

Overcoming Nihilism:
Nietzsche on Self-Creation, Politics and Morality

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores three of Nietzsche in terms of his conception of nihilism and his attempt to overcome it.

It is argued that Nietzsche views modernity as being characterized by nihilism and in a state of crisis. Nietzsche responds to this crisis by offering both an aetiology of it, and a vision of a future beyond nihilism. It is Nietzsche's vision which is the primary concern of this work.

Nietzsche's first attempt to overcome nihilism is found in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In this book Nietzsche offers a solution of individual salvation which is elucidated in terms of a trio of ideas - the Superman, the will to power and eternal recurrence.

Since nihilism is a social problem, however, this individual overcoming of it is insufficient. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche, realizing this, offers a more inclusive solution which centres on a political vision of an aristocracy which lies beyond, and outside of, social morality.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche attempts to show that the creation of such a future does not involve any ahistorical leaps, that the potential for it is already present, though repressed, in Western culture.

In subjecting Nietzsche's vision of the future to critical evaluation it is argued that his visions of individual and society are both unattractive and unfeasible. The Nietzschean individual is argued to be less a model of psychological health and well-being than a case study in alienation. The aristocratic society which Nietzsche envisages seems sure to lead to a new crisis.

It is further argued that this lack of a workable and attractive vision of the future is based in a misinterpretation of the

present, which, I suggest, is not characterized by a crisis.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in reference to Nietzsche's texts:

ASC	"Attempt at a self-criticism"
BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
BT	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i>
WP	<i>The Will to Power</i>
Z	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an examination of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) through a reading of three of his works: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). The focus of this work is Nietzsche's understanding of modernity as being characterized by a crisis of nihilism and his attempts to overcome it.

THE ARGUMENT

Chapter one explores Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism. It is argued that Nietzsche views nihilism as being connected to a world view which has come to dominate European life and thought, a world-view he associates with Platonism and Christianity. This world-view, he argues, is under threat of collapse and this constitutes a crisis to which Nietzsche responds and which he attempts to overcome. Nietzsche's conception of nihilism is explored as involving a crisis of truth, of value, and of agency and it is argued that our best understanding of it incorporates all three.

Chapter two takes the form of a reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It is argued that in this book Nietzsche offers a broadly aesthetic solution to nihilism in the form of the self-creating individual. This solution is worked out in terms of three novel concepts - the Superman, the will to power, and eternal recurrence. These concepts are notoriously difficult to grasp and I offer an interpretation of each of them.

For many years this aesthetic solution was taken to be the whole story of Nietzsche's attempt to overcome nihilism. This view of Nietzsche's thought can be traced back, in the English-speaking world, to the ground-breaking work of Walter Kaufmann (1974). Kaufmann, concerned to rehabilitate Nietzsche, to return him to philosophical respectability after his posthumous association with, and abuse by, the Nazis, offered a sanitized and apolitical

Nietzsche. The success of Kaufmann's work led to this view gaining enormous currency, which has not altogether waned. Taylor (1992a) and Rorty (1989), for instance, still subscribe to this view, as does Nehamas (1985).

The last decade, however, has seen a resurgence of interest in the political aspects of Nietzsche's thought; although pioneered by Tracy Strong in the 1970s, it was not until the 1980s that there was an important flourishing of political works on Nietzsche. Foremost among these were works by Detwiler (1990), Connolly (1988), Ansell-Pearson (1991a, 1991b and 1994) and Warren (1988). In chapter three I explore the political dimensions of Nietzsche's solution in a reading of *Beyond Good and Evil*. In this work Nietzsche offers a largely physiological interpretation of human beings, their philosophies and their moralities and argues for an aristocratic politics which will free the "strong" for the task of self-creation, but at the expense of the "weak".

In an exegesis of *On the Genealogy of Morals* in chapter four it is argued that Nietzsche views the genealogy he undertakes as a first step on the way to creating a new future. In this work, Nietzsche locates the sources of nihilism in *ressentiment*, bad conscience and the Ascetic ideal, while at the same time attempting to show that other, repressed, possibilities exist in Western culture and these might form the basis for the sort of future Nietzsche envisages.

In chapter five Nietzsche's vision of the future is subjected to critical scrutiny. Does Nietzsche have a workable vision? Does he offer a way to overcome nihilism? It is the argument of this thesis that he does not. I argue that Nietzsche's political vision is likely to reinstitute, rather than overcome the crisis of nihilism and that his ideal of the individual is severely distorted.

That Nietzsche fails as a visionary does not, however, detract from his importance as a philosopher. His importance rather resides in the way in which he subjects modern values, interpretations and ideals to a radical form of questioning.

THE TEXTS

PRIMARY TEXTS

As already stated, this work concentrates on a reading of three of Nietzsche's books *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (parts I-III, 1884; parts I-IV, 1891), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *On The Genealogy of Morals* (1887). I will read each of these as having a single, or at least a dominant theme - aesthetic redemption, political salvation and an aetiology of the crisis respectively. This of course, is not exactly the case. I do not mean to imply by this arrangement that the critique of, origins of, and alternative to, nihilism is what these three books are really about. These books are all wide-ranging and interpretatively open-ended. The arrangement is more in the manner of a convenience but one which I hope will be borne out and justified by the analysis thereby obtained.

None of Nietzsche's books is devoted to a single topic but instead each is an interweaving of diverse themes and topics - ethical, religious, political, aesthetic, scientific, literary, social, psychological and historical. Given that these many issues are further enmeshed in a variety of styles, literary genres and devices, diverse metaphors and symbolizations, the temptation is great either to give up completely the task of understanding Nietzsche, or to offer an artificially contained, cut-and-dried analysis which does little justice to his philosophy.

Attempting to do justice to Nietzsche means finding some path between over-simplification and over-complication; of showing how the various aspects of his thought fit together in a non-

reductively coherent way without allowing this to divert one from the critical appraisal of his stance on any particular issue. I have attempted to achieve this by tracing a dominant thread through these three works.

A defence of this choice of texts needs to meet two objections which might be summed up in the following questions: "on what grounds can you justify looking at just a few of Nietzsche's books when by your own admission all of his books deal with a multiplicity of issues?" and "why those books rather than any others?"

In response to the first question I would offer the following argument. It would seem not only possible but likely that in attempting a survey of the complete oeuvre depth would be sacrificed for breadth to an unnecessary and unjustifiable degree. On the other hand, an in depth look at just one of Nietzsche's works would be likely to misdescribe his solution to the problem of nihilism, by ignoring the strands that are explored in other works.

But, even if one accepts that some such compromise between depth and breadth is both necessary and unavoidable and that some selection has to be made the issue of a criterion for selection needs to be addressed. Firstly, the chosen works are those most widely regarded as Nietzsche's most important, and include the work Nietzsche himself regarded most highly - *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Secondly, they are importantly interconnected: Nietzsche saw *Beyond Good and Evil* as a commentary on and further working through of the ideas of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals* as a further elucidation of themes in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Together they give us Nietzsche's vision of future (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), present (*Beyond Good and Evil*) and past (*On the Genealogy of Morals*) - though here too, caution is advisable for past, present and future form a unity for Nietzsche, and each of the books touches on all three, while privileging one. Thirdly, these three works neatly straddle the

divide of what Nietzsche calls his "yes-saying" and his "no-saying" and allow us to see his affirmation and critique together and in the light of each other.

It remains to be said that no matter how well-defended, no choice of texts is neutral, any selection of books depicts a Nietzsche different from any other selection. The differences between, for instance, Kaufmann's rationalist Nietzsche and Jasper's existentialist one are at least in part attributable to their emphases on and preferences for different Nietzschean works (an emphasis and preference influenced no doubt by their own philosophical backgrounds).

SECONDARY TEXTS

The secondary literature on Nietzsche is enormous, and obviously some difficult choices have to be made in this regard. I have concentrated almost solely on those critical works written in English. Further, I have, by and large and with notable exceptions, concentrated on the work of the last ten years.

Heidegger and Deleuze are the most important of my omissions. Each of these has, like Kaufmann, had enormous influence on Nietzsche scholarship - especially in Germany and France, respectively. However, Heidegger's metaphysical reading of Nietzsche is outside the scope of this work and Deleuze's thought is only tangentially related.

THE APPROACH

I will approach Nietzsche's works through a reading of each in turn. Although matters of style will be alluded to the focus will be on the substantive issues that Nietzsche raises. But this is not to say that Nietzsche's content can be wholly divorced from his style, nor that issues of style are philosophically unimportant. I shall, therefore, briefly touch on this issue.

NIETZSCHE'S STYLES

In any discussion of Nietzsche's work, the question of his style, which is quite unlike anything we expect from a philosopher, is unavoidable.

"Only those readers of Nietzsche who lack eyes and ears can escape a confrontation with his style. Those who think him a poet rather than a philosopher do so because of his styles. Those who treat him as an analytic philosopher in disguise have patiently to peel aside his style. And those, again, who treat Nietzsche as a liminal thinker, a philosopher of the limits of philosophy have usually given his style(s) special attention." (Wood, 1990 p 30)

Until recently it has been commonplace to treat Nietzsche as a paradigmatically aphoristic writer¹. This view of Nietzsche is again traceable to Kaufmann and there are still some who hold to it, for example Zeitlin (1994).

But aphorism is just one of Nietzsche's stylistic devices and none of the books to be investigated in this work is straightforwardly aphoristic. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the most literary of Nietzsche's works and if not quite a novel, does have a narrative form centring on the development of the protagonist. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, on the other hand, is one of Nietzsche's more straightforwardly philosophical works, three essays each with an argument; and with an overarching argument uniting them. *Beyond Good and Evil* is the most difficult of the three to classify - nine sections, an after-song, some epigrams - it does display a tendency towards the aphoristic, but here too there is a unity both within and between the sections that cannot be overlooked without damaging the integrity of the work.

Nietzsche is unlike many other philosophers in that his work seems to become more rather than less opaque the more one reads

it. In reading Nietzsche we are constantly made aware of the active and interpretative nature of reading.

"Nietzsche's books are easier to read but harder to understand than those of almost any other thinker. . . . As soon as one attempts to penetrate beyond the clever epigrams and well turned insults to grasp their consequences and to coordinate them, one is troubled. Other thinkers generally accomplish this coordination for us, and if we follow their arguments, they will show us the connection that leads from one claim to the next. . . . while in Nietzsche's books the individual sentences seem clear enough and it is the total design that puzzles us." (Kaufmann, 1974 p 72)

Nietzsche's reliance on imagery and personae; the (apparent?) contradictions which we are constantly thrown up against in his work; his use of narrative to frame his argument all serve to foster this awareness that in reading Nietzsche we are actively engaged in the process of interpretation. A process with inherent problems:

"If we were to liken the task of interpretation to that of reconstructing a pioneer's journey through a wilderness, we could look at these various passages as clues. Working with a rough and presumably inaccurate map of this wilderness territory, we could then mark each of these clues on our preliminary chart of the area. Given these points of reference and an initial idea of the terrain, we could then reconstruct on our map the route our explorer probably took. Yet such a reconstruction will always remain tentative: there may be other clues to which we had no access, the explorer's route may have been much less direct, our own ideas about the terrain may be mistaken, or we may even be wrong about the goal our explorer had in mind.

Indeed, the terrain may even have changed since that initial exploration." (Hinman, 1982 p 180)

Magnus, Stewart and Mileur (1993) explicate five stylistic strategies which Nietzsche uses to force interpretation while problematizing it. The first of these is hyperbole (see also Nehamas, 1985). Hyperbole serves to make the author visible and present. Nietzsche makes no pretence at neutrality, but instead offers interpretations and solutions as his alone.

The second is undecidability. This undecidability is a matter of both content and tone. With regard to the former they argue that Nietzsche's works and ideas resist reduction to any single, coherent interpretation. And with regard to tone, it is never clear when Nietzsche is being serious and when he is being ironic.

Third, Nietzsche's works resist paraphrase not just in the sense that something essential is lost in any paraphrase, but in that a final interpretation of Nietzsche's thought is impossible in principle.

The fourth is tokening. Nietzsche through his use of aphorisms and sections forces the reader to make the connections giving no authorial guidance, no explication. Nietzsche seems not to argue in a sustained way but instead, as Hunt (1991) has argued, we find the premises for any given conclusion some distance away, perhaps in another book altogether, perhaps not at all.

Finally, Magnus *et al* speak of Nietzsche's use of what they call "self-consuming concepts" which they explain as:

"notions whose very articulation simultaneously invites and refuses meaning and coherence" (1993 p 22).

This kind of reading of Nietzsche would mean that it is pointless to try to talk about Nietzsche's thought. If the content of his philosophy is undecidable and resists paraphrase, and if the concepts he uses are self-consuming, then works such as the present volume are rendered obsolete. Nietzsche, it would seem is engaged in a philosophico-literary game, which we can enjoy and perhaps even participate in but which it would be a mistake to read as a serious attempt to deal with issues of self, society, politics and morality.

But this does not fit with the way Nietzsche views his own project, he does not seem to view his work as a meta-philosophical game. In *Ecce Homo* he speaks of his work as "dynamite", he speaks of the war he has waged against Christianity and says:

"- Have I been understood? . . . The unmasking of Christian morality is an event without equal, a real catastrophe. He who exposes it is a *force majeure*, a destiny - he breaks the history of mankind into two parts." (EH 4.8)

These are not the words of a man who feels that the style of his thought is its essence. It is rather a demand that the content of his work be taken seriously in the sort of way that this thesis attempts to.

If we accept this, two related questions arise: what does Nietzsche intend to achieve with his styles? and how are we to read him? The answers to these questions will shape any portrayal of Nietzsche and his thought.

In answering the first of these questions I would argue that the stylistic aspect of Nietzsche's work is too pronounced, too different from that of other philosophers', to be merely incidental. We can therefore accept that Nietzsche intends his style to perform some function. I would further argue that

Nehamas (1985) and Solomon (1988) are substantially correct in the suggestion that what Nietzsche intends is to find a way to express his thoughts without falling into the sort of dogmatism which he attacked; to offer interpretations while accepting that there are only interpretations. That is Nietzsche utilizes style as a way out of an epistemological dilemma, as a way of:

"presenting positive views that do not, simply by virtue of being positive, fall back into dogmatism. . . . They show his perspectivism without saying anything about it, and to that extent they prevent his view that there are only interpretations from undermining itself." (Nehamas, 1985 p 40)

If this is accepted then we can see that there is no contradiction in reading Nietzsche as a philosopher offering solutions to real problems. We can be open to his style without treating it as an end in itself. And we can engage in a critical examination of the substance of his thought, just as we would with any other philosopher.

This does not solve another interpretative problem related to Nietzsche's style, namely, how literally are we to take what he says? I will approach this question through looking at the politics of Nietzsche interpretation. There has been a marked tendency among Nietzsche scholars to treat as metaphorical or at least imagistic, those aspects of his work which are most unappealing. This is particularly the case with regard to Nietzsche's political and ethical thought. For example, Nietzsche we shall see argues for a politics of domination and exploitation. But if we treat "domination" and "exploitation" as metaphors then we do not have to confront the real horrors of Nietzsche's political vision.

While Nietzsche was still regarded by the philosophical community as a "crank" and a proto-Nazi, while he was still regarded not a "real" philosopher, such a project of metaphorization might

have had if not a philosophical then at least a political justification. But the situation has changed and fewer and fewer philosophers would deny Nietzsche's importance. The political justification for metaphorization then falls away. This work will treat Nietzsche's political and ethical thought by taking Nietzsche at face-value unless it is obviously absurd to do so; in this I follow Strong:

"Nietzsche is not, as so many commentators have said, 'obscure'; in fact, I think that he generally means exactly what he says. If we find him obscure or mystical, this says something about us, for it is not until we are able to cast off the pictures that hold us prisoner to a traditional way of seeing moral, political, social, and epistemological problems that we will be able to face directly what Nietzsche says."
(Strong, 1975 p x)

In facing directly what Nietzsche says, we must begin with the enormous problem that he faced, that of nihilism. For only by confronting the "abyss" with him can we appreciate his attempts to escape it. Only by appreciating the problematic can we evaluate his proposed solutions.

NOTES

1. The more interesting discussions of aphorism include Shapiro (1984) and Deleuze (see Patton, 1993a).

CHAPTER ONE: NIHILISM

"It seems to me more and more that the philosopher,, being necessarily 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 has always been the ideal of today." (BGE 212)

Nietzsche's philosophy can, I believe, be read as a critique of modernity. Modernity is, of course, a hugely complex phenomenon, a full analysis of which is beyond the scope of this thesis (not to mention my own capabilities). In using this term I intend to point to a confluence of three historical developments¹ - one intellectual, one political and one economic. Intellectually modernity is shaped by the Enlightenment with its emphasis on reason and science, and the gradual process of secularization. Politically modernity is marked by the development and popularization of the ideals associated with the French Revolution (liberty, equality and fraternity) and the institutionalization of (liberal and social) democratic politics. The economic side of modernity involves the development of the immense productive capacities and wealth, and the process of urbanization, associated with the Industrial Revolution and the growth of the capitalist system.

Although I have characterized Nietzsche's work as a critique of modernity, Nietzsche is not concerned with a detailed understanding of this confluence. Instead he sees all these developments as ramifications, final outworkings, of an underlying world view which he associates with both Platonic philosophy and Christianity. Nietzsche believes that these two strands of our heritage are really very much the same (in the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* he says "Christianity is Platonism for 'the people'"), and that what is central to this Platonic-Christian world view is the way in which it devalues this world in favour of a transcendent realm. Modernity is for Nietzsche the development of this world view, its rise to dominance and his critique of it centres on nihilism.

He views nihilism as both a constant, though hitherto latent, feature of western culture and a current situation of crisis. Although Nietzsche uses the term "nihilism" frequently in his notebooks he does so less in his published works, it is however an idea frequently and closely associated with him:

"I shall take Nihilism as the central concept in his philosophy" (Danto, 1965 p 22);

"this is the very core of Nietzsche's spiritual existence, and what follows is despair and hope in a new greatness of man, visions of catastrophe and glory, the icy brilliance of analytical reason, fathoming with affected irreverence those depths hitherto hidden by awe and fear, and, side-by-side with it, the ecstatic invocations of a ritual healer."
(Heller, 1988 p 3)

Even if Nietzsche does not use the term often in his published works, he clearly conveys the sense of nihilism with his powerful imagery of, for instance, "the death of God" and "the abyss"². Pervading Nietzsche's work is a sense that whatever benefits modernity may have brought, it has also resulted in some sort of void; where others see progress, Nietzsche sees decline. Also pervading his work is the sense that this nihilism has reached a critical point; that this situation of nihilism is unendurable but can be resolved if hard choices are made.

This first chapter explores what Nietzsche means by nihilism and why he thinks it is a crisis. The rest of this work is concerned with Nietzsche's attempt to resolve the crisis, to overcome nihilism.

Although there is considerable agreement that Nietzsche is concerned with nihilism, there is rather less agreement as to what exactly nihilism consists in. It is clear that Nietzsche thinks we confront a crisis, but what sort of crisis? Most

readings focus on nihilism as a crisis of truth and value but Warren (1988) has argued that nihilism is best understood as a crisis of agency. In sections 1.2 and 1.3 I will look at the issues of truth and value respectively. In section 1.4 I will investigate Warren's reading of nihilism. I shall argue that our best understanding of Nietzsche's conception of nihilism would incorporate and synthesize all of these aspects. Before turning to this discussion, though, I will, in section 1.1 take a brief look at one of Nietzsche's most famous passages, a passage which locates nihilism in the "death of God".

1.1 THE DEATH OF GOD

"The madman. - Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: 'I seek God! I seek God!' - As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated? - Thus they yelled and laughed.

"The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Whither is God?' he cried; 'I will tell you. We have killed him - you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not the night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light

lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

"How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us - for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto.'

"Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. 'I have come too early,' he said then; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars - and yet they have done it themselves.'

"It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: 'What after all are these churches now

if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?" (GS 125)

This beautiful and striking passage has many features worthy of analysis but I shall comment on just four: the character of the madman; the response of his audience; the cataclysmic consequences of the death of God; and, the need for redemption from this event.

By putting the words of this famous speech into the mouth of a madman Nietzsche might be supposed to be distancing himself from the content of the speech. This is not the case though, Nietzsche clearly identifies himself as not merely an atheist, but the antichrist. In *Ecce Homo* he identifies his philosophy with a war against Christianity, and he ends that book with the words:

"- Have I been understood? - *Dionysos against the Crucified . . .*" (EH 4.9)

The character of the madman, the buffoon, is in fact one of Nietzsche's most common "masks"³ (we shall see, for instance, in the next chapter that the character of Zarathustra is often portrayed as a fool and a failure). The judgement of the character as mad should be treated with suspicion: it is not Nietzsche's own but clearly that of those who encounter him. The madness of the character is analogous to that of Hamlet, a madness that threatens the truly sane, the ones who cannot but see the truth most clearly while all about them ignore it.

The true horror of the parable lies not in the madman's words but in the response he provokes. The laughter and jokes of the crowd are a foretaste of the response that Zarathustra will meet in his attempts to teach the crowd about the Superman. Their indifference to the death of God, to the fact of their having murdered him, marks them as shallow and out of touch. And again we might draw analogies with the Court at Elsinore where life and

merriment continue unimpaired despite the dreadful murder and the tragedy that must follow.

For Nietzsche, in the guise of the madman, the death of God is not just a fact to be shrugged aside but a catastrophic event. The horizon has been wiped away, the earth unchained from the sun moving everywhere and nowhere, there is the threat of an impending cold, dark nothingness. This is the nihilism which threatens, what he elsewhere terms the "abyss". But it is a nihilism, he implies, which we have wrought ourselves - God has not died a peaceful death of quiet old age, he has been murdered and we are responsible.

And if we are responsible for this cataclysm then we must redeem ourselves. This notion of redemption is a crucial aspect of Nietzsche's attempts to overcome nihilism. In this passage the awesomeness of the deed requires an equally awe-ful redemption - that we ourselves become gods; later, he will suggest that only the Superman can justify the death of God.

The suggestion throughout this passage is that the meaning, indeed the very possibility, of life is threatened by the death of God. But why should this be so? What exactly has the madman seen that the crowd, unperturbed, has not? The first suggestion that we will look at is that the madman has seen the effect of God's death on truth.

1.2 THE CRISIS OF TRUTH

According to what we might call the epistemological reading of nihilism, it might be summed up in the statement "there is no truth", where that statement would crucially include moral truths (the most influential epistemological reading of nihilism is that by Danto, 1965; more sophisticated versions include those by Connolly, 1988 and Strong, 1975). The loss of a transcendent realm seems to undermine our truth claims. Although initially

plausible, there is, I would argue, little support for such a reading in Nietzsche's work.

If we were to understand the crisis that Nietzsche sees unfolding, the abyss, the nothingness closing in upon man, in epistemological terms, then we might expect firstly, that Nietzsche's works would centre on questions of truth and knowledge and secondly, that he would be largely concerned to find a way to secure truth and knowledge against the threat of nihilism.

In fact, we find that neither of these projects is evidenced in Nietzsche's writing. It could be argued that Nietzsche's seeming lack of concern with epistemological questions has been one of the main reasons for his neglect and rejection by the philosophical community, especially in the English-speaking world. This is, for instance, the reasoning Russell uses:

"Nietzsche, though a professor, was a literary rather than an academic philosopher. He invented no new technical theories in ontology or epistemology" (1979 p 728).

This is not to deny, *contra* Russell, that Nietzsche has importantly suggestive things to say about truth and knowledge⁴. But these do not take up the greater part of his work, they can hardly be seen as the primary and central aspect of his philosophy. In turning, albeit very briefly, to what Nietzsche does say about truth and knowledge, we find the second reason for rejecting the epistemological reading of nihilism.

The epistemological position that Nietzsche outlines (though he never develops it into a full theory) is one of perspectivism and is intimately tied to his notion of interpretation. He gives a clear account of his position in *The Will to Power*:

"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.

"'Everything is subjective,' you say; but even this is interpretation. The 'subject' is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is. - Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is invention, hypothesis.

"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. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm." (WP 481)

While it is important to remember that *The Will to Power* is a selection⁵ from Nietzsche's notebooks and is therefore not to be seen as Nietzsche's final position on any topic (let alone the key to his thought), what he says in this passage does not conflict with what he says on the topic in his published works (as we shall see in the discussion of *Beyond Good and Evil* in chapter 3). What is important for our purposes here is that Nietzsche embraces the notions of perspectives and interpretations. There is no attempt to try and ground knowledge, to make it something more certain.

It might be argued that if Nietzsche embraces an epistemology of perspectives and interpretations then his position is self-

refuting, in the same way that all relativisms are self-refuting. Nietzsche offers his own interpretations, his own perspectives; and it might be argued that he would want these to be accorded the status of truths. Magnus (1983) and Schrift (1983 and 1990) have both argued that Nietzsche circumvents this charge through his always careful and explicit offering of his interpretations and perspectives as interpretations and perspectives. This is true in so far as it goes but it must also be borne in mind that Nietzsche never commits himself to an "anything goes" relativism. He is careful to maintain a notion of objectivity, though based not in a disinterested review of the facts but in a bringing to bear of as many perspectives as possible:

"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 will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' be." (GM 3.12)

And he also holds that some interpretations are better than others, though here again the criterion he uses is not an epistemological one, but an axiological one - interpretations are to be judged according to their "value for life". As Nietzsche puts it:

"The falseness of a judgement is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgement . . . The question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-breeding" (BGE 4).

Ultimately, then epistemology is grounded in axiology. It is the value of an interpretation, and not its truth, that is accorded most importance. This brings us on to the second reading of nihilism, that it signifies a crisis of value.

1.3 THE CRISIS OF VALUES

If truth plays a central role in the thought of most philosophers that role is taken in Nietzsche's work by concern for questions of value. Indeed, we might without exaggeration characterize Nietzsche as an axiological theorist.

"To be sure, Nietzsche's further reflections on other matters had a significant impact upon his thinking with respect to values and morality. The centrality and prominence of the latter throughout the whole course of his intellectual life, however, should be clear." (Schacht, 1985 p 341)

This is unusual itself in a tradition which has focused almost exclusively on epistemological questions; but Nietzsche does not merely make questions of value primary, he also probes values themselves, bringing them into question. And he attributes to philosophers a value-creating function. It is more plausible then to read nihilism as an axiological or existential crisis to be summed up by the statement "nothing has meaning/value".

Nihilism might be seen to be quite simply the crisis that arises when we recognize the contingency of our values; when we confront the fact that our conceptions of beauty, truth and goodness have no external and secure basis.

But if nihilism consisted solely in the acceptance of this contingency then it would become a fate, and exploring the fact of contingency could not help us overcome it. Nietzsche's ruthless vivisection of values could serve no purpose except to deepen the crisis, cruelly and unnecessarily (see Strong 1975).

Rather, I would argue, Nietzsche is concerned to show that the feeling that "nothing has meaning/value" is in some real sense illusory. Certainly our values have no transcendental basis but this does not mean they have no basis at all. Nietzsche shows

that the crisis of nihilism is itself the result of a nihilistic project founded in the Christian and Platonic world views which have shaped modernity. Both of these traditions have consistently devalued this actual world in favour of a transcendental world; body in favour of mind; passion and experience in favour of reason and contemplation. It is not values as such that nihilism exposes as meaningless but just one set of values; nihilism issues in crisis because we are unable to see that there are other possibilities of value - immanent, bodily, passionate, experiential. Thus Nietzsche's questioning is not intended sadistically but as a means to show new and unexplored possibilities. As Magnus says:

"When the highest values become devalued nihilism is a danger not because there are no other possible values, but because most of Western humanity knows no other values than those associated with a dualistic ascetic ideal." (1983 p 314)

This view that nihilism is a crisis not of valuelessness and meaninglessness as such, but of the collapse of one set of meanings is also taken by Schrift (1983). Schrift discusses nihilism using notes in *The Will to Power*. In the notes Nietzsche distinguishes between four types of nihilism. Schrift calls these "pessimistic" -

"when we have sought a 'meaning' in all events that is not there" (WP 12A);

"sceptical" - which signals the loss of a unity, an organisation, which was intended to provide value (WP 12A); "passive", which occurs with the loss of metaphysics (WP 12A); and, finally, "active", which is summed up in the following:

"Suppose we realize how the world may no longer be interpreted in terms of these three categories and that the world begins to become valueless for us after

this insight: then we have to ask about the sources of our faith in these three categories. Let us try if it is not possible to give up our faith in them. Once we have devaluated these three categories, the demonstration that they cannot be applied to the universe is no longer any reason for devaluating the universe." (WP 12B)

The first three of these Nietzsche labels "incomplete"; active nihilism, though, is "complete". It is the last type of nihilism which Nietzsche himself engages in:

"Main proposition. How *complete nihilism* is the necessary consequence of the ideals entertained hitherto.

Incomplete nihilism; its forms: we live in the midst of it.

