to speak the parable of the highest things only in the dance—and now my greatest parable has remained in my limbs unspoken! My highest hope has remained unspoken and unachieved! And all the visions and consolations of my youth are dead! How did I endure it? How did I recover from such wounds, how did I overcome them? How did my soul arise again from these graves? Yes, something invulnerable, unburiable is within me, something that rends rocks: it is called my Will. Silently it steps unchanging through the years. It shall go its course upon my feet, my old Will; hard of heart and invulnerable is its temper.53

The primacy of the will is therefore the most fundamental necessity for self-overcoming. Through the emphasis upon the individual will, Nietzsche argues that the individual will be able to resist normalizing mechanisms, as these are recognized as external and contrived. "Yes, you are still my destroyer of graves: Hail, my Will! And only where there are graves are there resurrections."54 In this sense, the will acts as a counter-agent to repression and offers a healthier mode for interpreting the world:

Will to the conceivable of being: that is what I call your will! You first want to make all being conceivable: for, with a healthy mistrust, you doubt whether it is in fact conceivable. But it must bend and accommodate itself to you! Thus will your will have it. It must become smooth and subject to your mind as the mind's mirror and reflection. That is your entire will, you wisest men; it is a will-to-


54 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II:11.
power; and that is so even when you talk of good and evil and of the assessment of values.\(^{55}\)

One of the most destructive impulses in humanity is the desire for comfort and freedom from doubt, related to the desire for stability. The exceptional individual, consciously willing self-overcoming, must move beyond this impulse towards confrontation with discomfort and tragedy. “For enjoyment and innocence are the most modest things: neither want to be looked for. Once should have them—but one should look rather for guilt and pain!”\(^{56}\) Through the realignment of the self around the will-to-power, the principle of multiplicity is affirmed. This sets the stage for the transmutation of the self from the contemplation of its essential fluidity.

“Truly, like the sun do I love life and all deep seas. And this I call knowledge: all that is deep shall rise up—to my height!”\(^{57}\)

Self-overcoming under the auspices of the will-to-power is without doubt a radical departure from traditional theories of selfhood. Nietzsche can be criticized for advocating this radical project without providing any clear-cut directives or even the semblance of a goal. However, Nietzsche goes on to propose a theory of self-creation that reemphasizes the essential fluidity of the self while offering an interpretive frame to guide the

\(^{55}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II:12.

\(^{56}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III:125.

\(^{57}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II:15.
individual. Following Nietzsche's interpretive philosophy, this theory centers on the aesthetic manifestation of the will-to-power. "Have you never seen a sail faring over the sea, rounded and swelling and shuddering before the impetuosity of the wind? Like a sail, shuddering before the impetuosity of the spirit, my wisdom fares over the sea—my untamed wisdom!"\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, II:8.}

III

Because creation is inherent in both self-overcoming and self-creation, the authentic self is an aesthetic interpretation of the will-to-power as manifested in the individual. Since the will-to-power is the most fundamental facet of human existence, Nietzsche's theory of the self calls for an active reinterpretation of the competing drives within the self while maintaining its plurality. Schutte notes:

Nietzsche's idea of self-overcoming is aesthetic rather than moral. It sees the drive for perfection as a drive toward integration and wholeness, not as a moralistic and judgmental effort to be perfect in order to accumulate rewards for oneself or to acquire power for oneself to reward or punish others.\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{Zarathustra}, II:8.}

The complicated notion of the self as an autocreated work of art will be the subject of the next chapter. However, it is first necessary to connect Nietzsche's concept of the will-to-power with aesthetic interpretation. First, Nietzsche praises all forms of artistic expression as creative acts of will. The
will channels formlessness into a precisely willed constellation which is the active expression of the consciousness. Camus argues: "Nietzsche's message is summed up in the word *creation*, with the ambiguous meaning it has assumed. . . . The transmutation of values consists only in replacing critical values by creative values."60 As such, artistic expression is a direct manifestation of the will-to-power. The product of art, and indeed of any creative action, is therefore a manifestation of the will-to-power. Nietzsche writes: "Where is beauty? Where I have to will with all my will; where I want to love and perish, that an image may not remain merely an image."61

Secondly, Nietzsche views artistic creation as indicative of the struggle fundamental to all existence. The act of creation is one that is necessarily destructive. "A change in values—that means a change in the creators of values. He who has to be a creator always has to destroy."62 Creation is essentially revaluation, the universe is reinterpreted according to the individual’s expression of will. "Evaluation is creation: hear it, you creative men! Valuating is itself the value and jewel of all valued things. Only through evaluation is there value: and without evaluation the nut of

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50 Ofelia Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks*, 34.


existence would be hollow.”

Because of the destructiveness inherent in creation, it is a dangerous act; but as Nietzsche argues, “all creators, however, are hard.” All of existence is therefore a continuous struggle of interpretation and reinterpretation of the will-to-power.

There is battle and inequality and war for power and predominance even in beauty.... How divinely vault and arch here oppose one another in the struggle: how they strive against one another with light and shadow, these divinely-striving things.

Therefore, the act of self-interpretation is the ultimate expression of the will-to-power. This necessarily entails the readiness to destroy parts of the self. However, this is not nihilism or the escapism inherent in “afterworldly” religions and philosophies. The ego is not to be annihilated, but to be constantly reformed according to the exigencies of the will.

“Loving and perishing: these have gone together from eternity. Will to love: that means to be willing to die, too. Thus I speak to cowards!” The reinterpretation of the self is therefore an affirmative act, as it acknowledges the centrality of the will-to-power. Deleuze notes: “Affirmation remains as the sole quality of the will to power, action as the sole quality of force,

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63 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:15.

64 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:3.

65 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:7.

66 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:15.
becoming-active as the creative identity of power and willing.”67 Nietzsche emphasizes that it is only through creation that life is imbued with meaning: “Creation—that is the great redemption from suffering, and life’s easement. But that the creator may exist, that itself requires suffering and much transformation . . . thus you are advocates and justifiers of all transitoriness.”68 Deleuze notes:

Being is not the object of affirmation, any more than it is an element which would present itself, which would give itself over to affirmation. Affirmation is not the power of being, on the contrary. Affirmation itself is being, being is solely affirmation in all its power. . . . Being and nothingness are merely the abstract expression of affirmation and negation as qualities of the will to power.69

By centering upon the self, Nietzsche further dissipates the hold of external moral and ethical standards and sets the stage for a comprehensive revaluation of selfhood. “When you are willers of a single will, and you call this dispeller of need your essence and necessity: that is when your virtue has its beginning.”70 Because these external signifiers repress the expression of the will, the self is unable to satisfy the imperative of the will-to-power.

The creative Self created for itself esteem and disesteem, it created for itself joy and sorrow. The creative body created spirit for itself, as a hand of its will. Even in your folly and contempt, you despisers of

67 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 198.

68 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:2.

69 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 186.

70 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:22.1. Thus, integration of the self is the new virtue, the new ruling principle of the self: unifying the symbols of the sun and the serpent. This leads to the discussion of “noon.”
the body, you serve your Self. I tell you: your Self itself wants to die and turn away from life. Your Self can no longer perform that act which it most desires to perform: to create beyond itself.71

However, it is impossible to overcome the socially-created portions of the self easily. It is one thing for Nietzsche to criticize the inauthentic expression of the will-to-power; it is a completely different matter to elaborate the process for self-overcoming. As it has been demonstrated, Nietzsche only hints at the specifics of the process for self-overcoming in the most general terms. It is possible to criticize Nietzsche for this, perhaps even stating that he has no concrete notion of how the self is to be overcome; perhaps this entire project is rhetorical. However, Nietzsche does offer some very concrete advice for self-overcoming, couched in his admiration for creative action and respect for multiplicity. It is not, however, in the manner of a positive political or psychological theory.

Rather, Nietzsche's ethical stance is highly subjective and transgressional. Traditional ethics, insofar as it is an encoded and fixed system that operates independently of the individual, is nothing less than the repudiation of the validity of individual existence and experience. As Haar notes:

From a genealogical point of view, it appears that ethical systems can only be defined univocally, in purely negative and pejorative terms: moral consciousness and its ideals are analyzed and unmasked as

71 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I.4. The despisers of the body, by betraying their own creative self in favor of the “ego,” have sealed their mediocrity.
inventions of ressentiment. But what does ressentiment mean if not hatred, condemnation, depreciation of "life"? In other words, ethical systems derive from a weak and impotent Will to Power reacting against the most affirmative impulses and favoring negation and destruction . . . it serves the purpose of a defensive wall, of a systematic protection against the unrelenting impulses of sex, egoism (every ethic being a disdain for the self, a rejection of the self Enstelbstung), aggression, cruelty, etc. 72

Nietzsche seeks to revalue the idea of ethics to one that is reflective of his emphasis upon the condition of the individual ego. Indeed, this project is foreshadowed in the prologue to Zarathustra: "Mankind is something that must be overcome. . . . All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves: and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man?" 73

The ethical actor in the Nietzschean sense is one who takes as the object of ethical action his own self. Because of the lack of a template, this can only take the form of experimentation. The individual, the searching experimenter, must resist social norms and transgress against custom. 74 Everything is called into question, although this does not mean that everything is bad or must be discarded. Rather, everything about the self must be questioned. Freedom through creation must be maintained, and

72 Haar, Nietzsche and Metaphysics, 17.

73 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §3.

74 "The term 'Versuchet', which occasionally appears in Nietzsche's texts, has the double meaning of 'experimenter' and 'tempter.' Every creator is at once someone who tempts others and who experiments on (tempts) himself and others in order to create something
this means that there can be no conclusion to the experimental interpretation of the self. The Nietzschean ethical imperative may mirror the Delphic “become who you are,” but it goes much further. It is also necessary to “overcome what you have become,” again and again.

Now that there is no goal for all, “an experimental morality is called for: setting one’s self a goal.” What is meant is “a substitute for morality through the will to our goal and consequently to the means to this goal.” It is the substance of the future that is to become free: “They will call you the destroyers of morality, but you are really only the finders of yourselves.”

This is no hit-or-miss experimentation. Self-overcoming is not a project to be taken lightly or handled carelessly. Nietzsche emphasizes that it is the epistemological necessity of the will to overcome itself, even calling likening it to the destiny of individual existence. “Truly, I have gone my way through a hundred souls and through a hundred cradles and birth-pangs. I have taken many departures, I know the heart-breaking last hours. But my creative will, my destiny, wants it so.” This experimentation is a direct reflection of Nietzsche’s view of both the individual and the universe. Deleuze notes: “We affirm chance and the necessity of chance; becoming

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that does not yet exist: a set of forces capable of acting upon and modifying that which exists.” Klossowski, Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle, 127.

75 Jaspers, Nietzsche, 158.

76 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:2.
and the being of becoming; multiplicity and the unity of multiplicity.....

Difference reflects itself and repeats or reproduces itself."\(^77\)

Nietzsche does not deny that aesthetic ethics are certainly fraught with difficulty. The affirmation of chance and flux has profound psychological impact. The lack of stability is disconcerting, even though it represents the ultimate expression of freedom in the Nietzschean sense.\(^78\) There is no form to which to aspire, although Nietzsche strives to include even the most mundane elements in the process of aesthetic self-overcoming. If aesthetic ethics are to be successful, even those elements of the self which were endemic or artificial must be re-willed into existence, creating the image of an internal harmony. As Klossowski argues, "Zarathustra’s remedy is to re-will the non-willed, inasmuch as he desires to assume the accomplished fact himself, thereby rendering it unaccomplished by re-willing it innumerable times."\(^79\) As Nietzsche writes, "truly, like the sun do I love life and all deep seas. And this I call knowledge: all that is

\(^{77}\) Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 197.

\(^{78}\) "In this world rid of God and of moral idols, man is now alone and without a master. No one has been less inclined that Nietzsche (and in this way he distinguishes himself from the romantics) to let it be believed that such freedom would be easy. This complete liberation put him among the ranks of those of whom he himself said that they suffered a new form of anguish and a new form of happiness." Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, 70.

deep shall rise up—to my height! Integrating the elements of the self is the only goal in Nietzschean aesthetic ethics:

Ah, you men, I see an image sleeping in the stone, the image of my visions! Ah, that it must sleep in the hardest, ugliest stone! Now my hammer rages fiercely against its prison. Fragments fly from the stone: what is it to me? I will complete it: for a shadow came to me—the most silent, the lightest of all dungs came at once to me! The beauty of the Übermensch came to me as a shadow. Ah, my brothers! What are the gods to me now?

Deleuze and Guattari argue: “Creations are like mutant abstract lines that have detached themselves from the task of representing a world, precisely because they assemble a new type of reality that history can only recontain or relocate in punctual systems.” The implication of this argument is that autocreation is a fragile process that can be derailed by any number of factors. It can therefore not occur within a social context. “But, by my love and hope I entreat you: do not reject the hero in your soul! Keep holy your highest hope!” Nietzsche therefore argues that it is necessary to reject those institutions and forms that are not created. For Nietzsche, such forms as the state and society are not valid because they are not aesthetic; they have not been created by the individual. Mass culture is inherited by

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80 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:15.
81 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:2.
82 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 296.
83 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:8.

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others and thus is not dynamic and tends toward stagnation. Indeed, the
state and the weakened man it produces saps the strength of the individual:

Nothing is beautiful, except man alone: all aesthetics rests upon this
naivete, which is its *first* truth. Let us immediately add the second:
nothing is ugly except the degenerating man—and with this the
realm of aesthetic judgement is circumscribed. Physiologically,
everything ugly weakens and saddens man. It reminds him of decay,
danger, impotence; it actually deprives him of strength.\(^{84}\)

Nietzsche’s aesthetic ethics is designed to return to the care for the
self that has become neglected in modern society. Rather than offering a
concrete model for self-overcoming, Nietzsche delineates the conditions
under which this process may become possible. Through the
reinterpretation of the self under the auspices of the will-to-power,
Nietzsche opens up the possibility of the transmuted self.

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CHAPTER VII

METAMORPHOSIS: THE TRANSMUTED SELF

This dissertation has argued thus far against a concretization of Nietzsche's philosophy and political thought. Nevertheless, Nietzsche certainly envisions some kind of personal transformation as the goal of his philosophy of self-overcoming. This is the meaning of the symbol of the Übermensch. However, it is necessary to examine the Übermensch as a psychological mode rather than as the traditional notion of an ideal type. The Übermensch represents an attitude towards life as encompassed in the overcoming of nausea and the acceptance of the task of self-overcoming; innately opposed to the idea of patterning one's life after a set of commandments. As such, Nietzsche's task of personal creation cannot be delineated in terms of essential traits or specific manifestations, in keeping with the argument thus far. Nietzsche's philosophy of the self is therefore inconsistent and nebulous by design. To paraphrase The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche is "superficial out of his profundity." The individual must seek transmutation on his own, not as the follower of another.

Nietzsche's invitation to this task is found in the pivotal section of Zarathustra "The Vision and the Riddle." The vision is an invitation to embrace the void left after the overcoming of nausea. "I saw a young

\[1\] "Full life-expression is a matter of physiological and spiritual endowment." Babich, Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science, 277.
shepherd . . . and a heavy, black snake was hanging out of his mouth. Had I ever seen so much disgust and pallid horror on a face? . . . Then a voice cried from me: 'Bite! Bite!' The snake is representative of existential nausea, and the shepherd must embrace this horror, let it become part of him, if he is to survive. Once the horror of existence is confronted and nausea overcome, the individual is no longer properly human, but a transmuted self. The riddle is therefore the emergence of a transmuted, creative self from the realization of nihilism:

Who is the man into whose throat all that is heaviest, blackest will thus crawl? The shepherd, however, bit as my cry had advised him . . . he spat far away the snake’s head — and sprang up. No longer a shepherd, no longer a man — a transformed being, surrounded with light, laughing! . . . My longing for this laughter consumes me: oh how do I endure still to live! And how could I endure to die now? 

One must embrace the void (i.e., snake), consume it, take it into one’s own being; and only then become transformed above the loathsomeness of life. This represents no less than the recreation of the self arising from a fundamental change in perspective and the destruction of previous external modes of interpreting both the self and the world. Self-overcoming therefore leads to the imperative of self-creation. "There are many souls one will never uncover, unless one invents them first." 

2 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, III:2:2.
3 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, III:2:2.
4 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, I:8.
Nietzsche’s recognition of the self as an ever-changing flux of forces in need of self-overcoming, however, represents only the beginning of Nietzsche’s theory of selfhood. The transmuted self, symbolized by the Übermensch, is its culmination. Because Nietzsche consciously avoids attaching specifics to the transmuted self, it is necessary to resort to inference and symbolic interpretation to divine the meaning behind the transmuted self. Deleuze argues that the transmuted self is a synthesis of the active and reactive, the unity of actor and medium, a self-replicating creative power relation.

