NIETZSCHEANA #1

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NIETZSCHE AND ALLAN BLOOM'S NIETZSCHE:
A SYMPOSIUM

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INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche figures prominently in Allan Bloom's widely-read and highly controversial recent book, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom's account of Nietzsche and his assessment of Nietzsche's significance are sure to influence the way in which Nietzsche is understood and regarded by many of those who read his book, and so call for discussion; for his view of Nietzsche may well be assumed to be sound even by many readers who may disagree with what Bloom has to say about other matters. Moreover, his treatment of Nietzsche provides an excellent occasion for others interested in Nietzsche to address the issues of Nietzsche-interpretation that it raises.

With these considerations in mind, the North American Nietzsche Society organized a symposium on "Nietzsche and Allan Bloom's Nietzsche," held at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meetings in Washington DC in December of 1988. The date of the symposium was a very fitting one; for it was held exactly a hundred years after the breakdown (in early January of 1889) that marked the end of Nietzsche's productive life. It thus was both a celebration of that life and a contribution to the assessment of his thought and significance that now at last, a century later, has begun in earnest.

The original four participants who were to take part in the symposium all have contributed to that assessment. Bloom himself was invited to take part, but was unable to do so. In Werner Dannhauser, however, Bloom's interpretation had an able defender. Alexander Nehamas was to have taken part, but had to bow out for personal reasons; and his place was well filled by Maudemarie Clark. She, Dannhauser, Richard Rorty and I thus made the four presentations in which the prepared part of the symposium consisted. They are gathered here (in the order in which they were presented) to enable those who were in attendance to consider further what they heard, and to give others the opportunity to read them. Each in its own way makes a further contribution to the assessment of Nietzsche, as well as to that of "Bloom's Nietzsche."

Richard Schacht

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NIETZSCHE AND ALLAN BLOOM'S NIETZSCHE

A Symposium

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REMARKS ON "NIETZSCHE AND ALLAN BLOOM'S NIETZSCHE"

Werner J. Dannhauser

My first appearance at a meeting of the American Philosophical Association necessitates my identifying myself, but even before I do that, I want to express my gratitude for the invitation extended to me.

I am not a professor philosophy, let alone a philosopher, but a professor of political science. Moreover, I am a Straussian and thus, according to Professor Richard Rorty in The New Republic, a member of a "sort of cult," as Catholics and Marxists are also. I am thankful for Professor Rorty's willingness--nay, his eagerness--to let a thousand cultists bloom.

As originally constituted, this panel featured two illustrious members of your profession who had attacked Allan Bloom in print--Professors Rorty and Alexander Nehamas, as well as one obscure defender: me. (Professor Clark has ably replaced one of the attackers.) I appreciate the two-to-one odds, for unlike Marxists and Catholics we Straussians have never controlled a continent or conquered a country. In fact, we have never even managed to capture a philosophy department (yet), so we are used to greater odds.

One more personal note: I bring no neutrality to my remarks on The Closing of the American Mind. I think of it as a fine book and I cherish its author as a friend.

But what of its interpretation of Nietzsche? It is surely an incomplete one, as one consideration alone will prove. Bloom's book has nothing at all to say about Nietzsche's enigmatic doctrine of "the eternal return of the same," which is crucial to any complete interpretation of Nietzsche.

That manifest omission becomes understandable when one considers the obvious fact that The Closing of the American Mind is not about Nietzsche but about the topic announced by the book's accurate sub-title: "How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students."

Within the limits Allan Bloom sets for himself, he has, I would argue, gotten Nietzsche right and is thus able to generate many valid insights about him. Moreover, he is able to speak intriguingly about Nietzsche because he has obviously learned a great deal from him. Bloom cannot be called a Nietzschean, at least not fairly, but to an appreciable extent he accepts Nietzsche's diagnosis of the crisis of our time. No one should underestimate the difficulty of separating Nietzsche's diagnosis from his prescriptions for a cure, but Bloom has succeeded in doing just that. Surely, most of us who read Nietzsche attentively engage in a similar attempt. We cannot follow him where he would lead us but we stand in awe of his power to elucidate the impoverishment of our souls.

Yet we do not, and Bloom does not, treat Nietzsche simply as a diagnostician. To extend the metaphor: he is, or ought to be, both part of the sickness we combat and the cure we seek. In The Closing of the American Mind, Nietzsche appears as neither a villain nor a hero (for the history of philosophy is not a melodrama), but above all as a most important thinker with whom we must come to terms, for the sake of the enrichment of our souls and perhaps even for the sake of their salvation.
When I speak of "us" and "our souls", I speak of us primarily though not exclusively as teachers of the young, and in no way do I mean to exclude myself. We find ourselves instructing students who are the victims of the crisis of our time--and day after day we fail them. They come to us, as it were, with bats in their bellfries—the bats of radical egalitarianism, dogmatic atheism, thoughtless relativism, all uttered in a degraded vocabulary of discourse. We fail them by refusing to call a bat a bat, or by adding to the foreign bodies in their soul, or by doing too little to fight those germs. We are sick physicians of the sick.

Let me now turn more specifically to Bloom's Nietzsche. Bloom finds the core of Nietzsche's thought to be the latter's ceaseless meditation on the real or alleged death of God, and surely Bloom is right in this. Rather frequently a philosopher attains his greatness by a relentless probing of a single problem in all its ramifications, outdoing others in the intrepid reasoning he brings to bear on the topic. The example of Rousseau's intense quest for the nature of man in the state of nature comes most readily to mind.

By claiming that "God is dead" Nietzsche means most obviously (though by no means exclusively) that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, has lost its power to focus the life of the individual and to act as the binding glue of the social order. Life thus loses its anchor because man is above all a believing, a revering animal. The religious instinct in human beings survives the death of God, but the latter's demise robs that instinct of its proper object.

In fact, according to Nietzsche himself and according to Bloom's Nietzsche, all the objects of our yearnings disappear. Nietzsche's Zarathustra not only proclaims the death of God but the death of all gods. All transcendent gods perish, including the Platonic ideas and nature as a standard. We lack, we moderns, all yardsticks for the measures of worth: relativism rears its ugly head and suffuses the daily atmosphere of our lives.

Nobody can deny that some kinds of relativism have been around "for ages"; but Nietzsche's relativism outdoes earlier versions in its radicalism. For example, he moves beyond the doctrine that human beings can have objective moral standards to the doctrine of cultural relativism: reason cannot possibly declare one culture or political order superior to any other. Nietzsche equates the death of God with the death of Truth; we are the first generation that does not purport to possess the truth. We now know that one cannot transcend one's particular and limited perspective on reality. Perspectivity is all.

Much of this sounds fairly familiar to us, and perhaps even more familiar to our students, who have relativism in the very fiber of their beings. We have reared a generation of relativists who need not be taught that one man's meat is another man's poison, but who do need to be taught (perhaps by reading Nietzsche) the actual or potential horrors attending relativism and the disappearance of objective standards. They are increasingly unwilling and unable to see the dark side of relativism. Instead they view it as the discover of toleration, a liberation from the narrowness, the superstition, and the dogmatism of the past. For them perspectivism means openness, and openness is all.

In part, Bloom uses Nietzsche to drive home the seamy underside of relativism to students as well as other readers. If all standards vanish, no good reasons can suggest themselves for striving for one good rather than another, or indeed, for preferring striving to sloth. The devaluation of all values, according to Nietzsche, is tantamount to nihilism, which can assume the passive form of "last men" whose absence of longing renders them despicably complacent and complacently despicable, or else the active form
of rebels who see the arbitrariness of willing but prefer willing nothingness to not willing.

The young, and not only the young, hesitate to follow Nietzsche in this line of thinking, perhaps because they find all lines of thinking suspect. Prematurely and cynically convinced of the impotence of reason, they no longer look to reason for help. In this respect, Nietzsche plays into their hands in two ways.