Attempts to escape nihilism without revaluating our values so far: they produce the opposite, make the problem more acute." (WP 28)

The loss of metaphysics, the death of God, becomes a crisis in late modernity because in the modern world-view all meaning, all value, has been situated in the religious interpretation of the world. Part of the task of active nihilism, therefore, must be a critique of this world-view.

Nietzsche argues that it is religion and metaphysics which with their other-world view, their removal of meaning to another and higher realm set the stage for nihilism by robbing the lived world of meaning, of any possibility of value.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche powerfully describes all of culture as a flight from the basic truth of contingency (and its necessity). Art, science, philosophy and religion all seek to

create meaning in a meaningless world; to set between us and this unpalatable truth a created world in which we can live and thrive:

"It is an eternal phenomenon: the insatiable will always finds a way to detain its creatures in life and compel them to live on, by means of an illusion spread over things. One is chained by the Socratic love of knowledge and the delusion of being able thereby to heal the eternal wound of existence; another is ensnared by art's seductive veil of beauty fluttering before his eyes; still another by the metaphysical comfort that beneath the whirl of phenomena eternal life flows on indestructibly . . . All that we call culture is made up of these stimulants" (BT 18).

It is this cultural lie which Nietzsche so much admires in man and in the Ancient Greeks especially. And against this modern man can only seem weak and soft, a maggot made out of a lion (GM 1.11). However, if the original metaphysical impulse was, for Nietzsche, a worthy one, its final result in modern society is to be deplored. Though it was originally an act of ultimate defiance to create metaphysics, Nietzsche suggests that for modern man the comparable act would be to reject it to move back to the bodily world.

Our values freed from any metaphysical underpinnings are open to question and valuation themselves. It is Nietzsche's belief that axiology as he conceives it opens a realm of depth-questioning which has hitherto been ignored and made invisible. This is the project he speaks about as the revaluation of values which he sees as a revolution indeed. He is explicit about his axiological project in terms not only of ethics:

"we need a critique of moral values, the value of these values themselves must first be called in question" (GM preface section 6);

and art:

"a much older, a hundred times more demanding, but by no means colder eye which has not become a stranger to the task which this audacious book dared to tackle for the first time: to look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life" (ASC 2);

but also of truth:

"we finally came to a full stop before a still more basic question. We asked about the value of this will. Suppose we want truth: why not rather untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?" (BGE 1.1)

The critique of contemporary values, the values which shape the Platonic-Christian world-view is just one side of Nietzsche's project. Throughout the work he sees himself as engaged in a "revaluation of all values". If Schmitt is right in seeing Nietzsche's project as involving active nihilism he is wrong to see that as an end in itself. Nietzsche seeks a way to overcome nihilism. Having found the values of modernity to be wanting Nietzsche searches for other values, values which will enhance life.

Kaufmann, however, says Nietzsche never intended a revaluation in this sense:

The revaluation is thus the alleged discovery that our morality is, by its own standards, poisonously immoral: that Christian love is the mimicry of impotent hatred; that most unselfishness is but a particularly vicious form of selfishness; and that *ressentiment* is at the core of our morals.

(Kaufmann, 1974 p 113)

But if the revaluation of values is merely negative in character, then we return to the criticism that Nietzsche is merely being unnecessarily cruel. I would therefore side with Schacht who reads the revaluation of values as an attempt

"to work out a new theory of value which would at once provide an interpretation and decisive reassessment of existing moral and evaluative schemes, and also fill the normative void which their mere 'devaluation' under critical scrutiny would otherwise leave." (1985 p 343)

The reading of nihilism as a crisis of value usually supports some version of an aesthetic reading of Nietzsche. This is the conclusion Schacht, for instance, reaches. Speaking of the famous claim in *The Birth of Tragedy* that "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified" (BT 5), Schacht says:

"while this was but his first approach to the general issue of value, posed here only in the broadest terms, the view he expresses is one which he may have modified but did not abandon." (1985 p 344)

Megill too interprets Nietzsche as advocating an aesthetic response to nihilism - that we:

"become the artists of our own existence, untrammelled by natural constraints and limitations." (Megill, 1985 p 34)

On such a reading the solution to nihilism lies in the way that we live. We respond to the crisis not with argument and refutation but by creating of our own lives a work of art which others may use as an example:

"The role of the philosopher is to warn and bear witness and exemplify, but not to invent values or to produce them out of his consciousness." (Blackham, 1989 p 33)

Blackham attributes to Nietzsche a problem which must beset any attempt to read nihilism as solely a question of values, the attempt to overcome it as an aesthetic self-creation namely, that such an attempt to overcome nihilism must result in nihilism:

"One can look down into the bottom of an abyss refusing the possibility of throwing oneself over the edge, but one cannot explore the possibility by a tentative jump." (Blackham, 1989 p 41)

But the problem is incorrectly attributed, I shall argue. For while part of Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism is axiological, another part of it is social and political.

"Nietzsche is a social philosopher; the force of his critique of Platonism, Christianity ('Platonism for the people'), representation and truth is misplaced if it is considered only a theoretical, contemplative critique detachable from the way in which the values designated by those terms have informed life, the practices of peoples. Philosophy for Nietzsche is always and everywhere a worldly praxis, a work of valuation, and hence a work of critique and transformation." (Bernstein, 1991 p 194)

The crisis is not just one of value but of practice, of agency. The aesthetic solution is not enough and it is not the only solution that Nietzsche offers, as will be argued in later chapters.

1.4 THE CRISIS OF AGENCY

In investigating nihilism as a crisis of agency Warren (1985 and 1988) has added a new depth to our understanding of how this central concept functions in Nietzsche's work. According to Warren's reading there are two nihilistic crises and further a more latent nihilism that runs through western culture. The first crisis "original nihilism" was directly political, a response to a world in which the lower class in society was so dominated, exploited and disempowered that effective action was made impossible. With agency closed to them, their only means to change their situation was through a re-interpretation of their values and world-view (the history of this crisis is the focus of *The Genealogy of Morals* which is the subject of chapter four of this work). But this could not, of course, solve the problem of agency as such and as the Christian-Platonic re-interpretation collapses, the problem is once again exposed.

According to Warren, Nietzsche is concerned with nihilism as a "psychological symptom" (1985 p 421) of situations in which human agency is rendered impossible as a result of a lack of fit between interpretations and situations. For Nietzsche we interact with the world through feeling, thought and action. In nihilism the cognitive side of man is not aligned with the affective and acting sides (1985 p 421). In the situation of nihilism experience and interpretation do not, and cannot be made to, fit together (1985 p 422).

Nietzsche understands history in terms of three epochs - the pre-moral, the moral (including the present), and the extra-moral (BGE 32) - and the transition between these epochs is characterised by nihilism (Warren, 1985 pp 422-3). The nihilism characteristic of the first transition Warren, following Nietzsche's usage in *The Will to Power*, labels "original nihilism" and that of the present "European nihilism" (1985 p 423).

Original nihilism is the response of an oppressed class, the slaves, to a particular social and political situation of oppression and exploitation. Denial of the conditions of agency in this situation is direct and material - all power lies with the masters and the slaves do not have the material means to change their situation. Nietzsche argues that the slaves use the only means open to them, they develop an interpretation of the world that makes their lives bearable - the Platonic-Christian world view (GM 1). Christianity, of course, does not alleviate the suffering nor does it offer a political solution to it. Instead it offers an interpretative framework in which that suffering is made meaningful and justified:

"What were the advantages of the Christian moral hypothesis?

1. It granted man an absolute value, as opposed to his smallness and accidental occurrence in the flux of becoming and passing away.
2. It served the advocates of God insofar as it conceded to the world, in spite of suffering and evil, the character of perfection - including 'freedom': evil appeared full of meaning.
3. It posited that man had a *knowledge* of absolute values and thus *adequate knowledge* precisely regarding what is most important.
4. It prevented man from despising himself as man, from taking sides against life; from despairing of knowledge: it was a *means of preservation*.

In sum: morality was the great *antidote* against practical and theoretical *nihilism*." (WP 4)

This Christian world view though does not solve the original problem, it merely represses it (Warren, 1985 p 424). It does not offer a means to agency, but instead sanctifies inaction as "good" (GM 1.13).

Modern nihilism, on Warren's reading, arises out of the failure of the Christian-moral interpretation to explain our experiences. Two different processes lead to this crisis, first the Christian-moral world-view becomes increasingly incoherent and unbelievable as a result of the will to truth and rationality which it itself upheld (GM 3.27). Second, it becomes increasingly inadequate to deal with everyday experience, a world no longer characterized by slavery and suffering (Warren, 1985 p 428).

"Actually, we have no longer such need of an antidote to the *first* nihilism: life in Europe is no longer that uncertain, capricious, absurd." (WP 114)

Nihilism is therefore, on this reading, to be understood as a fundamentally socio-political problem with a socio-political solution.

1.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

I would argue that Warren's reading adds a crucial and hitherto neglected aspect to our understanding of Nietzsche on nihilism. It also offers a critical edge to our rejection of those who would see the transcendence of nihilism in aesthetic terms, or those, like Strong (1975) and Martin (1989), who take the view that nihilism can be transcended through an understanding of language. For new interpretations and new languages cannot in and of themselves solve the problem of agency.

This would also explain what might otherwise seem perplexing in Nietzsche - his whole-hearted acceptance of perspectivism, on the one hand, but resistance to the relativisation of values, on the other. For truth *per se* is not a necessary condition of action, but value is.

The problem with Warren's analysis is that it underplays the way in which nihilism is experienced at the level of values, that it

is here that the crisis is both felt and must be met. As Ansell-Pearson puts it:

"For Nietzsche, the problem [of modernity] is not just a social or political one which can be solved simply by refining and improving liberal-democratic institutions and practices. He sees Western civilisation caught in the grip of debilitating and demoralising nihilism in which our most fundamental conceptions of the world are no longer tenable and believable. Nihilism is thus a condition which affects the metaphysical and moral languages through which we fabricate an understanding of the world and on which we base our acting in the world." (1994 p 7)

In understanding nihilism and the attempt to overcome it in Nietzsche's work it is necessary, therefore, to understand it as a crisis of the most fundamental and far-reaching sort. A crisis with not only socio-political but also linguistic, conceptual and evaluative ramifications. It is a crisis which requires fundamental change, if it is to be overcome. This change will have both individual (aesthetic, self-creative) aspects and social and political ones and none can be ignored. The next chapter will focus on Nietzsche's consideration of self-creation as a means to overcoming nihilism, the following chapter the socio-political aspects of this overcoming.

NOTES

1. In reading modernity this way I am indebted to Love (1986).
2. Walker (1991) writes of Nietzsche's attempt to overcome *metaphysics*, but this does not, I think, capture the full sense of what Nietzsche is attempting in the way that *nihilism* does.
3. Williams (1978) offers a particularly good discussion of Nietzsche's use of masks as both a method of communicating his perspectivism, and an argumentative structure.

4. Some of the more important recent works on this aspect of Nietzsche's thought are Nola (1987), Siegfried (1989) and especially Clark (1990).
5. Nietzsche did conceive of writing a work called *The Will to Power* and even made notes towards it. The work that exists under that title however is merely a compilation of extracts from his notebooks edited by his sister, Elisabeth. The book, therefore, has no authorial legitimacy from Nietzsche; though his sister did try to pass it off as Nietzsche's final systematization of his work. Given Elisabeth's politics, and her incomprehension of Nietzsche's philosophy, it is as well to treat the book with some suspicion; however, as a collection of Nietzsche's notes it is the only one presently available in English.

CHAPTER TWO: OVERCOMING NIHILISM THROUGH SELF-CREATION

The vision of the future which Nietzsche offers in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* might be read as an attempt to overcome the nihilism of the present. He proffers this vision in terms of a trinity of concepts - the Superman, the will to power and the eternal recurrence. An interpretation of each of these will be tendered (2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 respectively) and it will be argued that together they add up to an aesthetic of redemption, a psychology of personal redemption through creative assimilation of the past (2.4). This aesthetic solution to the problem of nihilism will then be critically evaluated (2.5).

The first question that must be addressed when embarking on a reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is that of what type of book it is. Nietzsche himself regarded it most highly as a statement of his philosophy. It is not, however, a philosophical text if we take "philosophical" to imply sustained argument, a reasoned defence, or something similar, for the text is declamatory in style, and it deals in images rather than concepts. Nor is it a novel, or if it is it is merely a bad one, for though it details the development of its central character (Higgins 1988, Lampert 1986), it has a meagre plot and few characters of any depth.

It might be argued that the most apt rubric under which to situate it is that of religious text. Martin, for instance, argues that many aspects of Nietzsche's work situate him as a religious thinker - the sense of fallenness which dominates his philosophy, the sense of a crisis precipitating the end of history, the belief that what is most important to human life is meaning (1989 p 73). He suggests that Nietzsche's project might be seen as an attempt to establish a religion without a metaphysics (1989 p 75).

However, I think such a reading misses the crucial feature of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, namely that Nietzsche intends it, at least in part, as a parody of religion. Ansell-Pearson has argued that the character of Zarathustra is itself parodic of the prophet:

"He hesitates when he should be firm in his pronouncements; he renounces authority when people are prepared to fall down on their knees before him and unconditionally obey him." (Ansell-Pearson, 1994 p 103)

And he suggests that it is this element of parody, in which Zarathustra's identity and teaching are constantly called into question, which prevents the teachings of the text from becoming dogma (1991a p 166).

Higgins (1988) has argued that the character of Zarathustra is a parody not only of the prophet (Christ) but also of the philosopher (Socrates). She goes on to elucidate yet another aspect of the way the character functions - as a tragic hero:

"Although Zarathustra's objective from the beginning of the book is to communicate with others, we rarely see even a glimmer of success." (p 138)

And she argues that this failure¹ is crucial, because it means that there is no promise of something better, only the choice of an alternative:

"In the end, Nietzsche offers us a vision of life that we can take or leave. . . . he has not packaged his worldview to ensure that we will find it attractive."
(p 150 my italics)

It is this non-dogmatic aspect that gives us the leeway to treat *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as philosophy². This will not satisfy

the hard-line critic such as Zeitlin (1994) or Megill (1985) both of whom view the declamatory style of the book as Nietzsche's way of avoiding the philosophical task of explaining and justifying his ideas. However, if we take a broader view of philosophy as a problem-solving activity requiring imagination and the use of all sorts of methods then we can quite easily fit *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* into philosophical discourse; for it is concerned with solving the problem of nihilism.

Our expectation that Zarathustra will offer a solution to the problem of nihilism is set up in his first encounter with the old hermit. Having spent ten years alone in the mountains gaining wisdom Zarathustra returns to society. On the way he encounters the hermit who has forsaken society in order to love and serve God. Zarathustra expresses amazement (to himself) that the old man has not heard of God's death. The context of nihilism is thus established but the apocalyptic atmosphere surrounding the message of the madman in *The Gay Science* is absent; God's death is simply taken for granted. We anticipate therefore that Zarathustra will offer in his teachings a new world view.

I would argue that we should read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* not as a failed attempt to explain and justify a world view but as an attempt to solve the problem of nihilism. Towards this end Nietzsche uses diverse sources and methods - literary, autobiographical (Hollinrake 1982) and religious - to create something entirely new, something that "stands altogether alone" (EH 3.6.6). That Nietzsche offers his solution in an ultimately non-dogmatic way counts in its favour, for it opens an arena of debate which others more analytically inclined, more rigorously argumentative are invited to join.

In turning to a discussion of the three concepts at the heart of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* - the Superman, will to power and eternal recurrence - it is as well to bear in mind Ansell-Pearson's reminder:

"Despite some major studies by philosophers of the work in recent years, there still exists no consensus as to the meaning and significance of the principal teachings of the book." (1994 p 101)

There are those who go so far as to deny that these teachings have any worthwhile philosophical content. Solomon and Higgins for instance say of these three concepts that they "do not bear even slight scholarly scrutiny" (1988 p vii). It is hoped that what follows will demonstrate the opposite to be true.

2.1 THE SUPERMAN

It has been argued (Ansell-Pearson 1991a, Magnus 1983, Higgins 1988) that the Superman³ is a polysemous notion, irreducible to a single definite content. This may well be the case but it should not prevent us however from attempting to say something concrete about it, to offer some sort of interpretation.

Much of the current literature on the Superman is concerned with whether the Superman is Zarathustra himself (Lampert 1986) or merely one of Zarathustra's teachings (Ansell-Pearson 1991a). I would argue that this line of argumentation is misconceived - that the Superman plays both roles. In taking this line my position is close to that of Conway (1988).

According to Conway Zarathustra should be read as a teacher of virtue. He points out that the problem confronting any teacher of virtue is that he has to find a way to change not just people's behaviour but their character, a task that is next to impossible. The teacher of virtue must therefore maintain an ironic stance to his project; he cannot afford to take it too seriously since he is likely to fail. In the first two parts of this book, Conway argues, Zarathustra does take himself seriously as a teacher of virtue (that is as the teacher of the Superman) and meets with failure. In the second half of the book, though, Zarathustra finds a way to teach virtue ironically - through

exemplification. Zarathustra no longer teaches the Superman, instead he becomes it; and it no longer matters if others accept the ideal or even notice the teaching.

Where I differ from Conway is in believing that these two modes of teaching - pedagogical versus exemplificatory - are in conflict, or at least they offer two different ideals of the Superman, each of which has to be explored and evaluated.

The Superman is Zarathustra's first teaching. At the first town he comes to on his descent from the mountains he finds a crowd gathered in the market-place to watch a tight-rope walker and he attempts to teach them the Superman as a replacement for God and as the redeemer of western history and nihilism. At first the Superman seems to be an evolutionary ideal:

"I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"

"All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man?"

"What is the ape to men? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And just so shall man be to the Superman: a laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment." (Z prologue 3)

But then the tone of the teaching changes and the ideal becomes a redemptive one, an alternative to God, and a creation of human will:

"Behold, I teach you the Superman."

"The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The Superman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!

"I entreat you, my brothers, *remain true to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of superterrestrial hopes! They are poisoners, whether they know it or not.

"They are despisers of life, atrophying and self-poisoned men, of whom the earth is weary: so let them be gone!" (Z prologue 3)

As a replacement ideal to God, an alternate redeemer, the Superman finds its birth in the rejection of the valuations of the Platonic-Christian world-view, and in nihilism:

"In truth, man is a polluted river. One must be a sea, to receive a polluted river and not be defiled.

"Behold, I teach you the Superman: he is this sea, in him your great contempt can go under.

What is the greatest thing you can experience? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness grows loathsome to you, and your reason and your virtue also." (Z prologue 3)

Getting no response to his teaching Zarathustra continues with his road for the attainment of the ideal of the Superman (Z prologue 4), in a parody of the Beatitudes in which Christ's "blessed are" become Zarathustra's "I loves". Throughout the passage Zarathustra praises that which leads to the overcoming of man, to the Superman. This passage is crucial to our understanding of the teaching of the Superman and much neglected. For although it apparently teaches the Superman as a world-historical character, a future but distant possibility,

Zarathustra also hints at the Superman as a realizable possibility for the individual. He begins by comparing man to a bridge between animal and Superman, and implies that the Superman is something distant to which the present, and even man, must be sacrificed:

"I love those who do not first seek beyond the stars for reasons to go down and to be sacrifices: but who sacrifice themselves to the earth, that the earth may one day belong to the Superman.

"I love him who lives for knowledge and who wants knowledge that one day the Superman may live. And thus he wills his own downfall.

"I love him who works and invents that he may build a house for the Superman and prepare earth, animals, and plants for him: for thus he wills his own downfall."
(Z prologue 4)

But more than once in the following lines he allows that man can move across the bridge, become the Superman:

"I love him who keeps back no drop of spirit for himself, but wants to be the spirit of his virtue entirely: thus he steps as spirit over the bridge."
(Z prologue 4)

"I love him whose soul is deep even in its ability to be wounded, and whom even a little thing can destroy: thus he is glad to go over the bridge." (Z prologue 4)

This would imply that the sacrifice of man to the Superman is the act of becoming individually Supermen. That the perishing, downfall, down-going are not prior to but the same as the going-across, the becoming. Lampert argues that Zarathustra does not exhort the crowd, or even his followers to become Supermen (1986

p 20). Now while it is true that Zarathustra never once says to his audience "become the Superman", the above evidence shows that he offers them the possibility of so becoming.

The crowd however is uninterested in the Superman and mocks Zarathustra and his teaching. In a last vain attempt to get their attention he teaches the Ultimate Man, an amalgam of all that Nietzsche sees as worst in modern man. The Ultimate Man is the self-satisfied seeker after happiness and comfort, the man with no goals, no desires and no ambition; who looks only to the moment and its petty pleasures. He is the jeerer of the parable of the madman - the atheist who does not recognise the problem of nihilism.

"'We have discovered happiness,' say the Ultimate Men and blink." (Z prologue 5)

The key to any understanding of the Superman, I would argue, is how it answers the question: "what does the Superman replace? to what is it an alternative?" If that question is answered "God" then the Superman will be interpreted as something distant and not immediately achievable. If, however, the question is answered "the Ultimate Man" then the ideal is not a distant future possibility but merely a post-nihilist one. The problem is that the text seems to support both readings.

The pedagogical teachings themselves are as we have seen ambivalent on this issue. The exemplificatory teaching however points unambiguously to the second. Moreover, the second reading has the advantage of incorporating the first. In the previous chapter it was argued that the underlying cause of nihilism is the Platonic-Christian world-view with its removal of value to another, transcendent, realm. The Superman is associated with the body, the earth - that is with the opposing set of values. If we understand the Superman as a post-nihilist alternative to modernity, one which recognises the value of the this-worldly,

it can be read as an ideal which replaces God through a process of individual revaluation.

To support this argument I will turn to another lengthy discussion of the Superman which seems to support the opposition:

"God is a supposition; but I want your supposing to reach no further than your creating will.

"Could you create a god? - So be silent about all gods! But you could surely create the Superman.

"Perhaps not you yourselves, my brothers! But you could transform yourselves into forefathers and ancestors of the Superman: let this be your finest creating!" (Z 2.2)

Here again we see the Superman invoked in opposition to God, as a distant ideal to work towards rather than something each of us can aspire to become. However, the whole argument of the passage is brought into ironic relief by the fact that Nietzsche does regard gods to be human creations. Furthermore, the "argument" Zarathustra offers against the existence of God:

"[I]f there were gods, how could I endure not to be a god! Therefore there are no gods." (Z 2.2)

might be easily turned against the Superman so conceived. Just as what makes God a real possibility is the possibility of my being God, so what makes the Superman a real possibility is the possibility of my being the Superman.

The Superman, however, has to be understood together with the task of value-creation with which it is associated. And here too, the teachings equivocate between the world-historical and the individual. The crucial passage in this regard, because it seems to militate against anything but a world-historical

interpretation, is "Of the Thousand and One Goals" (1.15). Because I take this passage to be so important I will quote at length:

"Zarathustra has seen many lands and many peoples: thus he has discovered the good and evil of many peoples. Zarathustra has found no greater power on earth than good and evil.

"No people could live without evaluating; but if it wishes to maintain itself it must not evaluate as its neighbour evaluates.

. . .

"A table of values hangs over every people. Behold, it is the table of its overcomings; behold, it is the voice of its will to power.

"What it accounts hard it calls praiseworthy; what it accounts indispensable and hard it calls good; and that which relieves the greatest need, the rare, the hardest of all - it glorifies as holy.

"Whatever causes it to rule and conquer and glitter, to the dread and envy of its neighbour, that it accounts sublimest, the paramount, the evaluation and meaning of all things.

. . .

"Truly, men have given themselves all their good and evil. Truly, they did not take it, they did not find it, it did not descend to them as a voice from heaven.

"Man first implanted values into things to maintain himself - he created the meaning of things, a human

meaning! Therefore he calls himself: 'Man', that is: the evaluator.

"Evaluation is creation: hear it, you creative men! Valuating is itself the value and jewel of all valued things.

"Only through evaluation is there value: and without evaluation the nut of existence would be hollow. Hear it, you creative men!

"A change in values - that means a change in the creators of values. He who has to be a creator always has to destroy.

"Peoples were the creators at first; only later were individuals creators. Indeed, the individual himself is still the latest creation.

"Once the peoples hung a table of values over themselves. The love that wants to rule and the love that wants to obey created together such tables as these.

"Joy in the herd is older than joy in the Ego: and as long as the good conscience is called herd, only the bad conscience says: I.

"Truly, the cunning, loveless Ego, that seeks its advantage in the advantage of many - that is not the origin of the herd, but the herd's destruction.

. . . .

"Truly, the power of this praising and blaming is a monster. Tell me, who will subdue it for me,

brothers? Tell me, who will fasten fetters upon the thousand necks of this beast?

"Hitherto there have been a thousand goals, for there have been a thousand peoples. Only fetters are still lacking for these thousand necks, the one goal is still lacking.

"Yet tell me, my brothers: if a goal for humanity is still lacking, is there not still lacking - humanity itself." (Z 1.15)

Apart from the central role this passage accords to values and the act of evaluation, there are two features of this passage which require comment. The first is the claim that it is now individuals rather than peoples who are the creators of value, the second is the claim that what is required is a single goal for all people. The first of these would support the view that Nietzsche offers a post-nihilist vision, the latter would seem to support the opposing view of a distant and world-historical vision. These two claims are not however in conflict - what Nietzsche seems to be arguing for is a world-historical vision based in the valuations of a single individual. The question then is which individual - Zarathustra (as the Superman) or the Superman as a world-historical figure. The answer I believe is neither. Instead, I would argue, Nietzsche accords that paramount role to himself.

Nietzsche speaks throughout his work of the need for a revaluation of values and in *Ecce Homo* he speaks consistently of himself as a world-historical moment or figure. How are we to understand this megalomaniac aspect of Nietzsche's thought? We have already shown in the introduction to this chapter that in the character of Zarathustra Nietzsche sets himself up in opposition to both Socrates and Christ; these two individuals are together the source of the modern world-view. Strong says:

"Small wonder then that Nietzsche should have fought so fiercely - I am tempted to say valiantly - with both Socrates and Christ. They broke the moral bonds of their times and effectively forced a reorientation of future history in their own and perhaps idolatrous images. Nietzsche is fascinated with their achievement and, without doubt, wishes for similar success for himself." (1975 p 111)

If we add Nietzsche to the equation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* instead of merely subsuming him into the main character we not only gain a richer conception of the text but we are able to separate out Zarathustra's self-creative overcoming from Nietzsche's broader project. Zarathustra represents not all of Nietzsche's solution to the problem of nihilism but one aspect of it and although there are hints of a political solution in Zarathustra, these are only worked out in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche offers a different manifestation of the Superman - solitary (Zarathustra is alone at the end of both part three, the original ending and part four) and aesthetic - a quiet creator of values. He is the embodiment of the claim that:

"'. . . The greatest events - they are not our noisiest but our stillest hours." (Z 2.18)

What then are the characteristics of the Superman that Zarathustra becomes?

According to Strong they are play (see also Schrift 1983), laughter and dance. In his discussion of these three characteristics he points out that the German "*spielen*" denotes not only games but also gambling. Both of these, he argues, have rules, or necessities but these are not experienced as constraints but rather as conditions for playing; in both it is the playing itself rather than the goal that matters; and

neither has a moral content - there is no room for blame, one simply accepts the outcome, nor does intention and responsibility count (1975 pp 278-81). Laughter, he argues, opposes reverence and the desire for permanence; it transforms suffering into joy; and it overcomes the past by forgetting it (1975 pp 281-2). Dance, though a highly complex activity which has to be learned becomes, when we have mastered it, an instinctual and natural, not to mention joyful, expression of freedom and self (1975 pp 282-3). We might add that all of these are centred on the body. He concludes:

"These concepts - playing, laughing, dancing - are highly metaphorical and condensed in resonance. It must be understood, though, that while Nietzsche intends them as metaphors . . . he also intends them as descriptive of a particular orientation toward the world." (1975 p 283)

Of these three laughter and dancing are the ones that Zarathustra teaches. To the Higher Men whom he has gathered around him in part four he says:

"'You Higher Men, the worst about you is: none of you has learned to dance as a man ought to dance - to dance beyond yourselves! What does it matter that you are failures!

'How much is still possible! so learn to laugh beyond yourselves! Lift up your hearts, you fine dancers, high! higher! and do not forget to laugh well!

'This laugher's crown, this rose-wreath crown: to you, my brothers, do I throw this crown! I have canonized laughter; you Higher Men, learn - to laugh!'" (Z 4.13.20)

Schacht offers rather a fuller picture of the Superman and argues that his qualities are:

"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 befriend and to respect and disdain and deal justly with others as they 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 love and esteem, and above all to create" (1985 p 340).