Reactive forces break their alliance with the will to nothingness, the will to nothingness, in turn, breaks its alliance with reactive forces. It inspires in man a new inclination: for destroying himself, but destroying himself actively. . . . Zarathustra wants to say: I love the one who makes use of nihilism as the ratio cognoscenti of the will to power, but who finds in the will to power a ration essendi in which man is overcome and therefore nihilism is defeated. . . . Active destruction means: the point, the moment of transmutation in the will to nothingness. Destruction becomes active at the moment when, with the alliance between reactive forces and the will to nothingness is broken, the will to nothingness is converted and crosses over to the

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5 "One common and general feature shared by both Nietzsche and Buddhism is the centrality of man in a godless cosmos, in the sense that both look to man, and not any external power, being, or numinous source, for their respective solutions to what they perceive as the problem(s) of existence. . . . Both see men as an ever-changing flux of forces possessing what may generally be called physical and psychological aspects. And within this flux there is no autonomous or unchanging subject corresponding to such terms as 'self', 'ego', or 'soul.' Both also emphasize the hierarchy that exists or can exist between individuals and within the individual’s own nature. . . . Another feature shared by both . . . is that their respective goals are to be achieved through a process of 'self-overcoming', (Selbstüberwindung in Nietzsche’s case, citta-bhavana in Buddhism’s), and that this self-overcoming is understood as the spiritual expression of a more basic and natural force (will to power in Nietzsche’s case, tanha in Buddhism’s).” Morrison, Nietzsche and Buddhism, 63.
side of affirmation, it is related to a power of affirming which
destroy the reactive forces themselves. Destruction becomes active
to the extent that the negative is transmuted and converted into
affirmative power: the “eternal joy of becoming” which is avowed in
an instant, the “joy of annihilation”, the “affirmation of annihilation
and destruction.” . . . This is the “decisive point” of Dionysian
philosophy: the point at which negation expresses an affirmation of
life, destroys reactive forces and restores the rights of activity.6

In this sense, the self becomes the site of both action and reaction, as
it is in the process of creating and destroying itself. It is also possible to
argue that the transmuted self represents a transcendence of the dichotomy
of active and reactive. Babich argues, “the emphasis upon the ‘post-human’
. . . in Nietzsche succeeds in a critical reading of the nature of the human as
such, shifting its position to the sliding or precessionally decentered subject
of interpretive style.”7 The individual can be neither a subject nor object of
action; it is no less than the site for the interpretation of phenomenon. The
distinction between external and internal experience ceases to have
meaning. Furthermore, the differentiation between action and reaction
cannot be made; they are both manifestations of the will-to-power,
perceived differently. Thus, Nietzsche’s vision of the integrated self has a
gestalt-like form. Schutte notes: “As soon as the individual form is given
preference over the totality, the intent of Nietzsche’s teachings is lost.”8

6 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 174-175.

7 Babich, Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Science, 21.

8 Ofelia Schutte, Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks, 34.
It is misleading to seek to determine whether or not the transmuted self represents the transcendence of action and reaction or a synthesis of the two. Nietzsche presents the transmuted self as something to be experienced, not analyzed. As such, this interpretation seeks to identify the symbols Nietzsche chooses to communicate the internal experiences of the transmuted self and explore their implications for the politics of the self. In terms of the transmutation itself, it will be argued that Nietzsche poses this as a problem of separating creative action from the necessity of reaction, leading to an ethos of eternal creation: the next permutation of the eternal recurrence as will-to-power.

I

Nietzsche uses the symbol of metamorphosis prominently in his theory of transmutation. Indeed, one of the most important sections of *Zarathustra* details the "three metamorphoses of the spirit." Nietzsche uses the symbols of the camel, the lion, and the child to detail the personality types found on the path to transmutation. This section is essentially a microcosm of Nietzsche's political argument in *Zarathustra*, and further serves to underscore the thesis of this dissertation.

The first type, the camel, represents the socially-created individual Nietzsche criticizes in the first part of *Zarathustra*. The camel is essentially a beast of burden, taking on inherited guilt and institutional structures that are not its own. The greatest problem with this type of individual is the lack
of creativity arising from the needless repression of the self. "There are
many heavy things for the spirit, for the strong, weight-bearing spirit in
which dwell respect and awe: its strength longs for the heavy, for the
heaviest." Nietzsche condemns this tendency in strong terms, extending it to the
Ultimate Man. Nietzsche argues that the personality of the camel is an
affront to human dignity and the self-worth of the individual. "What is this
heaviest thing, you heroes. . . . Is it not this: to debase yourself in order to
injure your pride? To let your folly shine out in order to mock your
wisdom?" As seen earlier, Nietzsche calls for the individual to escape
society in order to seek self-overcoming. "But in the loneliest desert the
second metamorphosis occurs: the spirit here becomes a lion; it wants to
capture freedom and be lord in its own desert."

The lion is independent and largely free of societal influence. As
such, the lion represents the individual searching for identity and self-
overcoming, as typified in the Higher Men. However, the lion is a pride
animal, not fully self-sufficient and still open to the influence of others, as

9 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:1.
10 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:1.
11 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:1.
elaborated in Nietzsche’s critique of the community. The lion represents self-overcoming, but is not able to make the transition to self-creation. “To create new values— even the lion is incapable of that: but to create itself freedom for new creation— that the might of the lion can do. To create freedom for itself and a sacred No even to duty... the lion is needed.”

The metamorphosis into the lion therefore creates the necessary substrate for the possibility of transmutation. However, the lion is incapable of self-creation, as evidenced by the failure of the Higher Men.

The last metamorphosis is that of the child, innocent enough to begin the process of self-creation without lapsing into repression. The child is no less than the transmuted self as expressed in the symbol of the Übermensch.

But tell me, brothers, what can the child do that even the lion cannot? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes. Yes, a sacred Yes is needed, brothers, for the sport of creation: the spirit now wills its own will, the spirit sundered from the world now wins its own world.

The symbol of the child underscores the interpretive aspect of transmutation. Nietzsche is not naïve enough to assert that the self can actually be recreated from scratch. Rather, the significance of transmutation is that the individual can reinterpret both the self and the world from a perspective that is not colored by inherited institutions or repressive

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12 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:1.

13 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:1.
normalizing mechanisms. However, even this more modest goal is troublesome. As Nietzsche emphasizes consistently, most of the means of human expression are in some sense repressive, including language and conventional philosophical discourse. More fundamentally, modes of thought such as reason and abstract conceptualizing are bound by factors that are socially-constructed and overly reductionistic. In this sense, Nietzsche seems to offer a false hope, if not a delusion, as his goal for human existence. If the individual's mode of interpretation is almost completely determined by socially-bounded symbols and methodology, self-overcoming would represent the total destruction of all previous experiences and their replacement by an undetermined, perhaps indeterminable, interpretive scheme arising totally from the individual's consciousness.

This criticism is not without merit. However, it retains its validity only if Nietzsche's critiques are taken to the extreme and his positive theory is taken too concretely. The most important implication of the symbolic progression of the three metamorphoses is that Nietzsche actually presents them as a progression. The individual must actually proceed through each of these manifestations in order to reach the goal of transmutation, which is the integration of the self-actuated elements of the consciousness under the auspices of the will-to-power. It is not necessary to forget previous
experience or even to abandon socially-created symbols and discourse, but to recognize them for what they are and to give the individual's own reinterpretation precedence over inherited power structures.

This point is underscored by Nietzsche's insistence on the integrity of the self as a discrete unit capable of presenting a valid interpretation of both itself and its world. In addition, Nietzsche emphasizes upon the integration of the parts of the self into a plural entity explicitly recognizes that all parts of the consciousness, including those that may be influenced by social and experiential patterns, must be retained and validated as essential to individual existence. The camel is not annihilated or even repressed, but is sublimated into the integrated consciousness along with the independence of the lion and the creativity of the child. All of these elements, coexisting and competing, insure that the individual neither stagnates nor consumes itself in the morass of nihilistic helplessness. Nietzsche's positive theory is not couched in negative terms, but rather in language of integration, typified by the symbol of noontide.

II.

One of the most important symbols in *Zarathustra* is that of the "noon" or "noontide." Nietzsche elaborates on this symbol in *The Twilight of the Idols*, identifying the positive purpose of *Zarathustra* with the symbol of noon. In this work, Nietzsche identifies the symbol of noon closely with an altered perception of reality and with the integration of the self:
The true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.* (Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; *incipit* Zarathustra).\(^{14}\)

For Nietzsche the symbol of noon represents the individual integrated consciousness, with no "shadows." By adopting the symbol of the shadow, Nietzsche implies that the subconscious elements of the consciousness are never destroyed, but are rather drawn up into the consciousness through existential awareness.\(^{15}\) In this sense, the unconscious elements are integrated into the consciousness through the process of overcoming and the confrontation with repressed knowledge. This mirrors the synthesis of the Apollonian and Dionysian psychological types that Nietzsche praised in ancient tragedy. The healthy mode of existence that Nietzsche envisions must take into account all aspects of human existence as manifestations of the will-to-power and therefore valid expressions of life. Morrison notes, "the real battle for power is within the individual. As Nietzsche says man is a war, which is a 'war within oneself', and the basic weapons in this war are "self-control [and] self-outwitting.'"\(^{16}\)

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\(^{15}\) Nietzsche's symbolic language in this regard is strikingly similar to Jung's analysis of the subconscious. Jung was certainly familiar with Nietzsche's argument in *Zarathustra*, but it is impossible to determine if he adopted this language from Nietzsche.

\(^{16}\) Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism*, 171.
The transmuted self represents the outcome of this battle; it is the awakening of awareness.

In the course of his masterful analysis, Jaspers identifies three types of “awareness of being” Nietzsche proposes, each of which “can be made manifest only through indirect language, through image and simile.” These are “(1) contemplative vision, (2) mystical oneness with being, and (3) Dionysian intoxication.” Although Jaspers does not delineate examples within Zarathustra where each of these states appears, it is possible to identify examples within the text. In the contemplative vision “the truthful man experiences what he himself is and what being is as ‘the great enlightenment about existence.’” Jaspers argues that mystical oneness with being is expressed most vividly in Zarathustra, with the symbol of noon. With this image, “the world’s perfection stands revealed. The yes, which has absorbed all that is, is experienced.” Dionysian intoxication is a multi-layered and more complex stage of experiencing being. Dionysian intoxication involves the affirmation of existence with all of its vicissitudes, through which the individual becomes “the transmuter of existence when he learns to transmute himself.”

The transmuted self embodies all three of these modes, but

Zarathustra emphasizes integration and wholeness above all others. The

\[^{17}\text{Jaspers, Nietzsche, 354-347.}\]
integration of the self through the awareness of its multiplicity is
paradoxical, but consistent with Nietzsche's theory of freedom. Camus
states, "there is freedom at midday when the wheel of the world stops
spinning and man consents to things as they are. But what is becomes what
will be, and the ceaseless change of things must be accepted."18 Noontide
represents the recognition of the only stability inherent in the human
constitution: change. The transmutation of the self is indeed a
transformation, but one of perspective rather than concrete. This
perspective acknowledges that the primacy of the self and of its variegated
nature:

But now the day, the transformation, the sword of judgement, the
great noontide comes to them all: then many things shall be revealed!
And he who declared the Ego healthy and holy and selfishness
glorious—truly, he, a prophet, declares too what he knows: "Behold,
it comes, it is near, the great noontide!"19

The recognition of the individual self as project further emphasizes
the lack of an endpoint for transmutation. Self-overcoming must continue
irrespective of the extent of transmutation. "Man is a bridge and not a goal;
counting himself happy for its noontides and evenings, as a way to new
dawns."20 The symbol of noon, a moment which recurs daily, is emblematic

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19 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, III:10.
20 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, III:12.3.
of the continuing nature of Nietzsche's theory of selfhood. The symbol of noon also connotes optimism for the possibility of transmutation:

And this is the great noontide: it is when man stands at the middle of his course between animal and Übermensch and celebrates his journey to the evening and his highest hope: for it is the journey to a new morning. Then man, going under, will bless himself; for he will be going over to the Übermensch and the sun of knowledge will stand at noontide. "All gods are dead: now we want the Übermensch to live"—let this be our last will one day at the great noontide!21

The symbol of noon is also related to the symbols of the eagle and the snake. It is telling that these symbols first occur in the narrative simultaneously, in section ten of the prologue. Furthermore, the animals only reappear in the narrative when Zarathustra is alone, when he finally abandons the "other." The voice of the animals represents instinct and self-knowledge, not the herd or collective mentality. Nietzsche emphasizes this point as both animals are solitary creatures. This is related to the symbol of noon as the animals are representative of parts of Zarathustra's own consciousness that are ignored or repressed when Zarathustra is within the confines of society. When the consciousness is exposed in solitude, these elements are free to manifest themselves:

Zarathustra said this to his heart as the sun stood at noon: then he looked inquiringly into the sky—for he heard above him the sharp cry of a bird. And behold! An eagle was sweeping through the air in wide circles, and from it was hanging a serpent, not like prey but like a friend: for it was coiled around an eagle's neck.22

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21 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:223.

22 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §10.
Zarathustra encounters the voice of the animals, which represents his own internal dialogue. This encounter takes place at noon, representing the integration of the self. This integration is the beginning of transmutation, a task as formidable as self-overcoming. "The proudest animal under the sun and the wisest animal under the sun—they have come scouting. . . . I found it more dangerous among men than among animals; Zarathustra is following dangerous paths." When taken together, the symbols of noon and the animals represent a fundamental point of Nietzsche's theory of the transmuted self. The symbol of noon, in connection with that of the animals, emphasizes that the individual must cultivate awareness of the internal movements within the self. "My animals are awake, for I am awake. My eagle is awake and, like me, does honor to the sun. With eagle's claws it reaches out for the new light." The price of personal transmutation is perpetual self-overcoming and vigilance.

The symbol of noon is therefore both one of integration and the affirmation of plurality. This apparent contradiction is at the very heart of Nietzsche's positive thought. Deleuze notes:

"The sense of Nietzsche's philosophy is that multiplicity, becoming and chance are objects of pure affirmation. The affirmation of multiplicity is the highest speculative proposition, just as the joy of

23 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §10.

24 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:20. The animals are therefore part of Zarathustra's consciousness.
diversity is the practical proposition. The player only loses because he does not affirm strongly enough, because he introduces the negative into chance and opposition into becoming and multiplicity.25

The symbols of the transmuted self: the metamorphoses of the spirit, noontide, and the animals are all representative of this imperative. The transmuted self is not a completed project. Indeed, the last paragraph of *Zarathustra* unites all of these symbols in the assertion that Zarathustra’s work has only now begun, that of the transmutation:

My suffering and my pity — what of them! For do I aspire after *happiness*? I aspire after my *work*! Very well, my lion has come, my children are near, Zarathustra has become ripe, my hour has come! This is *my* morning, *my* day begins: *rise up now, rise up, great noontide!* Thus spoke Zarathustra and left his cave, glowing and strong, like a morning sun emerging from behind dark mountains.26

Nietzsche, therefore, finishes his narrative by emphasizing that the integration of the self is a project that is never to be completed, and cannot therefore be explained. However, the mechanisms mediating the disparate elements of the consciousness receive a great deal of attention in *Zarathustra*, and must therefore be examined to gain any degree of understanding of the transmuted self.


26 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, IV:20. This is the last paragraph of the book — but where is Zarathustra going? Back to man? No, now that the great noontide has come and his consciousness is integrated, he can leave the solitude of his cave and venture forth into the world.
Much of Nietzsche's thought proceeds from an analysis of the dynamics of the human psyche, indeed it is ultimately from Nietzsche's psychological observations that his other philosophical and political doctrines flow. These psychological explorations are driven by frustration engendered by the lack of self-knowledge by modern individuals. Nietzsche laments in the *Genealogy of Morality*, “we are unknown to ourselves, we knowers, we ourselves, to ourselves, and there is a good reason for this. We have never looked for ourselves—so how are we ever supposed to *find* ourselves?”

In keeping, much of Nietzsche's thought is concerned with the analysis of the self. Indeed, one of the fundamental elements of Nietzsche's critique of modernity is the role of the human self as presented in the idea of the “subject.” The idea of the subject that has free will and the ability to act is essential to the modern project. It is only through the distinction between the subject and the object that it is possible to attach value judgments to actions, depending upon the intentions behind those actions.

Nietzsche tells us that this idea of the subject can not be seen as given, but is rather the product of an extensive historical development. Thus, the

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modern project is built upon an untenable ontological foundation, implicitly relying upon the concept of a fundamental human nature. Instead, Nietzsche emphasizes that the universe is not ordered, and that it is only through the interposition of the will that any semblance of order becomes apparent. Therefore, if one is to look for foundations one must seek to create them out of the concrete self.

Nietzsche insists that the self is composed of many parts, not one essential spirit or nature. Nietzsche wants philosophy to abandon the idea of the soul as found in Christian theology and even in Enlightenment thought. In the Christian philosophical tradition and Cartesian dualism, the soul is seen as separate from the body in a fundamental sense. The body and the spirit are composed of different elements, and exist on separate planes. The implication of these schemes is that the soul or spirit is superior to the body, and the entire material plane is, at least to some degree, contemptible.

At no time does Nietzsche entertain the notion that there may be a soul that exists outside the body. "But the awakened, the enlightened man

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29 "As an alternative to the logical method the Dionysian state of consciousness offers forms of communication such as song and dance. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra teaches one not to believe in a god that does not dance. The godliness of which Nietzsche speaks is that of the creative process of life, which is never self-contained. The rhythms and movement of song and dance, like those of life, elude classification... The subject-object distinction that rules discursive thought is suspended as the dynamic unity of life is perceived." Ofelia Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks*, 26-27.

says: I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body.” 31 Nietzsche urges us to “give the finishing stroke to that other and more calamitous atomism which Christianity has taught best and longest, the soul atomism.” 32 Nietzsche contends that it is necessary to have a new conception of the self, one that does not see the soul as composed of some external “substance.” The spirit, the consciousness, is therefore a historical development, and its contents are likewise products of this development:

Our mind flies upward: thus it is an image of our bodies, an image of an advance and elevation. The names of the virtues are such images of advances and elevations. Thus the body goes through history, evolving and battling. And the spirit—what is it to the body? The herald, companion, and echo of its battles and victories. 33

Nietzsche takes great pains to demonstrate that the self is created and bound by external factors, but ones that are concrete and experiential. As Schacht states: “in short, human consciousness for Nietzsche requires to be understood as a phenomenon intimately connected with our underlying human nature and constitution and our entanglement in a web of social relations.” 34 Nietzsche’s genealogical investigations were designed to

31 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:4.

32 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, §12.

