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NIETZSCHE'S ARGUMENT FOR THE PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE:
AN INTERPRETATION OF *BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL*

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As men come to resemble one another more and more, the dogma of the equality of the intellect gradually insinuates itself into their beliefs, and it becomes more difficult for an innovator, whoever he may be, to acquire and exercise great power over the mind of a people. In such societies, sudden intellectual revolutions are therefore rare; for if one looks at the history of the world, one sees that great and rapid mutations in human opinions result not so much from the force of an argument as from the authority of a name.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* 2:3:21

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Abbreviations

I use the following abbreviations to refer to primary texts by Nietzsche. References are to aphorism or section number and/or name, preceded (where applicable) by treatise or part number or name, e.g. BGE Preface, BGE 13, OGM 1:13, TSZ 1:13 On Chastity or TI The Problem of Socrates 8. Translations used are listed in the Bibliography. Citations from the original German are from *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 2nd. ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988).

AC = *The Antichrist* (trans. Judith Norman)

BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil* (trans. Walter Kaufmann)

BT = *The Birth of Tragedy* (trans. Ronald Speirs)

D = *Daybreak* (trans. R. J. Hollingdale)

EH = *Ecce Homo* (trans. Walter Kaufmann)

GS = *The Gay Science* (trans. Josephine Nauckhoff)

HATH = *Human, All-Too-Human* (trans. Gary Handwerk)

AOM = *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (trans. R. J. Hollingdale)

OGM = *On the Genealogy of Morals* (trans. Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale)

PTAG = *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (trans. Marianne Cowan)

SE = *Schopenhauer as Educator* (trans. R. J. Hollingdale)

TI = *Twilight of the Idols* (trans. Richard Polt)

TSZ = *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. Walter Kaufmann)

UDHL = *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (trans. R. J. Hollingdale)

CW = *The Case of Wagner* (trans. Walter Kaufmann)

WP = *The Will to Power* (trans. Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale)

WS = *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (trans. R. J. Hollingdale)

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Chapter 1

Nietzsche, Leo Strauss and the Rediscovery of Socratic Philosophy

Socrates, to confess it frankly, stands so close to me that I am nearly always fighting with him.

—Nietzsche, summer 1875

What is needed first of all is absolute skepticism against all traditional concepts, as one philosopher *perhaps* already possessed it – Plato. Naturally, he taught the opposite.

—Nietzsche, summer 1885

§1. Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche is well known both for his critique of Christian morality and for his critique of modern democracy, liberalism and egalitarianism. One of the most remarkable and surprising aspects of Nietzsche's cultural critique is his refusal either to take sides in the late modern struggle between traditional religion and the democratic Enlightenment or to advocate a reconciliation between them. Instead, he rejects them both as different manifestations of what he calls "slave morality." This provocative and unusual stance raises the question: What is Nietzsche's alternative to "slave morality"? From what perspective does he oppose both what we would call "religious conservatism" and what we would call "secular progressivism"? The textbook answer is that Nietzsche advocates the restoration of the brutal and hierarchical "master morality" characteristic of the ruling classes in pre-Christian societies, such as the ancient Greek cities and the Roman Empire, which he contrasts with the other-regarding and egalitarian "slave morality" invented by Jewish priests and spread across the globe first by Christianity and then by the modern democratic movement. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, many religious conservatives

and secular progressives, who are usually at each other's throats in the political arena, concur in opposing Nietzsche as a dangerous and irresponsible writer, whose far-reaching influence played a significant role in the political catastrophes of the twentieth century.

In this introductory chapter, I will first suggest some reasons to question this textbook answer, then adumbrate the alternative I defend in subsequent chapters. I argue that Nietzsche ought to be understood, not as an uncritical advocate of "master morality," but rather as a Socratic philosopher, in a sense closely related to that elaborated by Leo Strauss, in the latter's attempt to reconstruct what he called "philosophy in its original, Socratic sense."¹ I argue that it was not political, but philosophical antiquity which Nietzsche wanted to recover. Just as his praise of "master morality" is far more equivocal and ironic than it seems to be, so are his polemics against Socrates and Plato. His attacks on Christianity and on modern egalitarianism can only be understood when one grasps their deepest motivation, which is to breathe new life into Socratic philosophy in late modernity. For reasons I explain in what follows, I will focus primarily on *Beyond Good and Evil*, although I will also be concerned with its place in the development of Nietzsche's thought and its relationship to his other books.

This introductory chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I briefly discuss Nietzsche's psychology of "the master" and "the slave" in the first treatise of the *Genealogy of Morals*. I argue that Nietzsche's dialectical treatment of this dichotomy points towards his conception of "the philosopher" as a type higher than either the master or the slave, indeed as the highest human type. I argue that Nietzsche, much like Leo Strauss and Pierre Hadot, wanted to recover the ancient conception of philosophy itself as a way of life,

¹ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953), 32.

exemplified by the figure of Socrates, rather than as a merely academic or technical discipline. I then argue that Nietzsche's attempt to recover Socratic philosophy, as a way of life devoted to understanding the "fundamental problems" which steers a middle course between skepticism and dogmatism, is far closer to that of Strauss than to that of Hadot, whose superficially similar enterprise ends up trivializing the very meaning of philosophy. Finally, I suggest that, although Nietzsche's enterprise is usefully viewed through a Straussian lens, Nietzsche as it were picks up where Strauss leaves off, promising to make good on the promissory notes which Strauss seems to leave unfulfilled.

In the second section, I present a very broad overview of Nietzsche's developing understanding of the relationship between philosophy and religion throughout the 1860s and 1870s, understood (much as Strauss did) as fundamental alternatives or mutually exclusive answers to the Socratic question. I begin with a detailed analysis of the young Nietzsche's letter to his sister from June 1865, in which he announced his break with Christianity, immediately prior to his "Schopenhauerean" and "Wagnerian" phase, then touch briefly on *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Human, All-Too-Human*. I suggest that the deepest stratum of Nietzsche's thinking during his so-called "early" and "middle" periods was far more continuous than it appears to be and was already determined by conclusions he reached during his youthful break with the religion in which he was raised, even as he struggled to develop a coherent account of philosophy itself as an alternative way of life, while experimenting with wildly different forms of "cultural legislation."

In the third section, I bring out the connection between the Straussian thesis that philosophy and religion are "fundamental alternatives" and the seemingly unrelated Straussian

thesis that philosophical inquiry itself consists in a middle path between skepticism and dogmatism. I show how Nietzsche's development can be understood as a gradually deepening understanding of the inner relatedness of these theses, which culminates in his mature understanding of the Socratic-Platonic way of life, presented most comprehensively in *BGE*, as the best way of life, the answer to what Strauss calls "the political question *par excellence*," which at the deepest level is also a *psychological* question – "how to reconcile order which is not oppression with freedom which is not license."²

§2. Nietzsche as Socratic Philosopher

Nietzsche can certainly be faulted for his hyperbolic rhetoric, which lends itself easily to political use and abuse. However, Nietzsche's praise of what he calls "master morality" is far more qualified than it appears to be. In the first treatise of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche describes how the master and the slave inevitably misunderstand each other: "When the noble mode of evaluation blunders and sins against reality, it does so in respect to the sphere with which it is *not* sufficiently familiar, against a real knowledge of which it has indeed inflexibly guarded itself: in some circumstances it misunderstands the sphere it despises, that of the common man, of the lower orders; on the other hand, one should remember that, even supposing that the affect of contempt, of looking down from a superior height, *falsifies* the image of that which it despises, it will at any rate be a much less serious falsification than that perpetrated on its opponent – *in effigie*, of course – by the submerged hatred, the vengefulness of the impotent."³ Although the

² Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1952), 37.

³ OGM 1:10.

passage concludes by emphasizing the extreme “falsification” of the master in the perspective of the slave, Nietzsche also claims (as if in passing) that the slave is likewise “misunderstood” and “falsified” by the master, who “blunders and sins against reality” and “inflexibly guards” himself against “real knowledge” of those who are outside his “sphere.”

In this passage, then, and indeed throughout the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche implicitly occupies a perspective beyond – and more clear-sighted than – the opposed perspectives of the slave *and* the master. Nietzsche implies that he understands the slave and the master *better than they understand themselves*. He lays claim to a knowledge of human psychology which “masters” and “slaves” necessarily lack. Accordingly, the cartoonish account of Western history as a millennia-long struggle for victory between the masterly or noble mode of evaluation (“good and bad”) and the slavish or base mode of evaluation (“good and evil”) which emerges from the first treatise of the *Genealogy*, and which gives the impression that every human being must either be a master or a slave, cannot be Nietzsche’s last word. There is at least one exception, someone who is neither a master nor a slave – Nietzsche himself.

The attentive reader is thus prepared for an important point which Nietzsche makes towards the end of the first treatise. There we find the grandiose claim that, “The two *opposing* values ‘good and bad,’ ‘good and evil’ have been engaged in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years; and though the latter value has certainly been on top for a long time, there are still places where the struggle is as yet undecided.”⁴ But Nietzsche then adds an important qualification: “One might even say that it has risen even higher and thus become more and more profound and spiritual: so that today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a ‘*higher nature*,’

⁴ OGM 1:16.

a more spiritual nature, than that of being divided in this sense and a genuine battleground of these opposed values.”⁵ The struggle between masters and slaves, then, is not just a struggle for victory or power *between* individuals or political groups, a “culture war” – it is also a struggle *within* individuals, in their very souls, between masterly and slavish modes of evaluation. Furthermore, Nietzsche suggests that those individuals who are *themselves* a “genuine battleground of these opposed values” are “higher” and “more spiritual” than those who are merely “slaves” – or merely “masters.”

In fact, throughout the *Genealogy*, we are introduced to a variety of human types not easily assimilated to the slave or to the master – the priest, the artist, the scientist and the philosopher. All these types are too complex to be described as “masters” or “slaves” without qualification. Furthermore, Nietzsche’s depictions of the master and the slave are *themselves* so exaggerated and caricatured, one wonders whether there has ever been – whether there *could* ever have been – a real person who corresponds to them. In some passages, the master is portrayed as a being so purely driven by instinct, so utterly lacking in self-consciousness or interiority, that he must lack all self-knowledge or reflective awareness of the world around him – a beast, not a man. Conversely, in some passages the slave is portrayed as an individual with such a pathological excess of neurotic reflexivity as to make genuine knowledge of himself or the world around him as impossible as it would seem to be for the master. The psychological delicacy and nuance one expects from Nietzsche appear to have forsaken him in such passages. By contrast, the depictions of the artist, the scientist and the philosopher in the third treatise

⁵ OGM 1:16.

would not be out of place among the subtle analyses of different human types one finds elsewhere in his corpus.

Of course, one could imagine extreme cases that *roughly* approximate Nietzsche's caricatures of the master and the slave – for example, a violent, impulsive, sexually insatiable war criminal or gang leader, who gets what he wants when he wants it and never thinks about why he wants it, or a miserable, hypocritical religious fanatic, seething with resentment and endlessly nursing his sores and relishing the prospect of the exquisite tortures God will inflict on everyone who has slighted him from his earliest youth. However, it is more plausible to understand the master and the slave as unreal idealizations intended to prompt reflection on *why* they are unreal and thereby to help the thoughtful, demanding reader understand the complex structure of human interiority. They point to the connection between self-knowledge and genuine knowledge of others, as well as the dependence of both on the right kind of interiority or self-relation, equidistant from the sheer outward-directed instinct of the master, which is also a kind of solipsism, and the sheer inner-directed repression of the instincts in the slave, which transforms itself into an unbridled satisfaction of the instincts by losing itself in fantasy. Indeed, master and slave morality as Nietzsche presents them appear to be different forms of solipsism which lead, paradoxically, to the absence of a true sense of self or individuality.

Perhaps, then, Nietzsche's claim that "today" (starting when exactly?) the "higher nature" just *is* a battleground of masterly or noble and slavish or base modes of evaluation is not meant to apply only to exceptional human types such as the priest, the artist, the scientist and the philosopher. Perhaps this claim is meant to apply more generally to the human species, insofar as humanity itself represents a "higher" and "more spiritual" (*geistiger*) "nature" in relation to that

of unreasoning beasts. Certainly, in Nietzsche's other writings, the complex interplay between "the noble" (*edel* or *vornehm*) and "the base" (*gemein* – "the common") is central to his "depth psychology." Furthermore, while in the first treatise of the *Genealogy*, he conflates "the noble" with an overdrawn caricature of "the master," the presentation he gives elsewhere tends to be far more nuanced and complex.

There are good reasons, then, to doubt that Nietzsche wanted to restore an archaic past in which ruthless masters ruled over resentful slaves, a past which probably never existed in the exaggerated terms in which he describes it. But this only brings us back to the question from which I began – What is the purpose of his two-pronged attack on traditional Christianity *and* the democratic Enlightenment? The difficulty is particularly acute if one suspects that the opposition in terms of which Nietzsche frames his attack, "master and slave morality," is far more problematic, or dialectical, than it appears to be at first glance.

In this study of his thought, I argue that, although Nietzsche anticipated he would have an extraordinarily far-reaching political and cultural *effect* with his books, and he was willing to experiment with recklessly violent and rabble-rousing rhetoric in order to achieve such an effect, his *deepest* concern was not with politics nor even with "culture," but with *philosophy*. In the preface to the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche identifies himself emphatically as a "philosopher."⁶ One suspects, then, that the portrayal of "the philosopher" in the third treatise – someone who seems to reconcile in the most satisfactory way conceivable the reflective interiority of the slave with the instinctual self-affirmation of the master – is a kind of self-portrait.

⁶ OGM Preface: 2.

But what exactly did Nietzsche mean by “philosophy” or “philosopher”? In *BGE*, the book for which the *Genealogy* was supposed to be a “supplement” and “clarification,” Nietzsche contrasts his contemporaries unfavorably with the Greek philosophers of the classical period: “Let us confess to what extent our modern world lacks the whole type of a Heraclitus, Plato, Empedocles and whatever other names these regal and magnificent hermits of the spirit had; and how it is with considerable justification that, confronted with such representatives of philosophy as are today, thanks to fashion, as much on top as they are really on the bottom... a solid man of science *deservedly* feels that he is of a better type and descent.”⁷ I argue that Nietzsche, much like the ancient philosophers from whom he drew inspiration, regarded philosophy as a distinctive *way of life* devoted to the pursuit of knowledge concerning the “fundamental problems” (*Grundprobleme*).⁸ Contemporary philosophers tend to regard philosophy as a purely technical or academic discipline, comparable to other subjects in the sciences and humanities (albeit with fewer “results” than most of them), which might be pursued for an endless variety of reasons and need have no effect on the life of the individual who masters the discipline other than providing him with a salary as a professor. However, as historians of philosophy like to remind us,⁹ ancient philosophers thought of their discipline not just as a form of inquiry but, more fundamentally, as the distinctive way of life devoted to such inquiry. This is no less true for Plato and Aristotle than it was for the Epicureans, the Stoics and the Skeptics, and it appears to have been true for the pre-Socratic philosophers, so far as we can tell from the surviving

⁷ BGE 204. Translation modified.

⁸ BGE 23.

⁹ For example, Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998) and John Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

fragments. Of course, it is Socrates, who (like Jesus and Buddha) wrote nothing, who has survived in the Western cultural imagination as the paradigm of the philosophical way of life.

Many readers will find the suggestion that Nietzsche ought to be understood as a kind of Socratic philosopher highly implausible. Thus Brian Leiter, the most influential contemporary interpreter of Nietzsche in the analytic tradition, writes, “If Socrates is the patron saint of the philosophy canon, then Nietzsche, unsurprisingly, is the patron saint of the anti-Socratic – or what I will call the ‘anti-philosophy’ – canon... Nietzsche has, admittedly, a certain affection for Socrates, for his role as ‘gadfly’ in opposition to dominant opinion. But that occasionally expressed affection belies Nietzsche’s much deeper hostility to everything Socrates really stands for. From Nietzsche’s first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, with its polemic against ‘Socratic rationalism,’ to one of his very last works, *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche devotes an entire chapter to ‘The Problem of Socrates,’ Nietzsche’s entire conception of philosophy – in both substance and, as everyone knows, style – stands wholly opposed to the Socratic.”¹⁰ On the other hand, all the way back in 1948, Walter Kaufmann, the founder of Nietzsche studies in the philosophical Anglosphere, emphasized Nietzsche’s profound “admiration” for Socrates (in contrast to the “hostility” emphasized by Leiter) and the affinities between the two thinkers. Kaufmann goes so far as to describe Socrates as “the very embodiment of Nietzsche’s highest ideal.”¹¹ Kaufmann suggests that the common opinion (as widespread then as it is today) that Nietzsche despised Socrates is a strange and easily corrected misunderstanding, and certainly not the predictable consequence of a rhetorical strategy on Nietzsche’s part.

¹⁰ Brian Leiter, “Nietzsche Against the Philosophical Canon” (University of Chicago Public Law & Legal Theory Working Paper No. 438, 2013): 2-3.

¹¹ Walter Kaufmann, “Nietzsche’s Admiration for Socrates,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9, no. 4 (1948): 480.

Of course, how plausible it is to suggest that Nietzsche was a Socratic philosopher will depend on a number of variables – how exactly one understands “everything Socrates *really* stands for,” the nature and purpose of Nietzsche’s literary style (is it really so different from Plato’s as Leiter claims “everyone knows”?) and the elements of continuity in his development. Although one can find praise and criticism of Socrates in all periods of Nietzsche’s writing, he is generally far more overtly positive during his so-called “middle period” than he is in *The Birth of Tragedy* or in his later writings, a fact which Kaufmann emphasizes and to which Leiter reluctantly alludes. This curious fact is easily explicable if one assumes that “the late Nietzsche,” like “the early Nietzsche,” was an “anti-Enlightenment” and “irrationalist” thinker, while “the middle Nietzsche” went through an “Enlightenment phase.” But should there be more continuity in Nietzsche’s development than this conventional scheme suggests, his shifting rhetorical stance towards Socrates becomes more perplexing and difficult to explain.

In suggesting that Nietzsche ought to be understood as a Socratic philosopher, I mean in the first place something relatively straightforward, but (I think) non-trivial, especially in a late modern context. I mean to suggest that the central question with which Nietzsche was concerned was the so-called Socratic question – “How should one live?” or “What is the best life?” – and that he regarded philosophy itself as the answer to this question. Now, these points fail to differentiate Nietzsche from most ancient philosophers. By this criterion, even the Epicureans would count as Socratics, although they were the *only* school in antiquity who *didn’t* see in Socrates himself “either its actual founder or the type of person to whom its adherents were to

aspire,” as Alexander Nehamas remarks.¹² But in a late modern context, this position is far from trivial. Even someone like Bernard Williams, who argues that philosophical ethics would do well to proceed in a more Socratic fashion, beginning concretely with the question of how one should live, rather than with the abstract thought-experiments undertaken by Kantians or utilitarians, dismisses out of hand the Socratic view that the philosophical life *itself* might be the answer to this question.¹³

Of course, this preliminary and very thin characterization of Socratic philosophy raises many further questions. In what follows, I argue that Nietzsche is best understood as a Socratic philosopher in a sense very close to that elaborated by Leo Strauss. I do not mean that his conception of philosophy was *exactly* the same as that of Strauss. However, it seems to me that there are many substantive parallels, in light of which the more subtle differences can be seen more clearly, and that the Straussian attempt to recover “what philosophy originally meant”¹⁴ supplies the most useful hermeneutic framework through which to read Nietzsche – more so than, say, Foucault’s historicism or the most up-to-date analytic philosophy.

Introducing Strauss in order to illuminate another philosopher by means of the comparison brings with it certain difficulties. The partisan zeal both *pro* and *contra* in the reception of Strauss (and the political controversies surrounding his “conservatism” and “elitism”) have made it difficult to treat him as an important thinker to be learned from and criticized, rather than demonized or made into an oracle. Furthermore, Strauss’ hermeneutic approach is not a “method” one can “apply” mechanically to text-objects, and Strauss himself is

¹² Alexander Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 99.

¹³ Cf. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), 1-21.

¹⁴ Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 175.

a difficult and elusive thinker in his own right. As Rémi Brague notes, it is often difficult to tell “whether one is probing the depths of his thought or merely blundering about and sliding on its glittering surface.”¹⁵ Furthermore, insofar as the question of “Socratic philosophy” is at issue, this would seem to introduce endless controversies about how to read Plato and Xenophon, and perhaps also Aristophanes, Aristotle, Cicero and other classical sources.

Concerning the last point, my primary concern is not with the historical accuracy of the portrait of Socrates which emerges in Nietzsche (or in Strauss), or with the light they shed on the notoriously unsolvable “Socratic problem.” Rather, my primary aim is to understand Nietzsche’s conception of the philosophical life, which I believe is very close to what Strauss understands by “the Socratic way of life.”¹⁶ Furthermore, I argue that the later Nietzsche came to see in Socrates and Plato, whom he is careful to distinguish from “Socratism” and “Platonism,” *the* historical paradigms for his conception of the highest life. Thus, even if Nietzsche and Strauss are wholly mistaken in how they understand the ancients, this would be irrelevant for my purposes – although the reader won’t be surprised to know that I find the portrait of Socrates that emerges from their work to be highly plausible, taken as a historical hypothesis.

Despite its “near disappearance from so much of modern philosophy”¹⁷ as an explicit theme for reflection, the philosophical life has enjoyed a resurgence of interest in recent decades, among a number of heterodox scholars of ancient philosophy. Strauss himself and Pierre Hadot are by far the most well-known and influential. At first glance, Strauss and Hadot seem to be

¹⁵ Rémi Brague, “Athens, Jerusalem, Mecca: Leo Strauss’ ‘Muslim’ Understanding of Greek Philosophy,” *Poetics Today* 19, no. 2 (1998): 238.

¹⁶ Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1964), 51.

¹⁷ Nathan Tarcov, “Philosophy as the Right Way of Life in *Natural Right and History*,” in *Modernity and What Has Been Lost: Considerations on the Legacy of Leo Strauss*, eds. Pawel Armada and Arkadiusz Górniewicz (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2011), 43.

engaged in a very similar enterprise. They both lament the loss of the ancient conception, and seek to recover it, not merely as an object of historical curiosity, but as a challenge to contemporary philosophy. In Hadot's words, "Ancient philosophy proposed to mankind an art of living. By contrast, modern philosophy appears above all as the construction of a technical jargon reserved for specialists."¹⁸ They are both driven by a passionate sense that philosophical inquiry has an existential import in a way that isn't true of, say, mathematics or history, but also conversely by a sense that philosophers shouldn't take the value of their discipline for granted, but ought to raise the question: "Why philosophy?" They both seem to blame the loss of the ancient conception first on Christianity, and then on the modern Enlightenment (Strauss emphasizes the late modern forces of "positivism" and "historicism"), while also noting that the ancient idea never completely disappeared, surviving in a somewhat altered form in some modern thinkers, such as Nietzsche and Heidegger. Finally, they both seek to respond to the most pressing objection to their projects of recovery, namely that ancient conceptions of the philosophical life are bound up with outmoded cosmologies and theologies which appear to have been discredited by the scientific revolution. Thus, Hadot speaks of the need to "detach" ancient "philosophies" such as Epicureanism and Stoicism "from their outmoded cosmological or mythical elements."¹⁹

However, despite these outward similarities, the projects of recovery carried out by Strauss and Hadot are radically different. Hadot insists on the need to detach ancient "philosophies" from "the fundamental propositions *that they themselves considered essential*."²⁰

¹⁸ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 272.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

In other words, while the ancient philosophers regarded their “models of life” as standing or falling with their theories of the cosmos, for Hadot, the truth or falsity of these theories is irrelevant. What is important are the “models of life” attached to them, from which one can pick and choose as one sees fit: “It is precisely this plurality of ancient schools that is precious.”²¹ By casually dismissing the theories of the cosmos in which the ancient philosophers naively believed, Hadot shares in the typical modern condescension towards antiquity which he purports to deplore and assumes that he is less dogmatic or self-deluded than the ancient philosophers whom he praises, while also magnanimously treating this fact as if it were beside the point: “Everyone is free to define philosophy as he likes, to choose whatever philosophy he wishes, or to invent – if he can – whatever philosophy he may think valid.”²² In this way, Hadot ends up trivializing the very meaning of philosophy, and in a sense takes the ancients much less seriously than do those who dismiss their contemporary relevance on the grounds that they failed on their *own* terms.

For Strauss by contrast, the most important ancient philosophers were far *less* dogmatic than they appear to have been. Contra Hadot, “they themselves” regarded the “outmoded cosmological or mythical elements” in their doctrines not as “essential,” but as the playfully constructed “exoteric” teachings which both conceal and point towards the “esoteric” core of their thought: “What is nearest my heart about Plato is independent of the specifically Platonic philosophy.”²³ The deepest stratum of ancient philosophy is a perennially accessible skepticism, which has in no way been superseded or refuted by the scientific revolution – or, more precisely,

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 272.

²³ Leo Strauss to Jacob Klein, October 20, 1939, quoted in Laurence Lampert, *The Enduring Importance of Leo Strauss* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 13.

a middle way between skepticism and dogmatism, which results in a dialectical comprehension of fundamental problems that stops short of resolving them perfectly. Philosophy in this sense is “a human possibility which, at least according to its own interpretation, is trans-historical, trans-social, trans-moral and trans-religious.”²⁴ Its classic representative is Socrates, who knew only that he knew nothing. Socratic “knowledge of ignorance” differs profoundly from the naïve, unreflective ignorance of the simple, unphilosophical man, “the man from Missouri,” although Socrates (especially as presented by Xenophon) employed a kind of rhetoric which blurred the difference between these forms of “ignorance” in order to circumvent the hostility of “the vulgar.”²⁵

Unlike Hadot, Strauss makes a powerful case for resisting our instinctive condescension towards the past and taking ancient philosophy seriously. At the same time, his enterprise of recovery raises certain questions it is unclear that he is equipped to answer. First, although Strauss provides some suggestive and pregnant formulations, it is unclear how his notion of Socratic “ignorance,” as a dialectical comprehension of the enduring problems, offers a coherent middle way between the Scylla of dogmatism and the Charybdis of skepticism. Socratic “zeteticism,” as he calls this middle path, seems to be severely “undertheorized” in his own writings. Secondly, Strauss seems to offer no satisfying account of just *why* the philosophical life is the best life for human beings as such, especially since he rejects the common view that Socrates was an egalitarian moralist and seems to regard the teleological metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle as hypothetical at best and “merely exoteric” at worst.

²⁴ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 89.

²⁵ Cf. Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), 38-39 with *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 212-213.

If it is true that Strauss failed to present a decisive argument for the philosophical life, this could be understood in one of two ways. Either he ultimately begged the question on both issues – the necessity or coherence of “zeteticism” and the goodness or inherent superiority of the life devoted to “zetetic” inquiry. Or he meant to point his more demanding readers away from himself and towards those of his precursors, such as Plato or Alfarabi (and perhaps also some modern figures, such as Machiavelli, Rousseau or even Nietzsche), who *did* present a more complete argument than can be found in Strauss’ *own* books.

I am not sure which answer is closest to the truth – or how exactly to resolve the vexed question of Strauss’ relationship to Nietzsche. Strauss surely read Nietzsche as far more Socratic than he appears to be. Like Kaufmann,²⁶ Strauss interprets the figure of Dionysos in the penultimate aphorism of *BGE* as an idealized portrait of Socrates, a suggestion which if true would have far-reaching implications for how to understand the role of this ambiguous figure in Nietzsche’s later writings.²⁷ Strauss claims that Nietzsche’s depiction of “the philosopher” is surprisingly akin to Plato’s.²⁸ Strauss even says that it is “certainly not an overstatement to say that no one has ever spoken so greatly and so nobly of what a philosopher is as Nietzsche.”²⁹ On the other hand, Strauss sometimes suggests that Nietzsche was unable to recover Socratic philosophy in its original form due to the influence of revealed religion, which continued to

²⁶ Cf. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 410-411.

²⁷ Strauss himself seemingly never quite came to terms with just how Socratic Nietzsche’s Dionysos was or wasn’t supposed to be. For example, contrast “Note on the Plan of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*,” in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 175 (*BGE* 295 portrays “a super-Socrates who is in fact the god Dionysos”) with *On Nietzsche’s “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 209 (*BGE* 295 “shows the closeness of Nietzsche to Socrates and... at the same time, the radical differences”).

²⁸ Leo Strauss, “Existentialism,” *Interpretation* 22, no. 3 (1995): 315.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

determine his thinking indirectly even as he rebelled against it³⁰ – a strange observation coming from Strauss, who seems to take “the Bible,” or “revelation” in general, far more seriously than did Nietzsche as a “challenge” to philosophy, a challenge which somehow throws its very possibility into question.

In the end, it is difficult to determine just how far Strauss believed Nietzsche’s conception of philosophy diverged from its original Socratic-Platonic form.³¹ Strauss devoted only one text to Nietzsche, a very difficult late essay on *BGE*, written a few months before he died. His evaluation of Nietzsche must be gleaned largely from a handful of remarks scattered among various books, essays and lectures on other topics, along with the transcripts of the three seminars he gave on Nietzsche (one on *Zarathustra* and two on *BGE*), which contain many helpful observations, but are pitched at a somewhat popular or introductory level, and in any case don’t seek to develop authoritative interpretations of the texts under discussion.

However, in what follows, I will not primarily be concerned with Strauss’ reading of Nietzsche, although I will occasionally draw on his observations when they prove helpful. Rather, my primary aims will be to show that, on the one hand, Nietzsche came to regard himself as a Socratic philosopher in a sense very close to the Straussian one, while on the other hand, Nietzsche as it were picks up where Strauss leaves off. Nietzsche’s argument for the philosophical life has two basic elements, which correspond to the two major critical questions which I raised for Strauss and to the two main senses of “psychology” with which Nietzsche operates – its more epistemological sense, at play when he identifies “psychology” with “the

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ For an interesting, but in my view ultimately unpersuasive attempt to settle this question, see Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996).

critique of the elements of consciousness,”³² and its more humanistic sense, at play when he characterizes novelists such as Stendhal or Dostoyevsky as great “psychologists.”

First, while Strauss intriguingly suggests that the inadequacies of skepticism and dogmatism point towards the need for a middle path, he does little to spell this possibility out or defend it against alternatives. I argue that Nietzsche’s “perspectivism” should be understood, much like Strauss’ “zeteticism,” as an attempt to formulate a coherent middle path between dogmatism and skepticism. However, I argue that Nietzsche, in contrast to Strauss, presents an *argument* that is meant to provide a decisive grounding for such a position. Secondly, while Strauss occasionally suggests that the inherently unsatisfying character of non-philosophical forms of life points towards the superiority of the philosophical life (e.g. “superstition is the way of thinking and acting in which man’s pre-philosophic life protects itself against its breakdown in despair”³³) he does little to spell *this* suggestion out either and leaves himself open to the Nietzschean charge that he has no real answer to the question: “Why knowledge at all?”³⁴ Nietzsche by contrast presents a far more complete account of why and in what sense the philosophical life is the best life for human beings *as such*.

I will focus primarily on *BGE*, although I will also give some attention to its place in Nietzsche’s development. I have chosen to focus on *BGE* because, so far as I have been able to determine, it is the only book where he presents a complete *argument* for the philosophical life, to the extent he believes this is possible (more on this below). I proceed as follows. In the second

³² GS 355.

³³ Leo Strauss, “Reason and Revelation” (1948), appendix to Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, trans. Marcus Brainard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 152.

³⁴ BGE 230.

chapter, I present an interpretation of Nietzsche's intentions in *BGE* as a whole, arguing that the book is meant as a defense of Socratic philosophy. I focus primarily on aphorisms 1-12. I argue that, taken together, these aphorisms constitute a statement of intent for the book as a whole and a preliminary exploration of its main themes. In the third chapter, I reconstruct the movement of thought underlying aphorisms 13-22, the place where I argue that Nietzsche presents his core argument for a coherent middle path between dogmatism and skepticism. In the fourth chapter, I reconstruct the basic shape of his argument that philosophy is the best life, focusing first on the "physio-psychological" account of "the will to power" in BGE 19, supplemented by detailed consideration of the important lightning-flash passage in OGM 1:13, and then on what I will call the "philosophical ascent to the surface" presented in the sequence of aphorisms 23-29, which brings Nietzsche's argument to a kind of conclusion.

My primary aim will be interpretive – to present as faithful a reconstruction as possible of Nietzsche's argument. However, I will also be concerned with bringing out the inherent philosophical interest of his enterprise. Nietzsche first comes to sight not as a philosopher in the academic mode, but rather as a passionate cultural critic, disgusted by the vulgarizing effects of mass industrial society on the human soul, whose concern with philosophical questions proper can seem both amateurish or slapdash and peripheral to his main concerns. Philosophy professors often react to Nietzsche in the way that some of the ancient sophists reacted to Socrates – they view themselves as professionals and Nietzsche as a dilettante.³⁵ However, I hope to show that Nietzsche was a far more careful writer, and a far more rigorous thinker, than he appears to be, and that his deepest concern was not with "culture," but with philosophy itself. At the same time,

³⁵ Xenophon, *Symposium* i.3-7.

as I proceed with my reading of *BGE*, I will adumbrate a highly tentative critique of Nietzsche's mode of philosophizing – tentative both because my primary aim is to understand him as he understood himself and also because, in the case of a writer as subtle and as elusive as Nietzsche, it is nearly always difficult to be sure that one has “got him right” and not merely grasped one of the many “simulacra” of his thought generated by his highly figurative, indirect and ironic art of writing.

§3. Philosophy and Religion in Nietzsche's Development

Although Strauss characterized philosophy itself as a way of life which steers a middle course between skepticism and dogmatism, he is (unfortunately) much better known for his notorious thesis that philosophy and “revelation” or “religion” (he uses different formulations in different places³⁶) are *in some sense* “fundamental alternatives,” mutually exclusive answers to the Socratic question, than for anything he said about the positive character of philosophical inquiry itself. In this section, I argue that Nietzsche arrived very early at a similar view about the relationship between philosophy and religion, an assumption which determined the trajectory of his thought from the 1860s onwards, even as he only came to his fully mature understanding of the relationship between philosophy and religion in the 1880s.

Nietzsche's philosophical enterprise originated in his youthful loss of Christian faith in the early 1860s. The 20-year-old Nietzsche announced his break with Christianity to his family

³⁶ For example, contrast the introduction to *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, which presents “revelation” as merely one species in the genus “religion,” presenting no more of a special “challenge” to philosophy than does pagan mythology, with “Reason and Revelation,” which emphasizes the differences between revelation and “myth” and argues that revelation, unlike, myth, presents a radical theoretical and existential challenge to philosophy, which must be overcome in order for philosophy to ground *itself*. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 7-21 with “Reason and Revelation,” 141-167.

in a remarkable letter to his sister from June 1865, although the evidence suggests that this break had already taken place several years earlier.³⁷ This letter provides a vivid and illuminating glimpse into the personal experiences out of which Nietzsche's philosophical path emerged, which illustrates the important elements of continuity in his thinking and provides a useful introduction to the major themes of *BGE*, which is a very carefully composed but also extremely stylized and opaque piece of writing. At the same time, his preliminary sketch of these themes raises many difficulties with which he had only just started to grapple, ultimately finding their most systematic and comprehensive treatment in *BGE*.

In this letter, the young Nietzsche proposed that every human being is faced with a choice between two alternative and incompatible ways of life, the life of obedient faith and the life of questioning and inquiry: "Here the ways of men divide; if you want to strive for peace of soul and happiness, then believe; if you want to be a disciple of truth [*ein Jünger der Wahrheit*], then inquire."³⁸ Although the young Nietzsche had scarcely begun to develop his understanding of this alternative, the letter displays in a helpfully straightforward manner some of the assumptions which would determine his approach to the Socratic question throughout his life. On the other hand, the undeveloped character of his formulations already point hesitantly towards the more sophisticated understanding of this alternative which he would later develop:

³⁷ Cf. Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 43-44.

³⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche to Elisabeth Nietzsche, June 11, 1865, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 6-7. Translation modified.

As for your principle, that the truth is always on the side of the more difficult, I concede this to you in part. However, it is difficult to understand that 2×2 is not 4; does that make it any more true? On the other hand, is it really so difficult simply to accept everything in which one has been brought up [*erzogen*], which has gradually become deeply rooted in oneself, which is accepted as the truth among one's relatives and among many good people, and which moreover really does comfort and elevate man? Is that more difficult than to take new paths, struggling against habituation, in the uncertainty of an independent course [*in der Unsicherheit des selbständigen Gehens*], amid frequent vacillations of the heart and even of the conscience, often disconsolate, but always pursuing the eternal goal of the true, the beautiful, the good? Is it then a matter of acquiring the view of God, world and atonement [*Versöhnung*] which makes one most comfortable? Isn't it rather the case that for the true inquirer the result of his inquiry is a matter of indifference? Are we, then, searching for tranquility, peace and happiness in our inquiries? No, only for the truth, even if it should turn out to be in the highest degree frightening and ugly. One last question. Had we believed since youth that all salvation came not from Jesus but from another – say, from Muhammad – isn't it certain that we would have enjoyed the same blessings? Certainly, it is faith alone that blesses, not the objective reality [*das Objective*] which stands behind faith. I write this to you, dear Lisbeth, only in order to counter the most common proofs employed by believing people, who invoke their inner experiences and derive from them the infallibility of their faith. Every true faith is indeed infallible, it supplies what the believing person hopes to find in it, but it does not offer the slightest support for the grounding of an objective truth. Here

the ways of men divide; if you want to strive for peace of soul and happiness, then believe; if you want to be a disciple of truth, then inquire. In between, there are many halfway perspectives [*Standpunkte*]. But it all depends on the principal aim [*das Hauptziel*].³⁹

In this letter, the young Nietzsche doesn't articulate the reasons why the Christian faith in which he was raised had come to seem doubtful to him. However, he suggests that every man or woman, insofar as they begin to reflect seriously on the religious convictions in which they were raised, is confronted with an existential choice between following the path of inquiry wherever it might lead or binding themselves more firmly to those very convictions, as his sister was urging him to do. Nietzsche sketches in very broad outlines. He has scarcely begun to elaborate his conception of the life of questioning, and he doesn't use the words "philosophy" or "philosopher," speaking rather of the "inquirer" or "researcher" (*Forscher*). However, it is clear that he has in mind something very much like the ancient idea of the philosophical life as the life intransigently devoted to the pursuit of "the truth" and guided by its results, an idea associated with ancient philosophy in general and especially with Socrates. Nietzsche seems to differ from Socrates and most ancient philosophers, however, both in the antagonism he posits between philosophical questioning and religious faith and in the emphasis he places on the latter as an *alternative* to philosophy.

But even if one accepts Nietzsche's view of faith and knowledge as irreconcilably opposed, it doesn't seem to follow that the philosophical and the religious lives necessarily

³⁹ Ibid. Translation modified.

constitute *the* alternative with which the Socratic question confronts us. Aren't other ways of life possible? Nietzsche says that "it all depends on the principal aim." But aren't there "aims" other than the intransigent pursuit of knowledge or faithful religious obedience which might provide a human life with its highest guiding aim? For the ancients, the primary alternative seemed to be the philosophical and the *political* life, both of which were contrasted with the money-making life, which was generally despised, and with the life of the criminal tyrant, which Plato's dialogues (not to mention the facts of political history) show to have been immensely attractive to ambitious young men. The tyrant was often seen as an impious man, with no respect for the gods or for mortals, while the philosopher was presented by Plato and Aristotle as the most truly pious and godlike man, against the popular suspicion that the philosophers were religious innovators or skeptics, or simply atheists. Why does Nietzsche present philosophy and religion as fundamental alternatives? Does he mean that they are the only ways of life that deserve to be taken seriously as possible answers to the Socratic question? Or does he mean that they are disjunctive and *exhaustive* alternatives, that everyone to the extent that they are not philosophically driven is in some sense essentially "religious" in how they think and live?

Although Nietzsche had scarcely begun to think seriously about these questions when he wrote this letter, the assumptions he makes point towards the philosophical path he would take as he grew older. Although he doesn't use the word "religion" – he speaks rather of "faith" or "belief" (*Glaube*) – he seems to assume that everyone is raised in a religious tradition of some kind,⁴⁰ taking "religion" in a rough and ready sense of an authoritative teaching concerning the

⁴⁰ Strauss attributes to the medieval philosopher Alfarabi the view that "conformity with the opinions of the religious community in which one is brought up is a necessary qualification for the future philosopher," a view which implies that every "community in which one is brought up" is always in some

divine. But it is surely no accident that the contrast case he uses (necessary for his purpose, the *general* contrast with a life of inquiry) is Islam, a religion which like Judaism has a great deal in common with Christianity, especially when compared with other religious traditions. But what about someone who was raised a Hindu or a Buddhist? Would they also face the alternative with which Nietzsche confronts us? More to the point, what about someone who was raised without any “religion” at all in any conventional sense of the word? Someone who was born many generations after “the death of God” was in full swing and given a purely “secular” education?

