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NIETZSCHE IN A NUTSHELL

A BRIEF RENDERING OF HIS PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING

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"God is dead!" So proclaimed Friedrich Nietzsche a century ago. And this is only one of the many startling claims he made for which he had already become both famous and notorious by the time of his own death in 1900. He may be the most controversial thinker in the entire history of philosophy—not only because he is so easily misunderstood, but also because he rejects so many commonly accepted beliefs, and advances so many disturbing ideas in their place. The fact that the Nazis claimed him as their philosophical inspiration made it almost impossible for him to be given a fair hearing in the English-speaking world for many years. But even though their representation of his thought is now recognized to have been a travesty, he continues to be widely regarded with deep suspicion, and to arouse strong opposition.

This is hardly surprising. Nietzsche not only proclaims the "death of God," but also attacks Christianity violently. He rejects the religious idea of God as the source of all meaning, and also the humanistic idea of the intrinsic value of the human individual; and he proposes replacing them with the idea of the Übermensch—the "superman" or "overman"—as "the meaning of the earth." He denounces both democracy and socialism; and he challenges every point affirmed in the declaration: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; and that among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Few philosophers have had a more profound driving concern than Nietzsche did; and few have felt that more depended upon their philosophical enterprises. He believed that our entire civilization is now facing a fateful crisis; for the fundamental assumptions about ourselves and the world that have long given meaning to life in the Western world have been undermined.

The time has come when we have to pay for having been Christians for two thousand years: we are losing the center of gravity by virtue of which we lived; we are lost for a while. [WP 30]

Nietzsche feared that unless something could be done, mankind would cease to grow and develop, and would instead sink into a degenerate and ultimately moribund condition. He saw Schopenhauer as the first modern European to give expression to this development. Schopenhauer was not taken seriously by most of his contemporaries; but Nietzsche saw him as the herald of things to come, unless someone could show another way.

As we thus reject the Christian interpretation and condemn its "meaning" as counterfeit, Schopenhauer's question immediately comes to us in a terrifying way: Has existence any meaning at all? It will require a few centuries before this question can even be heard completely and in its full depth. [GS 357]

Nietzsche viewed this situation with the greatest alarm. He sensed impending disaster: and the increasing urgency with which he wrote, and the relentlessness with which he drove himself, were expressions of his belief that a tremendous responsibility rested upon his shoulders. He could understand that weak souls like Schopenhauer will quite naturally lack the stomach to jump into the fray and try to make something of life in spite of its agonies. But he dreaded the thought that the whole human race might become as weak and as hostile to life as Schopenhauer was, and so took his stand against him.
My instinct went into the opposite direction from Schopenhauer's: toward a justification of life, even at its most terrible, ambiguous, and mendacious; for this I had the formula "Dionysian."....

Schopenhauer was still so much subject to the dominion of Christian values that, as soon as the thing-in-itself was no longer "God" for him, he had to see it as bad, stupid, and absolutely reprehensible. [WP 1005]

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra Nietzsche attempts to evoke a new vision of life and its meaning, symbolized by the idea of the "overman," who is creativity incarnate. So he has Zarathustra proclaim:

I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?....

You have made your way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape.....

Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth. [Z P:3]

Here Nietzsche is saying that Schopenhauer, and Plato, and Christianity, have missed the "meaning of the earth," which can only be found in the continuing creative enhancement of life, represented by the overman: And he believes that unless this new teaching is learned and embraced, the impending collapse of traditional values will lead to nihilism and despair.

Religion and Nihilism

In Soren Kierkegaard's book Fear and Trembling, written during the early years of Nietzsche's life, Kierkegaard wrote vividly of what seemed to him to be at stake along with the religious faith he believed to be so essential:

If there were no eternal consciousness in man, if at the foundation of all there lay only a wildly seething power which, writhing with obscure passions, produced everything that is great and everything that is insignificant, if a bottomless void never satiated lay hidden beneath all--what then would life be but despair? If such were the case..., if the human race passed through the world as the ship goes through the sea, like the wind through the desert, a thoughtless and fruitless activity...--how empty then and comfortless life would be! [A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Bretall. Princeton. 1946. p. 30]

But for Kierkegaard the passionate Christian, this is not so. And it is not so thanks entirely to the God in whom he so passionately believes, who endows human life with meaning and each individual with value. But this, for Nietzsche, is precisely what he calls the great "crime" of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular. Christianity has taught us to think that this world without God would be a horrible world, in which life
would not be worth living; and that the only alternative to religious faith is despair. This alternative is accepted by Schopenhauer, who refuses to make Kierkegaard's leap of faith.

Schopenhauer views the world as Kierkegaard says one would have to view it if one did not believe in God. To live is to suffer, for Schopenhauer, to no purpose, and in far greater measure than any possible enjoyment can ever offset. The most one can hope and strive for is the reduction of suffering. The best possible state of affairs would be one in which suffering no longer exists; but this would only be possible if life itself were to disappear. Schopenhauer therefore advocates the ascetic ideal of extinguishing all desire and withdrawing from all activity, negating life as completely as possible. The truth of the matter, as he understands it, is worse than that life is simply life, utterly without meaning and value. Rather, it is that life is an unredeemable evil, and that oblivion would be preferable to it.

Nietzsche abhored this conclusion; and he laid the blame for it squarely at the feet of the religious tradition that paved the way for it, by depriving life of all positive meaning and value on its own terms. Schopenhauer was only drawing out the conclusion Christianity invited when it did this, and made God seem to be the only answer. It has taught us to think that if there is no God, then nothing matters. And this is not just an abstract argument; religions such as Christianity have taught us to view and experience life in this way.

Consider the damage all human institutions sustain if a divine and transcendent higher sphere is postulated that must first sanction these institutions. By then growing accustomed to seeing their value in this sanction,..., one has reduced their natural dignity, in certain circumstances denied it..

The fatefulness of a belief in God [is that] all actual values were therewith denied and systematically conceived as non-values. Thus antinaturalness assumed the throne. With relentless logic one arrived at the absolute demand to deny nature. [WP 245]

Nietzsche considers this "crime against life" to be a truly terrible one, because it has set the stage for a possible disaster of monumental proportions: an epidemic of despair following the collapse of this belief, that threatens to doom humanity. So he indicts religion in the strongest language he can muster, declaring "war" upon the major world-religions and their theologies. For he holds that they not only are utterly indefensible, but moreover are deeply objectionable owing to their detrimental impact upon human life.

Hitherto one has always attacked Christianity not merely in a modest way but in the wrong way. As long as one has not felt Christian morality to be a capital crime against life, its defenders have had it all their own way. The question of the mere "truth" of Christianity--whether in regard to the existence of its God or the historicity of the legend of its origin,...--is a matter of secondary importance as long as the question of the value of Christian morality is not considered. Is Christian morality worth anything, or is it a shame and disgrace despite all the holiness of its arts of seduction? [WP 251]

It is on these grounds above all that Nietzsche attacks Christianity and other religions. He argues that they have fed upon and fostered weakness, sickness, life-weariness, and resentment, poisoning the wellsprings of strength and vitality in the process. While promising salvation, their real effect has been the opposite, gravely hindering and threatening the development and enhancement of human life.
One should never forgive Christianity for having destroyed such men as Pascal. One should never cease from combating just this in Christianity: its will to break precisely the strongest and noblest souls. One should never rest as long as this one thing has not been utterly and completely destroyed: the ideal of man invented by Christianity, its demands upon men.... The whole absurd residue of Christian fable, conceptual cobweb-spinning and theology does not concern us; it could be a thousand times more absurd and we would not lift a finger against it. But we do combat the ideal that appeals to all the cowardices and vanities of wearied souls--and the strongest have their weary hours.... What is it we combat in Christianity? That it wants to break the strong, that it wants to discourage their courage, exploit their bad hours and their occasional weariness, convert their proud assurance into unease and distress of conscience, that it knows how to poison and sicken the noble instincts until their strength, their will to power turns backward, against itself--until the strong perish through orgies of self-contempt and self-abuse.... [WP 252]

To break the grip of religious modes of valuation, and to prepare the way for more truthful and life-affirming modes of interpretation and evaluation, Nietzsche attempts to undermine all other-worldly theologies. His strategy is to expose the misguided reasons and ulterior motives accounting for the emergence and widespread acceptance of religious ways of thinking.

How many there are who still conclude: "Life could not be endured if there were no God!... Therefore there must be a God...!" The truth, however, is merely that he who is accustomed to these notions does not desire a life without them: that these notions may therefore be necessary to him and for his preservation--but what a presumption it is to decree that whatever is necessary for my preservation must actually exist!" [D 90]

Nietzsche seeks to make the emergence and acceptance of religious beliefs understandable as human phenomena; and at the same time he intends to render them not only highly suspect but moreover unacceptable to those capable of doing without them.

In former times, one sought to prove that there is no God--today one indicates how the belief that there is a God could arise and how this belief acquired its weight and importance: a counter-proof that there is no God thereby becomes superfluous. --When in former times one had refuted the "proofs of the existence of God" put forward, there always remained the doubt whether better proofs might not be adduced than those just refuted: in those days atheists did not know how to make a clean sweep. [D 95]

Nietzsche attempts just such a "clean sweep" of the "God-hypothesis" and everything associated with it, through a consideration of the kinds of all-too-human needs, desires, fears and errors in which the very idea of God and belief in God are rooted. In this way the "God-hypothesis" is decisively subverted by being deprived of all credibility. For the faithful, "God is the truth"; but in reality, he argues, God turns out to be only the imaginary product of "the vanity, the lust for power, the impatience, the terror, the enraptured and fearful delusion of men." [D 93]

Nietzsche does have some respect for a religion like Christianity as a form of life, and associates Jesus with this human possibility:

The very word "Christianity" is a misunderstanding: in truth, there was only one Christian, and he died on the cross.... Only Christian practice, a life
such as he lived who died on the cross, is Christian.... Such a life is still possible today, for certain people even necessary: genuine, original Christianity will be possible at all times.... [A 39]

But Nietzsche argues that historical Christianity represents a perversion of this possibility, deserving a far more harsh assessment.

I condemn Christianity. I raise against the Christian church the most terrible of all accusations that any accuser ever uttered. It is to me the highest of all conceivable corruptions.... The Christian church has left nothing untouched by its corruption; it has turned every value into an un-value, every truth into a lie, every integrity into a vileness of the soul. [A 62]

So Nietzsche not only proclaims but also welcomes "the death of God" as the signal event of our time, posing at once the gravest danger and the greatest promise.

The greatest recent event--that "God is dead," that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable--is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe....

But in the main one may say: The event itself is far too great, too distant, too remote from the multitude's capacity for comprehension even for the tidings of it to be thought of as having arrived as yet. Much less may one suppose that many people know as yet what this event really means--and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it; for example, the whole of our European morality.... [GS 343]

The "death of God," Nietzsche realized, may be a slow one; and its full impact may not be felt for some time. The habit of religious belief may linger on among the unenlightened, and religious fervor may even increase in response to anxiety about the consequences of its abandonment. But Nietzsche considers the collapse of the world-view and scheme of values anchored in the "God-hypothesis" to be inevitable, as the recognition of its unbelievability grows and sinks in. And he warns that this collapse will lead to a crisis of unparalleled magnitude, of which Schopenhauer's pessimism offers a foretaste. His term for this impending crisis is "nihilism." In the aftermath of the "death of God" and the demise of metaphysical surrogates for religious faith, he prophesies "the advent of nihilism" [WP P:4], in reaction to the realization that traditional modes of interpretation and evaluation are among the casualties.

Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?.... [From] the end of Christianity--at the hands of its own morality.... The sense of truthfulness, developed highly by Christianity, is nauseated by the falseness and mendaciousness of all Christian interpretations of the world and of history; rebound from "God is truth" to the fanatical faith "All is false"....[WP 1]

This prospect deeply distressed Nietzsche; and so he sought to diagnose it, as the first step toward the overcoming of this crisis.

What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer. [WP 2]
Nihilism represents a pathological transitional stage. (What is pathological is the tremendous generalization, the inference that there is no meaning at all.) [WP 13]

A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist. According to this view, our existence...has no meaning: the pathos of "in vain" is the nihilists' pathos.... Intermediary period of nihilism: before there is yet present the strength to reverse values and to deify becoming and the apparent world as the only world, and to call them good. [WP 575]

Nietzsche took his basic challenge to be the overcoming both of traditional religions and metaphysical ways of thinking and of the nihilism resulting from their abandonment. And he knew that this will be very difficult indeed, in view of the fundamentally irrational and inhuman character of the world.