33 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:22.1.

demonstrate exactly this point. "Consciousness is capable of attaining at most a limited degree of self-autonomy in relation to them."\(^{35}\)

Rather than postulating the existence of a soul or endlessly contemplating the eternal nature of man, one should instead examine the many competing parts of the concrete consciousness. The soul in Nietzschean terms is the "sum of the inner movements" within the individual psyche.\(^{36}\) The psyche is composed of competing drives and inclinations, each of which seeks predominance. This is analogous to Plato's metaphor of the soul as a dwelling, as Parkes notes:

Nietzsche now introduces an image of the psyche as a boarding house. As new experiences enter the domicile of the soul (Seelenwohnung), those unable to find anything related to them are obliged to 'reside there alone, often to the displeasure of the older residents with whom they often run into conflict.' But if the newcomer is fortunate, it will not be long before 'new guests stream in from all sides into the open house, and the one who was just then standing alone finds many and noble relatives.'\(^{37}\)

Unlike Plato, however, Nietzsche does not argue that the elements of the consciousness should be ordered according to an arbitrary principle such as reason.

What the sense feels, what the spirit knows, never has an end in itself. But sense and spirit would persuade you that they are the end of all

\(^{35}\) Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 315.


things: that is how vain they are. Instruments and toys are sense and
spirit: behind them still lies the self. . . . Always the self listens and
seeks: it compares, overpowers, conquers, destroys. It controls, and it
is in control of the ego too. Behind your thoughts and feelings, my
brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage—whose name
is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body. 38

It is in the tension between competing psychological elements that
human existence occurs. "The I is no longer something stable and fixed, but
rather labile and dynamic: 'a moving midpoint.'" 39 Nietzsche does not
accept that the self is or must be a stable spirit or essence. Instead, it is
possible for the self to be eternally changing, as Nietzsche discusses in the
ideal type of the Dionysian man. "By virtue of the power of Dionysus one
can resolve oneself into a plurality of persons and play, thanks to the patron
deity of masks, a variety of parts in the drama of life." 40 Nietzsche argues
not only that the consciousness is composed of multiple competing parts,
but that the very notion of consciousness is a manifestation of the tension
between these parts. "The body is a great intelligence, a multiplicity with
one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman. Your little
intelligence . . . is also an instrument of your body, a little instrument and
toy of your great intelligence." 41 Nietzsche argues that this tension is what

38 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:1.
39 Parkes, Composing the Soul, 74.
40 Parkes, Composing the Soul, 276.
41 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:4.
is properly termed the "self," not a stable identity or perceiving subject. In this sense, the self is radically de-centered and perpetually unstable:

Sense and spirit are instruments and toys: behind them still lies the Self. The Self sees with the eyes of the sense, it listens too with the ears of the spirit. The Self is always listening and seeking: it compares, subdues, conquers, destroys. It rules and is also the Ego's ruler. Behind your thoughts and feelings, brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage—he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body.

The manner in which individuals are able to organize their internal chaos into a manageable and creative conversation is the hallmark of self-creation. This endeavor may be dangerous to both the individual and to society. In *Zarathustra* Nietzsche employs an interesting analogy

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42 "Nietzsche calls the 'under-wills' or 'under-souls' the different protagonists of this internal struggle (which is only a feeble debate, involving 'the one who orders,' 'the one who obeys,' 'the one feeling satisfaction') in the midst of the willing subject. These are, in fact, the parts of the unconscious of the body, an 'edifice of multiple souls.' Why does he talk about 'souls'? The usurpation or reversal, which attributes the 'noble' name 'soul' to what tradition considers inferior, is aimed at designating the true 'acting principles,' the impulses, the instincts." Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 94.


44 "Yet the sub-ego plurality is not reducible simply to the forces of the bodily unconscious, any more than it can be assimilated to the diversity of feelings and ideas. The logical identity of the ego or the moral identity of the person takes hold at the expense of the presence of multiple 'persons,' i.e., roles that follow each other or coexist in the apparatus of the individual psyche. Nietzsche does not tire of stressing that the 'person' is nothing but some special underscoring, a product of circumstances, within the multiple 'persons,' i.e., characters or personalities that we carry inside us in a state of greater or lesser virtuality. Most often a *person*, i.e., a dramatic character, a more or less 'arbitrary' mask, sticks to us, occupying the center stage of consciousness alone at the expense of those masks that we carry 'inside the body.'" Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 94-95.

45 "Nietzsche's well-known separation of men into higher and lower orders is not so much an evaluation of their soul's composition as of the different manner in which these materials are organized and exploited." Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul*, 67.
highlighting the peril of this undertaking: "What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under." 46

. . . envy and mistrust and calumny among your virtues is necessary. Behold how each of your virtues desires the highest place: it wants your entire spirit, that your spirit may be its herald, it wants your entire strength in anger, hate, and love. Every virtue is jealous of the others, and jealousy is a terrible thing. Even virtues can be destroyed through jealousy. He whom the flames of jealousy surround at last turns his poisoned sting against himself, like the scorpion. 47

The mechanisms by which the tensions between competing psychological states are mediated receive a great deal of attention from Nietzsche. Traditional philosophy cites reason as the faculty capable of bringing the drives under control and ordering the consciousness. Nietzsche does not disparage human reason, but he insists that it is not capable of the type of universal explanatory power that Enlightenment thinkers believe. Nietzsche insists that reason is simply another form of interpretation, although its operation is somehow endemic to the human mind. "Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off." 48 Reason, however, is intrinsically incapable of ordering the passions, as reason and the passions are not entirely separate. Reason is

46 Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Prologue §4.

47 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:5.

influenced by the passions, and the passions contain a “quantum of reason.” Reason may be a special form of intellectual operation, but it is not to be accorded a privileged place in Nietzschean psychology:

They are always looking back to the dark ages: then, indeed, illusion and faith were a different matter; raving of the reason was likeness to God, and doubt was sin. . . . That is why they hearken to preachers of death and themselves preach afterworlds.

In no case would Nietzsche accept any type of noetic reason existing on a different plane than that of human existence. Offering such a claim is sheer fantasy and is certainly harmful. In a section of *Twilight of the Idols* entitled “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” Nietzsche writes:

The reasons for which this world has been characterized as “apparent” are the very reasons which indicate its reality; any other kind of reality is absolutely indemonstrable . . . to invent fables about a world “other” than this one has no meaning at all, unless an instinct of slander, detraction, and suspicion against life has gained the upper hand in us: in that case, we avenge ourselves against life with a phantasmagoria of “another,” a “better” life.

The insistence upon an exterior order is thus representative of a deeply set antipathy towards the Lebenswelt. Rather than confronting life

49 Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, § 387.

50 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I:3.


52 “Our inability to see ourselves, along with those propensities to self-evaluation that parade as self-knowledge, causes us to live in constant self-deception. What we really are is concealed from us in a number of ways: (a) The framework within which we view ourselves is determined by language. . . . (b) Unconsciously we seek out the principles which conform to our temperaments: ‘Our thought and judgement are subsequently taken
as it presents itself, these philosophers are incapable of dealing with the
vicissitudes of life and must construct a higher reality towards which they
can pine. It is “the instinct of life-weariness, and not that of life, which has
created the ‘other world.’”53 Neither human nor abstract divine reason can
be the ordering mechanism for the human consciousness. It is necessary to
seek a more fundamental ordering mechanism than reason, and one that is
located within the concrete consciousness.

As an alternative, Nietzsche suggests that the only possibility of
bringing the drives under control is through the will, specifically the will-to-
power. This process of subordinating the drives to the will may be referred
to as sublimation. Rather than suppressing a drive or fulfilling it directly, it
is possible to channel it into creative spiritual activity, creating an “organic
harmony.”54

Yes, this Ego, with its contradiction and confusion, speaks most
honestly of its being—this creating, willing, evaluating Ego, which is
the measure and value of things. And this most honest being, the
Ego—it speaks of the body, and insists upon the body, even when it
fables and fabricates and flutters with broken wings. Ever more

to be causes of our nature.’ We interpret ourselves intellectualistically. (c) Success leads to falsification. . . . (d) The image of our past must be agreeable to us. ‘One forgets much of his past and deliberately excludes it from his memory. . . . We are always actively engaged in this kind of self-deception.’ (e) We are contaminated by the views which others take of us: ‘What we know of ourselves is not decisive for our happiness. . . . At times we are suddenly overwhelmed by what others know of us (or think they know of us), and we realize that their opinions can overpower our own.’” Jaspers, Nietzsche, 133.

53 Nietzsche, Will to Power, § 586C.

honestly it learns to speak, the Ego: and the more it learns, the more it finds titles and honors for the body and the earth.55

Nietzsche conceived the will to power as the essential drive in humanity.56 In his notes, Nietzsche states “this world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!”57 The will to power is manifested individually; it is neither a social creation nor is it expressed socially. The will to power acts primarily as a guide to the individual:

A will to the thinkability of all being; this I call your will. All being you want to make thinkable: for you doubt, with well-founded suspicion, whether it is thinkable. Yet it shall yield and bend for you. . . . Smooth it shall become and serve the spirit as its mirror and reflection. That is your entire will . . . a will to power.58

The individual who has been able to achieve self-mastery over his drives through the use of the will is truly a “free spirit.”59 This spirit does not need external signifiers to provide a reason to live or to order his consciousness; that would be herd morality. Rather, it is possible for the

55 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:3.

56 “Nietzsche was a dialectical monist. His basic force, the will to power, is not only the Dionysian passionate striving, akin to Schopenhauer’s irrational will, but is also Apollonian and possesses as inherent capacity to give itself form. The victory of the Dionysian is thus not complete, and the will to power is a synthesis of Nietzsche’s earlier two dualistic principles.” Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 235-236.

57 Nietzsche, Will to Power, § 1067.

58 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:12.

59 “The framework within which Nietzsche’s psychological understanding occurs is composed of (1) the fundamental relation of man to himself when he sees and evaluates himself, deceives himself about himself, and proceeds to mould himself; and (2) The operation and transformation of drives.” Jaspers, Nietzsche, 132.
free spirit to order his consciousness free of any such considerations.

Therefore, freedom for Nietzsche is to be "understood as facility in self-direction."\(^{60}\)

One could conceive of such a delight and power of self-determination, such a freedom of the will that the spirit could take leave of all faith and every wish for certainly, being practiced in maintaining himself on insubstantial ropes and possibilities and dancing even near abysses. Such a spirit would be the free spirit par excellence.\(^{61}\)

The free spirit is thus able to organize his inner chaos, but Nietzsche never asserts that the plural nature of the soul itself is something to be overcome. "Pluralism within the soul is to be maintained."\(^{62}\) The pluralism is the fundamental nature of the human psyche, and it is through conflict between different elements that creativity is possible. "The finest discoveries concerning culture are made by the individual man within himself when he finds two heterogeneous powers ruling there."\(^{63}\) Nevertheless, Nietzsche understands that there must be a type of mental parsimony.

One of the most integral characteristics of the mediating process within the psyche is forgetfulness. Nietzsche does not mean mere

\(^{60}\) Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 705.


thoughtlessness or some form of dementia. For Nietzsche, forgetfulness is necessary for health; it is a type of mental hygiene. Forgetfulness allows for peace, no happiness would be possible without it. Nietzsche's concept of forgetfulness is similar in application to Freud's concept of the unconscious mind, which also results in a type of mental economy operating to preserve sanity. Nietzsche expresses a similar sentiment in his earlier work:

The Greeks gradually learned to organize the chaos by following the Delphic teaching and thinking back to themselves, that is, to their real needs, and letting their pseudo-needs die out. Thus they again took possession of themselves; ... This is a parable for each of us: he must organize the chaos within him by thinking back to his real needs.

The task of making man into this reliable creature, "answerable for his own future," has been accomplished through the customs of society. The "conscience" of man is socially constructed and designed to preserve the prevailing social order; it does not emanate from some divine source outside of convention. The repression of the self by society ultimately leads to a form of self-loathing, "bad conscience." "All instincts which are not discharged outwardly turn inwards- this is what I call the internalization of man: with it there now evolves in man what will later be

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64 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 38.


called his 'soul.' Bad conscience, inextricably tied to religion, serves as a stumbling block to individual progress: "Indeed, the possibility cannot be rejected out of hand that the complete and definitive victory of atheism might release humanity from this whole feeling of being indebted. . . .

Atheism and a sort of second innocence belong together."69

Nietzsche determines that the triumph of "slave morality" in the modern age has left society incapable of responding to the challenge of nihilism engendered by the collapse of the modern worldview, primarily because the individual is caught up in the personal torments of "bad conscience," rendering him incapable of realizing his true potential. For Nietzsche, modern society is missing the ability to produce a culture based upon positive, aesthetic values rather than the repression of natural, healthy drives.70 The internal regime of competing drives forms the stage for the politics of self-exploration and self-creation. As Thiele notes, "the individual is a law unto himself, unpredictable and unmanageable."71

The transmuted self as Nietzsche envisions it is therefore the affirmation of internal multiplicity. The theory of the multiple self is a


70 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 22-23, see also "The Greek State."

71 Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul*, 38.
straightforward extension of Nietzsche's affection for the mask, but is more nuanced. By denying the stability of the self, Nietzsche undercuts the philosophical anthropology underlying modern models of selfhood and philosophical discourse. Nietzsche presents the self as essentially a conversation. The ideal of the transmuted self is the recognition of this fact and the addition of a level of intentionality to this fundamental process.

Haar argues:

[T]he point of view of internal plurality is not only that of a succession, but also that of a "social" coexistence of persons. "The free man is . . . a society of individuals." "The individual is a society." In fact, we maintain with ourselves and within ourselves social relations as complex and numerous as those we maintain within the individuals around us.72

By affirming internal life as an interpretive dialogue, Nietzsche validates the competing sections of the self which have been recognized since Plato while avoiding the type of rank-ordering philosophy has afforded to one part or the other. Rather than the creation of an entirely new self or the destruction of previous identity, the transmuted self is essentially the reinterpretation of the self along the lines of multiplicity. As Jaspers notes, "man, though blind to himself and captivated by his own self-deceptions, still manages—in spite of the self-evaluations by which he

72 Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 97.
lives—*to mould his own nature*. To mould himself would appear to be the highest possibility open to man.”

IV.

Nietzsche’s emphasis on the self as a project represents a return, at least in spirit, to the ancient care of the self. Unlike the ancients, however, Nietzsche presents no goal or standards by which to measure the worth of the individual or a ranking for the constituents of the soul. This is in keeping with his view of existence as an interpretive endeavor, rife with flux and perpetually changing configurations of the will-to-power. Nietzsche’s call to the transvaluation of values proves to be the reinterpretation of the need for valuation as an internal constellation of forces rather than as a means of measuring external phenomena. Transmutation represents revaluation as self-interpretation and self-valuation, a process without an endpoint or precedence. The analysis of *Zarathustra*, however, identifies three key strategies associated with transmutation: constant experimentation, transgression against norms, and the embracing of creativity as a way of life.

Because of the difficulty of identifying normalizing mechanisms, it is necessary to transgress social norms constantly and experimentally. The revaluation of the self requires consistent, affirmative action to avoid

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stagnation. "Are you the victor, the self-conqueror, the ruler of your senses. 

... Or do the animal and necessity speak from your desire? Or isolation? Or disharmony within yourself?" This further emphasizes the indeterminate nature of Nietzsche's theory of transmutation. Constant experimentation is required because of the lack of any meaningful order to revaluation. That which is revalued must be consistently revalued to avoid dogmatization or complacency. As Schutte notes, "from the Dionysian standpoint the self is always in process. It speaks for the dynamic unity of the body, not for something that controls the body or lodges in a different sphere from the body and the earth."  

Nietzsche argues that the only possible definition of virtue can therefore be that of the purity of self-created value. "Your virtue is your dearest self. . . . That your virtue is your Self and not something alien, a skin, a covering: that is the truth from the bottom of your souls, you virtuous!" The great tragedy of mankind, as well as a great pity, is that the vast majority of individuals never even try to achieve this type of virtue.  

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74 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:20.

75 Ofelia Schutte, Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks, 34.

76 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:5.

77 "It follows from the above that the self for which we consciously live is by no means our actual self: the vast majority live their whole lives 'only for the phantom of an ego.' . . . Consequently all of them together reside in a cloud of impersonal opinions and arbitrary or, one might say, fictitious, evaluations. This cloud of opinions comes very close to having a life of its own, independent of the people that it envelopes: from it derives the enormous effect of universal judgements about 'man'." Jaspers, Nietzsche, 133-134.
This is in fact Zarathustra’s greatest fear, that pity over mankind will drag him into despair and ruin his attempt at transmutation. It is better for Zarathustra to succeed alone than for everyone to fail.

The body purifies itself through knowledge; experimenting with knowledge it elevated itself; to the discerning man all instincts are holy; the soul of the elevated man grows joyful. Physician, heal thyself: thus you will heal your patient as well. Let his best remedy be to see with his own eyes him who makes himself well.78

It is also for this reason that Nietzsche does not attempt to present a political theory to reform the state and social structures. No matter how well constructed, collective systems have failed their members. Nietzsche therefore capitalizes on the failure of collective institutions. The individual, through resistance to normalizing mechanisms, can gain the experiences necessary to begin self-creation. In order for the individual to revalue, there must be values to reinterpret.

All names of good and evil are images: they do not speak out, they only hint. He is a fool who seeks knowledge from them. Whenever your spirit wants to speak in images, pay heed; for that is when your virtue has its origin and its beginning. Then the body is elevated and risen up; it enraptures the spirit with its joy, that it may become creator and evaluator and lover and benefactor of all things.79

Society is therefore good for something, and indeed necessary, as an object of resistance. By resisting the seriousness of society and its imperatives, the individual realizes how hollow these inherited structures

78 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:22.2.