And he goes on to suggest that:

"If there is any attainable form of human life that requires no independent justification to be found worthy of affirmation, and that may be considered to 'redeem' mankind more generally as well, Nietzsche makes a strong case for taking it to be something of this sort." (1985 p 340)

The key to the Superman is above all creation. The creation of self, the creation of values:

"With this notion he advocates neither an ahistorical return to the wild, prowling man of the blond beast, nor an equally ahistorical and simplistic side-stepping of man to some idéal model of man. Rather, the emphasis is on . . . a creative, playful labour of self-overcoming, by which man is able to transfigure all that has made him what he is so far, in order to attain a standpoint beyond good and evil and become what he is." (Ansell-Pearson, 1991a p 160)

If we accept such a reading of the Superman then we no longer feel with MacIntyre that:

"The *Übermensch* . . . belong[s] in the pages of a philosophical bestiary rather than in serious discussion." (MacIntyre, 1985 p 22)

We may, however, feel that the Superman is a vague ideal, which can be accorded whatever characteristics we choose. Higgins agrees and argues that this vagueness is intentional:

"The overman is a kind of place-holder for the aim of human aspiration toward greatness. The particular form of such aspiration varies from individual life to individual life. The overman's lack of defining characteristics makes it possible for this image to accommodate the full range of great striving as it appears in all individual cases." (1988 p 143)

To reach a fuller conception of the Superman, though, it is necessary to understand its companion conceptions, the will to power and the eternal recurrence. Only then are we in a position to evaluate it.

2.2 THE WILL TO POWER

Thus far we have built up an interpretation of the Superman, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* at least, as the creative individual. The means to creation is a process of self-overcoming and its driving force is the will to power.

Of the three teachings of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* the will to power is the most important if for no other reason than it is the one concept he continues to endorse explicitly in his later works, whereas after *Zarathustra* we do not hear of the Superman and eternal recurrence again. Solomon is at best two-thirds right when he says:

"The topics most often celebrated - the *Übermensch*, the will to power, eternal recurrence - in fact play an almost negligible role in the published philosophical works." (1988 p 8)

The will to power as it is conceptualised in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is intimately connected to the Superman understood both as a pedagogical teaching and as an exemplification. It is also identified with Zarathustra himself, lending credence to the interpretation that Zarathustra is one manifestation of the Superman.

The will to power is gradually introduced in the first part, which centres on the topic of virtue. This part culminates in Zarathustra's discovery of the will to power as his own virtue and the concept moves to centre stage in the second part (to be somewhat displaced in the third by the doctrine of the eternal recurrence).

Since the will to power is connected to the teachings on virtue and the process of self-creation and the creation of value through self-overcoming we will have to look at the crucial passages in section one which lead up to the climax. The first teaching of part one (that is, after the prologue) is "Of the Three Metamorphoses".

"Of the Three Metamorphoses" is a parable of spiritual development in which the spirit begins as a burden-seeking camel, becomes first a freedom-loving lion, which battles with and ultimately destroys the dragon morality, and then finally becomes a child, innocent and creative.

Ansell-Pearson characterises the various stages as follows: the camel "is the civilizing, humanizing process represented by the morality of custom"; the lion is "the supra-ethical sovereign individual"; the child is "the conscious innocence of becoming" (Ansell-Pearson, 1991a p 162). But Lampert (1986) has pointed

out that, in fact, only two metamorphoses are recorded in this parable. He surmises therefore that the first metamorphosis must be prior to this - that the spirit must first of all become a camel. This interpretation is borne out by the opening sentence:

"I name you three metamorphoses of the spirit: how the spirit shall become a camel, and the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child." (Z 1.1)

Not everyone is a burden-seeking camel, and only those that are, that pass an initial test of character, have the potential to become anything else, to become disciples of Zarathustra, or we might add (though Lampert would dispute it) to become the Superman.

Part one is dedicated to a critique of traditional conceptions of virtue and religion (and also of the state which he sees as being the modern, post-Christian incarnation of religion). These are portrayed as negative in impulse, based in denial of the body and the world, with no positive affirmative content. They are, as was argued in chapter one, contributors to and causes of contemporary nihilism.

Interspersed with this critique is a more positive conception of virtue. In "Of Joys and Passions" Zarathustra speaks of virtue as being based in the character of the individual:

"My brother, if you have a virtue and it is your own virtue, you have it in common with no one.

"To be sure, you want to call it by a name and caress it; you want to pull its ears and amuse yourself with it.

"And behold! Now you have its name in common with people and have become of the people and the herd with your virtue!" Z I.5 (p 63)

And he points to the cultivation of virtue out of passion, rather than as a denial of it:

"Once you had passions and called them evil. But now you have only your virtues: they grew from out your passions.

"You laid your highest aim in the heart of these passions: then they became your virtues and joys." (Z 1.5)

He elucidates a conception of the individual as a site of war and competition between passions rather than the harmonious unity which traditional conceptions of virtue envisage:

"Behold how each of your virtues desires the highest place: it wants your entire spirit, that your spirit may be *its* herald, it wants your entire strength in anger, hate, and love.

"Every virtue is jealous of the others, and jealousy is a terrible thing. Even virtues can be destroyed through jealousy." (Z 1.5)

But for Zarathustra, virtue is not an end in itself:

"Man is something that must be overcome: and for that reason you must love your virtues - for you will perish by them." (Z 1.5)

Part one reaches its climax in the final teaching "Of the Bestowing Virtue", in which Zarathustra names his own ruling virtue as the will to power (Ansell-Pearson 1991a; Lampert 1986). For Nietzsche the highest virtue is the "gift-giving" virtue, "in it one acquires things in order to act and give, and one acts and gives from a sense of superabundance." (Hunt, 1991 p 93) This is a benevolence of egoism rather than altruism and is, according

to Hunt (1991) Nietzsche's replacement for the role usually played in ethical theories by justice. Justice demands that it is a characteristic of the recipient which places a necessity on the giver to give (1991 p 93). The gift-giving virtue refers only to the character of the giver and involves no necessity (1991 p 94). Hunt argues that this sits better with some of our ethical experience, such as ordinary generosity, than the deontological and utilitarian perspectives (1991 p 94); but he expresses qualms about it if it is to be seen as the ruling virtue - for it leaves no place for rights, those who do not kill or murder me are not respecting my rights, but giving me a gift; there is no space left for the idea that human beings have status as ends not means (1991 p 95). Nietzsche allows for justice only between equals, for the higher to be benevolent to the lower is not justice but a gift (1991 p 97).

"Truly, it is a new good and evil! Truly, a new roaring in the depths and the voice of a new fountain!

"It is power, this new virtue; it is a ruling idea, and around it a subtle soul: a golden sun, and around it the serpent of knowledge." (Z 1.22.1)

In part two the will to power is taught as the basis of life, a continual process of movement in which any *stasis* is resisted and in which values, and virtues, are accepted only to be overcome (Z 2.12).

I will take as the starting point of my discussion of the will to power, Kaufmann's reading of it. Kaufmann takes the will to power to be Nietzsche's most important concept:

"Properly understood, Nietzsche's conception of power may represent one of the few great philosophic ideas of all time." (1974 p xvi)

He offers a purely psychological reading of the will to power which he ties to sublimation and rationality. He reads Nietzsche's basic thesis to be that all action is motivated by the will to power, understood as the will to overcome oneself. And because it is the common factor in all human action, the will to power also functions as a refutation of relativism.

According to this interpretation the will to power is a "dialectical monism" which manifests itself as both impulse and reason. Through a historical progression the greater will to power (reason) sublimates the lesser (impulse), creating out of the chaos of instinct an order, a style.

"In this life, Nietzsche thinks, some artists and philosophers come closest to this state of being, insofar as they may be able to give style to their characters, to organize the chaos of their passions, and to create a world of beauty here and now."
(Kaufmann, 1974 p 255)

Danto takes a similar view-point:

"[H]e held the basically sane if perhaps dull view that the passions and drives of men be disciplined and guided by reason, that our lives be Apollinian and Dionysiac at once, in that balance of force and form which, after all, had been recommended from the beginning of moral philosophy. Language aside, then, Nietzsche hardly deviated from the tradition which goes back at least to Socrates." (Danto, 1965 p 149)

What both Kaufmann's and Danto's interpretations tend to overlook is the way in which Nietzsche sees the self as a multiplicity rather than a unity⁵. I would therefore argue that Detwiler gives a more plausible reading:

"Self-overcoming is conceivable as the overcoming of one or more passions by a more dominant one, or perhaps as a dominant passions's increase in power and ascent to a higher level . . . In either case, self-overcoming would appear on the level of consciousness as the reason that reflects one organization of the passions overcoming the reason that reflects some earlier organization (or perhaps overcoming the unreason that reflects some earlier lack of organization). Reason is, in other words, a function of perspective, with every new organization of the passions engendering new perspectives and fresh interpretations of experience." (1990 p 159)

The ordering of psychic chaos on Detwiler's reading is a matter not of "rational self-scrutiny" but of a "subliminal form of creative activity that entails forgetting" (1990 p 162). It is a perpetual and cyclical process involving both creation and destruction; the process of self-overcoming is continuous and its possibilities endless.

As Hunt reads it, according to Zarathustra 1.5 (his most extended discussion of the topic) virtues are transformed passions, passions made active in the pursuit of a (high) goal (1991 pp 70-1). This conception of virtue is closely tied to his conception of will to power, which has two strands - the will to power as manipulation and control, and the will to power as spontaneous activity (1991 p 72). Hunt reads these as part of the same conception - will to power as interpretation (1991 p 73-4) and gives an example of how this works with regard to virtue:

"When virtue is created, the subject-matter which acquires a new meaning is the passion - that of the fanatic or the vengeful person, for example. The agency which projects and imposes the purpose is apparently some part of the individual human being that is able to envision ideals and make them

effective, thus imposing on the passion the character of a function. This constitutes its "overcoming" the passion. What perishes in the process is, in the first instance, the passion with which it began. By being directed toward one's highest goal, the passion of the fanatic, for instance, ceases to have the meaning it formerly had and becomes something quite different. What it was has been destroyed and supplanted by something else. . . . But since our passions are inextricable parts of our personal identity, we ourselves perish in the formation of our virtues; something that was essential to our old selves is annihilated in favour of something new. In changing our character we view ourselves as plastic material which is to be given up to the creation of something new" (Hunt, 1991 p 74).

Nietzsche's theory of virtue differs from those of others in not presupposing or even advocating the unity of virtues, but presuming an enmity between them (1991 p 81). Hunt thinks this may be because the virtues aim at competing goals and are in competition for resources (1991 p 82) and further each goal aims to be the highest, the most consuming (1991 pp 83-4).

But *contra* Kaufmann, the will to power is not just a matter of imposing order on chaos, creating a unified character, that is it does not only function as a psychological thesis in Nietzsche's work. It also functions as both a source of values (Blackham 1989) and a standard for their evaluation (Z 1.15).

One of the critics who views the will to power as an evaluative standard is Stern. He reads it as the standard of moral judgement in a "God-less Theology", as a moral doctrine which emphasises the enhancement of the self as the only end (1978 p 85). This "morality of strenuousness" judges a man's value according to

"his readiness to undertake whatever are to him the most strenuous and least comforting moral and existential tasks, regardless of their accepted moral value." (1978 p 89).

This interpretation, too, does not accord with Nietzsche's writings; for, the "morality of strenuousness" is the morality of the camel not of the child.

A rather better discussion of the evaluative aspect of the will to power is Schacht's (1985). He argues that it solves Nietzsche's dilemma of wanting to evaluate life and forms of life while rejecting any external standard. We can evaluate life in terms of the will to power because will to power is its fundamental character. Using the will to power Nietzsche is able to proffer critiques of religious values, moral values (especially selflessness and pity), psychological values (pleasure, pain, happiness, power), art, truth and even human beings themselves. And in each case the usual valuation is stood on its head. The will to power as a standard of evaluation is crucial to the overcoming of nihilism in its axiological or existential moment and as a standard of evaluation is both naturalistic and aesthetic.

"Nietzsche's naturalistic construal of the fundamental nature of value thus turns out to have a strongly 'artistic' cast because the 'will to power' in terms of which he understands life and the world - and thus also value as they determine it - is a fundamentally artistic affair." (Schacht, 1985 p 402)

For what is natural is self-overcoming, self-creation and this is tied to the enhancement of life (Schacht, 1985 p 402).

A further crucial element of the will to power, especially given our reading of nihilism as a crisis of agency, is its links to

this problem not just of interpreting and evaluating of creating a self, but of creating a self that can act.

Unsurprisingly it is Warren who investigates this link. He argues that:

"Will to power, then, consists in three possibility conditions of willing - self-reflective motives, experience, and interpretation. Willing permits the self-interpretation of agency. And when one gains such a self-interpretation, then one's world attains value. On the basis of these equations Nietzsche understands power, or 'will', to be the 'natural' ground of value . . . and hence the only ground upon which nihilism might be diagnosed and conquered."
(1985 p 434)

In "Of Redemption" (Z 2.20) Zarathustra locates the source of suffering and the inability to move forward, create values, overcome oneself, in people's relation to the past. People see themselves as prisoners of an unchangeable past and continually look backwards. In this backward-looking mode the will takes the form of "the spirit of revenge" which expresses itself in a search for punishment and quietism. Zarathustra seeks redemption in a reclamation of, and reconciliation with, the past through an act of creative will which liberates us from the past by willing backwards - "'But I willed it thus!'" (Z 2.20) - and thereby frees us to look forwards, to will the future.

Strong (1975) argues that the will to power might through genealogy be able to produce a past which will not result in nihilism (this would be analogous to psychoanalysis) but there is no necessity that the will to power will deal with the past in a satisfactory way (1975 p 235). This is why we shall see in the next section Nietzsche needs the further notion of the eternal recurrence, which is the key to the creative backward willing.

2.3 THE ETERNAL RECURRENCE

The eternal recurrence, it will be argued, far from being an odd-ball notion, is the crux of the vision of the aesthetic self-creative overcoming of nihilism. If the Superman is the creative individual and the will to power both the source and standard of his values, it is the eternal recurrence which explains how the Superman is able to transcend the past and create.

The doctrine of eternal recurrence is introduced in "Of the Vision and the Riddle" (Z 3.2) which is addressed to the sailors on the boat on which Zarathustra leaves the Blissful Islands. The vision is "the vision of the most solitary man" (Z 3.2.1) and Zarathustra tells it in the form of a story. He says that while out walking one twilight up a mountain path, he felt upon him, "half dwarf, half mole", the Spirit of Gravity all the while mocking him and then falling silent. Finally, Zarathustra is driven to exclaiming: "'Dwarf! You! Or I!'" (Z 3.2.1). The dwarf jumps from his shoulder and squats in front of him - "But a gateway stood just where we had halted." (Z 3.2.1) Zarathustra speaks to the dwarf and in so doing outlines his theory of the eternal recurrence:

"Behold this gateway, dwarf! . . . it has two aspects. Two paths come together here: no one has ever reached their end.

"This long lane behind us: it goes on for an eternity. And that long lane ahead of us - that is another eternity.

"They are in opposition to one another, these paths; they abut on one another: and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is written above it: "Moment".

"'But if one were to follow them further and ever further and further: do you think, dwarf, that these paths would be in eternal opposition?'

"'Everything straight lies,' murmured the dwarf disdainfully. 'all truth is crooked, time itself is a circle.'

"'Spirit of Gravity!' I said angrily, 'do not treat this too lightly! Or I shall leave you squatting where you are, Lamefoot - and I have carried you *high*!

"'Behold this moment!' I went on. 'From this gateway Moment a long, eternal lane runs *back*: an eternity lies behind us.

"'Must not all things that can run have already run along this lane? Must not all things that can happen have already happened, been done, run past?

"'And if all things have been here before: what do you think of this moment, dwarf? Must not this gateway, too, have been here - before?

"'And are not all things bound fast together in such a way that this moment draws after it all future things? *Therefore* - draws itself too?

"'For all things that can run *must* also run once again forward along this long lane.

"'And this slow spider that creeps along in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you at this gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things - must we not all have been here before?

" - and must we not return and run down that other lane out before us, down that long, terrible lane - must we not return eternally?" (Z 3.2.2)

Zarathustra says he heard a dog howling and the vision was gone, the dog was beside a young shepherd convulsing on the ground, a black snake hanging out of his mouth. Zarathustra tries to tug the snake from his mouth but cannot move it and calls to the shepherd to bite the snake's head off. He does so and jumps up, but no longer a man "surrounded with light, laughing!" (Z 3.2.2 p 180)

The riddle Zarathustra asks the men to solve is:

"Who is the shepherd into whose mouth the snake thus crawled? Who is the man into whose throat all that is heaviest, blackest will thus crawl?" (Z 3.2.2)

The answer to this question which comes much later after Zarathustra has returned home, is that the shepherd is Zarathustra himself.

Thus far Zarathustra has only taught self-overcoming but in "The Convalescent" (3.13) he experiences it. Zarathustra is struck by his most abysmal thought - disgust at man. He falls ill and remains ill for a week while his animals tend him. When he recovers he tells what he has experienced - that he was attacked by the black snake which crept into his throat and he had to bite its head off to save himself. He has been struck by the realization with which he has then had to come to terms that "the little man" whom he preaches against will also recur eternally. His animals recognize him as the teacher of the eternal recurrence, that that is his destiny.

One way in which the eternal recurrence has been read, and one which Nietzsche toys with in his notebooks, is that the eternal

recurrence is a cosmological thesis - an actual doctrine about the world.

Zeitlin, for instance, says

"if one carefully examines the several contexts in which Nietzsche either describes or alludes to the 'recurrence,' it seems indisputable that he believed literally that every moment is repeated eternally and, therefore, that every moment is an eternity." (1994 p 29)

and

"the corollary of the 'recurrence' is the lack of a principle of direction, *chaos*." (1994 p 29)

Heller, too, offers this sort of reading, arguing that for Nietzsche the eternal recurrence is to be read as

"the world's only chance to become wholly articulate. For articulation presupposes a measure of duration for what is to be articulated, and the Eternal Recurrence, Nietzsche wrote, is the closest approximation to Being of a world that otherwise knows only what is transitory." (1988 p 184)

But Heller points out the mistake behind this reasoning:

"The endless repetition of a senseless life is assumed to yield an immensity of spiritual significance, as if one could arrive at an overwhelmingly positive sum by fanatically multiplying zero." (1988 p 185)

The cosmological interpretation of the eternal recurrence does not accord, though, with the way it functions in the text of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Moreover if the eternal recurrence is, to

function as the key to creativity, to becoming the Superman, to an attitude of joy, dance and laughter it is impossible to see how taken literally it could do so. Such a literal understanding of eternal recurrence must surely work to worsen nihilism rather than offering a way to overcome it⁶.

This for instance is the conclusion that Macquarrie reaches:

"[T]he roots of Nietzsche's doctrine are essentially existentialist. The symbol of the eternal return may be understood as the expression of the finitude of existence. God is dead, and man has taken over; but in spite of the promise of the Superman, there can be no escape from the endless reshufflings of the finite. . . . If freedom, autonomy, and hope appear in Nietzsche's understanding of history, they are finally overcome by tragedy and *amor fati*." (1973 p 228)

Kundera in a similar way draws from this "mad myth" (1985 p 3) an existential lesson that in this world without eternal recurrence everything is so ephemeral that moral judgement is made impossible; the non-recurrence is itself a mitigating factor, "everything is pardoned in advance" (1985 p 4); in this consists the "unbearable lightness of being". For without another life choice is impossible, as we have no basis for comparison.

Clark, on the other hand, argues that the fact of eternal recurrence would function to exclude moral judgement:

"[A]ffirming eternal recurrence seems to require the overcoming of moral condemnation . . . we do not have to affirm Hitler unconditionally, or for his own sake. On the other hand, Nietzsche's ideal surely requires us to affirm him, and much else we find abhorrent, in some important sense, and I think that sense is one that excludes moral condemnation." (1990 p 285)

This offers an interesting contrast with another influential reading of the eternal recurrence: that it functions as a moral imperative, a counter-part to Kant. The main proponent of this thesis is Gilles Deleuze (1983)¹ - though Simmel offers a similar reading. Whereas the cosmological reading of the eternal recurrence has some textual support, albeit in *The Will to Power*, this moralised reading of it has none.

According to Deleuze's reading the eternal recurrence can be restated in the form of a categorical imperative "do only that which you could will to do eternally" and as a categorical it also acts as a filter - only active forces can return.

Ansell-Pearson looks at Deleuze's reading of the eternal return as a counterpoint to the categorical imperative. He focuses on two particular difficulties with this reading. Firstly, it makes the eternal return too reflective:

"How can the thought of eternal return not make us reflect deeply on life in a way which would prevent us from acting purely spontaneously?" (1994 p 114)

Secondly, Deleuze argues that the eternal return acts as a filter through which only active forces return. Here Ansell-Pearson points to the fact that active forces need reactive forces and are in any case likely to generate them. It also ignores Zarathustra's recognition that the small men will return (1994 p 115).

The crucial problem with the cosmological and moral readings of the eternal recurrence though is that they ignore the way in which the concept functions in the text of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. At the end of part two the key to self-creation is shown to be backward willing - and in part three it is shown that it is the eternal recurrence that makes backward willing possible. The eternal recurrence is thus the crucial notion in the aesthetic solution to the problem of nihilism. It is through

the experience of the eternal recurrence that Zarathustra finally becomes what he is - one manifestation of the Superman. What seems to be the most important effect of the eternal recurrence is the attitude towards life that it invokes, an attitude of *amor fati* which further allows for a spontaneous and innocent creation of self and values. I would argue therefore that the primary import of the eternal recurrence is psychological.

Nehamas, though he says we cannot rule out the cosmological interpretation, emphasizes the psychological:

"The eternal recurrence is not a theory of the world but a view of the self." (1985 p 150)

He offers three reconstructions of the thesis of the eternal recurrence:

"My life *will* recur in exactly identical fashion. . .
. My life *may* recur in exactly identical fashion. . .
. If my life were to recur, then it could recur only in identical fashion." (1985 p 153)

It is the third which Nehamas believes comes closest to Nietzsche's intentions. He ties this to Nietzsche's belief that "A thing is the sum of its effects", that one's being who one is depends on all one's features, that none is accidental. And the eternal recurrence challenges us to affirm ourselves totally; for to want any feature of our lives to be different is to want to be an altogether different person.

Nehamas highlights two difficulties with Nietzsche's thesis thus interpreted, both of which result, he says, from Nietzsche's modelling his ideal person on the ideal literary character. First, it is not at all self-evident, or perhaps even plausible, that a person cannot change certain features and remain the same person; though it is logically necessary that a character is just the sum of the statements about it and to change any one is

to change the character, this logical necessity may not carry over to people. Second, it ignores the moral dimension of personhood; the ideal fully justified character may be a complete blackguard but a fully justified person could not.

While I find Nehamas' interpretation illuminating and his criticisms cogent, he does I believe miss a crucial aspect of the doctrine - the problem is how to overcome the past and to this extent it does not matter if in fact it is a logical necessity that all features of my past have to be present to make me who I am. Rather the point is that I have a history made up of contingent facts, some of those facts are likely to be such that I am caught up in a relation of resentment and revenge towards them, and it is this relation that the eternal recurrence is intended to transcend.

"The linear character of time (and by implication our inability to alter the meanest aspects of our own past lives) is the basis of our resentment." (Martin, 1989 p 130)

Nietzsche's suggestion seems to be that the experience of eternal recurrence engenders an attitude of *amor fati* towards them. I cannot change those facts but I can accept them and accept them in a strong way which allows me to see these facts not as things that happened to me but things which I willed, and which I therefore no longer experience as a problem. It is as though through the experience of eternal recurrence I become the architect of my past rather than its victim.

The actual mechanisms of this are never explained and there is something slightly alchemical to it, as Bernstein says:

"[T]he will cannot will backward any more genuinely with the aid of recurrence than without it. The past cannot be willed but only accepted, detested, or forgotten, and there is perhaps little to be gained by

dignifying one's helplessness by an illusion of power indistinguishable from mere submission." (1987 p 64)

What is clear though is that Nietzsche does intend the eternal recurrence to perform this function of appropriating the past; an aspect which is missed by many commentators, e.g. Schacht (1985), who read the doctrine as just an affirmation of life and the world.

In reading the eternal recurrence as the key to backward willing I am following Ansell-Pearson. He argues that in the experience of eternal recurrence we experience an existential conception of time:

"In undergoing the experience of eternal return we experience for the first time the passing away and infinite movement of time in an existential manner. We no longer simply experience time in terms of a straightforward seriality of past, present, and future, but experience the dimensions of time as fundamentally interconnected, and in terms of the dramatic happening of the 'moment'. In willing the eternal return of the moment we are willing the law of life itself and recognising that life is the unity of opposites, of pleasure and pain, of joy and suffering, of good and evil." (Ansell-Pearson, 1994 p 111)

He argues that the doctrine teaches us to embrace the past because it has made us what we are.

"The test of return teaches a new will by teaching the individual to will creatively the existence which hitherto it has led only blindly and unknowingly." (Ansell-Pearson, 1994 p 111)

The eternal recurrence, therefore teaches the affirmation of life rather than some sort of redemption from it (1994 p 112). The

choice is given to accept or deny responsibility for the past, for what we are; and so while the past remains unchanged our attitude towards it is altered (1994 p 112).

"The task of becoming what one is, is far from being a superhuman task (it only appears so to the slothful self or to the individual who wishes everyone to be the same as in a slave morality), for we are not being invited to assume the role of God or a supreme judge who has a total view on the world and their existence in it. The question is whether we are able to view our life, *including* its accidents, mistakes, blunders, and so on, as a fate, thus becoming what we are, and cultivating a will to self-responsibility." (Ansell-Pearson, 1991a p 197)⁷

The attitude that the experience of eternal recurrence, and a successful appropriation of the past, engenders is one of affirmation. But this should not be confused with blind acceptance.

"*Amor fati* is not fatalism. The fatalist believes himself to be as a leaf in the wind: the forces of nature, of history, of chance, are simply too great to be affected or combatted. Resignation yields rest and comfort. *Amor fati* induces struggle with these forces. Fate is not merely what happens to one, but what happens as a result of one's active involvement with life. The love of fate is the love of this involvement and of its outcome. One cherishes the opportunity to do battle with *fortuna*." (Thiele, 1990 p 199)

However, it is as well to bear in mind Warren's (1988) caution that the effect of the thought of the eternal return may be empowerment or the furtherance of nihilism. For example in a situation like that of original nihilism, which is a direct

result of political oppression in which agency is denied the real possibility of expression, no amount of affirmation of historicity is going to make action possible.

2.4 THE AESTHETIC ALTERNATIVE TO NIHILISM

The notions of the Superman, the will to power and eternal recurrence when taken together offer a picture of individual redemption, an aesthetic overcoming of nihilism through self-creation.

"Not only does Nietzsche say that art makes life bearable and worthwhile but that human life itself is a work of art, a human creative act of constructing and deconstructing in an endless play of the imagination. There is no original point to begin with nor a final point to arrive at. There is only the process of an ongoing discourse." (Degenaar, 1985 pp 46-7)

The Superman as exemplified by Zarathustra is an individual characterized by a joyful embracing of the this-worldly, an individual actively engaged in the process of self-creation. This process is potentially endless, a continual self-overcoming, that is to say a process driven by the will to power freed from any vengeful relation to the past, through the experience of the eternal recurrence.

Understood thus we can see that the various aspects of this vision are complementary rather than contradictory. Commentators who have read the eternal recurrence as a literal doctrine of the return of the past have tended to see it as incompatible with the more linear notions of the Superman and the will to power. But if we read the eternal recurrence in a more hypothetical way then this is no longer a problem.

The aesthetic ideal offered in the tale of Zarathustra's development is clearly intended as an opposing ideal to that of the Platonic-Christian world view. If the latter has given rise to contemporary nihilism, then it seems to be Nietzsche's contention that an opposite sort of ideal would be needed to overcome that nihilism.

In "Of Old and New Law-Tables" (3.12) we are offered a summary of these two opposing ideals. The crucial aspects of the Platonic-Christian world view are the concern with man as a social being, a man characterised by pity and benevolence. The Platonic-Christian world-view, or the moral view of the world, emphasises the need to repress or suppress passion, to bring it under the moderating influence of reason. And further holds out the promise that if this is successfully done then a reward will be forthcoming in the form of another life, not bodily but spiritual, an eternal life which will redeem this present one.

The ideal of Zarathustra is of an embracing of the this-worldly with its flux and change, a recognition of the role of the bodily, the passions, in the development of the self. The will to power is thus seen as an opposition to repression, rather it is (as Kaufmann first saw) a form of sublimation. The eternal recurrence teaches the individual redemption of the past in this life rather than an other-worldly redemption of it.

All three concepts - the Superman, the will to power and the eternal recurrence - function as both parodies and critiques of the religious-moral world view. Together they teach that life's meaning and value must be sought inside rather than outside of it (Gemes 1992).

