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The Anatomy of Self-Overcoming in Nietzsche

Richard Enos

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Philosophy

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

The Anatomy of Self-Overcoming

Richard Enos

The main aim of this thesis is to consider Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of self-overcoming as the main focus of his philosophy. I will show how self-overcoming underlies Nietzsche's early thought, with his duality of Apollo and Dionysus, how it leads him through the problem of nihilism, how it applies to the Superman, and how it relates to the development of the will to power. Finally, I will reassess the importance of self-overcoming in Nietzsche's thought and show in what way it is relevant today.

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Introduction

The phrase 'self-overcoming' does not very often come to the foreground in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nonetheless, it will become clear that his belief in man's capacity to overcome himself was very close at hand throughout his works, appearing in many subtly different ways. Looking at Nietzsche's works objectively, one is tempted to relegate the concept of self-overcoming to a lower status than it deserves. This is one of the shortcomings in trying to capture the essence of Nietzsche objectively. Nietzsche himself tells us that we "have to be the victim of the same passion" in order to penetrate into his thoughts.¹ With Nietzsche more than most others, one has to read oneself into his writings.²

¹ This is found in posthumously published notes and quoted in R.J. Hollingdale's introduction to Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Middlesex, England: Penguin Classics, 1971) p. 11. One must be careful not to see this as a plea on Nietzsche's part for 'yes-men' as followers. Quite on the contrary, Nietzsche's stand is that his writings should be overthrown after they have been properly digested - but since passion is the key to understanding, it is a necessary prerequisite that one assume this passion in order to digest the content of his writings.

² This statement does not entail a viewpoint based on one's personal opinions and prejudices. It means that a subjective interpretation (as opposed to an objective interpretation which denotes being uninvolved) is necessary. One's true self, as human being who has experienced things must come to the forefront - to the exclusion of one's personal biases. The obvious statement to be made here is that not everyone can read himself into Nietzsche in that some lack an idea of their true selves.

The varying interpretations of Nietzsche often signify only various depths of thought which his interpreters have reached. Nietzsche states,

Of all writings I love only that which is written with blood: and you will discover that blood is spirit. It is not an easy thing to understand unfamiliar blood: I hate the reading idler.³

Here, one cannot understand Nietzsche unless one has to some extent been Nietzsche. The examined life is almost a necessary pre-condition for an examination of Nietzsche's works; otherwise, one remains little more than a 'reading idler'. Nietzsche bleeds into his work, and underlying beautiful phrases there is often much pain and anxiety. How can this be grasped unless one has bled along with him? Nietzsche appears as a pessimist and a nihilist to some, a heretic and a racist to others, a dreamer and a poet to still others. Yet, if Nietzsche is to be understood at all, it will be first because the reader has struggled to understand - and hence has begun to overcome - life itself.⁴

It would not be exaggerating to say that Nietzsche's writings took a wide turn away from the philosophical

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra (trans. R.J. Hollingdale) (Middlesex, England: Penguin Classics, 1971) p. 67.

⁴ The concept of overcoming of self here must be left without definition since it is the aim of the paper as a whole to describe its essence. Here, I can say that overcoming alludes to gaining knowledge, in the sense of enlarging one's perspective of life itself through a critical examination of one's life.

tradition which preceded them. Nonetheless, it is interesting how much of the thought of the German Idealist tradition seems close to the spirit of Nietzsche's writings. As far as the elements surrounding the notion of self-overcoming are concerned, two contemporaries of this tradition are important: Arthur Schopenhauer and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Nietzsche's approach to the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer was characterized by great passion and, initially, great dedication. His comments on Schopenhauer's major work, The World as Will and Idea, show why Nietzsche at first considered Schopenhauer a great educator:

Analyzing it, I find that the influence of Schopenhauer has three elements, his honesty, his joy, and his consistency. He is honest, as speaking for himself alone; joyful, because his thoughts have conquered the greatest difficulties; consistent, because he cannot help being so.⁵

Nietzsche would never dismiss the fact that Schopenhauer's writings had 'conquered the greatest difficulties,' yet where Nietzsche saw this as the source of great joy, Schopenhauer used his vision only to promote a negative and life-denying stance. Nietzsche had, in fact, read himself into the works of Schopenhauer - but to excess. Nietzsche went on to overtly reject Schopenhauer's philosophy. Although Schopenhauer's metaphysical notions

5

Friedrich Nietzsche, Thoughts Out of Season: Schopenhauer as Educator. This quote of Nietzsche is taken from Frederick Copleston's Friedrich Nietzsche (New York: Harper & Row, 1942) p. 148. His lack of footnote made it impossible to verify at source.

continued to influence Nietzsche, Nietzsche himself did not spend much of his time constructing a metaphysical system, especially through his earlier works.⁶ Here, Nietzsche employs much of Schopenhauer's metaphysics as a base out of which he elucidates his experience.⁷

Schopenhauer held that primal being was will, and everything else is seen as a manifestation of this will. Hence, The World as Will and Idea literally describes Schopenhauer's notion of reality. Each individual participates in this will which is the unity of all being, and the objective or phenomenal world is simply a projection of the activity of this will. Schopenhauer's thinking comes out of the tradition of the German Idealist philosophers, wherein a major issue was the distinction between an object as it appears to us and the 'same' object as it is in

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With his later works culminating in the Will to Power, it seems clear that Nietzsche was trying to build a metaphysics with the will to power as the central concept. However, it is true to the spirit of his early works to say that the issues he deals with are not metaphysical in nature and even deny the possibility of a metaphysical system. Here, Schopenhauer's idealism, though he would not completely validate it, served as a working idea out of which his unsystematic set of thoughts could proliferate.

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This does not mean to say that the thoughts in the writings of Nietzsche are any less original.

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 itself. Immanuel Kant, the founder of German Transcendental Idealism, spoke of the issue in the following way: it is the a priori categories of the mind to which the thing-in-itself necessarily conforms in order to produce the object as it appears, the phenomenon. The thing-in-itself is eternally out of reach of our consciousness since the act of perceiving an object by its nature transforms the thing as it is in-itself to an object which the mind is able to perceive. Kant thought that we could neither know nor talk about the thing-in-itself in any way, yet the validity of the external world rested on its credibility.

Schopenhauer's metaphysics denies that a thing-in-itself of such description - indeed, devoid of any description - is possible. He also rejects the need to validate the external world in any absolute sense. Schopenhauer's system revolves around the principle of sufficient reason, which states simply that all things have a cause or reason for being the way they are. For Schopenhauer, this principle was self-evident and indubitable. The activity which underlies the relation of all things reveals itself objectively as causality. Causality shows itself as a law governing changes in states =

8
 The discussion of the thing-in-itself as 'object' is almost necessarily self-contradictory, since 'object' as the objectification of the thing-in-itself does not fit in this realm. (Indeed, this is one point of attack used by Schopenhauer and others). In the discussion here, however, the use of the term seems clear enough to relay the desired meaning.

of things, not things themselves. There may be a multitude of causes for something to be the way it is, where some causes are evident and some not, but altogether they serve to create the object as it is. Beneath the phenomenal world matter reacts with itself, and the set of these actions and reactions manifests itself as causality. The causal structure then is not an imposition of the mind but becomes part of the working of the perception of phenomena. With Kant, the perception of external things in space precedes all application of the causal law; hence there remains nothing which causes perception. Schopenhauer thinks that this is where Kant has faltered.⁹ Schopenhauer's

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Schopenhauer's argument against Kant runs as follows: "According to Kant, the perception of external things in space precedes all application of the causal law, that therefore the causal law does not enter into perception as an element and condition. Only, insofar as we ask what may exist outside us, understood in the transcendental sense, and so when we ask about the thing-in-itself, is causality mentioned in connexion with perception. Moreover, Kant admits the existence and possibility of the causal law only in reflection and hence in the abstract distinct knowledge of concepts. He therefore has no conception that the application of the causal law precedes all reflection, and yet this is obvious by the case, especially in empirical sensuous intuitive perception which would otherwise never take place; this I have irrefutably proven in the above analysis of intuitive perception. Kant therefore has to leave wholly unexplained the origin of empirical intuitive perception; with him it is a mere matter of the senses, given as it were by a miracle, and so is identical with sensation." This is from Arthur Schopenhauer, The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (trans. E.F.J. Payne) (Illinois: Open Court, 1974) pp. 116-117.

metaphysics does not demand the causal law as a product of empirical intuitive perception. Consequently, there is no reason to extend this demand to a wholly transcendent question about the thing-in-itself.¹⁰ With Schopenhauer, then, the thing-in-itself becomes accessible to us in a way that was never possible for Kant. This becomes clear through the divergence of the two thinkers as to the nature of self-consciousness.

For Kant, self-consciousness equates with self-knowledge which is subject to the conditions of sensibility. We can only know ourselves empirically, as a knower. Schopenhauer contradicts Kant, here, saying

The subject knows itself as a willer, not as a knower, for the ego that represents, thus the subject of knowing, can itself never become representation or object, since, as the necessary correlative of all representations, it is their condition.¹¹

For Schopenhauer, our direct intuition of ourselves as willers leads us to a direct consciousness of the thing-in-itself, for as the subject of all representation, it is the source of individuation which becomes apparent in the phenomenal world. What Schopenhauer maintains is that we can intuit the source of the representations, hence see beyond the individuating characteristics of things and into the one source of all being. If these individuating characteristics are shedded,

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 117.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 208.

all that is left is mere activity in general, pure acting as such, causality itself, objectively conceived, thus the reflection of our own understanding, the outwardly projected image of its sole function, and matter is throughout pure causality; its essence is action in general.¹²

The domain of the will is one and indivisible, since the constructs of time and space do not apply. The phenomenal world is seen as a mirror of the will, and, through self-consciousness, man is able to intuit this as being so. Man is capable of becoming conscious of his willing capacity, and hence can guide his actions in direct conjunction with it.¹³

This assertion is indispensable to Nietzsche, for it is with his conviction of the will as the active force in man and his belief that this will can be directed by man that his concept of self-overcoming is able to flourish. Man must first recognize himself as willing subject, hence creator of the phenomenal world. With this knowledge he is able to elevate the senseless and chaotic nature of the will into something beautiful and noble. The essence of self-overcoming, understood in terms of a transformation of the infinite striving which is the will, is the element of Nietzsche's thought which clearly pervades most of his works

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Ibid, pp. 118-119.