To begin with, Nietzsche is the great irrationalist among philosophers—a strange phenomenon, for philosophy has always stood for the height of reason. As such, it has always had opponents, with poetry being its noblest and most potent adversary. The quarrel between philosophy and poetry is so ancient that the ancient Socrates called it ancient. Nietzsche presents us with the strange, new, and strangely alluring spectacle of a philosopher who takes the side of poetry in that quarrel.

Secondly, Nietzsche strives mightily to provide an alternative for the life of reason. He celebrates the unconscious, glorifies the instinctive, and develops the idea of creativity. Bloom follows Nietzsche’s thought sympathetically, but blinds nobody to the fact that Nietzsche raises as many problems as he resolves. For example, when philosophy takes to praising poetry, the latter cannot celebrate an unambiguous victory; for without a worthy adversary, it runs the danger of becoming rudderless. It thrives on the tension between reason and the passions, a tension that may well redound to the benefit of both: the example of Goethe suggests as much.

Similarly, Nietzsche’s notion of creativity all too easily degenerates into the mere encouragement of finger-painting by children in progressive schools and a tepid advocacy of “growth” in institutions of higher learning, increasingly characterized by listlessness.

For Nietzsche greatness depends on tensions; the taut bow propels the human arrow of longing to its self-defined goals. In our time, however, the bow has become unstrung. We lack the will to set great tasks for ourselves, and we lack the will to perform great tasks. For example, Nietzsche thinks that the passionate egalitarianism of Rousseau has decayed into the tepid egalitarianism that finds itself unwilling and unable to discriminate. Indeed, the way our time understands Nietzsche goes some way to document Nietzsche’s understanding of our time. We have defanged and domesticated Nietzsche, rendered him academic, and done our very best to make him as boring as possible.

Part of The Closing of the American Mind is a valuable contribution to the Rezeptionsgeschichte of Nietzsche in the United States. As somebody who has taught Nietzsche to graduates as well as undergraduates for well over twenty years, I can personally attest to the value of that contribution. In my experience, Nietzsche no longer helps the young as much to attain a liberal education as he once did, because he no longer shocks them as much as he once did.

In more halcyon times, Nietzsche could serve as a powerful antidote to the excessive egalitarianism to which Americans were vulnerable. However, he has long since been co-opted—which is to say abused—by the Left. One can understand the Left’s reasons for seizing upon Nietzsche, and even admire its taste. The trouble with teaching Marx to the young has always been that he tends to bore them, if only because he says little of interest about death, God, or love. He needs to be beefed up, or at least supplemented. Students—even left-wing students—consider it a kind of punishment to be assigned Das Kapital, and their eyes tend to glaze over when exposed to the intricacies of surplus value; so Nietzsche could, once upon a time, be used to shake them from their dogmatic
slumbers. Now, however, he plays into their dogmas, having been assimilated to a Leftist line; and what students find themselves unable to believe, they shrug off as historically determined limitations or engaging polemical zest. Nietzsche's disdain for moderation and the bourgeoisie does, to be sure, lend itself to this use and abuse; but he never fits easily into the role assigned to him, and he fits at all only at the cost of his emasculation.

Let me cease polemicizing, lest I give the wrong impression of The Closing of the American Mind. Bloom might agree with much of what I have said, and he might share my academic politics, but his book is not a political tract. He himself has correctly described it as a "meditation on the state of our souls." Its practical proposals amount to a defense—by no means uncritical—of the "Great Books approach." Even so, the book has become enmeshed in controversy, as can be seen by this very symposium.

I would characterize the book as an attempt to recover complexities and perplexities so that we might recover genuine open-mindedness in these United States. The Closing of the American Mind helps us to restate what must be restated in every generation of modernity, the great alternative of the ancients vs. the moderns. In that attempt at restatement, Bloom finds it most helpful to study Nietzsche, and we should emulate him.

Nietzsche, after all, presents himself as the radically modern foe of the ancient Socrates. At the same time, great thinker and artist that he is, Nietzsche manages to resurrect the image of Socrates in an incomparably vivid way. He may caricature and condemn him, but he also frees him from all the crusts of academic tradition, so that the reader can wrestle with his thought, even as Nietzsche himself does.

In presenting us with Nietzsche as a writer who not only attempts to wean us from the spell Socrates cases but actually leads us to appreciate the seductiveness of that spell, Bloom remains true to the complexities of Nietzsche's thought. He presents Nietzsche as an exciting thinker who demands and merits our closest attention. For this, and for much else, we owe him our gratitude.
BLOOM AND NIETZSCHE

Maudemarie Clark

That Nietzsche plays a central role The Closing of the American Mind is beyond doubt. Whatever else in this book may be fuzzy and ill-defined, it is clear that Bloom defines his own position in opposition to Nietzsche's. My concern here is to determine the nature of that opposition. I will argue that Bloom's view of it is different from what his book originally suggests, and that he offers one view for the people but a quite different one for the philosopher. In the interest of suggesting that we reject both of these views of Nietzsche, I will then offer what I believe would be Nietzsche's quite different view of the Bloom-Nietzsche opposition.

Nietzsche appears as the philosophical villain of Bloom's piece. We are told repeatedly that Nietzsche attacks, rejects, abandons, and sacrifices reason, replacing it with a call to war, chaos, and self-assertion. Even if Bloom refrained—which he does not—from suggesting that it led to the Nazis, his characterization of Nietzsche's thought would be sufficient to convince many readers that any movement heavily influenced by it should be fought at all costs.

On Bloom's account, one such movement is directed towards reform of the university by the inclusion of minority voices in the curriculum, and a greater openness to cultures other than our own. Bloom traces this American reform movement to Nietzsche's rejection of reason. Since he is very careless in his use of the word "reason," it is difficult to be sure that I am interpreting him correctly here. Bloom never says exactly what "reason" is, or explains the sense in which Nietzsche rejects it. But he seems to mean that Nietzsche denies that our faculty for reasoning can, all by itself, determine what is valuable. In other words, there are no truths in the realm of value that are independent of what human beings want. Bloom says of the view he attributes to Nietzsche: "we do not love a thing because it is good, it is good because we love it." (p. 197) Since values depend on our will, on what human beings want, we are creators of values rather than discoverers of the good. According to Bloom, this Nietzschean position leads to cultural relativism—to the claim that any culture's values are as good as any other. Far from celebrating such relativism, Bloom thinks, Nietzsche rejected it and spent his life fighting it. However, since he had already rejected reason as a source of values, he contributed to what he wanted to fight—and to much worse—for that left him with no solution for nihilism except decisions of the will, value-commitments, and the hope of a charismatic leader which Bloom claims Weber later developed from Nietzschean premises.

Bloom believes that we have absorbed both sides of Nietzsche's thought from the German intellectuals who brought to American shores the thought of those heavily influenced by Nietzsche, especially Freud and Weber. What we absorbed, he claims, was a watered-down Nietzscheanism, one which did not notice "the darker side of Freud and Weber, let alone the Nietzsche-Heidegger extremism lying somewhere beneath the surface." (p. 150) Nihilism was veiled by (and Continental angst transformed into) an "I'm o.k., you're o.k." American optimism. The disastrous result, Bloom contends, is that our students are relativists, as are most of their teachers. They sympathize with attacks on cultural imperialism because relativism has destroyed their faith in their own culture's values. According to Bloom, they also show great respect for those who are willing to use force to accomplish curricular reform. How are we to explain this? If no values are better than any others, whence comes this insistence on respecting other people's values? For Bloom, this is just the other side of Nietzsche's philosophy: his emphasis on value
commitment as the only way to fill the void left by reason's flight from the scene of values. We respect commitment, any commitment, because we have learned from Nietzsche that we have no recourse to reason, and that only commitment can save us from nihilism and disintegration.

I find Bloom's attempt to trace this movement to Nietzsche far-fetched. But I do not doubt its effectiveness for convincing many readers that no further argument is needed against opening up the curriculum, or in favor of faith in old-fashioned American values.