Who are we anyway? If we simply called ourselves...godless, or unbelievers, or perhaps immoralists, we do not believe that this would even come close to designating us: We are all three in such an advanced stage that one [can hardly] comprehend how we feel at this point. Ours is no longer the bitterness and passion of the person who has torn himself away and still feels compelled to turn his unbelief into a new belief, a purpose, a martyrdom. We have become cold, hard, and tough in the realization that the way of this world is anything but divine; even by human standards it is not rational, merciful, or just. We know it well: the world in which we live is ungodly, immoral, "inhuman"; we have interpreted it far too long in a false and mendacious way, in accordance with the wishes of our reverence, which is to say, according to our needs. [GS 346]

As a cultural event "the death of God" was a phenomenon Nietzsche viewed with profound concern. As a philosophical development, on the other hand, it was his point of departure; and he took it to call for a radical reconsideration of life and the world, human existence and knowledge, and value and morality.

God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. --And we--we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.... [GS 108]

The total character of the world...is in all eternity chaos--in the sense not of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms.... When will all these shadows of God cease to darken our minds? When will we complete our de-deification of nature? When may we begin to "naturalize" humanity in terms of a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature? [GS 109]

Nietzsche's answer to these questions is: Now, today, in and through the new kinds of philosophical inquiry he calls for and undertakes.
Philosophy

Nietzsche is harshly critical of much of the philosophical tradition as well as of traditional religion, and for much the same reason: he sees the same all-too-human weakness, resentment and ulterior motivation at work in the metaphysical schemes of philosophers as he sees in religious thought.

It is a miserable story: man seeks a principle through which he can despise men—he invents a world so as to be able to slander and bespatter this world: in reality, he reaches every time for nothingness, and construes nothingness as "God," as "truth," and in any case as judge and condemner of this state of being....

The history of philosophy is a secret raging against the preconditions of life, against the value feelings of life, against partisanship in favor of life. Philosophers have never hesitated to affirm a world provided it contradicted this world and furnished them with a pretext for speaking ill of this world. It has been hitherto the grand school of slander.... [WP 461]

This exemplifies one part of Nietzsche's critique of the philosophical tradition, which he calls his "psychology of metaphysics." The forms of rational thought, he contends, were originally devised for practical purposes; but philosophers seized upon them and turned them into something else:

The aberration of philosophy is that, instead of seeing logic and the categories of reason as means toward the adjustment of the world for utilitarian ends (basically, toward an expedient falsification), one believed one possessed in them the criterion of truth and reality.... Instead of employing [them] as a tool for making the world manageable and calculable, the madness of philosophers divined that in these categories is presented the concept of [a true] world to which the one in which man lives does not correspond....

This is the greatest error that has ever been committed, the essential fatality of error on earth: one believed one possessed a criterion of reality in the forms of reason--while in fact one possessed them in order to become master of reality, in order to misunderstand reality in a shrewd manner--

And behold: now [this] world became false, and precisely on account of the properties that constitute its reality: change, becoming, multiplicity, opposition, contradiction, war. And then the entire fatality was there. [WP 584]

But Nietzsche was not merely concerned to criticize previous religious and philosophical thinkers. He sought to show the way to what he called "a philosophy of the future." Such a philosophy would remain "faithful to the earth," and would yield a better understanding of ourselves and this world, contributing to the overcoming of nihilism and to a new enhancement of life. "Where, then, must we reach with our hopes?" he asks, and answers:

Toward new philosophers: there is no choice; toward spirits strong and original enough to provide the stimuli for opposite valuations and to revalue and invert "eternal values"...; to teach man the future of man as his will, as dependent on a human will, and to prepare great ventures and over-all attempts of discipline and cultivation by way of putting an end to that gruesome dominion of nonsense and accident that has so far been called "history".... [BGE 203]
The beginning of this task is analysis and criticism, at which Nietzsche himself excelled; but critical analysis is only the beginning of the kind of philosophical endeavor he has in mind.

My style...is **affirmative** and deals with contradiction and criticism only as a means.... [TI VIII:6]

The purpose of all critical analysis, for Nietzsche, should be to prepare the way for interpretations that yield greater insight and comprehension, and for revaluations that yield better assessments of all that makes a difference to the quality of human life.

More and more it seems to me that the philosopher, being *of necessity* a man of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, has always found himself, and *had* to find himself, in contradiction to his today: his enemy was ever the ideal of today....

Facing a world of "modern ideas" that would banish everybody into a corner and "specialty," a philosopher--if today there could be philosophers--would be compelled to find the greatness of man, the concept of "greatness," precisely in his range and multiplicity, in his wholeness in manifoldness. He would even determine value and rank in accordance with how much and how many things one could bear and take upon himself, how far one could extend his responsibility. [BGE 212]

The book in which Nietzsche wrote these lines bears the famous and often misunderstood title *Beyond Good and Evil*--a title he chose not to advocate irresponsibility, but rather precisely the opposite. It was meant as a call for "new philosophers" who would inquire with uncompromising honesty and courage into the most fundamental and unsettling questions, without allowing conventional ideas about "good and evil" to prejudice their thinking. It is his conviction that only such uncompromising and fearless thinking can possibly discover a way to overcome the impending crisis of nihilism, and to show how our existence in this godless world might be affirmed without recourse to illusion.

Philosophy, as I have hitherto understood and lived it, is a voluntary quest for even the most detested and notorious sides of existence.... Such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at a negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this--to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection.... The highest state a philosopher can attain [is] to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence--my formula for this is *amor fati* [the love of fate].

It is part of this state to perceive not merely the necessity of those sides of existence hitherto denied, but their desirability.... as the more powerful, more fruitful, *truer* sides of existence, in which its will finds clearer expression. [WP 1041]

Nietzsche knew very well how difficult as well as dangerous it is to embark upon the kind of philosophical thinking he advocated. It is dangerous because it calls into question all of those values and ideas we ordinarily take for granted and live by; and this is to risk more than the appearance of madness. And it is difficult, now more than ever, because it demands so much of one, and because there are so many ways a thinker can be side-tracked or led astray.
The dangers for a philosopher's development are indeed so manifold today that one may doubt whether this fruit can still ripen at all. The scope and the tower-building of the sciences has grown to be enormous, and with this also the probability that the philosopher grows weary while still learning, or allows himself to be detained somewhere to become a "specialist"—so he never attains his proper level, the height for a comprehensive look, for looking around, for looking down. Or he attains it too late, when his best time and strength are spent.... It may be precisely the sensitivity of his intellectual conscience that leads him to delay somewhere along the way....

Add to this, by way of once more doubling the difficulties for a philosopher, that he demands of himself a judgment, a Yes or No, not about the sciences but about life and the value of life—that he is reluctant to come to believe that he has a right, or even a duty, to such a judgment, and must seek his way to this right and faith only from the most comprehensive—perhaps most disturbing and destructive—experiences....

But the genuine philosopher...feels the burden and the duty of a hundred attempts and temptations of life—he risks himself constantly.... [BGE 205]

Nietzsche knew that he placed great demands upon his readers. He anticipated that it would be his fate to be misunderstood, and to be either embraced or rejected by most people for the wrong reasons. But this did not deter him. He wrote for the few who would have the ability to meet him on his own terms, and measure up to the high standard he sought to set.

One must be honest in matters of the spirit to the point of hardness before one can even endure my seriousness and my passion. One must be skilled in living on mountains—seeing the wretched ephemeral babble of politics and national self-seeking beneath oneself. One must have become indifferent; one must never ask if the truth is useful or if it may prove our undoing. The predilection of strength for questions for which no one today has the courage.... New ears for new music. New eyes for what is most distant. A new conscience for truths that have so far remained mute. And the will to the economy of the great style: keeping our strength, our enthusiasm in harness. [A Pref.]

To be able to think and live in the manner of the kind of "new philosopher" Nietzsche called for and sought to be, one must possess and cultivate all of these abilities and qualities. One must also attain something else, that may grow out of these qualities. He calls it "the great health." And he suggests that those fortunate enough to attain it will be richly rewarded.

Being new, nameless, hard to understand, we premature births of an as yet unproven future need for a new goal also a new means—namely, a new health, stronger, more seasoned, tougher, more audacious, and gayer than any previous health....

And now, after we have long been on our way in this manner..., it will seem to us as if, as a reward, we now confront an as yet undiscovered country whose boundaries nobody has surveyed yet, something beyond all the lands and nooks of the ideal so far, a world so overrich in what is beautiful, strange, questionable, terrible, and divine that our curiosity as well as our craving to possess it [is insatiable]. [GS 382]
Knowledge

Philosophers have long been concerned with the question of the nature and scope of truth and knowledge; and Nietzsche shares this interest with them. But his treatment of this question is a very novel one. He begins by observing that, in dealing with truth and knowledge, one is confronted with certain sorts of human affairs. And he insists that one's understanding of them will be either superficial or erroneous if they are not interpreted accordingly.

There is no question of "subject" and "object," but of a particular species of animal that can prosper only through a certain relative rightness; above all, regularity of its perceptions (so that it can accumulate experience)....

The meaning of "knowledge": here, as in the case of "good" or "beautiful," the concept is to be regarded in a strict and narrow anthropocentric and biological sense. In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behavior on it. The utility of preservation—-not some abstract-theoretical need not to be deceived—-stands as the motive behind the development of the organs of knowledge—they develop in such a way that their observations suffice for our preservation. In other words...: a species grasps a certain amount of reality in order to become master of it, in order to press it into service. [WP 480]

Nietzsche observes that most previous philosophers have tended to treat the elements of our conscious life as a set of activities altogether different from processes occurring in the world of nature. He regards this as a mistake. It is only if human life is "translated back into nature," at least initially, that we and our various activities can be properly understood. But he considers it no less important also to "translate" ourselves back into society. For in this context the human intellect has been further shaped in important ways; and it is here that the means of all human thinking and possible knowledge are acquired.

In one of his earliest essays, Nietzsche begins his discussion of knowledge with what he calls a little fable:

In some remote corner of the universe..., there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the haughtiest and most mendacious minute of "world history"—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.

One might invent such a fable and still not have illustrated sufficiently how wretched, how shadowy and flighty, how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature. There have been eternities when it did not exist and when it is done for again, nothing will have [changed]. For this intellect has no further mission that would lead beyond human life. It is human, rather,
and only its owner and producer gives it such importance, as if the world pivot around it....

The intellect, as a means for the preservation of the individual, unfolds its chief powers in dissimulation; for this is the means by which the weaker, less robust individuals preserve themselves, since they are denied the chance of waging the struggle for existence with horns or the fangs of beasts of prey. [TL, PN, pp. 42-43]

Nietzsche goes on to suggest that "the contrast between truth and lie" has its origin in the establishment of linguistic conventions, involving the selection of a variety of *metaphors* to designate things in a uniform manner. Through such conventions, sounds and signs are endowed with standard meanings and uses. But it is at most "only the relations of things to man" that are registered in them, rather than any independent reality.

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power....

To be truthful means using the customary metaphors—in moral terms, [it means] the obligation to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all.... [TL, PN pp. 46-47]

When we replace ordinary language with scientific terms and theories, Nietzsche further argues, we may improve upon our ability to deal with the world, but our redescriptions of it do not truly explain it in any ultimate sense. So he writes:

Physics, too, is only an interpretation and exegesis of the world (to suit us, if I may say so!) and *not* a world-explanation. [BGE 14]

Like our ordinary, pre-scientific schematization of the world, Nietzsche holds that "the scientific view of the world" is linked in its development to our practical need to make things "comprehensible" and "exploitable." [WP 677] Its truth is basically a matter of its *effectiveness*, to which simplification, abstraction, the use of fictions, and even a kind of shrewd superficiality often contribute in important ways. One face of this effectiveness relates to the extension of our capacity to control and exploit courses of events. The other pertains to the furthering of our ability to reduce the bewildering profusion of phenomena to a semblance of order and simplicity.

What human knowledge therefore basically amounts to, for Nietzsche, is the assimilation of our relations to our environing world to a useful conceptual scheme, in the construction of which our practical needs have played a dominant role.

The entire apparatus of knowledge is an apparatus for abstraction and simplification—directed not at knowledge but at taking possession of things: "end" and "means" are as remote from its essential nature as are "concepts." With "end" and "means" one takes possession of the process (one invents a process that can be grasped); with "concepts," however, of the "things" that constitute the process. [WP 503]
This leads Nietzsche to make some rather startling generalizations about truth, reason and knowledge.

Truth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live. The value for life is ultimately decisive. [WP 493]

Reason, for Nietzsche, fundamentally reflects only the rules of the structure of our language:

We believe in reason: this, however, is the philosophy of gray concepts. Language depends on the most naive prejudices.... We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language; we barely reach the doubt that sees this limitation as a limitation. Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off. [WP 552]

All knowing, for Nietzsche, is interpretive, rather than simply factual; and it is also always perspectival, rather than absolute.