13

The statement 'guide his actions in direct conjunction with it' {will} may be a bit vague, since, naturally, all human actions go in conjunction with the will. The difference here is the positing of reason and consciousness as having a possible effect on the activity of the will, being able to transform it as it were.

and can be easily classified as one of the dominant preoccupations of his writings.

It is no wonder Nietzsche sees joy as a result of Schopenhauer's thought 'having conquered the greatest difficulties'; with Schopenhauer's exposition of the irrational will as the foundation of all human activity (and all activity as such) the important initial step towards man's growth through self-overcoming has been made possible. For Schopenhauer, however, the discovery that the essential root of all life is the unceasing desire of the will leads only to one course of action: attempting to eliminate the striving altogether by trying to dissolve all objectifications of the will. Schopenhauer posits the denial of the will to life, not a suicide, but a disintegration of all phenomena. Self-consciousness, hence awareness of ourselves as will, is only worthwhile if it helps us to extirpate the will and cease all its activity. Schopenhauer is bold enough, in fact, as to suggest that the only purpose life serves is its capacity to make us realize how useless it is in the first place.

This is the crucial point of divergence from Schopenhauer for Nietzsche. Despite appreciating the honesty of Schopenhauer's philosophy, he very adamantly

believed that asceticism was not the appropriate response.

Where Schopenhauer denied the value of life because of the endless striving of the will, Nietzsche took the irrational nature of the source of all being and chose to see it as a possibility for an affirmation of life. Life now becomes the greatest challenge and overcoming the challenge becomes man's greatest source of joy. Nietzsche at first thought that reason was the necessary element in transforming the overwhelming nature of the will; but it certainly was not Schopenhauer who cultivated this idea, since for Schopenhauer the only purpose of reason was to uncover the irrational nature of the will. Nietzsche's ideas here may very well have been prompted by a contemporary of Schopenhauer, G.W.F. Hegel.

According to Hegel, reason underlies all activity. Hegel's important contribution to the philosophy of history worked on the assumption that it was the cunning of reason (which is inherent in all human acts whether conscious or not) which drives man towards a fuller consciousness of self through history. Hegel conceives of history as a progressive movement initiated by the rational nature of

Asceticism is seen as the life of non-engagement. Here, an individual attempts to suppress as much of his desire and striving as possible. It is interesting to note here that Nietzsche once advocated asceticism as one of the best means towards the accumulation of power in oneself, and saw the ascetic as one of the strongest men. He later repudiated this, though, when he took this approach to the limit and clearly recognized pure asceticism as life-denying.

all human acts, towards a "realization of the Spirit."¹⁵
 Here, total freedom is achieved on the part of the human individual, brought on by a consciousness heightened to the point where the human subject discovers himself as the one and original source of all things. The dichotomy of thing-in-itself and phenomena, of reality and appearance, are broken down through a heightening of consciousness perpetuated by the cunning of history. Schopenhauer believed that the dichotomy of thing-in-itself and phenomena can only be broken down through a denial of the will, followed by a dissolution of all objectifications. Schopenhauer denied that reason had much importance in this process, whereas for Hegel reason plays the major role in the breakdown of the subject/object dichotomy.¹⁶ In effect, the difference between the two thinkers can be shown by their opposition about the nature of the thing-in-itself. While Schopenhauer saw it as irrational, Hegel maintained that what is real is synonymous with what is rational.

Hegel characterizes the progressive movement of man through history as dialectical. The dialectic is a many-faceted concept. Stated simply, it is the synthesis of opposites. In a given historical situation, the resolution

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For Hegel, Spirit can be loosely assimilated to the primal source of all being, wherein its realization is a self-realization as unconditioned freedom.

16

For the first time this dichotomy is described as the subject/object dichotomy. The reasoning here shifts the focus on the nature of the dichotomy to accentuate the necessity of avoiding an objectification of the thing-in-itself (represented as subject).

that ensues from the conflict between opposing forces is seen as a movement beyond either of the two forces. Through history a given force, the 'thesis', will find or create an opposing force, its 'antithesis', and through the struggle between these forces a unity is produced which is called the 'synthesis'. This synthesis will in turn find its antithesis and a higher synthesis is produced, in that man's consciousness is heightened with each dialectical synthesis. This process can be more precisely described by the German word aufheben. Aufheben can be roughly translated as sublimation, and has a threefold meaning: to preserve, to¹⁷ cancel, and to lift up. In a given historical configuration, the process of aufheben works as follows: the essential objective, freedom, is preserved, where the immediate objective (based on the concrete situation) is cancelled. The essential objective is lifted up, expressed as the achievement of greater freedom, for the purpose of a¹⁸ higher confrontation.

The expression here of Hegel's process of attainment of freedom through history is remarkably similar to Nietzsche's process of self-overcoming; both deal with the expansion of

17

Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche (New York: Meridian Books, 1966) p. 204.

18

Ibid, p. 205.

the human consciousness as a mark of progress.¹⁹ Both see the process as helping 'man to fully become man.' True, the end for Hegel is freedom whereas for Nietzsche it is power.²⁰ Where the Hegelian formulation can be seen as a conceptual process Nietzsche's seems to represent a psychological notion; yet as Kaufmann points out,

it does not only belong in Hegel's Logik or Nietzsche's psychology, but is to be found wherever the basic principle manifests itself i.e. - everywhere.²¹

For Kaufmann the principle of aufheben is given an

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We must be careful in attributing Hegel's notion of historical progress to Nietzsche, in lieu of his notion of the eternal return. Ernest Joos clarifies this issue: "An answer should be found to reconcile self-overcoming and goal with the futility of efforts in order to show the kind of progress that is still possible under such unfavourable circumstances. Always following Nietzsche, it is here that I designate the ultimate goal and the final result - Wille zur Macht, Will to Power - as the will to understand, the will to group the truth and meaning in our lives, and all phenomena. If Eternal Recurrence abolishes progress, it does not prevent, but on the contrary, it encourages our efforts towards understanding life and our duty towards life." Ernest Joos, Poetic Truth and Transvaluation in Nietzsche's Zarathustra (Montreal: Concordia University, 1984) Dr. Joos alludes here to the fact that Nietzsche differs from both Hegel and Schopenhauer in not seeing the breakdown of the appearance/reality dichotomy as something necessary, possible, or even desirable.

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The concept of power here must unfortunately be introduced without a description. In Chapter 3 on 'The Will to Power' the concept of power will be discussed.

21

Kaufmann, op. cit., p. 205. Here Kaufmann limits the importance of aufheben, and hence the essence of self-overcoming, to a psychological formulation in Nietzsche. It will be the aim of the paper to show that self-overcoming has many dimensions for Nietzsche, and is the source of many of his ideas.

omnipresence in all activity. In this thesis, it will be shown that to a certain degree this characteristic can be extended to the concept of self-overcoming. The perception of self-overcoming from varying perspectives will be examined in the hopes that a greater understanding of this multi-dimensional concept can be attained. The first chapter focuses on Nietzsche's early dualism of Apollo and Dionysus, and the way in which self-overcoming is formulated in relation to this duality. In the second chapter, self-overcoming is seen as both the propellant of and the solution to a nihilistic vision of life. The third chapter examines the relation of self-overcoming to the development of the concept of the will to power. The final chapter will attempt to bring the various perspective together, and will elaborate both on the importance of self-overcoming to Nietzsche's thought and its application to contemporary men and women.

Chapter I

Apollo and Dionysus

The process by which 'man fully becomes man,' which for Nietzsche is self-overcoming, manifests itself as the struggle within man's dual nature. Man is seen as a unity having a dual nature: reason, his guiding force, and passion, his driving force. Only when each is given full reign can they oppose one another to produce a higher synthesis. This opposition is first stated by Nietzsche as the duality of Apollo and Dionysus in The Birth of Tragedy. Nietzsche considers Apollo and Dionysus as "artistic energies which burst forth from nature herself, without the mediation of the human artist."²² Classical Greek culture is dominated by the Apollonian spirit, which is characterized by such elements as reason, moderation, symmetry and serenity. Beyond Greek culture of the Classical period there were other cultures which were deemed 'barbarian' by the Greeks. Many of these cultures practised Dionysian festivals, which fell into sharp contrast with Apollonian tradition. Here, the participants unleashed their most savage instincts in the way of excessive behavior, such as cruelty and extreme sexual licentiousness. While Apollonian festivals established the principium

 22

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner (trans. Walter Kaufmann) (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 38.

²³
individuationis, the Dionysian festival was an attempt to eradicate the individual in establishing a complete mystical oneness - a forgetfulness of self.

Nietzsche's approach to this dichotomy hearkens back to Schopenhauer's thought, as he identifies the Dionysian with the true domain of being and the Apollonian with the phenomenal plane:

The contrast between this real truth of nature and the lie of culture that poses as if it were the only reality is similar to that between the eternal core of things, the thing-in-itself, and the whole world of appearances.²⁴

The Dionysian assumes the character of Schopenhauer's will, as being the eternal core of things which underlies all activity. Nietzsche explains that it is the 'lie of culture' which allows for the Apollonian plane to be seen as the only reality. This lie could not be kept from the Greeks however, as eventually the Dionysian festivals were seen as not being so foreign to their nature. The Apollonian Greek became more and more suspicious that "it was only his Apollonian consciousness which, like a veil, hid this Dionysian world from his vision."²⁵ Indeed, the partial breakdown of the Apollonian consciousness here can also be seen as an augmentation of this consciousness, since

23

Ibid, p. 36. This is translated as 'principle of individuation' and represents the validation of the individual in the midst of a vision of the oneness of being.