Viewed in this light, Bloom appears to differ from Nietzsche in his insistence that there is a purely rational foundation for values. To counteract Nietzsche's corruption of American youth, Bloom calls us to return to the thought of our true forefathers—the Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke—to affirm that the values upon which America was founded are based in reason; that all men are equal; that they have equal rights; and that democracy exists to serve the common good.

But this account of the difference between Bloom and Nietzsche is, I believe, mere facade and deception. A quite different picture emerges if we consider the history of philosophy and of the University Bloom offers very late in his book under the title "From Socrates' Apology to Heidegger's Rektoratsrede." Bloom concludes this section with the claim that the contemplation of Socrates is the most urgent academic task. (p. 312) He believes that the University exists to make possible the life led by Socrates, the philosophical life; but that, as the case of Socrates shows, this life is in danger. "The events of Socrates' life, the problem he faced, represent what the philosopher as such must face," according to Bloom. (p. 265)

The survival problem of philosophy, on Bloom's account, stems from the fact that only the philosopher is able to face up to the truth about life—the fact of death—which Bloom equates with the truth that there is no cosmic support for what we care about. The people deal with the problem of death by believing in divine beings who offer the kind of cosmic support for what humans care about that the philosopher insists does not exist. The philosopher's lack of belief fills the people with the moral indignation that led to Socrates' execution. In denying what humans most need to believe in—the existence of the gods—Socrates brought down upon himself the people's wrath. From then on, goes Bloom's story, a major philosophical concern was to protect the life of philosophy. The ancient philosophers thus invented the "truth party": its name was political science. Its purpose was to figure out and say the kinds of things that needed to be said to protect the life of philosophy. (pp. 275-76)

To protect the pursuit of truth, in short, the philosopher is required to lie—to engage in what Bloom calls "a gentle art of deception." (p. 279) "The philosopher loves the truth he says. That is an intellectual virtue. He does not love to tell the truth. That is a moral virtue." Philosophers would prefer to tell the truth if they could, but their survival depends on deception. According to Bloom, Socrates is quite obviously insincere in the Apology when he pretends belief in the gods, and argues for the philosopher as good citizen. Aristotle is more persuasive, but no less deceptive, when he speaks most of his Ethics speaking about the noble deeds that are the gentleman's speciality, not the philosopher's. Aristotle largely clarifies what the aristocrats practice; but he makes slight changes that point towards philosophy, to make it seem that philosophy is the ally of the aristocrat. According to Bloom, the practical policies of all philosophers have been the same, despite their great theoretical differences: "They practiced an art of writing that appealed to the prevailing moral taste of the regime in which they found themselves, but
which could lead some astute readers outside of it into the Elysian fields in which philosophers meet to talk." (p. 283)

At the risk of revealing my own lack of astuteness here, I must admit my difficulty in seeing how the conversations of these philosophers can avoid boredom, given Bloom's further insistence that their "inner teachings may be to all intents and purposes the same," despite the great differences in form and content of their writings. The "inner teachings," if I understand Bloom correctly, reduce to the claim that deception is necessary to protect the only thing philosophers really care about: the philosophical life, the Socratic life devoted to pursuing truth rather than possessing it. All of the great philosophical doctrines--the claims to metaphysical knowledge that Nietzsche exposed and criticized--are thus merely different attempts to deceive the powers that be into leaving philosophers alone to pursue the Socratic life.

Bloom interprets the Enlightenment philosophers who gave America its original political philosophy in the same way. Liberal democracy or bourgeois society was invented, he tells us, by a small group of men who wanted to protect reason (p. 293), that is, the Socratic life. In the time of the Enlightenment, philosophers changed allegiance from the aristocratic to the democratic party. They saw that they could protect their own freedom to live the philosophical life by inventing human equality, the rights of man, and the idea that democracy served the common good. "The philosophers, however, had no illusions about democracy," we are told. "They knew they were substituting one misunderstanding for another." (p. 289) For Bloom thinks these philosophers actually believed what he himself asserts, that "the real community of man...is the community of those who seek the truth," and that this is the "only real friendship, the only real common good." (p. 381) In other words, the old-fashioned American values Bloom originally portrays Nietzsche as threatening have no objective foundation or basis in reason after all. They are given the appearance of having such a foundation only by the philosophers' deception, which is directed towards protecting their own way of life.

If this is correct, Bloom's real disagreement with Nietzsche is not over reason's ability to provide a foundation for values, for Bloom agrees with him that reason cannot do this. On Bloom's account, the only thing the philosopher really values is the philosophical life; and it is difficult to believe that Bloom thinks this valuation is based on reason alone. It would be based on reason alone, according to the account of Bloom I have already given, only if philosophers loved philosophy because they perceived it to possess a goodness that is independent of their desires or preferences. But Bloom's description of philosophical experience leaves no doubt that the philosopher loves philosophy because of his desires and pleasures--because "his soul finds rest therein" (Bloom quotes Maimonides), because of the intense pleasure it gives him to use his faculties and solve problems, and because it affords him pride, "more complete than that of any conqueror, for he surveys and possesses all." (p. 210)

The last quotation may produce some confusion, since it implies that the philosopher possesses enormous knowledge; whereas I have presented Bloom's philosopher in Socratic terms, as loving truth, but not claiming to possess it. This problem can be resolved by realizing that it is only as a natural scientist that Bloom's philosopher possesses knowledge. Bloom counts Thales as a knower because of his ability to predict an eclipse. He counts him as a philosopher because he is liberated from myth, i.e., from belief in the gods. This ability to live without the gods is what defines the philosophical life for Bloom. Only philosophers can live without the illusion of cosmic support for what we care about. (p. 285) This again suggests that Bloom finds no foundation for the value of what he cares about--the life of philosophy--except the preferences of those who care about it.
We need not conclude from this, however, that Bloom thinks the philosophical life is no better than any other. He does in fact claim that only the philosophical life can, without contradiction, be affirmed as an end. (p. 271) But he gives not a clue about how he would argue for this claim. The position on the value of the philosophical life suggested by his text is somewhat different: that it alone can be affirmed as valuable without deception. That is, only philosophers—those who devote their lives to pursuit of truth—can continue to value their lives in full knowledge of the fact that its value depends solely on their desires. To value their non-philosophical ways of life, on the other hand, the people need to believe in the gods: that is, they need to believe the lie that there is cosmic support for their way of life. (p. 277)

If this correct, then Bloom believes that Nietzsche told the truth when he denied that human values are based on reason, and also when he insisted that the gods do not exist, and that therefore human values cannot have the value most of us believe them to have. Bloom seems to think that philosophers have always known these truths, but have kept quiet about them so they could manipulate the people’s beliefs about the gods and values for the purpose of protecting the philosophical way of life. Bloom’s real complaint against Nietzsche is that he blew the whistle on the whole philosophical tradition of lying to protect the philosophical life. This is why he claims that Nietzsche’s virtue was not love of truth—i.e., love of philosophy, of the life devoted to truth—but intellectual honesty, the moral virtue of telling the truth, which Bloom insists has no place in the university, but only gets in the way.

It would be unfair, however, to suggest that Bloom sets up Nietzsche as corruptor of America’s youth simply because he spoke the truth. On my interpretation, Bloom has a second problem with Nietzsche: namely, that Nietzsche does not affirm the gulf Bloom finds between the philosophical life and any other kind of life, a gulf which would allow the philosophical life to escape unscathed from Nietzsche’s critique of human values. For Bloom, the fact that Nietzsche does not give the philosophical life special status makes him a nihilist. If no other life can be honestly valued, and the philosophical life is no different from any other, then no life—the philosophical life included—can be honestly valued. We can now see a sense in which Bloom can honestly say that Nietzsche’s sacrifice of reason leads to nihilism. For Bloom often uses the word “reason” as interchangeable with “philosophy.” So Nietzsche sacrifices reason in the sense of denying a special value status to the philosophical life. And if he also shared Bloom’s nihilism regarding lives not devoted to the pursuit of truth, he would have to admit that no kind of human life has value.