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena--"there are only facts"--I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself": perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing.... In so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is interpretable otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings.-- "Perspectivism." It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. [WP 481]

Yet this does not lead Nietzsche to conclude that we therefore are incapable of ever comprehending anything at all. On the contrary, he suggests that our ability to shift perspectives actually can enable us to come to understand a good deal about ourselves and our world after all. He seizes upon this possibility, as a way out of the seemingly hopeless situation to which his naturalistic analysis of truth and knowledge might appear to be leading; and he turns it into a general statement of his philosophical method:

But precisely because we seek knowledge, let us not be ungrateful to such resolute reversals of accustomed perspectives and valuations....: to see differently in this way for once, to want to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future "objectivity"--the latter understood not as "contemplation without interest" (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability to control one's Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge....

There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing": and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," will be. [GM III:12]

What goes on in the world, what life involves, and our human nature and capacities are among the things Nietzsche takes to be commonly misrepresented. They are also among the things he believes to admit of more adequate comprehension in this way. And he suggests that the range of attainable knowledge further extends into the areas of value and morality.

"Thoughts about moral prejudices," if they are not meant to be [mere] prejudices about prejudices, presuppose a position outside morality, some point
beyond good and evil to which one has to rise, climb, or fly... The question is whether one really can get up there.

This may depend on manifold conditions. One has to be very light to drive one's will to knowledge into such a distance and, as it were, beyond one's time, to create for oneself eyes to survey millennia and, moreover, clear skies in these eyes. One must have liberated oneself from many things that oppress, inhibit, hold down, and make heavy precisely us Europeans today. The human being of such a beyond who wants to behold the supreme measures of value of his time must first of all "overcome" this time in himself--this is the test of his strength.... [GS 380]

It is truths of this sort that Nietzsche has in mind when he observes that "something might be true while being harmful and dangerous to the highest degree." [BGE 39] Such truths may be felt to be exhilarating, or harsh and ugly, or merely uninteresting, or all of these at different times and for different inquirers. But Nietzsche praises those who are prepared "to sacrifice all desirability to truth, every truth, even plain, harsh, ugly, repellent, unchristian, immoral truth.--For such truths do exist." [GM I:1] This requires strength and courage as well as intellectual ability.

At every step one has to wrestle for truth; one has had to surrender for it almost everything to which the heart, to which our love, our trust in life, cling otherwise. That requires greatness of soul: the service of truth is the hardest service. [A 50]

The road to knowledge for Nietzsche is no royal one, leading directly and easily to its goal. It is not even a single road, but rather a variety of rough and round-about paths, leading to various vantage points from which different aspects of life and the world become discernible. They include scientific inquiry, historical investigation, psychological analysis, and reflection upon much else that we may observe and experience. Each can afford some insight, and contributes to the interpretation of the results of the others.

All of these things play a part in the kind of thinking Nietzsche practices and preaches. Its results might not measure up to certain standards of knowledge reflecting the convictions or longings of some philosophers. But he attaches great importance to its attainment. And he takes it to surpass anything that might otherwise be achieved, in more ways than one for anyone like himself:

And knowledge itself: let it be something else for others...--for me it is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings, too, find places to dance and play. "Life as a means to knowledge"--with this principle in one's heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily too. [GS 324]

The World and Life

What Nietzsche seeks to reinterpret and comprehend, more truthfully and insightfully than his predecessors, is above all our human reality; and to that end he attempts to achieve a better understanding than theirs of the world in which we live and of which we are a part. It is this world that he considers the only one, in opposition to those who have envisioned a higher reality or "true world" transcending it. He emphatically rejects all such religious and
metaphysical schemes. While he began by accepting Schopenhauer's idea that the world and life are fundamentally manifestations of a basic active principle Schopenhauer called "will," he soon became convinced that this view too was objectionably metaphysical. The different conception he went on to develop has some similarity to the modern scientific understanding of the world in terms of energy or force; but it differs importantly from the mechanistic "matter-in-motion" materialism favored by many of his scientifically-minded contemporaries.

Of all the interpretations of the world attempted hitherto, the mechanistic one seems today to stand victorious in the foreground.... The dynamic interpretation of the world, with its denial of "empty space" and its little clumps of atoms, will shortly come to dominate physics.... [WP 618]

Yet Nietzsche does not simply accept this interpretation as it stands. He contends that by restricting themselves to descriptions of phenomena in terms that are as purely quantitative as possible, scientists achieve only a superficial comprehension of the character of the world and what goes on it it.

What? Do we really want to permit existence to be degraded for us like this—reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator and an indoor diversion for mathematicians? Above all, one should not wish to divest existence of its rich ambiguity.... That the only justifiable interpretation of the world should be one in which you [scientists] are justified because one can continue to work and do research scientifically in your sense...—an interpretation that permits counting, calculating, weighing, seeing, and touching, and nothing more—-that is a crudity and naïveté....

A "scientific" interpretation of the world, as you understand it, might therefore still be one of the most stupid of all possible interpretations of the world, meaning that it would be one of the poorest in meaning.... An essentially mechanical world would be an essentially meaningless world. [Suppose] that one estimated the value of a piece of music according to how much of it could be counted, calculated, and expressed in formulas: how absurd would such a "scientific" estimation of music be! What would one have comprehended, understood, grasped of it? Nothing, really nothing of what is "music" in it! [GS 373]

Nietzsche goes further, in an attempt to add what he takes to be missing from this way of thinking. In doing so, he seeks to make more comprehensible both the basic character of life and the world and their rich diversity of phenomena.

The victorious concept "force," by means of which our physicists [now conceive of] the world, still needs to be completed: an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as "will to power," that is, as an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power.... One is obliged to understand all motion, all "appearances," all "laws," only as symptoms of an inner event and to employ man as an analogy to this end. In the case of an animal, it is possible to trace all its drives to the will to power; likewise all the functions of organic life to this one source. [WP 619]

Nietzsche argues that if the notion of "force" is modified along these lines, in terms of "will to power," the result is a superior interpretation of life and the world. He takes this "will to power" to be so fundamental that even the phenomenon of "becoming" is derivative in relation to it. "Will to power" expresses his conception of the basic disposition of the forces or "dynamic quanta" that are the world's ultimate constituents. This interpretation makes
comprehensible the fundamental fact of change, and the many kinds of changes and phenomena we observe, without presupposing anything that cannot be gathered from experience.

Suppose nothing else were "given" as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other "reality" besides the reality of our drives--for thinking is merely a relation of these drives to each other: is it not permitted to make the experiment and to ask the question whether this "given" would not be sufficient for also understanding on the basis of this kind of thing the so-called mechanistic (or "material") world?...

Suppose, finally, we succeeded in explaining our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of one basic [drive]-- namely, of the will to power, as my proposition has it; suppose all organic functions could be traced back to this will to power, and one could also find in it the solution of the problem of procreation and nourishment... then one would have gained the right to determine all efficient force univocally as--will to power. The world viewed from inside, the world defined and determined according to its "intelligible character"--it would be "will to power" and nothing else.-- [BGE 36]

The world, for Nietzsche, is to be conceived neither as some sort of substance or collection of material entities, nor as Hegel's "spirit" or Schopenhauer's metaphysical "will," but rather as the totality of dynamic quanta or fields of force. Ultimately there exist "only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta." [WP 633] They form "systems," but in a manner reflecting no underlying world-order. The state of the world at any time is strictly and solely a function of the specific nature of whatever systems or organizations of "power-quanta" and relations among them happen temporarily to obtain--even though "the name of the game," which he calls "will to power," remains ever the same.

My idea is that every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (--its will to power) and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement...with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they conspire together for power. And the process goes on-- [WP 636]

In this way, Nietzsche is able to make sense of the undeniable reality of creatures and structures of considerable complexity in the world, despite the absence of any God who might ordain them, or of any "true world of Being" that might engender them. He is even able to dispense with the idea of immutable "laws of nature," which he regards as a naive fiction in the absence of a Divine law-giver. And he also is able to account for the general character of organic life in a novel way:

Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength--life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequently results. [BGE 13]

The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at the expansion of power and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation.... The struggle for existence is only an exception, a temporary restriction of the will to life. The great and small struggle always revolves
around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power—in accordance with the will to power which is the will of life. [GS 349]

The conception of power figuring in this hypothesis should not be understood too simplistically. In Nietzsche's hands it refers not merely to the more obvious forms of domination and control, but also to a whole range of much more subtle forms of the attainment of mastery and of supremacy. The varieties of power are many, and the struggle for power of which he speaks is not to be thought of as a struggle for any one of them in particular. It is one of his main points that frustration in the attempt to achieve one sort of power commonly leads to the development of another. And it may lead not merely to the development of other means to the achievement of the same kind of power, but also to the development of alternate forms of competition, in which power is both differently won and differently measured.

The general theme Nietzsche discerns throughout the whole range of processes and power-relations in the world is not mere assertion and domination or assimilation as such. Rather, it has the character of an ordering transformation, which under different circumstances takes such different forms as subjugation, regulation, structural imposition, and the organization and integration of forces. His idea that these processes constitute a power-struggle is to be understood along these lines. "Power" for Nietzsche is fundamentally a matter of the imposition of some new pattern of "ordering relations" upon forces not previously subject to them.

Nietzsche's conception of the world as a dynamic world of ever-changing power-relationships is admittedly an interpretation; but he believes it to be an interpretation that is superior to all of its rivals. It presupposes less and explains more, accounting better than they do for both the emergence and the impermanence of organization in the world. No single type of organization is either necessary or eternal; but the tendency to interaction that is both conducive to organization and disruptive of it is everywhere manifested. That is what his expression "will to power" designates. The emergence and development as well as the disintegration of different types of organization, in the absence of pre-established purposes and of governing laws, must for Nietzsche be understood in something like this way. And so he arrives at his picture of the world with which we are confronted, of which we are a part:

This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself...; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance..., blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying...--do you want a name for this world? A solution for all its riddles? This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides! [WP 1067]

Nietzsche here speaks of an unending alteration between extremes of order and disorder. This is one of the variants of his idea of the "eternal recurrence." This idea is introduced with much fanfare in Thus Spoke Zarathustra; and Nietzsche refers to it repeatedly in later writings. One reason why he seizes upon this idea is that it enables him vividly to express his complete rejection of all views according to which the world develops...
in a linear manner, proceeding toward some pre-established final goal or end-state. This idea also conveys the point that at bottom all structurings and restructurings manifest a single fundamental disposition: "will to power." On this level of consideration, all events are ultimately of the same kind; and so one may likewise speak of the eternal recurrence of the same basic story.

Another more radical version of Nietzsche's idea of the eternal recurrence is that all events and series of events recur eternally, down to the last detail. This version goes far beyond the others. But here his chief interest is in the question of what it would take to be able to endure and affirm this idea. The thought of the eternal recurrence of all events without addition, subtraction or alteration, for Nietzsche, presents the greatest possible challenge and test of one's strength and ability to affirm life in this world on the only terms it offers. It is as such a test that he first sets it forth.

What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and 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, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence--even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. 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 how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? [GS 341]

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra this idea is represented as one of Zarathustra's most important "teachings." Throughout Nietzsche's writings it functions fundamentally in the same manner: as a test, and more generally, as a touchstone of strength and affirmativeness. It is a challenge; and the ability to meet it is also the ability to live joyfully without any hope that life and the world will ever have a significantly different character than they do. What matters most to him is not the literal truth of the idea, but rather the capacity to endure the thought of it, and indeed to "crave nothing more fervently." For the qualities one would have to possess in order to be able to do so are taken to be characteristic of that higher humanity of which the "overman" stands as Nietzsche's symbol.

Value

No philosopher has been more intensely concerned with questions of value than Nietzsche was. His attention in his early works was drawn continually to evaluative questions, posed by the cultural developments with which he found himself confronted both in his philological studies and in his own time. The investigations he went on to undertake, in the years prior to Thus Spoke Zarathustra, were efforts to place himself in a better position than either classical scholars or previous philosophers or scientists to deal with them. The
whole of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* revolves around evaluative concerns; and the same is true of his subsequent works.

All the sciences have from now on to prepare the way for the future task of the philosophers: this task [is] the solution of the problem of value, the determination of the order of rank among values. [GM I:17n]

The problem of value is central to Nietzsche's thinking precisely because the overcoming of nihilism is his most fundamental concern. It was the threat of nihilism, as the devaluation and repudiation of all recognized values, that compelled him to take up the problem. And this led him to seek a new fundamental standard of value, by reference to which to *revalue* rather than merely *devalue* all previous values.