Furthermore, it is clear that Nietzsche hadn’t yet thought with sufficient rigor about the problem of hierarchy or rank-ordering, the sense in which one life might be said to be better or worse than another. Nietzsche’s letter is marked by an unresolved tension between the passionate conviction that the examined life – the life of “wakefulness itself,” as Nietzsche would call it in the Preface to *BGE* – is the *only* life worth living and the apprehensive suspicion that the examined life might *not* be worth living, at least insofar as “happiness” is the goal of our actions. Rather than a simple inconsistency, there is an inner relationship between the two tendencies which seem to pull the young Nietzsche in opposite directions.

On the one hand, the young Nietzsche is clearly driven by a profound sense of the *nobility* of the philosophical life, its inherent beauty and worthiness, which seems to consist in the philosopher’s admirably courageous willingness to refuse the consolations of faith and to alienate himself from those around him and even from himself, insofar as the convictions in which he was raised are “deeply rooted” in him and constitute a kind of second nature. On the

sense “religious.” Later in the same book, Strauss says that “philosophy comes first into sight as a denial of something.” Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 17, 112.

other hand, the young Nietzsche clearly believes that the philosophical quest leads at the very least to temporary alienation and uncertainty, which if it comes to an end at all may perhaps culminate only in the discovery that the truth is “in the highest degree frightening and ugly,” whatever satisfaction might be found in the search for the ugly truth and even in its contemplation. But if religious faith leads to “peace of soul and happiness” while philosophical inquiry leads to alienation and misery, then why philosophize at all, if indeed one has a choice? As the later Nietzsche would put it, what is the *value* of truth and the search for truth? Does the philosopher have a moral obligation to pursue the truth for himself, even if he doesn’t have a moral obligation to liberate others from illusion? Or if the philosopher must call into question the very existence of “moral phenomena,” what is the ground of the superiority of the life of inquiry to that of faith?

Nietzsche would be occupied with all these questions for the rest of his thinking life, in my view without ever arriving at a fully satisfactory set of answers. However, Nietzsche’s understanding of the philosophical life *as* the best life, and his understanding of the religious life *as the* alternative to the philosophical life, would become more profound and sophisticated over the course of his development from 1865 to 1888. This opposition would resurface in various forms, such as the opposition between free spirits and “bound” or “constrained” (*gebunden*) spirits in *Human, All-Too-Human* or between Dionysos and the Crucified in *Ecce Homo*. Sometimes the opposition would be represented by particular historical figures, such as Jesus and Spinoza, contrasted in one aphorism as “the noblest human being” and “the purest wise man,”⁴¹ or Pascal and Nietzsche himself.

⁴¹ HATH 475. Translation modified.

It is important to emphasize that this letter was written in June 1865, *prior* to Nietzsche's formative encounters with Schopenhauer (whom he first read in October 1865) and Wagner (whom he met in November 1868), the two most prominent influences on the early Nietzsche. The young Nietzsche's emphasis on the life of inquiry in pursuit of "objective truth" may seem surprisingly Socratic, given his reputation as the arch irrationalist and anti-Socratic philosopher. Indeed, the rationalistic tone of the letter anticipates the rhetoric of the middle Nietzsche of the "free spirit trilogy," where his references to Socrates are generally quite favorable, far more than the anti-Socratic rhetoric of the early or the late Nietzsche.

After June 1865, Nietzsche would reflect more deeply on the questions raised by the letter to his sister. It is often assumed that Nietzsche became a convinced adherent of Schopenhauer's philosophy as *the* true philosophy after he chanced upon a copy of *The World as Will and Representation* in a Leipzig bookshop in October 1865, and more or less remained so until the mid-1870s, despite occasional deviations from the master and evidence of burgeoning doubts in the years leading up to the break. However, although he certainly became a passionate Schopenhauerean of sorts, and set about trying to convert his friends to what he called "our faith,"⁴² the evidence suggests that from the very beginning he was highly skeptical about the metaphysical doctrines of "our master."⁴³ A very early fragment written between October 1867 and April 1868 subjects Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the "world-will" to devastating criticism, referring to the "extremely important and hardly avoidable contradictions" with which

⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche to Carl Gersdorff, December 12, 1870, in Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 73.

⁴³ Friedrich Nietzsche to Carl Gersdorff, September 28, 1869, in *ibid.*, 60.

“Schopenhauer’s system is riddled.”⁴⁴ In sum: “The attempt [*Versuch*] failed. Schopenhauer did not regard it as an attempt.”⁴⁵

Nietzsche, then, did not find in Schopenhauer’s philosophy a solution to the metaphysical or cosmological riddles to which his Christian upbringing gave him unsatisfying answers. Rather, he found in Schopenhauer an inspiring near-contemporary model of the philosophical life, inspiring in his courageous willingness to face the “frightening” possibility that the cosmos is indifferent to human strivings for happiness and justice (“he lacked all hope, but he wanted the truth,” as Nietzsche put it⁴⁶) and inspiring as a proudly self-sufficient atheist who refused to make compromises with religion or the state. In the third *Untimely Meditation*, Nietzsche contrasts Schopenhauer with Kant, who “clung to his university, submitted himself to its regulations [and] retained the appearance of religious belief,”⁴⁷ implying that the lip-service Kant paid to Christianity was insincere, prudential and cowardly. In *Ecce Homo* he would write, “It was atheism that led me to Schopenhauer.”⁴⁸

But Nietzsche never thought that atheism alone is enough to make someone a philosopher, and he could not remain content for long with Schopenhauer’s idiosyncratic metaphysical dogmatism. As many commentators have noted, Nietzsche’s concern in *The Birth of Tragedy* with the affirmation of life in the face of suffering, rather than with resignation and

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, “On Schopenhauer” (October 1867 – April 1868), trans. Ladislaus Löb, in *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, eds. Raymond Geuss and Alexander Nehamas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁶ BT 20.

⁴⁷ SE 3.

⁴⁸ EH *Untimely Meditations* 2.

self-denial, was already at odds with Schopenhauer's "pessimistic" moralism.⁴⁹ Furthermore, there is a striking contrast between the naturalistic skepticism and nominalism that Nietzsche sketches in his notebook entries from the early 1870s, and in the unpublished essay "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1873), which anticipate the epistemological reflections of his so-called "middle" and "late" periods, and the extravagantly self-confident Schopenhauerean metaphysics which he seems to take for granted in his first book.

However, as Daniel Breazeale notes, Nietzsche's published writings in the early-to-mid-1870s give a somewhat distorted and truncated picture of his philosophical concerns during this period, in part due to his propagandizing activities on behalf of Wagner and the related need to make a public display of loyalty to Schopenhauer.⁵⁰ After Nietzsche met Wagner in November 1868, they quickly formed a close friendship, based in part on their shared love for Schopenhauer. Without ceasing to reflect privately on the question of the philosophical life, Nietzsche also became a passionate public advocate for Wagner's plans for the renewal of European culture through the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which Nietzsche eulogizes in his first book as the rebirth of Greek tragedy at the peak of decadent and self-alienated modernity.⁵¹ He would later say that in this book he used Schopenhauerean formulations to express "strange and new evaluations" fundamentally at odds with Schopenhauer's own ideas,⁵² and Alexander Nehamas is

⁴⁹ For example, cf. James I. Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on The Birth of Tragedy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 24 and 174-175, footnote 22.

⁵⁰ Cf. Daniel Breazeale, Introduction to *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey and London: Humanities Press, 1979), xiii-xlix.

⁵¹ BT 19-25.

⁵² BT Attempt at a Self-Criticism 6.

right to describe this decision as “strategic.”⁵³ However, Nehamas goes too far in suggesting that it was merely a gesture of courtesy to Wagner himself. Nietzsche would not have allied himself so closely with Wagner’s cause (including the promotion of Schopenhauer) had he not believed it eminently fitting to the cultural needs of the age. In a very early letter from August 1866, Nietzsche claims that although Schopenhauer’s metaphysics are untenable from a “strictly critical standpoint,” his philosophy remains a highly “edifying” one for the present day: “If philosophy should edify [*erbauen*], I know of no philosopher at any rate who edifies more than our Schopenhauer.”⁵⁴

The young Nietzsche, then, was already quite conscious of the tension between what he then called a “strictly critical” perspective and one which demands “edification” or “faith” and evinced a growing awareness of the complex dialectical relationship between them. At the simplest level, this distinction corresponds to two human types – the philosopher, the rare human being who can live without faith and devote their life to the pursuit of knowledge, and everyone else, who requires “faith,” “religion” or “authority” *of some kind* in order to give their life meaning and forestall “breakdown in despair.” This surely included Nietzsche’s sister, but it also included Wagner, to say nothing of the Wagnerians.

Now, the theme of philosophy and religion as alternative ways of life, present at every other stage of Nietzsche’s thought (including the pre-Schopenhauerean stage), seems to disappear in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Furthermore, insofar as it remains present at all, Nietzsche seems to take the side of religion *against* philosophy, insofar as Socrates represents philosophy

⁵³ Alexander Nehamas, “Writings from the Early Notebooks,” in *Introductions to Nietzsche*, ed. Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 28.

⁵⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche to Carl Gersdorff, late August, 1866, in Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 18. Translation modified.

while “Dionysus” represents a kind of *religious* perspective, as he often emphasizes throughout this book.⁵⁵ However, on closer inspection, one can see that Nietzsche often suggests, albeit in a restrained and oblique fashion, that the philosophical life is indeed superior to the religious life in *any* of its forms – pre-Christian, Christian or post-Christian. He contrasts the “mood of contemplative delight” in which “every page” of *The Birth of Tragedy* was written with the “ascetic, will-negating mood” and profound “sense of revulsion” in which the Dionysian tragic enthusiast spends *most of his life*, when he is not lost in the temporary, self-forgetting exaltation of the religious festival.⁵⁶ At the same time, Nietzsche suggests that a truly philosophical perspective must recognize the *limits* of knowledge – “Socratic optimism,” the belief that the world can be rendered *fully* intelligible, is thus less authentically philosophical than it takes itself to be. As the later Nietzsche would have said, it involves a kind of “faith in reason,” which paradoxically treats reason *itself* as if it were an “authority.”⁵⁷

In other words, as Nietzsche indicated already in June 1865, even if the *principle* at work is black and white (it all depends on the *Hauptziel* – inquiry or faith, knowledge or obedience), human beings are not – “in between, there are many halfway perspectives.” As one can see from the uneven but remarkably consistent trajectory of his thought in the 1870s, articulated in his unpublished as well as in his published writings, Nietzsche gradually developed the implications of this complex thought. The most important of these are twofold.

First, “the philosopher” is an ideal type. One should not ignore the vast “chasms of rank” that separate “man from man,”⁵⁸ but one should also recognize that “absolute” freedom of mind

⁵⁵ See especially BT 7-8.

⁵⁶ Cf. BT Preface with 8.

⁵⁷ Cf. BGE 191.

⁵⁸ Cf. BGE 62.

is unattainable. As Nietzsche articulates this thought in *Human, All-Too-Human*, “free spirit” is a “relative concept.”⁵⁹ Many of Socrates’ interlocutors (such as Alcibiades, for example, or Euthyphro, to mention two very different types) may be “free spirits” in comparison with the average Greek, but in comparison with Socrates, they are “constrained spirits.” However, Socrates himself is a “constrained spirit” in relation to the godlike ideal towards which he constantly strives without ever fully actualizing it. However, the deepest reason for this “relativity” isn’t simply the difference among intellectual endowments. Rather, it is the fact that all human thought, even philosophical thought,⁶⁰ depends on dogmatic assumptions and distorting perspectives, for example the belief in “universals” or the belief in stable, self-identical “things,” which we must take for granted in order to gain any purchase on the world and with which we can never dispense entirely. As Tocqueville argued, all human thought involves a kind of mental “slavery,” but such slavery is “a salutary servitude that permits [one] to make good use of [one’s] freedom.”⁶¹

Secondly, if it is impossible even for an exceptional mind like Socrates to achieve perfect “enlightenment,” it would surely be even more of a delusion to think that society as a whole could become “enlightened” through the popular diffusion of philosophy or science. Again, Tocqueville’s formulation is helpful: “If I now consider man separately, I find that dogmatic beliefs are no less indispensable to him for living alone than for acting in common with those like him... It is therefore always necessary, however it happens, that we encounter authority somewhere in the intellectual and moral world. Its place is variable, but it necessarily has a

⁵⁹ HATH 225.

⁶⁰ Cf. BGE 3.

⁶¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 408 (Volume 2, Part 1, Chapter 2).

place. Intellectual independence can be more or less great; it cannot be boundless. Thus, the question is not that of knowing whether an intellectual authority exists in democratic centuries, but only where it is deposited and what its extent will be.”⁶² Although the political solutions they proposed were very different, Nietzsche’s diagnosis of the modern world is very close to that of Tocqueville. Like the French aristocrat, Nietzsche assumes that, although an openly secular society is now *irresistibly* coming into being (something most pre-modern thinkers seem to have assumed was politically impossible), a truly “enlightened” or “post-religious” society *is* impossible. If traditional religion declines, a this-worldly equivalent will inevitably take its place.

The whole problematic of what Nietzsche later called “the death of God” is implicit in the letter from June 1865, although he had scarcely begun to reflect on the set of questions it raised. However, it soon became prominent in his writings, published and unpublished, in the late 1860s and 1870s. Furthermore, it cuts across his “early” and “middle” periods, separated by the “crisis” of 1878 which precipitated the break with Wagner, and represents an important element of continuity in his thinking. Although the political-cultural meaning of *The Birth of Tragedy*, which advocates German nationalism and Wagnerian romanticism, is very different from that of *Human, All-Too-Human*, which advocates a kind of secular cosmopolitanism guided by a disenchanted scientism, the common factor is that they both supply the greater part of Nietzsche’s audience with some form of secular replacement for traditional religion. In both cases, while Nietzsche’s philosophical elitism is implicit in his overall approach and not too difficult to detect if one reads each book carefully, it is obscured by the rhetorical enthusiasm

⁶² Ibid.

with which he advocates for his proposals, suggesting in each case that Europe itself will be redeemed from cultural decay if only they are accepted,⁶³ even as the rhetoric employed and the proposals suggested in 1872 and in 1878 are otherwise very different.

However, while valid, this observation is insufficient. For while the deepest stratum of Nietzsche's thinking was more continuous than the rhetorical-political surface of his publication history in the 1870s suggests, it didn't simply remain static. Rather, Nietzsche spent the late 1860s and 1870s attempting to work out as coherently as possible the implications of the "Straussian" perspective on philosophy and religion at which he had in some sense already arrived by June 1865. If, as Nietzsche gradually came to recognize more clearly, philosophy and "religion" or "faith" are not only in tension with one another, but are also dialectically bound up with one another, how can the inquirer ever be certain that he is leading an *authentically* philosophical life, that when he *takes himself* to be differentiating "knowledge" from "faith," he isn't merely replacing one form of dogmatism with another? This question helps us see the *connection* between the Straussian theses that philosophy and religion (abstracting for the moment from the particular question of "revelation") are fundamental alternatives and that philosophical inquiry itself consists in steering a middle course between skepticism and dogmatism. For if "religion" in the broadest and deepest sense consists in any assumption which the human mind accepts dogmatically, on "faith" or "authority," even our "perceptual faith" in the external world, as Merleau-Ponty aptly calls it ("science and philosophy have for centuries been sustained by unquestioning faith in perception,"⁶⁴ "a faith common to the natural man and

⁶³ Cf. especially BT 20 and 23 with HATH 476.

⁶⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 62.

the philosopher”⁶⁵), and if “intellectual independence can be more or less great,” but never “boundless,” while “faith” or “authority” are in *fundamental* tension with knowledge (i.e. can *never* themselves count as forms of direct or intuitively accessible knowledge, because knowledge is essentially an “achievement” and never an infallible “gift”), then *if* philosophy is possible at all, it *must* consist in a middle course between skepticism and dogmatism, which reflexively recognizes the *interdependence* of “knowledge” and “faith” while still somehow discriminating between them. Finally, even if such inquiry yields some highly qualified form of knowledge of “fundamental problems,” why should the life devoted to such inquiry be the best way of life? In what sense can it even be called “good”?

§4. Philosophy and Religion in the Later Nietzsche

As we have seen, Nietzsche came very early to the view that philosophy and religion are fundamental alternatives, a view which would be taken up by Strauss, as well as by the early Heidegger.⁶⁶ However, as his thinking progressed, Nietzsche began to develop a more flexible sense of “religion,” which would encompass the kind of “religion” in which a second generation atheist might be raised, well as the traditional kind of religion in which Nietzsche, Heidegger and Strauss were raised, and would also account for the deeper sense in which philosophy and “religion” constitute disjunctive and exhaustive alternatives – the sense in which *everyone* is a

⁶⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 3.

⁶⁶ Cf. “Phenomenology and Theology” (1927), in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, trans. and ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39-62. Heidegger writes, “*Faith*, as a specific possibility of existence, is in its innermost core the mortal enemy of the *form of existence* that is an essential part of philosophy... This *existentiell opposition* between faithfulness and the free appropriation of one’s whole Dasein is not first brought about by the sciences of theology and philosophy but is *prior* to them.” (53)

“constrained spirit” *to the extent that* they are not a “free spirit” – alongside the narrower sense in which philosophy and religion are exceptional ways of life, driven by an intransigent “passion for knowledge” or by a devoutly pious “passion for God.”

At the same time, Nietzsche gradually came to recognize that the assumption that philosophy and “religion” are irreconcilably opposed was ultimately rooted in the *epistemological* assumption that tradition *as such* cannot be a source of knowledge, but only a starting-point for reflection (of course, he recognized that tradition can be a source of knowledge in a looser sense, insofar as it is actively appropriated). All human beings are inevitably raised in an authoritative tradition of some kind, whether or not this tradition is “religious” in a narrower sense. Accordingly, if there is a *fundamental* tension between philosophy and religion, as Strauss claims, and not merely an accidental or reconcilable tension, it must be because tradition (whether religious or philosophical) can only be a source of knowledge insofar as it provides dialectical starting-points for reflection, the active appropriation of which may *result* in knowledge.

Now, someone might argue that while it is indeed the case that, to the extent that our experience of the world is mediated by traditions, we merely have opinions about the world, not knowledge, we nonetheless have direct access to the world through sheer receptive intellectual awareness of “forms,” an immediate intellectual intuition or “noetic” awareness of the kind seemingly posited by Plato and Aristotle (the classic source texts are notoriously difficult to interpret), which bypasses our reliance on tradition or convention and furnishes us *directly* with knowledge. However, Nietzsche came to maintain – correctly, in my view – that there is a close connection between the view that tradition *as such* cannot be a source of knowledge and the

rejection of *noesis* or receptive intellection. For the shared assumption behind the two rejected premises (noetic awareness and tradition as knowledge) is the premise that the nature of reason is partly receptive (the distinction between *noesis* and *dianoia* in Plato and Aristotle or *intellectus* and *ratio* in scholasticism).

Indeed, the premises are still more closely linked. For on the assumption that our knowledge of the world results from a *combination* of active clarification and dialectical analysis with “humble” receptivity to the partially intelligible forms with which it presents us, one need not assume that tradition, *to the extent that* it is passively received and not actively appropriated, merely screens us from the world or (at best) presents us with “questions” or “problems,” but rather that it may also *heighten* our noetic insight into the world and thereby furnish us with a kind of *knowledge* which inevitably outstrips our ability to articulate it discursively.⁶⁷ Returning for a moment to the young Nietzsche, then, there is an inherent connection between his implicit rejection of the mere possibility of divine revelation in the sense in which his sister understands it (the “infallible” experience of faith humbly received by the believer) and his implicit rejection of the possibility of inherited or passively received knowledge.

At the heart of Nietzsche’s view that philosophy and religion are fundamental alternatives, then, is his rejection of receptive intellection. Of course, Nietzsche wasn’t the first or the only philosopher to reject this idea. To mention the other great thinkers who together with Nietzsche form a kind of late modern “anti-dogmatic” tradition, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger also reject this idea – with the qualification that Hegel in a way tries to restore *noesis*, not as a

⁶⁷ In this paragraph, I draw heavily on Mark Shiffman’s critique of what he calls Leo Strauss’ “dianoetic” conception of reason in “The Limits of Strauss’ Recovery of Pre-Modern Political Philosophy” (unpublished manuscript, 2010), typescript.

starting-point for reflection, but as *itself* an achievement or “result” of his systematic method (something utterly paradoxical from a classical perspective), while Heidegger emphasizes a kind of receptive openness or attentiveness to the world which however in no sense involves intellectual awareness of determinate form (thus also utterly paradoxical from a classical perspective). But what is distinctive about Nietzsche’s approach are the radical conclusions he insists one must draw from rejecting the idea of receptive intellection.

In different ways, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger (at least the early Heidegger) all want to “save the appearances.” If it could be shown that the rejection of noetic receptivity would mean that “the world in which we believe [*glauben*] that we live,” as Nietzsche puts it,⁶⁸ is in a very radical sense an illusion, they would consider this an *objection* to this premise. Nietzsche however is willing to embrace what he regards as its extremely radical consequences. Our “interpreted” world is to a large extent an illusion *because* it is a world unavoidably shaped by conventions which we for the most part passively accept rather than actively question and appropriate. Not just “ghosts, witches and so on,” to use Strauss’ phrase,⁶⁹ but the basic categories we use to understand the world are conventional or “fictional.” Particular traditions and conventions rest upon what one might call “fundamental conventions” or, in Nietzsche’s arresting phrase, the “fundamental errors” of the human species.⁷⁰ What to the first-time reader may appear to be Nietzsche’s idiosyncratic preoccupation with insisting vehemently that mathematics, rather than being a realm of necessary truths, represents a radical “falsification” of the world,⁷¹ stems in part from the fact that mathematics can easily be taken as the paradigm

⁶⁸ BGE 34.

⁶⁹ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 79.

⁷⁰ GS 110.

⁷¹ Cf. BGE 4.

instance of noetically or intuitively accessible truth for those who are otherwise skeptical of such an idea.

Stanley Rosen has argued that it is difficult to understand on Nietzsche's premises how this illusion even makes sense *as an illusion*: "Nietzsche seems to have deprived himself of the ability to explain the presence of a world... A world, like an individual subject or object, is said by Nietzsche to be an illusion. But on Nietzschean grounds a stronger statement is required: A world would seem to be impossible. The illusion of unity must itself be unified in order to function as an illusion, as *this* illusion. Conversely, an illusion is an illusion only to a unified consciousness, one which is unified as conscious of the aforementioned illusion. The production of illusion, at both the global and personal levels, is not and cannot itself be an illusion."⁷² As Rosen goes on to emphasize, it is difficult to understand how this illusion could have arisen or if so *how we could come to know that it is an illusion*. Rosen writes, "Nietzsche, unlike so many of his progeny, was aware of this problem... But I find no attempt in the Nietzschean corpus to resolve this mystery."⁷³

However, although I agree with Rosen that Nietzsche ultimately failed to "resolve this mystery," he *did* spend much of his life working on this problem, beginning with early and rather crude attempts, such as "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," and many of the notebook jottings from this period. He tried again in the first chapter of *Human, All-Too-Human*, "On First and Last Things," before disowning this attempt.⁷⁴ Although it seems to me that Nietzsche's

⁷² Stanley Rosen, "Poetic Reason in Nietzsche: Die dichtende Vernunft," in *The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 214.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Laurence Lampert relates that Nietzsche attempted to destroy "all the copies that remained of the first edition" of *Human, All-Too-Human* after he completed *Zarathustra*. Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of Beyond Good and Evil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 5.

mature position was more or less worked out by the time he wrote *The Gay Science*, the only place in his corpus where (so far as I can tell) he presents what he regards as a decisive *argument* for his position is the second half of the first chapter of *BGE*.

It may seem strange that Nietzsche's argument for his epistemological position is compressed into half a chapter of *BGE*. However, as I will try to show, Nietzsche's general approach to accounting for the possibility of knowledge leads to a kind of "transition problem" analogous to Hegel's transition problem at the beginning of the *Science of Logic*. Just as Hegel's entire project in the *Logic* depends on his ability to effect this initial transition, this "retreat into the ground" as he calls it,⁷⁵ so Nietzsche faces a similar problem, because of the productive, creative or "interpretive" way in which he understands the nature of intellection itself. Accordingly, it is possible to isolate, examine and (very) provisionally evaluate Nietzsche's "middle path" between skepticism and dogmatism through a close analysis of the movement of thought articulated in this sequence of aphorisms. Of course, Nietzsche no more than Hegel expects that his "transition argument" will be comprehensible to someone with no prior familiarity with the history of metaphysical problems.

But even assuming that Nietzsche could resolve this transition problem, was he able to answer the question of *why* the philosophical life is "good"? Despite the pervasive language of "hierarchy" and "value" in his books, it is difficult to determine what he regards as the proper *criterion* of value. Indeed, there is a profound tension between Nietzsche's praise of the courageous and seemingly disinterested perspective of "the noble" over the self-interested,

⁷⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 49. Translation modified.

calculating and utilitarian perspective of “the base” and his frequent suggestions that *all* human actions are equally self-interested. Furthermore, he often speaks in a surprisingly Epicurean fashion of his own trans-political “cheerfulness” and “happiness” as a sign of his elevated mode of life. In BGE 241, he refers to “my happiness and beyond,” where “Nietzsche’s beyond” clearly means a place (a mental “garden”?) “beyond” political disputes, such as the heated dispute between an ardent supporter and an equally ardent critic of Bismarck upon which Nietzsche bemusedly eavesdrops.⁷⁶ “Beyond good and evil” would seem to mean “beyond politics” as well as “beyond morality.” Furthermore, despite his rhetorical castigation of hedonism as a “plebeian” mode of evaluation, he often suggests that “pleasure” (*Lust*) or “enjoyment” (*Genuss*) is the motive force in all human action. He compares the soul in the grip of a noble passion (e.g. for justice or romantic love) to an animal driven by unreasoning instinct: “The noble, magnanimous, and self-sacrificing person does in fact succumb to his drives; and in his best moments, his reason *pauses*. An animal that protects its young at the risk of its own life or during the mating period follows the female unto death does not think of danger or death; its reason likewise pauses because the *pleasure* in its brood or in the female and the fear of being deprived of this *pleasure* dominate it totally.”⁷⁷

Nietzsche, then, suggests that the noble and the base are two different forms of the pleasure-seeking drive, even as they are directed towards different pleasures (e.g. “the passion for knowledge” rather than “the passion of the belly”⁷⁸) and in different ways, unreasoningly instinctive or reflectively calculating. The noble soul is essentially no less self-interested than the

⁷⁶ BGE 241.

⁷⁷ GS 3. Emphasis added to the word “pleasure.”

⁷⁸ GS 3.

base soul: “Egoism belongs to the essence of the noble soul.”⁷⁹ Insofar as the noble soul tends to believe that their egoism consists not in mere egoism but in “justice itself,” Nietzsche implies that *lack of self-knowledge* also “belongs to the essence of the noble soul.”⁸⁰ The noble soul acts from sheer instinct, while the base soul calculates prudentially, but neither the noble nor the base soul is capable of “unegoistic” action, the very idea of which Nietzsche regards as illusory or confused, bound up with assumptions which can be shown to be merely conventional or “fictional.” The noble soul believes that “what is good for me is good in itself,” but Nietzsche rejects the very idea of “the good in itself.”

In the preface to *BGE*, Nietzsche gives the impression that *the very idea* of “the good in itself,” i.e. that which is categorically good wholly independent of whether it is good from a particular “perspective,” was a Platonic “invention,” but such popular-polemical formulations are intentionally misleading.⁸¹ In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche says, “I... am far from blaming individuals for the calamity of millennia,” although he frequently does just that (indeed, it often seems that he hopes to take credit for coming calamities).⁸² Although Nietzsche was concerned with the extraordinary impact of “cultural legislators” such as Plato, he often exaggerates the extent to which they “create values” *ex nihilo*. In *The Gay Science*, he claims that the belief that “what is good for me is also good in and for itself,” far from being a Platonic invention at a certain point in historical time, belongs among the primordial “erroneous articles of faith” constitutive of the human perspective as such (others include the beliefs “that our will is free” and “that there are

⁷⁹ BGE 265.

⁸⁰ BGE 265.

⁸¹ BGE Preface.

⁸² EH Why I Am So Wise 7.

things, kinds of material, bodies”).⁸³ Whether or not Plato’s attempt to give a metaphysical account of this idea in the sixth book of the *Republic* was a “noble lie” (as Nietzsche, like Strauss, suggests), a cursory reading of the second book shows that he certainly didn’t “invent” the very notion. Plato’s brother Glaucon, a noble soul if ever there was one, instinctively believes in the good in itself, although sophists like Thrasymachus have led him to question his belief. But Glaucon doesn’t know how to give a rational, reflective defense of his “faith,” and he hopes that Socrates will help him.

Nietzsche’s praise of the noble, then, is “exoteric,” although not in a simple way. The passion for knowledge is indeed a noble passion at the outset (as we can see from the young Nietzsche’s letter to his sister), but in order to achieve its distinctive end (authentic knowledge of the *Grundprobleme*), it must subject the idea of nobility itself to Socratic examination, following Nietzsche’s example in the last chapter of *BGE*, the only chapter whose title takes the form of a question: “What Is Noble?”⁸⁴ The young philosopher driven by the passion for knowledge, naturally inclined to think himself superior to the common “herd,” who fearfully or lazily acquiesce in conventional opinion, must also question *his* own conviction that *his* way of life is superior to theirs. In doing so, the budding philosopher comes to realize, albeit reluctantly, that the noble and the base are bound up in complex ways he would rather not acknowledge (to mention just one among the many nuances in Nietzsche’s highly complex presentation, think of the noble soul’s *fear* of “being deprived” of the “pleasure” to which he is devoted – fear is a base

⁸³ GS 110.

⁸⁴ As Heinrich Meier observed in a seminar on *BGE* at the University of Chicago, spring 2018.

passion), while in another sense, insofar as they are different forms of the human drive towards pleasure, they are “in essence the same” (*wesensgleich*).⁸⁵

Accordingly, the heart of Nietzsche’s argument for the philosophical life is an account of the relationship between knowledge and desire. This amounts to a kind of philosophical anthropology, an account of the human being itself *as* “desiring intellect” (*orektikos nous*) or “intellectual desire” (*orexis dianoetike*). As Aristotle put it: “Such a principle (*arche*) is a human being.”⁸⁶ Nietzsche supplies an account of human desire in its generality and specificity and an unavoidably somewhat figurative and indirect presentation of the life driven by “the passion for knowledge,” the life whose *other* drives (noble or base) are organized hierarchically by *this* passion, and the unique combination of self-discipline and inner freedom such a life involves (“order which is not oppression” and “freedom which is not license”), as the kind of life that all human beings *want* to live but most *cannot* live, and can thus only dimly understand – the highest fulfillment of our natural desire for pleasure or enjoyment and in *this* sense “the life according to nature.” Nietzsche, then, I will argue, was indeed a kind of hedonist, although like the ancient Epicureans (and his hero Montaigne), and unlike crude modern utilitarians, he *distinguishes* momentary “pleasure” from lasting “happiness,” even as he understands the latter as nothing “higher” than a complex pattern of sustainable and internally differentiated pleasure that takes shape over the course of a human lifetime. Furthermore, although Nietzsche’s conception of the philosopher’s “solitude” or *inner spiritual withdrawal* from politics is far *more* Epicurean than his revolutionary rhetoric suggests, his conception of philosophy doesn’t demand

⁸⁵ Cf. BGE 2.

⁸⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b4-5. Translation is my own.

total withdrawal from politics and society, but rather a dialectical interplay of passionate engagement with the world and bemused detachment from it, or as Robert Pippin puts it, “wholeheartedness” and “irony,” a unique combination of gravity and levity which underlies the strangeness of his literary style and its resistance to conventional categories such as “romanticism” or “modernism.”⁸⁷

But while Nietzsche’s treatment of the problem of knowledge is in a way compressed into BGE 13-22, his entire mature corpus constitutes a series of experiments in presenting his understanding of philosophy *as* the best life. It is difficult to determine exactly when the major elements of this conception fell into place, or what role events like the “crisis” of 1878 or the “discovery” of the eternal return in 1881 played in its emergence. However, it seems to me that, while the major elements were in place by the time of *The Gay Science* (1881), the most comprehensive account can be found in *BGE*. However, a definitive presentation of philosophy itself is impossible for Nietzsche, because for him philosophy is not a “system” which ends with the final conceptual transition, but a way of life, which ends only in death.

In *BGE*, Nietzsche, much like Strauss, presents his discovery of the authentic meaning of philosophy, as “a human possibility which, at least according to its own interpretation, is trans-historical, trans-social, trans-moral and trans-religious,”⁸⁸ as a kind of rediscovery. He claims that psychology is now “again” the “queen of the sciences.”⁸⁹ But to when exactly does this refer? In the next chapter, I argue that Nietzsche primarily has Socrates in mind – as well as Plato and Xenophon, as first generation Socratics (another important point in common between

⁸⁷ Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 110.

⁸⁸ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 89.

⁸⁹ BGE 23.

Nietzsche and Strauss is the unusual emphasis they place on Xenophon as an important Socratic philosopher, as opposed to the conventional dullard portrayed by Kierkegaard and most other late modern admirers of Socrates⁹⁰). What appeared to Nietzsche in 1878 as the search for a “new, heretofore undiscovered, supreme *possibility of the philosophical life*,”⁹¹ transformed itself, by the time he wrote *BGE*, into the *rediscovery* of a possibility which was not merely always possible “in the most varied places on earth” and “the most varied cultures,”⁹² but had already been actualized in the distant past. Nietzsche’s most intensely polemical remarks about Socrates and Plato reveal themselves on closer inspection as ironic forms of praise, which serve, like his highly qualified and ironic praise of “master morality,” not only to establish his *own* authority as a “cultural legislator,” but also to provoke, in his more demanding readers, a questioning response which sets them on the path that leads back to Socrates.

⁹⁰ Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 13-27. Kierkegaard says that “with respect to irony, there is not one trace of it in Xenophon’s Socrates.” (25) Xenophon had “no intimation whatever” of Socrates’ “spiritual condition.” (19) “Xenophon... misunderstood [Socrates] in many ways.” (13) Kierkegaard rejects F. C. Bauer’s view “that, along with Plato, Xenophon should be most highly regarded.” (13) Xenophon “lacks an eye for situation” and “an ear for rejoinder.” (18) The “observations” Xenophon attributes to Socrates “are so scrubby and stunted that it is not difficult but is deadening for the eye to take in the whole lot at one glance.” (19) “Only rarely does one hear in this degenerate prose a comment that still has a remnant of its heavenly origin.” (20) By contrast, in July 1879 Nietzsche characterized Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* as “the most attractive book of Greek literature.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human II and Unpublished Fragments from the Period of Human, All Too Human II (Spring 1878 – Fall 1879)*, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 393. While this judgment may not be Nietzsche’s last word on “Greek literature,” he surely held Xenophon in very high esteem, much like Strauss.

⁹¹ HATH 261.

⁹² AC 4.

Chapter 2

Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* as a Defense of Socratic Philosophy

§1. Introduction

In *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (1879), Nietzsche makes a remarkable statement about Socrates: “If all goes well, the time will come when one will take up the *Memorabilia* of Socrates rather than the Bible as a guide to morals and reason [*um sich sittlich-vernünftig zu fördern*] and when Montaigne and Horace will be employed as forerunners and signposts to an understanding of this simplest and most imperishable of wise mediators [*Mittler-Weisen*]. The pathways of the most various philosophical ways of life lead back to him; at bottom they are the ways of life of the various temperaments confirmed and established by reason and habit and all of them directed towards joy in living and in one’s own self; from which one might conclude that Socrates’ most personal characteristic was a participation in every temperament. Socrates excels the founder of Christianity in possessing the cheerful manner of being serious [*die fröhliche Art des Ernstes*] and that *wisdom full of roguish tricks* that constitutes the finest state of the human soul. And he also possessed the finer intellect.”¹

In this passage, Nietzsche opposes Greek philosophy to the Bible, like Strauss, and Socrates himself to “the founder of Christianity” – either Jesus or St. Paul. The ambiguity is most likely deliberate,² although the reference to Socrates as a “mediator” surely alludes to Jesus. Rather than being a pagan forerunner of Jesus, as he has often been understood, Nietzsche

¹ WS 86.

² Two years later, in *Daybreak* (1881), Nietzsche describes St. Paul as the real “inventor [*Erfinder*] of Christianity.” D 68. Translation modified.

suggests that Socrates is a kind of anti-Christ *avant la lettre*, from whom we can draw inspiration in freeing ourselves from Christian morality and discovering “joy in living and in one’s own self.” Nietzsche seems to regard his own role as akin to that of Montaigne – a “signpost” towards rediscovering the Socratic art of living in the modern world. However, by the time he wrote *BGE*, Nietzsche’s attitude appears to have undergone a reversal. Socrates is no longer Nietzsche’s guide or precursor, but his enemy, the cunning moralist whose “corruption” of Plato prepared the way for Christian metaphysics and the two-thousand-year “nightmare” from which Europe is still trying to wake up. Nietzsche’s portrait of Socrates in *BGE* (and even more so in *Twilight of the Idols*) is far more polemical, but in some ways more conventional – he is an otherworldly moralist and metaphysician, or at least a teacher of metaphysicians, an ascetic martyr, almost a priestly figure.³

In this chapter, I argue that this transformation is more apparent than real. I argue that *BGE* ought to be understood as a defense of Socratic philosophy, as the best way of life and as the most self-conscious form of philosophizing and “freedom of spirit.” Thomas Mann famously described Nietzsche’s polemic against Wagner as “inverted panegyric.”⁴ I think this is exactly right in the case of his polemic against Socrates, but I argue that this “inverted panegyric” is a deliberate rhetorical strategy, rather than an uncontrolled or un-self-aware manifestation of Oedipal rage against the master, as Mann seemed to mean in the case of Wagner.

BGE is a very Platonic book, even in some fairly obvious ways. Like Plato in his dialogues, Nietzsche discusses many themes in a variety of registers, but all the while an image

³ Cf. TI The Problem of Socrates 11-12.

⁴ Quoted in Raymond Geuss, “The Birth of Tragedy,” in *Introductions to Nietzsche*, ed. Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 46.

gradually emerges – the image of “the philosopher.” Again like Plato, Nietzsche is always implicitly, and often explicitly concerned with distinguishing the *real* philosopher from the rivals and claimants who may be confused with him: “The crowd has for a long time misjudged and mistaken the philosopher, whether for a scientific man and ideal scholar or for a religiously elevated, desensualized, ‘descularized’ enthusiast and drunkard of God.”⁵ Some are easily dismissed as mere pseudo-philosophers, such as “the anarchist Eugen Dühring and the amalgamist Eduard von Hartmann,”⁶ while others are serious thinkers who nonetheless lack something decisive which would make them “genuine philosophers” in the strictest sense, such as Kant and Hegel, whom Nietzsche calls “philosophical laborers.”⁷

However, much as in Plato, Nietzsche’s conception of “the philosopher” is quite elusive and difficult to piece together. This conception is conveyed in many ways, one of which is the use of particular historical figures, whom Nietzsche claims or implies are “genuine philosophers” (such as Descartes and Spinoza, despite his apparently critical stance – and the likelihood that his knowledge of their thought was secondhand, derived largely from historians of philosophy⁸). The most important are Plato and above all Socrates, to whom Nietzsche frequently alludes even when he doesn’t mention him by name. On the other hand, much as in Plato, Nietzsche’s conception of “the philosopher” also emerges through the manner in which he treats various topics of inquiry, from highly abstract questions in epistemology and metaphysics to cultural phenomena such as religion, morality and art.

⁵ BGE 205.

⁶ BGE 204.

⁷ BGE 211.

⁸ On Nietzsche’s knowledge of Descartes, see Brobjer, *Nietzsche’s Philosophical Context*, 69, 72. On Nietzsche’s knowledge of Spinoza, see David Wollenberg, “Nietzsche, Spinoza and the Moral Affects,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 51, no. 4 (2013): 617-649.