Conway characterises Nietzsche's war against nihilism as taking the form of "local rebellions" on the part of individuals (1989 p 219) and says:

"Nietzsche's entire corpus constitutes a local rebellion against nihilism and often succeeds in inspiring his readers to create themselves anew."
(1989 p 220)

And these individual acts of rebellion may act as an inspiration to others to engage in similarly creative acts for themselves. This is certainly the way that the overcoming of nihilism is attained in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, though as I shall argue in the next chapter it is not the full story. This is a point made by Platt as well, Platt argues that in the full corpus of Nietzsche's work we are offered three exemplars of virtue - Dionysus, Zarathustra and Nietzsche himself and that Nietzsche is unlike Zarathustra in that he is not a-political and a-social (1988).

2.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In chapter one it was argued that for Nietzsche nihilism presented a catastrophe of enormous dimensions. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche, despite hints to the contrary, offers a personal overcoming of nihilism. He offers only a broadly aesthetic resolution of this problem.

Carroll points out that the ideal of the Superman cannot fully resolve the issue of nihilism for his self-creation arises out of a process of self-questioning which makes nihilism a constant possibility since he is left in a position

"in which there are no criteria left for ordering the world, or ranking alternative modes of action. However, an undertow of driving, Dionysian instincts is strong enough to carry him through this intellect-mediated void." (1974 p 95)

Even if we accept that some individuals do find a way to overcome nihilism there are two strands of criticism of this aesthetic

solution - the first is that it lacks a moral element, the second that it lacks a social element.

The first lack can be wholly explained in terms of the second. Morality only arises when people are in society. Zarathustra is an individual alone, outside of society and as such can live a life without need of moral values.

The solipsism of Zarathustra's solution is, however, a problem in two ways. Firstly, it is impractical and secondly it is not clear that it is in anyway a real option. The solipsistic aspect of Nietzsche's thought has been criticised by thinkers as diverse as de Beauvoir:

"If it is true that every project emanates from subjectivity, it is also true that this subjective movement establishes by itself a surpassing of subjectivity. Man can find a justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men. Now, he needs such a justification there is no escaping it. . . . I concern others and they concern me. There we have an irreducible truth. The me-others relationship is as indissoluble as the subject-object relationship." (1963 p 72)

and MacIntyre:

"To cut oneself off from shared activity in which one has initially to learn obediently as an apprentice learns, to isolate oneself from the communities which find their point and purpose in such activities, will be to debar oneself from finding good outside of oneself. It will be to condemn oneself to that moral solipsism which constitutes Nietzschean greatness." (1985 p 258)

MacIntyre further argues that:

"[T]he Nietzschean 'great man' . . . represents individualism's final attempt to escape from its own consequences. And the Nietzschean stance turns out not to be a mode of escape from or an alternative to the conceptual scheme of liberal individualist modernity, but rather one more representative moment in its internal unfolding." (1985 p 259)⁸

Zarathustra's solution to the problem of nihilism is one for the few.

"This is a life beyond good and evil, which has no need of moral problems, where one does what one is, means what one says, where character is destiny. But this is not a claim by Nietzsche that anyone can do anything one wants to, or that morality is simply pabulum for the weak. Men who live in eternal return are entitled to live beyond morality. Not anyone can at any time do this, however: one cannot claim to live beyond morality just because one wants to. The transfiguration required is slow and difficult and requires much effort." (Strong, 1975 p 292)

It is this which leads us to the ultimate problem not just with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* but with the whole of Nietzsche's thought. For while Zarathustra attains the status of the Superman by rejecting society (just as the hermit did) Nietzsche recognises that any full solution to the problem of nihilism will involve a social and political strategy. The hints of this in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are brought into clear focus in his next work *Beyond Good and Evil* where the possibility of the few attaining liberation is seen to depend on the exploitation and domination of the many.

NOTES

1. Graybeal (1990) shows how often this failure is connected to feminine characters in the book:

"The great feminine figures reappear throughout the book, to undermine and unsettle any pretense Zarathustra makes of coming up with a program, a plan, a new symbolic structure which would only issue again in nihilism. They throw him into confusion, and remind him of the silence underlying his wordplay, and of the laughter surrounding it." (1990 p 76)

2. We should not imagine, though, that it is all irony, all parody - as Detwiler points out:

"When Nietzsche turns to his preferred future, it is always with a certain urgency. . . . He does not simply describe; he proclaims and extols and eulogizes. If there is an element of parody in some of this, there is also seriousness." (1990 p 99)

Williams (1978) also points to the seriousness that lies behind Nietzsche's masks.

3. There is a certain amount of disagreement as to how to translate the German *Übermensch*. 'Superman' is the most established translation, and I think the best since the prefix 'super' carries the same connotations as the German 'über', in a way that 'over' (as in the later translation 'overman' does not). It does not seem to me that Nietzsche's Superman is in serious danger of being confused with Clark Kent.
4. For a reading of the Superman as a distant, though attainable, world-historical ideal see Jovanovski (1989).
5. Parkes (1989) is particularly insightful on this aspect of Nietzsche's thought, drawing as he does on depth-psychology for support of this view.
6. Nor can we understand it at the level of myth. Wurzer attempts such a reading of the eternal recurrence and concludes that:

"The central problem of the silent myth is exposed through the tensions which arise from the interaction of theory and image, thought and myth. . . . Ultimately, Nietzsche seems unable to attain a precision of thought or a vivid and powerful experience of myth." (1983 p 264)

7. See also Bruder (1983).

8. Compare this with Carroll, who calls the Superman a
"grotesque parody of the humanist ideal, a sign of how
close to the end of that culture the West had moved."
(1993 p 166)

CHAPTER THREE: THE POLITICS OF SELF-CREATION

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche says of *Beyond Good and Evil* that it is the beginning of his "No-saying, No-doing", that it is "in all essentials a critique of modernity" (EH 3.7). Yet the subtitle of the book is "Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future" and in a letter written to Jacob Burckhardt at the time of the books publication he says "it says the same things as my *Zarathustra*, but differently, very differently". I believe we can reconcile these apparently contradictory statements. In both *Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil* we find a vision of the future and a critique of the present but whereas in the former book the vision takes precedence, in the latter critique predominates.

Although in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche hints at a world-historical overcoming of nihilism, his final solution is asocial, an individual overcoming through creation. One of the reasons that this sort of solution is unsatisfactory is that it tends to imply that nihilism is a sickness which afflicts the individual, whereas Nietzsche believes that it is a social disease afflicting all of modernity. A true overcoming of nihilism, then, will have to involve a social and political element, and in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche attempts to address this issue.

This chapter will begin in section 3.1 by looking at Nietzsche's critique of modernity. In section 3.2 we will investigate the ideal of the self-creative individual now conceptualised as a new type of philosopher. Section 3.3 will discuss the politics of *Beyond Good and Evil*, with critical comment in section 3.4. First, though, some comments on the style of the work.

As I stated in the Introduction *Beyond Good and Evil* is one of Nietzsche's more aphoristic works. That this book is also one of the less discussed of Nietzsche's works is perhaps tied to this - the aphoristic works of the middle period suffer similar critical neglect.

Nehamas in a discussion of *Beyond Good and Evil* calls it "a work of dazzling obscurity" (1988 p 46) and says:

"In a very elementary sense, we still do not know how to read this book. We simply do not understand its structure, its narrative line. Indeed, we do not even know whether it has any narrative line at all." (1988 p 46)

But he argues that it is a mistake to read the book as an aphoristic work and suggests that commentators have done so at least partly to avoid this problem. But though Nehamas does not believe it to be aphoristic nor does he think it is a traditional philosophical treatise:

"Though *Beyond Good and Evil* contains a number of arguments, some of which may even be good, its primary goal still is not to establish specific philosophic positions. Read as a series of arguments aimed at such positions, too much of the work seems not to argue well, or at all, our text becomes a very poor philosophic work - in fact, a failure. It becomes actually unreadable." (1988 p 47)

Nehamas rather suggests that we read the book as "a long and sustained monologue" in which

"Nietzsche . . . introduces topics only to drop them, and pick them up later; what is in one place alluded to in an aside becomes a central issue elsewhere; discussions are interrupted in order to examine in detail some casually introduced tangential point. Such connections are dialectical in the most original sense of the term; they are, that is, conversational." (1988 pp 50-1)

He notes that a monologue

"finds the principle of its coherence not so much in the questions it does answer, but in the coherence of the narrator who must be supposed to be engaged in it." (1988 p 51)

I find this understanding of the style and structure of *Beyond Good and Evil* illuminating and useful, though it does not account for all features of the work (the epigrams of Part Four and the Aftersong, for instance, neither of which is a common feature of conversation). Like the aphoristic characterization of the work it emphasizes the lack of an overarching line of argument while adding an element of coherence to it.

It is not sufficient though that we view the coherence of the work as lying in the character of the narrator. To gain a sympathetic hearing any monologue (or any other form of text or discourse, for that matter) must invoke some other criteria of structure and coherence. No speaker however linguistically gifted, witty and insightful can expect to hold our attention long unless we can answer, to our own satisfaction at least, the question "What is he talking about?". As long as we cannot answer this question, as long as the work remains "dazzlingly obscure", we must conclude not necessarily that the work is a failed monologue but that the monologic characterization of *Beyond Good and Evil* is not satisfactory.

I propose that we accept that *Beyond Good and Evil* does not fit any particular genre, that it is in many ways an idiosyncratic work which we are unsure how to read but that we should not allow this uncertainty to paralyse our attempts to engage and engage critically with the text and the ideas it expresses. I attempt to offer in this chapter an interpretation of some aspects of the text¹ in the full recognition of the tentative and provisional nature of any such interpretation preferring this to the continued avoidance and neglect of the work.

As Nietzsche claimed, *Beyond Good and Evil* is in many ways a different presentation of ideas and themes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* but far from being simply a reiteration (or recurrence) of those ideas and themes it serves to both enrich our understanding of them and also to develop them further. This is not to imply that *Beyond Good and Evil* is a more important work than *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, or that it is in any way better. In fact I believe just the contrary, *Beyond Good and Evil* is far from being Nietzsche's best work and in some important respects it marks a failure.

One way in which I believe this work fails is that despite Nietzsche's best and avowed intentions the work often borders on, and sometimes becomes, dogmatic. In the preface Nietzsche outlines his opposition to dogmatism, starting with the suggestive image "Supposing truth to be a woman". But whereas in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche used the parodic and ironic elements of the narrative to great success in avoiding dogmatism, he seems unable to find a similar distance from his ideas in this text.

3.1 THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

In chapter one I suggested that we can understand modernity as the nexus of three developments: intellectually, the Enlightenment emphasis on reason; politically, the gradual institutionalization of liberal and social democratic politics; and economically, the Industrial Revolution and the shift to a capitalist system. In his reading of modernity, however, Nietzsche has almost nothing to say about the economic factor and he views both the Enlightenment and democratic politics, not as new and autonomous developments, but as reflections and refinements of a much older underlying world view which he associates with the post-Socratic conception of philosophy, on the one hand, and Christianity, on the other. It is this world view, and the brand of morality which accompanies and supports

it, that Nietzsche holds responsible for nihilism and which he seeks to undermine, and eventually overcome.

Nietzsche's dissection and critique of this underlying world view and its ramifications dominates five of the nine parts of *Beyond Good and Evil*, and is extraordinarily wide-ranging. Rather than try to account for everything Nietzsche says in this difficult work, I will concentrate on the central themes of philosophy, religion and morality. Nietzsche offers no knock-down arguments against these but instead through a psychological (Stern 1978; Blackham 1989) and physiological reinterpretation of these phenomena he casts suspicion upon our conceptions of them. In each case he suggests that claims to neutrality and truth are merely masks for the expression of the will to power.

Nietzsche's critique of philosophy occupies parts One, "On the Prejudices of the Philosophers" and Six, "We Scholars". Through an argument which is both global and local Nietzsche draws a picture of philosophy not as a disinterested and wholly rational quest for knowledge or a reflection of the truth but as an interpretative activity. The argument moves in three stages from the global, through an understanding of interpretation, to a series of local attacks on various philosophical (and other) concepts.

Nietzsche begins by asking an apparently absurd question but one which offers a potential undermining of the very basis of the philosophical enterprise:

"Granted we want truth: why not rather untruth? And uncertainty? Even ignorance?" (BGE 1)

He suggests that:

"With all the value that may adhere to the true, the genuine, the selfless, it could be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for all life might

have to be ascribed to appearance, to the will to deception, to selfishness and to appetite. It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of those good and honoured things resides precisely in their being artfully related, knotted and crocheted to these wicked, apparently antithetical things, perhaps even in their being essentially identical with them."
(BGE 2)

What Nietzsche proposes is a psychological and physiological explanation of philosophizing. He argues that conscious thinking, even philosophical thinking is ultimately instinctual, expressing basic instinctual valuations, physiological requirements.

"Behind all logic too and its apparent autonomy there stand evaluations, in plainer terms physiological demands for the preservation of a certain species of life." (BGE 3)

Philosophy then is not the neutral, objective, disinterested and purely rational project which it portrays itself to be. It is a way of life, a way of being in the world, one expression of the will to power. And this being so, the question is not whether a philosophy is right or wrong, true or false, but whether it is useful for life.

"The falseness of a judgement is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgement: it is here that our new language perhaps sounds strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-breeding; and our fundamental tendency is to assert that the falsest judgements (to which synthetic judgements *a priori* belong) are the most indispensable to us, that without granting as true the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented

world of the unconditional and self-identical, without a continual falsification of the world by means of numbers, mankind could not live - that to renounce false judgements would be to renounce life, would be to deny life. To recognise untruth as a condition of life; that, to be sure, means to resist customary value-sentiments in a dangerous fashion; and a philosophy which ventures to do so places itself, by that act alone, beyond good and evil." (BGE 4)

To understand a philosophy is to understand the philosopher behind it:

"It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy has hitherto been: a confession on the part of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir" (BGE 6).

A philosophy, according to Nietzsche, is the outcome of the interplay of the drives and instincts of an individual. Far from being something separate, an adjudicator between the drives of an individual, reason is a tool used by all the drives in their power-struggle, or perhaps it is the power-struggle itself:

"For every drive is tyrannical: and it is as such that it tries to philosophize." (BGE 6)

And Philosophy, far from reflecting, or reflecting on, the world creates its own world:

"It always creates the world in its own image, it cannot do otherwise; philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to 'creation of the world', to *causa prima*." (BGE 9).

Philosophy then is an expression of the will to power, the creation of interpretations, which, Nietzsche implies, either

dull life and result in nihilism or enhance life. The latter part of Part One is devoted to local attacks on the concepts philosophers use. Again Nietzsche casts suspicion on the idea that these concepts reflect reality, that they are something more than interpretations. Among the concepts he investigates are the notion of the "I", of the self as an indivisible unity (BGE 16-17); the will (especially the free will) (BGE 16, 18-19); and, causality (BGE 21-22).

All our concepts, he suggests (BGE 20) are physiological value-judgements according to which we divide the world in terms which are most necessary for our life. These judgements become embedded as concepts in our languages. There is no necessary universality here and such universality as appears has to do with shared linguistic roots. In this way, Nietzsche neatly overturns the empiricist notion that we, in some sense, read our concepts or ideas off the world, while also offering an alternative to the Kantian conception of basic universal categories of reason.

In keeping with his view of philosophy as interpretation, Nietzsche offers his own interpretation of ourselves and the world as will to power but, self-aware and self-reflexive as always, then adds a rider:

"Granted this too is only interpretation - and you will be eager enough to raise this objection? - well, so much the better. -" (BGE 22)

In Part One, then, Nietzsche unmask what he takes to be philosophy's pretensions. Philosophy does not reflect the truth, he argues, but creates interpretations. These interpretations are an expression of the will to power and in so far as they reflect anything, it is the psychology and physiology of their authors. In Part Six he reiterates this when he again attacks the ideal of the philosopher as epistemologist (BGE 204) and he seeks to contrast the true Philosopher (of whom we will say more in 3.2) with the scholar (under which rubric he includes even

Kant) whom he characterizes as an "ignoble species", respectable and uncreative (BGE 206). The scholar is objective to an extreme (even where he looks at himself) withholding judgement, having no depth of emotion, he is merely a mirror (BGE 207). He is above all a sceptic, in which he mirrors the age. And for Nietzsche scepticism is to be understood as a paralysis of the will, a sickness (BGE 208).

Hull summarizes Nietzsche's critique of philosophy thus:

"Fear, anxiety, weakness, hatred, the influences of 'elevated' feelings and sentiments, laziness, stupidity and above all a desire for a world that conforms to what philosophers have decided to be morally worthy - these are what Nietzsche identifies as causes of the construction and propagation of epistemological and metaphysical systems." (Hull, 1990 p 379)

What sets apart the Philosopher from the scholar is that the latter denies his will to power, or is incapable of exercising it. The former, however, recognizes and embraces the will to power, consciously creating interpretations.

In Part Three, "The Religious Nature" Nietzsche turns his focus onto the religious ideal of the saint. This ideal, with the ideal of the philosopher as a disinterested and rational quester for knowledge, is of primary importance in that it stands as the opposing ideal to that which Nietzsche wishes to develop. Again he proceeds through a psychological dissection of this ideal showing it, too, to be a manifestation of the will to power, albeit a neurotic one (BGE 47). The religious ideal is characterized by abstinence and denial and it is in the strength of will with which he sacrifices his bodily needs that the saint's power lies.

In view of his characterization of himself as the antichrist, and in the light of his own atheism it is important to note that Nietzsche allows to religion a certain social utility - it teaches the strong to rule (through mastery of the drives) and the weak to obey (BGE 61). The Nietzschean utopia (or dystopia) might well include religion but a religion which has ceded its autonomy, to become the tool of the Superman in the guise of philosopher-legislator (BGE 61).

Though Nietzsche keeps the ideals of the philosopher and the saint separate in *Beyond Good and Evil* (despite having hinted in the preface that they are essentially the same in his equation of Platonism and Christianity) he amalgamates them in *On the Genealogy of Morals* into a single ideal - the Ascetic Ideal. Through his dissection of these two ideals, of philosophy and religion, the philosopher and the saint, Nietzsche views himself as unmasking and laying bare a deeper reality behind surface pretensions. Philosophy and religion, he claims, despite their proclaimed aspiration to truth, are nothing more than interpretative expressions of the will to power, outgrowths of the individual physiological and psychological drives.

Nietzsche is critical of religion and philosophy not because they are interpretations, expressions of the will to power, but because of their deception about this fact. This criticism cannot be very wounding, of course, because the will to power originates with Nietzsche himself, it is his interpretation. Prior to Nietzsche philosophers and saints could claim a defence of ignorance. Post-Nietzsche they can claim simply to offer different and equal, or better, interpretations. If the post-Nietzschean philosopher or saint takes this line of defence she already weakens her case however, for she no longer lays claim to truth. On the other hand, without an external criterion for judging interpretations Nietzsche has not won his case.

Nietzsche recognizing this does offer such an external criterion - the standard of value for life (BGE 4). Nietzsche hopes to

persuade us that the philosophical and religious interpretations of the world associated with the Platonic-Christian world-view fail this test. More importantly, he hopes to persuade us that the morality that informs them both fails this test.

His critique of morality in Part Five "On the Natural History of Morals" is, like his discussion of the religious and philosophical ideals, a first working out of themes he will develop in greater detail in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. It is here that he first offers the distinction between slave and master moralities; and his analysis of these has two strands, which I call the psychological and the political.

The psychological critique points to the origins of moral evaluations and argues that these are far from pure - timidity, fear, prudence, revenge are all picked out as sources of morality. The political critique points to the results of slave morality and Nietzsche is concerned to show the way in which the morality of the Platonic-Christian world view leads to nihilism and the crippling of the strong and creative.

In the psychological critique, Nietzsche argues that a moral theory tells us not about morality but about the psychology (and physiology) of its author (BGE 187). This applies as much to whole cultures as to individual philosophers (BGE 194). In particular morality is merely a matter of prudence, the attempt by an individual to control those parts of himself whose domination he fears (BGE 198).

The political critique of morality focuses on the social results of moral valuation and in particular of Christian (or slave) morality. Slave morality begins with the Jewish revaluation of values, the inversion of the values of the noble caste (BGE 195). And it has at its basis the instinct of obedience and constraint. Nietzsche does allow that these have positive effects:

"[A]ll there is or has been on earth of freedom, subtlety, boldness, dance and masterly certainty, whether in thinking itself, or in ruling, or in speaking and persuasion, in the arts as in morals, has evolved only by virtue of the 'tyranny of such arbitrary laws'; and, in all seriousness, there is no small probability that precisely this is 'nature' and 'natural' - and not that *laissez aller*!" (BGE 188)

and also:

"The essential thing 'in heaven and upon earth' seems, to say it again, to be a protracted obedience in one direction: from out of that there always emerges and has always emerged in the long run something for the sake of which it is worthwhile to live on earth, for example virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality - something transfiguring, refined, mad and divine." (BGE 188)

But on the whole Nietzsche argues that they have crippled man, suppressed any creative impulse. Obedience has come to be seen as a good in itself rather than a means to something greater. And so entrenched has obedience become, Nietzsche argues, that any act of command has to be justified to the self and others in terms of greater obedience - to God, to the law, to man, etc. (BGE 199). Those few who can command without such self-deception, Napoleon is the example he gives, are labelled sick and dangerous. For social morality, "the morality of the herd", judges actions purely in terms of how much they contribute to the preservation of the community, with the result that only the unexceptional is condoned:

"[E]verything that raises the individual above the herd and makes his neighbour quail is henceforth called evil; the fair, modest, obedient, self-

effacing disposition, the *mean and average* in desires, acquires moral names and honours." (BGE 201)

This "morality of timidity" is an attempt both in the self and in society at large to be rid of everything dangerous, everything fearful (BGE 201). The democratic society - the "autonomous herd", is its culminating achievement. Where proponents of democracy laud this as progress, Nietzsche can see only decay (BGE 202); whatever may have been gained for the many Nietzsche can only see what has been lost for the few, the strong, since it is out of what is dangerous and fearful in man that Nietzsche sees greatness arising and he argues that if that were to be lost so too would all hope for mankind (BGE 202).

In Part Seven, "Our Virtues", Nietzsche dissects, *inter alia*, the morality of benevolence and pity. Pity he argues is just a cover for self-contempt (BGE 222). The desire to stop suffering he associates with nihilism for all greatness, all creation, he believes, arises out of suffering. Instead, he argues, suffering should be increased, we should be looking to experience suffering, not to avoid it.

"That tension of the soul in misfortune which cultivates its strength, its terror at the sight of great destruction, its inventiveness and bravery in undergoing, enduring, interpreting, exploiting misfortune, and whatever of depth, mystery, mask, spirit, cunning and greatness has been bestowed upon it - has it not been bestowed through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? In man, creature and creator are united: in man there is matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud, madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator, sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divine spectator and the seventh day - do you understand this antithesis? And that your pity is for the 'creature in man', for that which has to be formed, broken, forged, torn, burned,

annealed, refined - that which has to suffer and should suffer?" (BGE 225)

Likewise the fear of cruelty ignores the way in which culture is itself a product of cruelty, to oneself as well as others (BGE 229). Nietzsche, therefore, argues against the ethics of benevolence both in terms of its motives (fear and timidity) and its results (nihilism).

Nietzsche also attacks the notion of disinterestedness in morality. All action, he argues, is essentially interested (BGE 220). He argues that to demand unselfishness of all, as a moral imperative, ignores the crucial question of rank, universalizes rashly and illegitimately; while for some selflessness might be a virtue for others it would be a waste, a betrayal of virtue. In this case as in all cases it is a matter of the particular individuals concerned.

"Every unegoistic morality which takes itself as unconditional and addresses itself to everybody is not merely a sin against taste: it is an instigation to sins of omission, one seduction more under the mask of philanthropy - and a seduction and injury for precisely the higher, rarer, privileged. Moralities must first of all be forced to bow before order of rank" (BGE 221).

In sections 217 and 219 Nietzsche talks of the vengefulness that underlies much of conventional morality. This is a theme he will take up and explore in depth in The Genealogy of Morals. Moral judgement, too, is a form of revenge on Nietzsche's reading. A rage against those who have more reveals itself in a standard by which everyone is judged equal, or even can be condemned (BGE 219).

And he again reiterates the non-universalizability of the moral:

"Not one of all these ponderous herd animals with their uneasy conscience (who undertake to advocate the cause of egoism as the cause of general welfare -)' wants to know or scent that the 'general welfare' is not an ideal, or a goal, or a concept that can be grasped at all, but only an emetic - that what is right for one cannot by any means be right for another, that the demand for one morality for all is detrimental to precisely the higher men, in short that there exists an order of rank between man and man, consequently also between morality and morality." (BGE 228)

Since most of what Nietzsche says about morality here is taken up and developed in *On the Genealogy of Morals* I shall have more of a critical nature to say on this topic in the next chapter. There are however two aspects of Nietzsche's discussion which I want to draw attention to at this stage - the reductive element to Nietzsche's thought on morality, and the Lamarckian² underpinnings. There is a strongly reductive strain running right through *Beyond Good and Evil* with Nietzsche consistently arguing the case that not only morality, but concepts, philosophical and religious systems and the very ideals they set up are explicable not merely in psychological but in physiological terms. Underpinning this is Nietzsche's Lamarckian belief in the heritability of character. More and more Nietzsche comes to see the world in terms of two types - the strong and the weak, and more and more he comes to view those two types as physiologically based and even determined³. This we shall see in 3.3 plays an important role in shaping Nietzsche's politics.

The ideals of philosophy and religion, the ideals of the Platonic-Christian world view, Nietzsche attempts to persuade us are expressions of the physiologically weak; the ideal of the strong and healthy would be quite different. It is to this ideal as developed in *Beyond Good and Evil* that we now turn.

3.2 THE ATTEMPTERS

As in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche offers an ideal in *Beyond Good and Evil* of the sovereign self-creative individual. In this later work, however, this ideal is viewed not in terms of the aesthetic-religious Zarathustra but in terms of a new type of philosopher. In fact in the course of *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche expresses admiration or approval for three groups - the "free spirits" with whom he associates himself, the "attempters" and the "Noble". It is not clear that these express a single ideal at all. The first two he discusses in Part Two "The Free Spirit", the last in Part Nine "What is Noble?"

The free spirit is associated with a radical form of freedom involving the breaking of all bonds.

First, there is the dogmatic approach to truth. As was demonstrated in the previous section, Nietzsche believes that our concepts, our language, falsify the world, create it in an image which we require. If fabrication and falsehood are in this way necessary we should embrace them. Truth and the will to truth Nietzsche argues are only later products of falsehood and the will to untruth, dependent upon and refining them. And so, he maintains, we should take the truth lightly, cheerfully, treating it with humour rather than getting caught in its thrall, defending it, martyring ourselves for it.

"After all, you know well enough that it cannot matter in the least whether precisely you are in the right, just as no philosopher hitherto has been in the right, and that a more praiseworthy veracity may lie in every little question-mark placed after your favourite words and favourite theories (and occasionally after yourselves) than in all your solemn gesticulations and smart answers before courts and accusers! Better to step aside! Flee away and conceal yourselves! And

have your masks and subtlety, so that you may be misunderstood!" (BGE 25)

The second bond is that of people. Only the companionship of his peers is acceptable to the independent person and these relationships only in so far as they spur him on. Those friendships which are merely comfortable are to be treated with humour or left behind. They cannot be serious and should never be taken seriously (BGE 27).

The third bond is morality. As a consequence of recognizing the force of the unintentional, unconscious, we should be wary of claims of disinterestedness and selflessness in matters of art and morality (BGE 33).

Other bonds include language (each language Nietzsche believes has its own tempo, a reflection of the physiology of the people) in particular, regarding Nietzsche's own work this may be seen to point to his stylistic attempts to overcome what he sees as the ponderousness, solemnity, slowness of German (BGE 28); history, which is, of course, merely an interpretation (BGE 38); and, youth, with its characteristic quick and unconditional judgements and its lack, and overlooking, of subtleties (BGE 31).