I see no reason to believe that Nietzsche does share Bloom’s nihilism. The non-philosophical nobles of the first essay of the Genealogy, for instance, affirm the value of their lives; and Nietzsche does not seem to think they need the gods in order to do this. True, they have their gods; but Nietzsche seems to think they need them largely to express gratitude for their lives.

Nietzsche certainly does deny that reason alone can provide the basis for values. But this gives him plenty of philosophical company, and gives us no more reason to accuse Nietzsche of nihilism or relativism that so to accuse Hume and Hobbes. Nihilism can be found in Nietzsche’s early works—for instance, Human, All Too Human. Loss of faith in the philosopher’s ability, on the basis of reason alone, to know what we should value may well have led to Nietzsche’s conclusion here that we need illusion in order to value life. (32) But this is not Nietzsche’s contribution the history of philosophy. It is the kind of conclusion his later works diagnose rather than endorse.
He subsequently diagnosed this particular move—the inference to nihilism from pure reason's inability to found our values—as a philosophical expression of the ascetic ideal, which is the priestly view that the life of self-denial is the highest human life. According to Nietzsche, this idealization of self-denial deprives human life of any intrinsic value, of any value as an end. It implies that life can have value only as a means, and indeed only as a means to its own negation. But Nietzsche denies that the end to which the ascetic makes life a means has any positive content. Such an end or goal of human life is merely a negation—though it may be a disguised negation—of human life.

Nietzsche therefore interprets the ascetic ideal as a nihilistic will directed against life in an act of imaginary or spiritual revenge. The idealization of self-denial, with its devaluation of human life, constitutes a spiritualized version of burning one's opponent in effigy, in which one's opponent is life itself.

Nietzsche interprets traditional or metaphysical philosophy as an expression of the ascetic ideal, I believe, because he thinks it depends on the assumption that the things of the highest value—knowledge, truth, virtue, philosophy—cannot depend on features of ordinary human life, such as the senses or desires. Knowledge had to be a priori, truth had to be correspondence to things in themselves, and values had to be based on reason alone, Nietzsche suggests, in order to keep what philosophers valued safe from contamination by what they did not value: the things of the natural world, of ordinary human life. Nietzsche would therefore diagnose Bloom's idea that nihilism follows from the denial that values can be founded on reason alone as a sign of Bloom's own commitment to the ascetic ideal.

Indeed, there is reason to believe that Nietzsche would find an even closer relation between Bloom and the ascetic ideal. I suggest that he would consider Bloom a more cynical version of those he discusses in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, and calls the latest expression of the ascetic ideal. The thinkers who fit this description believe they are free from the ascetic ideal, for they have given up all its trappings: God, the other world, praise for virtues of denial. But they have done so, Nietzsche claims, because of their will to truth—because they consider truth more important than anything else: and precisely that is the latest expression of the ascetic ideal.

This picture fits Bloom's philosophy perfectly. The philosopher, he claims, "only enjoys thinking and loves the truth. He therefore cannot be disabused. He cherishes no illusion that can crumble." (p. 277)

Nietzsche's response would be that if the philosopher loves the truth this much, there is still an illusion that can crumble: the illusion that there is no faith or value commitment here except to truth. Bloom's philosopher's commitment, he would say, is still to the ascetic ideal. He values the pursuit of truth because he sees in it a denial or negation of natural or ordinary human life.

Consider again what philosophical knowledge as such is for Bloom. It is knowledge that the gods do not exist, that there is no cosmic support for what we care about. What was most important to Thales, he suggests, was not his ability to predict the eclipse, but "seeing that the poetic or mythical accounts of the eclipses are false." (p. 271) Now how can this kind of knowledge be considered the point of human life? How can it be that for the sake of which human life is worth living? Nietzsche has an answer: as in the case of earlier versions of the ascetic ideal, the point of Bloom's valuation of philosophy is precisely to accord human life value only as a means to its own negation. Philosophy has no positive content for Bloom: it is pure negation of what he thinks ordinary humans believe, and need to believe. Bloom's philosopher cannot therefore value philosophy for
its own sake. Behind Bloom's view of philosophy and its importance, his elitism, and his
disdain for ordinary human life, Nietzsche would see not the self-affirmation of
philosophy, but the nihilistic will of the ascetic ideal once again taking its revenge
against life.

This is not to say that Nietzsche rejects the value of philosophy or the commitment
to truth. He differs from Bloom on this issue insofar as he wants philosophy and truth to
serve life--and he thinks that we therefore need to create a new ideal for philosophers.
Truth itself cannot give us this ideal, but truths are certainly highly relevant to
determining what ideal we need. Bloom's response to Nietzsche's call for a new ideal is to
resort to scare tactics. He implies that philosophy can serve life only if it is coopted for
political purposes, as in the case of the Nazis.

I have been suggesting that Nietzsche can answer this charge by diagnosing Bloom's
own position as an expression of the nihilistic ascetic ideal. It is not as if we have a
choice: to pursue knowledge for its own sake, or in the service of some foreign ideal.
Nietzsche's claim (in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*) is that the commitment to truth
will always serve such an ideal in any case. The only question is whether we will invent
a new ideal for the sake of which to live out our commitment to truth, or remain stuck
with the old ideal, the ascetic ideal.

I do not know if Nietzsche is right about this; but I take the example of Bloom as
one small bit of evidence that he may be. In any case, I find this Nietzschean response to
Bloom much more convincing than Bloom's scare tactics in relation to Nietzsche. If we
must choose between creating a new ideal for both philosophers and non-philosophers and
sitting back in our philosophical corners plotting strategies to protect our hides,
Nietzsche's call for a new ideal does not sound so bad.
ON BLOOM'S NIETZSCHE

Richard Rorty

The thing about Bloom's Nietzsche which seems to me most wrong-headed is that this Nietzsche believes that philosophy is important to political history. Like Heidegger and Strauss, this Nietzsche thinks that philosophical ideas are decisive for the destiny of peoples. Bloom sets out the views of his Nietzsche on this topic in the following passage:

The novel aspect of the crisis of the West is that is identical with a crisis of philosophy. Reading Thucydides shows us that the decline of Greece was purely political, that what we call intellectual history is of little importance for understanding it. Old regimes had traditional roots, but philosophy and science took over as rules in modernity, and purely theoretical problems have decisive political effects. One cannot imagine modern political history without a discussion of Locke, Rousseau and Marx. Theoretical implausibility and decrepitude are, as everyone knows, at the heart of the Soviet Union's malaise. And the Free World is not far behind. (p. 197)

After attributing this view to Nietzsche Bloom goes on to endorse it, saying that "Nietzsche is the profoundest, clearest, most powerful diagnostician of the disease." Throughout Bloom's book, philosophical ideas are identified as the remote efficient causes of political events. He ends the book by saying that the fate of philosophy and the fate of freedom are related "as they have never been before." (p. 382)

When Bloom uses the word "philosophy" he does not mean "high culture" or "general ideas." He means something parochially departmental. (See pp. 378ff.) He means a discussion of the questions which Plato and Aristotle raised and discussed: of the good old textbook topoi, the items on the Philosophy 101 syllabus. He thinks of Nietzsche and Heidegger as "serious" philosophers because he thinks that they (unlike such uneducated dabbler as Rawls and Wittgenstein) take all or most Greek questions at face value—although, of course, they give mostly wrong answers to them. So Bloom winds up seeing the fate of human freedom turning on whether we can muster up belief in the right answers.

On Bloom's picture, America, and the other liberal democracies, are built on the "low but solid ground" (p. 167) of Enlightenment rationalism. In the skies above these happy valleys a great war is being waged between Greek nous and German thumos. The complacent and unphilosophical hedonists who inhabit the valleys do not know it, but their fate depends upon the outcome of this battle. Bloom tells us that "The overpowering visions of the German philosophers are preparing the tyranny of the future." (p. 240) On his view, freedom can only survive if we few who understand the danger, we philosophers, can recapture the vision of the Greeks.