79 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:22.1.
actually are. "And when I beheld my devil, I found him serious, thorough, profound, solemn: it was the Spirit of Gravity—through him all things are ruined. One does not kill by anger but by laughter."80

By embracing creativity as a way of life, the individual has come full circle. Beginning initially as a socially-created being, the individual has become a fully self-aware being capable of self-interpretation and continuous self-overcoming. "I have learned to walk: since then I have run. I have learned to fly: since then I do not have to be pushed in order to move. Now I am nimble, now I fly, now I see myself under myself, now a god dances within me."81 This is the transmuted self, and its exigencies are incommunicable. Nietzsche presents the transmuted self in veiled terms because it cannot be explained, it is too bound up in internal experience and hermeneutics to even try:

This tree stands here alone on the mountainside; it has grown up high above man and animal. And if it wished to speak, it would find no one who understood it: so high it has grown. Now it waits and waits—yet what is it waiting for? It lives too near the seat of the clouds: is it waiting, perhaps, for the first lightning?82

The transmuted self is therefore a concept that cannot be explained, only experienced. Nietzsche's theory of the transmuted self is anything but

80 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:7.
81 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:7.
82 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:8.
nihilistic, but it is solipsistic. "There are a thousand paths that have never yet been tread, a thousand forms of health and hidden islands of life. Man and man's earth are still unexhausted and undiscovered."83 Nietzsche therefore, does not present a political theory in any conventional sense. He does, however, present a theory of politics grounded in the sanctity of the individual self and the innate dignity of the individual spirit.
Nietzsche's presents a remarkably insightful analysis of the conflict between the self and society. Rather than the extremes of solipsism or statism attributed to him in some of the prominent interpretations, Nietzsche presents a radically different view of political life in *Zarathustra*. The modes of political existence analyzed by Nietzsche, the state and the community, produce tensions within the individual that must be resolved. Nietzsche's theory of the transmuted self presents a response to the void that is healthier than the internalized guilt he so vehemently criticizes. In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche presents the possibility of a new type of human existence that can transcend the morass of modern society and the grim fate of the last man to aspire to a new level of political life. Rather than a disconnected, ambiguous collection of political aphorisms, Nietzsche's Zarathustrian political theory is one of hope in the face of the horror of absurdity.

Nietzsche deconstructs human collective existence from the most broadly aggregated, the state, to the most basic, the interpersonal friendship, in order to reveal its pernicious effects upon the individual. Nietzsche concludes that all forms of human relationships invariably give rise to repressive power relations that threaten the natural expression of the individual self and frustrate the emergence of the creative personality. In
the course of the narrative, Nietzsche shifts his analysis toward the
manifestations of the will-to-power within the consciousness of the
individual.

Nietzsche concludes that each individual is a collection of competing
drives and impulses, which are perceived and interpreted by the will. In
this sense, "reality" is an interpretive construct arising from each
individual's confrontation with the world, each necessarily different.
Accordingly, any attempt to concretize this hermeneutic scheme either in
analytic philosophical systems or political dogmatism is a falsification of
authentic experience, which can only be gained through individual
confrontation with the field of objects and the other. Genuine philosophical
insight cannot be communicated through symbolically-deficient language; it
can only be hinted at. The philosophical use of such language is
exceptionally dangerous, as it leads to intellectual laziness and the
perpetuation of philosophical error. Nietzsche, attempting to overcome
these hazards, seeks a less repressive approach to the communication of
philosophy.

Nietzsche argues that each attempts to construct an interpretation of
reality in accord with their own internal configuration of the will-to-power.
Individuals with repressed drives or internalized social ideologies interpret
the world in unhealthy ways, undermining their own potential and
condemning them to mediocrity. Through self-overcoming, the individual
recreates the world in a healthier mode, corresponding to a more open internal configuration of the will-to-power. Reality is therefore always a projection of the internal, as all things are ultimately interpreted according to the internal constellation of forces within the individual. The will-to-power, as conceived by Nietzsche, is therefore the will-to-create, both ourselves and the world.

*Zarathustra* is thus Nietzsche's attempt to convey his interpretation of the will-to-power by invoking within the reader a semblance of his own internal experience. The narrative symbols in *Zarathustra* represent the forces that can provoke a change in the internal configuration of the will-to-power radical enough to cause a total reevaluation of the *Umwelt*. The most profound of these experiences is existential nausea, which strips away the false comfort underlying traditional interpretations.

After nausea is confronted, individuals are forced to radically modify their interpretive scheme, forcing an individually-actuated hermeneutics to come to the fore. As such, the interpretive frame arising from the individual's internal configuration of the will-to-power is necessarily reconfigured, parallel with the change in these constellations. This change in interpretive scheme is transmutation. The self is not therefore "re-created" in a concrete sense, but rather the perspective by which the individual interprets reality and the self is radically altered. This change in perspective is the outcome of self-overcoming, and the realignment
produced is the transmuted self. Transmutation is the interpretation of the elements of the consciousness under the auspices of internally-actuated will-to-power; a process rather than an outcome. "This—is now my way: where is yours? Thus I answered those who asked me ‘the way.’ For the way—does not exist!" 1

Importantly, nowhere in Zarathustra does Nietzsche articulate anything which could be construed as a traditional political theory. Nietzsche’s contribution to political theory, apart from his formidable critiques, must therefore lie in his highly individualistic theory of the self. This chapter will examine whether it is possible to synthesize this material into a political theory, or whether Nietzsche’s philosophy is inimical to political thought.

As examined in the previous chapter, the section “The Three Metamorphoses” represents the progression of the individual from herd creature to the overcoming of humanity to the transmuted self. This is properly termed a political theory, as it involves the relation between the individual and the state, political socialization, and the question of justice. However, Nietzsche political thought is unique in its lack of concern for the state and collective institutions. They remain objects to be criticized or perhaps rebelled against, but are not to be rehabilitated. Essentially,

1 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:11.
concern with the reform of social institutions is placing the cart before the horse; it makes no sense to rehabilitate the social realm when the individual self is at risk. Nietzsche's condemnation of society is complete, and he sees no use in attempting to rehabilitate it:

Everything among them speaks, no one knows any longer how to understand. Everything falls away into failure, nothing falls any longer into deep wells. Everything among them speaks, nothing prospers and comes to an end any longer. And what yesterday was still too hard for time itself and its teeth, today hangs chewed and picked from the mouth of the men of today. Everything among them speaks, everything is betrayed. And what was once called a secret and a secrecy of profound souls, today belongs to the street-trumpeters and other butterflies.²

For Nietzsche, an essential step in self-overcoming is no less than the alleviation of the human drive towards collectivization and thereby the concretization of the manifestations of internal life, i.e. the will-to-power.³ Nietzsche's political thought is therefore radically individualistic, not only because of the imperative to separate from social life but also in the distinctive interpretive philosophy he espouses. As Nietzsche writes, "it is the stillest words which bring the storm. Thoughts that come on doves' feet guide the world."⁴

² Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:9.
³ As Nietzsche argues: "Suffering from solitude is also an objection — I have suffered only from 'multitudes.'" Ecce Homo, II:10.
⁴ Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:22.
It is therefore difficult for political theorists, accustomed to thinking in state and collectively-bounded terms, to approach Nietzsche in the manner he intends. It is for this reason that Nietzsche's political thought has been essentially misunderstood by most political theorists as presenting an aristocratic theory of domination by a cadre of Übermensch. As argued in the introduction, this interpretation of Nietzsche as an advocate of "great politics" can only be advocated from an incomplete reading of Nietzsche and through the deliberate disregard of his most profound philosophical and psychological insights. The main political argument contained in Zarathustra is that of a metamorphic journey towards individual creation and away from the herd, not the return to society as a type-former or demagogue.

The interpretation of Nietzsche as an aristocratic or statist thinker is revealed as untenable through the careful reading of Zarathustra. This is because the metamorphic structure of Zarathustra is the only work in Nietzsche's mature philosophic corpus that brings together the disparate strands of his political critique and positive theory and provides a comprehensive political interpretation. From this analysis, the essential thrust of Nietzsche's intentionally evasive political thought becomes

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5 Indeed, one of the leading textbooks in political theory advocates this interpretation, essentially by presenting Nietzsche's ideas out of context and drawing from the dubious Nachlass fragments. John H. Hallowell and Jene M. Porter, Political Philosophy: The Search for Humanity and Order, (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall, 1997), 620.
evident. Nietzsche envisions no less than a reinterpretation of the way individuals live in the fullness of existence.

As mentioned earlier, Nietzsche’s earliest works have often been used to argue that Nietzsche envisioned a type of heroic community, like Homeric society. Similarly, Nietzsche’s later works have been used to demonstrate that Nietzsche was the “ultimate nihilist.” Both of these interpretations are flawed. Nietzsche’s political writings, as mediated through Zarathustra, reveal a perpetual desire to criticize the status quo, and seek continually to improve the self through resistance to mediocrity and the institutions that perpetuate it. As Jaspers notes:

Nietzsche follows neither course: he provides no constructive whole like Hegel’s and no practical political technique like Machiavelli’s. Instead, his thinking derives from an all-encompassing concern for the being of man. . . . He hopes to generate a movement that will quicken the ultimate grounds of humanity’s being, and he wishes through his thinking to impel those who hear and understand him to enter into this movement. Still he does not limit or define the content of this movement politically, ethnologically, or sociologically.6

Nietzsche’s political thought is indeed radical, perhaps so radical that political theorists overlook the more nuanced elements in their search for Nietzsche’s positive thought. As Zarathustra laments, “but why do I speak where no one has my kind of ears? Here it is yet an hour too early for me. Among these people I am my own frontrunner.”7 Nietzschean political

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6 Jaspers, Nietzsche, 253.

7 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:5.3.
thought simply does not provide the blueprint many writers seek to find. Rather, Nietzsche urges individuals to contemplate their existence, become aware of their potential, and act accordingly. This process cannot occur within a rigid state framework, although such a situation may spur individuals to act. Likewise, a community structure can serve only a limited role in the quest for self-authentication. The ultimate site for political action must lie within the restless individual spirit. Thus no political system, however constructed, can ever capture the essence of political reality: change. Nietzsche pushes us to accept this essential fact and to stop creating unhealthy narratives that perpetuate the myth of a stable cosmos.

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*Zarathustra* explores the space between the competing drives inherent in the self: the urge for order and the desire for freedom. The interpretations of Nietzsche that stress the desire for order and those that stress his call for the release from bounds both are equally in error. Nietzsche was neither an authoritarian nor an anarchist. His political theory does not fit into any categories of conventional political thought; Nietzsche consciously avoids this type of concretization. Nietzsche’s political thought is attitudinal rather than institutional. This renders the interpretation of Nietzsche’s political thought exceptionally difficult, as it extends to elements traditionally thought outside of political theory, such as psychology and
ontology. This, however, is exactly what Nietzsche intends. As Jaspers notes:

One cannot make a rational system of Nietzsche's politics without falsifying his thought. His voluntaristic thinking, whose direction is determined vitally rather than conceptually, exhibits what is most characteristic only when one seeks out the *antithesis* which it contains.⁸

Therefore, it is impossible to speak of Nietzsche's political thought as being in any sense bounded or well-defined. Nietzsche's politics is based upon a reinterpretation of what it means to be political. For Nietzsche, politics is an active stance toward the process of becoming-oneself.⁹ This necessarily involves interaction with others and even social institutions, but does not stop there. Nietzsche's critiques are grounded in contempt for those who are unwilling to consider the proposition that the fullest expression of politics may lead to the separation of the individual from the collective rather than the continuing immersion of the individual into the social matrix. The perfection of politics is not to be found in the rearticulation of the social, but in the continual reinterpretation of the self.

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⁹ Nietzsche speaks to the inherent individuality of his project in a preliminary draft for section III of *Ecce Homo*. "My writings are difficult; I hope this is not considered an objection? . . . Silence is as much of an instinct with me as is garrulity with our dear philosophers. I am *brief*; my readers themselves must become long and comprehensive in order to bring it up together all that I have thought, and thought deep down. . . . Finally, I speak only of what I have lived through, not merely of what I have thought through; the opposition of thinking and life is lacking in my case. My 'theory' grows from my 'practice'—oh, from a practice that is not by any means harmless or unproblematic." Found in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 796.
Politics, as originally conceived in the *polis*, recognized this proposition and was structured accordingly.\(^{10}\)

In this sense, Nietzsche apparently returns to a classical theory of politics, but his analysis paradoxically serves to undercut one of the fundamental presuppositions of classical political thought. Nietzsche affirms he classical emphasis on the care for the self while denying the validity of the *polis*. Whereas thinkers like Aristotle consistently argued that humans can only be fully human within the *polis*, Nietzsche argues that the opposite is the case. Within the confines of collective existence, humans are not capable of reaching their full potential *qua* humans; the mechanisms of conformity are simply too invasive. Nietzsche, however, does not reject the notion of the *polis* out of hand, his flirtation with the possibility of the community of the Higher Men is an experiment along the lines of the ancient heroic community. Nevertheless, Nietzsche concludes that even the least restrictive social situation will inevitable compromise the individual; it cannot be otherwise.

\(^{10}\) Patocka argues that the sixteenth century is the line of demarcation that leads to the destruction of the care-for-self. “Care for the soul means that truth is something not given once and for all, nor merely a matter of observing and acknowledging the observed, but rather a lifelong inquiry, a self-controlling, self-unifying intellectual and vital practice. Greek thought distilled the care for the soul in two forms: we care for the soul so that it could undertake its spiritual journey through the world... or, conversely, we think and learn to render our soul into that firm crystal of being... which represents one of the possibilities of the being which bears within it the source of movement, of deciding its being or nonbeing, that is, dissolution in the uncertainty of instinct and unclarified tradition.” Jan Patocka, *Heresetical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. by Erazim Kohak, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 82.
This is especially true of contemporary ideas of politics. The modern conception of politics, long removed from the intimacy of the *polis*, has become another detached symbol, appealing to ideals that no longer exist. Therefore, Nietzsche is not as radical as he first appears when he calls for a return to emphasis upon the individual. This theme has been repeated throughout history in response to the problems inherent in increasing collectivization. As Patocka argues, the individual self is always the victim of the collectivization of goals and commitments:

> From that time on another motif comes to the fore, opposing the motif of the care of the soul and coming to dominate one area after another, politics, economics, faith, and science, transforming them in a new style. Not a care *for the soul*, the care to *be*, but rather the care to *have*, care for the external world and its conquest, becomes the dominant concern. 11

In its emphasis upon societal collective goals and identities, modern politics has betrayed the classical foundations of politics and surrendered to a more primitive type of human existence, analogous to tribal existence. Whereas the ancients were preoccupied with defining a political space in which individuals could reach their ultimate potential as individual human beings, modern politics seeks to produce compliant members who do not seek to express their individuality, or only do so in a tightly confined manner. In essence, the classical political emphasis was upon the

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11 Patocka, *Heretical Essays*, 83. Modern politics therefore has little to do with the classical conception of politics; they are antithetical.
production of *citizens*, the modern emphasis is upon the production of subjects. Nietzsche calls for neither. Both models of politics have been a failure in that the inevitable product of collective existence is always mediocrity.

Nietzsche is calling for a return to the ancient care-for-self that was emphasized by classical philosophy, *albeit without the emphasis upon the polis*. This more than anything else represents Nietzsche's most radical contribution to political theory. Nietzsche's political thought is therefore not social, but it is not asocial either. The metamorphic structure of his argument in *Zarathustra* depends upon an initial immersion within a social matrix; this is the only condition which allows for the rise of nausea.

Without the social, therefore, Nietzsche's positive thought concerning the self is impossible. Indeed, the self is transmuted, i.e. changed, through the experience of existential horror; it must be changed from its initial state of collective being. The social man is the larval stage of humanity; nausea is its chrysalis; and the transmuted self is the goal. There can be no transmuted self without the social; this is why the community of the Higher Men is not tenable. It is not possible to skip over the stage of social creation of the self, to do so precludes the experiences necessary for the fostering of nausea.

It is most accurate to term Nietzsche's political thought *transsocial*. Nietzsche's politics thus remains *necessarily* ambiguous, but this return to
ambiguity is only the surface expression of a deep commitment to individual self-worth. Jaspers mirrors this point:

... that which underlies and determines all judgements is provided by an attitude directed upon the whole of being. It is no longer mere politics but philosophy, on the basis of which, within the wealth of possibilities but without rational principle, opposing and contradictory ways can be tried solely under the guidance of the idea of saving and advancing humanity's being. In comparison with the great traditional constructions of political science and philosophy of history, Nietzsche's political thinking is bound to show an absence of logical unity and of consistent, precise conceptual procedures. The substance of his thinking shuns any attempt at unequivocal expression, but still it generates a wholly uniform atmosphere. Such thinking can sweep through one's soul like a storm; but it cannot be formalized and conceptualized in a clear and conclusive manner. Insofar as Nietzsche intends to produce this atmosphere, he avoids anything that could resemble a doctrine. His conceptuality is not meant to express a truth that is assuming a fixed goal and final shape; rather it appears to present itself as a means of unlimited flexibility in the hands of a governing will to think that is not bounded by anything. In this way its formulation attains a maximum of suggestive power. Only by taking this power of expression together with the capacity for change can we lay hold of the import of such thinking.12

Rather than opening a new political space for collectives, Nietzsche instead calls for a reevaluation of traditional political categories with an eye towards individual development. He does not solve the problems of collective existence, nor does he seek to try. Politics must remain a function of the self, eternally changing and mysterious. As Jaspers notes:

Apart from Nietzsche, all political thinkers regard politics as precisely delimited. They usually take it to be bounded by God or transcendence or refer it to a specific human actuality. Political

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12 Jaspers, Nietzsche, 252-253.
thinking can for instance proceed (as in the case of Hegel) within the scheme of existing and developing totalities; then it is a systematic whole expressing the self-awareness of a factual reality. . . . Or again, it can develop (as in the case of Machiavelli) with a view to particular realities and their significance for the autonomy of power. 13

Because of this, the elaboration of a Zarathustrian political theory cannot take the form of a framework or even an ethical code; it is necessarily too subjective. Rather, Nietzschean ethics is a protean exercise operating within the context of the Nietzschean perspective of flux and eternal Becoming:

Free from what? Zarathustra does not care about that! But your eye should clearly tell me: free for what? Can you furnish yourself with your own good and evil and hang up your own will above yourself as a law? Can you be the judge of yourself and avenger of your law? It is terrible to be alone with the judge and avenger of one’s own law. It is to be like a star thrown forth into empty space and onto the icy breath of solitude.14

Nietzsche therefore cannot create a framework for politics without becoming hypocritical. Nietzsche’s theory of power precludes the creation of a non-repressive ethics. He consistently argues that all ethical systems, of whatever form, will eventually degenerate into dogma and repression.