24

Ibid, p. 61.

25

Ibid, p. 41.

the Dionysian force now became part of the Greek perspective. The Apollonian Greek came to grips with the imminent force and realized its significance:

Despite all its beauty and moderation, his entire existence rested on a hidden substratum of suffering and knowledge, revealed to him by the Dionysian. And behold: Apollo could not live without Dionysus!²⁶

The birth of tragedy in Classical Greece did not mark the birth of the Dionysian force in the Apollonian Greek; it was always at work there. However, for the first time, the Dionysian is recognized in the Apollonian consciousness as a truly essential force. With what Nietzsche calls a²⁷ "metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic Will," the two art forms are merged together in the way of Attic Tragedy. Nietzsche notes that just as tragedy,

with its metaphysical comfort, points to the eternal life of this core of existence which abides through the perpetual destruction of appearances, the symbolism of the satyr chorus proclaims the primordial relationship between the thing-in-itself and appearance.²⁸

Nietzsche's exposition of tragedy parallels Schopenhauer's metaphysics here; however, Schopenhauer's life-denying views are left behind. Nietzsche feels that Greek tragedy is an affirmation of life, as well as a clear and honest perspective on life. Nietzsche elaborates this

²⁶

Ibid, p. 46.

²⁷

Ibid, p. 33.

²⁸

Ibid, pp. 61-62.

point here:

With this chorus the profound Hellene, uniquely susceptible to the tenderest and deepest suffering comforts himself, having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will. Art saves him, and through art - life.²⁹

Schopenhauer has chosen to pursue what Nietzsche calls a 'Buddhistic negation of the will' as the only viable path. For Nietzsche, however, one can celebrate life as fundamentally powerful and pleasurable as the Greeks did, while still being as honest and free of optimistic illusions as Schopenhauer was.³⁰

The thrust of Attic tragedy is both penetrating and affirmative. It explores the depths of man beyond the Apollonian facade, and attempts to come to grips with what underlies it in all its horror. Also, however, it recognizes the underlying force as that which breathes life into an otherwise serene and calm man. As Rose Pfeffer discloses,

Without Dionysian depth, Apollonian beauty would be lifeless and expressionless and could not evoke an aesthetic response in us.³¹

Likewise, without Apollonian form, Dionysian expression would be chaotic and senseless. Nietzsche discerned that it was the pull between these two forces which affirms life.

²⁹

Ibid, p. 59.

³⁰

Ibid, footnote 3.

³¹

Rose Pfeffer, Nietzsche: Discipline of Dionysus (New Jersey: Buckwell University Press, 1972), p. 216.

This idea is at the root of Nietzsche's concept of self-overcoming. Indeed for Nietzsche, Apollo needs Dionysus, and Dionysus needs Apollo, and only through the tension produced by their opposition does a human being feel truly passionate, fully alive. The Dionysian and Apollonian are the archetypes of the opposing forces which find resolution in a dialectic synthesis. Clearly, though, this synthesis can never be seen as an elimination of one of the two forces, and so no 'progress' in this sense can be made.³² It is Nietzsche's vision that the joy is in the struggle,³³ and here if one of the forces was eradicated, then the struggle, the passion - and consequently life itself - would also be eradicated.

In Ecce Homo, Nietzsche explains that The Birth of Tragedy essentially is 'the first instruction about how the Greeks got over their pessimism, how they overcame it.'³⁴

32.

It is here that Nietzsche's self-overcoming departs from Hegel's development of the Spirit. For Hegel, the goal is the realization of the Spirit where all dichotomy or opposition is broken down. For Nietzsche, the end is the means, and so the opposition of two forces is eternally essential. In a way, an element of the eternal return could be found here. In any event, as I discussed earlier (see footnote 19, introduction), Nietzsche does not ban the notion of progress entirely - he only rejects progress as teleology - i.e. towards a specific and determined end.

33

Here, it is clear that Nietzsche sees the process of self-overcoming as capable of producing joy in itself, without external goals, and only in this way is life capable of justifying itself.

34

Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, (trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale) (New York: Random House, 1969) p. 270.

Rose Pfeffer takes this 'pessimism and its overcoming' as one of Nietzsche's fundamental doctrines. Pessimism in this context shall not be understood as an inherently negative outlook on the world and on life - it is derived from Schopenhauer's metaphysics which represents an honest approach to the world and to a life free of illusions. Insofar as pessimism served to bring men forward through overcoming, it was seen for Nietzsche as positive. Pessimism fought against a stagnation which Nietzsche saw to be burdening man; it served to destroy all things which kept man comfortable and inactive in illusion.

Overcoming this pessimism cannot be seen as a complete destruction of it, since at ³⁵ root it carries the most fundamental truth of life. Nor is the overcoming of pessimism an attempt to hide the pain and anguish inherent in life. Pfeffer returns to the principle of aufheben to explain the process of overcoming. In overcoming, the weaker elements of pessimism are cancelled out (i.e. - those elements which are life-negating). What is preserved are those aspects of pessimism which fuel creativity and serve

Indeed this holds the fundamental truth - i.e. that there is no essential truth. This pessimism is at base a destruction of the root of all value systems, such that one can no longer hold on to the truth of a matter. The human, therefore subjective element of truth is uncovered.

to give a deeper and more honest understanding of life.³⁶
 The pessimistic view is put into better perspective by the individual, where the positive elements become clearer to his consciousness. Much in the way of tragedy for Nietzsche, illusion-seeking consciousness and pessimism are sublimated into a unity.³⁷

The individual who has embraced these tendencies is described by Nietzsche as the Dionysian man. The Dionysian man symbolizes the man who has become fully conscious of the Dionysian root of his existence; that is to say that this man realizes that beneath the calm and serenity of his Apollonian exterior rests a substratum of pure passion, of chaotic striving. Nietzsche tells us that the experience of the Dionysian world is one of immersion, and wonder.

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Pfeffer's full statement runs as follows: "The overcoming of the pessimistic premise is manifested in a threefold function and activity: to cancel those elements of pessimism which are false and decadent and what Nietzsche calls "weak pessimism"; to preserve those elements which, despite their nihilistic aspects, are found to be constructive and creative; and to elevate them into a synthesis which represents a deeper and more honest understanding of the meaning of life. Thus in Nietzsche's "overcoming of pessimism" we have the Hegelian process of aufheben: cancelling, preserving, and lifting up all at once, to move from a pessimism Nietzsche calls weak to one that he designates as classic and strong." Pfeffer, op. cit., p. 40.

³⁷Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, op.cit., p. 271. Here I assimilate Nietzsche's discussion of tragedy with the concept of self-overcoming (i.e. - overcoming of pessimism) Consciousness is characterized as 'illusion seeking' to clearly put it in opposition with pessimism. The rationale here is that consciousness has the phenomenal (illusory) world as its domain, wherein subject and object are split.

However, with a return of one's consciousness to the everyday world, one experiences nausea, and with this an ascetic, will-negating mood.³⁸ This is the case for the Dionysian man because he:

has once truly looked into the essence of things, he has gained knowledge, and nausea inhibits action; for his action could not change anything in the external nature of things; he feels it to be ridiculous or humiliating that he should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires the veil of illusion.³⁹

This description may enable us to expose the Dionysian man as a forerunner of Nietzsche's Superman.⁴⁰ A comparison between the two images of man serves in each case to estimate the maturity of the concept of self-overcoming. With the Superman, self-overcoming is not only the accumulation of the knowledge which emanates from the Dionysian vision, it is the ability to override the component of this knowledge which kills action: it is the ability to act, in and through oneself, where action seems impossible. Nietzsche's development of self-overcoming had not reached this height in The Birth of Tragedy. Here, the

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Nietzsche, Birth, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

³⁹

Ibid, p. 60.

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Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy was published in 1872 and his Thus Spoke Zarathustra, where he develops the concept of the Superman, appears ten years later in 1882. The Superman is developed to great length in the next chapter. Here, it is sufficient to say, that the Superman is an image of the person capable of overcoming himself and making this overcoming the meaning and goal of his existence. Any further information needed with regards to the chronology of Nietzsche's writings can be found in Appendix I.

Dionysian man finds art as the only possible solution:

When the danger to his will is greatest, art approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live.⁴¹

In his works following The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche begins to examine more carefully the nature of the Dionysian vision as the vision of the horror and absurdity of existence. It is here that Nietzsche develops his nihilism, and with this development Nietzsche begins to pave the way in his thought for a full realization of the nature of self-overcoming.

Chapter 2

Nihilism

Nietzsche's early thought can be characterized as a tireless search into the true nature of things. Since Nietzsche did not bring preconceived notions into his inquiry, he was necessarily taken in many directions. The two predominant paths Nietzsche followed were key to the development of self-overcoming. First, Nietzsche sought to uncover all that was false and erroneous, and he tried to accelerate its destruction: this was the path of his nihilism. Second, he searched for what was truly human, and he tried to explain the world in human terms: this is his revaluation of all values.

R.J. Hollingdale points out that although Nietzsche's early works covered a broad range of subjects, his main preoccupation was a destruction of all things which had previously been considered to be truthful or good. The

⁴² Hollingdale sums it up well in the following passage: "the controlling tendency of his thought during all these five years is unmistakable: it is to break down all the concepts and qualities in which mankind takes pride and pleasure into a few simple qualities in which no one takes pride or pleasure and to see in the latter the origin of the former; likewise to undermine morality by exposing its non-moral basis and rationality by exposing its irrational basis; likewise to abolish the 'higher' world, the metaphysical, by accounting for all its supposed manifestations in terms of the human, phenomenal, and even animal world; in brief, the controlling tendency of his thought is nihilist." R.J. Hollingdale, introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra, (trans. R.J. Hollingdale) (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1971) pp. 12-13.

culmination of Nietzsche's nihilistic stance is contained in The Gay Science and embraces a destructive attitude from many different viewpoints.