The world does not have the value we thought it had.... Initial result: it seems worth less; that is how it is experienced initially. It is only in this sense that we are pessimists; that is, in our determination to admit this revaluation to ourselves without any reservation, and to stop telling ourselves tales--lies--the old way.

That is precisely how we find the pathos that impels us to seek *new values*. In sum: the world might be far more valuable than we used to believe; we must see through the naiveté of our ideals, and while we thought that we accorded it the highest interpretation, we may not even have given our human existence a moderately fair value. [WP 32]

"Seeking new values" thus became Nietzsche's task--and along with it, the companion task he calls "the revaluation of values." The advent of nihilism may be inevitable, following the "death of God" and the collapse of all metaphysical substitutes for the religious interpretation of the world and life. But for Nietzsche it is only a "transitional stage," to a new way of thinking going beyond it. He grounds his new conception and standard of value in his interpretation of the fundamental character of the world and life in terms of "will to power."

His conviction that it turns out to make sense after all to assign value to "our human existence" finds expression in some of his most striking formulations. It is reflected, for example, in his embrace of the idea of the "eternal recurrence"; and it is also indicated in his proclamation of "amor fati" or the "love of fate" as his "formula" for "a Dionysian relationship to existence," which he takes to be "the highest state a philosopher can attain." "I want to cross over to the opposite" of a negative stance toward the world, he says, "to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is." So Nietzsche speaks of "a Dionysian value standard for existence." [WP 1041] It is intended both to reflect the basic character of what goes on in the world and to serve as a basis for more specific evaluative judgments. "Dionysus is a *judge*" he exclaims; "have I been understood?" [WP 1051] If one fails to see this, one fails to understand him, and to understand his "revaluation of values."

In speaking of a "revaluation of values," Nietzsche means a reassessment of those things which are commonly supposed to be of greatest value. Here he is expressing a "new demand": that we cease to take received estimations of these things for granted, and that "the value of these values themselves must be called into question." [GM P:6] We must ask: "what value do they themselves possess?" [GM P:3]

The inquiry into the *origin of our evaluations* and tables of the good is in absolutely no way identical with a critique of them, as is so often believed: even though the insight into some shameful origin certainly brings with it a
feeling of a diminution in value of the thing that originated thus, and prepares the way to a critical mood and attitude toward it.

What are our evaluations and moral tables really worth? What is the outcome of their rule? For whom? In relation to what?--Answer: for life. But what is life? Here we need a new, more definite formulation of the concept "life." My formula for it is: Life is will to power. [WP 254]

It is in terms of "will to power" that Nietzsche suggests life is to be both comprehended and justified.

Life is a unique case; one must justify all existence and not only life--the justifying principle is one that explains life, too. Life is only a means to something; it is the expression of forms of the growth of power. [WP 706]

Value and valuation for Nietzsche are thus intimately connected with "will to power," which at once grounds and engenders them.

All "purposes," "aims," "meaning" are only modes of expression and metamorphoses of one will that is inherent in all events: the will to power.... All valuations are only consequences and narrow perspectives in the service of this one will: valuation itself is only this will to power. [WP 675]

Nietzsche employs the double formula "The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of Values" in formulating a "title" for the "gospel of the future" he announces, in which the "countermovement [to nihilism] finds expression, regarding both principle and task." [WP P:4] The "revaluation" is the "task," and "will to power" is the "principle" to be employed in carrying it out.

Life, as Nietzsche construes it, is "will to power" in various forms--an array of processes all of which are "developments and ramifications" of this basic tendency [BGE 36]; and there is nothing external to it by reference to which its value might be measured, or its character weighed and found wanting. In the last analysis, value can only be "value for life," and can only be understood in terms of what life essentially involves. The sole "objective" standard of value recognizes only "quanta of enhanced and organized power," and assesses them in terms of the extent and manner of their enhancement and organization.

What is the objective measure of value? Solely the quantum of enhanced and organized power. [WP 674]

Assuming that life itself is the will to power, there is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power. [WP 55]

But Nietzsche gets a great deal of mileage out of the deceptively simple notion of "degree of power." The enhancement and organization of power are associated with the notions of growth and development; and "the morality of development" is for him "the doctrine preached by life itself to all that has life." [WP 125] These ideas lead him to a conception of the "enhancement of life" that is to be understood both quantitatively and qualitatively, in terms of both heightened vitality and greater cultivation and creativity. The value of something is determined by the extent to which "it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating." [BGE 4] It therefore has to do not only with what preserves "life" and forms of life, but also with what promotes and cultivates them.
This emphasis upon growth and development follows from the fact that "will to power" for Nietzsche is a fundamentally transformative principle. This basic point also explains the great importance he accords to overcoming as opposed to mere enduring. So he has Zarathustra say: "And life itself confided this secret to me: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am that which must always overcome itself.'" [Z I:12]

Nietzsche characterizes his position concerning value in two different ways, along both "naturalistic" and "artistic" lines. Each is misleading by itself, and requires to be understood in light of the other. They are complementary rather than contradictory, each serving to bring out an important and fundamental aspect of his view of value. On the "naturalistic" side, he writes:

The attempt should be made to see whether a scientific order of values could be constructed simply on a numerical and mensural scale of force—All other "values" are prejudices, naivetes, misunderstandings. They are everywhere reducible to this numerical and mensural scale of force. The ascent on this scale represents every rise in value; the descent on this scale represents diminution in value. [WP 710]

Yet Nietzsche also accords great importance to qualitative considerations, emphasizing organization, refinement and enhancement. So he writes that what he espouses is "an antimetaphysical view of the world—yes, but an artistic one." [WP 1048] He also speaks of "the world as a work of art that gives birth to itself." [WP 796] And the "artistic" character of his conception of value is reflected in his disdain for any merely quantitative or "scientific" interpretation of the world, on the grounds that it would be as shallow and blind to what matters in it as a purely "scientific" estimation of music would be. [GS 373]

So the "objective measure of value" of creatures like ourselves may be the magnitude of the "quantum of power" we incorporate and express; but the full standard of value Nietzsche advances further discriminates with respect to its expressions. Quality here is thought of as depending crucially upon quantity, but not as being identical with it. The first of the things he mentions under the heading "Point of view of my values" is: "whether out of abundance is out of want?" [WP 1009] Only such "abundance" can engender the "the whole force of transfiguring virtues," which "replenishes and gilds and immortalizes and deifies life." [WP 1033]

It is to such transfiguration, coming about through the creative sublimation of an abundance of energy, that Nietzsche attaches greatest significance. It is within this larger framework that he proceeds to identify more concrete sorts of "values," and to undertake his "revaluation of values." One example of this "revaluation" is to be found in his reconsideration of the value of consciousness and of various particular forms of consciousness, which philosophers and others have often supposed to be supremely and intrinsically valuable.

In relation to the vastness and multiplicity of...the life of every organism, the conscious world of feelings, intentions, and valuations is a small section. We have no right whatever to posit this piece of consciousness as the aim and wherefore of this total phenomenon of life: becoming conscious is obviously only one more means toward the unfolding and extension of the power of life. Therefore it is a piece of naivete to posit pleasure or spirituality or morality or any other particular of the sphere of consciousness as the highest value—and perhaps even to justify "the world" by means of this.
This is my basic objection...to all wherefores and highest values in philosophy and theology hitherto. One kind of means has been misunderstood as an end; conversely, life and the enhancement of its power has been debased to a means....

The fundamental mistake is simply that, instead of understanding consciousness as a tool and particular aspect of the total life, we posit it as the standard and the condition of life that is of supreme value. [WP 707]

Nietzsche extends this revaluation to all three members of the celebrated trinity of the Good, the True and the Beautiful. They have long been considered the highest values, and have been accorded intrinsic worth apart from their relation to life. But he suggests a different assessment of them:

Art, knowledge, morality are means: instead of recognizing in them the aim of enhancing life, one has associated them with the antithesis of life, with "God"--also as the revelation of a higher world which here and there looks down upon us through them-- [WP 298]

Other instances of Nietzsche's revaluation are to be found in his reconsideration of a number of things that have long been regarded negatively, but deserve to be accorded a fundamentally positive value.

For all the value that the true, the truthful, the selfless may deserve, it would still be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life might have to be ascribed to deception, selfishness, and lust. [BGE 2]

Nietzsche's point here is that, although the more immediate and uncontrolled expressions of such drives may be destructive, they are fundamental to life and its enhancement. They constitute the basic resources through the sublimation of which all creativity and all qualitative enhancement of life alone are possible; and so they have a far greater value than is commonly supposed.

In view of Nietzsche's contention that "the overman is the meaning of the earth," it is not at all surprising that his concern with the "order of rank of different kinds of life" should loom so large in his "revaluation of values." So it is the type of the "full, rich, great, whole human being" whose emergence is said to "justify the existence of whole millennia." [WP 997] It is this type of human being to whom he looks to provide the "justification of life, even at its most terrible, ambiguous, and mendacious." [WP 1005]. This type represents a transformation of life beyond the level of robust but insipid animality, and also beyond that of ordinary "all-too-human" humanity. Such exceptional human beings, for Nietzsche, have an extraordinary and very distinctive sort of value. And the key to it is neither knowledge nor morality nor mere health or strength by themselves, but rather creativity. So Nietzsche has Zarathustra proclaim:

Creation—that is the great redemption from suffering, and life's growing light. Thus are you advocates and justifiers of all impermanence....

Willing no more and esteeming no more and creating no more—oh, that this great weariness might always remain far from me! [Z II:2]

Creating, for Nietzsche, is intimately related both to "willing" and to "esteeming"; for they are all aspects of the same process, through which life transforms and enhances itself, and is endowed with value. Life attains value though its creativity; and its creativity also
engenders values of a more specific sort, through our creations and their esteeming. So Nietzsche contends that the enhancement of life and its value proceeds by way of what he calls "value-creation" on the part of those who have it in them to accomplish it. He holds that "life itself values through us when we posit values." [TII V:5] It is life raised to its highest potency, expressing itself at once self-affirmatively and self-transformatively, which he conceives to be at work here.

The creation of values thus takes its place with the notions of strength, spiritual superiority and affirmation, in terms of which Nietzsche understands the enhancement of life. Each of these ideas adds something important to the others; and value-creation, as the expression of the greatest strength and spiritual superiority, is their unifying link. It is a task to which only those who are exceptional in both respects are equal. In rising to this task, they achieve a real and highly significant transformation of their own existence. And such transformations are the path to the emergence of Nietzsche's higher humanity, which translates the idea of the "overman" as the "meaning of the earth" into reality.

The value with which human existence and "the earth" are in this way endowed is itself "created," and is nothing apart from human life and creative activity. Yet it is no merely apparent value in Nietzsche's eyes, and no small one either. It is as real as this higher humanity itself is, or may come to be. The creation of values is more than the bestowal of value upon something one creates; for it is even more importantly an attainment of value. And the imbuing of life and the world with value in this manner is for him the highest of all forms of "will to power." Nor does it matter that particular value-creations, like particular lives, are but momentary attainments, swept away almost as soon as they make their appearance. It is enough that they come to be, and always will.
Human Nature

While human life may differ in many important respects from other forms of life, Nietzsche never tires of observing that we are "a species of animal," originating in this world rather than in some higher reality transcending it. If human life is "no longer merely animal" life, this can only be owing to the distinctive manner in which it has developed. Nietzsche sounds this recurring theme in one of his earliest essays:

When one speaks of humanity, the idea is fundamental that this is something which separates and distinguishes man from nature. In reality, however, there is no such separation: "natural" qualities and those called truly "human" are inseparably grown together. Man, [even] in his highest and noblest capacities, is wholly nature.... Those of his abilities which are terrifying and considered inhuman may even be the fertile soil out of which alone all humanity can grow in impulse, deed, and work. [Homer's Contest, PN, p. 32]

Nietzsche has little patience with the "verbal pomp" and "beautiful, glittering, jingling, festive words" religious and philosophical thinkers have long used to characterize our human nature.

To translate man back into nature; to become master over the many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over that eternal basic text of homo natura; to see to it that man henceforth stands before man as even today, hardened in the discipline of science, he stands before the rest of nature..., deaf to the siren songs of old metaphysical bird-catchers who have been piping at him all too long, "you are more, you are higher, you are of a different origin!"--that may be a strange and insane task, but it is a task--who would deny that? [BGE 230]

Nietzsche does not choose this task because he wishes to persuade us to think badly of ourselves. He chooses it rather because he considers it to be of the utmost importance to ground our assessment of our humanity in enlightened understanding rather than error, illusion or mere wishful thinking.