As Nietzsche’s ultimate concern is with the liberation of the individual from external signifiers, Nietzschean politics must be necessity resist

13 Jaspers, Nietzsche, 252.

14 Nietzsche, Zaratustra, I:17.
concretization in any form. By positing his ethical imperative in an aesthetic mode, Nietzsche seeks to insure that each transmutation is fundamentally separate and unique, precluding concretization. As Deleuze and Guattari argue:

The diagnosis of becomings in every passing present is what Nietzsche assigned to the philosopher as physician, “physician of civilization,” or inventor of new immanent modes of existence. Eternal philosophy, but also the history of philosophy, gives way to a becoming-philosophical.

The interpretation of Zarathustra presented in this dissertation makes it possible to reconcile the disparate strands of Nietzsche’s seemingly scattered political references with his epistemological and ontological precepts. In Zarathustra, he begins with a simple, yet devastating assumption: God is no longer in the picture. Although this assertion is one of the most powerful that can be offered, Nietzsche presents it in a subordinate clause within his introductory section. The irrelevance of God is not the ultimate conclusion of Nietzsche’s philosophy; it is the beginning. Nietzsche goes on to reject other traditional bases for order and ultimately

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15 “Independence is for the very few; it is a privilege of the strong. And whoever attempts it even with the best right but without inner constraint proves that he is probably not only strong, but also daring to the point of recklessness. He enters into a labyrinth, he multiplies a thousandfold the dangers which life brings with it in any case, not the least of which is that no one can see how and where he loses is way, becomes lonely, and is torn piecemeal by some minotaur of conscience. Supposing one like that comes to grief, this happens so far from the comprehension of men that they neither feel it nor sympathize. And he cannot go back any longer. Nor can he go back to the pity of men.” Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, § 29.

16 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy? 113.
meaning. He concludes that the state is a poor substitute for the unifying
effect of the belief in God. The community of like-minded individuals is
capable of more positive action, but is ultimately flawed as it will
degenerate into a type of herd mentality.

It is this total loss of order and meaning that sets the stage for
Nietzsche's positive theory. Nietzsche does not mourn the loss of meaning;
it was never really there to begin with. The nausea of the eternal return is
not only contempt for the return of the commonplace and the mediocre; it
represents something much more important. Indeed, nausea, not the eternal
return, may well be the central metaphor in Zarathustra. It represents the
abject horror created by the realization that there is ultimately no meaning
to be found in the universe as a whole. The heavens are silent, and human
society seeks to quell the questioning spirit.

The horror caused by this realization nearly destroys Zarathustra.
However, it is necessary for Zarathustra to stare into the void and
appreciate the full horror of the absurd universe before his task can begin in
earnest. Zarathustra is a harsh document; it peels away the layers of belief
that we have constructed over the course of human history to reveal the
only true arché: nothingness. It is only when Zarathustra embraces the void
that he can go on living. Thus, the concept of eternal return is not important
per se; it is rather the effect that it produces, existential nausea, which is
important. Eternal return teaches the individual that there is no higher good, no ultimate meaning. The universe is absurd and will remain so.

The horror of existence ultimately destroys the static view of the self; including the solace that comes from the belief in order, divine or human, which allows people to live their lives in the ordinary world without complaint. The confrontation with finitude destroys the ability to live as before and continued existence can only come with the price of great internal suffering in the face of an absurd universe. Ultimately, the individual life can have great meaning, but only within that individual self. Once we abandon hope for another world, and reliance upon others, it is possible to create ourselves in our own image. This is the ultimate political meaning of Zarathustra. It condemns the individual to an uncertain existence, consciously free from the systems and institutions of solace that have built up in society to shield the individual from these harsh truths. As Löwith argues, “as an at-tempter, Nietzsche-Zarathustra is always in transit, a ‘wanderer’ who attempts, and walks along, different paths in order to come to the truth.”17 This “truth” is the radical isolation of the individual in the face of a meaningless universe. It is a condemnation of a type, but Nietzsche argues that it opens up an entirely new space of personal existence, an undiscovered country.

17 Karl Löwith, Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same, 12.
II.

Although Nietzsche couches Zarathustra's arguments in prophetic language and metaphor, Zarathustra is far from being a conventional prophet. Importantly, Zarathustra urges those who have listened to his message to abandon him and mistrust his message. "I now go away alone, my disciples! You too now go away and be alone! So I will have it. Truly, I advise you: go away from me and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And better still: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he has deceived you."18

As argued earlier, this admonishment is meant as much to protect Zarathustra from contamination as to preserve his disciples. However, the figure of Zarathustra offers another object of resistance that can spur personal growth in those who listen:

The man of knowledge must be able not only to love his enemies but also to hate his friends. One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil. And why, then, should you not pluck at my laurels? You respect me; but how if one day your respect should tumble? Take care that a falling statue does not strike you dead!19

Zarathustra's failure to teach others is not a failure of his educational method or because of his lack of desire: the subject simply cannot be communicated, much less taught. It is the mistake of the modern age, and of ourselves, to assume otherwise. How can someone learn self-overcoming

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18 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, l:22.3.

19 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, l:22.3. Jung quoted this passage to Freud when he decided to transcend his theories with that of symbolic analysis.
without first having self-knowledge? It is this frustration that is the origin of Nietzsche’s genealogical analyses, and is exhibited prominently in *Zarathustra*. This is why Zarathustra constantly laments that “they do not understand me: I am not the mouth for these ears.”\(^{20}\) It is impossible to expect individuals who have not yet experienced the horrors of nausea to recognize the profound symbols in Zarathustra’s teaching for what they are: calls to transmutation. The idea of transmutation cannot occur to such a mind; it hardly warrants consideration. “You had not yet sought yourselves when you found me. . . . Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.”\(^{21}\)

Nevertheless, Zarathustra continues throughout the narrative to refer to himself as a prophet. “I spoke my teaching, I broke upon my teaching: thus my eternal fate will have it—as prophet do I perish!”\(^{22}\) Nietzsche intentionally casts Zarathustra as a prophet rather than a teacher. A prophet can speak in symbolic language; it is natural for the role. Furthermore, the prophet communicates knowledge that is gained in an unconventional manner, in this instance through personal insight. Jaspers argues:

> What is Nietzsche’s real intention in this conflict between prophetic proclamation and rejection of blind followers, between pedagogue and iconoclast, and in all the interplay of statements that cancel each


\(^{21}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I:223.

\(^{22}\) Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III:13.2.
other out while they yet strike at the heart of things? What will replace the religious founder for him and what does he wish to be for others?23

To answer Jaspers, Zarathustra does not wish to be anything for others. This is precisely the goal of Zarathustra’s rejection of his followers. If anything, Zarathustra is prophesying to himself, uttering a riddle of what he might become. “Zarathustra the prophet, Zarathustra the laughing prophet. . . . I myself have set this crown on my head!”24 Zarathustra serves as an impetus to the individual, but not as a guide. The harsh critiques of social existence advanced by Nietzsche can offer an impetus to the individual, but they cannot take the place of the experiences themselves. The individual must be ready to receive the prophesy in order for the transmutation to make sense.

The figs are falling from the trees, they are fine and sweet; and as they fall their red skins split. I am a north wind to ripe figs. Thus, like figs, do these teachings fall to you, my friends: now drink their juice and eat their sweet flesh! It is autumn all around and clear sky and afternoon. Behold what abundance is around us! And it is fine to gaze out upon distant seas from the midst of superfluity. Once you said “God” when you gazed upon distant seas; but now I have taught you to say “Übermensch”.25

In actuality, Zarathustra’s role is unclear, even to himself. It is impossible to characterize him as either a traditional prophet or teacher.

23 Jaspers, Nietzsche.

24 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:13.18.

25 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:2.
Zarathustra is as much the subject of his prophesy as its conveyor, in keeping with the conclusion that the narrative of Zarathustra is essentially a vehicle for the communication of internal experiences:

A seer, a willer, a creator, a future itself and a bridge to the future—and alas, also like a cripple upon this bridge: Zarathustra is all this. And even you have often asked yourselves: Who is Zarathustra to us? What shall we call him? And, like me, you answer your own questions with questions. . . . I walk among men as fragments of the future: of that future which I scan. And it is all my art and aim, to compose into one and bring together what is fragment and riddle and dreadful chance.  

Indeed, the most profound assertions Zarathustra makes arise from his inner experience, as revealed through his continuing reinterpretation.

"My past broke open its graves, many a pain buried alive awoke: they had only been sleeping, concealed in winding sheets." By releasing this repressed knowledge and reinterpreting the will-to-power, the individual brings forth his own prophetic imagination. "Truly, my happiness and my freedom come like a storm . . . yes, you too, my friends, will be terrified by my wild wisdom; and perhaps you will flee from it together with my enemies." Zarathustra’s prophesy is therefore one of self-revelation.

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26 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:20.
27 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:3.
28 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:1.
Because of the essentially subjective nature of this endeavor,

Nietzsche warns of the tendency to create ideal types based upon one's self,

most prominently in *The Twilight of the Idols*:

Let us finally consider how naïve it is altogether to say: "Man ought to be such and such!" Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the abundance of a lavish play and change of forms—and some wretched loafer of a moralist comments: "No! Man ought to be different!" He even knows what man should be like, this wretched bigot and prig: he paints himself on the wall and comments, "Ecce Homo!" 29

In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche asserts that there is no ideal type of the transmuted self; the symbol of the Übermensch is intentionally undefined.

Even the process of self-overcoming is different for each individual, much more so the outcome of this journey. As McGowan notes:

In the chaotic world of atomistic impulses, precepts, and experiences, all explanatory schemes must fail because random chaos is the only reality, and all freedom must be impossible because there can be no agent who directs or chooses the movements of will... As a result, like Nietzsche, postmodern theory often finds itself in the position of affirming (and desiring) something that it also declares impossible to attain. 30

Nietzsche emphasizes that since self-overcoming is never complete, it makes no sense to articulate a goal that can never be attained, setting up another signifier for bad conscience. "There has never yet been an Übermensch. I have seen them both naked, the greatest and the smallest man. They are still all-too-similar to one another. Truly, I found even the

The individual who is ready to receive Zarathustra's prophesy does not need such a concrete expression of the transmutation, it will intuitively make sense. "One has to speak with thunder and heavenly fireworks to feeble and dormant senses. But the voice of beauty speaks softly: it steals into only the most awakened souls." 32

III.

Nietzsche is not able, or does not desire, to overcome the political problems that plague modern existence. Essentially, the political argument in Zarathustra dismisses all forms of collective life as lost, a waste of time if not a danger for the individual. Nietzsche's positive thought, while it does not seek to destroy collective existence, relegates its role to that of producing the misery necessary to spur individuals toward nausea. However, Nietzsche also makes it absolutely clear that only a few will be able to overcome societal pressures and begin the process of self-creation. As such, Nietzsche's positive thought leaves political theorists at something of a loss.

Nietzsche does not deal with important political issues such as order and justice. Indeed, he dismisses both of these as societal myths that have evolved to perpetuate the status quo. Nietzsche's reticence on these topics is therefore somewhat understandable. He does not speak to the nature of

30 McGowan, Postmodernism and Its Critics, 88.

31 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:4.

32 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:5.

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justice because his theory of interpretation denies stable meanings, and
because he does not wish to set up the basis for new dogmas. However, this
does not solve the serious problems involved in social action. Nietzsche
essentially refuses to speak to practical politics, and therefore does not give
any guidance for how people should live together within the Lebenswelt.
Nietzsche’s silence is his prerogative, but it has contributed to his
marginalization within political theory.

Nietzsche’s political analysis in Zarathustra, inasmuch as it is
transsocial, denigrates the social realm in a manner that could be construed
as dangerous. If the social is not valued, indeed viewed with contempt,
there is no incentive to insure that those who are not capable of self-
overcoming are protected. Although Nietzsche does not argue that the
masses should be manipulated, he does not provide any guidance for how
the exceptional individual should interact with others. However,
Nietzsche’s imperative to separate from others to avoid contamination,
which ultimately led Zarathustra to seek solitude again, certainly supports
the assertion that Nietzsche did not have a social role in mind for the
individual.

Zarathustra therefore sets the stage for individual creation of a new
political milieu. Nietzsche informs us that the this project needs to be
undertaken, but not does not elaborate how. This is frustrating and
dangerous, but certainly consistent with Nietzsche's philosophy and with
postmodern thought in general.

Nietzsche's legacy to postmodernist theory, then, is his deeply
ambiguous atomism, which embodies a radical desire for freedom
(understood negatively) and provides a powerfully skeptical
ontology in his battle against the truth value of human
representational schemes, discourses of knowledge, and moral
systems. 33

For Nietzsche, the blind alleys along the way to self-overcoming are
as important as the successes. Indeed, those who walk a direct path are
probably not obeying their inner directives. "All good things approach their
goal crookedly.... His step betrays whether a man is stepping along his
own path: so watch me walk! But he who approaches his goal, dances.."34

Nietzsche's Zarathustra resembles Tiresias the blind soothsayer. He
possesses knowledge, but does not dare elaborate it to those who are not
ready. Such disclosure would surely destroy both the speaker and the
hearer. For Nietzsche, reticence is a virtue; it is the hallmark of truth. The
speaker immediately sets himself up as an external signifier, the potential
oppressor of those who hear. Further, the speaker assumes a measure of
responsibility for those who listen:

Something said to me voicelessly: "You know, Zarathustra, but you
do not speak!" And I answered at last defiantly: "Yes, I know, but I
will not speak!" Then again something said to me voicelessly: "You
will not, Zarathustra? Is this true? Do not hide yourself in your

33 McGowan, Postmodernism and Its Critics, 87.
34 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:13.17.
defiance!” And I wept and trembled like a child and said: “Alas, I want to, but how can I? Release this from me alone! It is beyond my strength!”35

In this sense, Zarathustra is a riddle. Its ultimate meaning can only be grasped through interpretation and personal insight. Because of this, it is Nietzsche’s reluctance to be specific that gives his philosophy such power.

“Be like a wind when it rushes forth from its mountain caves: it will dance to its own pipe, the seas tremble and leap under its footsteps.”36

Concretization and the hubris this implies is Zarathustra’s greatest enemy, threatening to destroy what he has created:

Where I found again my old devil and arch-enemy, the Spirit of Gravity, and all that he created: compulsion, dogma, need and consequence and purpose and will and good and evil: For must there not exist that which is danced upon, danced across?37

Not all of the socially-created elements can be overcome. Even if they could, the self in constant flux and one therefore never know himself completely. No matter how much we resist, it is inescapable that humans are innately social; we are created through interactions with others and cannot live on our own for a number of years. The project outlined in Zarathustra therefore is incapable of completion; it is a continuing project.

35 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:22. This is the stillest hour. It highlights that Zarathustra contains this knowledge all along, but does not want to confront the truth. Zarathustra is spoken to by “something” — it is his subconscious.


37 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:12:2.
without a definite outcome. This is not a flaw—it is the intentional
outgrowth of Nietzsche's epistemology. The tension with the social realm
serves as a constant impetus to resistance and therefore creation. "The air
thin and pure, danger near, and the spirit full of a joyful mischief: these
things suit one another."38 This also precludes concretization into a
teleological schematization. Nietzsche's project seeks to provide an
alternative to continual emergence in collective identity. The transmuted
self can see the social realm and the Ultimate Man for what they are, and
this contempt will serve to prevent backsliding into the morass of collective
mediocrity, even if the social can never be completely overcome:

What is the ape to men? A laughing-stock or a painful
embarrassment. In the same way will man be to the Übermensch: a
laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your
way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. Once you
were apes, and even now man is more of an ape than any ape. But he
who is wisest among you, he also is only a discord and a hybrid of
plant and of ghost.39

Nietzsche's analysis implies that resistance is a natural expression of
the will-to-power. However, modern society causes the individual to
internalize this innate conflict, which is then expressed in bad conscience
and self-hatred. Nietzsche argues that it is necessary to add a level of
intentionality to resistance. This is not to say that there must be a goal to
resistance, only that the individual must resist. For Nietzsche, resistance is

38 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 1:7.
not a moral statement, "the good and the just call me the destroyer of morals: my story is immoral." Resistance is however an ethical statement, albeit within the sphere of individual aesthetic ethics. In this sense, continual resistance is consistent with the need for perpetual self-overcoming. Resistance should be welcomed and encouraged; it is the hallmark of transmutation. "You tell me: 'Life is hard to bear.' But if it were otherwise why should you have your pride in the morning and your resignation in the evening?" Nietzsche's philosophical and political thought is therefore based upon the continual opposition between competing perspectives, both within and external to the self. "Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I have to oppose it and my love: thus will my will have it." The imperative of the will-to-power is therefore constant flux and continual tension. It makes no sense to speak of stable political structures or fixed identities; these are oxymoronic.

39 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §3.

40 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:19.

41 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:7. "The modern hero, the modern individual who dares to heed the call and seek the mansion of that presence with whom it is our whole destiny to be atoned, cannot, indeed must not, wait for his community to cast off its slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding. 'Live,' Nietzsche says, 'as though the day were here.' It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal—carries the cross of the redeemer—not in the bright moments of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair." Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 391.

42 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:12.
Nietzsche recognizes that the model of selfhood he proposes is inimical to politics. By its very nature, the simple fact of living with others necessarily involves the creation of a superstructure of debts, obligations, and responsibilities. Besides becoming the basis of bad conscience, these responsibilities limit the possibilities for self-creation necessary for transmutation. "Great obligations do not make a man grateful, they make him resentful; and if a small kindness is not forgotten it becomes a gnawing worm." All individuals seek to express the will-to-power, but this expression is inevitably frustrated by the limiting factors imposed by collective existence. Because of this, collective existence in any form is inimical to the fundamental nature of humanity: "Where I found a living creature, there I found will-to-power; and even in the will of the servant I found the will to be master." Because of this, Nietzsche refuses to entertain the notion of a reformed political theory of either the state or the community. Nietzsche's silence on this matter speaks volumes.