Given all the breaking of bonds that independence requires, it is unsurprising that Nietzsche believes that it is only for the strong. Anyone who would be independent can test his strength with the following tests Nietzsche claims:

"Not to cleave to another person, though he be the one you love most - every person is a prison, also a nook and corner. Not to cleave to a fatherland, though it be the most suffering and in need of help - it is already easier to sever your heart from a victorious fatherland. Not to cleave to a feeling of pity, though it be for higher men into whose rare torment and helplessness chance allowed us to look. Not to

cleave to a science, though it lures one with the most precious discoveries seemingly reserved precisely for us. Not to cleave to one's own detachment, to that voluptuous remoteness and strangeness of the bird which flies higher and higher so as to see more and more beneath it - the danger which threatens the flier. Not to cleave to our own virtues and become as a whole the victim of some part of us, of our 'hospitality' for example, which is the danger of dangers for rich and noble souls who expend themselves prodigally, almost indifferently, and take the virtue of liberality to the point where it becomes a vice. One must know how to conserve oneself: the sternest test of independence." (BGE 41)

As in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* then Nietzsche expresses an ideal of continual self-overcoming but here it is associated with a new type of philosopher which Nietzsche envisions for the future and which he dubs "the attempters" (BGE 43). These seem to differ from the free spirits not only quantitatively:

"[T]hey too will be free, very free spirits, these philosophers of the future - just as surely as they will not be merely free spirits, but something more, higher, greater and thoroughly different that does not want to be misunderstood or taken for what it is not." (BGE 44)

They too will be lovers of truth but not of dogma. Their truths will be their own, not for everyone (or anyone but they), and they will guard them selfishly and jealously, no longer caught in the traps of universalization and unconditionality. Their claim:

"'My judgement is my judgement: another cannot easily acquire a right to it'" (BGE 43)

For it is this judgement, Nietzsche claims, and not the disinterested and rational pursuit of knowledge, which is philosophy:

"[T]he philosopher demands of himself a judgement, a Yes or No, not in regard to the sciences but in regard to life and the value of life" (BGE 205)

The philosopher's task is not reasoned reflection but the creation of values and interpretations:

"[T]hey reach for the future with creative hand, and everything that is or has been becomes for them a means, an instrument, a hammer. Their 'knowing' is *creating*, their creating is a law-giving, their will to truth is - *will to power*." (BGE 211)

Nietzsche offers this new ideal of the philosopher as value-legislator in opposition to the religious ideal with the suffering and denial which it demands. Nietzsche speaks of it as:

"[T]he opposite ideal . . . the ideal of the most exuberant, most living and most world-affirming man, who has not only learned to get on and treat with all that was and is but who wants to have it again as it was and is to all eternity, insatiably calling out *da capo* not only to himself but to the whole piece and play, and not only to a play but fundamentally to him who needs precisely this play - and who makes it necessary: because he needs himself again and again - and makes himself necessary - What? And would this not be - *circulus vitiosus deus*?" (BGE 56)

The ideal also stands in opposition to morality and contemporary conceptions of virtue. The virtues of the free spirit are different and just as the common man misunderstands his own

virtues so too does he misunderstand the "immoralist" who appears to him as being without duty, through his breaking with the conventions of morality, or the morality of conventions. In contrast to this Nietzsche sees himself (and others like him) as bound by a perhaps higher and certainly stricter duty (BGE 226). The virtue which Nietzsche sees as most characteristic, most definitive, of the "free spirit" is honesty, this honesty which will stop at nothing:

"Our honesty, we free spirits - let us see to it that our honesty does not become our vanity, our pomp and finery, our limitation, our stupidity! Every virtue tends towards stupidity, every stupidity towards virtue; 'stupid to the point of saintliness' they say in Russia - let us see to it that through honesty we do not finally become saints and bores! Is life not a hundred times too short to be - bored in it? One would have to believe in eternal life to . . ." (BGE 227)

Nietzsche sees it as the task of the new philosophers to again revalue values, freeing moral thought from false dichotomies and antitheses and recognizing the non-eternal, non-universal nature of values (BGE 203).

In his discussion of this work Nehamas (1988) argues that Nietzsche presents himself as a prophet of the new philosophers "the philosophers of the future" but he also describes them in considerable detail and asks whether Nietzsche is merely a prophet or whether he is not himself one of the new philosophers. He suggests that:

"A philosophy of the future need not be a philosophy *that is composed in the future*. It can also well be a philosophy *that concerns the future*." (p 58)

What separates genuine philosophers from the rest is that they are concerned with the future rather than the past or present. Such philosophers of the future have existed in the past and the narrator of *Beyond Good and Evil* is himself such a philosopher. That Nietzsche subtitles the book "Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future" Nehamas suggests has to be understood by reading "prelude" in the musical sense in that

"[I]t sounds the major themes and motifs of philosophy of that kind." (p 59)

Nehamas' reading has much to support it. Certainly Nietzsche's philosophy is future-directed, directed I have been arguing to a vision of something beyond nihilism. Certainly also Nietzsche wishes us to associate him with the attempters rather than the philosophical scholars or under-labourers. Nor can it be denied that the features that he associates with the philosophers of the future are features characteristic of his own work - the anti-dogmatic approach to truth, the honesty, the experimentation, the affirmation of life, the centrality of value-judgement.

If we accept this reading then *Beyond Good and Evil* becomes a direct parallel of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in that it, too, could be seen as having both a pedagogical and an exemplificatory teaching of the ideal of self-creation and value-creation. Nietzsche might be seen as explicitly teaching that ideal while at the same time exemplifying a variation of it.

But I would argue that we should give equal weight, as Nehamas does not, to Nietzsche's talk of himself as herald and precursor (BGE 44) to "these coming philosophers" (BGE 43). Nor can I find any support for the claim that Nietzsche sees such philosophers of the future having written in the past nor does Nehamas provide such support. What Nehamas does do is conflate "genuine philosophers" with "philosophers of the future". Genuine philosophers are those who create values and certainly Nietzsche acknowledges that such philosophers have existed before now -

pre-eminently Plato. But even Nehamas is forced to concede that the philosophers of the future differ from the genuine philosophers of the past in terms of their perspectivism, etc. We seem to gain little then by not assuming that Nietzsche does mean to speak of the philosophers of the future as those who will live in the future.

I would therefore tend to agree with Fuchs (1988) that Nietzsche draws two different distinctions: a qualitative one, between original and derivative philosophers and a chronological one. And that chronologically Nietzsche places himself between the philosophers of the past and those of the future.

The Noble, of whom more will be said in the next section, seems to be the physiological type from whence both free spirits and the philosophers of the future come. The Noble is characterized by "courage, insight, sympathy, solitude" (BGE 284) and also by laughter (BGE 294) and the task of breeding its highest specimen, the genius, preoccupies Nietzsche and shapes his politics.

3.3 THE POLITICS

It is in the final two parts of *Beyond Good and Evil* that Nietzsche outlines his vision of a "great politics" in which he makes apparent the links between the development of the strong and sovereign individual, now seen to be a particular (strong) physiological type, and a politics of domination. Part 8, "Peoples and Fatherlands" is a dissection of the phenomenon of nationalism and certain types of national character (especially German, English, French and Jewish). Nietzsche offers a vision of a pan-Europeanism which incorporates the best (and worst) of all the ethnic characters.

His pan-Europeanism and his politics in general rests on Lamarckian assumptions about the heritability of character traits and on the assumption that character is based in physiology. In these regards we encounter Nietzsche at his most naturalistic.

The pan-European man is truly European, his ancestry diverse, and includes, importantly for those who would still view Nietzsche as an anti-Semite, the Jewish heritage (BGE 250). Nietzsche views nationalism as atavistic, an old need into which people lapse rather than a reasoned and modern outlook. Indeed, modernity itself he argues pushes inexorably towards the overcoming of nationalism, the birth of the European outlook.

"Whether that which now distinguishes the European be called 'civilization' or 'humanization' or 'progress'; whether one calls it simply, without implying any praise or blame, the *democratic* movement in Europe: behind all the moral and political foregrounds indicated by such formulas a great *physiological* process is taking place and gathering greater and ever greater impetus - the process of the assimilation of all Europeans, their growing detachment from the conditions under which races dependent on climate and class originate, their increasing independence of any *definite* milieu which, through making the same demands for centuries, would like to inscribe itself on soul and body - that is to say, the slow emergence of an essentially supra-national and nomadic type of man which, physiologically speaking, possesses as its typical distinction a maximum of the art and power of adaptation." (BGE 242)

Nietzsche recognizes that the pan-Europeanism will involve the intensification of those features of modernity which he most dislikes, in particular it will favour the breeding of the herd animal, but he believes it also contains within it the seeds of the truly great man:

"[T]he democratization of Europe will lead to the production of a type prepared for *slavery* in the subtlest sense: in individual and exceptional cases the *strong* man will be found to turn out stronger and

richer than has perhaps ever happened before - thanks to the unprejudiced nature of his schooling, thanks to the tremendous multiplicity of practice, art and mask. What I mean to say is that the democratization of Europe is at the same time an involuntary arrangement for the breeding of tyrants - in every sense of that word, including the most spiritual." (BGE 242)

Lest we misunderstand his claim by emphasising the "spiritual" and ignoring the "in every sense of the word", Nietzsche in Part Nine, "What is Noble", explicitly ties the development of higher culture to the Noble character and to an aristocratic organization of society. For Nietzsche class is both a necessary feature of society, and the precondition and source of all higher culture.

"Every elevation of the type 'man' has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society - and so it will always be: a society which believes in a long scale of orders of rank and differences of worth between man and man and needs slavery in some sense or other."
(BGE 257)

All class division depends, Nietzsche believes, first of all on the conquering, and domination, of a weaker, more peaceful people by a stronger people (BGE 257), that is to say that class is based in physiology. Equality Nietzsche believes is no basis for society:

"[L]ife itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and, at the least and mildest, exploitation - but why should one always have to employ precisely those words which have from of old been stamped with a slanderous intention? Even that body within which, as was previously assumed, individuals treat one another as

equals - this happens in every healthy aristocracy - must, if it is a living and not a decaying body, itself do all that to other bodies which the individuals within it refrain from doing to one another: it will have to be the will to power incarnate, it will want to grow, expand, draw to itself, gain ascendancy - not out of any morality or immorality, but because it lives, and because life is will to power." (BGE 259)

Nietzsche recognizes that his claims offend our morality but argues that they are consonant with noble morality:

"A morality of the rulers is, however, most alien and painful to contemporary taste in the severity of its principle that one has duties only towards one's equals; that towards beings of a lower rank, towards everything alien, one may act as one wishes or 'as the heart dictates' and in any case 'beyond good and evil' - : it is here that pity and the like can have a place. The capacity for and the duty of protracted gratitude and protracted revenge - both only among one's equals - subtlety in requital, a refined conception of friendship, a certain need to have enemies (as conduit systems, as it were, for the emotions of envy, quarrelsomeness, arrogance - fundamentally so as to be able to be a good friend)" (BGE 260).

In recognizing his own worth, Nietzsche claims, the noble also recognizes that others are subordinate to it and that only obligations to equals, only the rights of equals, are to be recognized (BGE 265).

Nietzsche, it must be noted, is not advocating a simple a-historical return to the aristocracies of the past. What differentiates the Noble of the future from that of the past is

that while the latter is himself a social and cultural construct, the former is an individual. The rise of the individual is again treated naturalistically. He claims that a species is shaped by the struggle against adverse conditions counting as virtues those qualities which help it survive. Should the unfavourable conditions end, variety becomes the order of the day:

"Variation, whether as deviation (into the higher, rarer, more refined) or as degeneration and monstrosity, is suddenly on the scene in the greatest splendour and abundance, the individual dares to be individual and stand out." (BGE 262)

In particular, the old morality is seen as unneeded, its constraints broken:

"The dangerous and uncanny point is reached where the grander, more manifold, more comprehensive life lives beyond the old morality; the 'individual' stands there, reduced to his own law-giving, to his own arts and stratagems for self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption. Nothing but new whys and wherewithalls, no longer any common formulas, misunderstanding in alliance with disrespect, decay, corruption and the highest desires horribly tangled together, the genius of the race overflowing out of every cornucopia of good and bad, spring and autumn falling fatally together, full of novel charms and veils such as pertain to youthful, still unexhausted, still unwearied corruption. Danger is again present, the mother of morality, great danger, only this time it comes from the individual, from neighbour and friend, from the street, from one's own child, from one's own heart, from the most personal and secret recesses of wish and will: what will the moral philosophers who come up in this age now have to preach?" (BGE 262)

This last has an almost democratic ring but Nietzsche's Lamarckism breaks through again in BGE 264: every person, he says, inherits the characteristics (especially the most prominent ones) of his ancestors; his character is thus set. Education may cover, hide, these characteristics but it cannot eradicate them.

"This constitutes the problem of race. If one knows something about the parents, it is permissible to draw a conclusion about the child: any sort of untoward intemperance, any sort of narrow enviousness, a clumsy obstinate self-assertiveness - these three things together have at all times constituted the characteristics of the plebeian type - qualities of this sort must be transferred to the child as surely as bad blood; and the best education and culture will succeed only in *deceiving* with regard to such an inheritance." (BGE 264)

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche reveals the dark underbelly of the Zarathustrian solution. The Superman is revealed to be a physiological type (though not another evolutionary stage). The role of politics becomes the task of shaping society so as to breed and sustain this sort of abundantly strong, healthy and creative individual.

The political vision of *Beyond Good and Evil* remains at a high level of abstraction and generalization; and it might be objected that it does not sound all that bad. It is as well, therefore, to spell out some of the implications of Nietzsche's proposed social organization.

First, though, it should be stated that whatever use the Nazis made of Nietzsche's work, his vision runs in many ways counter to their ideals. Nietzsche has no vision of a pure master race, instead, he argues for a pan-Europeanism involving the mixing of the different ethnic groups comprising Europe and including the

Jewish people. Nietzsche's vision runs counter not only to the anti-semitism of the Nazis but to all nationalisms.

What Nietzsche does argue for is a stratified society with a division of labour. This would not be in itself a necessarily bad thing; but Nietzsche also speaks of this society using such terminology as "domination", "slavery", "tyrants". Even supposing that we could read these terms as in some way figurative (and it is not obvious that we can), the crux of Nietzsche's social vision is that it lacks any social morality.

For example, Nietzsche says in BGE 260 "one has duties only towards one's equals" and "towards beings of a lower rank . . . one may act as one wishes". Admittedly, Nietzsche tempers the latter with the note that "it is here that pity and the like can have a place", but what would society be like if the dominant group had no obligations to the lower class? Hunt (1991) addresses this issue and remarks that in such a society the lower class is rendered without rights. In such a political system I could not expect of others that they refrain from killing, raping, harming me. If the nobility of such a society did not engage in such activities it would not be out of any respect for my person but only a sign of their benevolence or indifference, something for which I should have to be *grateful*. Further, if they did engage in such actions the only recourse open to me would be reciprocation.

I suspect that Nietzsche believed that in his aristocratic society the nobility would be so taken up with their own self-creation that they would ignore the lower classes rather than harm them. However, by placing his new society beyond the bounds of social morality, Nietzsche can in no way ensure that such disastrous consequences would not follow.

The playful tone and ironic distance of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is lost as Nietzsche, carried away by his own excess, seems unable to conceive of any explanation of man and society that is

not physiological and he gradually moves towards a sort of physiological fatalism. The Politics of *Beyond Good and Evil* is something like a zero-sum game in which two incompatible types - the weak and the strong, the master and the slave, the herd and the individual - with their incompatible needs and values compete for absolute power. The weak are doomed, Nietzsche tells us, so let us sacrifice them for the few.

3.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

It has been shown that in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche's critique of modernity takes a psychological and physiological turn. This is continued in his vision of the future. Now the physiological underpinnings of Nietzsche's understanding of individual greatness, of the basis of self-creation are made evident, and character becomes a matter of racial inheritance. Underpinning all of Nietzsche's social thought is the master-slave duality, the belief in two broad categories of human beings shaped by their physiologies and psychologies. Carroll argues that these categories are not moralistic, that there is no condemnation of the slave in the duality:

"He retains moral categories, rejecting only the highly charged, moralistic 'good' and 'evil'. He explicates his preferred distinction between good and bad individuals as non-condemnatory of the latter. A 'bad person' is merely devoid of what Nietzsche personally considers to be noble or virtuous qualities; he is not morally evil." (1974 p 91)

This is true enough, but what Carroll ignores is that the lack of noble qualities removes people from the horizon of Nietzsche's concern. With his physiological reading of the quality of character slavery becomes a fate. The reconceived role of politics is the creation of the conditions for the development and sustenance of the sovereign individual. And the politics he develops is an aristocratic one, as Ansell-Pearson puts it:

"Nietzsche does regard the 'exploitation' (*Ausbeutung*) of weaker powers by stronger ones as a necessary and essential aspect of an aristocratic social structure.. On one level, he seems to be suggesting that injury and overpowering of others are unconscious effects of a strong will to power; on another, the level of his overt political thinking, he makes the radical suggestion that in order for there to be a perpetual self-overcoming of 'man', which guarantees the creation of new and rare human types, the state, or the 'social structure', has to be built on relationships of command and obedience." (1994 p 50)

Nietzsche reads politics only in terms of culture (high culture). And its utility has to be assessed in those terms. The question for Nietzsche is "what role does politics have to play in overcoming nihilism?". His answer is that it must be put to the service of the creation of sovereign individual, now conceived as the philosopher.

"The way out is a daring gamble: great politics. Only this might lead to conditions permitting a cultural rebirth. Like most other things for Nietzsche, due to its genealogical structure, great politics begins by making things worse, before it might make them different." (Strong, 1975 p 210)

What Strong ignores is that even if the gamble pays off, in Nietzsche's terms, things will be not only different but probably worse for those at the bottom of the social heap.

Of course, we can reject the reductive and Lamarckian aspects of Nietzsche's thought. What we cannot do, though, if we wish to understand Nietzsche's proposed solution to nihilism is ignore, or downplay, this strand of his thought (as does Kaufmann, 1974). In Chapter Five I will discuss this in more detail but first I

shall turn to a discussion of *On the Genealogy of Morals* showing its role in Nietzsche's project.

NOTES

1. I thus leave many topics undiscussed, including Nietzsche's considerable remarks on feminism, his discussion of historiography and so on.
2. Lamarck (1744-1829) formulated the first comprehensive theory of evolution. The most important aspect of his thought, for our purposes, was his belief that acquired characteristics were heritable and that these then became a permanent and ineradicable feature of the line of descent; modern science suggests that this cannot be the case.
3. It may be though that I am taking Nietzsche too literally. However, Pasley (1978) tries to treat Nietzsche's vocabulary around health as metaphorical but concludes that Nietzsche becomes progressively more literal in his usage:

"[T]his image has certainly taken an obsessive hold of him; it has become a controller of his thinking; further than that, it is presented with so much insistent physiological detail that it clamours to be understood literally." (p 143)

[See also Letteri (1990) who argues that the terminology of health features as evaluative but also as literal.]

On a similar point see Reed (1978) who argues that Nietzsche's animal imagery is based in the very literal belief in man's animal nature.

CHAPTER FOUR: ON THE GENEALOGY OF MORALS

It has thus far been argued that Nietzsche's central concern is the problem of nihilism and the attempt to overcome it (chapter 1), and that Nietzsche's solution is primarily an individual one (chapter 2) but that he links this broadly aesthetic solution to a politics of domination and exploitation (chapter 3). In both cases the moral element is lacking and in both Nietzsche explicitly repudiates it.

In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche takes the argument a step further by showing the links between the morality of the Platonic-Christian world-view and nihilism showing why he believes that transcending nihilism must involve transcending morality. He attempts to convince us that the creativity of the Superman and morality are inimical. And he tries to persuade us through a genealogical argument. Before we look at his arguments we must first therefore address the question of method.

Nietzsche offers the following rationale for this method:

"Let us articulate this new demand: we need a critique of moral values, the value of these values themselves must be first called in question - and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed (morality as a consequence, as symptom, as mask, as tartufferie, as illness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, as remedy, as stimulant, as restraint, as poison), a knowledge of a kind that has never yet existed or even been devised." (GM preface 6)

So the first task of genealogy is to show how and why we came to value the things we do. In so doing the genealogy shows values to be not absolute and universal but historical, cultural.

"[G]enealogy displays as the product of a contingent history concepts and propositions that we very likely take as fixed and given. Such an enterprise can show that something we regard as unchanging is, in fact, quite accidental . . . In this way, genealogy can make us aware of alternatives and possibilities in places where we thought there were none." (Scott-Kakures, 1993 p 347)

The genealogy in this way functions not only to explain how our values give rise to nihilism but to uncover other possibilities and potentialities which though repressed still exist and might serve as the basis for liberation.

But is this genealogy itself an objective discovery about the origins and history of our values? Strong seems to read the genealogy in this way. He reads genealogy to be:

"[T]he investigation of the logic of a particular line of development of any coherent structure" (1975 p 28)

and he suggests that we can best understand genealogy by its contrasts with dialectics. Whereas the latter sees history as powered by an "automatic logic" in which the past is successfully overcome and left behind, for the genealogist the past leaves traces, shapes the present. Genealogy is a way of understanding the past which may be, at least initially, destructive:

"If one finds out that much of the personality system one has painfully elaborated is simply an elaborate justification for a set of unresolved problems, the realization is likely to precipitate a crisis. That which has been the bounds of one's life vanishes in the realization that there is no force to the barriers one has struggled so long to erect in self-definition; the self-consciousness produced by genealogical

analysis weakens the unquestioned bases that were necessary to a particular form of life." (1975 p 49)

But, it is hoped, genealogy might ultimately serve as a pointer to other, better, forms of life.

What Strong seems to be suggesting is that genealogy does in fact lead to an understanding of the facts about our values. But such a reading seems to contradict one of Nietzsche's most basic theses - his perspectivism. Nietzsche everywhere denies the possibility of finding the facts of the matter, of offering anything more than interpretations.

If this is so then it must also be the case that genealogy itself is interpretative; that what the genealogy offers is not the origins and the history of our values but one interpretation of those origins and that history. Is genealogy, then, just a story?

Martin, for one, thinks so. He argues that in *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche

"is not even beginning to attempt an historically accurate picture of the ancient situation. Rather, he is doing history "in the service of life" by creating what can be called "mythic-paradigms" designed to hermeneutically illuminate our understanding of the present." (1989 p 19)

White, too, argues that we should maintain an ironic distance from the story of the genealogy, we should not treat it as a history of lost origins. White characterises the first essay as "a mythical pre-history" (1988 p 686) and a "parable" (1988 p 687) and he argues that we should interpret it not literally but as "psychohistorical" or "psychodramatic" (1988 p 687).

And yet Nietzsche himself seems to think he is doing something more than offering a narrative that we can take or leave. There is none of the irony that accompanies the story of Zarathustra for instance. Instead we are presented with a wealth of historical and etymological detail. As Lang puts it:

"Nietzsche . . . argues in *The Genealogy of Morals* for a perspectival conception of knowledge from what seems itself to be the disinterested and universalist stance of the expository point-of-view that he is attacking."
(1990 p 17)

So the genealogy offers an interpretation of the origin and history of our values which at least has pretensions to be something more than just an interpretation. What does the "more" consist in? One conception of the "more" is that genealogy is not merely an interpretation of the past but an appropriation or reappropriation of it.

Ansell-Pearson and Warren both take this line. But the most useful work on this area is Bergoffen's. She proposes that we read the genealogy as analogous to the eternal recurrence.

"With the doctrine of the eternal recurrence, Nietzsche proposes a philosophy of history whereby the temporal and eternal are linked by an act of will, not reason, and where an absorption of the entire past into oneself allows for an integrated willing of, and creative transcendence toward, the future." (1983 p 130)

She reads *The Genealogy* as an exemplification and clarification of this approach to history. Its purpose is not just to recount what has been remembered but to recall what has been forgotten and further asks what motivates the forgetting (1983 pp 131-2). Genealogy and eternal recurrence are linked through the notion of repression, of that which has been forgotten but not lost and

which may erupt in violence. The genealogy attempts to investigate and explain these eruptions, the eternal recurrence wills the return of the repressed in such a way that it no longer needs violent expression (Bergoffen, 1983 p 133).

The genealogy, she argues, frees origin from purpose and makes the reinterpretation and reappropriation of the past through eternal recurrence possible (1983 p 134).

"The demand of the eternal recurrence: that I demonstrate the power of my freedom by willing the return of the past, only makes sense if the past, as past, is somehow retrievable and if it is, as past, somehow amenable to my power. The problematics of this demand are resolvable, if we accept two critical revelations of the genealogical method: one, that purpose is not already determined in the past; and two, a correlate of one, that the absence of ontological teleology establishes the existence of an ontological pluralism which can be unified diversely in accordance with human desire." (Bergoffen, 1983 p 134)

I think Bergoffen's drawing of a connection between genealogy and eternal recurrence is most fruitful. I would however read it slightly differently. I would argue that while it is true that eternal recurrence and genealogy both seek to reappropriate the past and particularly that which is repressed, what distinguishes them is their sphere of concern. The eternal recurrence functions, I believe, primarily at the level of individual psychology: through it the individual appropriates his or her own past. The eternal recurrence is thus, despite Nietzsche's attempts in his notebooks to give it wider application, part of the subjective solution to nihilism exemplified by Zarathustra. Genealogy on the other hand, seeks to appropriate and reinterpret social history - in Nietzsche's case, the history of Western values and the origins of nihilism. It is thus part of the

broader attempt to establish a social solution to the problem of nihilism¹.

It was suggested in chapter two that Nietzsche never satisfactorily explains how the experience of eternal recurrence transforms and appropriates the past. A similar sense of alchemy might attach to genealogy; but as Redding points out:

"The idea of redeeming the past by reinterpreting it can sound as if a mad magical power is being attributed to words and ideas. . . . [But] If the Enlightenment looks like it is leading to disaster and, on the basis of a certain 'redeeming' interpretation the course of its subsequent history is effected for the better, this has not been on account of magical powers of that interpretation. It will simply indicate that it was all along healthy enough to transform itself in this way." (Redding, 1993 p 220)

Does Nietzsche intend the genealogy only to be a way of answering the question of how and why we value the things we do or does it have a further critical function? Does genealogy, in other words, evaluate values?

Schacht (1985) argues that the genealogy is not intended to be critical. He believes that genealogy is a descriptive task that precedes the evaluative task, which itself precedes the final task of revaluating values.

Moreover, if we read what Nietzsche says about origins and purposes, and read 'value' for 'purpose' we can see that, for Nietzsche the origins of a value must tell us little about its actual value:

"[T]he cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system

of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous "meaning" and "purpose" are necessarily obscured and even obliterated. . . . [P]urposes and utilities are only signs that a will to power has become master of something less powerful and imposed upon it the character of a function; and the entire history of a 'thing,' an organ, a custom can in this way be a continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations whose causes do not even have to be related to one another but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and alternate with one another in a purely chance fashion. The 'evolution' of a thing, a custom, an organ is thus by no means its *progressus* toward a goal, even less a logical *progressus* by the shortest route and with the smallest expenditure of force . . . The form is fluid, but the 'meaning' even more so." (GM 2.12)

If purpose is not determined by origin, then Nietzsche is unlikely to think that value is and yet there are still those who read Nietzsche as arguing that the value of our values is somehow fixed by the circumstances of their genesis. For example, Redding says:

"Nietzsche's primary concern is with the value of certain values and he tries to articulate this value in terms of a story of their development, a story which gives expression to the baseness which he sees as characterizing the values themselves." (1993 p 215)

If Nietzsche were offering such a critique then Stern (in Magee and Stern 1987 p 238) and others would be correct in claiming that the genealogy is an extended case of the genetic fallacy.

I would argue that this is not the case, however. There are two aspects to Nietzsche's critique of values: firstly, he undermines the claims of universality and absolutism which underpin the Western value system by showing that there are different modes of valuation and that these are quite contingent; he also undermines the idea that good and evil are opposites, instead offering an interpretation that sees them in some sense as a unity (Nehamas, 1985). This is not a genetic argument though.

Secondly, Nietzsche does take a critical and oppositional stance towards certain values, for instance, those of slave morality. But his negative evaluation of these values is not based on their being slave values, not based that is in their origin. Rather, he evaluates those values in terms of whether or not they enhance life, and he argues that while once slave values, the ascetic ideal and so on made life possible their end result is nihilism and the diminishment of life; and that even where they make life possible they do so by diminishing life itself in favour of an ideal of life beyond this world. Thus while Nietzsche criticises and evaluates values and morality in the course of his genealogy he does so in terms of a criterion which is in some sense external to the genealogy and which he also uses in other contexts.

Since genealogy, too, is subject to the same evaluative criteria (Schrift, 1990) we can also see why Nietzsche can lay claim to his interpretation being better than alternative interpretations - by revealing the repressed values it makes possible new and better ways of interpreting and evaluating the world, ways not associated with nihilism.

In the rest of this chapter I will offer a reading of each of the three essays that make up *On the Genealogy of Morals*: ' "Good and Evil," "Good and Bad"' (4.1); ' "Guilt," "Bad Conscience," and the Like' (4.2); and 'What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?' (4.3) showing how in each Nietzsche locates a particular source of nihilism - *ressentiment*, bad conscience and the ascetic ideal respectively. In so doing Nietzsche also shows the historical and contingent bases of these and the grounds for liberation from them in other ways of experiencing and interpreting the world which have gradually been repressed.

4.1 *RESSENTIMENT*

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche argued that all moral systems were of either of two types (or a mix of both). In the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* he offers his interpretation of the origins of these two value systems - master morality characterized by the judgements "good and bad", and slave morality with its judgements "good and evil".