Probably no better elaboration on a nihilistic vision can be found than with Nietzsche's famous passage called 'The Madman', in which the madman proclaims that God is dead and all of humanity are the murderers. Following this is a rush of images which describe a life devoid of meaning and a universe that is no longer orderly. Nietzsche's expression 'God is dead' reveals an attack on Christianity as an organized system of values which considers itself to be the sole authority on what is good and evil. Nietzsche would later trace the morality of the Christian religion in The Genealogy of Morals but his opinion of the 'good and evil' of Christianity was essentially implied through the madman. Nietzsche maintained that Christianity, as all things, was a human creation, and the morality which had developed within it is no longer useful.

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Nietzsche feels that the death of God at the hands of mankind is a great event, and he adds mockingly, 'Is not the

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Not only was it no longer useful, but Nietzsche argues that the morality which began to develop and become transformed through history as 'Christianity' falls back on itself due to its hypocritical and self-contradictory nature.

greatness of this deed too great for us?'⁴⁴ Certainly, the death of God, and hence the destruction of an external system of valuation, is a monumental step: it implies chaos in the universe and meaninglessness in one's life.

What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?⁴⁵

The death of God implies that there is no existence beyond that of man. As with Hegel, the consciousness of man is seen as holding the world as its objectification. Nietzsche defies Hegel, however, in maintaining that it is not only reason which has guided our consciousness. Here, the objective world, its appeal to truth, is put into question:

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Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, (125), as quoted in R.J. Hollingdale's introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra, op. cit. p. 15. see Friedrich Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom (trans. Thomas Common) (New York: Fredrick Ungar Publishing, 1973) p. 168. In this paper I favor the translation of certain quotations by R.J. Hollingdale in his introduction to Thus Spoke Zarathustra over the translation in the above edition of The Gay Science (translated as Joyful Wisdom). In my paper I refer to the book only as The Gay Science even when making direct reference to the edition entitled Joyful Wisdom. In every footnote to a quotation from The Gay Science taken from Hollingdale's introduction I will submit the corresponding page in the edition entitled Joyful Wisdom.

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Nietzsche, The Gay Science (125) introduction to Nietzsche's Zarathustra, op. cit. p. 14. (see Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, p. 168).

We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we are able to live - with the postulation of bodies, lines, surfaces, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content: without these articles of faith nobody could now endure to live! But that does not yet mean they are something proved and demonstrated. Life is no argument; among the conditions of life could be error.⁴⁶

Here Nietzsche describes the foundations of science as unproven, and so puts into question the absoluteness of objective truth. He indicates that this objective truth is based on faith, and this faith rests in those unguided experiences which mankind has accumulated. Hence, it is very possible that this faith is based on error.

Nietzsche's thought here retains the distinction between the phenomenal plane and the thing-in-itself. He takes the idea of the phenomenal world as appearance to the limit, in the sense that he questions the absolute validity of the source of their appearances. Schopenhauer maintained that 'however massive and immeasurable {the world} may be, its existence hangs nevertheless on a single thread: and this thread is the actual consciousness in which it exists.'⁴⁷ Nietzsche's exposition goes even further than Schopenhauer, if this is at all possible; he maintains that our consciousness has been reared by errors:

Man has been reared by his errors: first he never saw himself other than imperfectly, second he attributed to himself imaginary qualities, third he felt himself in a false order of rank, with

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Ibid, pp. 13-14 (see Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, p. 164)

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Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, volume 2 (trans. E.F.J. Payne) (New York: Dover, 1958) pp. 3-4.

animals and nature, fourth he continually invented new tables of values and for a time took each of them to be eternal and unconditional so that now this, now that human drive and state took first place and was, as a consequence of this evaluation, ennobled. If one deducts the effect of these four errors, one has also deducted away humanity, humaneness, and 'human dignity'.⁴⁸

Nietzsche's total destruction is now clear: all our knowledge, our values, even our image of ourselves has been based on errors. Yet, amidst this confusion, Nietzsche also begins to lay out a course of action for man:

It is still an entirely new problem just dawning on the human eye, and hardly yet plainly recognizable: to embody knowledge in ourselves and make it instinctive - a problem which is only seen by those who have grasped that hitherto our errors alone have been embodied in us, and that all our consciousness is relative to errors!⁴⁹

Nietzsche thinks that our errors are based on our experiences which essentially have been unguided by our true nature. These experiences we have fallen into, by chance, and our haphazard interpretation of these experiences lead us astray and give us erroneous notions with respect to the essence of life and the true nature of man. The rise of Christianity is one example Nietzsche would use, but almost all of history follows the same pattern: the interpretation of events emanating from our weakness, and the avoidance of experiences which would truly have an impact on our

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Nietzsche, The Gay Science (115) introduction to Nietzsche's Zarathustra, op. cit., p. 13 (see Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, p. 160).

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Friedrich Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom (trans. Thomas Common) (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1973) p. 48.

understanding. In the first case, without imposing ourselves on the experiences we face, we are at the mercy of these events and can only react to them. The 'knowledge' gained from this reaction is taken to represent the reality of the situation. For example, if a man's solitude causes him to feel loneliness and despair, the conclusion is that man is a social animal, that he performs best among people and is not suited for being alone. This is not an active but a reactive discovery on the part of man, and consequently its 'truth' does not penetrate into the essential nature of human life. It remains as a superficial observation. It rests on experience but not on experimentation, which is for Nietzsche the quintessential mode of human experience.

To 'embody knowledge in ourselves and make it instinctive' is an active experience, not a passive or reactive experience. Nietzsche is calling us to stop embodying our errors which are derived from instinctual reactions to experiences. In its place, we must begin to embody true knowledge - that is, the result of active experimentation wherein we are responsible for the experience - and then make it instinctive, that is, make it become part of our own nature. We must build on the capacity of humans to create the meaning of a situation in order to arrive at what it is to be human. Unless our experimentation proceeds in this way, we are doomed to misrepresent our experiences and base our self-image on errors.

This type of experimentation is synonymous with self-overcoming. The individual able to impose himself on his experiences is the individual who stands in relation to his present nature as something that must be overcome. The image of the experimenter par excellence is revealed in Thus Spoke Zarathustra by Zarathustra, who is himself a great experimenter, warrior, and overcomer of self. He is the mouthpiece of this whole text, and as solitary wise man he tries to come down to men to teach them about life. One of his foremost ideas is that, since all gods are dead, the Superman now becomes the new meaning of the earth. The Superman, as experimenter, as overcomer, is the man on the path to becoming man. Nietzsche explains that 'man is a rope fastened between animal and Superman - a rope over an abyss.⁵⁰' Here, the animal represents man as reactive force, as unable to direct his experience. Man as animal is unaware of his true nature as creative. Man as Superman, on the other hand, is fully aware of his creative nature. Nietzsche describes man as a rope fastened between these two 'natures', and so to truly express 'man' one necessarily runs into paradox: man's nature is found through a going-across from what he is in a sense objectively (as animal, a reactive force) to what he is subjectively (as Superman, an active, creative force). Man here is a constant becoming.

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 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, op. cit., p. 43.

from what he is actually to what he is potentially. The propellant of this movement is self-overcoming, seen now as the process by which man becomes conscious of himself as creator, and since human consciousness is the measure of all things,⁵¹ only then does he actually become creator.

The activities of one of the Superman's predecessors in Nietzsche's writings, the warrior, can serve to elaborate on the nature of self-overcoming. At the end of The Gay Science, Nietzsche calls out to the individuals:

Many brave pioneers are needed...men who have an innate disposition to seek in all things that which must be overcome in them...men accustomed to and assured in command and equally ready to obey when necessary...men more fruitful, happier men! For believe me - the secret of realizing the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: to live dangerously!⁵²

Nietzsche's message seems clear here: living dangerously brings about the greatest enjoyment. Hence, for the sake of enjoyment, living dangerously through self-overcoming would seem to be accessible to every man and is a course of action which men can easily fall into. Nietzsche sets this straight, however, as he clarifies the nature of self-

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That human consciousness is the measure of all things seems a necessary conclusion of Nietzsche's nihilism. This statement may, however, be closer to the spirit of Schopenhauer in its formulation.

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Nietzsche, The Gay Science (283) introduction to Nietzsche's Zarathustra, op. cit., p. 18 (see Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, p. 219)

overcoming through the mouth of Zarathustra:

Enjoyment and innocence are the most modest of things: neither want to be looked for. One should have them - but one should look rather for guilt and pain.⁵³

Here, it is not truly in the spirit of the warrior to seek enjoyment. The goal is the struggle, self-overcoming itself. If one were to seek enjoyment as the goal, then one would necessarily fall short. One's actions and struggle would be mediocre at best. Life is difficult, and if one is to affirm life, one must validate the pains of life as essential to life. Whereas men will most often feel that nothing could be worth a good deal of pain and suffering, the warrior, and later the Superman, would maintain that nothing is worthwhile except through pain and suffering.

The Superman is the means and the end of this struggle with life's difficulties. Through ~~the~~ conviction that self-overcoming is the way of authentic existence (the way of the Superman) one can come to a full consciousness of one's creative nature (as represented by the Superman). Only a rigorous self-examination guided by authentic knowledge rather than tradition can lead man to discover himself as a maker of values and not a slave of values. Zarathustra states,

Man first implanted values into things to maintain himself - he created the meaning of things, a human meaning! Therefore he called himself: 'Man', that is, the evaluator.⁵⁴

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Nietzsche, Zarathustra, op. cit. p. 217.