BGE is a challenging text for the scholar. The book appears to have a fairly clear, overarching structure – the first three chapters are about philosophy and religion, the fourth is an interlude composed of very short aphorisms, and the last five are about morality and politics. However, there is considerable overlap, and Nietzsche frequently makes what appear to be digressions and personal asides. Furthermore, he rarely *argues* for his views in the manner one would expect from a philosopher, seeming rather to rely on the force of his rhetoric, his psychological acuity and his literary authority to convince the reader, while taking pride in a kind of aristocratic disdain for consistency. However, Nietzsche himself indicated in a letter to Georg Brandes that *BGE* is far more carefully written than it appears to be. Much like Plato’s dialogues, it has an inner logic the reader must discover for himself: “That they’re dealing here with the long logic of a completely determinate philosophical sensibility and *not* with some mishmash of a hundred varied paradoxes and heterodoxies – of that, I believe, nothing has dawned on even my most favorable readers.”⁹ The book develops what is meant to be “a coherent argument that never lets up,”¹⁰ as Laurence Lampert puts it, and the reader must follow the train of this argument and the implicit “chains of thought” (*Gedanken-Ketten*) which link aphorisms that seem to be juxtaposed arbitrarily.¹¹

The only way to discover whether *BGE* is as carefully written as Nietzsche claims, and to discover just *what* he wanted to achieve philosophically in the book and *how* he wanted to achieve it, is through a close reading of the text. Nietzsche doesn’t provide us with a clear

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche to Georg Brandes, January 8, 1888, quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 1-2.

¹⁰ Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 7.

¹¹ The phrase *Gedanken-Ketten* occurs in a notebook entry from June-July 1885, quoted in Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, xiv: “[For] aphorism books like mine... many lengthy and forbidden things and chains of thought stand between and behind short aphorisms.”

statement of intent – the Preface is no less stylized and ambiguous than are most of the aphorisms. In this chapter, I argue that the first twelve aphorisms of the first chapter (“On the Prejudices of the Philosophers”) taken together represent a statement of intent for the book as a whole, as well as a preliminary exploration of its most important themes. I argue that these aphorisms fall into three sub-sections, 1-7, 8-10 and 11-12, each of which develops a movement of thought to a certain conclusion, which then prepares the reader for a new beginning.

The central theme of *BGE* is philosophy itself, as a form of inquiry into the world *and* as a way of life devoted to such inquiry. In the Preface, Nietzsche claims that “all philosophers” hitherto, “insofar as they have been dogmatists,” have failed to acquire “the truth,” which he playfully likens to a “woman.”¹² However, as the book develops, one comes to learn that, insofar as they are dogmatists, “philosophers” aren’t really philosophers at all – except insofar as their apparent dogmatism might be an “exoteric” way of presenting their thought in the service of philosophical pedagogy and “cultural legislation.” For Nietzsche, “dogmatic philosophy” is a contradiction in terms – it is more like religion than philosophy. Real philosophy is non-dogmatic, without being purely skeptical. One of Nietzsche’s central tasks in *BGE* is to show how such a peculiar modality of thought makes sense.

On the other hand, as he indicates with the erotic image with which he begins the Preface, Nietzsche also thinks of philosophy as a way of life animated by a peculiar guiding passion, “the passion for knowledge,”¹³ especially knowledge of “fundamental problems,” rather than the empirical questions with which scholars and “respectable but mediocre Englishmen” are

¹² *BGE* Preface. Translation modified.

¹³ *BGE* 210. Cf. D 429.

concerned.¹⁴ The philosopher is only concerned with such questions insofar as some knowledge of them is necessary to begin thinking about the *Grundprobleme*. However, there is no advance guarantee that knowledge of this kind will be good for us or that the life devoted to its pursuit will be a good way of life, let alone the best life. Nietzsche's other major task in *BGE* is to show why and in what sense philosophy is the best way of life, or as he puts it late in the book, to answer the question: "Why knowledge at all?"¹⁵

I argue that in the first sub-section (1-7), Nietzsche introduces the problems of the possibility of philosophical knowledge and the goodness or "value" of such knowledge, in their complex relationship to one another. In the second sub-section (8-10), he zeroes in on the question of "the value of truth" or the goodness of the philosophical life by contrasting it implicitly with the religious life, understood as philosophy's great rival. In the third sub-section (11-12), he zeroes in on the question of what it would mean to ground philosophical inquiry in a non-dogmatic fashion, anticipating his claim in *BGE* 23 that "psychology" is "the queen of the sciences."¹⁶ Despite his seemingly dogmatic procedure (heavy on peremptory declarations, light on objections and replies), I argue that in these sections Nietzsche means to indicate to the demanding reader, who will not accept his claims on his rhetorical authority alone, what he proposes and how he will argue for it in the rest of the book – the assumptions he makes and how he will draw conclusions from them. In doing so, Nietzsche also undertakes a preliminary exploration of his central themes which illustrates his "perspectival" method, exploring the same problem from different angles in order to illuminate it more fully.

¹⁴ *BGE* 253.

¹⁵ *BGE* 230. Translation modified.

¹⁶ *BGE* 23.

Although (as I hope to show) Nietzsche's introductory exploration of themes is implicitly divided into three sub-sections, the first sub-section is much longer than the others, so I have divided this chapter into four sections, which deal with aphorisms 1-4 (1), 5-7 (2), 8-10 (3) and 11-12 (4) respectively. In the concluding remarks, I return to the question of Socrates and present an interpretation of the role of Socrates and Plato in the Preface, which will be easier to grasp once these themes are in view. In the next two chapters, I will focus on Nietzsche's attempts to accomplish the two most important tasks he introduces here – the grounding of non-dogmatic philosophy and the justification of the philosophical life.

§2. Philosophical Thinking and the Philosophical Life in BGE 1-4

BGE 1 begins: "The will to truth, which will still tempt us to many a venture, that famous truthfulness of which all philosophers hitherto have spoken with reverence – what questions has this will to truth not laid before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions! That is a long story even now – and yet it seems as if it had scarcely begun. Is it any wonder that we should finally become suspicious, lose patience, and turn around impatiently?"¹⁷ Nietzsche begins by questioning the will to truth, the Socratic quest for well-grounded knowledge about "fundamental questions." The Socratic quest rests on the assumption that such knowledge must be *valuable*, good for us: "We asked about the *value* of this will. Suppose we want truth: Why not rather untruth? And uncertainty? Even ignorance?"¹⁸ Nietzsche seems to imply that he is the

¹⁷ BGE 1. Translation modified.

¹⁸ BGE 1.

first philosopher to have questioned the will to truth – “all philosophers hitherto” have spoken about it with “reverence” (*Ehrerbietung*).

However, Nietzsche’s formulation is very careful. He says that all philosophers hitherto have *spoken* about the will to truth with “reverence.” He leaves open the possibility that this speech is partly misleading, even ironic. Not only that, but *Nietzsche himself* often speaks about the will to truth with apparent “reverence,” employing high-flown, heroic rhetoric to describe the seeker after knowledge,¹⁹ even as he also questions and often mocks the quest for knowledge. Could it be that “all philosophers” (even Nietzsche) are compelled to *speak* reverently about the will to truth, at least some of the time, even as they privately view “the truth” not as a goddess to be worshipped, but as a “woman” or “female” (*Weib*), to be pursued for their own enjoyment? Furthermore, Nietzsche’s questioning of the will to truth is itself an operation of the will to truth – an attempt to discover the truth *about* the will to truth. One can infer that the will to truth, when taken to its limit, is incompatible with “reverence” – a reverent attitude worships in awe, while a truthful attitude seeks to question and disclose. At the same time, in questioning the will to truth, one should not assume that Nietzsche excludes the possibility that such questioning will ultimately lead to a justification of the will to truth, to the conclusion that “the truth” is indeed valuable or good for us, at least for some of us. Nothing he says in the first aphorism excludes this possibility.

But is Nietzsche the first philosopher to have pursued the will to truth to the point that it questions itself and its own value? A lot depends on the “we” in question. Does the first person plural refer to “we moderns,” or “we modern philosophers,” or simply “we philosophers”?

¹⁹ For example, in BGE 23 and 230.

Nietzsche writes, “That is a long story even now – and yet it seems as if it had scarcely begun.”²⁰ This “story” appears to be the history of philosophy, and the “strange, wicked, questionable questions” it has brought to light. But do these include “the problem of the value of truth”? Or is Nietzsche the first to have posed *this* question? He concludes the aphorism by writing, “Though it scarcely seems credible, it finally almost seems to us as if the problem had never been posed so far – as if we were the first to see it, fix it with our eyes, and *risk* it. For it does involve a risk [*Wagnis*], and perhaps there is none that is greater.”²¹

Nietzsche suggests that the history of philosophy “seems as if” it had scarcely begun. This might be taken to mean that philosophy had been mired in dogmatism until recently, perhaps until the rise of modern science and empiricism, or until Kant’s critical philosophy. But Nietzsche also claims, in a very cautious formulation, that “it finally almost seems to us” as if the problem of the value of truth “had never been posed so far” – *as if* we were the first to “risk it.” This suggests that the questioning of the will to truth may indeed have a long history – even if it “almost seems to us” as if we were the first to carry it out. I suggest two implications. First, for “we moderns,” it can easily seem *as if* philosophical questioning had never been turned against itself, had never dispensed with a quasi-religious “reverence” for the will to truth and the truth itself, until recently – but this assumption must *itself* be questioned. Perhaps there has already been a long history of “irreverent” questioning. Secondly, it always seems to the philosopher, whether or not he has a long history of philosophy behind him, *as if* the fundamental questions were being posed for the first time, because it belongs to the nature of

²⁰ BGE 1.

²¹ BGE 1 Translation modified.

philosophy that it doesn't "progress" in the manner of the arts and sciences, that it must always begin again from the beginning.

Nietzsche raises two "fundamental" questions in this aphorism, although the bulk of the aphorism deals with the second question: "We came to a long halt at the question of the cause [*Ursache*] of this will – until we came to a complete stop before a still more fundamental question. We asked about the *value* of this will."²² The questioning of the will to truth compels the philosopher to raise two reflexive questions – the question of its cause or origin (*Ursache*) and the question of its value. The latter question is "more fundamental" and seems to come after the former in the order of questioning – but they are *both* "fundamental." The philosopher *first* asks where "the will to truth," the distinctively human desire and capacity to seek after knowledge, comes from. Is the will to truth a divine gift or otherwise derivative from a transcendent metaphysical world or does it emerge naturally, through an evolutionary process? The philosopher *then* asks after the value of this will. One can infer that philosophers begin by asking metaphysical or cosmological questions; only then are they in a position to inquire into the place of such questioning in a life well lived. Nietzsche leaves it open here how exactly questions of "value" are tied up with metaphysical questions. He starts to take up this theme in the next aphorism.

Nietzsche begins by speaking in the voice (in scare quotes) of a "metaphysician," in order to illustrate what he calls the "way of judging" and "typical prejudgment and prejudice" of "the metaphysicians of all ages."²³ Nietzsche's metaphysician claims that "the things of the

²² BGE 1 Translation modified.

²³ BGE 2.

highest value” cannot *possibly* originate in or “be derivable from this transitory, seductive, deceptive, paltry world, from this turmoil of delusion and desire.”²⁴ Rather, they must have a transcendent origin – “the womb of being, the intransitory, the hidden god, the ‘thing-in-itself.’”²⁵ The metaphysician asks indignantly, “How *could* anything originate out of its opposite? For example, truth out of error? Or the will to truth out of the will to deception? Or selfless deeds out of selflessness? Or the pure and sunlike gaze of the wise man out of concupiscence [*Begehrlichkeit*]?”²⁶

Nietzsche proposes a fundamental and trans-historical (“all ages”) alternative – between what might provisionally be called a dualistic perspective on the world and a naturalistic one. This distinction concerns both the origin and the nature of “higher things” – not only their causal derivation, but also the difference in their very being or essence. To add to the complexity, it *also* concerns their “value.” In his own voice, Nietzsche says that “the fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is the faith in *value-oppositions* [*Gegensätze der Werthe*].”²⁷ The dualistic metaphysician proposes that things of the highest value are essentially different from “lower” phenomena and also have a different, “higher” origin, in a transcendent world. For example, we are endowed by God with a rational intellect and a free will, even if our bodies have evolved. Nietzsche questions this perspective: “One may doubt, first, whether there are any oppositions at all, and secondly whether these popular valuations and value-oppositions on which the metaphysicians put their seal, are not merely foreground estimates, only provisional perspectives... For all the value that the true, the truthful, the selfless may deserve,

²⁴ BGE 2. Translation modified.

²⁵ BGE 2. Translation modified.

²⁶ BGE 2. Translation modified.

²⁷ BGE 2.

it would still be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life might have to be ascribed to deception, selfishness and lust. It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of these good and revered things is precisely that they are insidiously related, tied to, and involved with these wicked, seemingly opposite things – and maybe even in essence the same. Maybe!”²⁸

While it is roughly clear what he means to suggest, Nietzsche’s own contrast between what I have called a dualistic and a naturalistic perspective on the world is not immediately pellucid. The contrast between origin stories (truth or knowledge somehow *emerges out of* error, rather than being derived from contact with a transcendent, otherworldly realm) is somewhat clearer than the ontological contrast between the “possibility” that truth and error, or selfishness and selfless deeds, *are* “in essence the same” (*wesensgleich*) and the thesis that they are essentially different or “opposed.” Nietzsche doesn’t deny that they are *in some sense* different, just as they appear to be, which makes the proposal that they are nonetheless “in essence” the same difficult to bring clearly into view. The meaning of this claim will gradually be clarified as the inquiry proceeds.

Nietzsche proposes that the dualistic perspective originates in the value-feelings of the metaphysicians themselves – they *esteem* phenomena such as knowledge and selfless deeds so highly that they can’t bring themselves to consider the possibility that such phenomena derive from their contraries. The metaphysical enterprise isn’t an arbitrary, fantastical error. Although metaphysics itself is not a popular enterprise, it emerges out of the desire to provide a theoretical justification for “customary value-feelings,” as he puts it in BGE 4 – to legitimize these

²⁸ BGE 2. Translation modified.

“feelings” as a reliable guide to reality.²⁹ This enterprise can result in a variety of elaborate hypotheses (including the Kantian “thing-in-itself”), but it always has the same motivation. Metaphysicians can be found in “all ages [*aller Zeiten*]”; Nietzsche seems to assume that these “popular valuations” are at bottom the same everywhere, even as different cultures and epochs give rise to different variations on them. Even as he questions metaphysics, Nietzsche indicates that reflection on metaphysics will tell us something fundamental about human nature.

Nietzsche is very careful to offer his alternative as a *possibility*, a “dangerous maybe.” He assumes only that the reader is willing to regard “value-oppositions” as *questionable*. But what about Nietzsche’s own values? Nietzsche’s procedure invites the objection: If metaphysicians merely “put their seal” on popular moral evaluations they refuse to question, while *taking themselves* to be engaged in the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, might Nietzsche’s approach not merely put *his* seal on *unpopular* evaluations which reflect a perverse taste for the forbidden or the counter-intuitive? The aphorism concludes: “Who has the will to concern himself with such dangerous maybes? For that, one really has to wait for the advent of a new species [*Gattung*] of philosophers, such as have somehow another and converse taste and propensity from those we have known so far – philosophers of the dangerous ‘maybe’ in every sense. And in all seriousness: I see such new philosophers coming up.”³⁰

Nietzsche suggests that these philosophers will indeed have a different “taste and propensity” to the metaphysical “propensity,” although it will presumably be “insidiously related to” and might even emerge out of the latter, something the new philosophers would be

²⁹ Cf. BGE 4.

³⁰ BGE 2.

ready to acknowledge. If Nietzsche wants to substantiate his hypothesis, he will have to show how knowledge can emerge out of error “not as its opposite, but as its refinement [*Verfeinerung*],” as he puts it in BGE 24.³¹ He will also have to show how his own inquiry can attain “the truth” and not merely result in after the fact rationalizations of the “values” animating it. On the other hand, Nietzsche also raises the question of whether “the true, the truthful, the selfless” have “a higher and more fundamental value for life” than their opposites, without yet beginning to elaborate what it *means* to have “value for life.”³² In raising this question, Nietzsche carefully leaves open the possibility that these phenomena, after they have been re-interpreted naturalistically or immanently, may after all have a “higher value for life,” at least for some people, even if they turn out to be inseparable from their contraries.

The conclusion to BGE 2 seems to suggest that, contra Strauss, there has been no prior tradition of radical questioning of this kind, despite the cautious formulations in the preceding aphorism. Does Nietzsche regard himself as the founder of such a tradition or as its heir? Nietzsche contrasts the philosophers “we have known so far” with those “I see coming up.” Does he mean “coming up” in the future or “coming up” in the rest of this chapter? The abrupt switch from “we” to “I” is striking. Perhaps “we moderns” will come to realize that we are less original than we tend to think after we learn to approach, not only philosophy itself, but also the history of philosophy, in the way Nietzsche is about to propose. Perhaps we will discover a “new species of philosophers” when we read old, familiar books in a new way.

³¹ BGE 24.

³² Laurence Lampert points out that Nietzsche doesn’t yet distinguish the “preservation” of life from its “enhancement,” but the more important question is what it *means* to “enhance” life. Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 25-26.

The next aphorism begins with the image of Nietzsche *articulating to himself* a conclusion he reached after long immersion in the history of philosophy and careful study of old books: “After having looked long enough at the philosophers between the lines and over the shoulder [*auf die Finger*], I say to myself: by far the greater part of conscious thinking must still be included among the instinctive activities, even in the case of philosophical thinking.”³³ While Nietzsche seems to imply that he understands these philosophers better than they understood themselves (seeing through their self-understanding as men of reason not instinct³⁴), I note that his careful formulation leaves open the possibility that this insight is something he has found intimated “between the lines” of the books he has read, something he has learned *from* the philosophers and not just *about* the philosophers.

BGE 3 is one of the most complex and compressed aphorisms in the entire book. Nietzsche continues: “We have to relearn here, as one has had to relearn about heredity and what is ‘innate.’ As little as the act of birth comes into consideration in the whole process and procedure of heredity, so little is ‘being conscious’ in any decisive sense *opposed* to what is instinctive: most of the conscious thinking of a philosopher is secretly guided and forced into certain channels by his instincts. Behind all logic and its apparent sovereignty [*Selbstherrlichkeit*] of movement, too, there stand valuations or, more clearly said, physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life. For example, that the definite should be worth more than the indefinite, and appearance worth less than ‘truth’ – such estimates might be, in spite of their regulative importance for *us*, nevertheless mere foreground estimates, a

³³ BGE 3. Translation modified.

³⁴ Cf. BGE 191.

certain kind of *naiserie* which may be necessary for the preservation of just such beings as we are.”³⁵

Nietzsche begins to elaborate his new perspective on the world, while intimating that it might be a rediscovery of something real philosophers have always known. The central theme is the apparent difference-in-kind between instinctive activities and conscious thinking – especially *philosophical* thinking. Nietzsche has discovered that most conscious thinking, “even” philosophical thinking, is no less driven by instinct than those “activities” which are obviously instinctive. Much later in the book, he attributes this insight (a kind of self-knowledge) to Socrates.³⁶ Very importantly, however, Nietzsche says that *by far the greater part or most of* “the conscious thinking of a philosopher is secretly guided and forced into certain channels by his instincts.”³⁷ Thus he concedes, and in a way gently emphasizes, that *some* conscious thinking, presumably philosophical thinking at the very highest or most self-conscious level, *does* transcend merely instinctive activity.

What is the subject matter of this kind of “philosophical thinking”? From the example which Nietzsche himself provides, it appears that this thinking is in the first place thinking *about* thinking itself – a surprisingly Hegelian (or Aristotelian) intimation, although unlike Hegel’s “pure thinker” (or Aristotle’s God), Nietzsche’s “thinking *about* thinking” grasps “conscious thinking” itself as a process which emerges out of the “instinctive activities” and remains essentially identical with them (*wesensgleich*), even as it *also* somehow transcends the instincts through the very act of thinking *about* itself *as* primarily “instinctive.”

³⁵ BGE 3. Translation modified.

³⁶ BGE 191.

³⁷ BGE 3.

Nietzsche proposes that a reflexive comprehension of “conscious thinking” as an “instinctive activity” will lead the “new” philosopher to the insight that “all logic,” the rule-boundedness or formal structure of thinking itself (presumably including the principle of non-contradiction), must be understood as the expression of “physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life,” i.e. human life, rather than as an autonomous sphere of necessary truth which must be understood non-naturalistically (“its apparent sovereignty of movement”).³⁸ The idea of nature appears now for the first time almost explicitly, with the idea of the “physiological.” Nietzsche’s psychology, then, will in some sense be naturalistic, a kind of “physio-psychology,” as he calls it in BGE 23.³⁹ Nietzsche perhaps alludes to the Greek word for nature, *physis*, to indicate that the naturalism he proposes doesn’t depend on any distinctively modern discoveries about nature. In BGE 14, he rejects modern “physics” as “only an interpretation” of nature, albeit one useful for technological purposes.⁴⁰ Furthermore, here in this aphorism Nietzsche perplexingly identifies these “physiological demands,” not with events in the brain or the body, but with “valuations.”

Here, Nietzsche scarcely begins to unpack his elusive conception of “nature” or “the physiological” and its relationship to human thought. This aphorism is a kind of promissory note, summarizing in a highly condensed fashion what Nietzsche has learned from reading other philosophers and promising that the reader will also be able to learn it from him, presented in a novel way. Beyond that, Nietzsche limits himself to indicating the crucial difficulty that he will have to resolve. Nietzsche proposes that the human perspective on the world, rather than

³⁸ BGE 3.

³⁹ BGE 23.

⁴⁰ BGE 14.

providing us with direct access to nature or being, is constituted in large part by “regulative” fictions, illusions or conventions, which are themselves the manifestation of “instincts” or “physiological demands” (somehow identical with “valuations”) characteristic of *the kind of beings we are*. Nietzsche goes so far as to include “all logic” under this rubric. It is impossible for us to think without thinking logically, but Nietzsche proposes that logic itself is just a “perspective” on the world, a “foreground estimate,” which may well falsify the world and must therefore be questioned by the philosopher.

This invites the objection: How did Nietzsche come to *know* this? He implies that we are not *entirely* in thrall to the illusions constitutive of the human perspective (“just such beings as we are”); it would then be impossible for us to question this perspective or raise the possibility that it *is* merely “foreground.” Accordingly, the human perspective must give us *some* purchase on the world, or it would be impossible for us to make *any* progress in determining the extent to which our perspective either “falsifies” or provides us with epistemic access to the world. Nietzsche suggests that philosophical thought, as thinking *about* thinking, will provide us with a kind of limited, but genuine reflective awareness of the ways in which human thought is “forced into certain channels” by our “instincts,” “physiological demands” or “valuations” and thereby about the extent to which our species-perspective on the world is “from the beginning” a “simplification” and “falsification,” as he puts in BGE 24.⁴¹ Accordingly, Nietzsche states that, in rare cases, philosophical thought *can* in a sense transcend merely “instinctive activity,” not in the radically dualistic way advocated by proponents of free will in the “superlative,

⁴¹ BGE 24.

metaphysical sense,”⁴² but in a highly qualified way, as a kind of knowledge of our own (epistemic) bondage to the conventions constitutive of our perspective on the world which sees beyond them to the extent that it reflexively comprehends their origin in the instincts. Thus in this aphorism, Nietzsche proposes a version of the Spinozist thesis that true freedom is knowledge of one’s own bondage.

The unusual way in which Nietzsche introduces this thought (“I say to myself”) suggests that he regards it as one of his deepest private thoughts, even as he also indicates that he discovered it through the close reading of earlier books in the history of philosophy.⁴³ Nietzsche’s “physio-psychology” promises to answer the question of “the origin of the will to truth” – not by uncovering man’s ultimate cosmic origins, but rather through a reflexive phenomenology of the human perspective as such, which shows how knowledge emerges out of error as its “ground” (*Grunde*).⁴⁴ But what about the “even more fundamental” question of “the value of truth”? Does “philosophical thinking” of this kind possess a “higher value for life” than illusion?

Nietzsche takes up this question in the next aphorism, in a provocative – but also, I will argue, quite misleading – fashion: “The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment; in this respect our new language may sound strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating. And we are fundamentally inclined to claim that the falsest judgments (which include the synthetic judgments *a priori*) are the most indispensable for us; that without

⁴² BGE 21.

⁴³ Nietzsche’s use of the idiomatic German phrase *auf die Finger schauen* suggests that he is looking over the philosophers’ shoulders as they write their books.

⁴⁴ BGE 24.

accepting logical fictions, without a measuring of reality against the purely invented world of the unconditioned and self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world by means of numbers, the human being [*der Mensch*] could not live – that renouncing false judgments would mean renouncing life and a denial of life. To recognize untruth as a condition of life – that certainly means resisting customary value-feelings in a dangerous way; and a philosophy that risks this would by that token alone place itself beyond good and evil.”⁴⁵

This aphorism is a classic source text for the view that Nietzsche advocated the willful embrace of “life-affirming” illusions – deliberately choosing to believe claims one knows are false because one believes that one will “live better” if one comes to believe them.⁴⁶ It is unlikely, to say the least, that such an endeavor could be successful. One never simply *chooses* to believe something, although one can choose to explore (or refuse to consider) a possibility – and deliberate choice can also play a role in sustaining a sincerely held belief one fears one may lose if one allows oneself to be exposed to powerful incentives to reject it. But if Nietzsche means that one should choose to believe judgments one knows to be false, this proposal would seem to be “psychologically untenable,” as Nietzsche himself would put it.⁴⁷

Quite different is the idea of self-deception, to which Nietzsche often appeals, and which doesn’t involve a fully conscious or deliberate embrace of ignorance or falsehood. Of course, one might ask (and Nietzsche often does – he will soon address this issue directly in BGE 10) whether those who believe certain false claims are better off than those who don’t. But in raising this question, one recognizes at the same time, whether regretfully or not, that one cannot

⁴⁵ BGE 4. Translation modified.

⁴⁶ For example, Brian Leiter attributes this view to Nietzsche on the basis of this aphorism. Cf. Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002), 159-160.

⁴⁷ Cf. OGM 1:3.

believe those claims oneself. The classic example is the atheist who wishes he could believe in God because he believes that religious people are happier. But such an atheist couldn't just *choose* to believe in God, although he might choose to question his atheism.

But what does Nietzsche actually say? Must we attribute to him the view that one can and should choose to believe judgments one knows are false? In fact, his formulation leaves open a variety of alternative readings: "The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment."⁴⁸ This could be taken as an affirmation of the need for the judicious use (by "us," we philosophers) of "life-promoting" and "species-cultivating" falsehoods for the purpose of what Nietzsche calls "cultural legislation" (or sometimes even "breeding," *Züchtung*). Elsewhere, Nietzsche speaks favorably of the Platonic idea of the "noble lie"⁴⁹ and claims that the "improvers of mankind," including Plato, never "doubted their *right* to lie."⁵⁰

However, even if this suggestion partly captures what Nietzsche is getting at, he makes the same point elsewhere more clearly, and it doesn't explain why he makes it *here* or why he makes use of this "strange" and misleading language. A lot depends on the meaning of the first person plural ("for us"). On the reading I have just suggested, this would refer in the initial formulation to "we philosophers," in "our" capacity as cultural legislators. But as the aphorism continues, Nietzsche seems to be referring to the human perspective as such ("the human being could not live"), which he had already suggested in the preceding aphorism is constituted by the tyranny of fundamental illusions: "Without accepting logical fictions, without measuring reality

⁴⁸ BGE 4.

⁴⁹ Cf. OGM 3:19.

⁵⁰ TI Those Who "Improve" Humanity 5.

against the purely invented world of the unconditioned and self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world by means of numbers, the human being could not live.”⁵¹

The “fictions” to which Nietzsche refers here are clearly not the “life-promoting” and “species-cultivating” noble lies deliberately propounded by “cultural legislators” like Manu and Plato, but what he elsewhere calls the “fundamental errors” which have been “incorporated from time immemorial,” and have become part of “the basic endowment of the human species.”⁵² A human being cannot think or live without “instinctively” accepting “logical fictions.” Thus when Nietzsche concludes that “renouncing false judgments would mean renouncing life and a denial of life,” he is surely not suggesting that it would be possible, but inadvisable, to renounce “logical fictions” and the “constant falsification of the world by means of numbers,” as though such renunciation would lead merely to an impoverished way of life. The only way to “renounce” such “fictions” altogether would be to commit suicide.

However, in proposing that the human perspective as such is constituted by these illusions, Nietzsche adopts a meta-perspective *on* the human perspective and claims implicitly, not to stand outside it, but somehow to understand it reflexively or self-consciously from within. When he says “we are fundamentally inclined to claim,” the “we” in question would seem to be “we philosophers” after all, not just in “our” capacity as cultural legislators, but also as physiopsychologists, while the “for us” which follows it (“the falsest judgments... are the most indispensable for us”) refers rather to “we human beings,” the human species in general, whose “foreground” perspective must be questioned.

⁵¹ BGE 4. Translation modified.

⁵² GS 110.

In this aphorism, Nietzsche only unpacks this idea a little further, and doesn't yet try to resolve the epistemological difficulties it raises. The cautious formulation "we are fundamentally inclined to claim" evinces his awareness that he still needs to justify his proposal. But why the use of such "strange," intentionally misleading language, which provokes the misreading that he advocates the willful embrace of "life-promoting" illusions, while also alluding to the Platonic practice of promoting falsehoods in order to "cultivate" our species?

I suggest that Nietzsche indicates here that he engages in a new philosophical founding in this book, a kind of "Nietzschean turn" analogous to the Socratic turn. As Lampert puts it: "The Socratic turn necessitates the Nietzschean turn, each being a philosophical turn to the human and eventually to a politics on behalf of philosophy."⁵³ In doing so, he has two kinds of potentially "Nietzschean" reader in mind – those who will follow his argument patiently, without accepting his claims on his rhetorical authority alone, and those who, intoxicated by his paradoxical sloganeering, will take at face value his extravagantly self-refuting claims about "truth" and his proto-existentialist suggestions that one should *choose* to embrace illusions. Nietzsche's switch from "I" ("I say to myself") to "we" ("our new language") acknowledges this difference among his addressees. "We Nietzscheans," like "we Platonists," will include both real philosophers and dogmatic disciples. The theme of esotericism, discussed explicitly at various places in the book,⁵⁴ is introduced here implicitly, and will play an important role in the next five aphorisms (5-9). Nietzsche introduces a "new language" for philosophy, which need not mean that the thought conveyed in this language is historically "new." But it will surely lead

⁵³ Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 159-160.

⁵⁴ Most clearly in BGE 27, 30, 40 and 289.

to the invention of new doctrines which appeal to Nietzsche's authority, from "existentialism" to "deconstruction."

Now that Nietzsche has provided an anticipatory sketch of what he means by "philosophical thinking," as a kind of physio-psychology, he returns in the final sentence to the question of what it would mean to incorporate such thinking into one's way of life, introducing the first mention in the main body of the text, not of "philosophers," but of "philosophy" itself: "To recognize untruth as a condition of life – that certainly means resisting customary value-feelings in a dangerous way; and a philosophy that risks this would by that token alone place itself beyond good and evil."⁵⁵ In the same breath, Nietzsche employs for the first time the "dangerous slogan" which gives the book its title,⁵⁶ thereby suggesting that philosophy itself is essentially "beyond good and evil."

The first use of "philosophy" in *BGE* refers to a certain way of life – that of the "investigator," who has achieved a certain insight into human nature and thereby into nature itself.⁵⁷ The investigator recognizes that untruth is a "condition of life," which implies that in doing so, he can *differentiate* truth from untruth: "Whoever is unable to lie does not know what truth is."⁵⁸ But what about the other very general "value-opposition," which Nietzsche mentions here explicitly for the first time (he avoided the word "evil," *böse*, in *BGE* 2, presumably to make the statement here all the more emphatic), the opposition between goodness and wickedness or "evil"? Without yet explaining why, Nietzsche suggests that a proper understanding of the role of the instincts in conscious thinking will show that the moral

⁵⁵ *BGE* 4.

⁵⁶ *OGM* 1:17.

⁵⁷ Cf. *BGE* 23.

⁵⁸ *TSZ* 4:13 On the Higher Man 9.

distinction between “good and evil” involves a false “interpretation” of phenomena, as he later puts it.⁵⁹ Thus Socrates, who also had this insight into the priority of instinct, recognized the fundamental “irrationality in moral judgment.”⁶⁰ This absolute distinction (a deed is either good or evil) will be replaced by the distinction between “more or less valuable for life,” which permits of “gradation.”⁶¹ At the same time, Nietzsche’s calculated use of what he avowedly calls a “slogan” to indicate what a reflectively “trans-moral” life would look like suggests that such a life will be more elusive and difficult to bring into view, less cartoonishly *übermenschlich* or Cesare-Borgia-like,⁶² than the slogan itself leads one to think. Nietzsche takes up this question in the next three aphorisms, which approach the philosophical life from three different perspectives.

§3. Three Perspectives on Philosophy in BGE 5-7

Taken together, aphorisms 5, 6 and 7 are a beautiful example of Nietzsche’s perspectival method. These aphorisms concern how the philosopher appears from the outside, to non-philosophers (5), how he appears to himself (6), and finally how he appears to other philosophers (7). There is a clear logical progression: one always begins from the first perspective, when one first approaches the history of philosophy, then (perhaps) one becomes a philosopher oneself and understands the philosophical life “from the inside,” after which one develops a “politics of friendship”⁶³ (or enmity) with other philosophers – past, present or future

⁵⁹ BGE 108.

⁶⁰ BGE 191. Translation modified.

⁶¹ Cf. BGE 24.

⁶² Cf. BGE 197.

⁶³ Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 98.

– while bearing in mind what this politics will look like to the world in general, like an actor in a play. Thus one returns, in a sense, to the beginning. These aphorisms, then, represent three stages in the philosophical life, while addressing the themes of how the philosopher relates to the non-philosophers (5), the distinctive *self-relation* at the heart of the philosophical life (6) and the philosopher’s way of relating to kindred spirits (7). The latter may be overtly friendly, like Aristotle’s stance towards Plato, or antagonistic, like Epicurus’ “rage” against Plato – or Nietzsche’s “rage” against Socrates.

BGE 5 begins: “What provokes one to look at all philosophers half suspiciously, half mockingly, is not that one discovers again and again how innocent they are – how often and how easily they make mistakes and go astray; in short, their childishness and childlikeness – but that they are not honest enough in how they go about things although they all make a lot of virtuous noise when the problem of truthfulness is touched upon even remotely.”⁶⁴ In this aphorism, Nietzsche inhabits (and amplifies) the rhetorical perspective of a skeptical modern scholar, approaching the history of philosophy and being confronted by what appears to him as the spectacle of “a series of refuted systems,” as Nietzsche puts it in BGE 204.⁶⁵ As examples, Nietzsche mentions Spinoza and Kant, two of the most notoriously elaborate system-builders, and alludes to a third, Hegel: “They all pose as if they had discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic (as opposed to the mystics of every rank, who are more honest and doltish – and talk of ‘inspiration’); while at bottom it is an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of ‘inspiration’ – most

⁶⁴ BGE 5. Translation modified.

⁶⁵ BGE 204.

often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract – that they defend with reasons they have sought after the fact.”⁶⁶

At first, Nietzsche’s point seems to be that the philosophical enterprise is inherently futile and self-deceived. Philosophers take themselves to be engaged in the disinterested pursuit of truth, when really they merely construct doctrines or systems which provide elaborate justifications for how they *want* or *need* to view the world, like the metaphysicians in BGE 2. The arguments they make are specious “after the fact” justifications for the “values” motivating their inquiry. At bottom, they are not really engaged in inquiry at all, but in “advocacy”: “They are all advocates who resent that name.”⁶⁷ Although they are dishonest, they are not Platonic liars, but self-deceivers. If they refuse to admit to others that their arguments are rationalizations of “prejudices” they lack the “courage” to question, it is because in the first place they refuse to admit it to themselves. As Nietzsche says elsewhere, “Error... is not blindness. Error is cowardice.”⁶⁸

Nietzsche adopts a very common modern reaction to the history of philosophy and amplifies it to a hyperbolic degree, thereby provoking the reader to ask: With what authority does he claim that “all philosophers” are self-deceived? Might Nietzsche himself not be in the grip of his own anti-philosophical prejudice? Furthermore, the careful reader wonders how this aphorism can be reconciled with the conception of “philosophy” as “beyond good and evil” with which Nietzsche concluded the preceding aphorism. The formula “a philosophy that risks this by that token alone places itself beyond good and evil” is followed *immediately* by mockery of

⁶⁶ BGE 5.

⁶⁷ BGE 5.

⁶⁸ EH Preface 3.

“all philosophers” as gripped by moral prejudice, which is very jarring. Still further, how can this aphorism be reconciled with Nietzsche’s fulsome praise of philosophy in many other parts of the book, for example when he describes “philosophy” as “real *power* of spirituality, real *profundity* of spiritual perception”?⁶⁹ The self-deceivers of BGE 5 appear to lack any such depth of perception.

One might suggest that Nietzsche was carelessly using the word “philosophy” in different senses in BGE 4 and 5. However, a close reading of the aphorism suggests that Nietzsche knows exactly what he is doing. The mockery of “all philosophers” is ironic; the last laugh is on the modern scholar. Nietzsche says that the suspicious thing about philosophers is *not* that they are “innocent” and “childish,” *not* that they often and easily “make mistakes.” Rather, “they are not honest enough,” although they all talk virtuously about “truthfulness” (cf. BGE 1). But doesn’t their dishonesty consist primarily in self-deception rather than in deception of others? Nietzsche carefully says that “they all pose [*stellen sich*] as if” they have arrived at their “real opinions” through a “cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic.” This is very ambiguous. The claim that all philosophers “pose as if” this were true could mean that they *know* that this isn’t really true. Are they adopting a pose, behaving theatrically, as Nietzsche suggests in BGE 7, when he mentions “the grandiose manner, the *mise-en-scène* at which Plato and his disciples were expert”?⁷⁰ Rather than self-deceivedly erring, Nietzsche implies that philosophers know exactly what they’re up to. Nietzsche *contrasts* the philosophers with “the mystics,” religious figures, who are “more honest” than the philosophers; when they claim to be

⁶⁹ BGE 252.

⁷⁰ BGE 7.

“inspired” by God, they may be self-deceived or just self-deluded, but they surely believe it themselves. Philosophers are *not* so “innocent” – unsurprisingly, if they are “beyond good and evil.”

If “all philosophers” tend to be dishonest in their manner of self-presentation, perhaps they are dishonest not just about how they arrived at their opinions, but also about what their “real opinions” really are. Nietzsche’s formulation carefully leaves this possibility open. In BGE 289, he suggests that a “hermit” will “doubt whether a philosopher could *possibly* have ‘ultimate and real’ opinions.”⁷¹ Even if this doubt might eventually be resolved, Nietzsche’s reference in BGE 30 to “the difference between the exoteric and the esoteric, formerly known to philosophers” suggests that in many cases it won’t be easy to figure out what those “real opinions” are.⁷² That the only other occurrence of the phrase “real opinions” in the entire book occurs in an aphorism about esotericism (BGE 289) supports this suggestion.

When Nietzsche says that philosophers are “wily spokesmen” (quite unlike the honest, doltish mystics) for *their* “prejudices,” that they take an assumption, a hunch, or “a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract,” and defend it “after the fact” with reasons, rather than claiming that they are self-deceivers, he could mean that they are wily *deceivers*. In the doctrinal presentation of their thought, they flatter a variety of common “prejudices” (e.g. that what everyone *really* wants is “power”) which they artfully make their own without falling prey to them in their thought. Philosophers are erotic knowers;⁷³ they understand human desire, so they use the tools of their art, “reverent” rhetoric and abstract “concept-spinning,”⁷⁴ to give their

⁷¹ BGE 289.

⁷² BGE 30.

⁷³ Cf. TI The Problem of Socrates 8: “Socrates was also a great *erotic*.”

⁷⁴ Cf. TI Raids of an Untimely Man 23.

audience what they want. If they are “advocates” who don’t want to be recognized as such, it’s because they won’t be effective advocates unless they give the appearance of sincerity, as when Socrates at his trial claimed to be an inept orator.⁷⁵

Given that a major (implicit) theme of this aphorism is esotericism, it is fitting that it is one of the most deliberately misleading aphorisms in the book; there is an unusually strong contrast between the rhetorical pose Nietzsche adopts on the surface and the concealed meaning at which he hints. Rather than suddenly reversing course, this aphorism continues to develop the same conception of philosophy he introduced in the first four aphorisms. Real philosophers are exceptionally self-conscious, not exceptionally self-deceived. They are reflectively aware of the “instinctive” character of “conscious thinking,” including their own, but they conceal this awareness, posing as “divinely unconcerned” dialecticians. But why *must* philosophers engage in esotericism? And what about Nietzsche, who seems so outspoken?