I think that there is a Nietzsche—one of the worst of the various Nietzsche—who agrees with Bloom and Hegel about the importance of philosophy for history, and in particular about this own importance for history. But another of the available Nietzsches, the one I prefer, has a sense of humor. This Nietzsche agrees with Kierkegaard in thinking that philosophers who take themselves this seriously are pretty funny. This was the Nietzsche who wrote ("use and Abuse..." sec. 8; Preuss trans., p. 47) that for Hegel "the apex and terminus of world history coincided in his own Berlin existence." My Nietzsche is, however, just as much of a snob as Bloom's. The two Nietzsches agree with each other
and with Bloom that "one giant calls to the other across the bleak intervals of ages and, undisturbed by the wantonly noisy dwarfs who creep away beneath them, the lofty
conversation of spirits continues." (ibid., p. 53) But my Nietzsche does not think that the
fate of those dwarfs depends upon the effects upon them of overhearing snatches of this
lofty conversation. He thinks that their fate is as much a matter of chance as was the
fate of Athens in its battles with the Persians and with Sparta. He thinks that the sort of
unphilosophical history which Thucydides wrote--the kind which does not look behind
chance in search of world-historically significant Seinsverstaendnisse--is still the sort of
history which works for modern political events.

This Nietzsche strikes me as less professionally deformed than Bloom's Nietzsche.
For he combines a sense of his own uniqueness with a rueful appreciation of blind
contingency. This Nietzsche believes that the Americans, the French and the Russians
might well have had revolutions even if neither Locke, Rousseau, nor Marx had ever
penned a line. These revolutions would have had causes and consequences not very
different from those of the revolutions which in fact took place. My Nietzsche would
have been surprised to learn from Bloom that "everyone knows" that "theoretical
implausibility and decrepitude are at the heart of the Soviet Union's malaise." For he
would have thought that the sequence of chance events which left a mad tyrant in charge
of the Kremlin for thirty years had a lot to do with that malaise.

The Nietzsche I prefer would have agreed with Plato that what sort of people get
to rule states is up for grabs, and that very weird and unlikely things can happen--
someday, for example, philosophers might become kings. But for Bloom's Nietzsche, there
is a sense in which the philosophers already are kings--for they are the unacknowledged
determinants of the political fate of nations. Bloom's Nietzsche is wrong, in Bloom's eyes,
about most of the issues with which he disagrees with Plato, but he at least got one thing
right: he knows more about modern history than Plato could have, and knows that at
some point between Plato's time and ours the direction of history was handed over from
Chance to Philosophy.

I find it instructive that Bloom's Nietzsche is much more like the Nietzsche of
Bloom's principal targets than like mine. These targets are the members of what he calls
"the Nietzscheanized Left"--the people of whom Irving Howe has ruefully remarked that
they want to take over, not the government, but the English Department. These people
are so professionally deformed as to believe Paul de Man's claim that we can "approach
the problems of ideology and by extension the problems of politics only on the basis of
critical-linguistic analysis." (RT, p. 121; my italics.)

Like Bloom, these people think that philosophy is where the action is. They
believe that, now that Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida have made the nature and powers
of language clear to us, we are at last in a position to understand history. As J. Hillis
Miller puts it:

Language promises, but what it promises is itself. This promise it can never
keep. It is this fact of language, a necessity beyond the control of any use
of language, which makes things happen as they do happen in the material
world of history. (ER, p. 35)

Having finally tracked the remote efficient causes of history down, we can now envisage
a post-modern utopia. Miller says that he
would even dare to promise that the millenium [of universal peace and justice among men] would come if all men and women became good readers in de Man's sense. (ER, p. 58)

Miller, as I see it, is Bloom's opposite number. Both take philosophy with immense seriousness, and both see contemporary politics and modern history as a battle between Nietzsche and Plato. The only difference is over whom they want to win. Both have equally little belief in chance, as little as the old-time Marxists who thought that the powerful methods of dialectical materialism could illuminate the inner significance of any conceivable political conjuncture. Both have considerable disdain for the vulgar, the people who think that the adoption of views on topics such as the nature of reason and of language has very little effect upon whether our descendants will be free or enslaved.

The reason that Bloom and Miller are on opposite sides is that Bloom thinks that "Nietzsche was a cultural relativist, and he saw what that means--war, great cruelty rather than great compassion." (p. 202) Bloom rightly says that "the Nietzschean Left"--what I am calling the "Cultural Left"--acts as if Nietzsche's claim to be hard and cruel and ruthless was just the boyish bluster of someone who, deep down inside, longed for the millenium of universal peace and justice among men. Miller's Nietzsche is only ruthless toward logocentrists, just as Lenin was only ruthless toward people who were "objectively counter-revolutionary." In their treatment of others, both were as nice guys as you could hope to meet. Bloom puts it nicely when he says:

So Nietzsche came to America. His conversion to the Left was easily accepted here as genuine, because Americans cannot believe that any really intelligent and good person does not at bottom share the Will Rogers Weltanschauung. "I never met a man I didn't like." (p. 225)

My Nietzsche never did get clear about whether his anti-Platonist views on such topics as reason, language, human nature and the origin of morality required him to be cruel. The people who had invented and repeated the fable of "the true world" (Plato, the Christians, Kant, etc.) had insisted it was only memory of, or belief in, such a world that prevented one from becoming a real badass. My Nietzsche often felt that there must be something to this claim, and so he often felt it obligatory to do a lot of snarling and grimacing. He wanted to show that his anti-Platonism was serious and sincere--that he was willing to put his muscle where his metaphysics was. But at other times he reminded himself that the Platonic claim that there is a tight connection between epistemology, metaphysics and ethics was a sheer non sequitur. At those times his attitude was, indeed, a lot like Will Rogers. "Aw shucks," one imagines this Nietzsche saying, "us folks out here beyond good and evil aren't going to make war on anybody; we're too busy actively forgetting, becoming who we are, and all like that. If you're worried about cruelty, it's those busy-body ressenters who you have to watch out for."

As a pacific pragmatist, I obviously prefer my Nietzsche when he was in the latter mood, and I applaud his suggestion that ethics can swing free of metaphysics and epistemology. As a patriotic pragmatist, I should like to team my Nietzsche up with the All-Americans: Emerson, James and Dewey. My Nietzsche already shares a pragmatist theory of truth with these prospective teammates, as well as a genial contempt for Plato's primitive moral psychology and limited political imagination. So I do not see why he might not also agree with them that you are free to keep Christian love, if you feel like it, even after you've killed off the Christian God. My Nietzsche might in the end come around to what Bloom disgustedly calls "the peculiarly American way of digesting Continental despair: nihilism with a happy ending." (p. 147)
Emerson, James and Dewey would have agreed with my Nietzsche that "democracy is Christianity naturalized," but they would have urged that that naturalization has taken the curse off Christian love. This love can stop being reactive and resentful as soon as it stops claiming theological or metaphysical backup, as soon as it stops claiming a link with extra-human power. On this view, the fact that the true world has become a fable does not mean that our killer instincts get free rein. Maybe we only thought we had killer instincts because the ascetic priests kept telling us we did. Maybe cultural relativism doesn't "mean war, great cruelty rather than great compassion" after all. Maybe a cultural relativist can just say "I know I just happen to have been born into a genial, tolerant, slap-happy democracy, and that nothing lies behind the culture of this democracy except some chance historical events. But that's OK. I like it here. Indeed: thus I willed it."

Bloom doesn't think somebody who would say "serious philosopher." The serious philosophers are the ones who have a properly tragic sense of life--the ones who insist on knowing whether they are living according to reason, or authentically, or in accordance with nature, or the will to power, or the will of God, or something else which is big, non-human, and absolute.

Bloom thinks that once people stop insisting on asking this question, they are no longer worth much. Genial tolerance is, for him, a sign of mediocrity. As he says, "it was not necessarily the best of times in America when Catholics and Protestants were suspicious of and hated one another, but at least they were taking their beliefs seriously." (p. 35) When Rawls suggests that we found our theory of justice on nothing bigger or less culturally relative than our local traditions of religious tolerance and abhorrence of slavery, Bloom concludes that he doesn't qualify as a philosopher at all, but only as an "intellectual."