We have learned differently. We have become more modest in every way. We no longer derive man from "the spirit" or "the deity"; we have placed him back among the animals. We consider him the strongest animal because he is the most cunning: his spirituality is a consequence of this. On the other hand, we oppose the vanity that would raise its head again here too--as if man had been the great hidden purpose of the evolution of the animals. Man is by no means the crown of creation: every living being stands beside him on the same level of perfection.... The "pure spirit" is a pure stupidity: if we subtract
the nervous system and the senses—the "mortal shroud"—then we miscalculate—that is all! [A 14]

One of the most commonfailings of previous thinkers, Nietzsche contends, is that they have conceived of the human mind or spirit as something entirely separate from the body. Against this way of thinking, he has Zarathustra say:

"Body am I, and soul"—thus speaks the child.... But the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body.... An instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call "spirit".... The creative body created the spirit as a hand for its will. [Z I:4]

Nietzsche expresses the same point more prosaically when he writes:

Through the long succession of millennia, man has not known himself physiologically; he does not know himself even today. To know, for example, that one has a nervous system (—but no 'soul'—) is still the privilege of the best informed. [WP 229]

This failing, according to Nietzsche, has typically been accompanied by another, which has likewise contributed to the misunderstanding of our humanity. This is the failure to recognize and take seriously that our human nature is not some unchanging, timeless reality, but rather is the product of a long evolutionary and historical development.

All philosophers have the common failing of starting out from man as he is now and thinking they can reach their goal through an analysis of him. They involuntarily think of "man" as an "eternal truth," as something that remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things.... Lack of historical sense is the family failing of all philosophers; many, without being aware of it, even take the most recent manifestation of man, such as has arisen under the impress of certain religions, even certain political events, as the fixed form from which one has to start out. They will not learn that man has become, that the faculty of cognition has become.... Everything essential in the development of mankind took place in primeval times, long before the four thousand years we more or less know about; during these years mankind may well not have altered very much.... But everything has become: there are no eternal facts, just as there are no absolute truths. Consequently what is needed from now on is historical philosophizing, and with it the virtue of modesty. [HH I:2]

Nietzsche proposes to remedy these defects. So he attempts to reinterpret our nature in entirely naturalistic terms, freed of the erroneous idea that we were created by God in his image, and attentive to the conditions under which human life has developed.

Tremendous self-examination: becoming conscious of oneself, not as individuals but as mankind. Let us reflect, let us think back; let us follow the highways and byways! [WP 585]

Despite his emphasis on the body, Nietzsche is by no means of the opinion that everything about human life may be explained and understood in purely biological, evolutionary and physiological terms. "The body is a more astonishing idea than the old 'soul,'" he remarks [WP 659]; and one of the reasons it is so astonishing is precisely that the complex of functions it incorporates is no longer a merely biological phenomenon. The
human animal has undergone a profound transformation, resulting in the emergence of the broad range of activities that is our spiritual life. So while suggesting that "perhaps the entire evolution of the spirit is a question of the body," Nietzsche says:

It is the history of the development of a higher body that emerges into our sensibility. The organic is rising to yet higher levels. [WP 676]

Our humanity, for Nietzsche, is a multifaceted result of a variety of things having gone wrong in different ways in the course of our development. But he would not have them "corrected," in the sense of restoring life to conformity to the standard of "healthy animality." For even if that were possible, it would remove the conditions of all that makes us human, and makes a "higher humanity" possible. He characterizes man as "the most endangered animal" [GS 354], and as "the sickliest" and "most bungled of all the animals" [A 14]; but he regards this loss of "healthy animality" as the indispensable precondition of "the entire evolution of the spirit." This leads him to raise the question:

Where does it come from, this sickliness? For man is more sick, uncertain, changeable, indeterminate than any other animal, there is no doubt of that—he is the sick animal: how has that come about? Certainly he has also dared more, done more new things, braved more and challenged far more than all the other animals put together: he, the great experimenter with himself, discontented and insatiable, wrestling with animals, nature, and gods for ultimate dominion.... How should such a courageous and richly endowed animal not also be the most imperiled, the most chronically and profoundly sick of all sick animals? [GM III:13]

It is Nietzsche's view that, while the eventual outcome is still very much in doubt, nature is making a unique experiment in us. In our social and conscious life, a complex alternative to the general kind of instinct-structure operating in other forms of life has emerged. The conditions imposed by social life played an important role in the breakdown of our former instinct-structure, as well as in the filling of the void it left. This breakdown is what he has in mind in calling us "sick," by reference to the basic natural standard of healthy animality. And he considers the phenomenon of the "bad conscience" to be one of the most significant instances of this pathology.

Man was bound to contract [this illness] under the stress of the most fundamental change he ever experienced—-that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society and of peace. The situation that faced sea animals when they were compelled to become land animals or perish was the same as that which faced these semi-animals, well adapted to the wilderness, to war, to prowling, to adventure: suddenly all their instincts were disvalued and "suspended." ....In this new world they no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating, unconscious and infallible drives: they were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their "conconsciousness," their weakest and most fallible organ! [GM II:6]

It was under such conditions, Nietzsche holds, that our consciousness and powers of thought and expression emerged and developed. But this was not all; and in what he goes on to say, he indicates some of his most important ideas about the development that set the stage for our present humanity and its possible further enhancement:
At the same time the old instincts had not suddenly ceased to make their usual demands! Only it was hardly or rarely possible to humor them: as a rule they had to seek new and, as it were, subterranean gratifications.

All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward—this is what I call the internalization of man: thus it was that man first developed what was later called his "soul." The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth, and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was inhibited. Those fearful bulwarks with which the political organization protected itself against the old instincts of freedom—punishments belong among these bulwarks—brought about that all those instincts of wild, free, prowling man turned backward against man himself.... Thus began the gravest and uncanniest illness, from which humanity has not yet recovered, man's suffering of man, of himself—the result of a forcible sundering from his animal past, as it were a leap and plunge into new surroundings and conditions of existence, a declaration of war against the old instincts upon which his strength, joy, and terribleness had rested hitherto. [GM II:16]

While this traumatic development represented a dangerous departure from the condition of healthy animality, Nietzsche also regards it as a most remarkable and promising one:

Let us add at once that, on the other hand, the existence on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, was something so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and pregnant with a future that the aspect of the earth was essentially altered.... From now on, man is included among the most unexpected and exciting lucky throws in the dice game.... He gives rise to an interest, a tension, a hope, almost a certainty, as if with him something were announcing and preparing itself, as if man were not a goal but only a way, an episode, a bridge, a great promise.— [GM II:16]

With this development, human life was transformed from something merely animal into something more than that. It acquired psychological as well as physiological and social dimensions. In his attempt to do justice to it, Nietzsche combines his rejection of the traditional concept of the "soul" with a willingness to reintroduce this idea in a suitably reinterpreted way.

One must...first of all give the finishing stroke to that...calamitous atomism which Christianity has taught best and longest, the soul atomism.... the belief which regards the soul as something indestructible, eternal, indivisible.... this belief ought to be expelled from science!.... But the way is open for new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis; and such conceptions as "mortal soul," and "soul as subjective multiplicity," and "soul as social structure of the drives and affects," want henceforth to have citizens' rights in science. [BGE 12]

Nietzsche devotes a great deal of attention to the many forms and aspects of human experience and activity commonly attributed to the soul or mind. He argues that they are seriously misunderstood if their source in us is conceived as a purely spiritual entity, owing nothing to our mundane biological and social existence and development. He does not deny any reality at all to the phenomena we call by such names as reason, will, consciousness and self-consciousness; but he does argue that they all have natural origins, and deserve a much more modest appraisal than they have traditionally been given. For example, he contends
that consciousness is fundamentally a product of our social existence and practical needs, rather than a capacity with which the individual human mind is essentially equipped.

It seems to me as if the subtlety and strength of consciousness always were proportionate to a man's...capacity for communication, and as if this capacity in turn were proportionate to the need for communication..., [at least] when we consider whole races and chains of generations.... Consciousness is really only a net of communication between human beings; it is only as such that it had to develop; a solitary human being who lived like a beast of prey would not have needed it.... As the most endangered animal, he needed help and protection, he needed his peers, he had to learn to express his distress and to make himself understood; and for all this he needed "consciousness" first of all.... Only this conscious thinking takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication, and this fact uncovers the origin of consciousness.

In brief, the development of language and of consciousness...go hand in hand.... The emergence of our sense impressions into our own consciousness, the ability to fix them and, as it were, exhibit them externally, increased proportionately with the need to communicate them to others by means of signs. The human being inventing signs is at the same time the human being who becomes ever more keenly conscious of himself. It was only as a social animal that man acquired self-consciousness--which he is still in the process of doing, more and more. [GS 354]

Our personal identity too is held by Nietzsche to have originated socially, through our being held responsible for our conduct through time. And while fundamentally a fiction, this socially enforced self-identification has the consequence that we cease to be creatures of the moment, and actually become such "selves"--at least in a functional sense. Thus Nietzsche contends that, "with the aid of...the social strait-jacket, man was actually made calculable" [GM II:2], and so was rendered fit for society.

But this, for Nietzsche, is not the end of the story. While the imposing of personal identities on human beings is a socialization-phenomenon, he suggests that it prepares the way for a further development that transcends this result. For "at the end of this tremendous process," something quite remarkable becomes humanly possible: "the sovereign individual, like only to himself, liberated again from the morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral." [GM II:2] In this way, the foundation has been laid for the emergence of what Nietzsche calls a "higher" type of human being.

The attainment of all forms of "higher spirituality" involve something else for Nietzsche as well: the sublimation of our basic drives. By this he means bringing them under control, and giving them more refined and creative forms of expression than they have in human beings who have not risen far beyond their merely natural condition. Our basic drives may be brutal and destructive in their original forms; but he maintains that they supply the impetus to all higher spirituality and culture, through which alone human life can become worthy of esteem. So he has Zarathustra say:

Once you suffered passions and called them evil. But now you have only your virtues left; they grew out of your passions.... Once you had wild dogs in your cellar, but in the end they turned into birds and lovely singers. Out of your poisons you brewed your balsam.... And nothing evil grows out of you henceforth, unless it be the evil that grows out of the fight among your virtues. [Z I:5]
This sublimation process, for Nietzsche, "is what the task of culture demands," and is the key to the further enhancement of human life.

The greater and more terrible the passions are that an age, a people, an individual can permit themselves as means, the higher stands their culture. [WP 1025]

Herd and Higher Humanity

As Nietzsche contemplates our humanity, he finds that it presents a very mixed picture. There is much about it that betrays our merely natural origins, much that is all-too-human, much that is symptomatic of sickness and weakness; and yet there is more to it than this, that holds great promise. So Nietzsche has Zarathustra say:

Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman--a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping. [Z P:4]

The price of our development has been much suffering, both as its consequence and as its stimulus. But the result is a form of life on this earth that is a most remarkable as well as a self-endangered species.

The discipline of suffering, of great suffering--do you not know that only this discipline has created all enhancements of man so far? That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength..., and whatever has been [attained] of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness--was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? In man creature and creator are united: in man there is material, fragment, excess, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but in man there is also creator, form-giver, hammer hardness, spectator divinity, and seventh day: do you understand this contrast? [BGE 225]

This is not the only respect in which Nietzsche finds humanity to present a mixed picture. Human beings differ significantly in accomplishment, and also in strength and creative potential. And he contends that their differences are so substantial that the doctrine of their essential equality must be rejected. Some have it in them to surpass others, and so constitute potential exceptions to the human rule. He allows that a kind of actual equality among human beings is possible; but he insists that it could be realized only at the cost of the stultifying confinement of potentially exceptional human beings to the mediocre level of the common denominator. Those endowed with creative abilities others lack, and who cultivate, develop and manifest these abilities in their lives, deserve to be considered "higher" types in relation to the rest.

So Nietzsche discerns an "order of rank" among human beings, reflecting the qualitative differences among them. His concern to drive home this point pervades his writings. As he has Zarathustra say:

Thus blinks the mob--"there are no higher men, we are all equal. man is man; before God we are all equal." Before God! but now this god has died. And before the mob we do not want to be equal. [Z IV:13]
Religious beliefs of this sort have long been appealed to by proponents of the idea of human equality. This idea may linger on among many who no longer embrace them. But it continues to reverberate only as a kind of echo of this old faith, sustained by the unwillingness of most people to face and accept the consequences of abandoning it. Once one comes to realize that "the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable" [GS 343], one is compelled to take seriously the various respects in which human beings differ. Nietzsche considers the notion that "everyone has an 'immortal soul,' [and so] has equal rank with everyone else" to be a superstition so "impertinent" that it "cannot be branded with too much contempt." [A 43]

This is a prime example of what Nietzsche has in mind when he speaks of "how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it." [GS 343] For when one abandons the perspective generated by religious belief, and looks at human beings with a more sober and discerning eye, one finds nothing warranting the accordance of such importance to each individual. Nothing but the fact that the vast majority exhibit only minor variations on a mediocre general theme supports the idea of their fundamental equality. When one attends not only to this general rule but also to exceptions to it, which may be found at many different times and places, one learns to think otherwise.