Nietzsche doesn’t fully answer the first question yet or explain the particular motives for *his* variant of esotericism. The preceding aphorism suggests that esotericism will somehow be rooted in the recognition that “untruth is a condition of life,” in a deep epistemological sense, but also in a crudely political sense. Furthermore, if philosophers are “beyond good and evil,” even if they don’t behave like Cesare Borgia, they will presumably have no compunction about employing deceptive rhetoric to promote their “real interests.”⁷⁶ But what are a philosopher’s real interests? That is the theme of the next aphorism, but I will turn first to the concluding examples of Kant and Spinoza, which offer some hints.

⁷⁵ Plato, *Apology* 17a-18a. In AOM 94, Nietzsche describes the death of Socrates as a “well-hidden suicide.”

⁷⁶ BGE 6.

Nietzsche writes, “The equally stiff and decorous Tartuffery of old Kant as he lures as onto the dialectical bypaths that lead to his ‘categorical imperative’ – really lead astray and seduce – this spectacle makes us smile, as we are fastidious and find it quite amusing to watch closely the subtle tricks of old moralists and preachers of morals. Or consider the hocus-pocus of mathematical form with which Spinoza clad his philosophy – really ‘the love of *his* wisdom,’ to render that word fairly and squarely – in mail and mask, to strike terror at the very outset into the heart of any assailant who should dare to glance at that invincible maiden and Pallas Athena: how much personal timidity and vulnerability this masquerade of a sick hermit betrays!”⁷⁷

The first thing to note is that although Nietzsche gives Kant and Spinoza as his only two examples mentioned by name in an aphorism meant to convey something about the congenital dishonesty of “all philosophers,” in BGE 211, on the difference between “genuine philosophers” and “philosophical laborers,” who engage in a kind of reflective systematization of inherited values rather than questioning such values and “creating” new ones, Nietzsche gives Kant (along with Hegel) as one of his two examples of a “philosophical laborer.”⁷⁸ Kant is emphatically *not* a philosopher in the strict sense. This suggests that there may be an important difference between the functions of Kant and Spinoza in BGE 5. A close reading confirms this suspicion.

Nietzsche suggests that Kant’s intention as a writer was to “preach morals” by persuading the reader of his argument for the categorical imperative. Nietzsche ascribes hypocrisy (“Tartuffery”) to “old Kant” *himself*. Nietzsche describes this argument as a “trick,”

⁷⁷ BGE 5.

⁷⁸ BGE 211.

which leads the reader astray, but there is no hint in Nietzsche's statement that Kant was being insincere with his readers, rather than dishonest with himself – at least in his *moral* philosophy. Nietzsche's likening of "old Kant" to Molière's Tartuffe, a religious hypocrite and old lecher, suggests that Kant may have been insincere in "retaining the appearance of religious belief," as he put it in 1874.⁷⁹ What is more, this comparison suggests that, in trying to "seduce" (*verführen*) his readers down "dialectical bypaths" leading to his moral doctrine, "old Kant" is comparable to a lecher who draws innocent young women into his bedchamber, in order to gratify his lust. By contrast, Spinoza is a "virgin" (*Jungfrau*), who seeks to *repel* "assailants" who might rob him of his innocence. Nietzsche suggests that the moral impulse is closely related to lust, while there is something chaste about real philosophers.⁸⁰

The example of Kant indicates that those who seem like philosophers when one first "looks at" them may not be so on closer inspection. We shouldn't be surprised, then, that in Nietzsche's statement about Kant, the word "philosophy" doesn't occur. By contrast, Nietzsche states that Spinoza "clad his philosophy" in a "hocus-pocus of mathematical form," the famous geometrical method. Nietzsche describes this presentation as a kind of armor and weaponry Spinoza used to "strike terror" into any "assailant" who "dared to glance" at him (cf. "what provokes one to *look at* all philosophers..."). Unlike Kant's argument for the categorical imperative, Spinoza's elaborate presentation wasn't designed to convince ("seduce") the reader, but *to protect Spinoza himself* and "his philosophy" from "assailants." Nietzsche alludes to the

⁷⁹ SE 3.

⁸⁰ Cf. TSZ 1:13 On Chastity. This adds another dimension of irony to the suggestion in the Preface to *BGE* that "truth is a woman." If moral dogmatists are inept lechers, does that mean that real philosophers are comparable to maidens, whom dogmatists seek to rob of their innocence, i.e. "seduce" into dogmatism?

incident when Spinoza was attacked by a religious zealot and barely escaped with his life; famously, Spinoza kept the knife-torn cloak he was wearing, as a reminder that the people don't always love philosophy.⁸¹ Nietzsche intimates that Spinoza's *presentation* of his thought was a suit of armor ("mail and mask")⁸² intended to protect Spinoza from religious persecution and his books from censorship, presumably by giving the impression that he was more pious than he really was and making it difficult to figure out his "real opinions." Spinoza's self-presentation was a "masquerade," a deceptive and theatrical pose, like Plato's *mise-en-scène*.

In short, Nietzsche suggests that Kant is an example of self-deception, while Spinoza is an example of philosophical deceptiveness. Self-deception is presumably unavoidable for the "philosophical laborer," who has an unusually high degree of philosophical self-awareness, but still refuses to question inherited values or "popular valuations."⁸³ By contrast, Spinoza illustrates two reasons why "genuine philosophers" practice esotericism – to protect themselves from religious persecution and to ensure that they circumvent the censors and receive a posthumous reception. Spinoza is a good example to illustrate these points, because he suffered

⁸¹ Nietzsche certainly knew this very famous story from Kuno Fischer, his main source of information about Spinoza's philosophy. Cf. Kuno Fischer, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie. Erster Band: Descartes und Seine Schule. Zweiter Theil* (Bassermann: Heidelberg, 1865), 112. Fischer's source is Pierre Bayle's article on Spinoza. It is unknown whether Nietzsche read Bayle's article, but he mentions Bayle (in connection with Lessing, notorious as a Spinozist) in the next chapter, in BGE 28. Fischer (112) concludes there's no reason to doubt the story ("diese so beglaubigte Tatsache ist nicht zu bezweifeln"); by contrast, Steven Nadler regards it as implausible. Cf. Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 110.

⁸² Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 18: "The exoteric teaching was needed for protecting philosophy. It was the *armor* in which philosophy had to appear. It was needed for political reasons. It was the form in which philosophy became visible to the political community. It was 'political' philosophy." (Emphasis added.)

⁸³ Cf. GS 193: "Kant wanted to prove, in a way that would dumbfound the whole world, that the whole world was right: that was the secret joke of this soul. He wrote against the scholars in favor of popular prejudice, but for scholars and not for the people."

from persecution and censorship, but still managed to write in a way that disguised the extent of his heterodoxy and allowed him to be interpreted by many of his readers, not as an atheist, but as a “God-intoxicated man” with idiosyncratic religious opinions. Nietzsche at any rate presents Spinoza as a canny philosopher, not as a “drunkard of God.”⁸⁴ But the example of Spinoza also provokes the reader to reflect on the difference between Spinoza’s milieu and late modern Europe, where philosophers no longer need fear this kind of persecution. As Nietzsche writes elsewhere, “We more intellectual men of this age, we know our advantage well enough... We will hardly be decapitated, imprisoned or exiled; not even our books will be banned or burned. The age loves the intellect; it loves and needs us.”⁸⁵

Why, then, must late modern philosophers such as Nietzsche *still* practice esotericism? This aphorism raises this question pointedly by drawing an implicit parallel between Spinoza and Nietzsche. The phrase “personal timidity and vulnerability of a sick hermit” cannot help but call Nietzsche himself to mind. Nietzsche is notorious for being a sick recluse who “struck terror” into his readers and concealed his “personal timidity,” not with the imposing geometrical form of his books, but with ferocious rhetoric which praises cruelty and war. But Nietzsche was no longer “vulnerable” to persecution at the hands of religious zealots in the manner of Spinoza; he speaks often of “danger” and “risk,” but publishing his thought was no longer “dangerous” or “risky” as it had been for pre-modern or early modern philosophers.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ BGE 205. Nietzsche alludes here to the German romantic view of Spinoza as a mystical pantheist.

⁸⁵ GS 379. Translation modified.

⁸⁶ The first contemporary reviewer of *BGE* observed, “Nietzsche... allows one virtue ‘from which we free spirits cannot be separated’: *candor* [*Redlichkeit*]. Nietzsche demonstrates this candor throughout his book, which two hundred years ago would have landed him on the gallows.” Joseph Viktor Widmann, “Nietzsche’s Dangerous Book” (1886), trans. Tim Hyde and Lysane Fauvel, *New Nietzsche Studies* 4, Nos. 1 & 2 (2000): 199. On the other hand, Nietzsche himself claimed that in *BGE*, “refinement in form, in intention, in the art of *silence* is in the foreground.” EH *Beyond Good and Evil* 2.

Nietzsche raises this question here without answering it. Elsewhere, he suggests, in Tocqueville-like fashion, that toleration of diversity and freedom of speech do not cultivate freedom of thought; rather, they lead to the tyranny of public opinion, “nook-and-cranny” overspecialization in intellectual life and profound spiritual complacency: “The dangers for a philosopher’s development are indeed so manifold today that one may doubt whether this fruit can still ripen at all.”⁸⁷ Philosophy faces a new danger in the modern world – extinction through toleration, not through *auto-da-fé*. By contrast, “the long unfreedom of the spirit, the mistrustful constraint in the communicability of thoughts, the discipline thinkers imposed on themselves to think within the directions laid down by a court or church, or under Aristotelian presuppositions... all this, however forced, capricious, hard, gruesome and anti-rational, has shown itself to be the means through which the European spirit has been trained to strength, ruthless curiosity and subtle mobility.”⁸⁸ Nietzsche’s “gruesome” rhetoric is designed to shock his liberal age out of its complacency, not to protect him from “assailants.”

Finally, the example of Spinoza reminds us that the anti-philosophical perspective Nietzsche inhabits in this aphorism (“what provokes one to look at all philosophers half suspiciously, half mockingly...”) is not just that of the modern skeptic who sees in philosophy nothing but “a series of refuted systems.”⁸⁹ This kind of skepticism about philosophy is a modern secular variant on the perennial popular suspicion and mockery of philosophy, given voice for example by ancient satirists like Lucian, which has often taken the form of pious

⁸⁷ BGE 205. Note the contemptuous reference to “freedom of the press and newspaper-reading” in the Preface.

⁸⁸ BGE 188.

⁸⁹ BGE 204.

hostility. For example, Leibniz was suspiciously and mockingly nicknamed *Glaubenichts* by the commoners.⁹⁰

While BGE 5 begins with the phrase “what provokes one to look at all philosophers,” BGE 6 begins with the phrase “gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been.” Nietzsche switches from an outside perspective, concerning how *one* “looks at” philosophers, to an inside perspective (“it has become clear *to me*”), speaking now as a philosopher himself. The phrase recalls BGE 3 – “I say to myself.” We are about to be presented with one of Nietzsche’s “highest insights.”⁹¹

Nietzsche begins, “Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the self-confession [*Selbstbekenntnis*] of its author and a kind of involuntary and unnoted [*ungewollter und unvermerkter*] *mémoires*; also that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown.”⁹² At first, Nietzsche’s point seems to be similar to the surface teaching of the preceding aphorism – philosophers take themselves to be engaged in the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, but really they are in the business of producing “after the fact” metaphysical justifications for their moral convictions. Philosophy is the unconsciously motivated and un-self-aware expression of the philosopher’s unquestioned “values”: “Indeed, if one would explain

⁹⁰ “Leibniz did not attend church often, and his scanty church attendance, along with his refusal to take communion, earned him a reputation in Hanover as a non-believer. Locals playfully referred to him as ‘Glaubenichts,’ that is, one who believes in nothing. While it seems farfetched to suppose that Leibniz had no religious beliefs at all, it is far from clear what beliefs he did have.” Lloyd Strickland, Introduction to *Leibniz on God and Religion*, trans. and ed. Lloyd Strickland (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 10.

⁹¹ Cf. BGE 30.

⁹² BGE 6. Translation modified.

how the most bizarre [*entlegensten*] metaphysical claims of a philosopher came about, it is always well (and wise) to ask first: at what morality does it (does *he*) aim?”⁹³

However, a close reading suggests that Nietzsche’s point is rather more complex than it seems. What does Nietzsche mean by the qualification “every *great* philosophy”? Presumably not every “genuine philosopher” need be a “great philosopher.” I suggest that a “great” philosopher is one who has had a profound historical influence through his books – or through being immortalized in the books of others, like Socrates. A “great philosophy,” then, is a literary corpus, which inevitably reflects something about the life and personality of “its author.” As we saw from the commentary on Spinoza’s “hocus-pocus of mathematical form” in the preceding aphorism (and the way Nietzsche introduced BGE 3, which the first line of this aphorism calls to mind), the first chapter of *BGE* is not just a treatise on philosophy, but also a reflection on the history of philosophy and a guide to reading philosophical books properly. The use of the word *mémoires* (a literal French rendering of the title of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, to which Nietzsche probably alludes⁹⁴) suggests that in the first sentence of this aphorism, he is once again advising us on how to read such books – as autobiographies (or “recollections”) in disguise. But this need not imply that philosophers themselves were unaware of this fact. It also

⁹³ BGE 6. Translation modified.

⁹⁴ Kaufmann renders *mémoires* in the singular, “memoir,” with no justification. Especially given the importance of Socrates in *BGE* (and the importance of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* for Nietzsche), I find it difficult to find any other explanation for this unusual choice of word. It is unlikely that it is a mere literary flourish. Nietzsche might also be alluding playfully to the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis* – the doctrine that all our knowledge, unbeknownst to ourselves (*ungewollt und unvermerkt*), consists in “recollections” of what we have already learned (cf. BGE 20, where Nietzsche describes philosophical thinking as a kind of “remembering again,” *ein Wiedererinnern*). Surely Nietzsche’s unusual choice of word is meant to provoke the “slow reader” to wonder what significant associations it might have.

need not imply that such books convey nothing of general significance about the world – about the philosophical life or about nature itself.

But doesn't Nietzsche describe "every great philosophy" as an "involuntary and unnoted" *mémoires*? This formulation is careful and ambiguous. *Ungewollt* could mean "involuntary" in the sense of "inadvertent," but it could also simply mean "unchosen." Nietzsche could mean that a philosopher has no choice but to philosophize, it belongs to his nature – like a "germ of life" that will grow into a "whole plant" so long as it receives the proper nourishment. In the Preface, Nietzsche describes Plato as "the most beautiful growth [*Gewächs*] of antiquity."⁹⁵ *Unvermerkt* is a still odder choice of word. It could mean "unnoticed," but it could also mean "un-remarked-upon" or "unnoted" – its contrary, *vermerkt*, most often refers to a note one makes, for example in a calendar or in the margins of a text. Neither word need imply that the philosopher doesn't know what he's doing – taken together, they could simply mean that he has no choice but to express his "nature" in the books he writes and that (with some exceptions, such as Montaigne, Rousseau and Nietzsche himself) the philosopher typically doesn't draw attention to the unavoidably autobiographical or self-revelatory character of his writing. If the purpose of this statement was merely to convey the view that philosophers inevitably fail to understand their own real motivations, he could have made this point more unambiguously, as he did in the case of the metaphysicians in BGE 2.

Nietzsche then adds, as a *further* thought ("also"), that "the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy" – no longer just every "great" philosophy – "had constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown." The rhetorical context distracts the

⁹⁵ BGE Preface.

reader from the fact that Nietzsche may well be making a very “Straussian” point – in order to understand a philosopher, one must grasp his deliberate “intentions” (*Absichten*). In BGE 3, he suggested that one must read philosophers “between the lines.” Perhaps Nietzsche means that one must unearth a philosopher’s *unconscious* “intentions,” his “instincts” or “valuations,” which the philosopher himself couldn’t possibly have understood, but Nietzsche’s formulation leaves both possibilities open. The contrast “moral (or immoral) intentions” calls to mind the examples of Kant (moral) and Spinoza (immoral) in the preceding aphorism.⁹⁶ Could it be that “genuine philosophers” (unlike Kant) have *both* kinds of literary intention – they “preach morals” while also looking out for their “real interests”?

Nietzsche suggests that the philosophical life is always the most important theme of a truly philosophical book, whatever other subjects it might discuss – a very Platonic thought. But what about the “bizarre metaphysical claims” one often finds in such books? We must try to discover what “morality” the philosopher is “aiming at” by means of these claims – again, an ambiguous formulation, which might refer to strategic esotericism, not necessarily to self-deception about one’s real motives. Strauss points out that in the later aphorism on philosophical laborers, Nietzsche virtually identifies the “moral” with the “political.”⁹⁷ Strauss suggests that juxtaposing these aphorisms leads to one to infer that when a real philosopher makes “bizarre metaphysical claims,” one must understand his political intentions in doing so.⁹⁸ The example of Spinoza has already given us a sense of what this might involve. We are prepared to approach Nietzsche’s own metaphysical doctrines with the proper caution.

⁹⁶ Even though Kant is likened to an old lecher, and Spinoza to a virtuous maiden, anxiously concerned about preserving her innocence.

⁹⁷ Strauss, *On Nietzsche’s “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”*, 246. Cf. BGE 211.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 246-247.

Nietzsche continues, “Accordingly, I do not believe that a ‘drive to knowledge’ is the father of philosophy; but rather that another drive has, here as elsewhere, employed knowledge (and misknowledge – *Verkenntniss*) as a mere instrument.”⁹⁹ The oddly cautious, perhaps gently ironic phrase “I do not believe” (contrast “I say to myself” or “it has become clear to me”) is striking. So is the fact that “drive to knowledge” appears in scare quotes. What, then, *is* the “father of philosophy” – and what is philosophy itself? Nietzsche now introduces a very bizarre (although not metaphysical) reflection on philosophy as a kind of mastery, while alluding to the Socratic “demon,”¹⁰⁰ which however still leaves it unclear what “philosophy” itself actually is: “But anyone who considers the basic drives of man to see to what extent they have been at play just here as *inspiring* spirits (or demons and kobolds) will find that all of them have done philosophy [*Philosophie getrieben*] at some time – and that every single one of them would like only too well to represent just *itself* as the ultimate purpose of existence and the legitimate *master* of all the other drives. For every drive wants to be master [*Herr*] – and it attempts to philosophize *in that spirit*.”¹⁰¹

Introducing the phrase “the basic drives of man,” Nietzsche proposes that these drives are in a perpetual contest for mastery. For example, when we are overcome by hunger, all our other drives are in a way subdued by our hunger until we have satisfied it. But why describe this struggle for dominance among the drives as “philosophizing”? Nietzsche suggests that philosophizing itself consists in the attempt to “represent oneself” as “the ultimate purpose of

⁹⁹ BGE 6.

¹⁰⁰ Socrates famously argues that *eros* is not a god, but rather a “demon.” Plato, *Symposium* 202d-e. Could Nietzsche be suggesting that *eros* is somehow the father of philosophy, despite the peculiar chastity of philosophers? In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche speaks favorably of Plato’s “philosophical eroticism.” Cf. TI Raids of an Untimely Man 23.

¹⁰¹ BGE 6.

existence” and therefore as “the legitimate master” of – well, everything else. In the *Philebus*, Socrates remarks, “All the wise agree – whereby they merely exalt themselves – that intellect (*nous*) is king of heaven and earth. And perhaps they are right.”¹⁰² Does Nietzsche mean that philosophy is the drive, not to discover the truth about the world, but rather to reshape the world in thought in order to think of oneself as its final cause and creator, “the most spiritual will to power,”¹⁰³ such that one can by analogy describe, say, hunger or the sexual drive as “philosophizing” insofar as they seek to overpower our other drives? Nietzsche described Spinoza as a “Pallas Athena,” a virginal *goddess* – the first of many explicit suggestions in the book that there is something godlike about philosophers.¹⁰⁴

However, while Nietzsche’s rhetorical pose certainly invites such a radically “constructionist” interpretation, it is difficult to reconcile with his suggestion in BGE 3 that philosophical thinking, as a kind of thinking about thinking (*noesis tes noeseos*), can achieve a kind of knowledge of nature – or with his description of such thinking as a “physio-psychology” which is also the “queen of the sciences” in BGE 23. At the same time, it would only raise the question: What is the status of Nietzsche’s thinking *about* philosophy as “the most spiritual will to power”? I suggest that Nietzsche means rather to indicate that the philosophical drive can achieve a kind of authentic mastery over “all the other drives” which the other drives *cannot* achieve (even if they temporarily overpower their competitors), which makes possible an integrated personality and an elevated mode of life, while the philosophical drive *is* a genuine

¹⁰² Plato, *Philebus* 28c. Translation is my own.

¹⁰³ BGE 9.

¹⁰⁴ BGE 5.

drive for knowledge,¹⁰⁵ albeit for knowledge of the “fundamental problems” and thus very different from the mechanical “drive for knowledge” characteristic of the scholar, which reflects an impoverished way of life. This is why the other drives can be described as “philosophizing” when they seek (but inevitably fail) to achieve such mastery.

Nietzsche concludes by contrasting the philosopher with the scholar: “To be sure: among scholars who are really scientific men, things may be different – ‘better,’ if you like – there you may really find something like a drive for knowledge, some small, independent clockwork that, once well wound, works on vigorously *without* any essential participation from all the other drives of the scholar. The real ‘interests’ of the scholar therefore lie usually somewhere else – say, in his family, or in making money, or in politics. Indeed, it is almost a matter of total indifference whether his little machine is placed at this or that spot in science, and whether the ‘promising’ young worker turns himself into a good philologist or an expert on fungi or a chemist: it does not *characterize* him that he becomes this or that. In the philosopher, conversely, there is nothing whatever that is impersonal; and above all, his morality bears decided and decisive witness to *who he is* – that is, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to each other.”¹⁰⁶

The philosopher’s real interest is in philosophizing; the scholar *turns himself into* an expert on a subject in which he has no “real interest,” in part because merely empirical inquiries (in contrast to *Grundprobleme*) don’t concern man’s deepest spiritual needs, even if they satisfy a passing curiosity. The scholar becomes something he is not, while the philosopher becomes

¹⁰⁵ Hence the scare quotes in the initial formulation. In this aphorism, Nietzsche chooses to reserve the formula “drive for knowledge” for the scholar’s “little machine,” but elsewhere, he unhesitatingly ascribes a “passion for knowledge” to the philosopher. Cf. BGE 210 and D 429.

¹⁰⁶ BGE 6.

“who he is.” Nietzsche suggests there is a kind of self-alienation intrinsic to the scholarly life. But in the concluding sentence, Nietzsche contrasts the philosopher, no longer just with the scholar, but with *any* other human type. It is the *distinguishing* mark of the philosopher that in him “there is nothing whatever that is impersonal.” Alluding to Aristotle’s contest of lives,¹⁰⁷ while adding – in modern, post-Christian fashion – the alternative of a life devoted to the family, Nietzsche suggests that *anyone* whose “real interests” lie in a sphere other than philosophizing, for example in money-making, in politics or in family life, will lead a life that is in some elusive sense “impersonal” or self-alienated, while only philosophy allows a human being to become “who they are” (cf. Exodus 3:14), to achieve the distinctive kind of *self-relation* according to which their “morality,” their way of life, is in harmony with their individual being. Given the importance throughout the book of religion as an alternative to philosophy, its absence in this aphorism is surprising, especially after one has grasped the general import of Nietzsche’s suggestion. Religion is absent in part because modern scholars tend not to have “religious interests” in the conventional sense,¹⁰⁸ but it may also be because Nietzsche regards everyone who is not a philosopher as in some sense “religious.” Thus it is not the scholar *as* scholar, but the scholar as non-philosopher, whom Nietzsche ultimately contrasts with the philosopher – the scholar as an ordinary person who happens to be a scholar.

In this very important aphorism, Nietzsche intimates – alluding to the contest of lives in Aristotle’s *Ethics* – that philosophy is the best way of life because it allows one to achieve a kind of self-mastery which fulfills the deepest desire or need of a human being *as* a human

¹⁰⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095a-1096a.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. BGE 58.

being. It is important that the scholar has an unintegrated plurality of “real interests,” while the philosopher, it is implied, has *one* “real” interest – philosophy. But the philosopher is not a “pure spirit.”¹⁰⁹ The philosopher will also have other interests – in money-making, in politics, in the family, in scholarly pursuits – but these, Nietzsche implies, are somehow “mastered” and integrated by the philosophical drive, such that “in him there is nothing whatever that is impersonal.”

Nietzsche implies that philosophizing has a “higher value for life” than any other activity. He proposes that an analysis of human desire, “the basic drives of man,” will show that the philosophical life is the kind of life that all human beings in a sense *want* to live but most *cannot* live (note the scare quotes around the scholar’s real “interests”), and can thus only dimly understand. This aphorism raises many questions Nietzsche will have to answer as the book proceeds. What exactly is the nature of this self-relation? Why must a life which finds its organizing purpose in money-making, political engagement, romantic or familial love, artistic creativity, specialized scientific research or religious devotion fail to achieve this mastery and result in self-alienation? While BGE 3 presents an anticipatory sketch of Nietzsche’s “physio-psychology,” BGE 6 presents a sketch of the humanistic dimension of his psychology, the core of which will be an unavoidably somewhat indirect account of *his* way of life.

Nietzsche concludes this sequence of aphorisms by coming back to the surface at a new angle. Having looked at philosophy itself “from the outside” and “from the inside,” Nietzsche now looks at it “from the inside looking out,” as one philosopher observing two others – Plato and Epicurus – sparring in public, on the stage of world-history. Nietzsche implies that the

¹⁰⁹ Cf. BGE Preface.

philosopher's mastery of his drives manifests itself externally as a contest for influence with other philosophers, albeit a playful one which appears simply "venomous" to the untrained eye: "How malicious philosophers can be! I know of nothing more venomous than the joke Epicurus permitted himself against Plato and the Platonists; he called them *Dionysiokolakes*. That means literally – and this is the foreground meaning – 'flatterers of Dionysios,' in other words, tyrant's baggage and lickspittles; but in addition to this he also wants to say, 'they are all *actors*, there is nothing genuine about them (for *Dionysokolax* was a popular name for an actor). And the latter is really the malice that Epicurus aimed at Plato: he was peeved by the grandiose manner, the *mise-en-scène* at which Plato and his disciples were expert – at which Epicurus was not an expert – he, that old schoolmaster from Samos, who sat, hidden away, in his little garden at Athens and wrote three hundred books – who knows? Perhaps from rage and ambition against Plato? It took a hundred years until Greece found out who this garden god, Epicurus, had been. – Did they find out?"¹¹⁰

Speaking now as a philosopher himself, Nietzsche patiently explains the secret *intention* ("he also wants to say") of an Epicurean joke. This secret meaning itself concerns esotericism (Plato's theatrics) – and the "venomous" joke turns out to be a kind of flattery, a form of praise for the artistry to which Epicurus aspired, but at which Plato excelled. Perhaps Nietzsche's apparent "rage" against Socrates and Plato should not be taken at face value – it may be a "venomous joke" and a concealed form of praise for their artistry. What about Epicurus? Nietzsche carefully avoids attributing "rage" to Epicurus. He merely raises the question: "Who knows?" Otherwise put: Who is competent to decide? Nietzsche himself, one infers – he has just

¹¹⁰ BGE 7. Translation modified.

unpacked the secret meaning of an Epicurean joke! Due to his inept theatrics, it took a century for Epicurus to become famous throughout Greece – but did “Greece” ever really discover “who he had been”? The phrase calls to mind the statement about the philosopher in the preceding aphorism – “who he is.” The description of Epicurus as a “hidden” god calls to mind Spinoza as a goddess clad in armor. The preceding aphorism intimated that there is something godlike about the philosophical drive itself. If Epicurus, then, was a real philosopher, a kind of mortal god, only those akin to him (including Nietzsche) can comprehend “who” he really was: “What a philosopher is, that is hard to learn because it cannot be taught – one must know it, from experience.”¹¹¹

Marx famously claimed that “the philosophers” have “merely” interpreted the world in various different ways, whereas the important thing is to change it.¹¹² Nietzsche suggests that philosophers have always tried not only to understand, but also to change the world, even if they regard the “legislative” part of their task as less important. In establishing philosophical traditions, Plato and Epicurus each tried to make the world safe for philosophy – and also to contribute in a philanthropic manner to civilization and to the “enhancement” of man. Plato was more successful – unlike Epicurus, his books survived many centuries of unpredictable cultural upheaval and censorship of subversive ideas. But even Epicurus, who took shelter in a garden, had ambitions as a “cultural legislator” – he tried to establish a *tradition* of garden-philosophizing! If Epicurus wasn’t really “enraged” at Plato, he was surely ambitious, perhaps even “peevish” at his relative lack of success. He was competing with Plato for influence and

¹¹¹ BGE 213.

¹¹² Karl Marx, “Thesen über Feuerbach” (1845), in *Philosophische und ökonomische Schriften*, eds. Johannes Rohbeck and Peggy H. Breitenstein (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2018), 49. Translation is my own.

prestige, much like Nietzsche: “Maybe this old Plato is my real great antagonist? But how proud I am to have such an antagonist!”¹¹³ Nietzsche doesn’t yet explain why philosophers engage in this playful politics of friendship and enmity,¹¹⁴ or why philosophical thinking has this effect on their *thumos* – moderating their political ambition in the conventional sense, while heightening it in another.

I conclude with a note on the Epicurean joke itself. Epicurus alludes to Plato’s more crudely political ambitions – his ill-fated trip to Syracuse to be court philosopher for the tyrant Dionysios. The “secret meaning” of the joke may have nothing to do with the surface meaning – but it’s more likely to be meant (by Nietzsche if not by Epicurus himself) as a further elaboration of the surface meaning. In stepping forth as actors on the stage of history, where they are invariably misunderstood by most of their audience, philosophers are above all trying to win the favor of “tyrants,” who might then choose to protect them rather than to persecute them, but who might also in turn be influenced by them as philosophical advisors. Perhaps Nietzsche has in mind “tyrants” not just in a straightforward political sense, but also in a spiritual or

¹¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche to Paul Deussen, November 16, 1887. In Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe in 8 Bänden. Bd. 8: Januar 1887 – Januar 1889*, eds. Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari, 2nd. ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 6. Translation is my own.

¹¹⁴ Note the odd reference in BGE 5 to *warning* “an enemy or friend.” Why would one warn an “enemy,” unless they were really a kind of friend? Strauss suggests that Aristophanes’ lampooning of Socrates in the *Clouds* is a playful warning addressed to a rival who is also a friend: “It is no more plausible to say that the *Clouds* is an accusation of Socrates than to say that it is a friendly warning addressed to Socrates – a warning informed by a mixture of admiration and envy.” Leo Strauss, “The Problem of Socrates,” in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 105. Nietzsche’s hyperbolic exclamation that he knows *nothing* “more venomous” than this Epicurean joke reminds the “slow reader” of Nietzsche’s mention in the Preface of the “hemlock” (*Schierling*) which Socrates was made to drink. However playfully “malicious” philosophers might be when they compete with one another for influence and prestige, such playful “malice” cannot compare to the suspicion and very real malice which they provoke among non-philosophers, and the dangers such malice may bring upon them. Cf. BGE 25.

cultural sense,¹¹⁵ as when Pindar (famously cited by Herodotus) called *nomos* “king of all.” Further, the name of the tyrant Dionysios calls to mind the Greek god Dionysos, whom Nietzsche “flatters” in BGE 295.¹¹⁶ BGE 7 obliquely draws our attention to the theological-political problem – the question of relationship between philosophy, religion and politics. It also raises the question – Who are the real “gods”? The gods of the people or the philosophers themselves?

§4. Philosophy and Religion in BGE 8-10

BGE 7 returns explicitly to the theme of BGE 1 – the history of philosophy. The reader now suspects that philosophers aren’t very “truthful” beings – at least not in their public speech, no matter how “reverent” it might appear. With this aphorism, Nietzsche brings the first sub-section (1-7) to an end. Having completed his preliminary elaboration of the meaning of philosophy, Nietzsche now makes a new beginning. In the next sub-section (8-10), he turns to philosophy’s relationship with religion, its great political and spiritual rival.

BGE 8 is very short and appears to be a frivolous joke: “There is a point in every philosophy when the philosopher’s ‘conviction’ appears on the stage – or to use the language of an ancient mystery: *Adventavit asinus, pulcher et fortissimus* [*The ass arrived, beautiful and most brave*].”¹¹⁷ But we have just learned that philosophical jokes always have a serious point. When a philosopher appears on “stage,” in his public self-presentation, he always brings with him a stupid (but “beautiful” and strong, load-bearing) “conviction.” But the scare quotes

¹¹⁵ Cf. BGE 242 on “*tyrants*, taking that word in every sense, including the most spiritual.”

¹¹⁶ BGE 295.

¹¹⁷ BGE 8.

indicate that the philosopher isn't really convinced by his apparent "conviction." It is more likely to be a "bizarre metaphysical claim" he employs for his own purposes. Nietzsche warns the reader that he is about to introduce his own signature "conviction" of this kind, "the will to power," in the very next aphorism.

In *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Strauss says that in an esoteric text, "the unity of knowledge and communication of knowledge," the esoteric meaning and the exoteric doctrine by means of which it is communicated, can "be compared to the combination of man and horse, although not to a centaur."¹¹⁸ In other words, knowledge and its particular form of communication are in principle *detachable*, like an ass and the load it bears. Nietzsche has already intimated that philosophical thought must be presented figuratively and indirectly, while the particular form this communication takes will vary from philosopher to philosopher. In this aphorism, Nietzsche's use of the "language" of an "ancient mystery," and the Christian resonances of "the ass" (Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey¹¹⁹), suggest that the difference between the esoteric and the exoteric corresponds to the difference between philosophy and religion. To the extent that philosophical thought is confused with its exoteric presentation, it will be transformed into a kind of religion. Although it is still unclear how this will apply to Nietzsche himself, who is *obviously* not "religious" in a conventional sense (despite his playful worship of Dionysos, to which he alluded in the preceding aphorism), in BGE 53, Nietzsche suggests that religiosity can also take "atheistic" forms.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 290.

¹¹⁹ Nietzsche makes this connection explicit in TSZ 4:18 The Ass Festival.

¹²⁰ BGE 53.

In this aphorism, Nietzsche emphasizes the *difference* between philosophy and religion, reflected politically in the *detachability* of philosophical thought from its unavoidably “religious” self-presentation. Without contradicting himself, in BGE 9, Nietzsche qualifies this perspective by bringing out the dynamic *psychological connection* between them, while in BGE 10, he will return to the question of their opposition, comprehending it now in a richer way. Aphorisms 8, 9 and 10 thus have the structure of “thesis,” “antithesis” and “synthesis,” illustrating in a new way his perspectival method: “The *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe *one* thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be.”¹²¹

BGE 9 takes up the idea of a “life according to nature,” common to all the ancient philosophical schools and adopted by Christianity. Taking the Stoics as his example, Nietzsche appears to ridicule the very notion: “You want to live ‘according to nature’? O you noble Stoics, what a deception of words [*welche Betrügerei der Worte*]! Think of a being [*ein Wesen*] like nature, wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time; imagine indifference itself as a power – how *could* you live according to this indifference? Living – is not that precisely wanting to be other than this nature? Is not living – estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different? And supposing your imperative ‘live according to nature’ meant at bottom as much as ‘live according to life’ – how could you not do that? Why make a principle of what you yourselves are and must be?”¹²²

¹²¹ OGM 3:12.

¹²² BGE 9. Translation modified.

The first indication that Nietzsche's own words are somewhat "deceptive" is that, while distinguishing "nature" from "life," he describes nature as "without justice" (*ohne Gerechtigkeit*) and life as consisting in "being unjust" (*Ungerechtsein*). So human life *does* have a *certain* resemblance to nature.¹²³ But most importantly, Nietzsche carefully *distinguishes* two senses of a "life according to nature" – a life that takes nature itself as a model and seeks to *imitate* nature and a life in accordance with one's *own* nature as the being one is. Nietzsche seems to ridicule the latter notion as farcically redundant – Why exhort someone to become who or what they already are? But Nietzsche *himself* frequently makes use of Pindar's maxim "Become who you are!" Already in BGE 6, Nietzsche had characterized the philosopher as the man who becomes "who he is" (*wer er ist*), in contrast to the scholar, who "turns himself into" something he is not.¹²⁴ To be sure, there is a tension throughout Nietzsche's writings between his exhortatory rhetoric and his naturalistic denial of "free will" (although BGE 6 doesn't contain any exhortatory rhetoric, merely a kind of phenomenological claim about man's inner life). But however that tension is meant to be resolved, Nietzsche intimates that the idea of a "life according to nature" might indeed be understood as a "principle" by which one can (psychologically or phenomenologically) distinguish a better from a worse life, so long as it is understood, not as a life that seeks to imitate "nature itself," but as a life that is in accordance

¹²³ A *certain* resemblance – Nietzsche wants to distinguish simply *lacking* "justice" from *being* actively "unjust." Nature is described as *ohne Gerechtigkeit*, not *ungerecht*.

¹²⁴ Nietzsche adopts, reworks and alludes to Pindar's maxim in a variety of different ways throughout his corpus. For example, GS 270 runs "What does your conscience say? – 'You should become who you are' [*Du sollst der werden, der du bist*]." By contrast, the subtitle of *Ecce Homo* is "How One Becomes What One Is [*Wie man wird, was man ist*]." In BGE 6, the accent is on "who" (*wer*) the philosopher is. This emphasis is reinforced by BGE 7, which raises the question of "who" (*wer*) Epicurus "had been" (*gewesen war*). Nietzsche thereby alludes both to Pindar and to the divine name "I am who I am" in Exodus 3:14 (New Revised Standard Version). Both aphorisms emphasize the godlike nature of the philosopher.

with one's *own* nature as who or what one is. Nietzsche's seemingly rhetorical question, then, is addressed quite earnestly to the careful reader: "Why make a principle of what you yourselves are and must be?"

Nietzsche continues, "In truth, the matter is altogether different: while you pretend rapturously to read the canon of your law in nature, you want something opposite, you strange actors and self-deceivers! Your pride wants to prescribe your morality, your ideal, on nature – even on nature – and incorporate them in her; you demand that she should be 'nature according to the Stoa,' and you would like all existence to exist only after your own image – as an immense, eternal glorification and generalization of Stoicism!"¹²⁵

Nietzsche describes "the Stoics" as strange actors and self-deceivers. We have already learned that philosophers like Spinoza and Plato are actors, while "philosophers" like Kant are self-deceivers. Nietzsche doesn't mention the founder of the Stoic school by name – he speaks only of "the Stoics" in general. However, by speaking of "actors *and* self-deceivers," Nietzsche implicitly distinguishes those Stoics who "believed in" their own metaphysics from those who did not. Presumably, like other philosophical schools, the Stoic school included both dogmatists and non-dogmatists among its card-carrying members. The former "believe in" their own doctrines ("the fundamental propositions that they themselves considered essential"¹²⁶), and "pretend" (*vorgeben*) to themselves they have found their "ideal" in nature, while the latter "pretend" to others. The former are self-deceivers, the latter deceivers. They are both motivated by "pride," the latter by the pride of the philosopher who, like Plato or Epicurus, seeks his own

¹²⁵ BGE 9.

¹²⁶ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 273.

“glorification” by means of the tradition he establishes (“you demand that she should be ‘nature according to the Stoa”)), the former by the pride of the “believer,” who interprets his desire for self-glorification as a form of humility.

However, in this aphorism, Nietzsche also points to a real danger for the philosopher himself. Surely, as wrote his books, Nietzsche learned to view the world through the “perspective” of his own “metaphysics” – “the will to power” and “the eternal return” – even if he remained playfully detached from these doctrines. Nietzsche warns that every philosopher faces the danger that he might start to “believe in” his own doctrines – while (ironically, given the point that he is making) introducing his own “will to power” doctrine for the first time: “This is an ancient, eternal story: what formerly happened with the Stoics still happens today, too, as soon as any philosophy begins to believe in itself [*an sich selbst zu glauben*]. It always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise. Philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to the ‘creation of the world,’ to the *causa prima*.”¹²⁷ I suggest that the formula “as soon as any philosophy begins to believe in itself” refers in the first instance, not to the philosopher himself, but to the reception of “his philosophy” among his acolytes. However, while the preceding aphorism emphasized the sharp *political* division between the philosopher and his “conviction,” this aphorism presents a subtler, more internal and *psychological* account of the same phenomenon – the relationship between philosophy and its doctrinal form.