My Nietzsche is also merely what Bloom would call an "intellectual". For he feels at home in what Heidegger called "the age of the world-picture". He sees Kuhnian philosophy of science and Deweyan philosophy of art as the fulfillments of his own ambition to "look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life." (BT, sec. 2) He is cheered that in this latest age of the world his fellow-intellectuals have put aside Socrates' "theoretical optimism, his faith that the nature of things can be fathomed" (ibid., sec. 15)--and with it the very idea of an alternative to what Bloom calls "cultural relativism," the very possibility of what Heidegger calls "Thinking." The textbook topoi of Philosophy 101 are, for this age and for my Nietzsche, just optional raw materials for optional projects of self-creation. It is an age in which, as Bloom indignantly says, "one need not have read a line of philosophy to be considered educated" (p. 378), one in which philosophy is just one more art-form--suited to the talents of some and unsuited to those of others. It is an age which considers one's choice of project of self-creation is as much up for grabs, as much at the mercy of unpredictable contingencies of heredity and environment, as is political power. This age honors my Nietzsche, the pragmatic perspectivalist, not the metaphysician of the will to power, nor the prophet of cruel wars.

Bloom is as disgusted as are Heidegger and de Man by the very idea of such an age. He is as bitterly anti-bourgeois as the Cultural Left he despises, and as contemptuous of contemporary America. Like them, he cannot tolerate a conception of politics and political history to which philosophy is irrelevant, nor the idea that a cheerful, unheroic, unprincipled, experimental bourgeois democracy might turn out to be the best political regime. He hates the thought that chance, rather than philosophy might determine our fate, and that there will be no philosopher to blame if we happen to end up as the slaves of an immortal Orwellian state.
There is certainly a Nietzsche who would have shared Bloom’s sentiments. This is the Nietzsche who shared Heidegger’s pride in membership in the exclusive club of Thinkers—in being one of those rare spirits who break new ground, who can speak across the bleak ages between with the mighty Greeks, someone whose sole existence is sufficient excuse for his own age. But there is also a Nietzsche who was not interested in dethroning ancient idols, nor in debating Greek topics, nor in having a story to tell about world-history. This was the Nietzsche who carried Emerson around in his knapsack—Emerson the actively forgetful evader of philosophy, the man who asked “Why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe?” (Nature, Addresses and Lectures, Boston, 1903, p. 3). This Nietzsche might have liked the American project—the project of inventing a society which would deal even-handedly with both the last man and the passionate, snobbish, self-creator, a society in which neither is allowed to hurt the other.
NIETZSCHE AND ALLAN BLOOM'S NIETZSCHE

Richard Schacht

The great popular success of Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* is one of those phenomena I wish H.L. Mencken could have lived to see, and to remark upon. After the Bible, it is probably the most widely unread best-seller of modern times. Every college and university administrator in the land probably has at least one copy by now, for example; but those who have actually read it through probably do not outnumber those in this room.

Quite apart from any impact it may have on academia, for the better or for the worse, one sure effect of the book among those who read even a fair part of it is to make Nietzsche a household name. Bloom has probably done more to convince more people in this country that Nietzsche somehow matters in an important way than have all of us in the Nietzsche business, from Walter Kaufmann to the present company, put together. The manner in which he does so, however, makes this a mixed blessing, even for us. We have been working for some decades now to try to get our fellow philosophers and others to recognize that Nietzsche does matter, in important ways, within academic philosophy and also beyond it. In this respect, Bloom has done us a considerable favor. And his version of Nietzsche is infinitely more worthy of serious attention than was the lamentable caricature of Nietzsche figuring so prominently in the news a half-century ago.

On the other hand, Bloom's Nietzsche comes across as a kind of bogey-man of a different but no less sinister sort. Those who suppose that Bloom may be relied upon at least where Nietzsche is concerned are likely to conclude that Nietzsche matters chiefly as a kind of Darth Vader of modern thought, posing the most awful threat to the forces of light, and who must somehow be vanquished at all costs. Bloom may protest that he esteems and admires Nietzsche as one of the very greatest of philosophers, around whom (he even says) the modern world revolves. (p. 148) With such friends, however, Nietzsche does not need enemies. For Bloom, everything depends upon mounting a counter-offensive against Nietzsche and all of his works before it is too late—even if this means having to read Locke.

Bloom exemplifies a tendency that has become increasingly common among Anglo-American philosophers in recent years: to recognize that Nietzsche represents the culmination of the movement of modern thought away from the articles of faith of the Enlightenment—and then to recoil from the consequences of this development, as though he were its *reductio ad absurdum*, and to suppose that some alternative must be found. This is usually done by reverting with the fervor or the "born-again" either to these articles of faith or to others yet older. The line of thought seems to be: These developments lead to Nietzsche. It would be too horrible if Nietzsche were right. Therefore Nietzsche must be wrong. Therefore these developments must have gone astray somewhere. Something must have been rejected that should have been kept, among these abandoned articles of older philosophical or religious faith, and had better be revived and embraced.

But what if Nietzsche and others are right about their untenability? What if intellectual conscience and philosophical integrity require that we make no such retreat, and instead bid farewell to all such articles of faith once and for all? Would the philosophical and human outlook then really be as bleak as Bloom and other philosophical conservatives old and new suppose? Would the result necessarily be the dark night of
nihilism, either European-style or American-style, ending in no new dawn, but rather only in the abyss, as Bloom warns? Or is he posing a false forced choice in order to frighten the straying flock back into the old fold? In a word: Does he sell Nietzsche short? This is my conclusion, which I shall briefly elaborate. I consider Bloom's treatment of Nietzsche to be worth our attention not because it is so very important or illuminating in itself, but rather because it so nicely exemplifies the above-mentioned tendency, and because it serves to raise these questions so vividly.

Bloom actually presents us with a number of Nietzsches. There is the American pop cult Nietzsche, to be found (though happily without Nietzsche's name attached) in the widely prevalent ways of modern popular thinking Bloom so despises. There is the lit critic Nietzsche, of whom he thinks no better. There is the New Left Nietzsche, whom he considers a kind of bastardized bad joke. There are the two second-generation half-Nietzsches, Freud and Weber, both of whom he respects somewhat more, but still regards as offspring of dubious legitimacy and worth. And then there is Bloom's Nietzsche himself—a far more formidable figure and one of the greatest of modern philosophers, but also the most dangerous of them, who was fatefully wrong on the issues that matter most, however brilliant and insightful he may otherwise have been.

I shall focus upon he last of these Nietzsches, and shall pass over the others with but a few brief remarks. Bloom professes to be intent upon saving the real Nietzsche (his own Nietzsche) from the fate of being reduced to these other sorry forms—even if only to preserve him for the different fate Bloom himself has in mind for him, of a proper and honorable execution by philosophical firing-squad. Yet he give the strong impression of wanting to tar Nietzsche so completely with the brush of responsibility for these unwelcome fruits that anyone who shares Bloom's distaste for them will be ill-disposed toward their source as the final battle and reckoning commence. Bloom heaps much scorn upon those who have turned Nietzsche's dynamite into pablum, and repeatedly points to various purportedly characteristic shortcomings of Americans as deserving the blame for what has become of Nietzsche's ideas over here. At the same time, however, he seems to want to persuade us that all of this ultimately is really Nietzsche's fault, for having sown the seed of it in the first place. But this is as absurd as blaming Nietzsche for what the Nazis did with him—which Bloom at times also comes close to doing.