This leads Nietzsche to "distinguish between a type of ascending life and another type of decay, disintegration, weakness." And for him there can be no doubt about "the relative rank of these two types." [WP 857] He takes human beings generally to fall into one or the other of two radically different types, one very numerous and occupying "the human lowlands," and the other, "very small in number," constituting "a higher, brighter humanity" standing far above the rest. [WP 993]

Mankind [as a whole] does not represent a development toward something better or stronger or higher in the sense accepted today. "Progress" is merely a modern idea, that is, a false idea....

In another sense, success in individual cases is constantly encountered in the most widely different places and cultures: here we really do find a higher type, which is, in relation to mankind as a whole, a kind of overman. Such fortunate accidents of great success have always been possible and will perhaps always be possible. [A 4]

Nietzsche contrasts this higher type of human being with the kind of human being that is the general human rule—the average, mediocre, uncreative type he calls the human "herd animal." This type of human being, he laments, has come to prevail in the modern world, both socially and ideologically.

Men not noble enough to see the abysmally different order of rank, chasm of rank, between man and man—such men have so far held sway over the fate of Europe, with their "equal before God," until finally a smaller, almost ridiculous type, a herd animal, something eager to please, sickly, and mediocre has been bred, the European of today—[BGE 62]

This distresses Nietzsche greatly, because it undermines the possibility of the enhancement of human life. For he holds that this enhancement can only come about through the unconventional creative efforts of exceptions to the human rule, who must be strong and independent enough to be capable of harm if they are to be able to create.
The "desirability" of the mediocre is what we...combat; the ideal
ever conceived as something in which nothing harmful, evil, dangerous,
questionable, destructive would remain.  [WP 881]

What is it I protest against?  That one should take this petty, peaceable
mediocrity, this equilibrium of a soul that knows nothing of the mighty
motivation of great accumulations of strength, for something exalted, possibly
even for the measure of man.  [WP 249]

In place of this idealization of the "herd type" of human being, Nietzsche attempts to
launch a "countermovement" directed to the cultivation and encouragement of what he calls a
kind of "luxury surplus of mankind":

[This would be] a higher type that arises and preserves itself under
different conditions from those of the average man. My concept, my metaphor
for this type is...the word "overman."  [WP 866]

Nietzsche attaches the greatest importance to this distinction between "herd" and
"higher" types of human being, and to the liberation of those who have it in them to become
such exceptions to the human rule. He does so because he is convinced that in this godless
world, "the destiny of humanity depends upon the attainment of its highest type."  [WP 987]
And he recognizes that this outcome is by no means assured.

There is among men as in every other animal species an excess of
failures...; the successful cases are, among men too, always the exception—and in
view of the fact that man is the as yet undetermined animal, the rare exception.
But still worse: the higher the type of man that a man represents, the greater
the improbability that he will turn out well. The accidental, the law of
absurdity in the whole economy of mankind, manifests itself most horribly in
its destructive effect on the higher men whose complicated conditions of life
can only be calculated with great subtlety and difficulty.  [BGE 62]

Nietzsche's notion of "higher humanity" is actually a complex notion. It involves the
attainment of something not to be found in the more commonplace forms of humanity: a
"union of spiritual superiority with well-being and an excess of strength."  [WP 899] Those he
terms "higher" differ from the rest of mankind in being at once the "strongest" and the "most
spiritual" [A 57], possessing the "richest and most complex" natures.  [WP 684] Their "higher
form of being" translates into higher forms of "culture" [WP 1025], transcending the planes of
both merely natural and merely social existence and activity. For them "great ventures and
over-all attempts of discipline and cultivation" are possible.  [BGE 203] Because they possess
and display creative powers others lack, they represent an "enhanced" form of human life,
and also are the primary instruments of its further enhancement. And for these reasons he
considers them to be "higher in value" than others, and so to be "worthier of life."  [A 3]

The only value human beings have for Nietzsche thus relates to what they represent
and may bring about. It is a function of characteristics they do not all possess in equal
measure. And he does not shrink from the consequence that this warrants not only
competition but also exploitation. For competition and exploitation are reflections of the
"will to power" that is our fundamental nature, and are also inseparable from the
enhancement of life.

Here we must beware of superficiality and get to the bottom of the
matter, resisting all sentimental weakness: life itself is essentially appropriation,
injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness,
imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation..., not from any morality or immorality but...because life simply is will to power. "Exploitation" does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society; it belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life. [BGE 259]

But the forms of competition and exploitation Nietzsche has in mind, when he goes beyond observing that they are basic to life to commend them, are those the flourishing and advancement of culture require, rather than those which merely serve the self-interest of particular individuals. His entire conception of higher humanity is misunderstood if it is not recognized to relate directly and intimately to his conception of culture and its significance. It is his deep conviction that only culture and the creativity it involves can render human life meaningful and worth living. Otherwise our existence in this world is as bleak and senseless as Schopenhauer supposed it to be. So in his early book on Schopenhauer he proposes "consecration to culture" as the only path to the justification and affirmation of life that remains to us in the post-Christian world.

Anyone who believes in culture is thereby saying: "I see above me something higher and more human than I am; let everyone help me to attain it, as I will help everyone who knows and suffers as I do...." The men we live among resemble a field over which is scattered the most precious fragments of sculpture, where everything calls to us: come, assist, complete, bring together what belongs together, we have an immeasurable longing to become whole....

The individual has to employ his own wrestling and longing as the alphabet by means of which he can now read off the aspirations of mankind as a whole. But he may not halt even here. From this stage he has to climb up to a yet higher one; culture demands of him not only inward experience, not only an appreciation of the outward world that streams all around him, but finally and above all...a struggle on behalf of culture, and hostility towards those influences, habits, laws [and] institutions [obstructing] his goal: which is the production of the genius. [SE 6]

In Nietzsche's later writings he replaces "the genius" with his image of the "overman" as the symbol of the highest vitality and creativity, and with his conception of the "higher type" of human being who approaches this new ideal. An exceptional human being of this kind exemplifies what he calls "the great conception of man, that man becomes the transfigurer of existence when he learns to transfigure himself." [WP 820] Here mere life is transformed into culture, and life and culture are further enhanced. It is only such a human being whom Nietzsche would have freed from the bonds of conventional morality, to live "beyond good and evil." And for him this does not mean indulging one's every desire or regressing to the level of the sub-human "beast of prey." It rather involves replacing all commonplace means of the control and regulation of conduct with the more severe self-discipline of the creator.

Many chains have been laid upon man so that he should no longer behave like an animal: and he has in truth become gentler, more spiritual, more joyful, more reflective than any animal is. Now, however, he suffers from having worn his chains for so long, from being deprived for so long of clear air and free movement: --these chains...are those heavy and pregnant errors contained in the conceptions of morality, religion and metaphysics. Only when this sickness from one's chains has also been overcome will the first great goal have truly been attained: the separation of man from the animals. --We stand
now in the midst of our work of removing these chains, and we need to proceed with the greatest caution. Only the ennobled man may be given freedom of spirit. [WS 350]

Nietzsche's picture of higher humanity has much to commend it. Overflowing vitality and great health; powerful affects and the ability to control and direct them; high spirituality and refinement of sensibility and manners; independence of mind and action; the capacity to respect and disdain others as their merit may warrant; intellectual honesty and astuteness; the strength to be undaunted by suffering and disillusionment; persistence in self-overcoming; the resources to undertake and follow through on the most demanding of tasks; and the ability to esteem, and above all to create—this configuration of qualities may well be considered the consummation of human existence, translated back into nature and then transformed beyond it. In any event, it represents the greatest and richest enhancement of life Nietzsche considers possible.

The attainment of this goal would require a different kind of spirit from that likely to appear in this present age.... But some day, in a stronger age than this decaying, self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the redeeming man of great love and contempt, the creative spirit whose compelling strength will not let him rest in any aloofness or any beyond.... This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; this bell-stroke of noon and of the great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to the earth and his hope to man; this antichristian and antinihilist; this victor over God and nothingness—he must come one day.--- [GM II:24]

This is Nietzsche's answer to the threat of nihilism; and this is the faith in life and its enhancement that leads him to proclaim the higher humanity symbolized by the 'overman' as "the meaning of the earth." One can embrace this answer and share this faith, however, and still take exception to certain of the positions he takes along the way, relating to the distribution of human abilities. Even if he is correct in his insistence that human beings are not all created equal, and that some are genetically endowed with abilities greatly surpassing those of others, for example, he may turn out to be wrong in supposing that only a relative few are ever so fortunately endowed, and that the great majority inevitably will be incapable of attaining the kind of "higher humanity" he envisions.

Of course, there will always be an "average," which only some surpass, either in ability or in accomplishment; but it does not follow that uncreative mediocrity and mere "herd humanity" must always be the rule. It certainly cannot be assumed that, under the right conditions, all human beings would turn out as well as Nietzsche thinks only the fortunate few can. Yet it may well be that he greatly underestimates the proportion of humanity having the potential to do so. If so, he surely would be pleased to stand corrected; for this would not affect his qualitative distinction between mediocrity and excellence, while it would significantly increase the chances of the enhancement of life.

The same observation also applies with respect to another of Nietzsche's views, which quite certainly is in need of correction. Reflecting the prejudices of so many of his contemporaries, and of so many others before and since, he considers women to be far less likely than men to be endowed with the potential to rise above the level of the "herd" to the heights of "higher humanity," and believes them to be relegated by nature to a merely supporting role in the enhancement of life. He has been harshly and deservedly criticized for his acceptance and reinforcement of this view. But here again, its correction leaves his main point about the possibility and desirability of a "higher humanity" still standing, and
should only serve to strengthen his "joyful assurance" that its emergence is a real human possibility, which may yet redeem and truly justify human life.

Morality

Nietzsche was preoccupied with the problem of morality throughout the whole of his philosophical life. His stance in relation to it is complex, to say the least. He calls himself an "immoralist"; but this label is misleading. He adopts it to convey his deep hostility to a certain type of conventional morality. His favorite name for this type of morality is "herd animal morality"; and he contends that "morality in Europe today is herd animal morality." To this contention, however, he immediately adds something of no less importance:

In other words, as we understand it, [this morality is] merely one type of human morality beside which, before which and after which many other types, above all higher moralities, are, or ought to be, possible. [BGE 202]

Nietzsche's critique of moralities is one of the most important parts of his "revaluation of values." He claims considerable originality for it, not only owing to his novel approach and radical conclusions, but also because he believes that previous philosophers have failed to recognize just how deeply questionable moralities are.

Their usual mistaken premise is that they affirm some consensus of the nations, [or] at least of tame nations, concerning certain principles of morals, and then they infer from this that these principles must be unconditionally binding also for you and me; or, conversely, they see the truth that among different nations moral valuations are necessarily different and then infer from this that no morality is at all binding. Both procedures are equally childish.

The mistake made by the more refined among them is that they uncover and criticize the perhaps foolish opinions of a people about their morality, or of humanity about all human morality..., and then suppose that they have criticized the morality itself. But...even if a morality has grown out of an error, the realization of this fact would not as much as touch the problem of its value.

Thus nobody up to now has examined the value of that most famous of all medicines which is called morality; and the first step would be--for once to question it. Well then, precisely this is our task.-- [GS 345]

So Nietzsche considers it essential to ask: "Under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? and what value do they themselves possess?" [GM P:3] He holds these questions to be of the greatest importance, and to be far more than questions of mere academic interest.
One has taken the value of these "values" as given, as factual, as beyond all question; one has hitherto never doubted or hesitated in the slightest degree in supposing "the good man" to be of greater value than "the evil," of greater value in the sense of furthering the advancement and prosperity of man in general (the future of man included).... [But what if] precisely morality would be to blame if the highest power and splendor actually possible to the type man was never in fact attained? So that precisely morality was the danger of dangers? [GM P:6]

My demand upon the philosopher is well known, that he take his stand beyond good and evil and leave the illusion of moral judgment beneath himself. This demand follows from an insight which I was the first to formulate: that there are altogether no moral facts. Moral judgments agree with religious ones in believing in realities which are no realities. Morality is merely an interpretation of certain phenomena--more precisely, a misinterpretation. [TI VII:1]

On the other hand, Nietzsche considers it to be of equal importance to arrive at a proper understanding of the ways in which moralities function in human life, regardless of whether they are in any sense "true." For if they turn out to be useful or even indispensable means to the enhancement of life, it is essential to understand and take account of this, even after one recognizes that moral judgments and principles are neither absolute nor matters of fact at all. He readily allows that various moralities do exist; and he makes much of the fact that they have long played a very significant role in human affairs and the course of human development. Traditional moralities, he observes, are fundamentally social phenomena. They are primarily the moralities of certain societies, peoples or groups. The idea that morality is essentially an affair of solitary individuals and their consciences, discerning the requirements of some absolute moral standard, is for him an error born of the fictitious picture of individuals standing alone before God and his commandments.