The implication of the interpretation advanced in this dissertation is that Nietzsche's model of transmuted selfhood precludes all models of collective action. Although Nietzsche offers hints that some types of collective existence might be acceptable, like the Greeks or friendship, these are never articulated as a concrete alternative. Furthermore, it is telling that

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43 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II:3.
Nietzsche never discusses, in any of his works, educating children. His positive theory seems wholly devoted to the improvement of the already mature individual. As such, Nietzsche's philosophy is one of redemption, not utopianism. Nietzsche abandons the impulse inherent in political theory to articulate a new political system to foster his goals. Rather, it is the responsibility of the individual to recognize the pathological character of modern society and attempt existential escape.

*Zarathustra* can therefore be read as a modern philosophical tragedy. We know the problems of individual and collective existence, but can never complete the process of transmutation or redeem social existence. We can see the meaninglessness of existence as revealed in the void, but can never fully overcome it or even seek consolation. Human knowledge is uncertain, and given the symbolic deficiency of language, the most important insights concerning reality cannot be communicated. As Nietzsche states: "*The world is deep*"[^45] Interpretation can never cease; life is constant uncertainty in the face of an absurd universe that can communicate no solace. Humanity is in a sense cursed; it alone is capable of nausea but can never alleviate it. This is why individual existence is so precarious and prone to self-deception. "Uncanny is human existence and still without meaning: a


buffoon can destroy it." If the individual is to survive as an individual, it
is necessary to become light in the face of the void, and to dance over its
precipice:

And me too, who love life, it seems that butterflies and soap bubbles,
and whatever is like them among men, know the most about
happiness. To see these light, foolish, dainty, affecting little souls
flutter about—that moves Zarathustra to tears and song. I could only
believe in a God who knew how to dance.

This is the meaning behind Nietzsche's often misunderstood
imperative: "many die too late and some die too early. Still the doctrine
sounds strange: 'Die at the right time.'" Through the realization of
personal finitude, the individual is able to project himself against a concrete
endpoint, and thereby reinterpret his existence accordingly. Only then is it
possible to create a meaning for oneself in the face of the abyss of
meaninglessness.

What, then, does this interpretation of Zarathustra offer? Certainly
not a political theory, but a political project: continual resistance and self-
creation. Whenever and wherever the individual encounters seemingly
stable institutions and value judgements, they must be confronted and
resisted. "Good and evil, and rich and poor, and noble and mean, and all
the names of the virtues: they should be weapons and ringing symbols that

46 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §7.
47 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:7.
48 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:21.
life must overcome itself again and again!” Nietzsche argues that eternal self-overcoming is the secret of life. “And life itself told me this secret: ‘Behold, it said, ‘I am that which must overcome itself again and again.’”

This is a process of continual self-overcoming, not a teleological exercise. This eternal flux is inimical to social existence of any type, which requires stability. As Jaspers concludes, “instead of developing an unambiguous political theory, Nietzsche’s thinking reveals the abyss of existence and the ambiguity of all reality.”

_Zarathustra_ can be read as offering hope in the face of increasingly collectivized existence. In this sense, _Zarathustra_ is indeed a subversive document. It denies the validity and efficacy of politics, and calls for resistance to social norms and even to the idea of society. It further calls for individuals to confront inner truths that are profoundly disturbing, not only to personal mental health but to societal harmony. Is _Zarathustra_ then the harbinger of nihilism and anarchy? Nietzsche’s critique of society and new model of selfhood does not necessarily call for the destruction of society or complete alienation from others. Rather, Nietzsche calls for psychological liberation from metaphysical systems of consolation and existential

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49 Nietzsche, _Zarathustra_, II:7.

50 Nietzsche, _Zarathustra_, II:12.

51 Jaspers, _Nietzsche_, 277.
alienation. As Löwith states, "in the horizon of Nietzsche's 'atheism,' which recognizes for the first time that the 'death of God' means for man 'freedom towards death,' Hegel and Feuerbach draw together as 'church fathers,' 'half-priests,' and 'veil-makers.'"52 Similarly, the "death of the state" opens up a new space for personal existence free from ideology and nationalism.

Jaspers states:

Creation without transcendence, or self-being without God, must lead to two conclusions that Nietzsche actually draws. When human finiteness ceases to be evident as finiteness because it is no longer enclosed by any infinity, i.e., when creative freedom faces nothingness instead of transcendence (for that which has nothing outside itself is everything, with the result that finiteness cannot be taken seriously), then either (1) creation is absolutized as a temporal actuality to which no valid standard applies, or (2) it is deified. Neither of these related to transcendence; each is, instead, a way in which confidence becomes evident at the boundary which is no longer a boundary but a fulfillment.53

_Zarathustra_ can be read as a calling to a way of life that is cognizant of the dangers of society and confident of individual self-worth. The transmuted individual is unwilling to compromise personal growth for safety or convenience. This is perhaps the ultimate individual expression of the will-to-power, the will-to-self. It is paradoxical that one must be called back to an awareness of the self, an awareness that should be the most fundamental. As Klossowski argues, "on the one hand, forgetfulness and unconsciousness are necessary to life; on the other hand, there is a 'will to

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52 Löwith, Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same, 38-39.
unconsciousness' which, precisely because it is willed, implies the consciousness of our conditioned state: an irresoluble antimony."54 Nietzsche does not provide the resolution to this tension; perhaps it cannot be resolved.

Nietzsche is therefore not the prophet of nihilism; he also does not call for anarchy. He rather calls us to confront the uncomfortable truth that the universe is meaningless, the universe is silent, the myths with which we surround ourselves are unhealthy and insure mediocrity. As painful as it is, we must embrace the void and realize our own personal nausea. When we do this, it becomes evident that the only alternative is to create ourselves in our own image. "To be sure, I am a forest and a night of dark trees: but he who is not afraid of my darkness will find rosebushes too underneath my cypresses."55 There is, however, little guidance available and no assurance of success.

53 Jaspers, Nietzsche, 160.

54 Klossowski, Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle, 54.

55 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:10.
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Appendix

A Response to Heidegger's Question: "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?"

Both Nietzsche and Heidegger have received a great deal of attention in contemporary scholarship. Indeed, it has widely been recognized that these two philosophers have made some of the greatest contributions to "postmodern" philosophy and political thought. However, despite the voluminous amount of research and exhaustive interpretation of both of these thinkers, there is a surprising lack of unanimity regarding the content of their central philosophical tenets, much less the implications of their thought for philosophy as a whole. The philosophies of both Nietzsche and Heidegger remain heuristic nightmares, full of mutability and outright self-contradiction.

Complicating this interpretive endeavor is the fact that Heidegger was greatly influenced by Nietzsche; indeed a thoroughgoing examination of Nietzsche is central to Heidegger's philosophical-ontological project. The culmination of this ongoing dialogue is Heidegger's voluminous four-volume treatise on Nietzsche, which has arguably become the most influential interpretation of Nietzsche's thought, coloring many later interpretations of Nietzsche's philosophy.

However, Heidegger's analysis is open to criticism along many angles, from charges of outright misinterpretation to his reliance on the
highly problematic Nachlass fragments. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine Heidegger's entire interpretation of Nietzsche, especially considering these potentially serious problems with the text. Fortunately, Heidegger produced a compact essay on Nietzsche's self-proclaimed masterpiece, Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Heidegger's essay, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" contains the essential philosophical points Heidegger concludes from his Nietzsche project, and therefore serves as a microcosm of Heidegger's ruminations on Nietzsche. This essay will therefore examine Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's magnum opus to demonstrate the fundamental problems with Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche.

I

With characteristic understatement, Heidegger begins his essay by stating: "the question, it would seem, can be easily answered."\(^1\) However, Heidegger demonstrates that the interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra is anything but easy. The narrative format of Zarathustra is a drastic departure from conventional philosophical texts, and the use of symbol and metaphor can lead to intense confusion and multiple interpretations. Although Heidegger does not separate his essay into sections, it is possible

to identify several heuristic stages Heidegger progresses through to reach his ultimate conclusion: Nietzsche's thought as expressed in *Zarathustra* represents the ultimate expression of metaphysical thinking.²

First, Heidegger grapples with what the actual figure of Zarathustra is supposed to represent. Zarathustra goes down from his mountain to teach the wisdom he has accumulated in solitude. He is therefore according to Heidegger an advocate, *ein Fürsprecher*.³ Heidegger argues that the advocate does not only proclaim knowledge, he "interprets and explains what he is talking about and what he is advocating."⁴ Thus, Nietzsche's character of Zarathustra must do more than simply present "truth," he must integrate it into an interpretation of the fundamental order of the universe. Heidegger identifies this fundamental order as the will-to-power.

It is therefore Heidegger's contention that Nietzsche's philosophy is centered around the exploration of different manifestations of this unitary concept: the will-to-power. "Zarathustra speaks on behalf of life, suffering, and the circle, and that is what he speaks forth. These three, 'life, suffering, circle,' belong together and are the selfsame."⁵ Indeed, for Heidegger the

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² As Heidegger argues: "every great thinker always *thinks* one jump more originally than he directly *speaks*. Our interpretation must therefore try to say what is unsaid by him." Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche 1: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1979), 134.

³ Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 211.

⁴ Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 212.

⁵ Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 212.
entirety of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* is devoted to an examination of the different permutations of the will-to-power, as expressed in conflict and recurrence. In this sense, Zarathustra is expressing a philosophy of perpetual flux, yet rooted in the actions of the will:

Accordingly, Zarathustra introduces himself as an advocate of the proposition that all being is will to power, a will that suffers in its creating and colliding, and that wills itself precisely in this way in eternal recurrence of the same. With the above assertion we have brought the essence of Zarathustra to definition . . . 6

The "essence" of Zarathustra is therefore this advocacy of the will-to-power as the fundamental essence of the universe. The two most familiar elements of Zarathustra's teaching are the *Übermensch* (overman) and the eternal recurrence of the same, both therefore manifestations of the will-to-power.7 Heidegger examines what each of these doctrines represent, but is more concerned with the relationship between the two. As Heidegger argues: "to all appearances, he teaches two things: the eternal return of the same and the overman. However, it is not immediately apparent whether and in what way the things he teaches belong together."8

Indeed, these two concepts are problematic in themselves; the connection between the two is even less forthcoming. Heidegger asserts:

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7 It is best to leave the term *Übermensch* untranslated, but since Krell renders it as "overman" I have left it as such in citations from his translation of Heidegger.

8 Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” 213.
"yet even if the connection were to be clarified it would remain questionable whether we are hearing the advocate, whether we are learning from the teacher. . . . We must pay attention to the way he says it, on what occasions, and with what intent."9 Thus, for Heidegger the manner in which Zarathustra becomes aware of his destiny is as important as Zarathustra’s ultimate teachings.

Heidegger then moves to examining how Zarathustra becomes aware of his destiny to advocate these concepts of the Übermensch and the eternal recurrence. Heidegger focuses on a section in the third part of Zarathustra entitled “The Convalescent” (Der Genesende). Zarathustra has become comatose after his experience of the great nausea and the occurrence of his “most abysmal thought.”10 Heidegger argues that “The Convalescent is one who is getting ready to turn homeward, that is to toward what defines him. The convalescent is under way to himself, so that he can say of himself who he is.”11

Thus, it is in this passive mode of convalescence that Zarathustra is ready to learn of his destiny, what he must ultimately advocate. However, Heidegger notes that Zarathustra does not learn of this destiny from within

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10 Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra, III:13.

himself. Rather, it is revealed to him. "Zarathustra does not utter the
decisive phrase 'You are the teacher of the eternal return!' by himself to
himself. His animals tell him this." Indeed, "the animals seek to learn
Zarathustra’s essence. He asks himself whether he is still—that is, whether
he is already—the one who he properly is." However, Heidegger has
already identified Zarathustra’s essence as that of the advocate of the will-
to-power in its various forms. Therefore, Zarathustra must come to realize
this himself and act accordingly.

"The animals say: 'For your animals know well, O Zarathustra, who
you are and must become: behold, you are the teacher of the eternal
return—that is now your destiny!' Thus it comes to light: Zarathustra must
first become who he is." Zarathustra becomes this teacher through the
explication of the will-to-power as expressed in the concept of the
Übermensch and ultimately the eternal recurrence. Because of the
problematic nature of these concepts, it is necessary to analyze both of these
in detail to discern the connection between the two.

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12 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?" 213. In Nietzsche II, Heidegger discusses
the symbolism of the animals in great detail: "... Zarathustra’s two animals, eagle and
serpent, symbolize: first, in their circling and coiling—the circle and ring of eternal return;
second—in their essential character as pride and discernment, respectively, these
constituting the basic stance of the teacher of the eternal return and his mode of knowledge;
third, as the animals of his loneliness, being supreme exactions on Zarathustra himself.”
Heidegger, Nietzsche II, 48.

13 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?" 214.

14 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?" 214. Heidegger quotes from "The
Convalescent".

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First, however, it is necessary to comment upon Heidegger’s analysis thus far. Heidegger’s characterization of Zarathustra’s task is problematic. Heidegger casts Zarathustra as primarily an advocate of a specific worldview, the primacy of the will-to-power. This characterization overlooks Zarathustra’s self-proclaimed task, self-overcoming, and to urge action toward this ultimate goal. “Mankind is something that must be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?”

This task of self-overcoming is more concrete and experiential than Heidegger assumes. Indeed, much of the Zarathustra narrative is devoted to the task of overcoming various facets of modern humanity. These include the repression inherent in mass society, the problems of friendship, and finally the confrontation with personal finitude and the tangential nature of the self.

The task of self-overcoming necessarily involves the concept of the eternal return, but it is not limited to or even epitomized in the eternal recurrence, as Heidegger seems to argue. Indeed, Heidegger confounds the concept of the will-to-power, self-overcoming, and the idea of the Übermensch in his insistence that Zarathustra’s destiny is the teacher of the eternal recurrence. Each of these concepts are distinct elements in the

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15 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §3.
project of self-creation but are treated separately by Nietzsche. The relation between these elements will be specifically discussed later in this paper.

Heidegger's insistence that Zarathustra only learns of his destiny as the teacher of the eternal recurrence in the passive mode of convalescence is even more problematic. Rather, Zarathustra learns only of his destiny through concrete interaction in the world and eventually through self-contemplation; specifically not through a passive reception of knowledge. Indeed, Zarathustra acknowledges this task as supremely difficult:

Alas, I have to climb my most difficult path! Alas, I have started upon my loneliest wandering! But a man of my sort does not avoid such an hour: the hour that says to him: "Only now so you tread your path of greatness!" Summit and abyss—they are now united in one!16

The convalescence is actually brought about through Zarathustra's realization of the meaninglessness of existence, as symbolized in the great nausea. The period of Zarathustra's convalescence is therefore his recovery from his confrontation with this horror:

"Ah! You are coming—I hear you! My abyss speaks, I have turned my ultimate depth into the light! Ah! Come here! Give me your hand... nausea, nausea, nausea—woe is me!" Hardly had Zarathustra spoken these words, however, when he fell down like a dead man and remained like a dead man for a long time.17

16 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:1.

Indeed, Zarathustra’s worst horror arises from his realization that the imperative of the eternal return renders him, exceptional though he may be, as ontologically equal to the most crude specimen of humanity.

I had seen them both naked, the greatest man and the smallest man: all too similar to one another, even the greatest all too human! The greatest too small! — that was my disgust at man! And eternal recurrence even for the smallest! That was my disgust at all existence! Alas! Nausea! Nausea! Nausea!18

Zarathustra is only able to overcome this nausea by separating himself from others, and creating himself as worthy of recurrence.

How did I free myself from nausea? Who rejuvenated my eyes? How did I fly to the height where the rabble no longer sit at the well? Did my nausea itself create wings and water-divining powers for me? Truly, I had to fly to the most extreme height to find again the fountain of delight!19

Is it therefore accurate to characterize Zarathustra as an “advocate” or a “teacher”? All his attempts at communicating his knowledge ultimately fail. He abandons his students when he realizes that they are only forming new power relationships and making him an object of bad conscience.20 Indeed, Zarathustra abandons completely the possibility of teaching anyone.

18 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:13.2. Hollingdale renders this as “disgust.”
19 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:6.
20 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:22. “But that night he went away alone and forsook his friends.” This is the end of Part II, and of Zarathustra’s dealings with others. He must return to his solitude, and his internal conversation, in order to fully comprehend the enormity of his repressed knowledge of the void.
his fundamental concepts, including the eternal recurrence, much less the project of self-overcoming:

I need pure, smooth mirrors for my teaching; upon your surface even my own reflection is distorted. Many a burden, many a memory weighs down your shoulders; many an evil dwarf crouches in your corners. And there is hidden mob in you, too. And although you are of a higher type, much in you is crooked and malformed. There is no smith in the world who could hammer you straight and into shape for me.21

Zarathustra rather recognizes his project of self-overcoming as an essentially solipsistic enterprise, incommunicable and indefinable. He recognizes his attempts at teaching to have been a waste of time, detracting from his most pressing task. It is only when he returns to his solitude that he can begin the project of self-creation in earnest:

It is returning, at last it is coming home to me—my own Self and those parts of it that have long been abroad and scattered among all things and accidents. And I know one thing more: I stand now before my last summit and before the deed that has been deferred the longest.22

Rather than being an advocate for the eternal recurrence, Zarathustra is an advocate of the self-contemplation in a foundationless context. He does not as much advocate the will-to-power and the eternal recurrence as recognize their utility in his project. Zarathustra defines himself primarily as the conqueror of the great nausea, preparing a way for the creation of his

21 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, IV:11.