Even if there is something to the history of it all that Bloom relates, moreover (and there probably is, though not nearly as much as he thinks), that would cut no ice with respect to the question of whether Nietzsche's positions on the actual issues are sound. It also has no bearing on how his thinking with respect to these issues is to be interpreted. Nietzsche worried a great deal about the way in which his ideas would be taken. He was acutely concerned that much of mankind was not ready (as he put it) for his truths. But he was convinced that it is unworthy of a philosopher (as he also put it) to do anything other than try to get to the bottom of these issues, and to work out the consequences of doing so unflinchingly, at least while in philosophical company and with one's philosophical hat on. One who respects him as Bloom says he does should meet him on this ground, and should seek to come to terms with his thought accordingly, rather than by way of its uses and abuses.

What, then, are we to make of Bloom's Nietzsche, in relation to the Nietzsche we may find in his own writings? It must be acknowledged at once that, especially in his chapter on "Values," Bloom often captures the concerns and thrust of Nietzsche's thinking on various matters quite well, and conveys them better than many other writers who take notice of him do. Indeed, he does so well enough that it rings very oddly when, after a dozen pages of rather harrowing exposition, Bloom steps back and remarks: "Not all that Nietzsche asserted is plausible, but its charm is undeniable." (p. 206) **Charm?** A more
lightly dismissive term could hardly have been chosen; and Bloom uses it again in the same way a page later ("For all the charms of Nietzsche..."), as if to make sure that the reader will not miss the put-down. His intention is probably to assure the reader that there is no need to be alarmed, and that he knows a way out. But this is no way to take a formidable rival seriously.

Something strange is also going on when Bloom cites Nietzsche as the source of the "alien views and alien tastes" by which "democracy has been corrupted" (p. 148), and then proceeds, a few pages later, to complain that Nietzsche rejects the universalism of Greek and French philosophy, and with it the associated quest for real truth and real goodness. He replaces them, we are told, with mere "values"; and "For Nietzsche and those influenced by him, values are the products of folk minds and have relevance only to those minds." (p. 153) In the first of these passages, Bloom sounds as though he is in the camp he mentions in the second, seeming to suggest that Nietzsche's "alien views" may be fine for the "folk mind" of which they are the product, but have no place over here in the Land of the Free. In this case, however, it is Bloom rather than Nietzsche who has abandoned universalism; for Nietzsche surely did not think that what he had to say about truth, morality and values had no application outside of Central Europe.

Nietzsche might well have allowed that most American minds even today (including Bloom's) are not yet ready fully to comprehend and appreciate what he has to say—as he observes with respect to most of his contemporaries. He clearly thought, however, that it was twilight-time for all the old idols not only in Europe but throughout Western civilization, and wherever else a comparable sophistication might be attained. It is almost as if Bloom wishes he could close the American mind to Nietzsche's challenge, and dreams of a Fortress America in which his Socratic and Enlightenment faith in reason's power to disclose the Good, the True and the Beautiful can be preserved from all subversion from abroad. But that is an impossible and misguided dream; and attempts to achieve it can only enfeeble those they would protect, with consequences more serious than those Bloom associates with the closing he discusses.

Bloom is a splendid latter-day example of the kind of phenomenon Nietzsche takes Kant (among others) to represent. Nietzsche is very hard on Kant because he sees him as having devoted his efforts to mounting a brilliant, desperate rear-guard action to save the Socratic-Christian faith from final interment. This faith is also Bloom's. It is the faith in eternal verities and a transcendent "true world of being," to which our minds or souls most truly belong, and to which they may by proper application lead us. The "death of God" Nietzsche proclaims is the demise of this faith, as one that might still be plausibly held worthy of belief. For Socrates and Kant, reason was the key; for Christianity, the acceptance of Divine Revelation.

For Nietzsche, both are real enough as human phenomena; but they neither derive from nor are capable of leading us into any such Promised Land. The faith of Socrates, Kant and Bloom may be strong motivated, but is generally so motivated (Nietzsche suspects) for all-too-human reasons. On his view, we must learn to live without it, because it cannot withstand the scrutiny of the intellectual conscience to which it itself has given birth. And we must also distance ourselves from it because it is nihilism in disguise, setting us up for a fall into the abyss of despair and paralysis by its radical devaluation of everything that has no grounding and validation in the absolutes it postulates. Those who fight rear-guard actions on its behalf only make all the more difficult the necessary shift to a new conception and appreciation of ourselves and our world by which we might yet manage to live and flourish, beyond the transitional nihilistic rebound that disillusionment is likely to bring in its wake.
Like so many of his kindred spirits, Bloom can see only what must be given up if Nietzsche is right, recoils from the prospect, and blames the messenger for message. And like so many others, he either ignores or belittles what Nietzsche proposes to put in place of the idols whose twilight is at hand, portraying him (as Spiro Agnew might have put it) as nothing but a nattering nabob of nihilism. He sees Nietzsche as a nihilist, who "with the utmost gravity told modern man that he was free-falling in the abyss of nihilism." (p. 143) (The pun on "gravity" and "free-falling" is a nice one, whether or not it was intended; but if it was intended, it is another way of--pardon the further pun--making light of Nietzsche.) Bloom gives little weight (pardon again) to Nietzsche's professed intent to overcome nihilism, to attain a newly and more truly affirmative relation to life in this world, and to promote the emergence of a redeeming higher humanity that would be "anti-nihilist" as well as "Anti-christian," "victor over [both] God and nothingness." (GM II: 24) For Bloom cannot see the rejection of absolute truth discoverable by reason--especially with respect to morality and the good life--as anything other than nihilistic.

Bloom takes Nietzsche to have supposed that "the reconstitution of man" in the aftermath of the death of God "requires the sacrifice of reason" in opposition to our Socratic and Enlightenment heritage, in which reason is "at the center" and is supposed to be capable of leading us into all truth. He strangely has little to say about Nietzsche on interpretation in this connection. What he stresses instead is that Nietzsche replaces talk about the discovery of truth with talk about the creation of values, which are "not discovered by reason" (p. 143), leaving "no place for the theoretical man to stand." (p. 202) In place of Socratic and Enlightenment rationalistic faith in the power of reason to give us true knowledge of the highest things, Nietzsche is said to offer us "cultural relativism," which relates values to cultures and so to merely human invention, advocates "culture while knowing it is not true" (p. 202), and thus paradoxically and self-defeatingly "teaches the need to believe while undermining belief."

Bloom's picture of Nietzsche has a good deal to be said for it. It is fairly close to the mark in many respects, at least as far as it goes. It is even with some justice that he sums it up, toward the end of the book, by saying that "the issue for Nietzsche" is that "Socrates is alive and must be overcome." (p. 307) It suffers, however, from Bloom's all-or-nothing stance and disposition, which Nietzsche regarded as a recipe for disaster, far more dangerous than the determination to push down and out of the way what is misguided and falling, and then to get on with the task of reconsidering and making the most of what we may find available to work with.

So, for example, in undertaking to develop an account of interpretation and of how some interpretations may be superior to others in the comprehension they afford, Nietzsche seeks to do much more than merely sweep away traditional ideas about truth and knowledge. He attempts to give us something to take their place, that will still serve (and indeed serve better) to guide inquiry. In making so much of questions of value and the revaluation of values, he seeks to do much more than merely devalue traditional notions of the good life and inquiry into what really matters, leaving us stranded in a pure cultural relativism that knows no standard and undermines itself, thus plunging us into nihilistic free-fall and free-for-all. Rather, he attempts to discern a new standard and "center of gravity" enabling us to find our feet again, and to proceed to discover the possibility of an enhancement of life that would redeem humanity without recourse to fundamental illusion.

Further: in subjecting morality to genealogical analysis and searching criticism, Nietzsche seeks to do much more than merely subvert it, opening the way to a manner of existence "beyond good and evil" that knows no restraint. Rather, he attempts to develop a new way of thinking about morality that would endow it with significance within the
context of a naturalized conception of life and its enhancement. In undertaking to translate man back into a de-deified nature and to dethrone reason as a faculty transcending the circumstances of our mundane existence in its origins, he seeks to do more than simply sacrifice it on the altar of culture and creativity. Rather, he attempts to comprehend how we have come to be more than mere creatures of nature through the very circumstances of our naturalistic genealogy, and to do justice to the achievement our reason represents and to the more modest but nonetheless significant ability it may give us to attain forms of knowledge that are not to be despised or underestimated.