Nietzsche says that “any philosophy” creates the world in its own image *as soon as it begins to “believe” in itself* – in other words, when it accepts its own exoteric dogmas as true,

¹²⁷ BGE 9.

or *when it ceases to be philosophy* and becomes a kind of religion, as it did for some of the Stoics. But Nietzsche then says that *philosophy itself* is “this tyrannical drive,” “the most spiritual will to power.” He describes *this drive* as the drive to the “creation of the world” (religious language, in scare quotes) and to the first cause (philosophical language, without scare quotes). Philosophy bifurcates into the “creation of the world,” the philosopher’s drive to remake the world by imposing his doctrines onto it, and the philosopher’s drive to understand the world, which first manifests itself as the attempt to seek “the first cause” (cf. BGE 1). This distinction anticipates the distinction Nietzsche will introduce in aphorisms 11 and 12 between “invention” (*Erfinden*) and “discovery” (*Finden*).

Nietzsche indicates how easily philosophy transforms itself into “belief” or “faith” if the philosopher is not vigilant and how difficult it will be for him to formulate a conception of knowledge as neither purely skeptical nor dogmatic – and also why “the people” inevitably transform philosophy into a kind of religion to the extent that they are “convinced” rather than mockingly suspicious of it. Nietzsche had already suggested in aphorisms 3 and 4 that the human intellect has a tendency to “create” or falsify the world (“logical fictions”), even as the philosopher can become reflectively aware of this fact. This is a more radical position than the view that reason goes astray only insofar as it is misled by the imagination, although Nietzsche will presumably also have to give an account of how reason (as creative or productive) is related to the imagination. In BGE 128, he writes, “The more abstract the truth that you want to teach, the more you must seduce the senses to it.”¹²⁸

¹²⁸ BGE 128. Translation modified.

BGE 9 points to the deepest reason why philosophers must write esoterically (or present their thought in “religious” form) – the productive character of the intellect and its dependence on the imagination, which “falsify” and “simplify” the world, are reflected in language itself. In BGE 24, Nietzsche writes, “*Language... will not get over its awkwardness, and will continue to talk of opposites where there are only many degrees and subtleties of gradation.*”¹²⁹ The philosopher must somehow learn to use language against itself, to point out its own inherent distortions. Nietzsche will try to show how this can be done in BGE 13-22, which I discuss in the next chapter. Here, I note only that the image of nature with which Nietzsche begins – *addressed* with a theatrical flourish to “you noble Stoics” (he doesn’t say, “it has gradually become clear to me that nature is indifference itself as a power...”) – is already rather anthropomorphic. Is nature really “wasteful,” “uncertain” or “indifferent” except from a human perspective? It is only the *purely negative* attributes in Nietzsche’s description (“*without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice*”) that seem wholly non-anthropomorphic – with the possible exception of “fertile” (*fruchtbar*). But if “nature” has been distinguished from “life,” can it really be “fertile”? Can anything positive be said about nature itself? Nietzsche begins the aphorism by “creating the world” for the benefit of his audience – he will still have to show if one can discover the world.

However, Nietzsche’s *focus* in this aphorism is on the question of the best way of life, which was traditionally understood as the life “according to nature.” While overtly mocking this idea, Nietzsche intimates there is a sense in which it might be defensible. However, by suggesting that philosophy and religion are “insidiously related” (yet still opposed) in the human

¹²⁹ BGE 24.

psyche, not just politically, Nietzsche indicates that the portrait of “the philosopher” in BGE 6 – as the man whose “morality” is in perfect harmony with “who he is” – is an idealization. A human being will be a philosopher *to the extent that* (“gradation”) they possess “real *power* of spirituality, real *profundity* of spiritual perception.”¹³⁰

By first introducing “the will to power” through its “most spiritual” form, Nietzsche indicates that by “power,” he doesn’t primarily mean “power over others” in a crudely political sense. The philosopher’s will to “power” manifests itself primarily as an attempt to *understand* the world. However, Nietzsche doesn’t exclude the cruder meaning altogether – as we saw in BGE 7, the philosopher’s drive to understand the world transforms his *thumos* into a desire to “tyrannize” over the world through his doctrines, and playfully compete with other philosophers for influence, even as he also seeks to share his knowledge.

How might “power” provide a criterion by which one can distinguish a better from a worse way of life? In BGE 6, Nietzsche suggested that when the philosophical drive dominates and organizes man’s other “basic drives,” the individual achieves a kind of mastery (he used the word *Herr*, not *Tyrann*) over his other drives, which is lacking to the extent that this drive is absent or subdued in the individual’s psychic economy. Nietzsche here describes popular “Stoicism” as “self-tyranny” (*Selbst-Tyrannie*). Nietzsche suggests that philosophy is bound up with self-mastery, while a moral-religious way of thinking is bound up with self-tyranny. Thus we shouldn’t be surprised that his description of the Stoics as wanting to “prescribe” their “law” and their “morality” even onto nature has an unmistakably Kantian ring – it calls to mind the

¹³⁰ BGE 252.

categorical imperative (cf. BGE 5).¹³¹ Nietzsche suggests there is a close connection between the psychology of the religious believer and that of the moralist, even when the moralist thinks of the moral world-order as “self-legislated” rather than as found in nature or as legislated by God.

I note that the definition of philosophy as “the most spiritual will to power” indicates that there is, after all, *some* truth to the first, popular, traditional sense of the best life as the life “according to nature” – a life in harmony with nature, in harmony with the whole. To be sure, Nietzsche doesn’t suggest that the philosopher must *imitate* “nature” or “the world.” Nor does he suggest that final causes are discoverable in nature, which would then provide man with his *telos*. However, he *does* suggest that the distinctive *self-relation* at the heart of one’s way of life (self-mastery for the philosopher, self-tyranny for the believer) is bound up with one’s relation to the whole. The philosopher’s self-mastery is somehow bound up with his reflective openness to the world, while the believer’s self-tyranny is bound up with his “religious” stance to the world, creating it in thought then “immediately forgetting that one has done so,” as one always does in dreams.¹³²

Philosophical self-mastery, which is somehow “beyond good and evil,” will be difficult to distinguish with precision from moral-religious self-tyranny – one of the central tasks of *BGE* will be to elaborate this distinction further. One might also ask: In what sense is self-mastery *better* than self-tyranny? This will become clearer as Nietzsche begins to elaborate his idea of “power” in BGE 13 and later. At this stage in the inquiry, the more pressing question is: Why

¹³¹ I am grateful to Heinrich Meier for drawing my attention to the Kantian resonances of this passage in a seminar on *BGE* at the University of Chicago, spring 2018.

¹³² Cf. BGE 138.

should the human soul be constituted in this way? Might it not be the case that philosophical inquiry – by destroying the illusions which provide life with its meaning and coherence, like “the immortal soul” and “the old God,”¹³³ without offering serviceable replacements – leads to the dissolution of the instincts and to an impoverished way of life? Nietzsche takes up this question in the next aphorism.

Having plumbed these depths, in the next aphorism, Nietzsche returns to the surface – to the conflict between philosophy and religion on the stage of world-history in the present day. Although the Kantian problem of “the real and the apparent world” (crudely formulated, nature as it really is and as it appears to us through our anthropomorphic goggles) is discussed all over Europe today, “anyone who hears nothing in the background except a ‘will to truth’ certainly does not have the best of ears.”¹³⁴ For the most part, despite its putatively “critical” character, contemporary epistemology isn’t motivated by a truly philosophical impulse, but rather by the crassly egalitarian values of the modern scholar.

After this introduction, Nietzsche singles out two contrasting types, each of whom has something admirable which distinguishes him from his contemporaries, but neither of whom are really philosophers. In doing so, he indicates the problem he will have to solve. On the one hand, there are “puritanical fanatics of conscience who prefer even a certain nothing to an uncertain something to lie down on – and die.”¹³⁵ These have a real “will to truth” (no scare quotes) and even possess an “extravagant and adventurous courage.”¹³⁶ But Nietzsche describes this as “nihilism” (the first occurrence of this word in his books – and linked with a kind of

¹³³ BGE 10.

¹³⁴ BGE 10.

¹³⁵ BGE 10.

¹³⁶ BGE 10. The will to truth reappears in this aphorism for the first time since BGE 1-2.

courage!) and “the sign of a despairing, mortally weary soul.”¹³⁷ On the other hand, there are “stronger and livelier thinkers who are still thirsty for life.”¹³⁸ Surprisingly, given Nietzsche’s usual characterization, this group is made up of religious conservatives, or thinkers whose instinctive disgust with modernity propels them towards religious conservatism, and who seek therefore to *make use of* modern epistemological skepticism in order to cast doubt on the existence of “their own bodies” as a prelude to reviving old Christian dogmas: “Who knows if they are not at bottom trying to win back... something of the ancient domain of the faith of former times, perhaps ‘the immortal soul,’ perhaps ‘the old God,’ in short, ideas by which one could live better, that is to say, more vigorously and cheerfully [*kräftiger und heiterer leben*], than by ‘modern ideas’?”¹³⁹

This aphorism qualifies, without contradicting, the preceding aphorism and brings out the complexity of the relationship between one’s perspective on the world and one’s “values” and way of life. Aphorisms 6 and 9 intimated that a philosophical or trans-moral perspective is closely related to self-mastery and self-affirmation, while a religious or moral perspective is bound up with self-tyranny and self-denial. On the other hand, Nietzsche often emphasizes that the same convictions can have very different motivations. For example, a firm belief in “free will” might be rooted in resentment and the desire to blame others for one’s misfortunes, but it might also be rooted in the desire to take responsibility for oneself or even in the desire for endless novelty, so that one won’t grow weary of life.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ BGE 10.

¹³⁸ BGE 10. Translation modified.

¹³⁹ BGE 10.

¹⁴⁰ For example, contrast BGE 21 with OGM 2:7.

In BGE 10, Nietzsche shows how the “philosophy-religion” opposition he has been developing, which informs the structure of the book and much of its rhetoric, manifests itself in complex ways. The “puritanical fanatics” have *something* authentically philosophical about them, a real “will to truth,” but fail to achieve the psychic integration this promises. They cannot integrate their pursuit of knowledge with the lives they lead. They are also in some sense *religious* (“puritanical fanatics”), but atheistically so – they are piously committed to the value of truth, whether or not it does them any good. Even if they discover *some* truth (“a certain nothing” – implying negation or refutation without anything positive to fill the vacuum), it’s not very valuable for *their* lives. They are “courageous” enough to reject false certainties, but not strong enough to live “cheerfully” without them. In BGE 39, Nietzsche says that “the evil and unhappy are more favored when it comes to the discovery of certain *parts* of the truth,” though not the whole truth.¹⁴¹ Perhaps these puritanical fanatics are “evil,” courageous – and incurably unhappy. By contrast, the religious conservatives have healthy instincts, which lead them to rebel against the vulgarity of “modern ideas” such as “positivism” and seek “retrograde bypaths” away from modernity. Nietzsche assumes that how one lives is bound up with the ideas “by which” one lives.¹⁴² But if they were even stronger, and their instincts were healthier, Nietzsche suggests that rather than going backwards, they would go up: “The main thing about them is *not* that they wish to go ‘back,’ but that they wish to get – *away*. A little more strength [*Kraft*], flight, courage and artistry [*Künstlerschaft*], and they would want to *rise* – not

¹⁴¹ BGE 39.

¹⁴² Cf. BGE 285: “The greatest thoughts are the greatest events.”

return!”¹⁴³ Thus there is *something* unavoidably weak, ponderous, cowardly and lacking in “artistry” about even the “strongest” and most “cheerful” religious life.

This aphorism is more important than is usually recognized. Nietzsche shows here that his stark opposition between philosophy and religion must be understood in a more complexly psychological fashion than his rhetoric often suggests. In his sympathetic portrayal of “courageous” investigators, whose “will to truth” is “the sign of a despairing, mortally weary soul,” and intellectually sophisticated, “vigorous” and “cheerful” religious conservatives, Nietzsche shows that he doesn’t beg the question on the issue of the “value” of the philosophical life – in contrast to Strauss, who says, “Philosophy cannot possibly lead up to the insight that another way of life apart from the philosophic one is the right one.”¹⁴⁴ For Nietzsche, there is no advance guarantee that philosophical inquiry, having destroyed moral and religious “illusions,” will be able to replace them with anything “by which [*auf welchen*]” one might be able to “live well.” This aphorism is a crucial turning point. Until now, Nietzsche has elaborated a sketch of what philosophy is – for the reader willing to listen to his “dangerous maybes.” But BGE 10 ends with a promise. If the reader follows Nietzsche “upwards,” he will discover that philosophy is the best way of life, after all. Even those who cannot achieve this ascent “would want to” if they could.

An image has gradually been emerging of philosophy as a way of life (BGE 1) and a way of thinking about “the world” which is naturalistic rather than “metaphysical” or dualistic (BGE 2), involves a physio-psychology which achieves a kind of self-conscious knowledge

¹⁴³ BGE 10.

¹⁴⁴ Leo Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” *The Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1979), 113.

through recognizing the priority of instinct (BGE 3), recognizes “untruth as a condition of life” and is thus “beyond good and evil” (BGE 4), appears first in a disguised or “protected” form (BGE 5), allows the philosopher to achieve a singular kind of self-mastery and become “who he is” (BGE 6), leads the philosopher to engage in a playful politics of friendship and enmity with other philosophers (BGE 7) and has an unavoidably “religious” exoteric shell (BGE 8) while being opposed yet “insidiously related” to religion in the human psyche (BGE 9).

Nietzsche has gradually been intimating that philosophy is “perhaps” the best way of life, that philosophical thinking has the highest “value for life” for those capable of making it the inner *telos* of their lives, that this life is the life all human beings “would want” to live if they could, that philosophizing is a human being’s “real interest” *as* a human being – that “the interests of philosophy,” as Strauss puts it, are “the highest interests of mankind.”¹⁴⁵ After a fast-paced journey through the history of philosophy, BGE 10 returns to the present day to announce Nietzsche’s project in the book as a whole – to show, through an analysis of human desire (“the basic drives of man”), that philosophy is the best way of life, a conclusion one cannot take for granted. Nietzsche reappears in the first person (“I might say,” “it seems to me”) to make this promise. BGE 10 has a close connection with BGE 23, which likewise ends with a promise and announces a journey: “Let us open our eyes and keep our hand firm on the helm! We sail right *over* morality!”¹⁴⁶

However, aphorisms 10 and 23 are separated by a series of twelve aphorisms which constitute the closest thing to a treatise on first philosophy Nietzsche ever published. Before

¹⁴⁵ Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 18.

¹⁴⁶ BGE 23.

Nietzsche shows that philosophy is the best way of life, he must show that “real philosophy” has the character he ascribes it. He must show that philosophy is essentially naturalistic rather than dualistic and thus both “trans-religious” and “trans-moral,” as Strauss puts it.¹⁴⁷ I note the curious fact that (unlike, say, Hobbes or Spinoza) Nietzsche never gives a *definition* of religion (or “faith,” *Glaube*) in *BGE*, despite its importance as an alternative to philosophy. Rather, Nietzsche compels the reader to work out a coherent understanding of the implicit conception of “religion” employed throughout the book. I will come back to this issue in the next two chapters; I note here that Nietzsche has already indicated that “religion” and “dogmatism” are closely related – philosophy is transformed into “religion” to the extent that it is confused with its doctrinal form (cf. *BGE* 8-9).

Nietzsche’s critique of religion, then, *not just* as an impoverished way of life, but also as a “falsification” of the world, will be bound up with his attempt to ground his “physio-psychology” as a non-dogmatic, yet not purely skeptical “science” of nature (*physis*) and the soul (*psyche*). Nietzsche announces this project in *BGE* 11-12, which I discuss in the next section, and carries it out in *BGE* 13-22, which I discuss in the next chapter.

§5. Nietzsche’s Physio-Psychology in *BGE* 11-12

BGE 11 begins on a personal, inward note (“it seems to me”), reminding us of aphorisms 3, 6 and 10. In this aphorism, Nietzsche takes aim yet again at Kant – no longer at his practical philosophy, as in *BGE* 5, but at his theoretical philosophy. Kant is often regarded as a watershed moment in the history of philosophy, after which dogmatic metaphysics and naïve empiricism

¹⁴⁷ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 89.

were no longer historically tenable, even if Kant's own critical philosophy must be modified or transformed. Nietzsche himself once regarded Kant in a similar way, at the time of *The Birth of Tragedy*.¹⁴⁸ In the unpublished early work *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, he approached the history of philosophy in modern scholarly fashion, as a series of refuted systems, although even then he regarded the singular "personalities" of the great philosophers as "forever irrefutable" models for living.¹⁴⁹ But in the intervening years, Nietzsche had come to see that the history of metaphysical dogmatism is bound up in complex ways with the history of esotericism. He can no longer place on Kant anything like "the value he placed on himself."¹⁵⁰

At first, Nietzsche's mockery of Kant in BGE 11 seems utterly frivolous. Nietzsche cites Molière, who parodied obscurantist medieval science (a well-chosen dig at Kant, associating him with pre-critical dogmatism at its worst) by presenting his audience with a doctor who "explains" how opium induces sleep by a circular appeal to a "sleepy faculty [*virtus*]," whose "nature" it is to induce sleep. Similarly, Nietzsche mocks, Kant "explained" how synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible by appealing to a faculty of synthetic *a priori* judgment, which he claimed to have "discovered." Can one really dismiss the complex argumentation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* by citing a joke from Molière?

However, on closer inspection, Nietzsche's dismissal of Kant is both less dismissive, and less frivolous, than it appears. First, Nietzsche claims that "such answers belong in comedy." But is it an objection to a philosophical answer that it "belongs in comedy"? *BGE* itself is a kind of comedy – surely BGE 11 is a good example of this. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche associates

¹⁴⁸ Cf. BT 18.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. BGE 204 with PTAG Preface and A Later Preface.

¹⁵⁰ BGE 11.

morality and religion with “tragedy” and philosophy with “comedy.”¹⁵¹ If philosophy is a kind of comedy, then philosophical answers belong nowhere else. Secondly, Nietzsche’s example tacitly points to the difference between empirical science, where “such answers” surely reflect obscurantism, and *philosophical thought*, which (insofar as it can be formulated in language at all) may inevitably sound tautologous or absurd to “the people,” e.g. Molière’s audience. Perhaps philosophical “answers” will inevitably *sound like* a “repetition of the question.”¹⁵² In BGE 30, Nietzsche says that “our highest insights must – and should – sound like follies... when they are heard without permission by those who are not predisposed and predestined for them.”¹⁵³

So we have reason to be cautious. This isn’t to say that Nietzsche was a Kantian; far from it. But the serious point of the aphorism is that Kant’s entire project was based on starting assumptions which, if they can be shown to be wholly or just partly mistaken, undermine this project *as Kant himself understood it* (“the value he placed on himself”) and demand that one begin again from the beginning. This isn’t to say that the details of Kant’s project have no value, as Nietzsche’s generous allusion to Kant’s “table of categories” in BGE 44 and his praise of Kant as a scientific laborer in BGE 211 clearly indicate.¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche tells us that he will be more cautious than Kant, and take less for granted, even if his project has a certain affinity with Kant’s. In this sense, Nietzsche’s approach to Kant in this aphorism is analogous to that of Hegel, although (to say nothing of other differences) he also wants to emphasize that there is ultimately a *moral* prejudice behind Kant’s *theoretical* errors.

¹⁵¹ GS 1.

¹⁵² BGE 11.

¹⁵³ BGE 30.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. BGE 44 (“occasionally proud of tables of categories”) with BGE 211.

A real similarity between Kant and Molière's doctor is that they both take themselves to be explaining something evidently true – that opium causes sleep and that synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible and valid (Kant's primary example is mathematics). But Nietzsche has already proposed that mathematics involves a "falsification of the world,"¹⁵⁵ and he will soon make a similar claim about the very idea of causality.¹⁵⁶ Nietzsche proposes that we take a step back; the kind of judgments the validity of which Kant took for granted, including mathematical judgments and also natural-scientific judgments which appeal to causality,¹⁵⁷ must themselves be questioned, treated as "foreground." Such judgments are indeed "necessary," but they don't possess necessary and universal validity – rather, they are necessary in a different sense, necessary *for* the preservation of beings like ourselves: "Such judgments must be *believed* to be true, for the sake of the preservation of beings like ourselves [*Wesen unser Art*]... Belief in their truth is necessary, as a foreground belief... belonging to the perspective optics of life."¹⁵⁸ They are integral constituents of the human perspective as such. Accordingly, Nietzschean first philosophy won't be metaphysics or "transcendental logic," but a kind of "physio-psychology," very different however from empirical physiology. It will have a certain affinity with Kantian and even with Aristotelian first philosophy, insofar as it takes as its subject matter the concepts

¹⁵⁵ BGE 4.

¹⁵⁶ BGE 21.

¹⁵⁷ Kant counts mathematics and physics among those sciences "whose grounds are well laid"; the critical project aims to disclose the conditions of their possibility, not to put them on a "secure foundation" or to rescue their results from (let alone subject them to) skeptical attack. In this sense, Nietzsche is surely right that Kant takes their results for granted. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Axi. In citations from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I use the Guyer-Wood (Cambridge) translation and follow the standard practice of referring to the 1781 (A) and 1787 (B) editions.

¹⁵⁸ BGE 10. Cf. BGE 3-4.

(e.g. “cause”) and judgments unreflectively employed in ordinary experience and empirical science.

Nietzsche claims that Kant was received with great enthusiasm by the German idealists and other secularized Europeans (“three-quarter-Christians”) because he offered them a way to satisfy their moral and religious “cravings” without appealing to traditional metaphysics. He says that the German idealists were unable to distinguish “discovery” (*Erfinden*) from “invention” (*Finden*). But as we have already seen, Nietzsche *agrees* with Kant (and Fichte and Hegel) that experience is in some sense “invented” (Nietzsche’s word, not Kant’s!), constructed or produced by the “interpretive” activity of thought. Although Nietzsche doesn’t use the Kantian language of “spontaneity,” and draws more radical conclusions from this premise than Kant would accept, while also intimating (cf. BGE 3) that this is not a uniquely modern discovery, the problematic he introduces is the same – how to account for knowledge (or distinguish “discovery” from “invention”) given the premise that experience is in some sense always already constructed or “interpreted.”

Thus it is no accident that in this context Nietzsche singles out for special attack Schelling’s doctrine of “intellectual intuition” (*intellektuale Anschauung*), which represents a rejection of the premise *shared* by Nietzsche and Kant, that the intellect is in some sense constructive but in no sense passive or receptive. None of this is to say that Nietzsche had a deep familiarity with the original texts of German Idealism, his knowledge of which appears to have been derived largely from secondary literature, although he certainly knew Kant’s *Groundwork* and third *Critique*, and scholars disagree about whether he knew the first *Critique*

firsthand.¹⁵⁹ Given that he adopted a perspective he believed was methodologically prior to Kant's (questioning as "foreground" that which Kant took for granted), presumably he regarded a high level of expertise in Kant's writings as unnecessary for *his* purposes.

Having indicated his affinities with Kant, Nietzsche concludes the third sub-section (11-12) with a final promissory note before he undertakes his grounding of physio-psychology in BGE 13-22. Nietzsche begins BGE 12 by asserting that "materialistic atomism" has been utterly "refuted." The idea of ultimate particles of matter is at best a "convenient" fiction, "an abbreviation of the means of expression." But Nietzsche describes the refutation of atomism as "the greatest triumph *over the senses* that has been gained on earth so far."¹⁶⁰ This assertion is confusing; "the atom" is *not* something presented to us directly by the senses, rather it is the product of human *thought* (a "means of expression" or a "theory"), yet he describes the triumph over atomism not as a triumph over (the errors of) thought, but rather as a triumph "over the senses."

Nietzsche returns to this theme in BGE 134, which Kaufmann translates, "All credibility, all good conscience, all evidence of truth comes only from the senses (*Von den Sinnen her kommt erst alle Glaubwürdigkeit, alles gute Gewissen, aller Augenschein der Wahrheit*)."¹⁶¹ But Kaufmann's translation stifles two ambiguities in BGE 134 and renders its meaning more naively empiricist than it needs to be. *Glaubwürdigkeit* (which shares a root with *Glaube*, belief or faith) could simply mean "plausibility" or "believability," which for Nietzsche is hardly a

¹⁵⁹ For an argument that Nietzsche had more firsthand knowledge of Kant's critical philosophy than is often supposed, see Michael Stephen Green, *Nietzsche and the Transcendental Tradition* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002). On Nietzsche's knowledge of Fichte, Hegel and Schelling, see Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context*, 46, 53, 58, 135-6, 138-9.

¹⁶⁰ BGE 12. Emphasis added.

¹⁶¹ BGE 134. I am grateful to David Welbery for illuminating correspondence about this aphorism.

reliable indicator of truth, while *Augenschein der Wahrheit* could just as well be translated “appearance of truth” rather than “evidence of truth.” As for “good conscience,” Nietzsche often emphasizes that one can have a good conscience about something while being utterly deluded about the role one has played in it.

Considering BGE 134 helps us see that in BGE 12, Nietzsche begins by distancing himself from naïve empiricism – indicating a further affinity with Kant. The senses don’t provide “evidence” except insofar as they have already been “worked on” by what Kant would call our cognitive faculty or what one is tempted in Nietzsche’s case to call our interpreting or interpretive faculty. Reflective analysis of this “instinctive” process shows that the senses themselves *in combination with* our capacity for thinking creatively about the world (or producing “interpretations”) “instinctively” produce the very idea of “the atom” (“the earth-residuum and particle-atom”). However, when this idea is presented as a “theory” and reflectively analyzed, it can be shown to be a misinterpretation of what it purports to capture, “nature itself.” The senses mislead us, but only insofar as they are *always already* “interpreted.” Kant famously begins the first *Critique* by stating that although all our cognition *begins* “with experience,” because our cognitive faculty is first roused to action by “the raw material of sensible impressions,” “it does not on that account all arise from experience”: “For it could well be that even our experiential cognition is a composite of that which we receive through impressions and that which our own cognitive faculty (merely prompted by sensible impressions) provides out of itself, which addition we cannot distinguish from that fundamental material until long practice has made us attentive to it and skilled in separating it out.”¹⁶²

¹⁶² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* B1-2.

Similarly, Nietzsche suggests that while “all appearance of truth” arises from the senses, this initial evidence must be regarded as “foreground.” Once we reflectively grasp the role played by our cognitive activity in “interpreting” the evidence of the senses before it can count as evidence for us, we will have moved a step beyond – “triumphed over” – our necessary starting-point, which may include certain “fictions” (like the atomic material unit) recognizable as fictions only after such a reflective analysis.

Nietzsche ascribes (playfully, I suggest¹⁶³) the decisive refutation of atomism to “the Pole Boscovich,” and compares its importance to the better-known discoveries of “the Pole Copernicus,” on which Kant modeled *his* philosophy. Copernicus and Boscovich were natural scientists (“the greatest opponents of visual evidence [*Augenschein*] so far”¹⁶⁴), Kant and Nietzsche philosophers. Nietzsche implies that he is about to undertake a “Boscovichian turn,” analogous to Kant’s “Copernican turn.” Copernicus and Kant questioned received assumptions about natural science and philosophy; Boscovich and Nietzsche do the same thing, but more radically: “Boscovich taught us to abjure the belief [*Glauben*] in the last part of the earth that stood fast.”¹⁶⁵ Kant replaced the substantial metaphysical subject with the formal transcendental subject; Nietzsche will replace them both with “new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis” – for example, “mortal soul,” “subjective multiplicity” and “the social structure of the drives and affects.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ On Nietzsche’s interest in Boscovich’s theory of matter as force, see Greg Whitlock, “Roger Boscovich, Benedict de Spinoza and Friedrich Nietzsche: The Untold Story,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 25, no.1 (1996), 200-220. However, it seems to me that in BGE 12, Nietzsche playfully exaggerates the historical and philosophical significance of this rather obscure figure, to use the implied Boscovich-Nietzsche nexus as a stylized counterpoint to the famous Copernicus-Kant nexus.

¹⁶⁴ BGE 12. This phrase could also be translated “the greatest opponents of appearance.”

¹⁶⁵ BGE 12.

¹⁶⁶ BGE 12.

Just as Boscovich went further than Copernicus, Nietzsche will go further than Boscovich (who was still a Christian) *and* Kant and “declare war, relentless war unto death” against “the atomistic need.”¹⁶⁷ This curious phrase calls to mind “the will to simplification” in BGE 230.¹⁶⁸ Nietzsche suggests that the same “will” to impose unity on the multiplicity of experience – one might think of Kant’s notion of “sensation” as a “manifold” wholly lacking in determinacy – which manifests itself in the notion that the world is made up of “atomic units,” or distinguishable, self-identical material “things,” also manifests itself in the “belief” (or “faith”) which regards the soul “as something [*etwas*] indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an *atomon*” (note that one may ascribe some but not all of these predicates to the soul – it is unclear if Nietzsche means to imply that they are mutually implicated).¹⁶⁹

Nietzsche’s first philosophy will *primarily* be a psychology, not a physics. As he says in *The Gay Science*, it will involve “the critique of the elements of consciousness”¹⁷⁰ – it will compel the inquirer to turn inwards and reflect on his own being as human and at the same time on the essentially “interpretive” character of his cognitive activity. Although it will be a psychology, it will be “naturalistic” (although not “clumsily” so), a “physio-psychology,” which treats the question of the soul as inseparable from the question of nature as such. Its artistry (*Künstlerschaft*) or lack of clumsiness will consist in the psychologist’s recognition that, due to the omnipresence of “interpretation,” the concepts and even the *language* he uses will unavoidably be somewhat distorting and misleading (this includes the “soul-hypotheses” cited above). Language must be used “inventively” to undermine its own unavoidable

¹⁶⁷ BGE 12.

¹⁶⁸ BGE 230.

¹⁶⁹ BGE 12.

¹⁷⁰ GS 355.

“simplifications” and somehow point beyond itself to capture the world as it is. Yet this psychology will still be a kind of “science.”¹⁷¹ Nietzsche ends BGE 12 with the claim that “the *new* psychologist... condemns himself to *invention* – and – who knows? – perhaps to discovery.”¹⁷² He thereby indicates the task he has set himself – how to effect the transition from convention (invention) to nature (discovery) *despite* the dependence of human thought on simplifying and falsifying “interpretations.”

§6. Conclusion

I have argued that the first twelve aphorisms of *BGE* represent Nietzsche’s statement of intent for the book as a whole. Nietzsche doesn’t make this clear – he compels the reader to figure it out for himself and thereby gives him a lesson in how to make sense of his “art of allusive and elusive writing.”¹⁷³ One can’t follow the argument of *BGE* on a first reading, not just due to the difficulty of the text, but also because the book has a structure which is both linear and circular – even though one must follow Nietzsche’s argument as it develops aphorism-by-aphorism, earlier aphorisms can often be understood only when they are juxtaposed with much later ones, the connections between them marked by the reappearance of certain themes or *dramatis personae* or sometimes just by the striking reappearance of an unusual word or phrase.

These twelve aphorisms are also a highly condensed, preliminary exploration of the book’s central themes, on which Nietzsche will build as he proceeds. They illustrate his perspectival method – approaching the same problem from a variety of angles to achieve a more

¹⁷¹ BGE 23.

¹⁷² BGE 12.

¹⁷³ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 231.

complete understanding. In this sense, Nietzsche's aphoristic style has the same function as Plato's use of the dialogue form, which demands that one pay attention to the particular dramatic and rhetorical context in which a theme is treated as well as the explicit argument. In developing a "new language" for philosophy, Nietzsche sought to imitate and surpass his "real great antagonist," who possessed "the greatest strength any philosopher so far has had at his disposal."¹⁷⁴

Is there a writer more perspectival than Plato, except perhaps Nietzsche himself? But in the Preface to *BGE*, Nietzsche says that to "speak" about "the pure spirit" and "the good in itself" as Plato did means to "deny the perspectival (*das Perspektivische*)," which is also directly to invert "the truth," because "the perspectival" is "the fundamental condition of all life."¹⁷⁵ However, we have already seen that Nietzsche was well aware of Plato's artful *mise-en-scène*. In BGE 190, he calls Plato "the most audacious of all interpreters," who took up the Socratic theme "in order to vary it into the infinite *and the impossible* – namely, into all of his own masks and multiplicities."¹⁷⁶ I suggest that "the impossible" includes "the pure spirit" and "the good in itself." In the Preface, Nietzsche carefully avoids ascribing "dogmatism" to Plato *himself*. He calls "Platonism" a "monstrous and frightening" *Fratze*, not exactly a "mask," but a grimace, a face which Plato pulls when he appears on stage.¹⁷⁷ This curious choice of word suggests that Platonism is a caricature of Plato, a distorted image, which however reveals the

¹⁷⁴ BGE 191.

¹⁷⁵ BGE Preface. Translation modified. Nietzsche writes, "To be sure, it also meant standing the truth on her head." How can one "stand the truth on her head" unless one first possesses her? Nietzsche implies Plato had "the truth" securely in his grasp, so much so that he could even hold her upside down, as befits the philosopher who possessed "the greatest strength."

¹⁷⁶ BGE 190. Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁷ BGE Preface.

original – indeed, it *is* the original presented in a certain way, Plato’s natural features kept in an unnatural state of sustained tension, like an actor who contorts his face for the length of a performance while playing a tragic role, in order to make himself appear more “frightening” than he is “in real life.”¹⁷⁸ The implicit parallel with Nietzsche himself is easy to see. Nietzsche describes Plato’s metaphysical doctrines as *ein Dogmatiker-Irrthum* (interestingly implying that “the pure spirit” and “the good in itself” somehow constitute *one* “error,” that they are mutually implicated or two sides of the same mistake), but he never describes Plato himself as *ein Dogmatiker*. Nietzsche’s description of this “error” as Plato’s “invention” (*Erfindung*), taken with the other evidence I have supplied, suggests that Plato knew what he was doing – Plato’s “error” was a deliberate invention, a feature of his “grimace” or one of his “masks.”

But why did Plato invent Platonism? We already have some sense of why Nietzsche thinks philosophers write esoterically, and I will return to this theme in the next two chapters. But in the Preface to *BGE*, Nietzsche ascribes Plato’s invention of Platonism to the “corrupting” influence of “the evil Socrates (*der böse Sokrates*).”¹⁷⁹ Nietzsche inverts the common scholarly view that the more Plato freed himself from the influence of Socrates, in the later dialogues, the more “Platonic” (and metaphysical) he became. In calling Socrates “evil,” and asking if he “deserved his hemlock” after all, Nietzsche suggests that Socrates may well have been guilty of the charges on which he was convicted by the Athenian *demos* – corrupting the morals of the youth (“above all that typical Hellenic youth, Plato”¹⁸⁰) and teaching them to disbelieve in the gods of the city. Socrates may well have been an “evil” philosopher who trafficked in

¹⁷⁸ Cf. BGE 21.

¹⁷⁹ BGE Preface.

¹⁸⁰ BT 13.

“dangerous maybes” of the kind Nietzsche is about to propose, who in his deepest and most private thoughts was an unsparingly irreverent critic of both morality and religion, even as he disguised himself with edifying rhetoric. Socrates, Nietzsche implies, “that great ironist, rich in secrets,” taught his student well.¹⁸¹

Nietzsche’s deeper stance towards Socrates, then, didn’t change as drastically between 1879 and 1885 as his “inverted panegyric” suggests. Socrates remains the “wise mediator” who can help us discover “joy in living and in one’s own self.”¹⁸² In BGE 39, Nietzsche tells us that “the concept ‘philosopher’ isn’t restricted to the philosopher who writes books – or makes books of *his* philosophy.”¹⁸³ Nietzsche clearly alludes first to Socrates, as the most famous philosopher who didn’t write books, but also, somewhat more obliquely, to Plato, as the most famous philosopher who *did* write books *without* making books of “*his* philosophy,” but rather of somebody else’s, namely that of Socrates. As Plato himself writes, “No writing of Plato exists or will exist and those that are now said to be written by him belong rather to a Socrates become beautiful and new.”¹⁸⁴ Just before he alludes to Socrates and Plato, Nietzsche mentions, as if in passing, “the evil who are happy [*den Bösen, die glücklich sind*],” describing them as a “species [*Species*] about whom the moralists are silent.”¹⁸⁵ I suggest that “the evil Socrates” and the corrupted Plato are the main examples Nietzsche has in mind of “the evil who are happy.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ BGE 191. In the Preface, he suggests that Socrates “corrupted” Plato; in BGE 191, he calls him Plato’s “teacher.” That which first appears as “corruption” reveals itself upon closer inspection as “education.”

¹⁸² WS 86.

¹⁸³ BGE 39.

¹⁸⁴ Plato, *Second Letter* 314c. Translation is my own.

¹⁸⁵ BGE 39.

¹⁸⁶ The moralists are silent about them because *they don’t know* “the evil Socrates” (or the evil Plato), only their exoteric doubles. Nietzsche frequently (e.g. throughout *Zarathustra*) uses the word “evil” (*böse*) to refer, not to Cesare-Borgia-like behavior, but to the willingness radically to question moral conventions or “law-tablets.”

Like *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, *BGE* is a “signpost” towards recovering the Socratic art of living and the “joy” or “happiness” it promises. But while in 1879 Nietzsche presented Socrates as a kind of anti-Christ *avant la lettre*, now he emphasizes that Platonism, invented by Plato as a vehicle for the preservation of Socratic philosophy, played a decisive role in the triumph of Christianity, which he describes as a “nightmare” (*Alpdrucke*) from which Europe is still waking up.¹⁸⁷ Nietzsche intimates that the extreme situation created by the fight against Christianity and its after-effects has somehow necessitated the novel, anti-Socratic pose he adopts. Nietzsche is confident that Socrates would have enjoyed his venomous jokes.

¹⁸⁷ *BGE* Preface. This word is difficult to translate; it suggests a sense of heavy pressure, as though one were to wake up panting, unable to breathe.

Chapter 3

Nietzsche's Physio-Psychology in *Beyond Good and Evil* 13-22

§1. Introduction

In the second chapter, I argued that *BGE* was understood by Nietzsche himself as a defense of Socratic philosophy. I argued that the first twelve aphorisms taken together constitute a statement of intent for the book as a whole. This statement is divided into three parts. The first part (BGE 1-7) presents Nietzsche's preliminary elaboration of the double meaning of philosophy itself – as a way of life, which is trans-moral or “beyond good and evil,” but also as a naturalistic form of inquiry into the world, a kind of “physio-psychology.” In this part, Nietzsche presents his conception of philosophy as a “dangerous maybe,” evincing his awareness that the demanding reader, the reader with an “intellectual conscience,” will require *reasons* to accept this dangerous possibility as a dangerous *truth*.¹ Nietzsche presents his conception of philosophy as though it were a novel proposal, while gradually disclosing that he regards it as a rediscovery of something ancient, at least in part.

The second part (BGE 8-10) focuses on the question of the best way of life, already raised implicitly in the first aphorism as “the problem of the value of truth.” The traditional formula for the best life is the “life according to nature.” Nietzsche intimates that, properly understood, this notion is indeed defensible as a criterion by which a better life can be distinguished from a worse. He raises the question, “Why make a principle of what you

¹ Cf. GS 2.

yourselves are and must be?”² The answer he suggests is that human beings are characterized by a kind of internal division, such that one’s way of life can be more or less in harmony with one’s nature, with “who one is” as a human being. One’s competing drives must be hierarchically organized; for Nietzsche, conflict and struggle, insofar as they do not lead to sheer chaos and dissolution of form, inevitably resolve themselves into some form of hierarchy, whether at the political or at the psychological level, in the city or in the soul.

However, before Nietzsche can present his argument for the philosophical life as the life which *psychologically* reconciles “order which is not oppression with freedom which is not license,”³ he must show that philosophy itself is possible. Put differently, he must give an account of the nature of philosophical thinking and its “results,” whether these results are dogmatic, purely skeptical or some peculiar alternative which is neither purely skeptical nor simply dogmatic. Accordingly, after Nietzsche has promised in the second part of his introduction (BGE 8-10) to show that the philosophical life is the highest form of human existence, “the most spiritual will to power,” in the third part (BGE 11-12) he focuses on the question of first philosophy, which he introduces by turning back to Kant. Although Nietzsche again emphasizes his differences with his precursor, he also more gently indicates his affinities, and suggests that he goes further in the same “anti-metaphysical” direction than Kant himself, hampered by his moralism, was willing to go. Like Nietzsche, Kant also regarded himself as a kind of modern Socratic, who wanted to replace traditional metaphysics with a less dogmatic and more self-conscious form of first philosophy, which “starts from” the subject but

² BGE 9. Translation modified.

³ Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 37. Cf. BGE 188.

paradoxically ends up throwing its very existence into question: “At bottom *Kant* wanted to prove that, starting from the subject, the subject could not be proven [*vom Subjekt aus das Subjekt nicht bewiesen werden könne*] – nor could the object: the possibility of an *apparent existence* of the subject [*einer Scheinexistenz des Subjekts*], that is ‘the soul,’ may not always have been foreign to him.”⁴

In BGE 2, Nietzsche suggested that authentically philosophical thinking has the same subject matter as “metaphysics,” the whole and man’s place in the whole, but it approaches this subject matter in a different *way*, guided by an alternative hypothesis, which might be called “non-dualistic” or “naturalistic.” While these alternatives are in one sense simply parallel hypotheses, competing answers to fundamental questions, analogous in form but differing in content, like each side of Kant’s antinomies, Nietzsche suggests that there is also an important sense in which they are *formally* disanalogous. Nietzsche proposes that the dualistic perspective on human nature is a “foreground” perspective and also a “popular” (*volkstümlich*) perspective. It is the perspective from which we inevitably *begin* – a kind of self-misinterpretation to which we are naturally prone. In rendering this perspective reflectively explicit, and trying to make systematic sense of its implications, the metaphysician takes an important step in the direction of the philosopher. Nietzsche implicitly pays tribute to the metaphysician’s willingness to entertain extravagant hypotheses which go far beyond popular belief and ordinary experience *in order to make sense of* popular belief and ordinary experience – and his willingness to redescribe the later (in some cases radically) in order to do so. In this sense, the metaphysician is a quasi-philosopher or proto-philosopher. At their best, the metaphysicians are indeed

⁴ BGE 54. Translation modified.

“philosophical laborers” of a noble kind. However, they are unwilling to *question* the *fundamental* structure and assumptions of popular belief, which are themselves assumptions *about* ordinary experience which are woven into the fabric *of* ordinary experience. This is not a purely theoretical mistake, but an error bound up with “value feelings.” The metaphysicians remain in the thrall of “popular” morality, however “bizarre” (*entlegen*) or “extravagant” (*ausschweifend*) the hypotheses they entertain in order to justify that morality. In this sense, their mode of thinking remains essentially dogmatic or un-self-conscious.

It is thus no accident that the next aphorism begins with the claim, which seems to come out of left field, that *most* “philosophical” thinking remains a kind of “instinctive activity” – it is only philosophical thinking at the *highest* or most self-conscious level, Nietzsche implies, which overcomes our natural instinct to misinterpret ourselves.⁵ Accordingly, for Nietzsche metaphysical thinking and the highest kind of philosophical thinking (authentically Socratic thinking, I suggest) differ not merely in content, but also in form. Philosophy proper requires “relearning” (*umlernen*). It requires a *more* radical form of cognitive reflexivity than metaphysicians believe is necessary (or possible), as well as the “courage” (*Mut*) to embrace the results of such thinking, however disquieting they may be. The philosopher “will suffer from such an orientation of his judgment [*an einer solchen Richtung seines Urtheils*] as from a kind of seasickness.”⁶

Nietzsche, then, doesn’t simply present the metaphysical and the naturalistic perspectives as competing dogmatic hypotheses. Rather, he suggests that the naturalistic

⁵ BGE 3.

⁶ BGE 23. Translation modified.

perspective is *essentially* a reflective achievement, which requires that the philosopher question the instinctively held “foreground” assumptions from which we begin and which the metaphysician as such refuses to question. These unquestioned assumptions are in the first place assumptions about human phenomena (“the soul”), but (as the metaphysicians themselves help us see) they ultimately involve assumptions about being as a whole. No less than, say, Plato or Heidegger, Nietzsche presents the question of the nature of the human being as inseparable from the question of nature itself or being as a whole.

Metaphysical thinking, then, differs from philosophical thinking not merely in its content, but in its very form. At its core, metaphysical thinking is passive, receptive and un-self-conscious, even as it supplies a reflective systematization of the assumptions it “instinctively” accepts on “faith,” while philosophical thinking is actively, reflexively questioning and *thereby* authentically self-conscious. However, Nietzsche’s position is subtle and in a sense deeply paradoxical. It is precisely *because* philosophical thinking reflexively questions the instincts that it achieves insight into how the world really is (“philosophy, that is to say... seeing clearly into what is”⁷), while metaphysical thinking prevents us from seeing the world as it is *on account of its very passivity*. In a deep sense, then, philosophical thinking *is* receptive – to the world as it is – while metaphysical thinking is receptive not to the world as it is, but to the world *as it presents itself to us* from a “foreground” perspective. Nietzsche’s proposal, then, hypothesizes that the world as it initially presents itself to us is an “interpretation”; authentic openness to the world can only be achieved *through* questioning received interpretations: “What is needed first

⁷ BGE 39. These are Stendhal’s words, but Nietzsche artfully alludes to Plato and Aristotle by the context in which he cites them.

of all is absolute skepticism against all traditional concepts, as one philosopher *perhaps* already possessed it – Plato. Naturally, he taught the opposite.”⁸

It is for this reason that from *The Birth of Tragedy* onwards, Nietzsche returns again and again to the analogy of “dream”: “When we are awake we also do what we do in dreams: we invent and make up the person with whom we associate – and immediately forget it.”⁹

Philosophical “wakefulness” consists in becoming reflexively aware of the constructive or “interpretive” nature of our cognitive faculties and thereby overcoming naïve receptivity *to that which we ourselves have instinctively constructed*. Such a “physio-psychology” immediately provokes the question: Given the omnipresence of “interpretation” in experience, how can we become reflectively aware of our own nature *as self-misinterpreting*?

The difficulty is particularly acute because Nietzsche regards the *epistemic* liberation from “interpretation” achieved by the philosopher as “insidiously involved with” the “will to simplification” out of which it emerges and upon whose constructions it remains dependent in order to articulate the knowledge it achieves, just as he regards the *psychological* liberation from “morality” achieved by the philosopher as a highly qualified “self-overcoming of morality,”¹⁰ rather than an utterly transformative *metabasis eis allo genos*. As Robert Pippin puts it, “Exploring what *not relying* on the idea of a causally independent, persistent subject, supposedly transparent to itself... might amount to turns out to be a kind of mirror image of

⁸ This remark occurs in Nietzsche’s notebooks from April-June 1885, around the time he began writing *BGE*. Quoted in Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 47.

⁹ BGE 138.

¹⁰ Cf. BGE 32.

philosophical theory, antitheory conducted in images, metaphors and similes, but in a certain sense trapped by the systematic ambition of what it is countering.”¹¹

“Antitheory conducted in images, metaphors and similes” is an apt description of Nietzsche’s “physio-psychology” – and also, I would add, of Platonic psychology in dialogues such as the *Phaedrus*. My main disagreement with Pippin’s reading, which I hope to substantiate in what follows, is that I don’t think Nietzsche wants to avoid any reliance on “philosophical theory” altogether, nor does he mean wholly to repudiate the “systematic ambition” of traditional metaphysics. In BGE 20, he acknowledges “the innate systematic structure and relatedness” of philosophical concepts and describes philosophical thinking as a kind of “recollection” or “remembering again” (*Wiedererinnern*), a clear allusion to the Platonic idea of *anamnesis*.¹² Nietzsche intimates, however that, such “recollection” consists not in remembering what the soul has learned in a past life, but in bringing to self-consciousness that which is implicit in human experience *as such*, the primordial inheritance of the human species (arguably what Plato *actually* tries to do in dialogues such as the *Phaedrus*¹³).

However, as many readers have complained, it is far easier to bring into view what Nietzsche rejects than his intended replacement (the same might be said about Plato as a critic of pre-Socratic theories of the soul), especially because the “naturalism” he proposes, whatever it might have in common with garden variety reductive materialism, is clearly a far stranger and more elusive beast than the latter, which Nietzsche invariably treats as a form of naïve dogmatism incapable of recognizing its own “clumsiness.” In this chapter, I argue that

¹¹ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 121.

¹² BGE 20. Translation modified.

¹³ Cf. Charles Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

Nietzsche attempts to provide a kind of systematic grounding for his “physio-psychology” in *BGE* 13-22. I argue that this part of the book is divided into three sub-sections – 13-16, 17-19 and 20-22 – each of which (much like the three sub-sections in his statement of intent) develops a movement of thought to a certain conclusion, which then prepares the reader for a new beginning. These sub-sections focus on the questions of philosophical method (13-16), the soul or the subject (17-19) and nature or the whole (20-22).

Although Nietzsche’s style of writing is far more Platonic than Aristotelian, there is a sense in which his procedure in *BGE* as a whole is more Aristotelian than Platonic. Plato never wrote a dialogue called the *Philosopher* (in contrast to the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*), perhaps to indicate that it is easier to show who the philosopher is *not* than to show “who he is.” Nor did Plato write anything that purported to be a “treatise on ethics.” As a thematic treatment of the philosophical life as the best life, *BGE* resembles Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* more than it resembles any of Plato’s dialogues. Furthermore, the problem of the relationship between Nietzsche’s “physio-psychology” in *BGE* 13-22 and his “psychological analysis of the philosophical type”¹⁴ in the rest of the book is comparable to the notoriously thorny problem of the relationship between the *De Anima* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. To what extent is Aristotle’s treatment of the human being as “desiring intellect” (*orektikos nous*) or “intellectual desire” (*orexis dianoetike*) in his “practical philosophy” dependent on, or even consistent with, the naturalistic psychology of the *De Anima*? The structure of *BGE* raises an analogous question for Nietzsche’s readers.

¹⁴ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 15.

§2. The Question of Philosophical Method in BGE 13-16

In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche claims that “the most valuable insights are discovered last [*am spätesten*]; but the most valuable insights are *methods*.”¹⁵ This claim has a somewhat paradoxical sound; one might suppose that a method is merely the means, even if the indispensable means, through the application of which other, more important discoveries are made. Furthermore, the claim that these methods are discovered “last” or “latest” (*am spätesten*) is ambiguous. Does Nietzsche mean historically latest, i.e. in late modernity, or does he mean last in the order of inquiry?

Although Nietzsche doesn’t unpack this claim further in this aphorism (AC 13), his claim that these “methods” are “the most valuable insights” suggests that he has in mind primarily, although perhaps not exclusively, the “methods” proper to philosophical inquiry. In a notebook entry from the same period, he describes Aristotle and Descartes as “great methodologists.”¹⁶ Earlier in the book (AC 3-4), he claimed that the human type of the “highest value” does not come into being through historical progress (a foolish “modern idea”), but is rather a “happy accident” (*Glücksfall*) or an “exception”: “There is a continuous series of individual successes in the most varied places on earth and from the most varied cultures... Such happy accidents... were always possible and perhaps will always be possible.”¹⁷ Much later in the book (AC 59), he laments that “the entire work of the ancient world” became “overnight a mere memory” through the triumph of Christianity: “To what end the Greeks? To what end the Romans? All the presuppositions for a scholarly culture, all the scientific *methods*

¹⁵ AC 13.

¹⁶ WP 468.

¹⁷ AC 3-4. Translation modified.

were already there, the great incomparable art of reading well had already been established – this presupposition for the tradition of culture, for the unity of science.”¹⁸

When Nietzsche claims, then, that “the most valuable insights are discovered *last*,” he is surely not making a primarily historical claim, even if he partly has in mind the recurring need to establish (or re-establish) a “tradition of culture” in the face of the ever-present threat of barbarism and superstition (the Greeks and the Romans were both latecomers of a certain kind). Rather, he primarily has in mind the cultivation and self-education of the “lucky stroke,” the crowning peak of any such tradition, someone like Aristotle, Descartes or Nietzsche himself. The “highest insights”¹⁹ of the philosopher are “methods” for thinking philosophically and living well: “We have *to learn to think differently* [*umzulernen*] – in order finally, perhaps very late on, to achieve even more: *to feel differently* [*umzufühlen*].”²⁰ One of these methods is “the incomparable art of reading well” – hardly what one would expect as the basic presupposition of “the unity of science.” But in reading a work of first philosophy (such as *BGE*) carefully, what is one doing but reconstructing *for oneself* the author’s thought-process – “the long logic of a completely determinate philosophical sensibility”²¹ – in order to make that philosopher’s discoveries one’s own?

If the philosophical life consists in an art of living, through which one reflectively incorporates philosophical thinking into one’s life such that one eventually learns to “feel differently,” one can see how this might be described as a (very unusual) kind of “method.” But what about philosophical thinking itself? We have already seen that Nietzsche regards such

¹⁸ AC 59.

¹⁹ BGE 30.

²⁰ D 103.

²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche to Georg Brandes, January 8, 1888, quoted in Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 1-2.

thinking as a kind of “thinking *about* thinking,” which questions whether the concepts through which we instinctively understand ourselves and the world are not merely “logical fictions” necessary for the preservation of “such beings as we are.” Rather than taking such concepts for granted and building a metaphysical “edifice” with them (for example, in an Aristotelian or Leibnizean manner, or even in that of Hegel, who still counts as a “metaphysician” for Nietzsche, because he takes for granted the *Selbstherrlichkeit* of “pure thought” as radically *differentiable from* human psychological phenomena or mental events), Nietzsche will be “cautious” (*vorsichtig*) and explore the possibility that the fundamental concepts through which we understand the world involve a dualistic “falsification” of the world inherent in our “foreground” perspective.

Such a hypothesis indeed raises the question of method in an urgent fashion. For if these supposedly “foreground” concepts (such as “substance” and “cause”) are as fundamental to the human perspective as Nietzsche suggests, it is difficult to see how it could even be *possible* for us to question them (how such an enterprise could *make any sense*) – even if they in fact involve a “falsification” of the world. In proposing to replace metaphysics with a radically reflexive “physio-psychology” as “queen of the sciences,” Nietzsche commits himself to providing an account of the human being as essentially self-misinterpreting. But this account must itself begin from and at least provisionally rely on the self-misinterpretations to which it is subject “primarily and for the most part,” to use Heidegger’s apt formula. Accordingly, if we take seriously Nietzsche’s promise of a “new” and in some sense “scientific” account of the soul or the subject, not simply a generalized skepticism, we must recognize that he is faced with a radical version of the classic “modern” or “Cartesian” problem of how to “re-establish”

cognitive access to the world after having thrown our “foreground perspective” into question – “the attempt to ‘break free’ from one’s implicit, unreflective involvement in the world, and then to ‘re-establish’ a connection with Being through a methodologically determined, mathematically certain procedure, or a critically self-conscious criterion of knowledge,” as Pippin formulates it.²² This point sheds light on Heidegger’s notorious claim that Nietzsche is a kind of Cartesian, perhaps even the most radical Cartesian. Although Nietzsche’s “method” (like Hegel’s) obviously has little in common with mathematical procedures, he is indeed searching for “a critically self-conscious criterion of knowledge.”

Nietzsche implicitly raises the question of method at the end of BGE 12. This aphorism ends with the claim that the new psychologist is condemned to “*invention* and – who knows? – perhaps to discovery.”²³ He is condemned to invention because he must proceed by experimenting with new “interpretations” of the soul, e.g. “subjective multiplicity,” which he opposes to traditional conceptions, such as the soul-substance. But Nietzsche himself, in contrast to “postmodern” thinkers inspired by him such as Derrida, clearly *distinguishes* “invention” (*Erfinden*) from “discovery” (*Finden*), even as he suggests that they are complexly interrelated. The phrase “who knows?” was used once before, in aphorism 6, where the implied answer was “the philosopher.” If one sets out to make “discoveries,” one requires a method which enables one to reach one’s goal. It ought to come as no surprise, then, that the next aphorism introduces the question of what “method demands.”

²² Robert Pippin, “Nietzsche, Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Modernity,” in *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson (London: Routledge, 1991), 303.

²³ BGE 12.

Nietzsche writes, “Physiologists should reflect before [*sich besinnen*] positing the drive to self-preservation as the cardinal drive of an organic being [*eines organischen Wesens*]. A living thing [*etwas Lebendiges*] wants above all to *discharge* its force [*seine Kraft auslassen*] – life itself is *will to power*; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *consequences*. In short, here as everywhere, let us beware of *superfluous* teleological principles! – one of which is the drive to self-preservation (we owe it to Spinoza’s inconsistency –). Thus method demands it, which essentially must be economy of principles [*Principien-Sparsamkeit*].”²⁴

Nietzsche’s claim that method demands “economy of principles” raises the question: What *else* does “method” demand? As Hegel would ask, “With what must science begin”? I note that Nietzsche begins in a surprisingly “ancient,” Aristotelian manner. Nietzsche doesn’t begin from the contents of inner experience – Cartesian “thought” or Humean “impressions” and “ideas.” Nor does he begin from Hobbesian “matter in motion.” Rather, like Aristotle in the *De Anima*, Nietzsche begins from the “organic being” or the “living thing” as given in experience. He implies that “method demands” that one *begin* in the (broadly) Aristotelian fashion, rather than in the Cartesian or the Humean, however naïve this might seem.

This ought to be surprising, given Nietzsche’s “modern” emphasis on questioning our foreground perspective on the world. In beginning in this “ancient” manner, Nietzsche implies that even if the world as it initially presents itself to us turns out to be a kind of “construction,” we must *begin from* the world as it presents itself to us and *show how* we reach this conclusion about it. Like Strauss in his critique of positivist social science, Nietzsche suggests that if we

²⁴ BGE 13. Translation modified.

depart too hastily from the world as it appears to us, our “new” perspective will be no less dogmatic (perhaps even more so) than the naïve immersion in the world we take ourselves to be overcoming. Indeed, it is likely to be unconsciously over-determined by pre-scientific *moral* assumptions, as with the seemingly hard-headed materialistic physicists in BGE 22, whose idea of “nature’s conformity to law” reflects “the democratic instincts of the modern soul.”²⁵ Genuine methodological sophistication demands that we reflect on our naïve starting-point and take it seriously.

Furthermore, it is striking that although BGE 12 ends with the claim that “the new psychologist” will be condemned to invention and perhaps also to discovery, BGE 13 begins by asserting that “physiologists” should “reflect” or “recollect themselves” (*sich besinnen*) before they make hasty assumptions about the “cardinal drive” of a living thing. The sudden shift from the new *psychologist* to how *physiologists* ought to proceed is jarring. Although the goal of his inquiry is a kind of self-knowledge, Nietzsche suggests that in order to achieve this goal, we must begin from how we first encounter ourselves, as living beings sharing the world with other living beings like animals and plants, rather than as a Cartesian “thinking thing” (*res cogitans*) confronted by its own “thoughts” or as a Humean “bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.”²⁶ Even if (as I will argue) Nietzsche’s position turns out to be more Humean than Aristotelian, he wants to avoid *too hasty* or “clumsy” a leap to a radical redescription of ordinary experience.

²⁵ BGE 22.

²⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. rev. by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 252 (Book 1, Part 4, Section 6).

The primary phenomenon with which we are confronted is not the soul or the mind in contradistinction to the body, but the “living thing” as such. This isn’t to say that a distinction between the body and the soul (or the mind), the bodily and spiritual aspects of our nature, isn’t in some sense natural to our thinking. As soon as we attempt to understand ourselves reflectively, in however primitive a fashion, we are led to make such a distinction, in some form or other: “‘I am body and soul’: Thus speaks the child. And why should one not speak like children?”²⁷ The distinction between body and soul can be found among the ancients no less than among the moderns, whether or not it is only the particular way of understanding the distinction between the bodily and the spiritual aspects of our nature originating with Descartes which results in an unsolvable “mind-body problem.” Indeed, Nietzsche himself will introduce (and reject or question) materialistic and idealistic interpretations of the human being in the next two aphorisms (14 and 15), suggesting that such a distinction is indeed somehow inescapable, albeit problematic. But by beginning with the “living thing” in BGE 13, Nietzsche suggests that materialism and idealism are in the first instance different interpretations *of what it means to be a living being*.

Nietzsche characterizes the “living thing” initially in terms of its cardinal drive or instinct (*Trieb*), which he claims is directed not towards self-preservation, but towards the discharge of force (*Kraft*) or towards power (*Macht*): “A living thing wants [*will*] above all to *discharge* its force.”²⁸ Nietzsche begins with a characterization of the living thing as a *desiderative* (or erotic) being. If we are to understand how we *differ* from the other animals with

²⁷ TSZ 1:4 On the Despisers of the Body. Translation modified.

²⁸ BGE 13.

whom we share the world, we must begin from a characterization of what we share with them (again, I note the similarity with Aristotle's procedure in the *De Anima*). If we are to understand the distinctive character of our "subjectivity," we must understand ourselves as instinctually driven subjectivity, as "desiring intellect" or "intellectual desire."

Before turning to Nietzsche's claim that "the will to power" is our "cardinal drive," I note a striking peculiarity about his procedure. He begins with a claim about the "cardinal drive" of "life itself," not just animal life. But what about plants? Are they also desiderative beings? This is the first intimation of Nietzsche's cosmological doctrine of the will to power, according to which all beings in the cosmos (even inorganic beings), from amoebas to asteroids, are driven by a desire for power.²⁹ We shall have to see if Nietzsche means this doctrine seriously. If (as I will argue) he does not, perhaps he means here to intimate that we have an instinctive tendency to anthropomorphize (or "zoomorphize") the world, to assume for example that the plant that "reaches for" the sunlight *wants* to enjoy the sunlight, even as such a notion dissipates easily upon reflection.

Nietzsche's emphasis in this aphorism on the importance of method, and on the need to reflect carefully before one "posits" or "sets down" (*ansetzen*) principles in dogmatic fashion as though they were unquestionable axioms, as Spinoza appears to do in the *Ethics*, sits uneasily with the peremptory manner in which he seems to claim, quite implausibly, that *the* fundamental drive of all living beings (even if we restrict this claim to sentient beings or animals) is "the will to power." Before we assume that Nietzsche wants us to accept this claim on his authority alone, we should reflect carefully on what he *means* by it.

²⁹ Cf. BGE 36.

What does it mean to say that we have *one* “cardinal drive”? Nietzsche could be suggesting that all our desires are *really* desires for power, for different forms of power. Thus, for example, hunger and thirst, sexual desire and the desire for knowledge are really desires for power, because, say, bodily enjoyment and the enjoyment of thinking are *themselves* at bottom different forms of “power,” *ways of* exercising power over our environment. Another way to understand Nietzsche’s claim would be to propose that all our other goals are motivated by and exist *in the service of* our desire for power – for example, we want to eat and drink, not for their own sake, but in order to survive *so that* we can pursue power, as a means to the end of attaining power. We want to satisfy our sexual drive, not for its own sake, but as a means for attaining power, in this case presumably over other people.

Nietzsche’s lapidary formulation appears to leave both (equally implausible) possibilities open. However, Nietzsche doesn’t explain what he means by “power” itself, a grasp of which is surely crucial for evaluating his proposal. However, he offers the reader some clues first by *identifying* the will to power with the desire to “discharge” or “release” – or perhaps “express” (*auslassen*) – one’s “force” or “strength” (*Kraft*) and then by *contrasting* the will to power with the drive to mere self-preservation or survival (Spinoza’s *conatus* – there is also a clear allusion to the Darwinist idea of the “struggle for existence”³⁰). Nietzsche claims that self-preservation is only an “indirect” (albeit very common) consequence of the more fundamental drive of an organism to discharge its force or express its strength.

Nietzsche’s odd identification of “the will to power” with the desire of an organism to discharge its force suggests that he has something very different in mind from what we typically

³⁰ Cf. GS 349.

imagine when we hear the popular formula “will to power.” Indeed, from the perspective articulated in this aphorism, the “Machiavellian” impulse to amass power over others in the political and interpersonal spheres in a prudent, calculating fashion seems to have more in common with the fearful, calculating drive to security and self-preservation, the expression of a life (such as Spinoza’s) which feels threatened and seeks to protect itself from “assailants,” than with the “will to power” in the sense of a “noble,” uncalculating drive to express one’s strength, without thinking about the “consequences” – which may be quite devastating *for oneself*. Nietzsche implicitly introduces here the opposition between the noble and the base, which plays an important role in the very next aphorism, where he contrasts the “noble” Platonic way of thinking, which seeks “triumph” *over oneself* and one’s baser nature (over *one’s own* senses, “the mob of the senses, as Plato said”), with the vulgar, “plebeian” way of thinking characteristic of modern physics, which is directed towards protecting the human race from external dangers and acquiring technological power over our natural environment.³¹

Nietzsche’s “physiological” axiom, then, is far more psychological than its initial formulation in BGE 13 suggests. As we know from Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, the “noble” impulse to express one’s strength, regardless of the consequences, when it overrides the “base,” calculating desire for self-preservation and willingly risks its very existence, can indeed result in self-preservation *and* in power over others, if they submit to our force, although it can also lead to death, if we are overpowered by those against whom we express our force. But what does Nietzsche mean when he suggests that the will to power is more fundamental, more “natural,” than the drive to self-preservation? Nietzsche claims that the will to power is the cardinal drive

³¹ BGE 14.

of *any* living being – presumably including the “base” man, who is generally more bent on ensuring his survival than on noble displays of strength.

In aphorism 349 of *The Gay Science* (Book 5), which is a kind of commentary on BGE 13, Nietzsche writes, “To desire [*wollen*] to preserve oneself is the expression of a condition of distress [*einer Nothlage*], a constraining of the real fundamental instinct of life [*einer Einschränkung des eigentlichen Lebens-Grundtriebes*], which aims at *expansion of power* [*Machterweiterung*] and in doing so [*in diesem Willen*] often enough puts into question and sacrifices self-preservation... As an inquirer into nature [*als Naturforscher*]... one should come out of one’s human’s corner – and in nature it is not distress [*die Nothlage*] which rules, but abundance, squandering, even to the point of absurdity. The struggle for existence is only an *exception*, a temporary restriction of the will to life; the great and small struggle revolves everywhere around preponderance, around growth and expansion, around power and in accordance with the will to power, which is simply the will to life.”³²

GS 349 helps us bring into view the non-anthropomorphic sense in which nature itself can be described as “noble.” Nietzsche proposes that, contrary to the “crude” and “one-sided” perspective of popular Darwinism, “the struggle for existence” is at best a description of the human world *insofar as* it is distinguishable from the animal world, *not* of the animal kingdom itself. The exceptional “condition of distress” to which Nietzsche refers is *the human condition*, “the human corner.” Animals don’t “struggle to preserve themselves” in a *calculating* fashion, they simply act on their instincts, “express” or “discharge” their “force” or “strength” in pursuit of the objects towards which they are “by nature” immediately directed (like the noble type who

³² GS 349.

follows his passion without regard for the consequences), even as these instincts generally contribute to their survival (either the temporary survival of the particular organism or the survival of its offspring and thereby of the species to which it belongs) and can thus be described (anthropomorphically or metaphorically) as “directed towards survival.” For this reason, the notion of a “drive to self-preservation” as a principle *distinguishable from and governing the other drives* is “superfluous.” At best, it is a *façon de parler*, as when evolutionary biologists talk about “the selfish gene.” It is only human beings who are ratiocinative, calculating animals, who “struggle for survival,” directing their actions consciously towards this goal, like the slave in Hegel’s dialectic or “the consumptive Spinoza.”³³

But doesn’t Nietzsche frequently emphasize that human beings are themselves nonetheless part of nature? Nietzsche’s deeper target in these aphorisms is neither Spinoza nor Darwin, but the “metaphysical” assumption that the distinctively human capacity to reason and calculate, which is inseparable from a kind of weakening or “constraint” of the instincts, requires that we posit an *independent* rational faculty understood as radically distinguishable from the instincts and capable of governing or directing them “from without,” whether such a faculty (or set of faculties) is understood in a Platonic, Aristotelian, Christian, Kantian or some other fashion. Nietzsche suggests that while modern reductionists (“clumsy naturalists”) scoff at such notions, in anthropomorphically describing the evolutionary process as a “struggle for survival,” they betray their failure to reflect in a philosophically fundamental way on what it means to be a living thing *or* a human being.

³³ GS 349.

Nietzsche proposes that “method demands” that we first try to understand what it means to be human without positing “superfluous teleological principles” understood as *independent* of the instincts while still doing justice to that which is *distinctive* about the human animal. However, in order to do so, we cannot rely on evolutionary hypotheses, however plausible, about human origins, for such hypotheses unavoidably *take for granted* that there is no “metaphysical” difference between human beings and other animals and that such an explanation is therefore *possible*. The “metaphysician” can always reply that even if our lower animal nature has evolved, our higher faculties couldn’t *possibly* have evolved. Nor can we rely on materialistic hypotheses about the human being as a part of material nature like any other unless we have an independent justification of such an account of man *and* nature, however useful such a hypothesis might be as a conceptual framework for the natural sciences (including physiology and medicine) insofar as they are directed towards the technological manipulation of the world. Rather, we must begin from a phenomenological analysis of the human being as a desiderative being sharing the world with other such beings. We must see whether such an inquiry *compels* us to posit irreducibly “metaphysical” principles in order to understand that which is distinctive about our nature (as Aristotle argues in Book 3 of the *De Anima*) or if it shows rather that such principles are “superfluous.”

Nietzsche often suggests that nature is “noble” in the sense of “uncalculating,” while conversely, the noble man resembles an animal. In GS 3, he writes, “For base natures all noble, magnanimous feelings appear to be inexpedient and therefore initially unbelievable... They are suspicious of the noble man, as if he were furtively seeking his advantage... What distinguishes the base nature [*die gemeine Natur*] is that it unflinchingly keeps sight of its advantage and that

this thought of purpose and advantage is even stronger than its strongest drives; not to allow these drives to lead it astray to perform inexpeditious acts – that is its wisdom and its sense of self [*Selbstgefühl*]. In comparison the higher nature [*die höhere Natur*] is more *unreasonable* – for the noble, magnanimous and self-sacrificing person does in fact succumb to his drives; and in his best moments, his reason *pauses*. An animal that protects its young at the risk of its own life or during the mating period follows the female unto death does not think of danger and death; its reason [*Vernunft*] likewise pauses because the pleasure [*Lust*] in its brood or in the female and the fear of being deprived of this pleasure dominate it totally; the animal becomes stupider than it usually is – just like the man who is noble and magnanimous. Such a man has several feelings of pleasure and displeasure [*Lust- und Unlust-Gefühle*] so strong that they reduce the intellect [*der Intellect*] to silence or to servitude.”³⁴

Nietzsche’s comparison of the noble man to an unreasoning beast is rather comical; we are typically inclined to compare the *base* man to an animal and the noble man (“the higher nature”) to an angel or a god. However, Nietzsche doesn’t mean to suggest that this “foreground” perspective is altogether wrong. The higher nature’s unreasoning drives are indeed directed towards objects which the lower animals do not pursue. It is this that the base man regards as incomprehensibly “unreasonable”: “The unreason or askew-reason [*Unvernunft oder Quervernunft*] of passion is what the base man despises in the noble man, especially when this passion is directed at objects whose value seems quite fantastic and arbitrary. He is annoyed by the man who succumbs to the passion of the belly, but at least he comprehends the stimulus [*Reiz*] that plays the tyrant in this case; but he cannot comprehend how anyone could, for

³⁴ GS 3. Translation modified.

example, risk health and honor [*Ehre*] for the sake of a passion for knowledge. The higher nature's taste is for exceptions, for things that leave most people cold and seem to lack sweetness; the higher nature has a singular measure of value [*Werthmaass*].”³⁵

Nietzsche's phenomenology of the noble and the base is complicated and somewhat paradoxical. The noble man resembles the lower animals in the unreasoning, instinctive *way* in which he pursues his desires, but his desires are directed towards “higher” objects which the lower animals do not pursue, such as knowledge, justice and romantic love, while the base man resembles the lower animals in the *objects* he pursues (e.g. “the passion of the belly”), but he pursues them in a distinctively human, rational and calculating fashion. The picture is further complicated by the base man's inability to understand the noble man's willingness to sacrifice “health and honor” in pursuit of his passion. Isn't the concern with “honor” a noble concern? The concern with honor (or reputation) appears to be something shared by the noble and the base; perhaps this concern can take both noble and base forms, or perhaps it points to the “insidious” interrelatedness of the noble with the base.

However, in GS 349, Nietzsche suggests that it is the “noble,” uncalculating perspective which is the *natural* perspective (“in nature” it is “squandering” which “rules,” “even to the point of absurdity”), while the “base,” calculating perspective is distinctively human. One might say that human beings *as such* are “base,” insofar as we are all rational, calculating animals, who reflectively pursue our advantage (set ends before ourselves and seek the most efficient means to them) and self-preservation, at least much of the time. The word *gemein* could also be translated as “common.” The perfectly noble man is an abstraction, a self-misinterpretation to

³⁵ GS 3.

which exceptional natures are prone. If such a nature is to understand himself, he must understand “the lower nature,” not just in others, but in himself. He must “go *down*, and above all go ‘inside.’”³⁶ If “the human corner” is a state of exception in nature, nobility is a state of exception in the human corner. Insofar as noble self-squandering is more “natural” than baseness, man is the being who is *by nature* “unnatural” or in reflective tension with his own instincts. Spinoza may have been “consumptive,” but we are all psychically diseased.

To complicate matters further, the base perspective, which is in a sense the common human perspective, also involves a kind of self-misinterpretation. For in calculating the means to his advantage and survival, the base man *takes himself* to be in control of his drives or instincts, governing them from without by means of his “reason,” rather than being dominated by them: “What distinguishes the base nature is that it unflinchingly keeps sight of its advantage and that this thought of purpose and advantage is even stronger than its strongest drives.”³⁷ While in this formulation, Nietzsche inhabits the perspective of the base, he often makes it clear that he regards the belief that “reason” can override the drives as though from without as a “foreground” assumption: “The will to overcome an affect is ultimately only the will of another, or several other, affects.”³⁸ “To our strongest drive, the tyrant in us, not only our reason bows but also our conscience.”³⁹ The base man, who prudently calculates his advantage, is subject to the illusion that he possesses rational control over his drives “from without,” an illusion most commonly described today as “free will.”

³⁶ BGE 26.

³⁷ GS 2. Translation modified.

³⁸ BGE 117.

³⁹ BGE 158.

This is Spinoza's *real* "inconsistency"; he denied "free will," but in attributing *conatus* to all of nature ("each thing, insofar as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being"⁴⁰), he effectively attributes "free will" to all of nature, because the only thing this could *mean* is that all beings seek their self-preservation – freely seek the *means* to the consciously held *end* of survival – in the way human beings *take themselves* to be doing (I note that Nietzsche leaves open the possibility that Spinoza was well aware of this, that the doctrine of *conatus*, like "the will to power," was in part a popular or "exoteric" teaching). Nietzsche means to suggest that the Spinozist or Darwinist who attributes a "drive to self-preservation" to all of nature doesn't merely anthropomorphize nature; he also fails to grasp the sense in which human beings themselves are no less part of nature than the other animals. The noble and the base are *both* manifestations of "the will to power." The "will to preserve oneself" is a "constraining" of the will to power – not an independent drive.⁴¹ The base man no less than the noble is governed by his instincts, despite being subject to the illusion that he can govern his instincts rationally "from without," which is present whenever we calculate our advantage and has been given reflective doctrinal articulation by thinkers such as Augustine and Kant who didn't want to recognize that it's an illusion. When Nietzsche says that the base man's *thought* of purpose and advantage (*diess Denken an Zweck und Vorthail*) is "stronger" even than his strongest drives, he means that the base man's "commanding thought" (cf. BGE 19), the purposeful *thought* of advantage and survival, *takes itself* to be the governing "master" of his actions, when in fact ("in real life," as he puts it in BGE 21) it is merely an "affect" ("the affect of command"⁴²) which

⁴⁰ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley, 2nd. ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 108 (III, P. 6).

⁴¹ GS 349.

⁴² BGE 19.

results from the activity of his drives: “What happens here is what happens in every well-constructed and happy commonwealth; namely, the governing class identifies itself with the successes of the commonwealth.”⁴³

Strictly speaking, then, there is no such thing as a “drive to self-preservation,” not just in the rest of nature, but even in human beings. The belief that we have such a drive (or the *Scheinexistenz* of the drive itself) is reducible to our “instinctive” belief in free will, because such a “drive” consists only in the “complex” of “feeling” or “sensing” and thinking (*Complex von Fühlen und Denken*) involved in anxiously calculating the means to the end of survival, a process bound up with the illusion of rational control over the instincts. None of our actual drives or instincts (as opposed to our *thoughts*) are directed towards the special object of self-preservation; rather, they are directed towards the feelings of pleasure (*Lust-Gefühle*) we take in, say, eating, drinking, mating or thinking – including the pleasure we take *in the thought that we are struggling for our survival and rationally controlling our actions in service of this goal*. It is from this “thought” that the base man derives his “feeling of self,” his *Selbstgefühl*.

Someone might *say* that he “takes pleasure in mere survival,” but all this could *mean* is either that he takes pleasure in the “thought” of *having secured* his survival by rationally directing his actions towards this goal (an illusion – this “affect of command” is an epiphenomenon of the “commonwealth” of the instincts) or simply that he takes pleasure in the *particular activities* that make up his quotidian existence – such as eating, drinking, watching the world go by or enjoying the mere sentiment of his existence, as Rousseau would say. But doesn’t Nietzsche say that self-preservation is one of the most frequent *consequences* of our

⁴³ BGE 19.

“instinctual activities,” even if strictly speaking we don’t have an instinct directed towards “self-preservation” as a special object of desire? So couldn’t we take pleasure in *the mere fact* that our “instinctual activities” do indeed tend to “result in” our self-preservation? One could even think of a noble type who acts on his noble instincts – he “lives ‘unphilosophically’ and ‘unwisely,’ above all *imprudently*... he risks *himself* constantly”⁴⁴ – but delights in the awareness that his noble imprudence nonetheless generally turns out to his advantage. The masters in the *Genealogy* reject the “slavish” notion of free will, but they still take pride in their accomplishments.

In order to evaluate such a stance from a Nietzschean perspective, we must wait until he introduces his critique of causality, which he will soon argue (in BGE 19 and 21) is itself a kind of “superfluous principle.” BGE 13 anticipates the direction Nietzsche will take without yet presenting his argument for a “parsimonious,” naturalistic account of the human being. Rather, the methodological caution Nietzsche articulates in this highly compressed aphorism, which is difficult to unpack without drawing on more elaborate statements from elsewhere in his mature corpus, serves to indicate the *direction* which a naturalistic attempt to understand the human being (“a genuine physio-psychology”⁴⁵) *must take* – the conditions it must fulfill – in order to avoid “metaphysics” on the one hand and “clumsy naturalism” (itself a kind of “metaphysics”) on the other.

However, if Nietzsche’s central thesis is that we are instinctively driven beings like the other animals, and that if possible we must avoid the urge to posit “metaphysical” principles

⁴⁴ BGE 205.

⁴⁵ BGE 23.

independent of the instincts in order to understand what *is* distinctive about our way of being (human *eros*), why does he claim that there is *one* “cardinal drive”? And why does he call this drive “the will to power”? And why does he define the will to power in such a strange way, as the desire to “discharge one’s force” or “express one’s strength”? As Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick write, “The behavior of living beings simply is a discharging of strength or energy. Positing a *goal* of discharging energy therefore seems to be a clear instance of invoking a ‘superfluous teleological principle.’ Things get even more problematic if we ask why Nietzsche equates a desire to discharge energy with a will to power. Even if we granted that the birds in the sky often seem to be flying and swooping simply in order to discharge their strength, why should we take this to have anything to do with power?”⁴⁶

Here I note an ambiguity in Nietzsche’s statement of method. He cautions “physiologists” against positing “*superfluous* teleological principles.”⁴⁷ But it is unclear if he means that *teleological* principles *as such* are superfluous or merely that we ought to avoid those which are unnecessary for understanding the phenomenon of (sentient) life. Without providing any explanation of what he (or Nietzsche) means by this distinction, Lampert claims that the drive to self-preservation is essentially teleological while the will to power is not.⁴⁸ But as Clark and Dudrick point out, both drives are equally teleological in the sense of “goal-directed.”⁴⁹ I have argued that Nietzsche regards the drive to self-preservation as superfluous, not merely because it is goal-directed, but rather because none of our instincts are *actually*

⁴⁶ Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick, *The Soul of Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 216.

⁴⁷ BGE 13.

⁴⁸ Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 44.

⁴⁹ Clark and Dudrick, *The Soul of Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil*, 214-216.

directed towards the particular goal of self-preservation or survival (either our own survival or the survival of our species⁵⁰). Ultimately, the very attribution of such a goal to *human* activity (then by unreflective analogy to other species) rests on the “metaphysical” assumption that our instincts can be directed from without by an independent rational faculty.

But what about the instincts themselves? If they are all in fact directed towards one *real* goal, such as “power,” it would indeed be “superfluous” to posit a plurality of drives. The apparent plurality of our drives would be a kind of illusion. However, Nietzsche doesn’t say in BGE 13 that “method demands” that we reduce the apparent plurality of our drives to one *real* drive – only that we should be cautious before we posit “principles” that may turn out to be “superfluous.” On the other hand, he *does* claim that our “cardinal drive” is “the will to power,” defined in a way Clark and Dudrick rightly emphasize is very odd. Yet elsewhere, Nietzsche often speaks of a plurality of drives (“the basic drives of man”⁵¹) and seems to be concerned, not with reducing these drives to one *real* drive, but rather with understanding the principle of their organization – or disorganization, in the case of “decadent” forms of life.