22 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:1. Zarathustra has returned to solitude, and can then recover his self and begin the new quest.
own self: “This is the man without nausea, this is Zarathustra himself, the
overcomer of the great nausea”

II.

Heidegger analyses in detail the enigmatic concept of the
*Übermensch*. Heidegger must argue that there is an “essence” of man to be
found in Nietzsche’s thought to sustain his contention that Nietzsche’s
philosophy is metaphysical. Heidegger argues that Nietzsche identifies the
essence of contemporary humanity as incapable of correctly relating to
“Being,” i.e. the will-to-power. Indeed, humanity in its present form is
radically estranged from its own essence—a type of ontological
inauthenticity similar to Heidegger’s analysis in *Sein und Zeit*. Heidegger
asserts that the *Übermensch* is more than a new expression of the heroic
personality or even an existential attitude, it is a new permutation of
ontological relation:

With the name *overman* Nietzsche is by no means designating a
merely superdimensional human being of the kind that has prevailed
hitherto. Nor is he referring to a species of man that will cast off all
that is humane, making naked willfulness its law and titanic rage its
rule.

Heidegger asserts that Nietzsche realizes that humanity is no longer
in proper relation to the “being of Beings”, again understood as the will-to-
power. This ontological estrangement is the cause of modern *Dekadenz*.

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The *Übermensch* is therefore the reawakening of the innate constitution of human ontology, which has become repressed (forgotten) through centuries of doctrinal and philosophical error:

... the overman—taking the word quite literally—is that human being that goes beyond prior humanity solely in order to conduct such humanity for the first time to its essence, an essence that is still unattained, and to place humanity firmly within that essence.25

For Heidegger, Nietzsche understands this ontological problem as a value judgement. "The question asks: Is man, in his essence as man heretofore, prepared to assume dominion over the earth?"26 Nietzsche of course answers in the negative. The question, then, is how to rectify this ontological alienation. The answer, and the problem, is to be found in transcendence. Heidegger asks of Nietzsche:

Must not prior man be conducted beyond himself, over his prior self, in order to meet this challenge? If so, the 'over-man,' correctly thought, cannot be the product of an unbridled and degenerate fantasy that is plunging headlong into the world.27

In other words, there must therefore be a method to the madness.

The ontological substrate, the will-to-power, is indefinite and indefinable. If there is to be a relation between the essence of humanity and pure existence as such (Being), then it must proceed, i.e. be revealed, from existence itself.

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Man's existence is already compromised by a faulty relation to its own being; it cannot expect to proceed towards an authentic relation to Being, the will-to-power.

Heidegger thus asserts that Nietzsche expects Being to reveal itself to the individual as the will-to-power. If Heidegger is correct, then Nietzsche is indeed a metaphysician. Transcendent reality, even in the guise of the indefinable will-to-power, is a component of metaphysical things. One cannot have metaphysics without the "meta" — the transcendent. Indeed, the use of symbols to identify the indefinable is perhaps even more than metaphysical, it smacks of theology. Heidegger implies that Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is a messianic figure, showing the way for ontological salvation:

The overman proceeds beyond prior and contemporary humanity; thus he is a transition, a bridge. In order for us learners to be able to follow the teacher who teaches the overman, we must—keeping now to the imagery — get onto the bridge. We are thinking the crucial aspects of the transition when we heed these three things: First, that from which the one who is in transition departs. Second, the transition itself. Third, that toward which the one in transition is heading.28

Heidegger asserts that the one who is in transition is the inauthentic self, the estranged individual. The transition is the revealing of Being. The one in transition is therefore heading towards an authentic relation to the Being of beings. The aim of this transition, in Nietzsche’s terms, is

existential justification. Only the ontologically authentic individual is justified in assuming dominion over world (existence). This is no mere call for dominance of others or material reality, it is a call to ontological integration. Zarathustra is therefore the advocate for the possibility of authentic relation to Being. "Whither the one in transition goes, there his longing is at home. The one in transition, and even the one who points out the way to him, the teacher, is . . . on the way home to the essence that is most proper to him. He is the convalescent."30

Nietzsche therefore diagnoses the fundamental problem of modernity much as Heidegger does himself: the inauthentic relation to Being. How then can Heidegger accuse Nietzsche of being the culmination of metaphysics? Ultimately, Heidegger implies that Nietzsche's understanding of ontological alienation remains too deeply rooted in the philosophic tradition to make the leap ahead into clear understanding. Nietzsche has begun to grasp the truth, but it remains largely in the shadows, primarily because of his problematic and erroneous conception of time.

29 "What is being contested is decided in advance: power itself, which requires no aims. It is aim-less, just as the whole of beings is value-less. Such aimlessness pertains to the metaphysical essence of power. If one can speak of aim here at all, then the "aim" is the aimlessness of man's absolute dominance over the earth. The man of such dominance is the Over-man." Heidegger, *Nietzsche IV: Nihilism*, ed. David F. Krell; trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 82.

30 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 217.
Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's Übermensch and the will-to-power is far from clear. Even in Zarathustra, Nietzsche speaks sparingly of the Übermensch, and even then in allegorical terms. However, what does the Übermensch represent, if not the embodiment of the will-to-power? Essentially, the Übermensch represents the human being who has been able to conquer the transcendental nonsense that has been inculcated into modern man. It is in this sense that the Übermensch is the meaning of the earth, as it is solely based in the material and experiential Lebenswelt:

The Übermensch is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the Übermensch shall be the meaning of the earth! I entreat you, brothers, remain true to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! They are poisoners, whether they realize it or not.31

Accordingly, the Übermensch represents one who is strong enough to endure the great nausea without capitulating to the desire for transcendental solace. Indeed, the Übermensch actually desires the moment of the great nausea, as it is the only method open to the promise of self-creation:

In truth, man is a polluted river. One must be a sea to receive this polluted river and not become defiled. Behold, I teach you the Übermensch: he is this sea, in him your great contempt can go under. What is the greatest thing you can experience? It is the hour of the

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31 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §3. Here we are dealing with a conception of the "earth" similar to the phenomenological conception of the "world." As such, the individual Übermensch's Umwelt would constitute the meaning of the earth, rather than the social matrix and pre-constructed meaning of das Man.
great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness becomes loathsome, and your reason and virtue as well.  

This is not to say that the Übermensch is some sort of fixed goal or predetermined set of psychological traits. “Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Übermensch—a rope over an abyss...What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal.”  

The Übermensch is therefore not a separate species or supernatural being. The Übermensch represents an attitude towards existence, one that is able to endure the horror meaninglessness of existence and continue to create.

Zarathustra does not see the Übermensch as some ontological category or even as the embodiment of the will-to-power. In Nietzsche’s philosophy, all beings and objects are manifestations of the will-to-power, “where I found a living creature, there I found will to power.”  

Nietzsche’s concept of the Übermensch is much more concrete than Heidegger interprets it. Zarathustra argues that the Übermensch lies with the individual self, waiting to be created:

Ah, you men, I see an image sleeping in the stone, the image of my visions! Ah, that it must sleep in the hardest, ugliest stone! Now my hammer rages fiercely against its prison. Fragments fly from the stone: what is it to me? I will complete it: for a shadow came to me—the most silent, the lightest of all things came at once to me! The

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32 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §3. This is the calling for the great nausea and thus the separation from the herd.

33 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §4.

34 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:12.
beauty of the Übermensch came to me as a shadow. Ah, my brothers! What are the gods to me now?35

For Nietzsche, therefore, the concept of the Übermensch is actually anti-metaphysical. It is concrete, arising from the experiences of the individual, and actively opposed to the transcendence inherent in metaphysical thinking. Heidegger fundamentally misinterprets this concept by concentrating on an ontology that is simply not present in Nietzsche’s thought, as will be further demonstrated.

III

Heidegger attempts to bolster his metaphysical interpretation by linking Nietzsche’s conception of time as expressed in the eternal recurrence to the temporality of traditional metaphysics. Indeed, the Heidegger argues that the very manner in which Nietzsche has Zarathustra realize his philosophical insights is the epitome of metaphysical thinking:

In the section ‘On the Great Longing’ Zarathustra speaks to his soul. According to Plato’s teaching—a teaching that became definitive for Western metaphysics—the essence of thinking resides in the soul’s solitary conversation with itself. The essence of thinking is . . . the telling-self-gathering which the soul itself undergoes on the way to itself, within the scope of whatever it is looking at.36

35 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:2.

36 Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” 218. Heidegger cites Plato, Theaetetus 189e; and The Sophist, 263e. In Nietzsche’s defense: “Is there anything worse, said Nietzsche, than to find oneself facing a German when one was expecting a Greek?” Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy? 109.
It is through this self-conversation that the essential nature of time is revealed to Zarathustra. "In converse with his soul Zarathustra thinks his 'most abysmal thought.'" This thought is the fundamental unity of the three ekstases of time: past, present, and future, in the "Moment." The Moment is the conflation of time into an enduring yet constantly recurring point of temporal existence. Therefore, the Moment is a seeming contradiction: a moment of recurrence that is also a point of eternal endurance. Taken metaphysically, this problematic assertion takes on an almost mystic character:

All three phases of time merge in a single identity, as the same in one single present, a perpetual "now." Metaphysics calls the constant now "eternity." Nietzsche too thinks the three phases of time in terms of eternity as the constant now. Yet for him the constancy consists not in stasis but in eternal recurrence of the same.

However, Nietzsche could argue that his conception of time is not as much of a concrete temporal theory as it is a therapeutic tool for redeeming mankind from the fundamental cause of its estrangement: revenge. Heidegger acknowledges this possibility: "Nietzsche's thought thinks in the direction of redemption from the spirit of revenge. His thinking would

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37 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 218.

38 "In the end, Zarathustra hears which eternity it is that his animals are proclaiming to him, the eternity of the Moment that embraces everything in itself at once: the downgoing." Heidegger, Nietzsche II, 59.

39 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 218.
minister to a spirit which, as freedom from vengefulness, goes before all mere fraternizing — but also before all vestiges of the sheer will to punish."\(^{40}\)

If the moment is to be worthy of recurrence, it must be free from revenge. Since revenge has dominated humanity’s thought until now, this is not a simple task. It requires the overcoming of the inauthentic nature of man.\(^{41}\) This overcoming is complicated by Nietzsche’s particular conception of revenge. “If Nietzsche understands revenge as the spirit that defines and sets the tone for man’s relationship with Being, then he is from the outset thinking revenge metaphysically.”\(^{42}\)

According to Heidegger, this metaphysical revenge is not grounded in any reaction to concrete conditions or social relationships, it flows from a much deeper source. Heidegger argues that such an expansive concept of revenge is also fundamentally metaphysical:

> What is revenge? We can now provisionally say that revenge is persecution that defies and degrades. And such persecution is supposed to have sustained and permeated all prior reflection, all representation of beings? If the designated metaphysical scope may in fact be attributed to the spirit of revenge, that scope must somehow become visible in terms of the very constitution of metaphysics.\(^{43}\)

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41 “That is what is peculiar to, and hardest to bear in, the doctrine of eternal return — to wit, that eternity is in the Moment, that the Moment is not the fleeting ‘now,’ not an instant of time whizzing by as a spectator, but the collision of future and past. Here the Moment comes to itself. It determines how everything recurs.” Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, 57.

42 Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” 221.

43 Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” 222.
Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's revenge as that of resentment towards time: "Nietzsche has Zarathustra say: 'This, yes, this alone is revenge itself: the will's ill will toward time and its 'it was'." Heidegger implies that this spirit of revenge is contempt towards all that which is finite and ephemeral, which is necessarily therefore everything human:

Revenge is the will's ill will toward time and that means toward passing away, transiency. Transiency is that against which the will can take no further steps, that against which its willing constantly collides. Time and its "It was" is the obstacle that the will cannot budge. Time, as passing away, is repulsive; the will suffers on account of it. Suffering in this way, the will itself becomes chronically ill over such passing away; the illness then wills its own passing, and in so doing will everything in the world be worthy of passing away. Ill will towards time degrades all that passes away.

If man is to be redeemed from this ill will, it is necessary to overcome this contempt for finitude. "Redemption releases the ill will from its 'no' and frees it for a 'yes.' What does the 'yes' affirm? Precisely what the ill will of a vengeful spirit renounced: time, transiency." It is necessary to fully accept the truth of finitude, despite the psychological pain that will surely result.

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44 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 223.

45 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 224-225. Heidegger is missing the point—the individual must acknowledge and accept finitude in order to progress beyond the need for metaphysical consolation.

46 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 226.
The mechanism by which this overcoming of resentment against time is to be accomplished is the realization of the eternal return of the same.

"Redemption from revenge is transition from ill will towards time to the will that represents being in the eternal recurrence of the same. Here the will becomes the advocate of the circle."47

Heidegger identifies several problems with Nietzsche's advocacy of the eternal recurrence which fundamentally link it with metaphysics. First, Nietzsche's use of will in this context strikes Heidegger as overtly transcendental:

Nietzsche says that revenge is the will's ill will. But will signifies the Being of beings as a whole, and not simply human willing. By virtue of the characterization of revenge as 'the will's ill will,' the defiant persecution of revenge persists primarily in relationship to the Being of beings.48

It follows that since the revenge that must be overcome is ontological—transcendental; the will that responds must be the quasi-mystic "will" that Nietzsche supposedly inherits from Schopenhauer and Hegel.49

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47 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 226. "As for Nietzsche, he does not want to instill perfect comprehension by means of the few, cryptic things he says about his doctrine of eternal return. Rather, he wants to pave the way for the transformation of that fundamental attunement by which alone his doctrine can be comprehensible and effective. What he hopes for his contemporaries is that they become fathers and forefathers of those who surely must come." Heidegger, Nietzsche II, 17.

48 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 223. For Nietzsche there is no willing besides human willing! Heidegger fundamentally misses Nietzsche's point about the essential concreteness of the politics of ressentiment, which is a self-replicating system of mutually-supportive societal mechanisms.

49 Heidegger ignores the fact that Nietzsche explicitly refutes Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy of will and the Hegelian dialectic.

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Heidegger bolsters this supposed parallel by emphasizing the temporal understanding of metaphysics that is joined to this particular ontological connotation of will. “Passing away and transience must recur in that coming as the same. And such recurrence itself is perdurant only if it is eternal. According to the doctrine of metaphysics, the predicate ‘eternity’ belongs to the Being of beings.”

The eternal recurrence is thus doubly metaphysical, both in terms of the will driving it to a particular configuration and the confluence of metaphysical temporality sustaining the recurrence. Again, Heidegger portrays Zarathustra as messianic in tone by advocating this particular ontological scheme: “Only when the Being of beings represents itself to man as eternal recurrence of the same can man cross over the bridge and, redeemed from the spirit of revenge, be the one in transition, the overman.”

It is through the joining of the “will” expressed in the Übermensch and the perpetual becoming of the eternal recurrence that Platonic metaphysics is fulfilled.

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52 “‘Recurrence’ thinks the permanentizing of what becomes, thinks it to the point where the becoming of what becomes is secured in the duration of its becoming. The ‘eternal’ thinks the permanentizing of such constancy in the direction of its circling back into itself and forward towards itself.” Heidegger, Nietzsche III, 164-165.
As the teacher of eternal recurrence and the overman, Zarathustra does not teach two different things. What he teaches coheres in itself, since one demands the other as its response. Such correspondence—in the way it essentially unfolds and the way it withdraws—is precisely what the figure of Zarathustra conceals in itself, conceals yet at the same time displays, thus allowing the correspondence to provoke our thought. Yet the teacher knows that what he is teaching remains a vision and a riddle. He perseveres in such reflective knowledge.53

Again, Heidegger portrays Zarathustra as a teacher of mystical knowledge that can only be apprehended in part, and then only through the revelation of Being through the confluence of “will” and “recurrence.”

Indeed, the circular and interdependent structure underlying Nietzsche’s philosophy points to its innate connection to traditional metaphysics:

These doctrines are conjoined in a circle. In its circling, the teaching corresponds to that which is—to the circle which as eternal recurrence of the same makes out the Being of beings, that is, what is permanent in Becoming.54

Nietzsche is thus able to obtain a partial insight into the fundamental problems of ontology. However, his underlying connection to the temporality of metaphysics ultimately causes the failure of his project.

Within the infinite temporal horizon of metaphysical thinking, it is impossible to obtain freedom from revenge:

What is left to say, if not this: Zarathustra’s doctrine does not bring redemption from revenge? We do say it. . . . But we say it in order to

54 Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” 228.
turn our attention to the fact that—and the extent to which—Nietzsche’s thought is too animated by the spirit of prior reflection.\textsuperscript{55}

Heidegger thus concludes that Nietzsche remains mired in the metaphysical abyss that he claims to be reacting against. That this failure to break free of metaphysics occurs in Nietzsche’s most radically different work, employing a narrative framework in explicit rejection of traditional philosophical forms, is doubly damning. If Nietzsche is indeed unable to break free of metaphysical thinking, which he categorically rejects, Heidegger is able to then support his position as the first post-metaphysician. However, this conclusion is based upon a very narrow reading of Nietzsche bordering on misinterpretation, as will be demonstrated below.

However, Heidegger’s entire analysis of the implications of the eternal recurrence is only tenable if one takes for granted that Nietzsche actually intended the eternal recurrence to be taken seriously as a cosmological doctrine. “Ill will” towards time is a characteristic of a specific mode of human existence: mass society. In Nietzsche’s analysis, revenge towards time is the epitome of \textit{ressentiment}. The individual, enmeshed in historical and social circumstances, may well resent his place in this order.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” 229.

\textsuperscript{56} This argument is extensively explored in \textit{The Genealogy of Morality}. In addition, Nietzsche warns against the “tyranny of history” in his early essay “The Uses and Abuses of History.”
Repressive morality has cultivated this existential self-hatred while depriving the individual of the means to liberate himself:

To be sure, there are sour apples whose fate is to wait until the last day of autumn: and they become at the same time ripe, yellow, and shriveled. . . . Many a man never becomes, sweet, he rots even in the summer. It is cowardice that keeps him fastened to his branch.57

This pathetic creature is identified by Nietzsche as the Ultimate Man.