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Ibid, p. 85.

This is man's true tradition - the manifestation of his creative and evaluative capabilities. Zarathustra continues:

Peoples were the creators first; only later were individuals creators. Indeed, the individual himself is still the latest creation.⁵⁵

In this crucial passage, it becomes clear how self-overcoming has a multiple significance. Nietzsche says that man, that is, people, first implanted values into things to maintain themselves, and that these values are the table of their overcomings. Here, self-overcoming (understood as the overcoming that a group or race of people impose on themselves) has a historical significance. Nietzsche is making an observation in the same way that in the Will to Power he talks about the advent of nihilism as an inevitable event which European culture is moving towards.⁵⁶ This is a kind of passive nihilism, because it is not seen as being brought on by man, intentionally. Hence, here, nihilism in and of itself is not capable of bringing forth new creation through all of mankind. Nietzsche exemplifies the preachers of death to whom a nihilistic vision represents a refutation of life:

They encounter an invalid or an old man or a corpse and straight away they say 'Life is Refuted!' But only they are refuted, they and

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Ibid.

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Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, (trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale) (New York: Random House, 1968) p. 3.

their eye that sees only one aspect of
existence.⁵⁷

The feeling that this nihilism brings one to despair and causes one to lose hope is echoed by Zarathustra's Shadow near the end of Thus Spoke Zarathustra:

Too much has become clear to me: now I am no longer concerned with it. No longer is there any living that I love - how shall I still love myself?

To live, as I desire to live or not to live at all, that is what the most saintly man wants. But alas! How can I still have - a desire?⁵⁸

The significance of this passive nihilism serves the possibility for overcoming. Similarly the madman of The Gay Science does not necessarily excite immediate response by telling of God's death. Nietzsche's nihilism take on a different shade, however, when he addresses the individual, that 'latest creation'. Nietzsche's term generally used for the struggling against passive nihilism is 'overcoming'. However since overcoming is a manifestation of man's creative nature and man is seen as the creator of all things, then all things that are 'overcome' ultimately revert back to the creative self, i.e. - the individual (or group of people) who are overcoming. All overcoming is foremost a self-overcoming, then, since when a resistance is overcome, it is seen to have been a part of the human entity involved in the struggle. Here, active nihilism is the sufficient propellant for self-overcoming.

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Nietzsche, Zarathustra, op. cit., p. 72.

⁵⁸

Ibid, p. 285

Active nihilism can be understood as that form of nihilism which the individual imposes on himself and on all his experiences. Here we see the essence of true experimentation where the individual is responsible for his experience. In The Will to Power Nietzsche describes himself as one who has endorsed an active nihilism in his own life,

as a "spirit of daring and experiment that has already lost its way once in every labyrinth of the future; as a soothsayer-bird spirit who looks back when relating what will come; as the perfect nihilist of Europe who, however, has even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it beside, outside himself.⁵⁹

Thus nihilism is a necessary step one must go through, in order to begin to become conscious of oneself as creator; and through active nihilism the individual brings this on himself. The Superman is this path of the individual, which accepts, nay, demands nihilism as a necessary element that life brings. To go the way of the creator, Zarathustra teaches,

You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame: how else could you become new, if you had not first become ashes?⁶⁰

Here, the relation between nihilism and self-overcoming becomes clear. As was said earlier, our errors are the immediate source of what we hold as values and the way in which we perceive ourselves. Nietzsche attempts to uproot

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Nietzsche, Will to Power, op. cit., p. 3.

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Nietzsche, Zarathustra, op. cit., p. 90.

the ideas which we have acquired accidentally in order to force us to create new ideas intentionally. In the historical sense, man is pushed to new evaluations in order to maintain himself. With regards to the individual, man is forced to destroy what he is in order to go in the direction of what he can become. Here, it is clear that Nietzsche perceives man as creative, though this 'perception' is not a static one because it is the prerequisite which allows man to have an active part in the way in which he is perceived. One is capable of overcoming oneself only when one recognizes oneself as capable of this overcoming. In effect, since one has to overcome oneself before one is aware of one's ability to overcome, one must first be given the impetus to do so. Nietzsche sees the discovery that all values are meaningless and the realization that our consciousness is based on errors as the necessary impetus. Facing a life without meaning, peoples create new sets of values in order to survive. Similarly, with the individual, one is forced to 'make one's life meaningful,' despite its absurdity in-itself. The idea that mankind is reared by his errors can easily be extended to the individual; as the individual's life experiences are in the reactive mode, all he has learned (all that is in his consciousness) is founded on errors. In this way, an individual sees the world and himself in a certain way, through a limited perspective. If these notions and values are destroyed, or better still, if

the individual can will this destruction,⁶¹ then a new creation will take place. Only here does the individual intuit himself as creator - and gain authentic knowledge.

To truly will the destruction of values one must be acting in conjunction with one's own will, and this will's deepest desire - that is, power. The discussion of man as seeker of power is essential to an elaboration on man's behavior and his creative nature. We have stated that man implanted values into things to maintain himself, and that these values are the table of man's overcoming. In the next chapter, it will be shown how this table of overcomings is the voice of man's will to power.⁶² A fuller explanation of the central role of the will to power in self-overcoming will be provided.

⁶¹Here, this destruction is the result of an active nihilism.

⁶²Nietzsche, Zarathustra, op. cit., p. 84.

Chapter 3

The Will to Power

Nietzsche's concept of the will to power did not come to him all in one piece. The development of the concept was manifested through the unsystematic aphoristic style of his early works. Here, it seems clear that Nietzsche was not searching for a single principle which would unite all activity in the universe.⁶³ It was his analysis of many human traits and characteristics which led him for the most part to a single motive: the desire for power.

Nietzsche's initial expression of the nature of power is negative. Early on he proclaims: "Who among you would renounce power, knowing and having learned that power is evil?"⁶⁴ Nietzsche's impression here is that the desire for power underlies ignoble actions on man's part. In Human, All Too Human, Nietzsche exposes the desire for pity as a case of a person being able to make another suffer for his own weakness. Here, the person can feel that at least they have one power, in spite of all their weakness, the power to hurt.⁶⁵ Later, in The Gay Science, Nietzsche attacks those

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This is his formulation of the will to power found in his works following Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

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Friedrich Nietzsche, Thoughts Out of Season: Richard Wagner in Bayreuth (trans. Anthony M. Ludovici) (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964) p. 203.

65

Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human (trans. Paul V. Cohn) (New York: Russell and Russell, 1984) p. 36. This passage is quoted from Kaufmann's Nietzsche, op. cit., p. 158, due to a superior translation.

who have pity on others:

Pity is the most pleasant feeling in those who have not much pride, and have no prospect of great conquest: the easy booty - and that is what every sufferer is - is for them an enchanting thing.⁶⁶

In its early expression, Nietzsche assimilates the desire for power to pleasure-seeking,⁶⁷ almost in the sense that it is an attempt to fulfil our most hedonistic drives. Through his early works Nietzsche shows the desire for power to be at the root of modesty, gratitude, conformity, revenge, and even says that "one strives for independence,⁶⁸ for the sake of power, not the other way around." In keeping with his nihilistic tendencies, then, Nietzsche tried to uncover supposedly sacred human acts as having a profane basis. Even independence, which remains throughout for Nietzsche a commendable pursuit, is shown to be motivated by this lust for power. Nietzsche saw that one way to deal with this desire for power was to transform it into artistic creativity. This approach hearkens back to The Birth of Tragedy, where the Greeks were able to transform Dionysian desire into creative expression through their tragedy.

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Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, op. cit., p. 51

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Here, Nietzsche's early disdain for power as a motive for human action typifies his nihilistic frame of mind. Where he sees the desire for power later as the source of great joy, here he sees it as degenerate need-fulfillment.

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This quotation of Nietzsche is taken from the Gesammelte Werke (which has not been translated) and is used by Kaufmann in his book Nietzsche, op. cit., p. 160.

In The Dawn, Nietzsche began to look at all of Greek culture as a manifestation of this desire for power. It was perhaps here that his vision of the desire for power as motive of human action changed focus.⁶⁹ Greek culture, symbolized by the great competitions which Nietzsche admired, could not now become considered mundane simply because its source was seen to be this desire for power. Nietzsche began to think of power, while being something that controlled human behavior, as something which also could be controlled itself by man. Here, Nietzsche was able to go beyond the discussion of power in itself and come to a way of evaluating power as strength in its manifestations in human action.

Still one lies on one's knees before strength - according to the ancient habit of slaves - and yet, when the degree of worthiness of being honored is to be determined, only the degree of reason in strength is decisive: one must measure in how far strength has been overcome by something higher and now serves that as its tool and means!⁷⁰

The duality of Apollo and Dionysus is reborn here, and the expression clarifies the relation of this duality to self-overcoming. Here, the Dionysian as overwhelming desire (for power) is brought under control through the reason of the Apollonian force. Reason serves to transform power which is chaotic and unwieldy into something that can be a

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This observation was prompted by a discussion in Kaufmann's Nietzsche, op. cit. p. 165.