He begins the genealogy with an etymological excavation. Noting the connection, in various (European and Indo-European) languages, of the word "good" to "aristocratic" and "noble" and of "bad" to "common" he draws the generalization that:

"[A] concept denoting political superiority always resolves itself into a concept denoting superiority of soul" (GM 1.6)

And from this evidence he argues that judgements of "goodness" originate as self-affirmations of the nobles in a society, denoting characteristics which mark them off from the rest. The judgements which resolve into "badness" originate as secondary, merely as a way of naming the Other.

"[F]rom the masters' perspective, those unlike themselves are merely *bad humans*; that is to say,

humans who do not come up to the mark. This is similar to the way bad eggs are low in the scales of egghood. There is nothing *morally* bad in being a bad egg or, in this usage, a bad human. It is just the way one is. Too bad, then, for the bad. They hardly can be blamed for what they are; but they are bad."
(Danto, 1965 p 159)

These original aristocratic societies Nietzsche further divides into two groups based on whether the ruling elite is worldly or priestly. The essential difference between the value systems that each develops being that whereas the worldly aristocrat marks himself by what he is, has or does - "the powerful", "the rich", "the truthful", "the blond", "the man of war", "the godlike" - the priest marks himself according to his restraint, by what he abstains from doing - what he doesn't eat, who he doesn't have sex with. Or put in another way, the secular noble embraces the world, the priest sees it as dangerous. From the beginning the priest has been associated with a turning away from the world and with nihilism:

"[T]he desire for a *unio mystica* with God is the desire of the Buddhist for nothingness, Nirvana - and no more!" (GM 1.6)

And yet, Nietzsche admits:

"[I]t was on the soil of this *essentially dangerous* form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became an *interesting animal*, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth* and become *evil* - and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts!"
(GM 1.6)

At this point the argument of *The Genealogy* becomes sticky in a way that commentators ignore. Most readings of slave morality

take it to be the opposing set of values set up by the underclass in the original aristocratic societies. But this is not how Nietzsche first argues the case. Instead he identifies the worldly aristocracy with Rome and the priestly aristocracy with Judea and locates the decisive moment in Western (and world) history in the clash of these two societies.

The decisive military victory of the Romans in this conflict is overshadowed by the moral victory of the Jews, who extract their revenge not at the physical but at the spiritual level - through a revaluation of values. A new value system is created, that of good and evil, through a simple and consistent inversion of the Roman (i.e. noble) valuation.

"With the Jews there begins *the slave revolt in morality*: that revolt which has a history of two thousand years behind it and which we no longer see because it - has been victorious." (GM 1.7)

Slave morality as thus explicated is not a universal phenomenon, nor a creation of the underclass, but a value system created by one aristocracy in its defeat by another. Prior to this point there is no slave morality nor any master morality, merely the noble valuations of various societies. The master-slave dichotomy arises not within society but out of conflict between societies.

Slave morality is nothing more nor less than Christianity which on Nietzsche's reading is not a repudiation of revenge (a turning of the other cheek), not an expression of pure love, but an expression of (impotent) hatred and vengefulness:

"One should not imagine it grew up as the denial of that thirst for revenge, as the opposite of Jewish hatred! No, the reverse is true! That love grew out of it as its crown, as its triumphant crown spreading itself farther and farther into the purest brightness

and sunlight, driven as it were into the domain of light and the heights in pursuit of the goals of that hatred - victory, spoil, and seduction - by the same impulse that drove the roots of that hatred deeper and deeper and more and more covetously into all that was profound and evil." (GM 1.8)

Our modern western values, then, have their genesis in *ressentiment*. And the creative act in this morality is a No, to the Yes of the masters.

But then Nietzsche begins to vacillate. He identifies the noble with the master and thereby implies that slave morality is a more universal phenomenon. At the base of this vacillation we find Nietzsche's Lamarckism. He offers a racial understanding of class. There are two types of races - noble and slave; the former defeat the latter physically, the latter exact spiritual revenge. It seems we are dealing with universals, that the conflict of Rome and Judea is just one exemplar of military conquest and spiritual revenge. The characteristics that are to be found in slave morality are already present in the priestly aristocracy - in particular an aversion to the world, the body and action.

In what follows Nietzsche outlines the differences between the two systems of valuation, the crucial difference being:

"This inversion of the value-positing eye - this need to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself - is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all - its action is fundamentally reaction.

"The reverse is the case with the noble mode of valuation: it acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks

its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly - its negative concept . . . is only a subsequently-invented pole, contrasting image in relation to its positive basic concept" (GM 1.10).

In the moral system of good and bad, the "bad" is an afterthought, whereas in slave morality it is "good" which is the later concept, "evil" being primary. And of course, the concept "good" is not unchanged - the "good" of noble morality is the "evil" of slave morality, reinterpreted, seen through the eyes of *ressentiment*.

But the labelling of the noble as "evil" does not appear to be merely a matter of perspective, it has a basis in the noble's own actions. For while in dealing with his equals the noble is kept in check by

"custom, respect, usage, gratitude, and even more by mutual suspicion and jealousy" (GM 1.11)

and these equal relations are characterised by

"consideration, self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride, and friendship" (GM 1.11)

in dealing with the Other they show quite a different side of themselves:

"There they savor a freedom from all social constraints, they compensate themselves in the wilderness for the tension engendered by protracted confinement and enclosure within the peace of society, they go back to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey, as triumphant monsters who perhaps emerge from a disgusting procession of murder, arson, rape, and torture, exhilarated and undisturbed of soul, as if it

were no more than a student's prank, convinced they have provided the poets with a lot more material for song and praise. One cannot fail to see at the bottom of all these noble races the beast of prey, the splendid *blond beast* prowling about avidly in search of spoil and victory; this hidden core needs to erupt from time to time, the animal has to get out again and go back to the wilderness" (GM 1.11).

This then is the evil enemy of the slaves:

"This 'boldness' of noble races, mad, absurd, and sudden in its expression, the incalculability, even incredibility of their undertakings . . . their indifference to and contempt for security, body, life, comfort, their hair-raising cheerfulness and profound joy in all destruction, in all the voluptuousness of victory and cruelty - all this came together, in the minds of those who suffered from it, in the image of the 'barbarian,' the 'evil enemy'" (GM 1.11).

The question for Nietzsche is whether the taming or domestication of this beast is a good thing or not. Generally it would be regarded as good, that is the purpose of culture, the basis of civilization, which is itself held to be a good thing. Nietzsche, though, turns this evaluation on its head.

"These 'instruments of culture' are a disgrace to man and rather an accusation and counterargument against 'culture' in general! One may be quite justified in continuing to fear the blond beast at the core of the noble races and in being on one's guard against it: but who would not a hundred times sooner fear where one can also admire than not fear but be permanently condemned to the repellent sight of the ill-constituted, dwarfed, atrophied, and poisoned?" (GM 1.11)

The loss of the noble is, Nietzsche argues, one source of nihilism:

"[T]ogether with the fear of man we have also lost our love of him, our reverence for him, our hopes for him, even the will to him. The sight of man now makes us weary - what is nihilism today if it is not *that*? - We are weary of *man*." (GM 1.12)

What we note, throughout, is that Nietzsche in no way offers a one-sided appraisal of the noble, or indeed of the slave. Both offer mankind something important; both have positive and negative elements. We do not have to accept the noble at his own evaluation of "good", but nor do we have to accept the slave's evaluation of him as evil. On the other hand, Nietzsche is clearer and more straightforward in his rejection of the slave's evaluation of himself as "good", a subject to which he returns in section 13.

Continuing the imagery of animals, Nietzsche offers a parable:

"That lambs dislike great birds of prey does not seem strange: only it gives no ground for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say among themselves: 'These birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb - would he not be good?' there is no reason to find fault with this institution of an ideal, except perhaps that birds of prey might view it a little ironically and say: 'we don't dislike them at all, these good little lambs, we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb.'" (GM 1.13)

In explicating this parable Nietzsche touches on many crucial topics and it is, therefore, worthwhile to quote him at length.

"To demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength, that it should not be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength. A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect - more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to the seduction of language (and of the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it) which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a "subject," can it appear otherwise. . . . [P]opular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was free to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no "being" behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction added to the deed - the deed is everything. . . . [N]o wonder if the submerged, darkly glowering emotions of vengefulness and hatred exploit this belief for their own ends and in fact maintain no belief more ardently than the belief that *the strong man is free to be weak* and the bird of prey to be a lamb - for thus they gain the right to make the bird of prey accountable for being a bird of prey." (GM 1.13)

What Nietzsche objects to in the slave's evaluation of himself as "good" is not that it is wrong but that it is dishonest, relying on self-deception. If the weak wish to call themselves "good" there is nothing wrong with that but to further claim that they are not weak, but strong, that they could be otherwise but choose not to be, is deeply dishonest.

Nietzsche goes on to suggest that all slave ideals take this form of dishonesty using the imagery of the "workshop where *ideals* are

manufactured" (GM 1.14). Here, the slaves turn their weakness into religion with the crowning touch being their reinterpretation of their own desire for revenge into the "justice" of the last judgement and the coming of the kingdom of God (GM 1.14) and with it the eternal suffering of the "evil" in hell (GM 1.15). Here there are notes reminiscent of Marx with religion serving to justify passivity; the difference is that for Marx religion is not a creation of the underclass and works against their interests, while for Nietzsche it is precisely a creation of the underclass and serves them.

Visker (1990 p 446) argues that Nietzsche leaves unexplained why the master succumbs to the slave and the slave system of valuation and he argues that this surely points to some "slavishness" in the master himself. However, what Visker ignores is this dominant role of religion in shaping thought and values, a role which Nietzsche explores in depth in the third essay².

The last two thousand years, therefore, mark the history of a struggle between two competing systems of evaluation. Although Christianity has become dominant:

"... there are still places where the struggle is as yet undecided. One might even say that it has risen ever higher and thus become more and more profound and spiritual: so that today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a '*higher nature*,' a more spiritual nature, than that of being divided in this sense and a genuine battleground of these opposed values." (GM 1.16)

Nietzsche ends this first essay with the hope that the battle has not yet been completely won:

"Must the ancient fire not some day flare up much more terribly, after much longer preparation? More: must

one not desire it with all one's might? even will it?
even promote it?" (GM 1.17)

I have tried to emphasise in my reading of this first essay that Nietzsche does not merely glorify the nobles and denigrate the slaves. There are those, however, who disagree. Zeitlin for instance accuses Nietzsche of rejecting "slave" values without reason (1994 p 68) and argues that Nietzsche can see nothing of value in the slave revaluation:

"... whereas Freud recognizes that when accompanied by Eros repression brings with it certain redeeming social qualities, Nietzsche appears to have nothing but contempt for what he calls the 'herd-values' of co-operation and altruism." (1994 p 92)

Zeitlin implies that Nietzsche's aim is

"... restoring the noble, masterful type of man in whom the natural impulses are free" (1994 p 93).

This seems to me to be a straight-forward misreading of the essay. Nietzsche is careful to show both the strengths and weakness of both modes of valuation and to show what each has added to the development of Western man. What he argues for in the end is not an outright rejection of slave morality and a return to the past but for a new type of man - the Superman, the sovereign individual.

This is not to deny that Nietzsche regards the noble or master (and his way of valuing) more highly than the slave. Nehamas is surely nearer the mark when he says:

"[T]hough Nietzsche accepts the mode of valuation that characterizes the nobles of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, these nobles still do not constitute a particular type of person he wants directly to praise.

Rather, we can take them as one manifestation, under specific historical circumstances, of a general personality type which Nietzsche outlines and of which they are an example." (Nehamas, 1985 p 206)

But I think that even this oversimplifies and I would be more inclined to agree with Ansell-Pearson that Nietzsche is not simply for master morality and against slave morality but is rather looking towards the creation of something new and better out of a synthesis of the two, a way of valuing and acting which will incorporate both the depth of the slave and the instinctuality of the master (1991a pp 132-3).

A number of different critics have argued that we should not read the master and slave literally as historical depictions but rather more figuratively. Strong, for instance, argues that slave and master are to be understood as ideal types rather than descriptions of reality and that they define character types rather than behaviours (1975 pp 238-9). What is essential in distinguishing the two, according to Strong, is the direction of their willing - the master expresses his will outwardly, the slave directs it inward (1975 p 240).

Connolly, on the other hand, argues that what Nietzsche depicts is a dramatization of a struggle internal to each of us:

"The presentation of the slave morality allows Nietzsche to dramatize a struggle going on in everyone. Humans are incomplete outside of social form, yet any social form requires a measure of cruelty to complete humans according to its specifications. Moreover, to live we must suffer pain, injury, insults, losses, sickness and death, so we yearn to identify some higher purpose or goal to which our suffering contributes. *Human beings resent the transiency and suffering which define the human condition.* This condition can be tolerated best if

humans can find some agent who is responsible for suffering, an agent who can become the repository of resentment." (1988 p 153)

And White takes a similar view with his psychological reading:

"[I]f we read the story of the Master and Slave on this psychohistorical level it is relatively easy to comprehend them as the fragments of a single identity." (1988 p 688)

The master, White suggests, is pure activity, unmediated autonomy; the slave pure passivity and suffering, ruled by *ressentiment* (1988 pp 688-9). For White the question the genealogy raises is:

"How can the individual affirm himself as an autonomous individual, given a society that has steadily suppressed all active forces, and thus established willessness, or self-denial, as the dominant moment of contemporary life?" (1988 p 689)

Such readings seem to me to be incorrect, though not wholly so. Throughout both the first and second essays of the genealogy Nietzsche attempts to show that spiritual/moral concepts have their origins in material and physical circumstances. Likewise, in this first essay he argues that what was once a real struggle between two types of people has become internalized and thereby spiritualized. At the end of *The Genealogy*, that is in modern people, we find that the struggle between master and slave is indeed, as Connolly and White suppose, a psychological battle within individuals; but we should not read this all the way back. Indeed if Nietzsche did intend the work to be a "psychohistory" there would be little point in his suggesting that the battle between the two modes of valuation has now and gradually over the last two millennia become internalized (GM 1.16).

This would suggest that Nietzsche intends with his genealogy to portray actual occurrences. Whether he is successful or not is another matter. MacIntyre accuses Nietzsche of misrepresenting noble (heroic) societies:

"Nietzsche had to mythologize the distant past in order to sustain his vision. What Nietzsche portrays is aristocratic self-assertion; what Homer and the sagas show are forms of assertion proper to and required by a certain role. The self becomes what it is in heroic societies only through its role; it is a social creation, not an individual one." (1985 p 129)

This is not altogether justified for in both *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche acknowledges that society was originally the basis of valuation but argues that the final result of western history is the individual who can create his own values.

Another accusation of misrepresentation comes from Gaita:

"[H]is brilliant descriptions of the pathology of what he called a 'slave morality' can only be appreciated for what it is, namely a description of the pathology of certain Christian virtues, if we recognize what he did not, namely, that corruptions of, for example, remorse, are indeed *corruptions* of it." (1991 p 92)

Whatever the weaknesses of the story Nietzsche offers in this first essay, in it he offers us a powerful analysis of a useful concept - "ressentiment". *Ressentiment* is a matter of allocating blame for one's suffering and is occasioned when an affect does not lead to action. The active person does not suffer *ressentiment*, does not carry the past with him as a problem (Strong, 1975 p 246). The man of *ressentiment*, not at peace with

the past cannot make peace with the present either and can only assimilate the new in terms of the old (Strong, 1975 pp 246-7).

It leads to a moralising interpretation which wants to hold something responsible for the suffering. And it is, Nietzsche would argue, the basis of the Platonic-Christian world-view:

"Religion . . . abolishes all possibility of resentment, but it scarcely abolishes all possibility of *ressentiment*, since in fact it depends upon it for its existence: for what does religion do except to teach us that the suffering we endure we also deserve: religion redirects *ressentiment*, as Nietzsche puts it, by making the patient the very agent he seeks, informing us that we have brought it on ourselves."

(Danto, 1988 p 23)

Overcoming slave morality then is a matter of overcoming the *ressentiment* from which it springs. The implication of this is that in dealing with the past successfully - through the experience of the eternal recurrence or through genealogy - we will overcome the moral interpretation of the world by overcoming *ressentiment* and the need to allocate blame.

4.2 BAD CONSCIENCE

If the most important concept of the first essay is *ressentiment* that of the second essay is bad conscience and the primary relationship in this essay is not between master and slave but between creditor and debtor.

One of the difficulties we face in understanding this second essay is that Nietzsche offers no chronological link between this essay and the first. Strong and Ansell-Pearson who have both tried to situate it chronologically have given diametrically opposed interpretations.

Strong reads the second essay as talking of a later period than the first. He reads *ressentiment* as the first stage of the bad conscience, it is the stage in which the oppressed class blame the world for their suffering, seeking to overcome their enemies, which they do because of their numbers (1975 p 248). After this victory, the old instincts are turned inwards and there is a shift from *ressentiment* to bad conscience, in which man blames himself for his suffering (1975 p 249).

But according to Ansell-Pearson bad conscience precedes *ressentiment* and is a sort of "pre-moral guilt". It is man's first repression of his instinct and aggression which ultimately makes the slave revolt in morality possible (1994 p 137).

If forced to choose I would tend to agree with Ansell-Pearson with regard to chronology here: Nietzsche does talk of the creditor-debtor relation as the "oldest" relationship. He also speaks throughout the essay of the workings of the morality of mores, which preceded the Platonic-Christian moral view. But I would rather argue that both Ansell-Pearson and Strong are wrong in their assumption that the two crucial concepts of *ressentiment* and bad conscience are related to each other in a linear or other non-complex way. I would argue that the fact that Nietzsche does not himself explore the connection between the two indicates that he sees a diversity at the origins of our moral concepts and the experiences which give rise to them.

A second difficulty in understanding the second essay is that it lacks the clear narrative that shapes the first. It is a wide-ranging essay in which many issues are discussed - justice, the origins of state and society, the origins of religion, besides the concepts of bad conscience and guilt mentioned in its title. The second essay, unlike the first and third leaves the reader with a sense of being unsure of what it is really about. And as with so many of Nietzsche's "difficult" texts this second essay suffers relative critical neglect.

According to Ansell-Pearson the essay outlines the development of man as a political and moral being, underlying which is a conception of culture as discipline (1991a pp 133-4). And he argues that it

"[O]ffers two accounts of the formation of man as a moral and political animal, one in terms of what he calls the 'morality of custom' . . . and the other in terms of the bad conscience" (1991a p 134).

It is through the morality of custom that man is turned into a political animal, a creature with a memory, who can make promises, take on and meet obligations etc. (1991a p 137). The means employed to perform this task are often cruel, but:

"It is on account of the cultivation of his memory by the use of such methods that the human being learns the significance of its obligations to society. These obligations to perform social duties are made in the form of the individual making promises in return for which society offers it protection and security. It is in the context of this exchange between the individual and society that Nietzsche locates man's power of reasoning and capacity for rational thought." (Ansell-Pearson, 1991a pp 137-8)

In this way Nietzsche turns modern political thought on its head

"For what that tradition, including Rousseau, takes for granted - free will, conscience, and other so-called innate 'moral' capacities - are shown to be the product of a historical process of socialization." (Ansell-Pearson, 1991a p 138)

This second essay begins with the notion of promising and memory.

"To breed an animal *with the right to make promises* - is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man? is it not the real problem regarding man?" (GM 2.1)

This task entails the overcoming of forgetfulness which, for Nietzsche, is not a passive thing:

"[I]t is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression" (GM 2.1).

In fact it is the basis of psychological health and well-being. Once again we encounter the theme of successfully dealing with the past; forgetting is one way of accomplishing this. But the case of promises requires memory which is not only active, like forgetfulness, but an act of will. So much is presupposed by promising, Nietzsche says.

"This precisely is the long story of how *responsibility* originated. The task of breeding an animal with the right to make promises evidently embraces and presupposes as a preparatory task that one first *makes* men to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and consequently calculable. The tremendous labor of that which I have called "morality of mores" . . . - the labor performed by man upon himself during the greater part of the existence of the human race, his entire *prehistoric* labor, finds in this its meaning, its great justification, notwithstanding the severity, tyranny, stupidity, and idiocy involved in it: with the aid of morality of mores and the social straitjacket, man was actually *made* calculable.

"If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process, where the tree at last brings forth fruit, where society and the morality of custom at last

reveal what they have simply been the means to: then we discover that the ripest fruit is the *sovereign individual*, like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral, in short, the man who has his own independent, protracted will and the *right to make promises* . . . The 'free' man, the possessor of a protracted and unbreakable will, also possesses his *measure of value*: looking out upon others from himself he is bound to honor his peers, the strong and reliable (those with the *right to make promises*) . . . The proud awareness of the extraordinary *privilege of responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate, has in this case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct, supposing he feels the need to give it a name? The answer is beyond doubt: this sovereign man calls it his *conscience*." (GM 2.2)

The first stage in this whole process is, of course, memory. How did memory come about? Through cruelty and suffering, is Nietzsche's reply.

"Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges (sacrifices of the first-born among them), the most repulsive mutilations (castration, for example), the cruellest rites of all religious cults (and all religions are at the deepest level systems of cruelties) - all this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics." (GM 2.3)

This is the history of conscience; but what of bad conscience? Nietzsche suggests that etymology may again hold the clue pointing to the link (in German, at least) between the word for

guilt and that for debts. Punishment, Nietzsche argues, arises out of the debtor-creditor relationship. Punishment originally functioned not out of notions of accountability, but as a way of repaying debts. Again, we can note that Nietzsche locates the genesis of a moral notion in more basic material conditions and relations.

The creditor-debtor relation crucially involves a promise and therefore memory. Where the debtor failed to repay his creditor he offered in substitution:

" . . . something else that he 'possessed,' something he had control over; for example, his body, his wife, his freedom, or even his life. . . . Above all, however, the creditor could inflict every kind of indignity and torture upon the body of the debtor" (GM 2.5)

he could extract quite literally "his pound of flesh". What this amounts to is that the creditor takes his repayment in the form of pleasure:

"[T]he pleasure of being allowed to vent his power freely upon one who is powerless, the voluptuous pleasure '*de faire le mal pour le plaisir de le faire*,' the enjoyment of violation." (GM 2.5)

Nietzsche's argument is that the cruelty suffered by the debtor must be *enjoyed* by the creditor or repayment is not affected. Right from the start the notion of guilt is associated with suffering:

"To see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more. . . . Without cruelty there is no festival . . . and in punishment there is so much that is *festive*!-" (GM 2.6)

It is, Nietzsche argues, the relation of debtor and creditor, "the oldest and most primitive personal relationship" (GM 2.8), which gives rise to the ideas of guilt and responsibility and also Nietzsche claims to justice (which he portrays as a noble virtue having nothing to do with later Christian conceptions of justice as revenge):

"'everything has its price; all things can be paid for' - the oldest and naivest moral canon of *justice*, the beginning of all 'good naturedness,' all 'fairness,' all 'good will,' all 'objectivity' on earth. Justice on this elementary level is the good will among parties of approximately equal power to come to terms with one another, to reach an 'understanding' by means of a settlement - and to *compel* parties of lesser power to reach a settlement among themselves.-" (GM 2.8)

Nietzsche argues that the community stands in relation to its members as creditor to debtor, membership of a community offers benefits and the breaking of this pledge is an act of aggression (GM 2.9).

The more powerful the community, the less dangerous the threat posed by any individual, the less harm any one person can wreak on the whole; and the more merciful, therefore, the community can be towards the lawbreaker - even protecting him against the wrath of those he has injured. The power of a community can be measured, Nietzsche continues, by its attitude towards its lawbreakers, the amount of mercy in its penal code.

"It is not unthinkable that a society might attain such a *consciousness of power* that it could allow itself the noblest luxury possible to it - letting those who harm it go *unpunished* . . . it ends, as does every good thing on earth, by *overcoming itself*. This self-overcoming of justice: one knows the beautiful

name it has given itself - *mercy*; it goes without saying that mercy remains the privilege of the most powerful man, or better, his - beyond the law." (GM 2.10)

But punishment is not a means of instilling or awakening the transgressor's guilt or bad conscience. Nietzsche argues, if anything, punishment hardens people against guilt and so punishment has served as a means of preventing guilt rather than awakening it. Indeed, Nietzsche says, the criminal cannot but be aware that it is not his acts as such which the judicial system repudiates but his ends, and those who put the same actions to the service of acceptable ends go unpunished. We must seek the source of bad conscience elsewhere, then.

In section 16, Nietzsche offers his own hypothesis:

"I regard the bad conscience as the serious illness that man was bound to contract 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." (GM 2.16)

Nietzsche likens the stress of this change to that of the first animals to leave the sea for land. In both situations old instincts no longer apply and these are turned inwards.

"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.'" (GM 2.16)

In particular, man's wildness had to be tamed, his freedom curtailed and this turned inwards on him:

"Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction - all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: *that is the origin of the 'bad conscience.'*"

"The man who, from lack of external enemies and resistances and forcibly confined to the oppressive narrowness and punctiliousness of custom, impatiently lacerated, persecuted, gnawed at, assaulted, and maltreated himself; this animal that rubbed itself raw against the bars of its cage as one tried to 'tame' it; this deprived creature, racked with homesickness for the wild, who had to turn himself into an adventure, a torture chamber, an uncertain and dangerous wilderness - this fool, this yearning and desperate prisoner became the inventor of the 'bad conscience.' But 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 2.16)

This also however constitutes the heart of man's potential:

"[T]he 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. . . . 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 2.16)

Nietzsche goes on to outline the two assumptions which underlie this reading: firstly, that society marked not a gradual evolution but a complete break, a leap; secondly, that society is from the start, but also throughout, an act of violence. The state Nietzsche claims arises not out of a contract but by the conquering of one group by another, stronger group. And these masters, unharmed by society, their wildness and freedom unchecked do not experience the bad conscience though they are its source (GM 2.17).

In section 18, Nietzsche tells us that this instinct for freedom is nothing other than the will to power. The bad conscience is thus the will to power denied outward expression and turned inwards.

The bad conscience, the will to power turned against itself, is, Nietzsche would have it, the real basis of all selflessness and explains the joy of selflessness, self-denial - it is the joy of cruelty turned on oneself (GM 2.18).

Religion, too, Nietzsche claims, can be traced back to the debtor-creditor relation. The present generation is indebted to its ancestors for the formation of the tribe and the sacrifices they made in order for this to happen. The ancestors must be repaid with sacrifice, obedience, festivities. As the tribe increases in power the debt to the ancestors becomes greater, the ancestors themselves seem ever larger and more fearful until they turn into gods. This movement reaches its apex in the Christian God - the God who cannot be repaid because he sacrificed himself. It is no coincidence, then, that as Christianity declines so too does the feeling of guilt, the sense of the unpaid debt. Ultimately Nietzsche sees in atheism "a kind of *second innocence*" (GM 2.20).

What has happened, Nietzsche tells us, is that man - driven by his bad conscience - has seized upon the religious explanation to make his suffering worse to drive his torment to new heights,

to reject himself still further - all his nature, all his naturalness. The will to power denied its true expression becomes a will to be found unworthy, a will to failure, a will to poison itself and all it is denied.

"Oh this insane, pathetic beast - man! What ideas he has, what unnaturalness, what paroxysms of nonsense, what *bestiality of thought* erupts as soon as he is prevented just a little from being a *beast in deed!*"
(GM 2.22)

The bad conscience, then, is a second source of nihilism. By repressing the will to power man cripples his own creative capacity. But at the same time, bad conscience brings with it new possibilities.

Danto, who despite criticisms levelled at him persists in translating the German as "bad consciousness", argues that bad conscience develops out of a situation in which man has to repress and contain his instincts and does so through finding mental ways of releasing his instincts. Newman takes a similar view:

"It is thus that, for Nietzsche, the inner life of consciousness, originally weak and insignificant, first became important for him." (1982 p 211)

And not just subjectively important but instrumentally so for man's new inner life ultimately endows him with new powers:

"Through releasing his assertive drives in a controlled and systematic, instead of in a random and haphazard, fashion, he began to transform his will to conquer the world outside of him into a will to describe and to understand it, and to control his own life within it by making rational, scientific predictions concerning it." (Newman, 1982 pp 211-2)

Paramount among these interpretations man has devised is the Platonic-Christian world-view:

"Christian morality and its metaphysics of the soul are now affirmed as the sole representatives of truth, order, preservation, and survival; while the will to power is denied, as representing only untruth, chaos, death, and destruction. The revaluation of the natural order is complete." (Newman, 1982 p 214)

With the result, Newman argues, that modern man is caught in a tension between consciousness and his drives which cannot be fully expressed or sublimated by it. Nietzsche views these interpretations developed by the bad conscience as being at the core of modern nihilism. So it might be argued that overcoming *ressentiment* leaves open the way for new values, overcoming bad conscience leaves open the way for new interpretations. Nietzsche believes that these new values and interpretations must be shaped by a new ideal and so in the final essay he sets about analysing the dominant ideal of Western history.