Bloom sells Nietzsche short because he misses all of this. He sees only the Nietzsche who threatens everything that he holds dear. He and many others who shrink from letting go of their attachment to the faith in absolutes and in the power of reason to discover them thus regard him as their mortal foe. They do not perceive that he is actually perhaps their best ally in their resistance to a nihilism that would plunge us into the abyss of radical meaninglessness, in the darkness and emptiness of which our humanity and all distinctions would disappear. Nietzsche does insist that a price must be paid, which Bloom and his kindred spirits are loath to pay, for at least the chance of passage to the other side: namely, the abandonment of the old faith and its idols, so prominently displayed in Bloom’s book. But I believe, with Nietzsche, that if life and philosophy are to have a non-nihilistic future, this future is to found on the far side of the disillusionment that Bloom condescendingly dismisses as "Continental despair."

Bloom is certainly right in claiming that the other Nietzsches he identifies are sorry creatures, on which we would be ill-advised to stake our fortunes. But Nietzsche is certainly right in claiming that there is likewise no hope of avoiding the abyss if we can do no better than huddle with Bloom by the altar of the old Socratic-Enlightenment faith. If there is a live alternative that promises any real hope of escaping the nihilistic catastrophe that both deem to threaten, it is neither that of Bloom’s Nietzsche nor that of Bloom himself, but rather something like that of the counter-nihilist Nietzsche who picks up where Bloom expires in bankruptcy and Bloom’s Nietzsche leaves off.

Bloom quite rightly and commendably recognizes that the cluster culture-values-creativity is central for Nietzsche, as the heart of his conception of our humanity and its possible enhancement, and indeed of what he has Zarathustra characterize as "the meaning of the earth." But Bloom regards this cluster as a poor substitute for the rival cluster of knowledge-morality-reason more immaculately conceived, which for him is the true locus of our humanity and worth, in the spirit of Socrates and the Enlightenment. He takes modern philosophers and other intellectuals to task for capitulating to Nietzsche in this respect, with greater or lesser degrees of sophistication, rather than rallying to the defense of his traditional trinity. This is what he takes the failure and impoverishment of higher education fundamentally to involve and reflect. Nietzsche, however, would consider the real failure and impoverishment to be that of those like Bloom, who lack either the sophistication, the intellectual honesty or the courage to recognize the untenability of the traditional claims made for his trinity, and to turn to the task of reinterpreting our humanity and his trinity along with it. For if that is not done, we and our students and the rest of modern humanity will be left empty-handed and despairing upon the impending overdue final demise of Bloom’s faith and quest.

Moreover, Nietzsche is by no means intent upon persuading us that when culture, values and creativity are brought to the fore, the elements of Bloom’s trinity must be abandoned altogether or so marginalized that they cease to be of any significance. On the contrary, he finds that when they are demythologized and reinterpreted they acquire a new lease on life—no longer immaculately conceived, to be sure, but with a significance that is far from negligible. This is true of knowledge, which turns out for Nietzsche to
be a genuine human possibility after all, when properly understood, with respect to the host of matters Nietzsche examines in Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft and elsewhere. It should be plain to anyone who reads him that he himself was deeply committed to its pursuit, and attached great importance to it. This is even true of morality, not only in the form that "higher morality" he took to be both appropriate and needful for exceptions to the human rule in the service of their realization of the possibility of a "higher humanity," but also where more ordinary forms of morality are concerned. Indeed, he considers them to have a crucial function in human life more generally, past, present and future. His denials of the appropriateness of a single morality for all human beings, and of the absoluteness and autonomy of moral principles, should not be allowed to obscure these points.

In view of the great fuss Bloom makes about reason, it is particularly important to stress that the same observation also applies with respect to Nietzsche's treatment and assessment of it. What upsets Bloom most about Nietzsche is that he is supposed to have "required the sacrifice of reason." "For all the charms of Nietzsche," according to Bloom, this sin is unforgivable, and fatally flaws his thought. (p. 207) But does Nietzsche "require the sacrifice of reason"? Not at all. What he requires is the acknowledgement that our human reason is no pristine faculty with which we are endowed from on high, unconnected with the rest of our biologically, socially and historically conditioned existence and practical dealings with each other and our world. Rather, it is a capacity we have gradually acquired and now possess to a greater or lesser extent, that has emerged as one of the more remarkable outgrowths of the interplay of these elements and circumstances. So to understand it, however, is not to require its sacrifice.

Moreover, as Nietzsche observes, the human and even all-too-human, very maculate origins of a thing or capacity do not settle the questions of what may be done with it once it has been engendered, and of what its worth and significance may prove to be. And in the case of reason, notwithstanding his insistence upon its limits and links to our affective constitution and practical needs and interests, he thinks that a great deal may be done with it, and that its importance is likewise great. It may be no substitute for creativity, which he for good reason takes to be more important still. He considers both to be indispensable, however, to all genuine philosophy, to the advancement of science, to the comprehension of everything humanly comprehensible, and indeed--now that the point of no return has long passed in our exchange of blind and unwavering instinct for consciousness--to the preservation, flourishing and enhancement of human life as well. In short: far from sacrificing reason, Nietzsche would have us make the most of it.

To be sure, Bloom is right to observe that for Nietzsche the kinds of values that give life its savor and culture its content "are not discovered by reason," but rather require to be "created." (p. 143) Bloom overstates the case in suggesting that Nietzsche supposes reason to have nothing whatever to do with the discovery of value, since he acknowledges it to be one of Nietzsche's views--presumably arrived at by means of thought--that "the very idea of culture carries with it a value: man needs culture and must do what is necessary to create and maintain cultures." (p. 202) On this level, at any rate, and also in carrying out his "revaluation of values," Nietzsche undeniably is employing reason in the elaboration and application of his value-theory. Moreover, he considers reason to have an important role in the ascertainment of the kinds of values--and even the kinds of morality--that are and are not conducive to the flourishing of various types of human beings under diverse conditions of existence. But he also clearly and reasonably holds that reason by itself does not suffice to establish the values that give cultures their identities and human lives their direction.
It is hard to see, however, why Bloom should find this so troubling. It is no objection to a philosopher of art if he maintains that works of art and the values they engender are not to be discovered by reason, but rather require to be created, and that they have nothing to do with truth. And it is surely no objection to Nietzsche that he holds that the same points apply with respect to cultures as well. The sticking point for Bloom would appear to be that Nietzsche proposes to extend them further, leaving no room beyond their scope for an independent purely rational determination of the content of the One True Morality, and of the lineaments of the One True Good Life. To this, however, we and Nietzsche might well reply that the burden is on Bloom and anyone else who may care to join him to make sense of these notions, and to show how such a program can be carried out, rather than upon Nietzsche to demonstrate the impossibility of doing so—and that one would be well advised not to hold one's breath until they deliver.

Meanwhile, while they are off pursuing their Holy Grail, we would do well to turn out attention to the task of seeing what mileage we can get out of the phenomena at hand, mindful of those relating to values, cultures and creation, as well as those our scientific brethren contemplate. That is what Nietzsche sought with such determination and urgency to do, in works such as *The Gay Science*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. It seems to me that his enterprise, pursued in this way, is a much more promising one than the one Bloom urges upon us. And it further seems to me that, in trying to persuade American readers that they should disdain Nietzsche's "alien views and alien tastes" in favor of our (native?) Socratic and Enlightenment heritage, Bloom not only is being rather silly, but also misguidedly seeks to close the American mind to a valuable import. Even if he is right about what happened when Nietzsche first "came to America"—"the goods," he says, "got damaged in transit" (226)—it would be bad policy to deny him a visa today. For he deserves a serious hearing—and a better one than Bloom has given him. Fortunately, the attention Bloom draws to him may help to bring about that very result, to Bloom's philosophical disadvantage, and our gain.