Reflecting on "the oldest moral judgments," Nietzsche suggests that they had their origin in the basic human tendency to suppose that "whatever harms me is something evil..., whatever benefits me is something good." [D 102] This tendency was long ago given a social turn, so that "preserving the community generally and protecting it from destruction" became the primary emphasis, and after that "preserving the community on a certain level." [WS 44] These circumstances are reflected in the fact that "the person whose conduct is sympathetic, disinterested, commonly useful, and social is now regarded as the moral one." [D 132] But Nietzsche contends that it is "only a narrow and petty-bourgeois morality" that focuses upon "the most direct and immediate consequences of our actions for others" and upon "choosing accordingly." [D 146] This refinement of "herd morality" is commonly considered to represent the essence of "true morality," and a high point of enlightenment; but he takes a very different view of it:

Behind the basic principle of current moral fashion: "moral actions are actions of sympathy for others," I see a social impulse of fearfulness at work, which dresses itself up intellectually in this way. This impulse has as its highest, most important and immediate aim the removal from life of everything dangerous which was earlier associated with it, to which end everyone is supposed to contribute and make every effort: consequently only actions conducive to the common security and feeling of security are permitted to be accorded the predicate "good"! [D 174]

The prescriptive, negative side of this sort of morality is thus taken by Nietzsche to be the application of the idea that "the more dangerous a quality seems to the herd, the more
thoroughly it is proscribed." [WP 276] Its prescriptive side, on the other hand, is the commendation of "all the herd thinks desirable." So he remarks that "the herd animal thus glorifies the herd nature," and "with fair words" masks its "judgment of comfort"—and "thus 'morality' arises." [WP 285]

Nietzsche finds both sides of this morality quite dismayingly, when he considers the consequences of the extension of its sway to potentially "higher" as well as intractably mediocre human beings. He is more than willing that "the ideas of the herd should rule in the herd"; but he is very much concerned that they should "not reach out beyond it." [WP 287] For, where its negative side is concerned, he laments that "all the forces and drives by virtue of which life and growth exist lie under the ban of morality." [WP 343] And he finds little merit in life lived merely in accordance with what "the herd thinks desirable."

What in Europe today is called simply "morality"—as if there were no other morality and could be no other—[is] herd-animal morality, which is striving with all its power for a universal green-pasture happiness on earth, namely for security, absence of danger, comfort, the easy life.... The two doctrines it preaches most often are: "equal rights" and "sympathy with all that suffers"—and it takes suffering itself to be something that must absolutely be abolished. That such "ideas" as these are still modern gives one a bad opinion of modernity. [WP 957]

Reflecting on the origins of this morality and on the possibility of alternatives to it, Nietzsche arrives at his famous distinction between two fundamental original types of morality:

Wandering through the many subtler and coarser moralities which have so far been prevalent on earth, or still are prevalent, I found that certain features recurred regularly together and were closely associated—until I finally discovered two basic types and one basic difference.

These are master morality and slave morality.... The moral discrimination of values has originated either among a ruling group whose consciousness of its difference from the ruled group was accompanied by delight—or among the ruled, the slaves and dependents of every degree.

In the first case, when the ruling group determines what is "good," the exalted, proud states of the soul are experienced as conferring distinction and determining the order of rank. The noble human being separates from himself those in whom the opposite of such exalted, proud states finds expression: he despises them. It should be noted immediately that in this first type of morality the opposition of "good" and "bad" means approximately the same as "noble" and "contemptible." (The opposition of "good" and "evil" has a different origin.) [BGE 260]

This second contrast, of "good" and "evil," is taken by Nietzsche to have come into the world within the "ruled groups" in reaction against their rulers and all they stood for:

The slave revolt in morality begins when resentment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values.... While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is "outside," what is "different," what is "not itself": and this No is its creative deed. [GM I:10]
As "slave morality" developed, Nietzsche suggests, it was colored by the perspective, fears and interests of those who were obliged to live under conditions of distress:

Suppose the violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, who are uncertain of themselves and weary, moralize: what will their moral valuations have in common? Probably, a pessimistic suspicion about the whole condition of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man along with his condition.... Those qualities are brought out and flooded with light which serve to ease existence for those who suffer: here pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness are honored--for here they are the most useful qualities and almost the only means for enduring the pressure of existence. Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility.... [BGE 260]

Nietzsche argues that the kind of morality that has come to prevail in the modern world, whether in the form of conventional "herd" morality or in the more refined forms philosophers have given it, is fundamentally an outgrowth of this "slave" morality. And while he does not seek merely to resurrect "master morality," he emphatically rejects the claims of this "slave morality" in all its forms.

This entire old morality concerns us no more: there is not a concept in it that still deserves respect. We have outlived it--we are no longer coarse and naive enough to have to let ourselves be deceived in this fashion. [WP 459]

Nietzsche argues that the demand of truthfulness and honesty which this morality itself has instilled in us now requires its rejection, as its ulterior motives and all-too-human origins are brought to light, and its attempted sanction by reference to divine authority collapses with "the death of God."

As the will to truth thus gains self-consciousness--there can be no doubt of that--morality will gradually perish now: this is the great spectacle in a hundred acts reserved for the next two centuries in Europe--the most terrible, most questionable, and perhaps also the most hopeful of all spectacles.--- [GM III:27]

Whatever their origins and symptomatic significance, Nietzsche observes that moralities promote the adoption of certain valuations by those whose lives they touch. Under the spell of such "moral values," people live differently than they otherwise might, were they to embrace differing sets of values. The dominant morality of the present time is marked by a number of these value-determinations. And his most fundamental objections to it concern their detrimental impact upon the quality of human life. "Whoever reflects upon the way in which the type man can be raised to his greatest splendor and power," and on the other hand considers the nature of this morality and the consequences of its ascendancy, must recognize that "morality has been essentially directed to the opposite end: to obstruct or destroy that spendid evolution wherever it has been going on." [WP 987]

It is for this reason that Nietzsche opposes it, even though he recognizes that it has long been "needed that man might prevail in his struggle with nature and the "wild animal" in himself. [WP 403] "From a superior point of view," he writes, what is to be desired is the "emancipation of man from the narrow and fear–riddled bonds of morality." [WP 386] A new and different sort of look at "moral values" is called for; and his proposed "standard by which the value of moral evaluations is to be determined" is that of "the elevation and strengthening of the type man." [WP 391]
But Nietzsche would not have everyone abandon ordinary "herd morality." On the contrary, he considers it to be entirely fitting for all those who do not have it in them to be more than the "herd type" of human being. What he objects to is rather its inculcation in the potential exceptions to the human rule; that is where he takes it to be so seriously detrimental to the enhancement of human life. It is not with everyone in mind, but rather only those who have it in them to transcend the plane of ordinary humanity, that he advocates living "beyond good and evil," and proclaims:

Profoundest gratitude for that which morality has achieved hitherto: but now it is only a burden which may become a fatality! Morality itself, in the form of honesty, compels us to deny morality. [WP 404]

Nietzsche is concerned not merely to come to terms with past and present moralities, but moreover to look beyond them. He attempts to achieve a reorientation of the manner in which morality is understood, that would serve to place it on a new footing. It also may be thought of as involving the transformation of morality. "The overcoming of morality"—that is, of "morality in the traditional sense"—may be the initial task confronting "the finest and [sharpest] consciences of today." [BGE 32] But with the accomplishment of this preliminary task, another takes its place: moral theory is to be transformed into the elaboration of "the doctrine of the [conditions] under which the phenomenon of 'life' comes to be," and may flourish and develop further. [BGE 19] His formula for this task is the "naturalization of morality," based upon "purely naturalistic values."

Owing to the constitutional differences among human beings, Nietzsche argues, different manners of life are properly prescribable for various human "types," in the form of differing moralities. These constitutional differences translate into different "conditions of life." If one thinks of a "morality" as "a system of evaluations that partially coincides with the conditions of a creature's life" [WP 256], as he proposes to do, the result is a form of moral pluralism: different moralities are warranted in some human contexts, while being inappropriate or even harmful in others. But he requires more of moralities than that they simply answer to the "conditions of life" of various types of human beings. For it is to "life" more generally that they require to be referred—"to human life as a broader phenomenon, the strengthening and enhancement of which they are to serve, indirectly if not directly. A particular sort of morality may be warranted for human beings of some type not simply because it answers to their needs, but rather, more fundamentally, because it serves to maximize the contribution of their existence in one way or another to the "elevation of the type man."

In speaking of possible "higher moralities," Nietzsche does not merely have in mind the original sort of thing he terms "master morality." They may be akin to it in certain respects; but they differ importantly from it as well, just as the "higher humanity" he envisions differs markedly from the robust but barbaric humanity of these earlier "master types." And while he considers this kind of morality to be appropriate for "higher human beings" generally, he does not conceive of it as having the same specific content for them all. So he urges that, in place of seeking to establish some "universal law" or "categorical imperative," we "limit ourselves" to something quite different: "to the creation of our own new tables of what is good," as "human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves." [GS 335] These "laws" and "tables of what is good" would be the differing concrete realizations of the "higher morality" by means of which their potential higher humanity can be developed.

Such a morality therefore would not merely be a license or injunction to assert their own individuality. Nietzsche stresses the function of this kind of morality as a form of discipline, serving "to train men for the heights." [WP 957] Its aim would be to enable them to
"transfigure" themselves, in contrast to ordinary morality, which seeks merely to render everyone harmless and helpful to others.

All those who do not have themselves well under control, and do not know morality as self-mastery and self-overcoming constantly practiced in the greatest and smallest matters, come naturally to exalt the good, sympathetic, benevolent sentiments of that instinctive morality which has no head, but rather seems simply to be all heart and helping hands. [WS 45]

Such a higher morality of "self-mastery and self-overcoming" is like other moralities in that it too involves restraint, resistance to impulse, and proscription. But in this case these directives reflect the requirements of the attainment of an enriched, strengthened, refined and more creative form of life. In practical terms, for Nietzsche, this means that one is "to give oneself a goal," and to work out the means to it; and in this connection he takes "an experimental morality" to be called for. [WP 260] One's own "laws of life and action," discovered "experimentally" to be required by one's highest aspirations, are what one's particular morality here would involve.

This unconventional higher type of morality would seem to be modeled on the more familiar idea of the "morality" of the artist. Artistic forms of endeavor are characterized by a significant measure of creativity or innovativeness, and by the attainability of varying forms and degrees of excellence. And what is meant in speaking of the "moralities" of those who devote themselves to such pursuits is the particular kinds of discipline, selection and application necessary for the cultivation and fullest utilization of their artistic ability.

It is this sort of morality that Nietzsche considers to be most appropriate for the "higher type" of human being. It is essentially the morality of the creator, whose only law is that called for by the task undertaken. If such exceptional human beings are subject to any more general imperative, it is only that which demands of them that they determine upon some way of being the creators they have it in them to be. If this creative self-realization is a privilege of these "choice types," it is also their responsibility. Self-overcoming, self-mastery, self-cultivation, and self-direction in the employment of one's powers, along with the "loftiness of soul" they make possible, characterize both his higher type of human being and his higher type of morality.

Here the greater, more manifold, more comprehensive life transcends and lives beyond the old morality; the 'individual' appears, obliged to give himself laws and to develop his own arts and wiles for self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption. [BGE 262]

This higher morality may be no morality for everyone, and certainly is no morality in the usual sense of the term; but Nietzsche never supposed that it is. Whether one chooses to call it a morality of a different kind or something else altogether, it is what he would have supplant all more commonplace moralities among those capable of doing without them. It may be "beyond good and evil"; but it amply warrants his insistence that "at least this does not mean 'beyond good and bad.'" [GM I:17]
Looking beyond Nietzsche's conception of a "higher" type of morality to his ideas about the broader context of human life and its possible enhancement, one enters an area in which his views are commonly even more seriously misunderstood. This is partly owing to the travesty of his appropriation and distortion by the Nazis, and to the tendency of many people to mistake the Nazis' pseudo-Nietzschean ideology for Nietzsche's own actual thinking. But it is also partly owing to the common tendency to take democratic ideas and ideals for granted. This leads many people to recoil from his challenge to them, and to misunderstand his proposed alternatives to them.