"The time of the most contemptible man is coming, the man who can no longer despise himself. Behold! I shall show you the Ultimate Man."58 The Ultimate Man is the individual manifestation of mass society, unable to even conceive of himself as an individual outside of his societal context. This individual is a socially-created historical being, truly suffering from the tyranny of history and revenge against time.

Willing liberates: but what is it that fastens in fetters even the liberator? "It was": that is what the will’s teeth-gnashing and most lonely affliction is called. Powerless against that which has been done, the will is an angry spectator of all things past. The will cannot will backwards; that it cannot break time and time’s desire— that is the will’s most lonely affliction.59

How, then, does Nietzsche propose to free is from this revenge?

Heidegger argues that Nietzsche cannot because of his flawed temporality.

Perhaps the answer lies in Nietzsche’s intention—he does not argue that it is

57 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:21.

58 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Prologue §5. Der Letzte Mensch is often translated as the “Last Man.”

59 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:20.
necessary to completely overcome the revenge against time. Indeed, the
definition of the Ultimate Man cited above is one that can no longer despise
oneself, i.e. capitulation to revenge against time. It is the desire to make
oneself worthy of recurring eternally that drives the project of self-creation
in Zarathustra. This is epitomized in one of the most misquoted passages
from Zarathustra: “Many die too late and some die too early. Still the
doctrine sounds strange: ‘Die and the right time.’”

The attitude of the eternal recurrence is not a capitulation to the need
for consolation in the face of death. Rather, it is a method of coping with the
contingency of existence and the realization of finitude. As such, the
concept of the eternal recurrence represents a much more drastic departure
from metaphysical temporality than Heidegger is willing to admit. Indeed,
the eternal recurrence is a call for the individual to use time as a foil—
revenge cannot be overcome, but it can be turned to one’s advantage. “O my
soul, I taught you the great contempt that comes not as the gnawing of a
worm, the great loving contempt which loves most where it despises
most.” Thus contempt brought about by ill will against time can lead to
the great nausea and the possibility of self-creation.

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60 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:21.
IV.

As argued above, Heidegger’s interpretation ultimately rests upon construing Nietzsche’s ontology as metaphysical. Primarily, Heidegger attempts to demonstrate that Nietzsche’s conception of revenge is essentially ontological, rather than concrete or even existential. However, Heidegger’s discussion of the relation of beings to Being is especially problematic considering Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics.

The most fundamental problem with Heidegger’s interpretation is his reading of Nietzsche’s “ontology of man.” In Heidegger’s analysis of Zarathustra this takes the form of Heidegger’s characterization of human will. Heidegger identifies Nietzsche’s concept of the will-to-power with transcendental ontology. “Here the word willing names the Being of beings as a whole. Such Being is will . . . Nietzsche is thinking the selfsame thing when he acknowledges the primal Being of beings as power.”

Heidegger’s interpretation of the will-to-power as the primal Being of beings extends beyond the subjective will. Heidegger completes an analysis of Nietzsche’s concept of the will-to-power connecting the

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61 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, III:14.


63 “Nietzsche interprets the Being of Beings as will to power. Art he considers the supreme configuration of will to power. The proper essence of art is exemplified in the grand style. But the latter, because of its own essential unity, points to an original, concrescive unity of the active and reactive, of Being and Becoming.” Heidegger: Nietzsche 2, 135-136.
individual will to the "will" that Heidegger contends lurks behind the
phenomenal world. In this manner, human will is actually a component of
the substrate of primal existence:

In modern metaphysics, there for the first time appears expressly and
explicitly, the Being of beings appears as will. Man is man insofar as
he comports himself to beings by way of thought. In this way he is
held in Being. Man's thinking must also correspond in its essence to
that toward which it comports itself, to wit, the Being of beings as
will.\textsuperscript{64}

Thus, Heidegger connects the will-to-power to his own ontology at
the expense of Nietzsche's philosophy. According to Heidegger,

Nietzsche's concept of will is flawed as it does not explicitly accept a
connection to the "Being of beings" of which it is a part. In this sense,

Nietzsche's thinking is implicitly metaphysical—it may deny an ontological
connection between beings but it nevertheless relies upon this mistaken
distinction in order to support its own ontology:

Metaphysical thinking rests on the distinction between what truly is
and what, measured against this, constitutes all that is not truly in
being. However, what is decisive for the essence of metaphysics is by
no means the fact that the designated distinction is formulated as the
opposition to the suprasensuous to the sensuous realm, but the fact
that this distinction—in the sense of a yawning gulf between the
realms—remains primary and all-sustaining.\textsuperscript{65}

In order to sustain this interpretation, Heidegger must bolster his
contention that there is in fact an "essence" of human existence and that it is

\textsuperscript{64} Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 223.

\textsuperscript{65} Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 230.
indeed connected to a larger ontological context. This is no small feat, as
Heidegger himself acknowledges: “On what basis do Being and the essence
of human being belong together? How do they cohere, if Being is no
fabrication of human beings and humanity no mere special case among
beings?”

Can the coherence of Being and the essence of human being be
discussed at all, as long as our thinking remains mired in the
previous conception of man? According to it, man is *animal rationale*, the rational animal. Is it coincidence, or a bit of lyrical
ornamentation, that the two animals, eagle and serpent, accompany
Zarathustra; that they tell him who he must become, in order to he
the one that he is?

It is in the discussion of the symbol of the animals that Heidegger
reveals that he has fundamentally misread *Zarathustra* and is therefore
largely incorrect in his interpretation of Nietzsche. Much of Heidegger’s
analysis of Nietzsche has centered upon the symbols of the animals, who
within the narrative of *Zarathustra* reveal most of the innate truths about
existence to Zarathustra. Heidegger interprets this as the revelation of Being
to Zarathustra, as these pronouncements come from a source outside of
Zarathustra’s concrete experience or philosophical interrogation. Again, the
connection between the two doctrines is critical:

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66 Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” 231. Here Heidegger has exposed a
central assumption that is the weakness of his philosophy and interpretation of Nietzsche.
According to Nietzsche, the idea of essence and Being are assumptions that have arisen
from the need of logical discourse.

The riddle of who Zarathustra is, as teacher of eternal return and overman, is envisaged by us in the spectacle of the two animals. In this spectacle we can grasp more directly and more readily what our presentation tried to exhibit as the matter most worthy of question, namely, the relation of Being to that living being, man.68

According to Heidegger, the two animals represent different facets of Zarathustra's teaching and in turn different facets of existence. Because the two animals are always presented together in the narrative, Heidegger is able to argue that they represent two indivisible aspects of the same teaching. What, however, do these symbols mean? These symbols are essentially indefinable by conventional philosophical terms, they are poetic symbols representing the creative energy of Zarathustra.69 Nevertheless, Heidegger argues the symbol of the animals point to constituent elements of Zarathustra's ontology.

Heidegger identifies the symbol of the eagle as analogous to the concept of the Übermensch. The eagle, which Zarathustra hails as representative of pride, represents the spirit of the person who stands against the tide of fate to shape his own destiny.70 The analysis of the

68 Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" 232.

69 "Zarathustra's animals are all the more implacable inasmuch as we hear them—not expressing certain propositions or rules or admonitions—but saying from out of their essential natures what is essential, and saying it with growing lucidity through the palpable presence of sensuous imagery. Sense-images speak only to those who possess the constructive energy to give them shape, so that they make sense. As soon as the poetic force—that is, the higher constructive energy—wanes, the emblems turn mute. They petrify, become sheer 'façade' and 'ornament'". Heidegger, Nietzsche II, 48.

70 "The eagle is the proudest animal. Pride is the fully developed resolution of one who maintains himself at the level of his own essential rank, a rank to which his task appoints
symbol of the serpent reveals an identification with the concept of the eternal recurrence.\textsuperscript{71} Zarathustra identifies the serpent with wisdom, implying that wisdom borne of experience leads to the realization of the eternal recurrence. These two symbols therefore signify two essential traits: pride and wisdom.

According to Heidegger, the symbol of the eagle further represents the “human essence” while the symbol of the serpent represents the ontological substrate:

Essential to the figure of Zarathustra remains the fact that the teacher teaches something twofold which coheres in itself: eternal return and overman. . . . “Eternal return of the same” is the name for the Being of beings. “Overman” is the name for the human essence that corresponds to such being.\textsuperscript{72}

Thus, the two symbols, and the two doctrines that correspond to them, are actually representative of the authentic ontological condition.

Why, then, does Heidegger critique Nietzsche’s philosophy as

\textsuperscript{71} “The serpent is the most discerning animal. Discernment suggests the mastery of actual knowledge concerning the sundry ways in which knowing announces itself, holds itself in reserve, asserts itself and yet remains flexible, avoiding its own pitfalls. Proper to such discernment are the power to metamorphose and to disguise oneself—a power that cannot be reduced to vulgar falsehood—and the mastery of masks. Discernment does not betray itself. It haunts the background while playing in the foreground; it wields power over the play of Being and semblance.” Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche II}, 47.

\textsuperscript{72} Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” 231.
metaphysical? Beyond the objections to Nietzsche's temporality analyzed above, Heidegger argues that Nietzsche fails to recognize the extent of the ontological link between the two concepts of the Übermensch and the eternal recurrence.

Heidegger's interpretation of the symbol of the animals is central to his entire analysis, but it is based upon a questionable presupposition. Heidegger's interpretation of the animals has them speaking to Zarathustra as outside influences, presumably the revealing of Being. However, it is more in keeping to argue that the symbol of the animals represent constituent elements of Zarathustra's own consciousness. The animals only appear to Zarathustra when he is in solitude or in his cave. They coax him to the realization of things he already knows, but has been drowned out by his interactions with others. Heidegger does not speak to this possibility, no matter how strongly it is implied by the text.

Heidegger further argues that the principal reason Nietzsche fails to fully comprehend the innate link between these concepts is that both of the animal symbols correspond to the Dionysian mode of existence rather than the more analytical and rational mode of the Apollonian. This reliance on solely poetic symbols is symptomatic of the metaphysics inherent in Nietzsche's philosophy. According to Heidegger, this is no mere accident:

That Nietzsche interpreted and experienced his most abysmal thought in terms of the Dionysian only speaks for the fact that he still thought it metaphysically, and had to think it solely in this way. Yet
it says nothing against the fact that this most abysmal thought conceals something unthought, something which at the same time remains a sealed door to metaphysical thinking.\(^7^3\)

Here is the paradigmatic occurrence of Heidegger’s analysis of the “unthought.” The unthought Heidegger finds lurking behind Nietzsche’s philosophy is the metaphysical belief in transcendence, however specially denied by Nietzsche. In this instance, the transcendent element in Nietzsche’s thought is exacerbated by his failure to recognize the essential unity of the will-to-power and the ontological relationships Heidegger identifies.

It is in this light that Heidegger constantly criticizes Nietzsche’s conception of the will-to-power is existential rather than ontological.\(^7^4\) It is this fundamental criticism, which includes the problems of temporality, that forms the root of Heidegger’s critique. Paradoxically, Heidegger criticizes Nietzsche for failing to realize the essential character of the will-to-power as an ontological doctrine; while at the same time elaborating an ontological doctrine:

\(^{73}\) Heidegger, “Who is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra?” 233. Italics mine. It is difficult to characterize Nietzsche’s treatment of these, as use of these ideal types changes. The Dionysian and the Apollonian are ideal types, both are valid strategies for becoming.

\(^{74}\) “Will to power is the essence of power itself. . . . Will does not hover beyond power; it is rather the empowering command within the essence of power to exercise power. The metaphysical determination of Being as will to power remains unthought in its decisive import . . . to think Being, the beingness of beings, as will to power means to conceive of Being as the unleashing if power to its essence; the unleashing transpires in such a way that unconditionally empowering power posits the exclusive preeminence of beings over Being.” Heidegger, *Nietzsche III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, David F. Krell, and Frank Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 164.
theory strikingly similar to Nietzsche's existential analysis. Both are fundamentally concerned with rescuing the individual from repressive societal mechanisms, through the realization and confrontation with the fundamental truth of finitude.

Heidegger argues that in failing to recognize that there is an actual "essence" of human existence, Nietzsche has opened the door to that which he decries most. Nietzsche's deficient existential conception of the Being of beings as the will-to-power actually leads to nihilism, the "forgetting of Being." For Nietzsche, this is a pleasant prospect. Heidegger's ontological scheme, which leads to the concept of "destiny" and Volksgewalt, is nothing more than a repackaging of the mystic transcendence found in religious and metaphysical modes.

Indeed, the abandonment of ontology is exactly what Nietzsche prescribes for philosophy. Ontological schemes of the type Heidegger advances lead to a static perception of reality. Nietzsche's conception of the universe as the manifestation of the will-to-power is designed to overcome the being/Being relationship inherent in traditional philosophy, including Heidegger. The ontology espoused by Heidegger leads to the further entrenchment of the Descartean subject/object distinction, specifically rejected by the presuppositions of phenomenological thought.

75 "The essence of nihilism proper is Being itself in default of its unconcealment, which is as its own 'it', and which determines its 'is' in staying away." Heidegger, Nietzsche IV, 216.
It is in this spirit that Heidegger is the type of philosopher that Nietzsche is reacting against. Heidegger chastises Nietzsche for failing to overcome metaphysics while at the same time setting up a quasi-mystical ontology to replace the metaphysical myths of transcendence. Heidegger thus falls into the trap of previous philosophers: they become dogmatists. "You have served the people and the people's superstitions, all you famous philosophers! — you have not served truth!"  

Nietzsche has no lack of venom for career philosophers such as Heidegger. According to Nietzsche, such philosophers will always be compromised by the need of their work to conform to accepted standards. "The genuine man, the free spirits, have always dwelt in the desert, as the lords of the desert; but in the towns dwell the well-fed famous philosophers—the draught animals. For they always, as asses, pull-the people's cart!" This leads to the failure to address the really hard questions of philosophy, especially the type that leads to the collapse of accepted worldviews. Rather than grappling with the meaninglessness of existence, philosophy turns towards the endless repackaging of the same concepts and doctrines. "To all of these lauded wise men of the academic

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76 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:8.

77 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, II:8.
Nietzsche therefore argues that philosophical knowledge is exceptionally difficult to come by, especially ontological knowledge. This difficulty has led to the creation of disingenuous shortcuts common to metaphysical philosophy:

It was suffering and impotence—that created all afterworlds; and that brief madness of happiness that only the greatest sufferer experiences. Weariness, which wants to reach the Ultimate with a single leap, with a death-leap, a poor ignorant weariness, which no longer desires even to desire: that created all gods and afterworlds.79

For Nietzsche, metaphysics is therefore a symptom of philosophical Dekadenz. Seeking a fundamental ontology is not problematic per se, but Heidegger tends to objectify ontological terms in a manner that comes very close to metaphysical transcendence. Nietzsche argues that there is no existence beyond that of human experience, and therefore it is necessary to interpret ontology as essentially a human construct: "But that 'other world', that inhuman, dehumanized world which is a heavenly Nothing, is well hidden from men; and the belly of being does not speak to man, except as man."80

78 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:2.
79 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:3.
80 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:3.
Much as Heidegger argues at the beginning of *Being and Time*, it is necessary to interrogate human existence in order to gain understanding of the nature of Being. This is, of course, a difficult task: "Truly, all being is hard to demonstrate; it is hard to make it speak. Yet tell me, brothers, is not the most wonderful of all things most clearly demonstrated?" The narrative of Zarathustra is partially aimed at the interrogation of this Being, with the conclusion that all existence is concrete and centered within the human consciousness.

Nietzsche completes this interrogation, with the following results:

Yes, this Ego, with its contradiction and confusion, speaks most honestly of its being—this creating, willing, evaluating Ego, which is the measure and value of things. And this most honest being, the Ego—it speaks of the body, and insists upon the body, even when it fables and fabricates and flutters with broken wings. Ever more honestly it learns to speak, the Ego: and the more it learns, the more it finds titles and honors for the body and the earth.

Therefore, when the self is interrogated, it reveals its immanent constitution, the concrete, physical Being of consciousness. This Being is not revealed to the Ego, the Ego seeks this knowledge within itself. By constructing his argument on the passive reception of this knowledge through the revelation of Being, Heidegger has set up his fundamental ontology as a meta-object separate from the human consciousness, and therefore produces a metaphysical construct.

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81 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I:3.
Heidegger can only sustain his critique of Nietzsche as a metaphysician by concretizing Nietzsche's rhetorical concepts to the point of exaggeration. Rather than as an interpretive scheme, Heidegger asserts that the will-to-power represents the "Being of beings." Rather than as an instructive concept, Heidegger argues that the Übermensch represents the "essence of man." Finally, Heidegger represents the eternal recurrence as the revelation of the Being of beings to the individual. The misunderstanding of these concepts renders Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy untenable.

The answer to Heidegger's question, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra," has indeed proven difficult to answer. He is not, however, merely the teacher of regurgitated metaphysics. Zarathustra's teaching is instead a profoundly anti-metaphysical philosophy of immanent action within the lebenswelt, with no hope of help from Beyond.

82 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, I:3.
Vita

James D. Stewart is a native of Greenville, Mississippi. He completed his bachelor of arts degree at Mississippi College, completing an honors thesis entitled "An Analysis of National Socialist Ideology Through the Writings of its Major Contributors." He was also an exchange student to London, England, during his undergraduate career. He then completed a master of arts degree in political science at Louisiana State University with a thesis entitled "The Racial Interpretation of History: Alfred Rosenberg and National Socialist Ideology." Upon completion of the master's degree, he completed the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy in political science. He received the Carleton Fellowship and the Paul Grosser Memorial Graduate Assistant Teaching Award while completing his doctoral study. His ongoing research concentrates on postmodern political philosophy and existentialism.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: James Daniel Stewart

Major Field: Political Science

Title of Dissertation: Embracing the Void: Nietzsche's Zarathustra and the Political

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

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