I suggest that Nietzsche is well aware of this difficulty and seeks to resolve it in what is again a surprisingly Aristotelian fashion – by (implicitly) drawing a distinction. On the one hand, Nietzsche doesn’t seriously maintain that all our desires are “really” desires for power, such that, e.g., hunger would “really” be a desire to subjugate our physical environment by

⁵⁰ In apparent contradiction with BGE 13, in GS 1 Nietzsche seems to claim that our most fundamental instinct is for “the preservation of the human species.” However, he in fact claims that all our instinctive activities *have this result*, even as they are directed towards *their own particular goals*, whether “good” or “evil” (e.g. “hatred, delight in the misfortunes of others, the lust to rob and to rule”). We have an instinct “to do what” *contributes to* (“results in”) the preservation of our species, not an instinct *for* the preservation of our species. The contradiction with BGE 13 is merely apparent.

⁵¹ Cf. BGE 6.

consuming it. For Nietzsche, such a claim would be as arbitrary as the Christian doctrine that our pursuit of the things of this world is unsatisfying because all our desire is “really” directed towards union with God. Any such claim would involve the kind of “metaphysical” distinction between appearance and reality which Nietzsche questioned in BGE 2. I note that the phenomenon of self-deception is quite different. This involves a misinterpretation *of* our own desires, rather than a claim that, say, our “empirical” desire for sex is *really* the manifestation of “the will to power” understood as the “intelligible character” of the world.⁵² It may well be that what somebody *wants* above all when he pursues the object of his desires is, say, to subjugate another person, or to achieve recognition by others for his prowess as a seducer, even as he takes himself to be pursuing mere bodily satisfaction.

On the other hand, Nietzsche *does* want to claim that all our desires are at bottom of the same instinctual kind and in this sense *wesensgleich*. We desire food and sex in essentially *the same way* as we desire, say, knowledge or justice. Even the base man is instinctively directed towards *thinking of himself as being* in control of his instincts (he derives his *Selbstgefühl* from this “thought”). In this sense, Deleuze is right to speak of Nietzsche as affirming a kind of ontological “univocity,” which however is a “univocity of differences.”⁵³ The positing of “the will to power” as a unitary “physiological” principle in BGE 13 is a kind of thought-experiment; Nietzsche proposes that if all our desires can be understood as operating in essentially the same (*wesensgleich*) instinctual way, there will be no need to posit “metaphysical” principles of our being.

⁵² Cf. BGE 36.

⁵³ Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), especially “Difference In Itself,” 28-69.

But why call this principle “the will to power”? In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche identifies “power itself,” not with control over other people, but with “the feeling of power” and with “the will to power” *itself*, placing these three phrases in apposition. He then identifies “happiness” with the *feeling* “that power grows, that a resistance is being overcome [*ein Widerstand überwunden wird*].”⁵⁴ In the famous letter in which he calls Spinoza his “precursor,” Nietzsche praises him for recognizing that “knowledge” is “the most powerful affect.”⁵⁵ By “power,” then, Nietzsche means a certain kind of “feeling” or “affect,” not the ability to tell others what to do. What Nietzsche means by “power” corresponds far more closely to what we mean when we describe an extraordinary experience, such as falling in love, reading a great novel, losing or gaining a religious faith or understanding something important about ourselves as a “powerful experience,” than to what we mean when we call somebody like Hitler or Stalin a “powerful man.” Nietzsche suggests that everything we do, from eating and drinking to mating and thinking, is driven by the instinctual desire for such an “enhancement” of our experience, even as some activities supply us with such a “feeling” (*Gefühl*) to a greater “degree” (*Grade*) than others.

However, when we describe an experience like falling in love or reading a great novel as a “powerful” experience, or when Nietzsche describes knowledge as “the most powerful affect,” we are inclined to think of such “feelings” or “affects” as “powerful” in the sense that we are overwhelmed by the power of *that which* we experience rather than in the sense that we feel *our*

⁵⁴ AC 2. Bernard Reginster emphasizes the “overcoming of resistance” as central to Nietzsche’s conception of will to power and life-affirmation. Cf. Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche to Franz Overbeck, July 30, 1881, in Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 177. Translation modified.

own power “growing.” If a resistance is overcome, it would seem to be *our* “resistance” to that which strikes us from without – the person we love, the artwork the beauty of which we savor or the truth we delight in comprehending: “A philosopher: that is a human being who constantly experiences, sees, hears, suspects, hopes and dreams extraordinary things; who is struck by his own thoughts as [*wie*] from outside, as [*wie*] from above and below, as [*als*] by *his* type of events [*Ereignissen*] and lightning strikes.”⁵⁶ But in BGE 13, Nietzsche equates what he elsewhere calls the “feeling of power” with the discharge of *one’s own* force or the expression of *one’s own* strength – a “living thing” wants “above all” to discharge “its” force. Might it be the case that in order to receive such experiences, we must actively *strive* to be open to them, we must “discharge” the strength of our thought and passion, such that we concomitantly grasp the “power” of such experiences *as* our own?

On the other hand, the feeling that power is “growing” would seem to be quite different from the feeling that power is being “discharged,” “released” or “expressed.” Wouldn’t this involve a *loss* of power or strength, which at first leaves us spent, rather than a gain in power? Or is there a dialectical relationship between the ebb and flow or the build-up and discharge of power? In an interesting aphorism in *Daybreak* (1881), Nietzsche claims there are *two* “species of happiness,” “the feeling of power” and “the feeling of surrender [*Ergebung*].”⁵⁷ He observes that the “thought-out way of life [*ausgedachte Lebensweise*]” of “the higher and highest Catholic priesthood,” “perhaps the most refined figures in human society that have ever existed,” involves “the constant ebb and flow” of these two “feelings.”⁵⁸ He describes this way

⁵⁶ BGE 292. Translation modified.

⁵⁷ D 60. Translation modified.

⁵⁸ D 60. Translation modified.

of life as resulting in a “thorough spiritualization [*Durchgeistigung*]” of “the animal in the human being [*das Thier im Menschen*].”⁵⁹ But Nietzsche presumably interprets this “spiritualization” in a very different way than the Catholic priest himself, as a manifestation of the instincts somehow turning against themselves.

Daybreak is arguably a transitional work, but it would take me too far afield to enter here into the question of Nietzsche’s development. At any rate, presumably the Nietzsche of 1886 would describe the “feeling of surrender” as itself a *form* of the “feeling of power.” Indeed, the mature Nietzsche’s concept of *amor fati* suggests an element of “surrender” in his conception of philosophical happiness, albeit to natural necessity rather than to the will of God. I will take up the question of the internal differentiation of “the feeling of power” in the next chapter. Here I want only to emphasize that Nietzsche’s programmatic claim that life itself is “will to power” is a preliminary formulation of his hypothesis that the human being can be understood as no less instinctually driven a being than the other animals, driven by instincts which are directed towards feelings of pleasure (*Lustgefühle*) or enjoyment (*Genuss*), even as the human instincts are reflectively turned against themselves in a way that seduces us into positing “superfluous principles.” It is Nietzsche’s version of the Aristotelian claim that a human being just *is* “desiring intellect” or “intellectual desire.” Nietzsche’s contrast between “self-preservation” and “power” refers obliquely to the difference between “the human corner” and the animal kingdom, as GS 349 helps us see, while his denial that there is such a thing as a *Selbsterhaltungstrieb* strictly speaking is an oblique way of denying “any cardinal distinction

⁵⁹ D 60. Translation modified.

between man and animal,” as he put in 1874⁶⁰ – a formula echoed (perhaps deliberately) by the claim that the will to power is the “cardinal drive” of life itself.

I have argued that Nietzsche’s proposal that *instinct as such* be described as “will to power” is intentionally misleading, although not altogether so – what he means by this is not entirely unrelated to ordinary usage. Similarly, even if Nietzsche’s claim that “life itself” (not just sentient life or animal life) is “will to power” is partly “exoteric,” it reminds us that although the human soul must be the primary theme of non-dogmatic first philosophy, we cannot understand ourselves without at the same time considering our place in the whole. The question which he raises here without answering – and to which he will return in BGE 22 (and again in BGE 36) – is whether naturalistic “method” demands that the distinction between “nature” and “life” which he made in BGE 9, where he first introduced “the will to power,” *itself* be understood as the manifestation of a “univocal” principle.

Nietzsche’s core assumption in BGE 13 is that the world of instinct or desire directed towards feeling or affect – “our world of desires and passions” or “the world of affects,” as he puts it in BGE 36 – is the primary phenomenon with which we are confronted.⁶¹ Ontological doctrines such as materialism, idealism and dualism are in the first instance “interpretations” of this “world.” Insofar as such doctrines posit “metaphysical” principles that are supposed to describe or explain this world – this includes materialistic doctrines about ultimate, in principle imperceptible reality, such as “materialistic atomism” – they must show how such principles are

⁶⁰ UDHL 9.

⁶¹ BGE 36.

necessary in order to describe or explain “the world of affects” itself. This is what Nietzsche means by method as *Principien-Sparsamkeit*.

BGE 14 continues the theme of method. Nietzsche begins by dismissing contemporary materialistic physics as an “interpretation” (*Auslegung*) of “the world” and “not a world-explanation” (*Welt-Erklärung*), while emphasizing that it must be *taken as such* to serve the purposes of modern technology: “It may be the right imperative for a tough, industrious race of engineers and bridge-builders of the future, who have nothing but *coarse* work to do.”⁶² There is a certain irony in this – it is naïve “sensualism,” suggests Nietzsche, “belief” or “faith” in the sole reality of *that which* we can touch and feel (*Glauben an die Sinne*), which leads us to posit imperceptible “material things” or “forces” which *cannot* be touched or felt *as though* they constituted the ultimate reality of “the world of affects.” Highly sophisticated, mathematized techniques of describing the world are employed for the “coarse” task of transforming the world we experience through the application of modern technology rather than understanding its “nature.” These techniques combine technical sophistication with philosophical coarseness or naiveté.

It is striking that Nietzsche presents no argument whatsoever for this claim here. By contrast, he offers relatively detailed (albeit somewhat indirectly presented) arguments in short order against the Cartesian doctrine of thinking substance and the voluntarist notion of free will, even as he describes the latter (in what might be taken as a kind of a backhanded praise) as “the best self-contradiction that has been conceived so far, a kind of logical rape and perversion.”⁶³

⁶² BGE 14. Translation modified.

⁶³ BGE 21.

Nietzsche takes it as obvious that the world described by modern physics *isn't* the world we experience – after all, “the physicists of today” admit as much, even as they arbitrarily claim that the world *they* describe in mathematized terms is “the real world.” As Stanley Rosen puts it, “Recognition that life is a dream is obliterated by the apparent access to ultimate mastery of nature. Not much attention is paid by enthusiasts of science to the fact that the dream of mastery is itself a dream within a dream.”⁶⁴ By contrast, the doctrines of thinking substance and free will *are* supposed to describe the experience of human activity and its constituent elements, although Nietzsche will argue that they misdescribe this experience and posit “superfluous” principles unwarranted by the evidence.

The will to power should not be understood materialistically, then, even as Nietzsche’s own rhetoric often provokes such an interpretation, thereby catering to the “plebeian taste” of our age.⁶⁵ How, then, should it be understood? Nietzsche contrasts the coarseness of “the physicists of today” with the “noble” and sophisticated Platonic way of thinking.⁶⁶ While the modern technological way of thinking is directed outward, at material nature, the Platonic way of thinking is directed inward, *at one’s own senses*. Rather than being seduced by the senses into positing a world of material things or forces which cannot themselves be perceived by the senses, Plato sought reflexively to understand “the world of affects” *itself* by means of “concept-nets” (*Begriffs-Netze*), much like Nietzsche.⁶⁷ Although Nietzsche surely rejects the dualistic “theory of Ideas,” according to which “concepts” enjoy a self-subsistent reality in a transcendent

⁶⁴ Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche’s Zarathustra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 245.

⁶⁵ BGE 14. Translation modified.

⁶⁶ BGE 14. Translation modified.

⁶⁷ BGE 14.

world, there is no hint in this aphorism that such a theory is essential to the Platonic way of thinking itself (one might say Nietzsche implicitly contrasts Plato's own way of thinking with the Platonic doctrines). Rather, Plato *himself* sought "enjoyment" (*Genuss*) in the "interpretation" of *this* world, the world of affect and desire (*eros*).⁶⁸

But did Plato's "overpowering" and "interpreting" of "the world" result in a real "world-explanation" or merely in a different, perhaps more self-aware form of "mere interpretation"? A lot depends on just what Nietzsche means by "explanation," a question he poses in this aphorism (in reference to "perennially popular sensualism") without explicitly answering it in his own name: "What is clear [*klar*], what is 'explained [*erklärt*]'? Only that which lets itself be seen and felt: every problem has to be pursued up to that point."⁶⁹ But the word *Erklärung* is ambiguous – it could be translated as "explanation" (as in natural-scientific explanation), but also as "clarification." The identification of what is *erklärt* with what is *klar* suggests that Plato's *own* way of thinking consisted primarily in a phenomenological *clarification* of human experience, understood as a complex entanglement of feeling or sensibility with thought ("concept-nets"), rather than in a metaphysical "explanation" of "the world of affects" by reference to imperceptible postulates.

Such a method or "way of thinking" suggests a kind of idealism, perhaps akin to Kantianism. Nietzsche takes up this question in the next aphorism. However, he seems to reverse course. Having just rejected "sensualism," Nietzsche now claims that in order "to pursue physiology with a good conscience," one must hold to the assumption (*darauf halten*) that "the

⁶⁸ BGE 14.

⁶⁹ BGE 14. Translation modified.

sense-organs are *not* appearances in the sense of idealistic philosophy,” because “as such they could not be causes!”⁷⁰ For *this* reason, Nietzsche says, one must accept sensualism “at least as a regulative hypothesis, in order not to say [*um nicht zu sagen*] as a heuristic principle.”⁷¹ However, in BGE 21, Nietzsche will argue that “cause” and “effect” are “conventional fictions for the purpose of designation or communication – *not* explanation [or clarification – *Erklärung*].”⁷² I suggest that by pursuing physiology “with a good conscience,” Nietzsche means pursuing physiology *without* a reflective philosophical conscience, but rather after the fashion of the epistemologically naive “sensualists” of the preceding aphorism, who confidently employ the concepts of cause and effect as though they were *not* merely “conventional fictions.”⁷³ The philosopher recognizes that sensualism is merely a “regulative hypothesis,” indispensable for the purpose of natural-scientific redescription and technological transformation of the world. I suggest that Nietzsche means here to *contrast* such a hypothesis with a “heuristic principle,” a real principle of “discovery” (*heuresis*).⁷⁴ In order to make discoveries (or achieve genuine clarification of the phenomena), one must *question* “sensualism” and the legitimacy of the concepts it unreflectively employs, such as “cause,” “effect” and “material thing.”

Does this mean that the sense-organs *are* in fact “appearances in the sense of idealistic philosophy”? Rather than answering this question immediately, Nietzsche suddenly introduces another group of thinkers: “What? And others even say that the external world [*die Aussenwelt*]

⁷⁰ BGE 15. Translation modified.

⁷¹ BGE 15.

⁷² BGE 21. Translation modified.

⁷³ Cf. BGE 14 with 21. Translation modified.

⁷⁴ Nietzsche alludes to the distinction between invention and discovery which he made in BGE 12.

is the work of our organs?”⁷⁵ Nietzsche contrasts *these* thinkers with the “idealistic” philosophers who claim that the sense-organs are mere “appearances” (*Erscheinungen*) but presumably *don't* go so far as to reduce the external world itself to a mere “appearance.”

The first form of “idealistic philosophy” seems to be a kind of Kantianism, which makes a distinction between an unknowable (or at least not directly perceptible) “external world” or “thing-in-itself” and the “sense-organs” of the human body, understanding the latter as mere “appearances” (*Erscheinungen*), presumably *of* the former. This form of idealism seems to make a distinction between the phenomenal body, the lived body as we inhabit and experience it, and the body as it is “in-itself” or “externally,” whether or not the latter is accurately described by the techniques of natural science, with or without the proper “critical” qualifications (the phenomenal *Leib* as opposed to the objective *Körper* described by the scientist, to use a distinction employed by phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty). The lived body is the phenomenal form in which the underlying or “external” corporeal reality, “the thing-in-itself” or *Aussenwelt*, appears *to us*. This form of idealism is actually a kind of dualism. But then what *are* we such that the thing-in-itself or “the objective body” *can* appear *to us* in the form of the subjectively experienced body or “the apparent body”?

The second, more radical kind of idealism regards the external world *itself* “as ‘appearance [*Schein*],’ as ‘idea [*Vorstellung*],’ in the Berkelyean and Schopenhauerean sense,” as he puts it in BGE 36, which echoes the formulation “in the sense of idealistic philosophy” in BGE 15.⁷⁶ While leaving the first kind of idealism untouched (he neither rejects nor affirms it),

⁷⁵ BGE 14.

⁷⁶ BGE 36. Translation modified.

Nietzsche presents a very brief, knock-down argument against the more radical kind: “But then our body, as a part [*ein Stück*] of this external world, would be the work of our organs! But then our organs themselves would be – the work of our organs! It seems to me that this is a complete *reductio ad absurdum*, assuming that the concept *causa sui* is something fundamentally absurd.”⁷⁷ However, Nietzsche’s argument is curiously inadequate – it seems to be directed against a straw man. For as BGE 36 makes perfectly clear, Nietzsche knew that idealists like Berkeley and Schopenhauer don’t claim that the external world is “the work of our organs.” Rather, they refuse to make a distinction between “our organs” and “the external world” to begin with. They understand being *itself* as “appearance” (*Schein*, not *Erscheinung*) or “idea” – the problem they face is rather how the materialistic or dualistic *belief* in a transcendent physical world (*Aussenwelt*), distinguishable in kind from the “phenomenal” or “mental” realm as such, arises *for* the human “subject” in the first place. Indeed, in *this* respect, Berkeley’s idealism seems very close to the position towards which Nietzsche himself is moving – the most important difference being that Nietzsche will argue that rigorous “self-observation” shows (contra Berkeley) that thinking substance and free will are *also* illusions.

Nietzsche concludes this aphorism with a question: “Consequently the external world is *not* the work of our organs – ?”⁷⁸ In other words, does it – or does it *not* – follow from Nietzsche’s knock-down, straw-man argument against Berkeley’s idealism that the external world is the work of our organs? Presumably this depends on what “our organs” *are* (or what our body *is*) and what one means by “the external world.” But these questions can presumably

⁷⁷ BGE 15. Translation modified.

⁷⁸ BGE 15.

only be clarified through the Platonic way of thinking Nietzsche sketchily adumbrated in the preceding aphorism, i.e. through a reflective consideration of the entanglement of sensibility with thinking (“concept-nets”) *in our experience*, through a kind of self-observation, the theme of the next aphorism. But is such an enterprise properly conducted in the manner of Descartes, Berkeley or Kant, or in some other way, which would show that all these thinkers rely on concepts (e.g. cause) derived from our “foreground perspective”?

I suggest that the purpose of this confusing aphorism is to show that as soon as we begin to question our “foreground perspective,” to raise the possibility that the world as we initially comprehend it is *in some sense* a “construction” or an “appearance,” we are compelled to make a distinction between ourselves and the external world, a distinction which can then be understood in a variety of possible ways (“individual philosophical concepts are nothing arbitrary or autonomously evolving [*Für-sich-Wachsendes*], but grow up in connection and kinship with one another... however suddenly and haphazardly they seemingly emerge in the history of thinking”⁷⁹), all of which are initially problematic. The rejection of materialism in BGE 14 precedes the questioning of dualism and idealism in BGE 15, because we first reflectively encounter ourselves as a “living thing” similar to the things “out there in the world,” the things we can “see and feel.” We then turn *inwards*, and *contrast* ourselves with “the world out there” (*die Aussenwelt*), only to discover that any such contrast must also make sense of how we still belong to and remain “a part” (*ein Stück*) of the world even as we distance ourselves from it in thought.

⁷⁹ BGE 20. Translation modified.

Although he reiterates the rejection of naïve “sensualism” from the preceding aphorism (while seeming to retract it), Nietzsche doesn’t reach any new conclusions in this aphorism. He leaves the Kantian form of “idealistic philosophy” untouched, while rendering it questionable by the way in which he formulates the doctrine itself. He rejects idealism “in the Berkelyean sense,” while rendering his own critique of Berkeley questionable by the way in which he formulates this very critique. Fittingly, the aphorism ends with a *question*, which Nietzsche indicates can only be answered through some form of phenomenological “self-observation.” If materialistic sensualism is merely a “regulative hypothesis” for the sciences, Plato’s way (method) of thinking is a real principle of discovery for the first philosopher.

Nietzsche’s phenomenology of “the subject,” which he presents in BGE 17-19, will – like Heidegger’s *Daseinanalytik* – indeed involve a peculiar kind of “self-observation.” However, Nietzsche doesn’t begin *directly* with “self-observation.” Rather, he works up to this theme by showing how we are “methodically” *led* to such an enterprise in trying first to make sense of ourselves as a living thing, then running into difficulties in trying to make sense of *what it means to be a living thing* in materialistic, dualistic and idealistic ways. If we simply leap into “self-observation,” as Descartes encourages us to do with remarkable haste in the *Meditations*, we will fail to recognize the difficulties involved in such an enterprise. We will describe ourselves hastily as a “thinking thing,” “immediately” transparent to itself, an error almost as “clumsy” as dogmatic materialism. BGE 16 analytically enumerates the assumptions (“a series of reckless assertions”) made by “harmless self-observers” such as the Cartesian meditator when they leap too hastily into this difficult enterprise.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ BGE 16. Translation modified.

Nietzsche's target in BGE 16 is "immediate certainty" or (as he called it in BGE 11, with reference to Schelling) "intellectual intuition."⁸¹ Nietzsche claims that "the people" (*das Volk*) believe (*glauben*) in immediate certainty, while "the philosopher" questions this belief.⁸² Of course, "the people" don't believe in "immediate certainty" or "intellectual intuition" in the way someone like Schelling might; such doctrines are the product of metaphysical reflection. Like Socrates, Nietzsche assumes that ordinary experience is always already entangled in unreflectively held beliefs about the world ("concept-nets") or *interpretations* of experience, which the philosopher must render reflectively explicit. However, this task can be understood in two contrasting ways, the "metaphysical" and the truly philosophical.

BGE 16 makes clear that the difference between "metaphysics" and "physiopsychology" is in a crucial sense a *methodological* difference. This point can be illustrated by a remark about Aquinas made by the Thomist F. C. Copleston: "Aquinas... did not think that the philosopher enjoys private access to a sphere of reality from which ordinary people are excluded. The ordinary man apprehends in some sense the fundamental metaphysical principles, though he does not formulate them in the abstract way in which they are formulated by the philosopher... The philosopher makes explicit what is implicitly known by people in general."⁸³ Even a doctrine as abstract and sophisticated as the Thomistic theory of causality, or act and potency, is only a rendering explicit of what we already *know*, although only the philosopher can know it in such a reflective, discursively articulated *way*.

⁸¹ Cf. BGE 11 with 16.

⁸² BGE 16.

⁸³ F. C. Copleston, *Aquinas* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), 43-44.

For Nietzsche by contrast, the philosopher's task consists in bringing to reflective consciousness what "ordinary people" implicitly *believe* or *assume they know*, in order to subject it to radical questioning: "In place of the 'immediate certainty' in which the people may believe in the given case, the philosopher thus finds a series of questions of metaphysics [*eine Reihe von Fragen der Metaphysik*], properly authentic conscience-questions of the intellect [*recht eigentliche Gewissensfragen des Intellekts*]."84 In spite of its mocking, polemical tone, BGE 16 brings out the subtlety of the distinction Nietzsche wants to make. On the one hand, in bringing to self-consciousness what "the people" already "immediately" know (but don't know *that* they know), a metaphysician such as Aquinas doesn't only transform this "implicit knowledge" in quite a drastic manner; he also eliminates a great deal of sheer popular prejudice (and sophisticated pseudo-philosophical confusion) along the way, raising difficult questions about the relationship between immediate and mediated knowledge or intuitive and discursive rationality. On the other hand, in questioning the very idea of "immediate certainty" or "a kind of intuitive knowledge" (*eine Art Intuition der Erkenntnis*, literally "a kind of intuition of knowledge"), not only with respect to Cartesian self-observation but *in general*, Nietzsche raises the question of just how *he* intends to ground *his* project – or how exactly he understands the relationship between "the people" and "the philosopher."⁸⁵

If we aren't careful, the lesson we'll take from BGE 16 is that we can be immediately certain that there's no such thing as immediate certainty: "That 'immediate certainty,' just like 'absolute knowledge' and 'thing-in-itself,' contains a *contradictio in adjecto*, I shall repeat a

⁸⁴ BGE 16. Translation modified.

⁸⁵ BGE 16. Translation modified.

hundred times; one should finally free oneself from the seduction of words!”⁸⁶ So far as I know, no commentator has noted the reflexive irony in Nietzsche’s promise to repeat the same phrase “a hundred times” in order to drill it into our heads that we shouldn’t let ourselves be enslaved by mere words. However, rather than keeping this promise (he knows that most of his readers will keep it for him), Nietzsche instead gives us an example of his Platonic “way of thinking” by proceeding to “analyze” or “disassemble” (*zerlegen*) what he calls the “process” or “occurrence” (*Vorgang*) “expressed” (*ausgedrückt*) in the Cartesian formula “I think” (*cogito*): “The people may believe that knowing is a knowing to the very end [*dass Erkennen ein zu Ende-Kennen sei*]; the philosopher must say to himself: ‘When I analyze the process which is expressed in the sentence [*Satz*] ‘I think,’ I thereby acquire [*so bekomme ich*] a series of reckless assertions, the grounding [*Begründung*] of which is difficult, perhaps impossible. For example, that it is *I* who think, that there must be a thing [*ein Etwas*] that thinks at all [*überhaupt*], that thinking is an activity and an effecting [*eine Tätigkeit und Wirkung*] on the part of a being [*seitens eines Wesens*] that is thought of as a cause, that there is an ‘I,’ and finally, that it is already determined what is to be designated by thinking – that I *know* what thinking is.”⁸⁷

Although Nietzsche’s target is “immediate certainty” *in general*, the mere possibility of which is the implicit methodological assumption of “the metaphysicians,” it is no accident that he focuses on the Cartesian *cogito*, which was meant to serve as an “Archimedean point” for first philosophy. By focusing on *this* doctrine in *this* place, Nietzsche pays tribute to the philosophical labor of Cartesian metaphysics. Descartes has given reflective articulation to what

⁸⁶ BGE 16. Translation modified.

⁸⁷ BGE 16. Translation modified.

“the people” implicitly believe “in the given case,” i.e. self-knowledge, the methodological importance of which Nietzsche has already established in BGE 13-15. However, Nietzsche distinguishes between the *process* “expressed” in the sentence or principle (*Satz*) “I think” and the *cogito* itself and suggests that this principle “expresses” an interpretation of the former. The distinction between what “the people” believe and the Cartesian doctrine itself is analogous to Sartre’s distinction between the pre-reflective and thethetic *cogito*,⁸⁸ except Nietzsche takes what Sartre would call the “pre-reflective *cogito*” to be a *questionable interpretation* of a “process” (*Vorgang*), an instinctively held interpretation with a complex internal structure which the philosopher must “analyze” or “disassemble.”

Nietzsche proposes, then, that human experience is far more mediated than it appears to be. As he will soon say, “the I” itself is a “synthetic concept.”⁸⁹ What “the people” implicitly believe is an interpretation of a more primordial “process” or “occurrence.” What we do to others, we do first of all to ourselves: “When we are awake we also do what we do in dreams: we invent and make up the person with whom we associate – and immediately forget it.”⁹⁰ What the Cartesian meditator takes as a bringing to reflective consciousness of what we implicitly know, “the philosopher” recognizes as a bringing to reflective consciousness of what we implicitly *think* we know. In assuming that “I *know* what thinking is,” I take what is in fact the *result* of a kind of unreflective or pre-conscious *decision* or *act* as though it were “a kind of intuitive knowledge” or a form of sheer intellectual receptivity, like the Aristotelian *nous pathetikos* or the Cartesian *lumen naturale*: “For if I hadn’t already *decided* in myself [*schon bei*

⁸⁸ Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1943), 157.

⁸⁹ BGE 19.

⁹⁰ BGE 138.

mir entschieden] what it is, by what [*wonach*] could I gauge whether that which actually occurs [*was eben geschieht*] isn't perhaps 'willing' or 'feeling'?"⁹¹

In the next aphorism, Nietzsche will argue against the Cartesian doctrine itself. In this aphorism, where his concern is methodological and his primary target is the doctrine of "immediate certainty" itself (not *that which* we take ourselves to know immediately), he only argues provisionally that *even if* the *cogito* turned out to be a true interpretation of the "process" it tries to capture, it would be "difficult, perhaps impossible" to prove this, such that even if this claim *could* be proven, the knowledge supplied by such a "grounding" (*Begründung*) would be mediated, not immediate. The *cogito* "presupposes that I *compare* my state at the present moment with other states which I know in myself [*an mir*] in order to determine what it is; on account of this reference back [*Rückbeziehung*] to further 'knowledge,' it has for me at any rate no immediate 'certainty.'"⁹² Thus "the philosopher" doesn't reject the popular belief in causally effective thinking substance out of hand. Rather, he raises a series of "metaphysical questions": "From where do I get the concept of thinking? Why do I believe in cause and effect? What gives me the right to speak of an 'I,' and even of an 'I' as a cause, and finally of an 'I' as a cause of thoughts [*Gedanken-Ursache*]?"⁹³

The "metaphysician" could respond that the mediation inherent in philosophical inquiry consists primarily, not in the transition from opinion to knowledge, but in the transformation of implicit into explicit knowledge, which is effected through the discursive analysis into parts of intuitively grasped wholes or natural forms ("the people" believe that knowing is knowing

⁹¹ BGE 16. Translation modified. Emphasis added.

⁹² BGE 16. Translation modified.

⁹³ BGE 16. Translation modified.

something “entirely” or “to the very end,” *ein zu Ende-Kennen* – pre-philosophical knowledge is primarily knowledge of wholes, as Aristotle suggests). Even if some of these apparent wholes, when analyzed, turn out to be imaginatively constructed (“synthetic”) wholes rather than natural “forms” or noetically graspable “essences,” Nietzsche has supplied no argument against the possibility of the latter, whether or not his critique of the *cogito* as an immediately self-certifying principle lands on target.

However, Nietzsche’s procedure implies that the *cogito* is in a certain sense the Archimedean point of first philosophy, not as the first principle upon which to build, but as the central target of critique, the fundamental assumption of “metaphysics,” by which it stands or falls. We find further support, then, for Heidegger’s claim that Nietzsche is in a sense the most radical Cartesian. As Nietzsche emphasizes in a more dogmatic fashion elsewhere, putatively intuitive self-observation is *the* primary example of “immediate certainty.” We misinterpret *ourselves* as causally effective thinking substances, implicitly assume that this putative self-knowledge is “immediately certain,” then unreflectively project this *self*-misinterpretation onto the rest of nature: “Human beings projected their three ‘internal facts,’ the objects of their firmest belief – will, mind [*Geist*], ‘I’ – beyond themselves; they originally derived the concept of being from the concept ‘I,’ they posited ‘things’ as existing in their own image, according to their concept of the ‘I’ as cause. Is it any wonder that they later rediscovered in things *only what they had put into them?* – The thing itself, to say it once again, the concept of a thing is just a reflex of the belief in the ‘I’ as cause.”⁹⁴ The pre-reflective *cogito* is the *ground* of the belief in substance and causality as well as forms and essences. Much like Hegel’s, Nietzsche’s method

⁹⁴ TI The Four Great Errors 3. Translation modified.

involves a transition from a “foreground” Aristotelian perspective (“a living thing”) to an inward Cartesian perspective (“self-observation”) and the dualism-idealism problem it generates, followed by a “retreat into the ground” of both perspectives, which for Nietzsche is not “pure thinking,” but an interpretive “process” which is a constitutive element of “our world of desires and passions.”⁹⁵

In BGE 16, then, Nietzsche indicates that first philosophy *proper* must in a sense “begin from the subject,” as Descartes and Kant proposed.⁹⁶ The inadequacy of materialistic, dualistic and idealistic interpretations of “the living thing” lead us to reflect on the *cogito*, as the presupposition of all three. We discover that at a deep, pre-reflective level, we take ourselves to be causally effective thinking things, an interpretation of what it is to be a human being reflectively articulated by Descartes as though it were an immediately self-certifying truth. Nietzsche provisionally suggests that even if the Cartesian doctrine turned out to be provable, it couldn’t be immediately self-certifying. Such a proof would have to imply rather that “the philosopher” has access to a privileged realm of knowledge concerning which “the people” have at best a kind of faith. “Method demands,” then, that first philosophy proper begin (after the proper methodological preparation) with the *questioning* of the *cogito*.

But Nietzsche also indicates that the philosopher himself must rely on “popular” language and concepts in order to question the *cogito*. In a striking phrase which echoes BGE 3 (“I say to myself”) as well as Plato’s description of philosophy as “the soul’s silent dialogue with itself,” Nietzsche contrasts “what the people believe” with what “the philosopher must say

⁹⁵ Cf. BGE 16 with 36.

⁹⁶ Cf. BGE 54.

to himself.”⁹⁷ But even when the philosopher articulates questions privately or silently *to himself*, he relies on the very concepts (“when I analyze the process...” – Nietzsche distinguishes himself as “I” *from* the process) he seeks to question. As the Cartesian would eagerly ask: Is it even possible to question the *cogito* and know what one is talking about? The philosopher thus faces a crucial transition problem – from the *cogito* to “nature.” Nietzsche indicates that reflections *on* method (“methodology”) can only take us this far. To see if physio-psychology is possible, we must enter the realm of philosophical science, which is *method actually carried out self-consciously*. This transition takes place in BGE 17.

§3. Nietzsche’s Physio-Psychological Method in BGE 17-19

At this point, it will be helpful to provide a high altitude overview of the ground we have covered. Nietzsche’s most general project in *BGE* is to provide an account of philosophy, the “most spiritual” or “most intellectual” form of “the will to power,” as the best way of life (cf. BGE 8-10). Before he can do this, he must show that philosophical self-consciousness as he understands it (cf. BGE 2-4 and 11-12) is *achievable* – that “philosophical thinking,” as a kind of “thinking *about* thinking” which questions our “foreground perspective” and thereby achieves some form of insight (however qualified) into “how things are,” is possible. For Nietzsche, the *need* for such a reflexive form of thinking – the need to “overcome metaphysics,” as his post-Heideggerean admirers like to say – is established by a preliminary determination of the *questionable* character of our foreground perspective. Aphorisms 13-16 are comparable to Hegel’s methodological prefaces and introductions to the two versions of the *Science of Logic*,

⁹⁷ BGE 16.

which establish the *need* for a “transition” from ordinary experience to philosophical “thinking *about* thinking.” We see now why Nietzsche calls both Aristotle and Descartes “great methodologists” – whether they were “real philosophers” or “dualistic metaphysicians” at the deepest level of their thought, they undertook the indispensable metaphysical labor of making reflectively explicit the assumptions embedded in our foreground perspective, Aristotle focusing on the “external” or “objective” world of naturally given wholes (above all the forms or essences of living things) and Descartes on the “inner” or “subjective” world of the self-identical *cogito*, which is presupposed by and unreflectively “projected onto” the former. In doing so, they laid the foundations for the empirical sciences (establishing traditions of empirical inquiry) and prepared the way for the “new psychologist” to “retreat into the ground” of both “worlds,” the interpretive activity of thinking itself. We are thus better positioned to appreciate the curiously Hegelian structure of Nietzsche’s first philosophy and to understand why he says that “the most valuable insights” are “methods.”

The careful reader will already have some sense of what Nietzsche’s method will look like. Like the Platonic way of thinking, it will involve a “clarification” (*Erklärung*) of human experience, “the world of desires and passions” or “the world of affects,” which is always already interpreted or entangled in “concept-nets.” Nietzsche’s metaphor indicates the difficulty of such an enterprise – the Platonic way involves disentangling thought from feeling or sensibility by means of the very concepts in which sensibility is always already entangled. Nietzsche’s method will consist in a rearrangement of the “concept-nets” themselves. One might think of Neurath’s boat, which must be repaired while at sea: “We are like sailors who on the open sea must reconstruct their ship but are never able to start afresh from the bottom. Where a

beam is taken away a new one must at once be put there, and for this the rest of the ship is used as support. In this way, by using the old beams and driftwood the ship can be shaped entirely anew, but only by gradual reconstruction.”⁹⁸ For Nietzsche, our experience is “always already” logically interpreted, yet he wants somehow to contrast logic itself *with* experience and ask whether it involves a misinterpretation *of* experience.

BGE 17 begins, “Concerning the superstition of the logicians [*was den Aberglauben der Logiker betrifft*]: I will never tire of underlining again and again [*immer wieder*] a small concise fact [*eine kleine kurze Thatsache*] reluctantly acknowledged by these superstitious people [*von diesen Abergläubischen*] – namely, that a thought comes when ‘it’ wants and not when ‘I’ want; so that it’s a *falsification* of the factual state of affairs [*des Thatbestandes*] to say: the subject ‘I’ is the condition of the predicate ‘think.’ It thinks: but that this ‘it’ is that famous old ‘I’ is, to put it mildly [*milde geredet*], only a supposition, an assertion, above all not an ‘immediate certainty.’ In the end one has already done too much [*zu viel gethan*] with this ‘it thinks’ – this ‘it’ already contains an *interpretation* of the process [*eine Auslegung des Vorgangs*] and doesn’t belong to the process itself. One concludes here according to the grammatical habit ‘thinking is an activity [*eine Thätigkeit*], to every activity there belongs one who is active [*Einer, der thätig ist*], consequently... –”⁹⁹

Nietzsche takes aim at “the logicians,” whom he describes as a “superstitious” group of people. There is a deliberate irony in this rhetoric – those who pride themselves on their strict adherence to logical procedures are for this very reason in the grip of something comparable to

⁹⁸ Otto Neurath, “Anti-Spengler,” trans. Paul Foulkes and Marie Neurath, in *Empiricism and Sociology*, eds. Marie Neurath and Robert S. Cohen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1973), 199.

⁹⁹ BGE 17. Translation modified.

religious superstition, insofar as they have “faith” or “belief” in the inerrancy of logic itself. Nietzsche makes a similar rhetorical move in BGE 21, when he says that “the desire [Verlangen] for ‘freedom of the will’ in that superlative metaphysical sense... unfortunately still holds sway in the heads of the half-educated [Halb-Unterrichteten].”¹⁰⁰ In each case, he takes aim at one of the “fundamental errors” (*Grundirrhümer*) of the human species in the post of a radical enlightener, as though it were merely a popular religious superstition.¹⁰¹

In the latter example, Nietzsche reminds us of anti-religious polemicists and popularizers of science who treat the belief in “free will” as a piece of antiquated “mythology” (Nietzsche’s word), which will disappear once the results of the latest neuroscience have been diffused among the populace. The allusion to those who are as yet only “half-educated” and the phrase “unfortunately *still* holds sway” suggests that the time may come when progressive enlightenment will have relegated the belief in “free will” to the dustbin of history, along with Zeus’ lightning-flashes and intervening saints. Similarly, Nietzsche’s mocking references to “the superstition of the logicians” and “the fictions of logic” anticipates the emancipatory rhetoric of postmodern philosophers who look forward to the day when the human race will have freed itself from the illusion of subjectivity.¹⁰² BGE 17 concludes in such a hopeful vein: “Roughly according to the same schema the older atomism sought, in addition to the ‘force’ which operates, also that lump of matter in which it resides and out of which it operates [zu der *Kraft*, die wirkt, jenes Klümpchen Materie, worin sie sitzt, aus der heraus sie wirkt], the atom. More rigorous minds learned at last to get along without this ‘earth-residuum,’ and perhaps one

¹⁰⁰ BGE 21. Translation modified.

¹⁰¹ Cf. GS 110.