4.3 THE ASCETIC IDEAL

As stated in the previous chapter, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche brings together religion and philosophy into a unity which he calls the Ascetic Ideal. In the third and final essay, "What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?" Nietzsche analyses this Ideal at work and links it to the genesis of nihilism.

As Magnus points out the story Nietzsche tells not only in *On the Genealogy of Morals* but throughout his work depends on our accepting Nietzsche's two crucial assumptions: first, that morality, religion and philosophy intersect in a way that enables us to see them as some sort of unity,

"as expressing a single ascetic ideal motivated by the will to power" (1983 p 305)

and second,

"that of all the complex historical factors . . . that have shaped western civilization and character, none are as important . . . in telling us how we became who we are." (1983 p 305)

Nietzsche begins by showing that ascetic ideals (poverty, chastity and humility) have many different meanings and argues that this variety of significances must have its own significance:

"That the ascetic ideal has meant so many things to man, however, is an expression of the basic fact of the human will, its *horror vacui*: it needs a goal - and it will rather will *nothingness* than *not will*." (GM 3.1)

The first sections of the essay are given to analyses of the phenomenon of asceticism in two of Nietzsche's greatest influences: Wagner (GM 3.2-4) and Schopenhauer (GM 3.6-7). And from these Nietzsche draws general conclusions about the nature of asceticism in the artist and the philosopher.

The artist's embodiment of asceticism Nietzsche thinks is ultimately unimportant, the artist is too distanced from reality for his values to be of interest. Moreover, artists' values are never their own:

"They have at all times been valets of some morality, philosophy, or religion . . . They always need at the very least protection, a prop, an established authority: artists never stand apart; standing alone is contrary to their deepest instincts." (GM 3.5)

The philosopher, on the other hand, does (even needs to) stand alone and his independence depends on asceticism. With this in

mind Nietzsche offers his answer to the question of what asceticism means to the philosopher:

"[T]he philosopher sees in it an optimum condition for the highest and boldest spirituality and smiles - he does not deny 'existence,' he rather affirms his existence and only his existence" (GM 3.7).

Asceticism is thus, for the philosopher, essentially interested and selfish; a release from all that binds him to the animal world, freeing him, his time and energy, for his all-consuming task. For the philosopher the ideals of poverty, chastity and humility are not virtues but conditions of existence (GM 3.8).

Nietzsche then looks back to the genealogical links between philosophy and asceticism, finding a strong bond. In particular Nietzsche argues that philosophy originally needed asceticism in order to gain strength. In the first instance philosophy (in the person surely of Socrates) stood against morality and society:

"Draw up a list of the various propensities and virtues of the philosopher - his bent to doubt, his bent to deny, his bent to suspend judgment . . ., his bent to analyze, his bent to investigate, seek, dare, his bent to compare and balance, his will to neutrality and objectivity, . . . is it not clear that for the longest time all of them contravened the basic demands of morality and conscience" (GM 3.9).

And standing against society and its values in this way, the earliest philosophers were either feared or despised (GM 3.10). Only by invoking fear in others could philosophers ensure for themselves the space they needed, all the more so since they must have feared and resisted "the philosopher in them" (GM 3.10):

"[T]o begin with, the philosophic spirit always had to use as a mask and cocoon the *previously established*

types of the contemplative man - priest, sorcerer, soothsayer, and in any case a religious type - in order to be able to exist at all: the ascetic ideal for a long time served the philosopher as a form in which to appear, as a precondition of existence - he had to represent it so as to be able to be a philosopher; he had to believe in it in order to be able to represent it." (GM 3.10)

So for the philosopher, asceticism is a mask necessary to invoke fear in others and thereby to make possible his life.

For the religious type, the priest, on the other hand asceticism is no mask but a real end:

"The ascetic priest possessed in this ideal not only his faith but also his will, his power, his interest. His right to exist stands or falls with that ideal" (GM 3.11).

It is with the priest that we really get to grips with the meaning of asceticism. Asceticism for the priest works in terms of a value system which places value in a different world, a different life from this one; asceticism, as a denial of this world, offers a bridge to the other. This form of valuation has been the most prevalent throughout human existence:

"So monstrous a mode of valuation stands inscribed in the history of mankind not as an exception and curiosity, but as one of the most widespread and enduring of all phenomena. Read from a distant star, the majuscule script of our earthly existence would perhaps lead to the conclusion that the earth was the distinctively ascetic planet, a nook of disgruntled, arrogant, and offensive creatures filled with a profound disgust at themselves, at the earth, at all life, who inflict as much pain on themselves as they

possibly can out of pleasure in inflicting pain - which is probably their only pleasure." (GM 3.11)

Why is it so universal a phenomenon?

"It must be a necessity of the first order that again and again promotes the growth and prosperity of this *life-inimical* species - it must indeed be in the *interest of life itself* that such a self-contradictory type does not die out." (GM 3.11)

From a physiological perspective Nietzsche argues it is not possible for life to turn against life, and so he concludes there must be another explanation for asceticism - the contradiction can only be apparent. According to his reading asceticism actually works to preserve life, it is a struggle not against life but against this life, with its sickness and degeneracy, and hence against death (GM 3.13).

The nihilism at the heart of asceticism is powered by nausea and pity at man and his sickness, and such pity serves to protect the weak and sick while attempting to convince the strong that their strength is itself unhealthy (GM 3.14).

The priest protects the sick herd not only against the masters but also against itself. He "*alters the direction of resentment*" (GM 3.15), the need to allocate blame for suffering by convincing them that they themselves are to blame (GM 3.15). By giving meaning to suffering the priest relieves the suffering but does not cure it.

Religion, then, has its basis in physiological weakness and sickness which it seeks to overcome by first of all anaesthetizing man:

"If possible, will and desire are abolished altogether; all that produces affects and 'blood' is

avoided . . .; no love; no hate; indifference; no revenge; no wealth; no work; one begs; if possible, no women, or as little as possible" (GM 3.17).

That this has the affect of bringing renewed joy for life is attested to by holy men and saints of all religions. They experience it as access to the truth and goodness as such; Nietzsche, though, offers a different interpretation:

"[T]he hypnotic sense of nothingness, the repose of deepest sleep, in short *absence of suffering* - sufferers and those profoundly depressed will count this as the supreme good, as the value of values; they are *bound* to accord it a positive value, to experience it as *the positive* as such. (According to the same logic of feeling, all pessimistic religions call nothingness *God*.)" (GM 3.17)

The second method of treatment employed by the priest is mechanical activity, which seeks to keep the sick so busy, their minds so focused, that they do not have the time and energy to dwell on their suffering. A third is the use of petty pleasure, most often the pleasure of giving pleasure to others, which gives release to the will to power in carefully managed and modified doses, so that it does not find more painful and dangerous outlets. This third treatment leads to the formation of the sick into a herd, a community of sufferers, which relieves the suffering of the individual by focusing his attention on another (GM 3.18).

Besides these means, which Nietzsche labels his "innocent" means, the priest also employs "guilty" means, through which he attempts to relieve the depression through an "*orgy of feeling*" (GM 3.19), which serves:

"To wrench the human soul from its moorings, to immerse it in terrors, ice, flames, displeasure, gloom, and depression as by a flash of lightning" (GM 3.20).

Although such a course is prescribed in good faith by the priest it serves in the end only to make the sick sicker for they must pay for what they have done. Examples of this type of means include exploiting the sense of guilt - turning man's suffering back against himself, so that he sees himself and not society as the cause, turning the sufferer into the "sinner" who must then be punished through the inflicting of pain (on the self); such pain works to make life interesting and therefore once again livable (GM 3.20).

Given that its effects are deleterious, why has it thrived, and how?

"What is the meaning of the power of this ideal, the monstrous nature of its power? . . . Where is the other 'one goal'?" (GM 3.23)

Nietzsche answers the second question first. He looks then at the possible contenders for this role, principally science. Science appears to be opposed to religion but Nietzsche rejects it as an alternative:

"Science today has absolutely no belief in itself, let alone an ideal above it - and where it still inspires passion, love, ardor, and *suffering* at all, it is not the opposite of the ascetic ideal but rather the *latest and noblest form of it.*" (GM 3.23)

In this critique of science Nietzsche includes "the last idealist left among philosophers and scholars" (GM 3.24), the free spirits; these, too, he disqualifies since they still believe (have faith) in truth (GM 3.24). He compares this with the

Assassins' motto: "Nothing is true, everything is permitted."
(GM 3.24). The belief in truth, Nietzsche says is nothing more
than an incarnation of the ascetic ideal:

"[I]t is the faith in a *metaphysical* value, the
absolute value of *truth*, sanctioned and guaranteed by
this ideal alone (it stands or falls with this
ideal)." (GM 3.24)

But truth is questionable for Nietzsche:

"From the moment faith in the God of the ascetic ideal
is denied, a *new problem arises*: that of the value of
truth.

"The will to truth requires a critique - let us thus
define our own task - the value of truth must for once
be experimentally *called into question*." (GM 3.24)

Having rejected science and philosophy as creators of liberating
new ideals Nietzsche turns to art. Art was, of course,
Nietzsche's own first solution to the problem of meaning - in *The
Birth of Tragedy* he wrote "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon*
that existence and the world are eternally *justified*." (BT 5).
Art does not lay claim to truth in the same way that philosophy
and religion do; it embraces appearance and lie. It may seem,
therefore, that here we have an opposing ideal. But Nietzsche
no longer holds out such a hope for art, having come to believe
that art is parasitic on values and ideals rather than a creator
of them (GM 5, GM 25).

He concludes that:

"[I]n the most spiritual sphere, too, the ascetic
ideal has at present only one kind of *real enemy*
capable of *harming* it: the comedians of this ideal -
for they arouse mistrust of it." (GM 3.27)

In the final section (section 28) Nietzsche at last offers his answer to the question of the meaning of the ascetic ideal. It has been an attempt to give meaning to life:

"Apart from the ascetic ideal, man, the human *animal*, had no meaning so far. His existence on earth contained no goal; 'why man at all?' - was a question without an answer; the *will* for man and earth was lacking; behind every great human destiny there sounded as a refrain a yet greater 'in vain!' *This* is precisely what the ascetic ideal means: that something was *lacking*, that man was surrounded by a fearful *void* - he did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he *suffered* from the problem of his meaning. He also suffered otherwise, he was in the main a sickly animal: but his problem was *not* suffering itself, but that there was no answer to the crying question, 'why do I suffer?'" (GM 3.28)

It is not the suffering man fears but the meaninglessness of it - the ascetic ideal gives meaning to man's suffering and in so doing helps him to live: "*the will itself was saved.*" (GM 3.28), for:

". . . man would rather will *nothingness* than not will." (GM 3.28)

It is perhaps surprising that in this text Nietzsche's vision seems to fail him. Strong argues that at the end of the genealogy Nietzsche leaves a void, he offers no constructive alternative (1975 p 251).

I do not think this is so. Nietzsche explicitly stated in the original edition that the book should be read in the light of *Beyond Good and Evil* and he also stated that the latter was to be read in the light of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Thus, we might

surmise that Nietzsche felt no need to reiterate ideals and ideas that he had already developed.

According to Ansell-Pearson (1991a) Nietzsche finds his answer in Zarathustra.

"Nietzsche's final message seems to be that there is no alternative to the ascetic ideal other than a parodic overcoming of it." (Ansell-Pearson, 1994 p 146)

But this I would argue is only half true. The ideals that Nietzsche developed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and in *Beyond Good and Evil* were not themselves parodic. And while Nietzsche speaks of the comedic response to the ascetic ideal he says not that it is a replacement, nor that it is the only response, only that it is the only current enemy of the ideal. Nietzsche is never comic for long, it is always the tragic which attracts him (after all he calls himself a "tragic philosopher"). Nietzsche does not, I would argue, abandon his vision of the future in *On the Genealogy of Morals* but rather takes it as read.

That said, I would agree with White that Nietzsche, well aware of the role of chance in history, offers two visions of the future - one of the continued triumph of the slave, one of the sovereign individual - and we are thereby forced to choose (1988 pp 694-5).

4.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

While *On the Genealogy of Morals* does not offer a further elucidation of Nietzsche's proposed solution to nihilism it does support his vision by offering an aetiology of the problem.

Although *On the Genealogy of Morals* is about the past, it is a history offered with an eye to the future. In the course of the three essays Nietzsche locates three sources of nihilism, three

factors which the Superman, now conceived as the sovereign individual must overcome - *ressentiment*, bad conscience and the ascetic ideal. The genealogy itself can be read as an attempt to overcome these factors by showing their natural roots and offering the vision of alternative moral codes, alternative ways of interpreting the world and (though not, as we have said, spelled out) alternative ideals based in the repressed, though not lost, aspects of western culture and history.

Throughout the three essays he presents us with a picture of ourselves as crippled, in counterpoint to the extreme health characteristic of Nietzsche's ideal of the future. But perhaps he sets up too strong a dichotomy, perhaps we are not as crippled, and perhaps the vision he offers is not as healthy, as he would have us believe. The next chapter will explore these possibilities through a critical examination of Nietzsche's vision.

NOTES

1. Newman (1991) makes the point that in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche repudiates both the market place of ideas and the essay form, yet in *On the Genealogy of Morals* he brings three essays to the market place of ideas. Newman argues from this that Nietzsche can be seen still to be seeking the disciples that Zarathustra never found.
2. Interestingly Danto pointed out the role of religion in this defeat in his *Nietzsche as philosopher* (1965). But he too thinks there is an incoherency here:

"[I]t is virtually inconsistent to say of x and y that x is weaker than y, but y succumbs to x." (1965, pp 186-7)

CHAPTER FIVE: SELF-CREATION, POLITICS AND MORALITY

In the preceding chapters it was argued that Nietzsche can be read as responding to a perceived crisis in modernity - a crisis of values, truth and agency which he labels nihilism. He offers a vision of a future beyond the crisis - a vision which rests on the ideal of healthy and strong individuals who are able to shape themselves, to act and create both values and interpretations of the world in the face of the death of God. Far from being the solipsistic ideal that it appears to be in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche indicates in *Beyond Good and Evil* that it might somehow serve to justify and redeem the whole of Western history and culture - if society is, in the first instance, sacrificed to the development of such individuals, through an era of great politics in which the demands of social justice are subjugated to the demands of culture.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche attempts to convince us of both the plausibility and possibility of a rejuvenated Western culture by analysing those factors that he believes to be the source of the modern malaise - the values of slave morality with their basis in *ressentiment*; the interpretative framework of bad conscience and the ideal of asceticism. In the course of analysing these he also shows that they are only one way of experiencing and making sense of the world, that Western culture contains within itself other possibilities, which have been repressed, and which can serve as the basis of a future liberation.

In this chapter I will explore Nietzsche's solution to the problem of nihilism both in terms of its ideal of the individual (5.2) and politics (5.3). In both cases it will be argued that Nietzsche's proposals are ultimately unfeasible and unattractive. In 5.4 I argue that Nietzsche's solution is matched by his misconception of the problem - I will suggest that modernity is not characterized by a crisis of nihilism. Before moving on to

this discussion I want to clarify Nietzsche's position on morality (5.1).

5.1 MORALITY

Nietzsche called himself an immoralist and critics have often read that to mean that Nietzsche rejects all morality. The most influential contemporary instance of such an interpretation is that of MacIntyre. In his book *After Virtue* he reads Nietzsche's claim to be that:

"[A]ll rational vindications of morality manifestly fail and that therefore belief in the tenets of morality needs to be explained in terms of a set of rationalizations which conceal the fundamentally non-rational phenomena of the will." (MacIntyre, 1985 p 117)

From the discussion of *Beyond Good and Evil* it is evident that Nietzsche does believe morality to be ultimately irrational, a manifestation of will. But since he takes all values and all interpretations, including his own, to be at bottom irrational manifestations of will, the issue of rationality cannot be at the basis of Nietzsche's critique of morality. Rather, as I have argued in the previous chapter, he is concerned with the effects of morality - nihilism and the crippling of creativity.

"Morality as benevolence on demand breeds self-condemnation for those who fall short and a depreciation of the impulses to self-fulfilment, seen as so many obstacles raised by egoism to our meeting the standard. Nietzsche has explored this with sufficient force to make embroidery otiose. And indeed, Nietzsche's challenge is based on a deep insight. If morality can only be powered negatively, where there can be no such thing as beneficence powered by an affirmation of the recipient as a being

of value, then pity is destructive to the giver and degrading to the receiver, and the ethic of benevolence may indeed be indefensible. Nietzsche's challenge is on the deepest level, because he is looking precisely for what can release such an affirmation of being. His unsettling conclusion is that it is the ethic of benevolence which stands in the way of it." (Taylor, 1992a p 516)

I would agree with Taylor here. Nietzsche does believe that morality functions only negatively; but when he speaks of morality in these terms he is referring to an ethics of benevolence or in his own terms "slave morality".

Bergmann explains this using a distinction, which he thinks is already implicit in Nietzsche's work, between the content and the modality of a code. He sees Nietzsche's attack being directed at a certain modality, one which uses

"the apparatus of agency, selfhood, freedom, responsibility, blame, and guilt" (1988 p 34).

He argues that we might call any code using this modality a morality. Bergmann goes on to suggest that looking at Nietzsche's critique of morality in this way clarifies two issues:

"On one side, it establishes that Nietzsche did not only attack Christian morality but all morality 'as such.' But very much more important is the other side: namely, that other values, or ways of encoding values, are vigorously split off from the modality that makes them 'moral.'" (1988 p 36)

In fact, Bergmann argues that Nietzsche shows that morality, understood in this sense, is inextricably linked to religious commitment that notions like "guilt", "freedom", "responsibility"

and "equality" are tied up in "the web of quite particular stories and ideas" (1988 p 37) in which they originate.

"The claim is that the connection is *conceptual*, that the full meaning of any of these terms . . . cannot be captured or restated if one separates them off the belief in God. Strictly speaking they are part of a *theological* language which cannot be secularized!" (1988 p 38)

So, on Bergmann's account Nietzsche attempts to rescue values from nihilism by jettisoning the moral code which is anyway liable to collapse and which might otherwise drag all values down with it.

I believe Bergmann's interpretation of Nietzsche's critique of morality is substantially correct. It was argued in chapter one that a significant aspect of the crisis of nihilism is, for Nietzsche, the fact that the dominant Platonic-Christian world view is collapsing and threatens to leave a valueless void, not because its values are the only ones, but because its absolutist claims have been accepted.

Nietzsche is thus concerned to show that the collapse of our moral code does not necessarily produce such a void, that there are other ways of valuing that can take its place. And, furthermore, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche is concerned to show that these other values are present in Western culture though they are repressed.

One such repressed code is that of virtue and it is to this code which Nietzsche turns. Though MacIntyre, through his irrationalist reading of Nietzsche, is led to conclude that we have a single choice - Aristotle or Nietzsche - other critics have been more struck by the parallels between these two thinkers. Solomon (1985), for instance, points to these parallels arguing that both favour excellence over commonality,

practice over reason and that in this they stand in sharp contrast to someone like Kant.¹

Nietzsche's adoption of a virtue code is not without its problems though. In the first place, human nature is not merely given on Nietzsche's account. Instead the virtuous individual takes what is given (his drives) and creates himself through a process of experimentation:

"Nietzsche, like Aristotle, believes that our tables of what is good should conform to what we essentially are . . . Where Nietzsche and Aristotle differ is that Nietzsche believes that we don't yet know what our nature is." (Kerckhove, 1994 p 157)

Secondly, Nietzsche's individual is decontextualized in that either he is asocial as is Zarathustra or he finds his place in a form of society not yet in existence (the pan-European aristocracy of *Beyond Good and Evil*).

"There is no context . . . within which the new virtues we are to 'create' are to be virtues, for a virtue without a practice is of no more value than a word without a language, a gesture without a context." (Solomon, 1985 p 255)

"Without a presupposed ethos, no justification is possible. Within an ethos, none is necessary." (Solomon, 1985 p 260)

The problem of how any code can have a hold without a social context and within only an experimental individual situation is put most forcibly by Stern.

"[I]t is obvious that every decision must be preceded by a moment of indecision: such a moment may occur in the course of all sorts of practical choices and

scientific experiments, but can it occur in ethics? No man, other than the lunatic or criminal, is ever in a moral vacuum. And if he were, what could possibly cause him to emerge from it? Not the old values, for they are to be rejected (this is to be a radical 're-valuation'), nor yet the new ones, for on these he has not yet decided" (1979 p 137).

There is a gap in Nietzsche's thought, it seems between the crisis-ridden present and the redeemed future. There is a void which leaves the question of how we get from here to there unexplained and perhaps inexplicable. *The Genealogy* is the first step towards this, explaining how the resources we draw up on in the transition are latently present, but an explanation of the mechanics of the process is lacking. We will encounter this gap again in our discussion of Nietzsche's political vision, but first I will turn to a discussion of Nietzsche's individual.

5.2 THE INDIVIDUAL

In this section I want to investigate the ideal of the individual which Nietzsche offers. He characterises this type variously as the Superman (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), the attempter (*Beyond Good and Evil*) and the sovereign individual (*On the Genealogy of Morals*) but in each case he attributes to this type a range of features which he takes to be expressions of psychological health - creativity, laughter, playfulness, responsibility. To these he adds another - solitude. The Nietzschean individual both creates and justifies himself.

Given that Nietzsche's model individual is solitary commentators have been prone to interpret Nietzsche as neglecting, even ignoring, the social². This sort of reading can be traced in Anglo-Saxon philosophy to Kaufmann's rehabilitative work but it finds particularly strong expression in Stern:

"[A] pervasive limitation of Nietzsche's thinking . . . is his consistent neglect of, and his indiscriminate bias against, what I shall call the sphere of association." (1978 p 116)

"Between the two poles of individual psychology and cosmic or millennial speculation . . . there seems to be a void; or rather, not a void but the curiously unreal picture of a society which is both rigid and provisional, and which (he avers) must be totally transcended." (1978 p 120)

It should be unnecessary, at this stage, to refute the idea that there is a social vacuum in Nietzsche's thought. The social sphere is present in all three of the works we have discussed. Moreover, it is not just the past and present that have a social content, but Nietzsche's vision of the future too. Nietzsche is not concerned merely with the individual but with the type of society that would best enhance the possibilities of the individual.

But readings such as Stern's are not, I believe, altogether wrong. Nietzsche does tend to pit the individual against society and social morality:

"Authenticity involves originality, it demands a revolt against convention. . . . Morality as normally understood obviously involves crushing much that is elemental and instinctive in us, many of our deepest and most powerful desires. So there develops a branch of the search for authenticity that pits it against the moral. Nietzsche, who seeks a kind of self-making in the register of the aesthetic, sees this as quite incompatible with the traditional Christian-inspired ethic of benevolence." (1992b pp 65-6)

Nietzsche does seem to suppose that the authentic self, the fully individuated individual can only attain this state through opposition to society and its mores. And by opposing the individual and society in this way he comes to view society in negative terms. Society, like morality, is seen as that which would shape man into its own image, crush his deepest drives and most individual aspects, mould him into conformity.

"[T]he tendency to equate 'social man' with 'unauthentic man' is highly misleading. . . . Any society will put pressure on the individuals who are born into it to think and behave in certain ways, but this need not be only the conversion of individuals to social purposes; it is also, in very many cases, an expression of the society's desire to see those individuals survive and grow, according to the best experience the society has." (Williams, 1965 pp 103-4)

The picture of a society which does not merely cripple but also nurtures and in which the individual may be integrated and yet authentically himself is, I believe, one Nietzsche both rejects and yearns for. This yearning is evident in Nietzsche's aristocratic vision, for this is a society which is intended to meet the (strong, creative) individual's needs. But at the same time Nietzsche cannot quite believe in the possibility of peaceful coexistence between society and individual and so this society has to be made subject to the individual will, shaped and moulded to fit him. The Nietzschean individual is wholly self-sufficient, he stands alone and has need of society only in so far as it makes this possible.

"The idea that there might be a form of ethical creativity that is in some sense collective and social and not just the fiat of an individual will is not one that Nietzsche can be said to have entertained in any meaningful way. As a result, by overtaxing the individual will and by construing the social side in

terms of a contrast between the passive compliance of the herd and the arbitrary commands of an aristocratic elite, he disjoins the individual and social components within morality in a way that can only be detrimental to both." (Olafson, 1991 p 572)

What is missing from Nietzsche's understanding is the way in which the self is not an individual creation, but a dialogical construction. This absence is most evident if we look at his conception not of society but of interpersonal relationships. Here, I believe, we find the real lacuna in Nietzsche's work, one which has been neglected both by those who see Nietzsche's vision as lacking any social understanding and by those who have argued that Nietzsche's thought is importantly social - there is in Nietzsche's work little engagement with, and almost no positive conception of, interpersonal relationships.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* for instance, the title character is alone not just at the end of the tale but is isolated throughout. His most serious and sustained human relationships are with his disciples and the higher men but we do not encounter the disciples as individuals and the higher men remain at the level of caricature. In both cases Zarathustra is the imparter of wisdom gained on an individual quest rather than an equal engaged in a shared adventure. The hero seems unable to find anyone he might consider an equal and any encounter that might hold such potential (such as that with the hermit at the beginning of the book) is abruptly cut short. His most meaningful relationships are with his snake and eagle! Is Zarathustra really a model of psychological health, someone so spiritually advanced that his equal genuinely does not exist? Or is he rather a case study of alienation, unwilling and perhaps incapable of genuinely sharing his life and participating in the lives of others?

In *Beyond Good and Evil* the overcoming of all bonds to other people is advocated as necessary to the development of the self (BGE 26, 27, 29). Where Nietzsche allows some positive element

to friendship (BGE 27) it is in disturbingly instrumental terms - the friendship is justified if it spurs one on to greater heights otherwise it must be left behind for it stands in the way of one's own development.

On the Genealogy of Morals explores two possible self-other relationships - the master-slave relation of the first essay and the debtor-creditor relation of the second. Neither of these involves equality and the first involves only enmity and contest. The second, which does hold possibilities of equality (debts after all can be repaid), is barely explored as a relationship at all. Where the relationship among the masters, another potentially equal relationship, is discussed it is characterized in terms of respect and gratitude but also of suspicion and jealousy and again the possibilities are left unexplored.

Nietzsche's supposedly supremely healthy individual begins to look on closer examination psychologically disturbed. Nietzsche seems unable to conceive of equal and positive relationships³. All relationships it seems are antagonistic; and anything that is not wholly centred on the self, he implies, diminishes the self. As Houlgate puts it:

"I am not convinced that Nietzsche thinks the free spirit ever lets go of his own will completely or transforms himself into a genuinely open and responsive self." (1991 p 133)

Diverse critics have picked up on the idea that Nietzsche ultimately fails to affirm the less than perfect members of society. The acceptance of their eternal recurrence was Zarathustra's final test and he passed that test. Nietzsche seems unable to do so.

"Nietzsche's own 'metaphysic' is a kind of heroic historicism, envisaging a development of the race toward a higher general form of human being, and so of

human society, since this change of being can clearly be the property only of a few. This evolution is to be a 'transvaluation of all values', involving a destruction of 'herding-animal morality', democracy ('the autonomous herd'), the religion of 'mutual sympathy' with its 'compassion for all that feels and suffers', and of soft effeminate sentiments 'under the spell of which Europe seems threatened by a new Buddhism'. Man must learn to see the future of humanity as 'his will'. (*Beyond Good and Evil* 202-3.) The hubris and sheer hatred expressed in these pages is remarkable." (Murdoch, 1993 p 182)

Schutte argues that Nietzsche fails in this affirmation because he cannot escape from the dualism of good and evil and merely replaces it with a new dualism of strength and weakness.

"There is an irresistible tendency on Nietzsche's part to deny the value of human life as such and to accept it as valuable only if it is perfect, noble, or strong. The dualism between good and evil is maintained as a measure of human worth. The fact that the dualism remains, however, means that the broader project of the affirmation of life in its totality is blocked." (Schutte, 1984 p 189)

However I would argue that it is not just the weak that Nietzsche fails to affirm but any other human being. By neglecting and even rejecting any positive conception of the Other and the self's relation to it, Nietzsche relegates his individual to a sphere of self-obsessed alienation rather than, as he supposes, of self-sufficiency.

Moreover, it is this distorted picture of the self which shapes Nietzsche's politics. His aristocratism, Schutte suggests

"represents an attempt to generate in society at large an ethical and political structure which would simply duplicate the distorted experiences of a highly isolated and socially alienated individual." (1983 p 152)

5.3 NIETZSCHE'S POLITICS

If Nietzsche's vision of the individual is ultimately unattractive, his politics is obviously so. In this section I will look at two strategies for dealing with Nietzsche's politics - a line of argument that attacks its assumptions and another that shows it to be unfeasible.