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Friedrich Nietzsche, The Dawn of Day (trans. J. M. Kennedy) (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964) p. 379., quoted in Kaufmann's Nietzsche, op. cit., p. 170.

tool and a means. This passage is crucial, because it is here that Nietzsche goes beyond the necessity to sublimate passion into art; he sees that power can be sublimated to serve as a means to a higher goal, e.g. - independence.⁷¹

Nietzsche originally associated power with pleasure in the hedonistic sense. In a note dated before The Dawn, Nietzsche reduces pleasure to the feeling of power:

The pleasure of power is explained by the hundredfold experience of displeasure at dependance and impotence. If this experience is not there, then pleasure is lacking, too.⁷²

However, Nietzsche's understanding of power slowly changed through his early works. As stated, he began to see that the desire for power could serve as a means to a higher goal through self-overcoming. With this realization, Nietzsche began to see the pleasure which is experienced through an increase in power as positive and life-affirming. In The Gay Science, the proclamation is enthusiastic:

One could image a delight and a power of self-determining, and a freedom of will, whereby a spirit could bid farewell to every belief, to every wish for certainty, accustomed as it would be to support itself on slender cords and possibilities, and to dance even on the verge of abysses. Such a spirit would be the free spirit par excellence.⁷³

In this passage, the importance of an active nihilism, the life-affirming quality of the free and self-determining

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Independence stands as the goal in reason's sublimation of passion because it is also the means by which the process of transforming power is made possible.

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Again, from notes as yet untranslated and used by Kaufmann in his book Nietzsche, op. cit., p. 159.

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Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, op. cit., p. 287.

individual, and the positive joy which ensues from a feeling of power all come together. The essential relation of nihilism to self-overcoming is realized here: only if an individual can destroy all values and let go of all beliefs can this individual truly experience the delight of self-determination. Self-overcoming, seen as the strengthening of the will, is the vehicle by which the individual gains this power of self-determination, that is, the power to shed all beliefs. Nietzsche notes that:

Belief is always most desired, most pressingly needed, when there is a lack of will: for the will, as emotion of command, is the distinguishing characteristic of sovereignty and power.⁷⁴

In these passages will and power begin to come together. The will is the 'emotion of command' and thus serves as the instigator of self-overcoming. The desire for power, which Nietzsche sees as needing to be overcome, is also the vehicle of this overcoming. Nietzsche is slowly moving away from his earlier configuration where the accumulation of power rests in the capacity of an individual's reason to overcome the chaotic nature of the striving for power. Now, it seems, the will is the distinguishing characteristic whose force is the measure of autonomy in an individual.⁷⁵

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Ibid., p. 286.

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The essence of Nietzsche's main concepts remain pretty much the same - i.e., his observations which bring forth his statements. It is the terms that change, and so here Nietzsche is getting a sharper and sharper focus on the elaboration on self-overcoming, while its meaning was always pretty clear to him.

It is in this discussion in The Gay Science that the concept of the will to power came together for Nietzsche. His experimentation finally led him to an understanding of the will to power as the merging of the desire for power and the will to live. As he had reduced most human acts to the desire for power, Nietzsche concluded that this must be the pure motive for all acts, to the extent that even the struggle for existence in all living creatures is only an example of the manifestations of this will to power. Nietzsche confronts Darwinian theory at this point:

The struggle for existence is only an exception, a temporary restriction of the will to live; the struggle, be it great or small, turns everywhere on predominance, on increase and expansion, on power, in conformity to the will to power, which is just the will to live.⁷⁶

In this formulation, the will to power becomes an instinctual drive by which all living things move. The desire for power which Nietzsche treated in various ways in earlier works here becomes understood as a natural drive inherent in all life.

With this reformulation, the question must now be asked whether talk of self-overcoming can be significant, given that man naturally moves in the direction of an expansion of power. All is not lost, however. In Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra, most of the concepts discussed come together in a mysterious yet cohesive way. Self-overcoming is

elaborated on by Nietzsche here as in no other work, and its relation to the will to power is clarified.

With the concept of the will to power now unified, Nietzsche illuminates the distinction between will to power and self-overcoming. Self-overcoming is only one possible manifestation of the will to power. It can be seen as that process by which power is increased and retained, in the sense that an individual is always stronger and more autonomous after each overcoming. This must be distinguished with other manifestations of the will to power, where power may be momentarily increased but then is lost or dispersed. In self-overcoming, the will itself is strengthened, not as appetite for power, but as 'emotion of command' - i.e. as capable of commanding and of carrying out the command. The development of Christianity, for Nietzsche, is certainly a manifestation of the will to power but it does not strengthen the will - i.e. it maintains a dependence on the part of individuals. With self-overcoming, on the contrary, autonomy and independence are gained. For the warrior it becomes the source of the greatest enjoyment of existence, just as with the free spirit who celebrates his own freedom as a power of self-determination. Here the will to life (as will to power) is justified, as its manifestation brings about the 'supreme celebration' - of life itself.

Zarathustra invites us into a secret which life itself has confided to him: "I am that which must overcome itself

again and again."⁷⁷ This secret unveils an important tenet of existential thought: it shows that simply 'being in life' does not constitute authentic living, represented here simply as 'life'. Only with overcoming does a man's feeling mirror his authentic living (that is, his self-overcoming). Only through the tension produced through self-overcoming does one truly experience being alive. Life sacrifices itself for the sake of power, and only in this way is its activity regarded as authentic. The preachers of death say "life is refuted", and in a sense they are right: their life is refuted because they do not manifest their will to power in a way that justifies life.

The errors which constitute our consciousness can be seen here as manifestations of our will to power which we have not directed. Our lack of will in this instance brings about experiences which we cannot call our own. In essence, we are the slaves of these manifestations of the will to power, not the commanders. Zarathustra elaborates here:

Wherever I found living creatures, there too I heard the language of obedience. All living creatures are obeying creatures.

And this is the second thing: he who cannot obey himself will be commanded. That is the nature of living creatures.

But this is the third thing I heard: that commanding is more difficult than obeying. And not only because the commander bears the burden of all who obey, and that this burden can easily crush him.

In all commanding there appeared to me to be an experiment and a risk: and the living creature always risks himself when he commands.⁷⁸

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Nietzsche, Zarathustra, op. cit., p. 138.

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Ibid, p. 137.

Commanding appears as an experiment, indeed synonymous with the active experimentation discussed earlier. One is also reminded of the warrior, who is 'accustomed to and assured in command, and equally ready to obey when necessary.' The thrust of being an active force in one's experiences is to be in command of the experience. The essence of self-overcoming is not simply a command but also an obedience of this command. Both actions come together as one and represent the strength of a will. Heidegger, in his work Nietzsche, explains this dual capacity of the will:

Is willing then wishing to which we add our own initiative? No, willing is not wishing at all. It is the submission of ourselves to our own command and the resoluteness of this command, which already implies our carrying out the command.⁷⁹

Here, Heidegger tries to explain the nature of self-overcoming while keeping true to the essential nature of the will to power. As Walter Kaufmann tells us, Nietzsche's⁸⁰ formulation of the will to power is a form of monism. Yet, self-overcoming is only possible through a dualism, i.e., that which overcomes and that which is overcome. If reason now is only a manifestation of the will to power, what is left to create the opposition which is necessary for self-overcoming? Kaufmann leads us out of the problem in

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Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche, vol. I, (trans. David Farrell Krell) (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) p. 40.

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Kaufmann, Nietzsche, op. cit., p. 204.

the following way:

The decisive point of Nietzsche's cosmology can be expressed in two words: Nietzsche was a dialectical monist. His basic force, the will to power, is not only the Dionysian passionate striving, akin to Schopenhauer's irrational will, but it is also Apollonian and possesses an inherent capacity to give itself form. The victory of the Dionysian is thus not complete, and the will to power is a synthesis of Nietzsche's earlier two dualistic principles.⁸¹

Within the structure of this monism, the duality of subject and object, of reality and appearance, of reason and passion, are retained. For Nietzsche, says Heidegger, thus⁸² duality 'is proper to the essence of willing'. He elaborates on the fashion in which will to power as a unified concept can still manifest such a duality: 'Willing wills the one who wills, as such a one, and willing posits the willed as such.'⁸³ Nietzsche goes beyond the standpoint of Schopenhauer who felt that a destruction of all dualities was the important step in life. Nietzsche embraces the duality as eternally indispensable to life, and so self-overcoming, rather than a denial of life, becomes the essential course of action.

The problem that begins to present itself within this discussion is whether self-overcoming retains the status it had acquired when will and power were separate in Nietzsche's writings. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, however,

⁸¹

Ibid.

⁸²

Heidegger, Nietzsche, op. cit., p. 40.

⁸³

Ibid.

Nietzsche succeeds in reconciling the two concepts. Of prime importance here is an understanding of how, in light of the apparent omnipresence of the will to power, that any valuation derived through self-overcoming is meaningful. Could we not point to an arbitrariness of the destruction and creation of values? Nietzsche leads us through this in an elaboration of the valuations of different peoples.

Zarathustra has told us that peoples have overcome themselves in order to maintain themselves, to make themselves strong. What they have overcome, resulting in their evaluation of good and evil, is not arbitrary; however, it is not absolute, either. Zarathustra shows evaluation to lend itself differently to each concrete circumstance. The common link between different peoples' evaluations of good and evil is expressed as follows:

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.⁸⁴

The reason that valuation is based on what is hard is as follows: If a people can overcome what is hard, and if a people can attain what is most indispensable, then they will necessarily be strong as a group and independent as a nation. They will be capable of great commands in that they will have the collective means to obey those commands. What is indispensable and hard, that is, what can serve to strengthen the nation, is the good of that people.

Similarly, that which weakens a collective people constitutes their evil.

This can easily be extended to the individual. What is hard and indispensable to an individual is what presents itself to the individual as the greatest obstacle, and an overcoming of this obstacle exemplifies what Nietzsche terms 'a power of self-determining'. Obstacles take shape, in the self-overcoming of an individual, only as the individual's weaknesses. Hence self-overcoming is self-contained and is tenable with the monistic nature of the will to power. An individual's strength (i.e. - ability to overcome obstacles) is the means by which he gains strength (understood as autonomy). For Nietzsche, the greatest affirmative feeling one can experience is that one's power has increased. In this way, self-overcoming, which sees the overcoming of weakness and impotence as essential, recognizes pain and anxiety as a necessary part of life. It is no wonder that only those on the path of self-overcoming can endure Nietzsche's most abysmal thought, that of the eternal recurrence of all things;⁸⁵ only those who see the

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Although many things are said of the eternal recurrence, it seems distinctly possible that Nietzsche's thoughts on self-overcoming influenced the inception of this concept. Since Nietzsche denies the idea of teleological progress, the eternal recurrence seems to be a proposal out of which life as self-overcoming can flourish. Only if one can say "I want this life again and again for eternity" can one truly prove their affirmative feeling about life.

inextricable link between all pains and all joys as the only possible constitution of life are able to will their life as it has been lived, in all its pain and joy, for eternity. The eternal recurrence of all things remains the happiest thought for the Superman and the penultimate affirmation of life.