Nietzsche is often taken to be advocating things he is merely analyzing; and those who do not like the harsh realities of life to which he draws attention often react by blaming the messenger for the message. Yet his real concern is not at all to undermine humanity at its best. Rather, it is to lead us to an appreciation of what humanity at its best can be, and of what its achievement and strengthening require. And this involves replacing pious illusions and naive beliefs with deeper insight and unflinching honesty.

When Nietzsche insists that war, conquest, exploitation, suffering, mastery and domination are essential to life and inseparable from its development, he is not championing brutality and barbarism. His point is that it would be naive to suppose that human life could have developed and can develop further without them in some form or other. But he also holds that its further development is to be conceived in terms of the flourishing and enrichment of cultural life; and in that context they take on very different forms from those associated with less highly developed types and stages of human life.

Similarly, when Nietzsche insists that all enhancements of human life have been associated with aristocratic societies, orders of "rank," "noble" types set apart from those who are "common," and "master" types whom others serve, he is not advocating the establishment of some new sort of caste or class system along the lines of traditional societies. Rather, his point again is that the dynamic of development always has required the accentuation of human differences, and always will require it, in some form or other. But the kind of "new nobility" or "new aristocracy" he envisions, in opposition to the equalizing and leveling tendency of both democracy and socialism in the modern age, would not be based on anything like racial or ethnic or socioeconomic class identity. Instead, it would have the character of a meritocracy. One's higher or lower "rank" in Nietzsche's sense depends entirely upon one's ability to contribute creatively to the flourishing and enrichment of cultural life in some way, and so to the enhancement of life.

Nietzsche is often thought to regard his fellow Germans and the new Germany of his day as the very embodiment of his conception of this "higher humanity," and even to be a "master race" deserving to rule the world. But this is far from the truth. In fact, he considers them to leave a great deal to be desired.

Perhaps I know the Germans, perhaps I may even tell them some truths. The new Germany represents a large quantum of fitness, both inherited and acquired by training.... [But] it is not a high culture that has thus become the master.... The Germans--once they were called the people of thinkers; do they think at all today? The Germans are now bored with the spirit, the Germans now mistrust the spirit; politics swallow up all serious concern for really spiritual matters. Deuschland, Deuschland uber alles--I fear that was the end of German philosophy. [TI VIII:1]

In the history of European culture the rise of the "Reich" means one thing above all: a displacement of the center of gravity. It is already known
everywhere [that] in what matters most—and that always remains culture—the Germans are no longer worthy of consideration. [TI VIII:4]

Nietzsche also is often thought to be a champion of the powerful national state, and so to be sympathetic to totalitarianism. But this too could not be further from the truth. So he has Zarathustra say:

Somewhere there are still peoples and herds, but not where we live, my brothers: here there are states. State? What is that? Well then, open your ears to me, for now I shall speak to you about the death of peoples.

State is the name of the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it tells lies too; and this lie crawls out of its mouth: "I, the state, am the people." That is a lie! It was creators who created peoples and hung a faith and a love over them: thus they served life....

It is annihilators who set traps for the many and call them "state": they hang a sword and a hundred appetites over them.... Verily, this sign signifies the will to death. Verily, it beckons to the preachers of death....

Only where the state ends, there begins the human being who is not superfluous: there begins the song of necessity, the unique and inimitable tune..., the rainbow and the bridges of the overman. [Z I:11]

Nietzsche is often thought to be hostile to democracy—and indeed he is, insofar as the ideology of democracy denies that differences between human beings matter, and so discourages the development of those with exceptional abilities. But he also recognizes that, if the anti-meritocratic tendencies of this form of society can be resisted, there is much to be said for it, even from the standpoint of the exceptional type:

In a certain sense, the latter can maintain and develop himself most easily in a democratic society: namely, when the coarser means of defense are no longer necessary, and habits of order, honesty, justice, and trust are part of the usual conditions. [WP 887]

Finally, Nietzsche is often thought to be an advocate of war and military might. But a very different conclusion is suggested by an eloquent statement he makes on this very topic, which bears the heading "The means to real peace."

No government nowadays admits that it maintains an army so as to satisfy occasional thirsts for conquest; the army is supposed to be for defence. That morality which sanctions self-protection is called upon to be its advocate. This is how all states now confront one another. They presuppose an evil disposition in their neighbor and a benevolent disposition in themselves. This presupposition, however, is a piece of inhumanity as bad as, if not worse than, a war would be.... The doctrine of the army as a means of self-defence must be renounced just as completely as the thirst for conquest. And perhaps there will come a great day on which a nation distinguished for wars and victories and for the highest development of military discipline and thinking, and accustomed to making the heaviest sacrifices on behalf of these things, will cry of its own free will: "we shall shatter the sword"—and demolish its entire military machine down to its last foundations. To disarm while being the best armed, out of an elevation of sensibility—that is the means to real peace.... Better to perish than to hate and fear, and twofold better to perish than to make oneself hated and
feared--this must one day become the supreme maxim of every individual state!
[WS 284]

What Nietzsche champions is neither Germany nor the state, and neither war nor a return to some imagined state of nature in which free rein is given to all the basic impulses civilization has brought under control. His cause is rather the flourishing of culture, which he believes to be threatened by developments on all of these fronts, as well as by those types of political ideology, morality and religion that suppress the creativity on which it depends. His basic concern is with the transformation of merely biological and social existence into an ever-expanding array of cultural expressions of human ability; and his ideal is the sublimation of merely natural drives into a higher spirituality characterized by a wealth of forms of creative activity.

This is what Nietzsche means by the "enhancement of life" he envisions, by the "higher humanity" he calls for, and by the image of the "overman" he employs as their symbol. They too manifest that fundamental disposition he calls "will to power," but represent its most highly developed and demanding expression. In them this "will to power" is no longer expressed in those more primitive displays of strength and domination associated with barbarism and tyranny. It is transformed into the kinds of competition, mastery and assertion associated with cultural life, of which art is Nietzsche's paradigm from his first works onward.

So, in his first book *The Birth of Tragedy*, he celebrates the culture of the ancient Greeks as one of humanity's greatest achievements; and he takes their arts to have been the key to their solution of the problem of overcoming "the terror and horror of existence" and endowing life with value. Art for them was a "transfiguring mirror," serving as "the complement and consummation of existence." [BT 3] Nietzsche uses the example of the Greeks to make the point that in this way it is "the arts generally which make life possible and worth living." [BT 1] Indeed, he goes further:

We have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art--for it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified. [BT 5]

In his later writings Nietzsche broadens his focus to include cultural life more generally, as the sphere in which human creative powers transform merely natural existence in this way. It represents a larger-scale version of what artists do in narrower contexts. But he reveres art as the form of human activity and experience in which this transforming and value-creating ability was first developed. "Our ultimate gratitude to art," he writes, is that it has taught us to be well disposed to "appearance" and to what has been created.

As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be able to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon. [GS 107]

Art for Nietzsche has served as a kind of special schooling of the human spirit. In it capacities of expression other than those typical of merely natural and social existence have been cultivated, and a higher form of self-mastery has been learned, contrasting with that taught in the obedience-school of society. The distinction he draws between "taming" and "breeding" here finds application. Art shows what he means by "breeding" or cultivation, and serves as its best exemplification thus far. Both "taming" and "breeding" involve the transformation of the "human animal," but along importantly different lines and in very different ways. The narrow form of spiritual cultivation art involves may leave much to be
desired. But as an initial great experiment along these lines, providing an indication of "what might yet be made of man" [BGE 203], we owe it very much indeed.

Artistic creativity *transfigures*, heedless of the way things may happen to be. "Unlike men of knowledge, who leave everything as it is," artists "alter and transform." [WP 585] What they produce are not so much representations as re-presentations of life, which depart from it as they find it. And artists have no qualms about doing so, teaching us that there is no contradiction between relishing and embellishing life, and that more is gained than is lost by altering its aspect. We are indebted to them because this constitutes a crucial step in the larger process of the transformation of human life, in such a way that "all nature ceases and becomes art." [GS 356]

Art fosters the development of human abilities and possibilities reaching beyond the confines of its established sphere. In so doing it prepares the way for the emergence of a higher form of human life, which would be at once its supersession and its consummation. Artists for Nietzsche are only an "intermediate" type, and art is but a "preliminary" state in relation to this "higher concept of art" and humanity. But that is not only their limitation; it is also their great significance and their glory.

*What one should learn from artists.*—How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not? And I rather think that in themselves they never are....

This we should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them this subtle power usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; but we want to be the poets of our life—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters. [GS 299]

It is in this spirit that Nietzsche would have all who can do so devote themselves to various forms of creative activity, contributing to the further enrichment of cultural life through which human life endows itself with value. In this same connection, he also commends both scientific inquiry and that last remnant of traditional morality: honesty. For they too are needed in the service of the enhancement of life.

We...want to become those we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves. To that end we must become the best learners and discoverers of everything that is lawful and necessary in the world: we must become physicists in order to be able to be creators in this sense—while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been based on ignorance of physics or were constructed so as to contradict it. Therefore: long live physics! And even more so that which compels us to turn to physics—our honesty! [GS 335]

**Conclusion**

Nietzsche has been seen to be severely critical of religion, morality, science, traditional values, and many of our most cherished beliefs about ourselves and our society. Yet he is far from rejecting everything setting humanity apart from merely natural existence; just as he is far from advocating a nihilistic denial of any meaning or value in human life. His deepest concern is precisely the opposite: to show that the "death of God" does not give the last word to nihilism, and to find a way beyond it. There has perhaps never been a philosopher who criticizes as much as Nietzsche does—and yet there also may never have been a philosopher whose thought is more affirmative in its basic thrust: affirmative of this life in
this world, of the promise humanity represents, of the future that lies open to us, and of philosophy as a means of showing the way to that future.

Nietzsche's philosophy is a searchingly critical examination and stock-taking of all that we have been and are and of all that we have to work with; of the typically human and the all-too-human, of the interpretations and evaluations we have lived by, and of the resources and abilities by means of which we may go beyond them. And it is also an extraordinary attempt to begin to move beyond them. If there is one word that sums up his thinking, it is this word "beyond": beyond good and evil, beyond old faiths and values and ideas, beyond the death of God and nihilism, beyond the all-too-human, beyond the merely natural, beyond the merely social and conventional, beyond the mere preservation and perpetuation of life as it already is. That is why he speaks so often of "overcoming" and "creativity" and "enhancement." They are by no means inevitable; but they are humanly possible—and Nietzsche seeks to be the herald and midwife and stimulus of such further development, of human life and philosophy alike.

The subtitle of Nietzsche's book *Beyond Good and Evil* is *Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. His entire thought is such a "prelude" and beginning; for genuinely philosophical thinking of the sort he envisions and practices can never achieve complete and final form. Our understanding of ourselves and our world may always be improved upon, as may the manner of our human existence. Neither in what we think, nor in what we are, will we have *have arrived*, once and for all, at some absolute and final state of knowledge or spirituality or humanity.

But rather than signifying the failure of the philosophical and human enterprise, this is taken by Nietzsche in precisely the opposite way. It underscores the need for his "new philosophers," who will take the lead in new ventures of interpretation and enhancement. They are to be both "knowers" and "creators," inspired rather than daunted by the prospect of the "open sea" without fixed horizon or final port that confronts them. With the assimilation of "the news that 'the old god is dead,'" and having also recovered from the initial nihilistic reaction to it, Nietzsche writes, "our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation" in the "new dawn" which thus breaks:

All the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea"— [GS 343]
# Reference Key

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</tbody>
</table>
Z = Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Also Sprach Zarathustra)
    Parts I–II 1883 VI:1
    Part III 1884
    Part IV 1885
BGE = Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und Böse) 1886 VI:2
GM = On the Genealogy of Morals (Zur Genealogie der Moral) 1887 VI:2
CW = The Case of Wagner (Der Fall Wagner) 1888 VI:3
TI = Twilight of the Idols (Die Götzen-Dämmerung)7 1889 VI:3
A = The Antichrist (Der Antichrist)7 1895 VI:3
NCW = Nietzsche contra Wagner (Nietzsche contra Wagner)7 1895 VI:3
EH = Ecce Homo (Ecce Homo)7 1908 VI:3
WP = The Will to Power (Der Wille zur Macht)8

Notes

2. Essays written in the early 1870s, which Nietzsche left unfinished and unpublished.
3. Subsequently published as part of Untimely Meditations.
4. A collection of four essays, consisting of UDH, SE, and two others on David Strauss and Richard Wagner.
5. First published as a supplement to HH under the title Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche.
6. Subsequently published as the second part of volume II of HH.
7. Works completed by Nietzsche in 1888 but published after his collapse.
8. Compiled after Nietzsche's death from material in his notebooks of 1883–88 (KGW volumes VII:1,2,3 and VIII:1,2,3).
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