Most of us would want to reject the politics of Nietzsche's vision, not because it is illiberal or inegalitarian but because of the suffering it potentially involves for the weaker members of society. But on what grounds might we do so? A purely moral argument is not appropriate because Nietzsche recognizes that his vision is incompatible with the demands of social morality. We could certainly argue that social justice, equality, benevolence are important values to us and therefore that we would rather retain them than move towards what Warren calls Nietzsche's "cultural-aesthetic fascism" (1988 p 66) but that does not gain us any ground. It merely exposes, Nietzsche would argue, our own enthrallment to slave morality, our inability to overcome *ressentiment* and bad conscience, our own weakness.

However, as Schutte argues, Nietzsche's critical impetus often fails him when it comes to his own ideals - he does not subject his own ideal to rigorous criticism and so we need to perform this task for him:

"We need to raise questions as to how his political views apply to our present and future well-being. In keeping with this goal of the investigation, it is better to reject the assumption that Nietzsche is an

undisputed authority on the political future of human beings." (1983 p 139)

And in pursuing this investigation a purely moral opposition is only one of the options open to us. Another strategy would be to question the assumptions underlying Nietzsche's political thought. This is the approach taken by Warren (1988) who identifies three assumptions: first, that all society is necessarily class-based; second, that human nature is to be understood biologically; and third, that the modern crisis of nihilism is, unlike original nihilism, not politically grounded (Warren, 1988 pp 226-7).

With regard to the first assumption, we might note that Nietzsche's conception of society is from the first class-based. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* for instance, Nietzsche assumes that there are two groups in any society - the nobles and the base. He can conceive in that first essay of only two types of society, the worldly aristocracy and the priestly aristocracy. Now this assumption that all society is class-based is clearly unwarranted, one need only point to the Khoisan of our own country to establish this⁴.

However, the fact that not all societies have been class-based does not preclude the possibility that a healthy future society with the sort of strong culture which Nietzsche envisions might necessarily be class-based. Indeed, part of Nietzsche's argument is that the creation of culture requires leisure, that the creative agent must be freed from the necessities of productive labour and the banal tasks of everyday life. This may well have been the case in the past, and in Nietzsche's own time. However as Bernstein (1987) argues, twentieth-century advances in technology have led to a position in which labour and leisure are no longer incompatible. The first assumption that Nietzsche makes does seem then to be refutable.

The second assumption cuts to the heart of Nietzsche's political thought. We saw in our discussion of *Beyond Good and Evil* that in that text Nietzsche is reductive in his analysis of people, that he sees them only in terms of weakness and strength, and these only in physiological terms. Though the physiological element is less dominant in *On the Genealogy of Morals* it is still clearly present. Danto says of this aspect of Nietzsche's thought:

"The physiologization of moral concepts, the proposal that in the end moral differences must be physiological differences, or that a certain physiognomic paradigm must be a paradigm of health, all other variants being sick, are among his most reckless and dangerous conjectures." (1988 p 20)⁵

Without rehearsing all the debates for and against biological determinism⁶ let it suffice to say that there is no firm evidence to support Nietzsche's view that our character is set by physiology. And he himself does not adduce any; appealing instead to what Schutte calls a "quasi-metaphysical" justification in terms of necessity and destiny (1983 p 147).

Further, and more tellingly, even if we were to accept Nietzsche's physiological dualism we might agree with Bernstein (1987) that his argument that inequality is natural does not of itself lead to an anti-democratic position.

The third assumption Warren identifies in Nietzsche's work is that modern nihilism is not politically conditioned. Warren argues that this assumption is based in Nietzsche's rather naive understanding of the actual workings of modern society. In particular, Warren argues, he failed to see how modern institutions such as bureaucracies and markets work to render people powerless (1988 p 234). Smoot (1981) makes a similar point saying that Nietzsche ignores social and economic factors

in his critique of modernity and his genealogy of it, preferring to concentrate on the psychological and cultural factors.

By failing to see the political and economic factors at work in modernity and in the crisis of nihilism, Warren argues, Nietzsche leaves out of the reckoning the way in which modern institutions - despite their apparent enhancement of individual autonomy - actually serve to render individuals powerless. Nietzsche can therefore only explain people's passivity in terms of their weakness (Warren, 1988 p 234). Again, we find an important gap in Nietzsche's thought, one which not only leads him to misinterpret the present, but also lends to his vision of the future a curiously unreal quality. His discussion of the future society tends to remain at a high level of generality with the actual institutional ordering and functioning, the day-to-day mechanics, left completely unconsidered.

Warren argues that it is these assumptions - that the present crisis is not political or economic, that man and his values can be understood physiologically, and that society is necessarily class-based - supplemented by an illegitimate overextension of the concept of the will to power which underpin Nietzsche's politics.

In his discussion of the overextension of the will to power Warren (1988 pp 227-237) argues firstly that when Nietzsche uses the will to power in a political context he uses it metaphysically and that such a usage is therefore subject to Nietzsche's own criticisms of metaphysics. Secondly, Nietzsche consistently explains society in the terms in which he understands the individual which is if not just simply wrong, at least deeply problematic. Thirdly, this extension of the will to power loses the evaluative aspect of the concept and we are left with a might is right philosophy that stands in contrast to his own critical and evaluative stance towards societies.

Warren believes if we drop both the assumptions and this political conception of the will to power we can reconstitute a liberal Nietzscheanism which, he further argues, is more in line with the rest of Nietzsche's thought (1988 pp 246-248).

Warren's attempt to reconstitute Nietzsche as a liberal has been subject to a great deal of criticism. Detwiler, for instance, argues against Warren's contention that Nietzsche's conception of the will to power is in conflict with his politics. Warren argues that the will to power is motivated by self-constitution not domination. But, says Detwiler, on his reading self-constitution involves domination of one passion by another. In other words, Detwiler rejects Warren's belief that the political conception is different in kind from his ordinary use of the concept (1990 pp 160-1). Similarly Parens argues that Nietzsche uses the same metaphysics of will to power in the critique of Christian metaphysics as in his politics (1991 p 170). Parens thinks that it is thus a genuine problem as to whether one can buy Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics without having to buy his politics (1991 p 178).

But even if Warren were correct his rejection of Nietzsche's assumptions would only constitute a thorough-going critique of Nietzsche's politics if it is assumed that these stand as premises from which he infers a particular political vision. But the relation between Nietzsche's political thought and his philosophy is not so straightforward.

As Love (1986) points out Nietzsche's politics may not be separable from his assumptions, nor his assumptions from his philosophy. Moreover, the flow may be from politics to philosophy (rather than is as supposed from philosophy to politics) - that is, it may be that Nietzsche's political commitments are prior to, rather than outgrowths of, his philosophy - or the two may be symbiotic'.

We need, therefore, to supplement the strategy of undermining Nietzsche's assumptions with a second strategy - one which shows his political vision to be unworkable. This is the approach Ansell-Pearson takes. His argument centres on the issue of legitimacy, which, he argues, Nietzsche ignores and without which he can neither persuade us to adopt his politics, nor maintain it without recourse to force.

Nietzsche legitimates his politics in two ways. The first is an appeal to naturalism, but:

"It is precisely this kind of justification - the noble *lie* disguised as a natural law - which is now no longer credible in the modern age of nihilism."
(Ansell-Pearson, 1994 p 41)

The second is the appeal to culture, but again:

"[T]he great problem arises, a problem faced head on by Zarathustra, of how an aristocratic politics can appeal to human beings living in a non-aristocratic age and social world, and entice them to transfigure themselves and become overhuman." (1994 p 154)

I think Ansell-Pearson is probably overly optimistic in his belief that Nietzsche's aristocratic politics cannot appeal to people living in a democratic age. I am not as convinced as Ansell-Pearson appears to be that all people are freedom-loving, democratic, egalitarians at heart. All sorts of authoritarian, fascist and even totalitarian political groups have their adherents. If there were really no danger of people being inspired by a Nietzschean politics it would be of little interest. But the opposite is the case - if as highly complex and intelligent a thinker as Nietzsche believes that aristocracy is a solution to the problems of modernity we have little reason to hope that other people won't.

But does Nietzsche's politics really have the potential to resolve the crisis of modernity? Let us look again at Nietzsche's analysis of how we came to be in such a fix. In chapter one it was shown that Nietzsche sees the present crisis as having its roots in a much earlier crisis. This original nihilism was the result of an oppressive political system in which the lower orders were powerless to change their condition through action and so resorted to a cultural revaluation. This cultural revaluation has ultimately led, Nietzsche claims, to a situation in which everyone is unable to act, to exercise their power.

His solution is to order society so that the few are released but the many are not. Why should he imagine that this will resolve rather than exacerbate the crisis? How can he imagine that his new aristocracy will not lead to precisely the same problem as the original caste system which gave rise to the crisis in the first place? (Ansell-Pearson, 1994 pp 41-2; Connolly, 1988 pp 159-60).

Perhaps because Nietzsche, in the first place, deems the weaker members of society incapable of action; a view which is tied to his assumption that people's passivity in the face of the present crisis is not politically-shaped but in some sense physiological. Secondly, though, Nietzsche may suppose that the cultural gurus of the new aristocracy will be able to forge a system of meaning which will justify both the weak and the strong, both action and inaction. If this is Nietzsche's supposition, however, it remains merely a hope and, given that Nietzsche sees the needs of strong and weak as inimical and opposed, probably a vain one.

"In Nietzsche's vision we do not find any redemption at all, but only the eternal return of the struggle between the will to power of the strong and the weak, of masters and slaves, of the justice that claims to be beyond resentment, and of the resentment that masquerades as justice." (Ansell-Pearson, 1991a p 230)

With the result that

"By failing to address the question of legitimacy on the level of social justice . . . it is difficult to see how aristocratic rule as conceived by Nietzsche could be maintained except through ruthless forms of political control." (Ansell-Pearson, 1994 p 155)

The politics that Nietzsche advocates, thus, lacks the wherewithal to sustain itself. The failure of Nietzsche's politics also strikes the final blow to the Nietzschean individual, for the politics provide the context within which his practice might make sense, his virtues attain meaning. Without this structure the individual remains an eccentric, isolated and alienated.

5.4 BEYOND NIHILISM AND CRISIS

In the previous two sections I have attempted to show that Nietzsche's vision of a future beyond nihilism is doomed to failure; that in both its subjective and its social aspects it is neither attractive nor feasible. I will now suggest that Nietzsche's failure was inevitable because he misconstrued the problem.

Nietzsche offers us a stark choice between the demands of social morality and those of culture, between an ideal of the good (slave) man as moral and an ideal of the good (noble) man as creative. It is in posing this choice that Nietzsche, perhaps, first goes wrong. It is almost inconceivable that the same Nietzsche who teaches that nothing is simple - that the world is a dynamic process of becoming, that the self is multiplicity and conflict - imagines that we have a stark choice, that there is a simple either-or solution to a problem of the magnitude of nihilism.

Nietzsche's view of modernity is informed by his understanding of the ancient Greek world. He believes that in the pre-Socratic era Greek culture was characterized by a unity in which all aspects of life were integrated with each other. Socrates marked a turning point:

"What was lost, for Nietzsche, and thereafter never recovered, was healthy philosophy, philosophy integrated with its culture and expressing the same world view." (Lesser, 1987 p 30)

That modernity lacks not just a "healthy philosophy" but such an integrated and unified world-view is undeniable, as is fact that many feel the absence of such a world-view to be a loss. Certainly this is the way that Nietzsche experienced it.

Modernity is marked by competing values and interpretations, dispersal and dissonance. However, we can only characterize that situation as a crisis if we believe it is both intolerable and resolvable. At times Nietzsche seems to accept the complexity and dissonance of the modern situation, for instance in what Ansell-Pearson calls his:

"less well-known 'politics of survival', which consists not in legislating new values and law-tables for man, but in playing in parodic and ironic fashion with the ideals of humanity. Here Nietzsche does not foresee a simple solution or end to nihilism, but devises strategies for its endurance." (1994 pp 147-8)

More often, though, he seeks a world in which unity is restored. Perhaps, he sometimes suggests, we can only create this unity within ourselves, for we too are subject to competition (among the drives), dispersal and dissonance. Perhaps, he sometimes suggests, it would be enough to create out of this internal chaos an integrated personality, to make of ourselves a work of art. But just as often he hopes that in creating the conditions under

which this sort of self-creation is possible we also create the conditions under which a larger-scale integration can occur, in which all of European diversity can be united into a great culture.

Nietzsche's characterization of the modern situation as suffering a crisis of nihilism implies that we have a single monolithic problem with which to contend, that this problem is open to solution and that an equally monolithic solution is feasible.

It may well be that each of these corollaries is false. It may well be the case we are simply faced with competing (and perhaps even irreconcilable) demands and that the only response open to us is to muddle along as best we can using all resources at our disposal, creativity and reason and social concern.

Nietzsche, however, implies otherwise: if the demands are competing then we must make a choice one way or the other. If it emerges that they are irreconcilable then we must jettison some of them (those of social justice) in favour of others (the demands of authentic self-expression and cultural creativity). In doing so, Nietzsche believes we solve the problem. Are we not, however, simply repressing it?

"In his thinking on the nature of the political, Nietzsche shares the delusion which has served to inspire the politics of the modern age, namely, the belief that it is possible to gain control of the historical process and to subject it to the mastery of the human will." (Ansell-Pearson, 1991a p 223)

In this belief Nietzsche is possibly more a man of his age than he would ever admit. But where Nietzsche differs from most other thinkers is in his belief that in order to solve the crisis we must first live it:

"Nietzsche is nothing if not extreme and his vision of the nature of modernity is terrifying in the extreme. One must throw one's lot in with modernity, with its Enlightenment and its nihilism which are the two sides of the same coin. And with this one might thereby be participating in the bringing about of a terrible catastrophe: the total collapse of the fabric of its values. There is something more terrifying in such a vision, it seems to me, than in the traditional pessimist's vision of modernity as hurtling towards disaster. There, one can at least dig in one's heels. Even if this has absolutely no effect there is the consolation that one did not participate in nor affirm this catastrophe. But for Nietzsche, the only hope for avoiding the catastrophe, for turning its reactive collapse into an active re-valuation, is to will it." (Redding, 1993 p 220)

So, for Nietzsche, nihilism is not just something to be solved but to be experienced, to be lived and lived through

"Nihilism is needed to clear the way for creativity, to make it plain that the world is without significance or form." (Danto, 1965 p 228)

And in order to bring about a resolution more quickly Nietzsche attempts to hasten the crisis:

"The second [no-saying] half of the calling . . . engages on the terrain of previous and current values, and attempts to institute a state of crisis and decision." (Caygill, 1991 p 222)

Berman (1983) argues that what separates nineteenth century critics of modernity like Nietzsche (and Marx⁸) from contemporary critics is the former's belief in people's capacity to understand and fight the ills of their society and times.

This is interestingly illustrated by a contemporary thinker who is sympathetic to Nietzsche. Rorty accepts Nietzsche's dichotomy between the creative individual and social morality but for Rorty this dualism results only in the belief that we must give up the search for a theory which combines self-realization and social justice since they involve incommensurable languages:

"[T]here is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory. The vocabulary of self-creation is necessarily private, unshared, unsuited to argument. The vocabulary of justice is necessarily public and shared, a medium for argumentative exchange." (1989 p xiv)

On Rorty's reading we are not faced with a critical choice. The two discourses are not in any way opposed, and we live with both.

"Both are right, but there is no way to make both speak a single language." (Rorty, 1989 p xv)

He sees Nietzsche and other "ironist theorists" as the final step on the way to our recognition of the incommensurability of public and private discourse. They attempted a synthesis of the two through narrative instead of metaphysics but they failed (Rorty, 1989 p 120) and Rorty argues that we should now give up that quest altogether.

Ansell-Pearson says of Rorty's position:

"Missing . . . is any recognition of the anxiety which informed Nietzsche's choice of art *contra* politics. . . . Rorty seems fairly sanguine about the fact that, in a secular age, there can be no appeal to objective, transhistorical criteria (no appeal to criteria at all) in giving legitimacy to one's most cherished ideals and deeply held beliefs." (Ansell-Pearson, 1994 p 170)

Perhaps, though, anxiety is inappropriate. In any case we need not be as sanguine as Rorty to believe that there is no way back to the simplicity of a single world view, a fully integrated culture; to reject, that is, the notion of crisis which informs Nietzsche's work.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Nehamas (1985) says of Nietzsche's morality that it has been charged with four faults - banality, vagueness, inconsistency and incoherence. The same charges might be levelled at Nietzsche's solution to nihilism.

The political aspect of Nietzsche's vision is particularly open to the charge of banality. His highly conservative, and perhaps even reactionary, vision is not powered by a particularly deep understanding of socio-economic institutions and does not offer us any new and interesting political concepts.

"Viewed through his politics, Nietzsche's philosophy becomes crude and uninteresting." (Warren, 1988 p 208)

Nietzsche's vision is vague in both its individual and social moments. This is not necessarily bad. The fact that the ideal of the Superman is left open-ended allows for it to incorporate many different species of ideal, allows it to speak to many very different sorts of people. When this vagueness attaches to the political solution, however, the dangers are much greater. By leaving open the actual content of an aristocratic society beyond morality, by not actually working through the institutional and economic functioning of such a society, Nietzsche again is able to appeal to people of all sorts of persuasion.

"By leaving the content of his revolutionary doctrine undefined, except as a stirring appeal to Dionysian intoxication, Nietzsche is able to recruit disciples from the entire diapason of antiliberal sentiment,

left as well as right. There are incentives for all to regard themselves as constituting the highest rank." (Rosen, 1989 p 207)

And the most obvious case of a group being inspired by Nietzschean ideas is the Nazis. While there are many ways in which Nietzsche's work runs counter to the ideology of National Socialism, the very vagueness of his solution allows for this sort of appropriation of it.

Nietzsche's vision is incoherent in that it does not seem that it will solve the problem of nihilism and may well result in a new crisis. And finally, an element of inconsistency attaches to the sort of ideal society that Nietzsche espouses. Nietzsche consistently argues throughout his work that the world is a world of becoming, that we must embrace the dynamic nature of life and world and resist *stasis*. The process of self-creation through self-overcoming is a beautiful expression of this, but the aristocratic society Nietzsche envisages would be much more rigid than, for instance, liberal democracy; does it not then contradict one of the most basic tenets of Nietzsche's thought?

Nietzsche's visions of individual and society are deeply problematic. The Nietzschean individual, supposedly a model of psychological integration, looks, on closer examination, more like a model of psychological disintegration. His social order is intended to resolve the crisis of nihilism but is likely to lead to a new crisis.

Three lacunae underlie Nietzsche's failed vision - his failure to appreciate the dialogical nature of self-creation; his lack of political and economic understanding; and his inability to answer the question of how we are to get to the future from the present.

It is hardly surprising, though, that Nietzsche fails in his quest to secure a vision of the future, for he misconstrues the

present. He sees a crisis where there is only complexity and change. And so he sees a clear-cut solution where there is none.

It might seem, then, that Nietzsche's work, though interesting, has nothing of substance to offer. I would argue that the contrary is true. Once Nietzsche's ideas are freed of the need he imposes on them to change the entire course of human history, once his vision no longer has to redeem all of the past, they become open to exploration, adaptation and appropriation.

NOTES

1. Warnock, too, sees a connection between Nietzsche's and Aristotle's ideal of excellence and suggests that both advocate ideals which are antagonistic to the demands of morality. For Warnock the crucial tension between the two perspectives lies in the notion of equality at the heart of morality, which the Nietzschean view rejects. And he, thus, endorses Nietzsche's own view that his perspective is not a moral one but "an ideal of conduct and character of a quite different kind." (1967 p 51)
2. See, for example, Roberts (1988).
3. Interesting attempts to construct a more positive notion of self and other out of Nietzsche's work include Diprose (1993) and Vasseleu (1993).
4. I do not intend to imply that the Khoisan represent some sort of ideal society or that their social structures are completely egalitarian, merely that whatever stratification exists in this, and similar, societies is not a matter of class.
5. Compare this to his earlier attempt to underplay this aspect of Nietzsche's thought:

"[T]he truly incoherent element in Nietzsche's thought is his speaking as though an objectively better type of being can be talked of, whereas it is wrong to take normative criteria as having the least bearing on the way things are to be judged in reality. This is an unpleasantly tangled pocket in his system, and an aberration from the overwhelmingly dominant direction of his thought. But I see no way of explaining it away." (Danto, 1965 p 187)

6. The arguments against biological determinism are not all moral. Two of the more hard-hitting critiques are Gould (1981) and Kitcher (1985).
7. Weiss (1993) argues to the contrary that from a postmodern perspective we can reject the assumption of "hermeneutic holism" - the notion that Nietzsche's politics and philosophy form an unbreakable unity.
8. The relation between Nietzsche's work and that of Marx is explored by Love (1986), who believes they offer competing and incompatible solutions to the problem of nihilism, and Caygill (1991) who believes they can be reconciled.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

This thesis has explored three of Nietzsche's major works - *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals* - in terms of Nietzsche's conception of nihilism and his attempt to overcome it.

In chapter one it was argued that Nietzsche views modernity as being characterized by nihilism and in a state of crisis. He associates this nihilism with the dominant Platonic-Christian world view; the state of crisis with its collapse, "the death of God". The Platonic-Christian world view, Nietzsche argues, attempted to secure both truth and value by placing these in a transcendent realm; and the loss of faith in metaphysics, therefore, seems to place truth and value in jeopardy.

This situation is potentially disastrous, for as the old ideals, interpretations and values lose their hold they threaten to leave a void (Nietzsche's "abyss"). It is also potentially liberating, though, for if the old world view can be stripped of its absolutist pretensions then the vacuum can be filled with competing ideals, new values and interpretations.

Nietzsche views himself as a man of destiny, the first to see this crisis. His response to it is to abandon the quest for truth, to embrace instead notions of interpretation and perspective, while at the same time attempting to secure a more immanent basis for value.

Nietzsche is concerned to secure value not for its own sake but because it is the foundation of action. Nihilism is above all, it was argued, a crisis of agency. This crisis of agency has its roots in a much earlier era of political oppression and slavery and the Platonic-Christian world view arose, Nietzsche argues, out of the attempts by the oppressed class to justify and give

meaning to their suffering, in a context in which any solution through political action was closed to them. However, since this reinterpretation of the world did not resolve the original crisis but merely repressed it, the net effect as it gained dominance was to deprive everyone of the possibility of agency. As the world view collapses, Nietzsche believes, the possibility of agency becomes real once more, provided we can overcome the crisis.

Chapter two focused on Nietzsche's first attempt to describe a vision of something beyond nihilism in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The solution that Nietzsche offers in this book is one of individual salvation and it is elucidated in terms of a trio of ideas - the Superman, the will to power and eternal recurrence. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I argued, charts the journey of its protagonist's development from the teacher of the ideal of the Superman to an incarnation of that ideal. The Superman engages in a process of continual self-overcoming, driven by the will to power, in which he creates a unity out of his competing drives. In order to engage in this process, however, he must first free himself of his past, find some way to overcome resentment and vengefulness towards his own personal history; and, Nietzsche offers the experience of the eternal recurrence as the means to effect this. Once the past has been successfully appropriated by means of this experience, he argues, the individual achieves an attitude of affirmation towards life, of *amor fati*. It is this attitude which characterizes the Superman and enables him to treat life joyfully: singing, dancing, playing and laughing; and thereby becoming the sort of individual who can live beyond nihilism, who can create his own meaning and values.

The ideal of the Superman that Zarathustra becomes is solitary and asocial. It is an individual overcoming of nihilism. The problem of nihilism, though, is a social problem. And an individual solution is therefore insufficient. In chapter three it was shown that in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche, realizing this, offers a more socially and politically inclusive attempt

at a solution. In this book Nietzsche tenders a more physiologically-based understanding of people, interpretations and values. He dissects the ideals of the philosopher and saint, which inform the Platonic-Christian world view, as well as their accompanying moral values. He proceeds by casting suspicion on these ideals and values, and their claims to truth; rather than offering any knock-down argument against them, he reinterprets them as physiologically-based expressions of the will to power of the weak. In contrast he offers an ideal which embraces the interpretative nature of the philosophical enterprise and the will to power, an ideal he suggests which is also physiologically-based, but this time an expression of strength. Having set up these opposing ideals, Nietzsche offers a vision of the sort of society which would lie beyond the nihilism of the present and encourage the expression of strength. The political vision he offers is one of an aristocracy which lies beyond, and outside of, social morality. He suggests that this sort of social organisation is necessary for the production of strong individuals, who, it is intimated, might provide a revitalisation of culture, a new revaluation of values to counter that of Socrates and Christ.

The method of genealogy used in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which was the subject of chapter four, can be seen, it was argued, as the social analogue of the eternal recurrence. It, too, is intended to appropriate the past in order to free the future for action, but on a much broader scale. In this work Nietzsche locates nihilism in the values of *ressentiment* associated with slave morality, the interpretations of bad conscience and the ideals of asceticism. It is these which have dominated the West through the past millennia; but, Nietzsche argues, repressed within Western culture are other possibilities - the values of a noble, or master, morality; the interpretations of good conscience and the new ideal which he has developed. It is these latent potentialities which make possible the overcoming of nihilism.

In chapter five Nietzsche's vision of the future was subjected to critical evaluation. It was argued that Nietzsche's vision of both individual and society are unattractive and unfeasible. The Nietzschean individual, isolated or in a struggle for supremacy, is less a model of psychological health and well-being than a case study in alienation. The aristocratic society which Nietzsche envisages, besides being unattractive in its lack of any social morality (and therefore of controls on behaviour) is also unfeasible in that it may lack any basis for legitimation bar naked power, and therefore seems sure to recreate the crisis it was intended to overcome.

It was further argued that this lack of a workable and attractive vision of the future is based on a misinterpretation of the present. I suggested that while modernity does indeed lack the sort of unity which, in Nietzsche's view, characterized the pre-modern period, the dissonance and divergence of values, interpretations and ideals with which late modernity is associated are something we have to accept and work with rather than a crisis to be overcome through rather simplistic choices and solutions.

NIETZSCHE BEYOND NIHILISM

In arguing that Nietzsche fails as a visionary I do not wish to deny his stature as a philosopher. In both roles Nietzsche is inspiring. We do not, cannot, merely read him in a detached manner. He takes our ideas, our values, our ideals and twists, moulds, shakes them, sometimes even tears them apart, until we feel disoriented and giddy. He assaults our senses with his imagery, our reason with his polemics. He seems to know us backwards and forwards, yet he always remains elusive.

In trying to capture his thought and subject it to criticism it tends to become a collection of trite ideas. We suspect that this triteness is our own, and in many ways we are correct, for in interpretation we flatten out the contours of his thought,

turn in his many voices into a monophone. Perhaps, then, we should not seek to interpret and criticise his work; perhaps, instead, we should experience his artistry and join his celebration. That seems to me, however, a most dangerous course.

It is important, I believe, to find some critical distance towards Nietzsche's works; to treat his ideas and values with the same suspicion that he levels at those of modernity. We, too, must learn to say no as well as yes. I have argued that we should say no to Nietzsche in his visionary role. In what follows I shall look at some of the ways in which we might say yes to Nietzsche the philosopher and critic.

If Nietzsche's work had no other value, he would remain crucially important for his challenge to modernity. He ruthlessly dissects the values, ideals and interpretations which have shaped the modern experience and announces that they are now worthless or ruinous. If we agree with him then we are challenged to produce new values, interpretations and ideals. If we disagree with him, on the other hand, we are challenged to defend them against a most radical onslaught.

I do not believe, though, that this is the only value of Nietzsche's work. Although I have argued that Nietzsche incorrectly ascribes to modernity a situation of crisis, he does, nevertheless, respond in his work to a very real situation. The Christian world view no longer has a secure hegemony, and the lessening of its hold over Western culture has resulted in the loss of old certitudes of truth and value.

Nietzsche, who might be characterized as the first post-Christian philosopher, presents us with one man's attempt to come to terms with the implications of an atheistic and relativistic world. He offers a way of philosophizing which, while recognizing (and even embracing) relativism is not reduced to either an "anything goes" vacuousness, or a withdrawal from the task of making substantive claims and judgements. Instead, Nietzsche's ideal

is of an experimental philosophy in which philosophers recognize the perspectival nature of their claims and value judgements and yet continue to make them.

In his attempts to find a way of accomplishing this Nietzsche considerably broadens our conception of what it is to philosophize, and of what a philosophical text looks like. Thus *Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* are each different in form from each other, and with the possible exception of *The Genealogy* from most other philosophical works. Nietzsche consistently tests and breaks down the boundaries of philosophy.

He does this not only in the formal qualities of his work but also in its content. For Nietzsche philosophy is not an arcane academic discipline but an engagement with all of the world and life. The concern with life is never far from the centre of Nietzsche's thinking. The question of how we do and should live, and not merely how we do and should theorize, is at the core of Nietzsche's philosophy. In this Nietzsche speaks to all of us. Despite his protestations that he writes for only the very few, and his fears that he would find no audience, Nietzsche may well be the most popular and widely-read philosopher of the twentieth-century. The irony of this would probably appeal to him.

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