In his works following Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche's formulation of the will to power begins to lose its metaphorical articulation. In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche begins to discuss the will to power in much sterner and more absolute terms:

'Will' can of course operate only on 'will' - and not on 'matter' (not on 'nerves', for example)-: enough, one must venture the hypothesis that whatever effects are recognized, will is operating upon will - and that all mechanical occurrences, in so far as a force is active in them, are force of will, effects of will. - Granted finally that one succeeded in explaining our entire instinctual life as the development and ramification of one basic form of will as will to power, as in my theory -; granted that one could trace all organic functions back to this will to power and could also find in it the solution to the problem of procreation and nourishment - they are one problem - one would have acquired the right to define all efficient force unequivocally as: will to power. The world seen from within, the world described and defined according to its 'intelligible character' - it would be 'will to power' and nothing else.-86

This expression, and many more like it in his later works, constitute a bit of a departure from his earlier works. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra the concept of the will to power had

a concrete relationship with everyday struggle, whereas in the above passage, it is presented as an abstraction.

Previously the will to power as metaphorical expression served as an opening into a new world of possibilities; here it begins to become rigid, and too objectified. The discussion here seems no longer to invite the reader in, as an active participant in the interpretation of the will to power. Nietzsche states the following in The Will to Power:

How does it happen that the basic articles of faith in psychology are one and all the most arrant misrepresentations and counterfeits? "Man strives after happiness," e.g. - how much of that is true? In order to understand what 'life' is, what kind of striving and tension life is, the formula must apply as well to trees and plants as to animals. What does a plant strive after?...For what do the trees in a jungle fight each other? For "happiness"? - For power! 87

The formulation of a single principle now capable of explaining all activity in the universe clearly rubs against much of his early teaching - his destruction of science, his focus on mankind, and his rejection of metaphysical structures. Here, Nietzsche tries to make a complete system based on the findings of unsystematic inquiries. As far as most critics are concerned, Nietzsche's later formulation of the will to power betrays the beauty and depth of his earlier works.

Nietzsche does in some ways continue to discuss self overcoming in his later works, but his elaboration slowly

has moved from oneⁿ which invites thought to one which leaves nothing to the imagination. In The Will to Power he states:

Knowledge works as a tool of power. Hence it is plain that it increases with every increase of power -. In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behavior on it.⁸⁸

Now, knowledge works as a tool of power, rather than power working as a tool of reason. The emphasis of the predominant role of power, in and of itself, serves only to justify the thesis of the will to power as sole force in the universe. For the reader interested in being stimulated towards greater growth through self-overcoming, The Will to Power describes the process only as an inevitable occurrence which man, as a physical phenomena, is brought through.

Ernest Joos explains that, with Thus Spoke Zarathustra,⁸⁹ ideas came to Nietzsche 'on doves' feet', which is to say that they are truly sublime, and yet for this reason powerful. Nietzsche's later works easily relate to the subtitle of Nietzsche's Twilight of the Idols, 'how to philosophize with a hammer'.⁹⁰ In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche's words are truly inspiring, they invite tender

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Nietzsche, Will to Power, op. cit. p. 266.

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Joos, Poetic Truth, op. cit., p. 105. I am strongly indebted to Dr. Joos for the discussion in this paragraph, in his exposition of Nietzsche's Zarathustra and his elaboration on Nietzsche's change of attitude which ensued.

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Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ (trans. R.J. Hollingdale) (Middlesex, England: Penguin books, 1968) p. 19.

thoughts, they incite passionate action. His later formulation of concepts, which become too rigid and objectified, no longer ask the reader for participation in the interpretation of life. Here, the spirit of self-overcoming, so brilliant in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, loses much of its strength.

Nietzsche's elaboration on the nature of self-overcoming takes on many different forms, as has so far been shown. In the final chapter, I will try to bring these forms into a coherent relation with each other. Naturally, this concept is many-sided, and no single statement can be true to all the perspectives on it. Nonetheless, it flows through much of Nietzsche's work with the same spirit,⁹¹ and it is this spirit which, in my estimation, unifies all that is important in Nietzsche's thought.

Actually, it flows through all of his works in which he remains true to himself in this way; only when he tried to unify all perspective in a single principle did the essence of self-overcoming start becoming empty in his work.

Chapter 4

The Anatomy of Self-Overcoming

Some effort has already been given to explain the concept of self-overcoming as having a dual significance in Nietzsche's writings. It has relevance not only to the individual as such, but to human groups, i.e. - mankind in general. The microcosm (man as individual) is very often discussed simultaneously with the macrocosm (man as mankind). Nietzsche, as psychologist, draws from his relations with his contemporaries and his experience of himself; and as historian of culture, Nietzsche draws on the events of the past. It is in the interplay of these two frames of reference and the elaboration on the common element, man, that some of Nietzsche most profound revelations are expressed. Nietzsche synthesizes these two frames of reference through his experimentation and in doing so, draws many original conclusions concerning man.

It was Nietzsche's early discovery of the duality of Apollo and Dionysus in Greek culture which led to an elaboration of the forces which are at work in creating human life. Nietzsche saw during his times that man's Apollonian side was becoming too dominant, that man was engrossed with his reason, with science and with technology. For Nietzsche, all things are valid insofar as they serve man in the increase of his strength. What he saw develop was man becoming more and more dependent on machines and the principles of science to guide his life. Here, man was

becoming alienated from life, in the sense that technology began to hide man from his creative self.

Nietzsche's polemics on Christianity are similar in this respect. For Nietzsche, Christian morality levels any attempt to rise above the more mundane forms of human existence. What is evaluated as good in Christian morality is the equality of all:

"Will to equality" - that itself shall henceforth be the name of virtue; and we shall raise outcry against everything that has power!⁹²

Zarathustra's response is decisive:

Justice speaks thus to me: 'Men are not equal.' And they should not become so either! For what were my love of the Superman if I spoke otherwise?⁹³

Nietzsche sees the onset of Christian doctrines as 'the slave revolt in morality';⁹⁴ and he explains that its inception came from the desire of the weak to gain strength by making a virtue of their position of weakness. Here, there is 'no chance of promotion' to heights of great and exceptional quality. With Christianity, the passions, which for Nietzsche are the source of all great human achievements, are seen as evil and offensive. In a biting

⁹²

Nietzsche, Zarathustra, op. cit., p. 123.

⁹³

Ibid, p. 124.

⁹⁴

Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals (trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale) (New York: Random House, 1969) p. 16.

criticism from Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche elaborates:

The most famous formula for doing this is contained in the New Testament, in the Sermon on the Mount...(where) it is said, with reference to sexuality, "if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out"; fortunately, Christians do not follow this prescription. To exterminate the passions and desires merely in order to do away with their folly and its unpleasant consequences - this itself seems to us today merely an acute form of folly...The church combats the passions with excision in every sense of the word: its "cure" is castration. It never asks: "How can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a desire?" - it has at all times laid the emphasis of its discipline on extirpation. But to attack the passions at their roots means to attack life at its roots.⁹⁵

This Christian formulation of 'self-overcoming', i.e. - with its suppression of passions - is clearly opposed to Nietzsche's idea. For Nietzsche, self-overcoming utilizes the passions and embraces their energy, and, in overcoming, elevates their chaotic nature into something potentially beautiful. Nietzsche's view of art and culture rests with the proliferation of the Dionysian force in mankind. This constitutes Nietzsche's love for the Dionysian, and clearly, if this side of man is extirpated, life is cut 'at its roots.' This does not mean to say, however, that Nietzsche denies the critical importance of man's Apollonian side. Clearly one cannot live without the other, as this duality is and always will be essential to life. However, Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, quoted by Pfeffer directly from a German edition. The corresponding passage in my edition could not be found due to insufficient footnote information. It is from Pfeffer's book Nietzsche: Discipline of Dionysus, op. cit., p. 251.

saw that man's Apollonian consciousness was too dominant in his age; and when the Dionysian force did manifest itself it was often only in cruel or destructive ways. Nietzsche does not think that this is the price we should pay for modernity, since it is indeed life that is at stake.

Nietzsche's nihilism attempts to lead us towards the creation of new values with the origins of these values recognized as ~~our~~ desires, our striving, our willing. Nietzsche calls for 'a replacement of morality by the will to our goal, and consequently to the means to it.'⁹⁶ If this form of valuation makes it possible to 'spiritualize, beautify, deify a desire,' then life itself becomes beautiful, valuable, and is justified. In the individual, the way this comes about is through self-overcoming expressed in terms of a sublimation of passion. Here, reason and passion oppose each other but neither gains an ultimate victory. Since for Nietzsche all passions have one source, that is, the desire for power through the will to power, it is the domain of reason and of the understanding to direct and control these passions. What direction is truly desirable? For Nietzsche, what is desirable are those manifestations which serve to make oneself independent and, in the moral sense, contribute to the growth of independence in others. Here, our manifestation is truly consonant with the will to power as the desire to increase strength and power.

Along these lines, Zarathustra speaks the following:

In your friend you should possess your best enemy.
Your heart should feel closest to him when you
oppose him.⁹⁷

In opposing others with an honest spirit, we incite them to overcome themselves. In this way, independence, autonomy - this could also be expressed as strength or power - is the end. In moral terms, it is only if we are autonomous that we can interact with others in such a way that their power increases and is maintained along with ours. In opposing a friend, each person is given the opportunity to grow. We contrast this with pity, which is itself a manifestation of the will to power. Pity, however, only serves to weaken all participants because of their dependence on one another. Self-overcoming destroys dependence, and it is for this reason that Zarathustra must leave his followers:

I now go away alone, my disciples! You too now go away and be alone! So I will have it.
Truly, I advise you: go away from me and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And better still: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he has deceived you.
The man of knowledge must be able not only to love his enemies but also hate his friends.
One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil.⁹⁸

Here, Zarathustra forces his disciples to shed their dependence on him. This is essentially the way of Nietzsche's teaching, especially in this book. Even if Nietzsche's theories are followed, one must make them one's

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Nietzsche, Zarathustra, op. cit., p. 83.

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Ibid., p. 103

own. To this extent, it is essential to go away from Nietzsche and develop one's own course of action. 'One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil'. This is one of the main reasons for Nietzsche's metaphorical elaboration of his ideas in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Nietzsche does not want to be an idol, nor does he want his exposition to be similar to a doctor's prescription, in which 'an overcoming a day keeps the psychiatrist away'. For Nietzsche, the Superman is the way of the individual, and each individual's way is different. This is why the Superman necessarily remains a vague concept - because it must be applicable to concrete situations, all of which are different. Zarathustra elaborates as follows:

This - is now my way: where is yours? Thus I answered those who asked me 'the way'. For the way - does not exist!99

Indeed, many perspectives, many ways of seeing things characterizes the path of self-overcoming. One of the goals of self-overcoming is to gain access to as many of these different perspectives as possible. Karl Jaspers, in his book Nietzsche, vividly describes Nietzsche's preoccupation of this kind:

The significance of this overcoming for Nietzsche is that it always involves an attack, a calling-in-question, an experimental negation, while that which is rejected must previously, however, have been directly experienced, real, and even identical with his own being. That is why he investigates

the full extent of those things that he finds to be very real possibilities. He inveighs against those who try "to acquire one kind of disposition and one kind of view to serve in all of life's situations and against the uniformity that is referred to as "being of a dignified philosophical disposition". He believes that for enrichment of knowledge, it may be better to hearken to the soft voices of the different situations in life: "These bring their own views with them. Thus one participates cognitively in many lives and natures when he refuses to treat himself as one permanently fixated individual." As opposed to those who remain unenlightened and impervious to enlightenment as a result of not having entertained numerous persuasions, Nietzsche expresses his way and his goal as follows: "To have circled the whole periphery of the modern soul, to have sat in every one of its nooks - that is my torment and my delight."¹⁰⁰

Here, 'a greater perspective on the world is achieved, similar to the 'overcoming of pessimism' discussed in Chapter 1. Self-overcoming destroys an individual's instinct to glorify one perspective at the expense of all others. In The Will to Power Nietzsche maintains:

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 other drives to accept as a norm.¹⁰¹

Self-overcoming serves to enable an individual to overcome each perspective and empowers him to create a new perspective within himself. This is why Nietzsche denigrates the 'permanently fixated individual'; because clinging to one perspective does not enable one to gain

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Karl Jaspers, Nietzsche (trans. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz) (Chicago: Gateway, 1969) p. 391.

¹⁰¹

Nietzsche, Will to Power, op. cit., p. 267.

independence. Zarathustra tells us: 'I love him who wants to create beyond himself, and thus perishes.'¹⁰² The way of the Superman is both a self-destruction (of one's opinions, values, and perspectives which constitute the individual's identity in their claim to eternal validity) and a self-creation (of a new perspective, or new truth among many truths). Here, the individual who overcomes himself gains a broader perspective (i.e. - sees things from many sides and in many ways); this, as Nietzsche says, is the source of his torment and his delight.

This growth of perspective is identical to an increase of knowledge. Nietzsche tells us that 'knowledge works as a tool of power', and here, for all intents and purposes, knowledge is power. As Dr. Joos states:

Will to power has nothing to do with power in the ordinary sense of this term. The power referred to is the power we draw from our understanding. We dominate events, we rule over our destiny through the reasons we invent and propose as answers to our questions.¹⁰³

Hence, self-overcoming truly relates to Nietzsche's expression in The Gay Science 'to embody knowledge in ourselves and make it instinctive.' Here, knowledge empowers us in giving us an understanding of our relation to the world - i.e. as creative force. The perception of ourselves as creators is the highest amplification of our autonomy, in the sense that we are not dependent on anything external,

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Nietzsche, Zarathustra, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

¹⁰³

Joos, Poetic Truth and Transvaluation, op. cit., p. 88.

i.e. external things are objectifications of our creative will.¹⁰⁴ Zarathustra gives a passionate account of the feeling of experiencing oneself as overcomer and as creator:

I have learned to walk: since then I have run. I have learned to fly: since then I do not have to be pushed in order to move. Now I am nimble, now I fly, now I see myself under myself, now a god dances within me.

Thus spoke Zarathustra.¹⁰⁵

The thought of Nietzsche has been explored through this thesis in an effort to show that much of what is important in Nietzsche relates to self-overcoming. That the will to power is somehow the foundation of all activity in the universe is a monumental statement indeed: however, only insofar as the will to power has a human meaning and relates to self-overcoming does it retain a timeless quality which is of interest today.

Many things today bear the mark of Nietzsche's self-overcoming: the proliferation of how-to books, the growing preoccupation of individuals to maintain better physical and

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We are reminded both of Hegel and Schopenhauer here, but we must be precise in understanding that for Nietzsche, these objectifications are not illusions but are essential to the nature of willing. We are the creators but the phenomena are no less essential because of this. One's struggle for independence is nothing if one has no phenomena to be independent from.

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Nietzsche, Zarathustra, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

mental health, the branching out of certain disciplines of psychology, religion, and art, each one stemming from the human striving towards greater strength and vitality. Unfortunately, much of the substance of modern practices have lost the key message. Zarathustra reminds us that 'we have to search for guilt and pain'. Donald D. Weiss elaborates:

Nietzsche would say that the kinesthetic experience of overcoming obstacles is the only way in which we are able to have an immediate, intuitive experience of our own vigor...The discomfort that signals the presence of resistances is inherent in the joy that comes of meeting such resistances successfully.¹⁰⁶

Much of today's instruction focuses on 'how to overcome yourself the easy way,' and so the main thrust is forgotten. Here, self-overcoming does not produce a 'rising above'; it becomes a part of the levelling of our culture and acquires its decadent ways.

Whereas in Nietzsche's times external value systems such as Christian morality were easily delineated and seen by him to be oppressive, today a slightly different monster faces us: we live in the guise of freedom wherein our values are handed down to us subliminally, through media and advertising. Here, it is not clear to us that something should be overcome, and yet modern men and women remain more alienated from themselves than ever.

¹⁰⁶Donald D. Weiss, 'Nietzsche on the Joys of Struggle: Some Remarks in Response to Professor Neveille,' International Studies in Philosophy 16, 121-124, 1984, p. 122.

Here ~~is~~ where Nietzsche's teaching is truly valuable. Nietzsche's formulation of self-overcoming is so profound that it is capable of transcending Nietzsche's own biases. Where Nietzsche may have felt that women are not capable of overcoming themselves, the nature of self overcoming easily allows for its manifestation in all humans, regardless of sex, race, or other discriminating characteristics. Self-overcoming addresses itself to each concrete situation, in that it demands the full participation of an individual and leaves the interpretation of the situation in the individual's hands. Only in this way can an individual achieve not only happiness, but more importantly independence (power) through each experience. This comes in sharp contrast with modern methods, whose prescriptions towards happiness ignore that lasting happiness, a joy which justifies living itself, is only possible if the individual is given the impetus to be creative and to be strong. If a certain 'method' of achieving happiness works for an individual, it nonetheless makes the individual dependent on this method for his or her happiness; and since any method can only work in just so many situations, the individual will still feel the pain of impotence in many aspects of life.

Due to this omnipresent character of self-overcoming and of other aspects of Nietzsche's writings, there is much room for misinterpretation. As I said in the beginning of this thesis, one must read oneself into Nietzsche's works, but only in the sense that one has tried to experience what

Nietzsche is discussing. Many sources - Hitler is but an example - have taken Nietzsche out of context and tried to use his philosophy to promote their ideas. It seems apparent, though, that Nietzsche himself never intended to have his writings serve to validate someone else's way of thinking as the way. For the way, as Zarathustra tells us, does not exist!

It must be noted that this final phrase does not imply that any way is acceptable since Nietzsche certainly does not call for an arbitrariness of values. An understanding of Nietzsche's transvaluation of values is essential as a background to the true nature of self-overcoming. What is only implicit in parts of the text but must be stated here is that basic values - those which are truly human - are always returned to, rediscovered through self-overcoming. Hence self-overcoming, which entails the creation of new values, must occur in the context of the transvaluation of values and so does not simply entail an augmentation of one's autonomy and independence. This thesis purported to trace the anatomy of self-overcoming; but it is only with an examination of the transvaluation of values that the body as a whole of the concept of self-overcoming in Nietzsche can be understood.

Appendix I

Publication dates of Nietzsche's works mentioned in this text.

The Birth of Tragedy	1872
Thoughts Out of Season	1873-76
Human, All Too Human	1878
The Dawn	1881
The Gay Science	1882
Thus Spoke Zarathustra	1883-85
Beyond Good and Evil	1886
On the Genealogy of Morals	1887
The Twilight of the Idols	1889
Ecce Homo*	1908
The Will to Power**	1967

* published posthumously

** published and edited posthumously, in 1967 by Walter Kaufmann (see bibliography)

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