¹⁰² Cf. BGE 4 with 17.

day we will also accustom ourselves [*gewöhnt man sich daran*], including the logicians [*auch seitens der Logiker*], to get along without that little ‘it’ (into which the honest old ‘I’ has evaporated [*sich verflüchtigt hat*]).”¹⁰³

However, in each case the last laugh is on the Enlightenment polemicist or the postmodern revolutionary. Although Nietzsche regards “free will” and “thinking substance” as illusions, which are in this sense comparable to religious “superstitions” or “mythologies,” he doesn’t regard them as beliefs of the kind from which one can free oneself once and for all, like the belief in the virgin birth or in the inerrancy of the Bible. Although he regards the causally effective thinking substance as a kind of self-misinterpretation, he also regards the belief *that one can free oneself once and for all from this illusion* as a kind of self-misinterpretation, a failure to grasp the inherent limitations of self-knowledge and the dependence of philosophical thinking on the “interpretations” which it subjects to questioning. Insofar as we all “instinctively” believe in the “superstition” of logicians and the “mythology” of free will, we are all self-deluded (and in a sense “religious”) at a very deep, pre-reflective level. On the other hand, insofar as we *reflectively* accept the doctrines of thinking substance or free will, like Augustine or (unless these doctrines were for him exoteric, as Nietzsche sometimes implies¹⁰⁴) Descartes, we are self-deluded in a more straightforward sense. But insofar as we reflectively accept the doctrine that it is *possible* once and for all to “overcome” our pre-reflective belief in these “mythologies,” we are likewise self-deluded in a more straightforward sense. The “perhaps” in the phrase “perhaps one day” is deeply ironic.

¹⁰³ BGE 17.

¹⁰⁴ Albeit rather obliquely, for example in BGE 54 and 191.

Nietzsche sometimes treats what he calls the “fundamental errors” of the human species as if they were “errors” which arose at an identifiable point in recorded historical time, for example after the Socratic revolution or the rise of Christianity, and which one can therefore suppose might one day disappear, just as religions like Greek polytheism or Manichaeism have disappeared. The clearest example is the notion of “free will” in the radical voluntarist sense. One can find two general approaches to this idea in his writings, a broadly historicist approach and a psychological, naturalistic approach which treats “free will” as a piece of “folk-psychology,” not of a particular “folk,” but rather of the human species. Although both approaches can be found throughout his corpus and even in the same books, the historicist approach is most prominent in the first treatise of the *Genealogy*, while the naturalistic-psychological approach is presented most clearly in Book 3 of *The Gay Science*.

I don’t have space here to enter into detailed discussion of Nietzsche’s other writings. The *Genealogy* provides the strongest apparent support for the historicist reading of Nietzsche on “free will” and “subjectivity.” Here I note only that in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche, an avowedly “esoteric” writer, claims that each of the three treatises in the *Genealogy* begins in a way that is “calculated to mislead,”¹⁰⁵ while in BGE 23, Nietzsche proposes that “physio-psychology,” not “genealogy” however understood, should be recognized as “the queen of the sciences.”¹⁰⁶ In the next chapter, I present a detailed interpretation of the famous “lightning-flash” passage in OGM 1:13 which supports the general approach I take here.

¹⁰⁵ EH *Genealogy of Morals*.

¹⁰⁶ BGE 23.

Nietzsche's attack on "the logicians" in BGE 17 isn't primarily directed at a particular group of thinkers, but towards human beings in general insofar as they (we) instinctively believe in "logical fictions." Nietzsche "will never tire of underlining again and again a small concise fact" ("a thought comes when 'it' wants, not when 'I' want") because – just as in the case of the "hundred-times-refuted theory of the 'free will'" mentioned in BGE 18 and "refuted" yet again in BGE 19 – the point he wants to make is not the kind that can be made once and for all, as one can liberate oneself for the rest of one's life from belief in a particular religious dogma.¹⁰⁷ Rather, it is the kind of point that must be made "again and again," not just for others, but for oneself. Furthermore, Nietzsche's target in this aphorism isn't the kind of belief which can be "refuted" in the way a particular religious dogma (e.g. the resurrection) might be thrown into question, for example by casting doubt on the historical evidence. Rather, much like the Cartesian *cogito* argument itself, Nietzsche's point concerns the structure of human experience *as such*.

But what did Descartes claim about the structure of human experience? A central debate in the scholarly literature concerns whether the *cogito* is an "intuition" or an "inference."¹⁰⁸ Am I immediately certain merely of the fact that "there are thoughts" or "there is thinking," on the basis of which I can infer that I must be a thinking thing who is aware of these thoughts? Or am I immediately certain of the complex fact that "there is thinking and so I must exist as a thinking thing"? Since this "intuition" itself possesses an inferential structure, as many commentators

¹⁰⁷ Cf. BGE 18.

¹⁰⁸ This debate was inaugurated by Jaako Hintikka's seminal article, "*Cogito, ergo sum*: Inference or Performance?", *Philosophical Review* 71 (1962): 3-32.

have pointed out,¹⁰⁹ it is perhaps better to ask whether the *cogito* is *merely* an inference or rather an intuition with an inferential structure, like *modus ponens*, which is usually taken by logicians as immediately self-evident.

Nietzsche has already argued that whatever Descartes himself may have meant, the *cogito* would at best be a kind of inference *as opposed to* an immediately self-evident principle (whatever the internal structure of the latter), an inference which involves a series of assumptions (including the assumption that I already *know* enough to distinguish “thinking” from “willing” and “feeling”) and which requires that I compare “my state at the present moment” (*meinen augenblicklichen Zustand*) with past states of my being.¹¹⁰ Nietzsche argued that whether or not there is anything of which I can be “immediately certain,” I am *not* immediately certain of my existence as a thinking thing – although this “instinctively” held *assumption* underlies dualism, idealism and even materialism (here Nietzsche in a way agrees with Descartes).

What about the claim that we are immediately certain that “there are thoughts” or that “there is thinking”? Lichtenberg (and later Bertrand Russell) famously argued that this is all Descartes is entitled to claim, although an “inferentialist” Cartesian might respond that this is all I need to establish my existence as a thinking thing. On the basis of *this* intuition alone (“there are thoughts” or “there is thinking”) I can legitimately infer that there must be a thinker who is *having* the thoughts, even if the latter claim is not *immediately* certain. Nietzsche is usually taken to be arguing in BGE 17 against the legitimacy of *this* inference. For example, Clark and

¹⁰⁹ For example, cf. E. M. Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 79.

¹¹⁰ BGE 16.

Dudrick write, “BGE 17 argues, against Descartes, that based simply on the facts of experience or consciousness, we have a right to conclude only that thinking is going on, not the existence of an ‘I,’ a person or entity who does the thinking.”¹¹¹

But Nietzsche’s argument is curious and seems to involve a subtle misunderstanding of the Cartesian position. Nietzsche does say that the claim “the subject ‘I’ is the condition of the predicate ‘think’” is a “falsification” of the facts.¹¹² But Nietzsche’s *argument* against this claim seems to assume that the *Cartesian* assumes that thinking is a *voluntary* “activity” (*Tätigkeit*) or *something that we do*, not simply a state of “experience or consciousness.” Nietzsche denies that we can infer from the fact that “there is thinking” the existence of a thinking subject distinguishable from the “thinking” *because* “a thought comes when ‘it’ wants and not when ‘I’ want.”¹¹³ But Descartes himself (as the evil genius argument makes unambiguously clear) doesn’t assume that I am *doing* the thinking in the sense of willing my “thoughts” into existence. Descartes merely assumes that I am “doing the thinking” in the sense of “having thoughts,” in which “thoughts” are understood as states of “experience or consciousness,” which may or may not include effective volitions. Clark and Dudrick get Descartes right, but they don’t get Nietzsche’s argument against Descartes right – because they don’t notice that *Nietzsche* doesn’t seem to get Descartes right.

Of course, Nietzsche isn’t a Descartes scholar. Indeed, it is curious (and important) that he doesn’t mention Descartes himself by name in aphorisms 16 and 17. But if Nietzsche isn’t attacking the Cartesian *inference* from “the facts of experience or consciousness” (“there are

¹¹¹ Clark and Dudrick, *The Soul of Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil*, 184.

¹¹² BGE 17.

¹¹³ BGE 17.

thoughts”) to the existence of a thinking substance, what *is* he doing in BGE 17? I suggest that Nietzsche’s target is the Cartesian conception of “thought” itself, understood as an immediately accessible datum of “experience or consciousness,” which can then further be classified either as sensation, imagination, intellection, volition, etc.: “By the term ‘thought,’ I understand everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it. Hence, thinking is to be identified here not merely with understanding, willing and imagining, but also with sensory awareness.”¹¹⁴

I suggest that when Nietzsche says that “a thought [*ein Gedanke*] comes when ‘it’ wants, not when ‘I’ want,” he means to propose that, if we reflexively examine the nature of thinking itself, we discover that thinking is neither a kind of weak after-effect of sensory impressions (like Hume’s “ideas”), nor a kind of receptivity to noetic forms or thought-objects (Platonic-Aristotelian *noesis*), but rather a kind of “activity” or “process.” However, “thinking” (*Denken*) isn’t primarily or essentially a kind of *voluntary* activity, as when we deliberately think about something (or deliberately *do* anything at all), but rather a kind of unreflective, non-voluntary cognitive “activity” or “process,” which goes on beneath the threshold of reflective awareness, at least most of the time.

In the preceding aphorism, Nietzsche suggested that in order to understand the distinctive character of “thinking,” one must first be sure that one hasn’t confused it with a kind of “feeling” (*Fühlen*) or affect or with a kind of “willing” (*Wollen*) or voluntary action. In this aphorism, he suggests that if we examine what “thinking” itself is, we discover first that it is not

¹¹⁴ Descartes, “Principles of Philosophy” (1644), in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 1*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 195 (I.9).

a kind of voluntary activity, a kind of “willing.” His point concerns thinking *in general*: “A thought comes when ‘it’ wants, not when ‘I’ want.”¹¹⁵ This has two important implications. First, deliberate, reflective thinking is a *special case* of thinking, which takes place mostly at an unreflective, pre-volitional level. As Nietzsche says elsewhere, “Man, like every living creature [*wie jedes lebende Geschöpf*], is constantly [*immerfort*] thinking but does not know it; the thinking which becomes *conscious* is only the smallest part of it.”¹¹⁶ Secondly, even deliberate, reflective thinking *isn’t really* a voluntary activity in a causal sense – when we take ourselves to be willing our thoughts into existence, their actual emergence isn’t causally effected by the dictates of our will or desire, even if it seems that way to us.

But how do we know that thinking isn’t a kind of “feeling” or affect, whether sensory or noetic? Nietzsche doesn’t say that a thought comes when the body or the brain “wants” it to come, but when *the thought itself* “wants” to come. A thought is a kind of activity or process. Indeed, even to describe *the thought itself* as “it,” as a determinate object or thing, or an immediate datum of conscious experience which can be identified and classified in the Cartesian manner, is merely an “interpretation” of this “process.” When Nietzsche says that “this ‘it’ already contains an *interpretation* of the process and doesn’t belong to the process itself,” commentators usually take him to be making a distinction between an impersonal and a personal subject of thinking – “a thing that thinks” (as when Locke suggests that for all we know, a material thing might be capable of thinking) and “a thinking thing,” i.e. a thing whose essence consists in thinking, the Cartesian subject – and to be claiming that not only the latter, but even

¹¹⁵ BGE 17.

¹¹⁶ GS 354.

the former postulate goes beyond what can legitimately be inferred from “the facts of experience or consciousness.”¹¹⁷ But when Nietzsche says “a thought comes when ‘it’ wants, not when ‘I’ want,” before going on to suggest that even this “it” goes too far, this “it” refers unambiguously to *the thought itself*, not to “this I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks,” in Kant’s famous formula.¹¹⁸

Nietzsche’s target in BGE 17, then, isn’t the Cartesian inference from “thought” to the existence of a thinking thing, but rather the Cartesian conception of thought or consciousness itself. If “thought” in the Cartesian sense doesn’t exist (or is so general a conception as to be virtually meaningless), then surely a “thinking thing” in the Cartesian sense doesn’t exist either. Nietzsche’s goal in this aphorism is closer to Kant’s goal in the early sections of the first *Critique*, when he distinguishes the different contributions to experience made by thinking and sensibility, than it is to the goal of Lichtenberg or Russell when they attack the Cartesian *inference* as illegitimate. Nietzsche proposes that thinking is primarily a kind of *interpretive* activity (“even the ‘it’ contains an *interpretation* of the process”), not in the reflective, self-conscious sense in which Plato or Nietzsche interprets the world by means of concepts such as *eros* or “the will to power,” but in the “instinctive” sense in which we have always already cast our “concept-nets” on the deliverances of sensibility or “feeling.”

But what about “feeling” and “willing” themselves? BGE 17 raises two sets of questions about the nature of experience itself. On the one hand, if our experience is always already “interpreted,” what is “given” *to* “thinking” *to* interpret and how does this “physio-

¹¹⁷ For example, cf. Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 48 and Douglas Burnham, *Reading Nietzsche: An Analysis of Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 34.

¹¹⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A346/B404.

psychological” process work? On the other hand, even if thinking isn’t primarily a reflective activity, what is the status of self-conscious, deliberate and seemingly voluntarily effected thinking, including but not limited to philosophical thinking, or indeed voluntary activity in general? Why don’t we need to posit a separate, metaphysical faculty of “the will” in order to understand the distinctive character of *human* thinking and agency?

In addition to these questions about the constitutive elements of human experience, BGE 17 also raises the ontological question about the subject, even if it begins by rejecting the Cartesian premise in a more fundamental way than commentators tend to acknowledge. If Cartesian thought doesn’t exist, then neither does the Cartesian thinker, but if Nietzschean “thinking” (or “interpreting”) takes place, must one not conclude that a Nietzschean thinker (an interpreting being) must exist? What is the status of the Nietzschean self?

Nietzsche will address these questions in BGE 19, where he presents his ontological account of the human being as continuous with animal life in general. Nietzsche’s reductive analyses of human experience in aphorisms 17 and 19 have parallel and complementary structures. BGE 17 takes something which seems to be complex (the world of subjects, objects, things, powers, causes and effects) and breaks it down into something simple (“a small concise fact”), while BGE 19 takes something which seems to be simple (“this manifold thing, for which the people have only one word”) and breaks it down into something which is in fact complex (“willing seems to me to be above all something *complicated*, something which is a unit [*eine Einheit*] only as a word”).¹¹⁹ Before he can present his own account of the human

¹¹⁹ Cf. BGE 17 with 19.

being, Nietzsche must break down the interpretive framework to which we are subject “primarily and for the most part” by virtue of our human perspective.

BGE 17 supplies a retrospective “clarification” of the methodological reflections of the preceding four aphorisms. Nietzsche deconstructs (this overused metaphor is appropriate here) the world of ordinary experience by showing how the “fundamental errors” we instinctively accept, which give rise to the distinction between the body and the soul or the problem of dualism, can be seen as emerging out of the process of thinking itself, once it is grasped as neither a kind of “willing” (we don’t organize “affects” into “things” *deliberately*, we “instinctively” *take* the world *as* organized into causally interrelated things of different kinds) nor a kind of “feeling” (we’re not immediately receptive to the world as it is – we *do* actively organize and interpret our experience, albeit for the most part unreflectively).

In aphorisms 16 and 17, Nietzsche attacks the doctrines of “immediate certainty” *and* “thinking substance” at the same time, but with different emphases in each case. I suggested that there is an important connection between these doctrines for Nietzsche just as for Descartes – we take ourselves to be immediately certain of many things, but this network of assumptions ultimately rests on the core assumption of the *cogito*, even if we tend *reflectively* to begin by understanding ourselves as a kind of living body we can “see and feel,” before then making a distinction between the body and the soul in order to make sense of our distinctive nature. I cited a passage from *Twilight of the Idols*, where Nietzsche says that *the concept of being itself* is a result of the self-projection of the “I” onto the world: “Human beings... originally derived the concept of being from the concept ‘I,’ they posited ‘things’ as existing in their own image, according to their concept of the ‘I’ as cause. Is it any wonder that they later rediscovered in

things *only what they had put into them?* – The thing itself, to say it once again, the concept of a thing is just a reflex of the belief in the ‘I’ as cause.”¹²⁰

Nietzsche’s point in BGE 17 is very similar to Hegel’s point at the beginning of the *Logic*. Hegel tries to show that if we attempt to think the sheer thought of “being,” we realize that our thinking is grasping emptily at a thought indistinguishable from “pure nothing,” rather than enjoying a determinate “intellectual intuition” of “pure being” or “being as such.” I will not enter here into the complexities of Hegel’s attempt to reconstruct the world of conceptually “interpreted” experience in a way that, having dispensed with reliance on intellectual receptivity or intuition, also (in contrast to Nietzsche or Kant) in some sense dispenses with reliance on sensibility or “affect.” Here I want only to note that the Nietzschean “it” (“a thought,” an indeterminate thought of any-thing whatsoever) is analogous to the Hegelian thought of “pure being,” “the indeterminate immediate.” Nietzsche proposes that even to refer to “a thought” *as* a determinate something or “it” is an interpretation of the *process* of thinking. If we attempt to grasp a pure thought of anything whatsoever, it “evaporates” into nothing: “Perhaps one day we will also accustom ourselves, including the logicians, to get along without that little ‘it’ (into which the honest old ‘I’ has evaporated [*sich verflüchtigt hat*]).”¹²¹ The emptiness of a pure thought of any-thing at all (“it”) is indistinguishable from the emptiness of the thinking subject’s attempt to grasp *itself* as a determinate “thing” *qua* thinking subject.

Similarly, in the *Logic*, Hegel identifies “the pure I,” purified of all empirical or psychological determinations, with the thought of pure being, the proper “beginning of

¹²⁰ TI The Four Great Errors 3. Translation modified.

¹²¹ BGE 17. Translation modified.

science.”¹²² However, Nietzsche (as a “physio-psychologist,” not a dialectical logician) says that the concept of being is *derived from* “the concept I,” and “the concept of a thing” is “a reflex of the belief in the ‘I,’” *and not the other way around*, because in trying to grasp *the thought of pure being* (“it,” any-thing at all), what we are really doing is trying in vain to grasp “immediately,” as though it were a determinate and directly accessible cognitive object, the instinctive “process” or “activity” of thinking itself, which is the only phenomenon that is there for us to grasp, although it is already an over-interpretation to think of “it” *as* a “thing.” Our thinking about things in the world around us as distinguishable and self-identical things or substances (whether as atomic units or as internally complex wholes) merely follows “the same schema.”

Nietzsche’s approach (like Hegel’s) is surely open to objections. How is such a reflexive grasp of thinking *as* a process or activity possible? The orthodox Platonist or Aristotelian might reply that *this* reflective act of “transition” must cognitively “see” some determinate, non-sensible content “with the mind’s eye,” i.e. must involve some kind of “intellectual intuition.” Nietzsche or Hegel would reply that there is “nothing” there to grasp – pure being is indistinguishable from pure nothing, “the last wisp of evaporating reality.”¹²³ “Let those who insist on the distinction between being and nothing, let them just try to state in what the distinction consists.”¹²⁴ It is difficult to determine who is begging the question. My concerns here are primarily interpretive, but I will return to this question briefly in the final chapter.

¹²² Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 53-54.

¹²³ TI “Reason” in Philosophy 4.

¹²⁴ Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 68.

I conclude my discussion of BGE 17 by returning to the problem of causality. Nietzsche says that “the concept of being” is derived from “the concept of the I,” not just as “thing,” but as “cause” (hence the perplexing, non-Cartesian emphasis on the “fact” that thinking is neither inherent in a “thinking thing” *nor a voluntary, causally effective activity*). The concepts of “thing” and “cause” are distinguishable, but Nietzsche suggests that they are somehow equiprimordial (as the concept “material thing” is derived from the concept of “I” *as thinking thing*, so the concept of a causally effective “force” which “resides” in material things is derived from the concept of “I” *as volitional cause*). Yet they are *both* “simplifying” misinterpretations of the process of thinking.

Nietzsche implies that when the process of thinking begins to become conscious of itself in *human* experience, it bifurcates into the concepts of “thing” and “cause.” Both concepts are “simplifying” misinterpretations of the nature of thinking itself, which however indirectly reveal something true about thinking (the will to truth emerges out of the will to “the untrue,” as he will soon say¹²⁵). The concept “cause” reveals while also distorting the character of thinking as active or interpretive, while the concept “thing” reveals while also distorting its character as a *non-voluntary, primarily pre-reflective* “activity.” In contrast to Kant and Hegel, philosophical “logicians” who in different ways try to show that thinking can be rendered completely intelligible to itself (albeit with “critical” qualifications in Kant’s case), Nietzsche tries to show that thinking *about* thinking must rely on distorting conventions (“logical fictions”) with which it cannot dispense, even as it can make artful use of these conventions (“concept-nets”) in such a way as to point obliquely to the truth. In this respect, Nietzsche’s view is surely closer to that of

¹²⁵ BGE 24.

ancient philosophers, such as (arguably) Socrates, who recognized the inescapable dependence of philosophical thought on the questionable conventions (“interpretations”) which make it possible in the first place. As Richard Velkley puts it, “The Socratic lesson is that philosophical seeing/questioning is dialectical in the sense that it never fully discloses what makes it possible, and can point to it only by oblique indications and inevitable distortions.”¹²⁶

Nietzsche’s intention in BGE 17 is to show *the way in which* human experience is far more mediated than we take it to be. We instinctively take ourselves to be causally effective thinking things and instinctively interpret the world around us as a causal network of thinking things (“subjects”) and material things (“objects”). This interpretive framework gives rise in metaphysical reflection to materialistic, dualistic and idealistic interpretations of the world and our place in the world as self-conscious thinkers. But if we reflexively question the framework itself, motivated by the difficulties we encounter in trying to render it coherent (cf. BGE 13-16), we discover that the basic concepts it employs are not “immediately” accessible to thought as determinate objects of “intellectual intuition.” Rather, they are the result or the product of the non-voluntary and primarily pre-conscious or pre-reflective process or activity of thinking itself: “A thought comes when ‘it’ wants, not when ‘I’ want... In the end one has already done too much with this ‘it thinks’ – this ‘it’ already contains an *interpretation* of the process and doesn’t belong to the process itself.”¹²⁷ There is no such thing as *noesis* in the Platonic-Aristotelian sense or “immediate awareness” in the Cartesian sense of “thought in general.” Rather, experience is the mediated *result* of the interpretive activity of thinking. But in contrast to Kant,

¹²⁶ Richard Velkley, *Being after Rousseau: Philosophy and Culture in Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 153-154, footnote 13.

¹²⁷ BGE 17.

who might be said to agree with Nietzsche that experience is the result of “interpretation” while affirming the (“critically” qualified) objective validity of the human interpretive framework, for Nietzsche, the insight into the omnipresence of “interpretation” at the same time constitutes an insight into the omnipresence of illusion.

Does Nietzsche take himself to have demonstrated in BGE 17 either the premise (his version of the “discursivity thesis”) or the radical conclusion he draws from it? I suggest that Nietzsche takes himself only to have shown the “interpretive” character of thinking in BGE 17; we must wait until BGE 19 before he tries to show that the world in which “the human being lives,” the world of ordinary experience, is *for this reason* a “strange simplification and falsification.”¹²⁸ Nietzsche’s intention in this aphorism is to show that the human interpretive framework isn’t “intuitively given,” but is rather the result of the “simple concise fact” that thinking itself is an interpretive activity. Nietzsche hasn’t yet ruled out the Kantian possibility that the “pure concepts” we employ in ordinary experience and empirical science possess “objective validity” in their application, at least in some cases, *despite* the fact that they aren’t intuitively given objects of *noesis*.

But has Nietzsche really demonstrated his fundamental thesis about the character of thinking? Isn’t his approach here at least as hasty as that of Descartes in the *Meditations*? Here I must interject a general observation about the character of Nietzsche’s philosophizing. I have tried to show that Nietzsche was far more seriously concerned with traditional questions of “theoretical philosophy” than he appears to be. Indeed, BGE 16 contains two of only three non-pejorative references to “metaphysics” in the whole book, when he describes the “properly

¹²⁸ BGE 24.

authentic conscience-questions of the intellect” raised by *the philosopher* as “questions of metaphysics” and “metaphysical questions” (the third occurs much later in the book, when he refers to “the highest and most delicate shudders of metaphysics”¹²⁹). Nietzsche thereby indicates that although he tends to use “metaphysics” in a pejorative sense, to refer to the dualistic framework he questions, this is a deliberate terminological choice which serves a rhetorical purpose; he recognizes the continuity of his enterprise with traditional concerns and indicates that his “physio-psychology” could also be described as a kind of “metaphysics,” with the proper qualifications (I note the similarity with Kant and Hegel). Nietzsche’s distinctive contributions to the history of philosophy surely lie far more in “moral psychology,” and in reflection on the nature of the philosophical life, than in “theoretical philosophy”; in this respect, he resembles his heroes Xenophon and Montaigne, these “signposts” to the Socratic life, more than, say, Aristotle or Heidegger. However, Nietzsche’s conception of the Socratic life itself (much like that of Strauss) involves ceaseless reflection (“I will never tire of underlining again and again a small concise fact”) on the fundamental problems of metaphysics, which provides the philosopher with his distinctive perspective on the conventionally mediated (“falsified” and “simplified”) character of human being-in-the-world.

Although Nietzsche didn’t engage in extensive “metaphysical labor” in his books, he indicates that the “real philosopher” must engage in such labor in his thought. The reader must therefore engage in such labor in order to fill the gaps in Nietzsche’s highly compressed presentation in BGE 13-22 and raise the appropriate objections and replies as he studies the text. Although Nietzsche surely didn’t have the detailed knowledge of the history of philosophy

¹²⁹ BGE 229.

possessed by, say, Hegel or Heidegger, and he doesn't assume familiarity with, say, the intricacies of Plato's *Parmenides* or Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, he does assume acquaintance with, and sensitivity to, the history of metaphysical problems. Like Hegel's *Logic*, *BGE* is both a work of first philosophy and a very unusual commentary on the history of philosophy, addressed to those who are unsatisfied *both* with traditional approaches to metaphysics *and* with modern empiricist or materialist rejections of first philosophy.

The question with which Nietzsche is concerned in BGE 17 is a question which, if it permits of a "scientific" treatment at all, requires a "demonstration" of a very peculiar kind. The transition he wants to effect is analogous to the "absolute act of self-elevation" taking us from "empirical consciousness" to "pure thought" which Hegel wants to effect in the *Logic*,¹³⁰ although Hegel spends far more time explaining what his version of such an act involves and responding to possible objections and alternatives. My main concern here is to bring out the underlying structure of Nietzsche's argument in this part of the book, so I will have to restrict myself to this somewhat curtailed exposition. A fuller elaboration of Nietzsche's argument in BGE 17 would be a book-length project in itself, which would require detailed treatment of other passages in his published corpus (e.g. the many discussions of the problem of "consciousness" in *The Gay Science*¹³¹) and cautious consideration of relevant passages in the *Nachlass*. I conclude by summarizing Nietzsche's argument as concisely as possible: If we attempt to grasp thinking itself as a determinate thing or object of thought, we discover that

¹³⁰ Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 54.

¹³¹ For example, cf. GS 11, 33 and 354.

there is “nothing” there to grasp, only a pre-reflective and non-voluntary process or activity, which however can be grasped reflexively *as* the origin of all determinacy in experience.

As I mentioned above, a major question raised by BGE 17 concerns the status of deliberate, self-conscious thinking (deliberately thinking *about* something) and voluntary action in general. In BGE 3, Nietzsche had already intimated that the “metaphysical” distinction between freely caused and instinctively driven activity ought to be replaced by the “non-metaphysical” distinction between more or less self-conscious “instinctive activity,” which (unlike the former distinction) permits of “gradation.” The human being is distinguished from other animals, not by free will, but by (a higher degree of?) self-consciousness, while the philosopher is distinguished from other human beings by a (still?) higher degree or a unique form of self-consciousness. But the discursivity or “interpretivity” thesis proposed in BGE 17 isn’t obviously incompatible with free will in the voluntarist sense, as Kant himself illustrates. Accordingly, before he reconstructs “the world of affects” in BGE 19, Nietzsche touches on the question of “free will” in BGE 18.

This aphorism concerns the “persistence” or “perpetuation” (*Fortdauer*) of the *theory* of free will – i.e. not necessarily the notion itself. The reader will remember that “metaphysicians” supply popular assumptions (“foreground perspectives”) with reflective, theoretical elaboration. However, Nietzsche suggests here that the perpetuation of this “theory” stems from the fact that “again and again [*immer wieder*] someone comes along and feels he is strong enough to refute it.”¹³² This curious formulation suggests a note of skepticism or irony – nobody is strong enough to refute free will once and for all, even if they *think* they are. As so often with Nietzsche,

¹³² BGE 18. Translation modified.

“strength” carries a connotation of stupidity (think of the ass in BGE 8). And yet Nietzsche himself will refute it again in BGE 19. Is Nietzsche *actually* “strong enough” to refute free will, unlike his many precursors? What is going on here?

Nietzsche says that the “attraction” (*Reiz*) of a “theory” may well lie above all in the fact that it is “refutable.”¹³³ But the word “theory” (*Theorie*) is ambiguous; it could refer to the modern idea of a theoretical “construction” intended to shed light on a problem, but it could also allude (as Nietzsche alluded to *heuresis* in BGE 15) to the ancient idea of *theoria* as pure, immediate contemplation of reality. BGE 18 thus continues, somewhat obliquely, the theme of the nature of “thinking” addressed in the preceding two aphorisms. In the next aphorism, Nietzsche will claim that “the people” take themselves to have immediate certainty of their own freedom as spontaneous uncaused causes of their actions. Nietzsche will argue that this “popular prejudice” is an instinctive *simplification* of a complex phenomenon (a complex of thinking and feeling or sensing), which properly analyzed shows this popular belief to be an illusion, a “prejudice.” The philosopher “refutes” this putative intuition by analyzing and reconstructing in thought the constitutive elements of the simplification it involves, while the people take it as something “entirely and completely known [*ganz und gar bekannt*], without subtraction or addition.”¹³⁴

BGE 18 is also a kind of advance commentary on the next aphorism. Having excluded the *cogito* and its attendant concepts in BGE 17, Nietzsche indicates that he is about to rule out the one remaining candidate for “intellectual intuition” or “immediate certainty,” the idea that

¹³³ BGE 18. Translation modified.

¹³⁴ BGE 19. Translation modified.

we are immediately certain of our own freedom (he would surely regard the Kantian idea of a “practical cognition” of our freedom as a dodge or play-on-words, intellectual intuition by another name). In doing so, Nietzsche returns to the question of the relationship between “the people” and “the philosopher.” Do the people, i.e. human beings insofar as they are not philosophers, *know* anything at all? Does “the philosopher enjoy private access to a sphere of reality from which ordinary people are excluded,” as Copleston puts it, even if this “sphere of reality” is not “Platonic heaven” but the nature of ordinary experience itself?

I suggest that BGE 18 conveys an important lesson about the relationship between the philosopher and the people, a lesson Machiavelli succinctly formulated by saying that “in the world there is no-one but the vulgar.”¹³⁵ It is impossible to free oneself (let alone the human race) permanently from the belief in free will even if one refutes it “a hundred times.” And yet it *is* “refutable.” But the insight into the illusory character of free will is also an insight into the inescapability of this illusion, *even for the philosopher who recognizes it as an illusion*. What BGE 18 teaches about free will applies *a fortiori* to the “persistence” of all the “fundamental errors” of the human species: “Such erroneous articles of faith, which were passed on by inheritance further and further, and finally almost became part of the basic endowment of the species, are for example: that there are enduring things; that there are identical things; that there are things, kinds of material, bodies; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free; that what is good for me is also good in and for itself.”¹³⁶ The word “almost” acknowledges the possibility of philosophy. Nietzsche implies that philosophical “wakefulness” consists in

¹³⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 71 (Chapter 18).

¹³⁶ GS 110.

becoming reflexively aware of the fact that human experience is shot through with fundamental illusions without ceasing to be human and thus subject to these illusions. The philosopher thus possesses a kind of double-consciousness equidistant from the Platonic image of the philosopher as achieving insight into a transcendent sphere of reality and the Aristotelian image of the philosopher as merely rendering common sense reflectively explicit.

Can such a conception of the philosopher be rendered epistemologically coherent? Nietzsche attempts to do so in BGE 19, which supplies a kind of “physio-psychological” foundation for the conception of the philosophical life he develops in the rest of the book. I will present a detailed interpretation of this aphorism in the final chapter, where I also reconstruct Nietzsche’s argument for philosophy as the best way of life. I conclude this chapter by turning to the question of what he means by proposing that traditional conceptions of first philosophy as a science of the whole be replaced by psychology, a question he addresses from three different perspectives in the final sub-section.

§4. Three Candidates for First Philosophy in BGE 20-22

The concluding aphorism 23 of the first chapter begins with a characteristic statement of novelty: “All psychology so far has until now got caught in moral prejudices and fears; it has not dared to go deep. To understand it as morphology and *doctrine of the development* [*Entwicklungslehre*] of the will to power, as I do – nobody has yet come close to this even in thought – insofar as it is permissible to recognize in what has been written so far a symptom of what has so far been kept silent.”¹³⁷ However, the careful reader already has reason to be

¹³⁷ BGE 23. Translation modified.

suspicious of Nietzsche's rhetoric of novelty, while the qualification "even in thought" and the distinction between "what has been written" and "what has been kept silent" draws our attention to the question of esotericism. While Nietzsche's "doctrine" of the will to power is surely novel, the deepest thoughts he means to convey by means of this doctrine may not be. Indeed, Nietzsche retracts or at least qualifies his declaration of novelty in the famous conclusion to this aphorism, where he tells us that the psychologist who questions moral prejudices, who sacrifices his "heart" but not his "intellect," will "at least be entitled to demand in return that psychology again be recognized as the queen of the sciences, for whose service and preparation the other sciences exist. For psychology is now again the path to the fundamental problems."¹³⁸

When was psychology formerly so recognized? While Nietzsche surely Socrates and Plato in mind, he may also be thinking of the Cartesian turn to the subject and even to some extent of Kantian "transcendental psychology." But my primary concern here is with the meaning of the demand that psychology be recognized as "queen of the sciences." First of all, this signals Nietzsche's partial *agreement* with traditional dogmatism and entails a rejection of modern skepticism about the very idea of first philosophy. It entails an affirmation of what Nietzsche calls the "masterly task" (*Herren-Aufgabe*) of philosophy.¹³⁹ However, this task is accomplished not by a metaphysical doctrine of the whole, but rather by an inquiry which focuses *primarily* on "the soul" or "the subject."¹⁴⁰

I suggest that Nietzsche's turn to psychology has a double meaning, which corresponds to the two broad dimensions of the Socratic turn to human phenomena – epistemological caution

¹³⁸ BGE 23.

¹³⁹ BGE 204.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. BGE 54.

about ungrounded claims (“the intellectual conscience”) and an emphasis on the *human meaning* or existential import of the pursuit of knowledge (“the problem of value”). The “other sciences” are subordinated to psychology for two reasons – psychology understood as “the critique of the elements of consciousness,”¹⁴¹ the reflexive physio-psychology of BGE 17-19, supplies the philosopher with a “meta-level” reflection on how the other sciences are related to each other and also the sense in which they supply us with knowledge at all, while psychology understood as “a critique of moral values”¹⁴² supplies the philosopher with a hierarchical understanding of the drives or instincts and the place of the philosophical drive, the “masterly” drive *par excellence*, in the psychic economy of human life. Together they comprise a “morphology” or phenomenology of the human being as continuous with “the will to power” or animal life in general.

In the next chapter, I will be concerned with the complex relationship between the two dimensions of Nietzsche’s “morphology of the will to power.” But what about the question of the whole? If Nietzsche has “learned from Socrates that... the human things are the key to the understanding of all things,”¹⁴³ what can he “unlock” about “all things” by means of his “physio-psychology”?

After presenting the core of his physio-psychology in BGE 19, Nietzsche turns to three traditional candidates for first philosophy understood as the science of the whole – cosmology (20), theology (21) and ontology (22). The subject matters of these sciences are in different ways comprehensive – the cosmos as a totality or as an ordered whole, the highest being or most

¹⁴¹ GS 355.

¹⁴² OGM Preface 6.

¹⁴³ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 19.

truly real being (*ens realissimum*) and being as such (*to on he on*). They are all traditional candidates for the subject matter of metaphysics as the highest or most comprehensive science, in relation to which the other sciences are preparatory or subordinate. Nietzsche's procedure in these aphorisms consists primarily in *drawing conclusions* about the whole *from* the account of the soul he has presented in BGE 17-19 – or, more precisely, in showing what conclusions (if any) *can* be drawn in the domains of cosmology, theology and ontology on the basis of this account. Unsurprisingly, these conclusions turn out to be primarily negative or problematic, although in different ways in each case.

BGE 19 concludes by claiming that “a philosopher” has the “right” to include “willing in itself” (*Wollen an sich*) in “the sphere... of the relations of supremacy [*Herrschafts-Verhältnissen*] under which the phenomenon of ‘life’ comes to be.”¹⁴⁴ The claim that “a thought comes when ‘it’ wants, not when ‘I’ want” has now been fully justified – not merely unconscious, pre-reflective thinking, but also self-conscious, seemingly voluntarily effected thinking is an automatic or instinctive process, although not a completely blind one. Free will is a “superfluous teleological principle.” Human life is essentially continuous with animal life. But what about the question of origins? Where does human life come from and how does it emerge? And what about sentient life and life in general? The concluding sentence of this aphorism indicates “Nietzsche’s awareness of the cosmological problem that philosophy must face,”¹⁴⁵ whether or not it can resolve that problem.

¹⁴⁴ BGE 19.

¹⁴⁵ Seth Benardete, “Review of Michael Tanner’s *Nietzsche: A Very Short Introduction*,” in *The Archaeology of the Soul: Platonic Readings of Ancient Poetry and Philosophy*, eds. Ronna Burger and Michael Davis (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2012), 350.

BGE 20 begins with a reflection on the growth or evolution of “individual philosophical concepts,” but in doing so, as Nietzsche’s development of this theme gradually makes clear, it also points to the problem of the evolution of the human species itself, our historical and cosmic origins, the problem raised by the conclusion of the preceding aphorism.

Nietzsche’s reflection on the systematic interrelatedness of philosophical concepts supplies his programmatic claim that “a thought comes when ‘it’ wants, not when ‘I’ want” with a new, quasi-Hegelian layer of meaning. Unlike other concepts (at least insofar as they escape the *Herrschaft* of philosophy), philosophical concepts (e.g. “substance” or “cause”) are interrelated according to “a definite fundamental scheme,” however “capriciously” they appear “in the history of thinking.”¹⁴⁶ If I want to think philosophically, I must follow the “orbit” or “circular path” (*Kreisbahn*) in which philosophical thoughts themselves naturally “want” to appear, rather than trying to impose *my own* “critical or systematic will” (the double allusion to Kant and Hegel is clear) or desire on them.¹⁴⁷ However, while for Hegel such thinking grasps “the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic,”¹⁴⁸ radically autonomous of human physiology (this is part of what he means by “absolute”), even if the individual’s capacity to think has physiological pre-conditions, Nietzsche claims that the systematic interrelatedness of philosophical concepts is *itself* a manifestation of shared “*physiological* valuations” and “racial conditions.”¹⁴⁹

While important, I suggest that the implications of this qualification are less “relativistic” than Nietzsche’s rhetoric seems to imply. For it is *the human race* which Nietzsche

¹⁴⁶ BGE 20. Translation modified.

¹⁴⁷ BGE 20.

¹⁴⁸ BGE 5.

¹⁴⁹ BGE 20.

has in mind, not, say, the Caucasian or African race. “Philosophizing” always has the same underlying “systematic structure,” whether it appears in India or in Europe, in antiquity or in modernity.¹⁵⁰ When Nietzsche *then* adds that it is “highly probable” that “philosophers” in the “Ural-Altai language zone” have a different way of looking “into the world” than “the Indo-Germanic peoples” *or* “the Muslims” (never mind that Turkish-speakers are usually Muslims!), I suggest that he is being wryly ironic, distracting us from his deeper point by adopting the pose of a fussy professor, the kind of “modern scholar” who “talks about philosophy” self-importantly from out of his “nook” while lacking all comprehension of philosophy itself.¹⁵¹ In Nietzsche’s time, such professors were inclined to crackpot racial theories; today, they are more likely to be disciples of Foucault.

Nietzsche’s deeper point is that “philosophizing” always reflects the structure of the common *human* perspective on the world, irrespective of the differences among races, languages and religions. When Nietzsche emphasizes the “marvelous [*wunderlich*] family resemblance” among the forms of “philosophizing” which have appeared in many different cultures, it is *the human family* – and its origins – with which he is concerned.¹⁵² The deeper meaning is virtually the opposite of the rhetorical impression – but not quite. For Nietzsche indicates here his awareness of a real problem already touched on in BGE 2-4. Even if there is a common human perspective on the world, if the “fundamental concepts” inherent in our perspective aren’t radically independent of our physiology and history, but rather reflect the contingent way in which we have gradually evolved or emerged out of pre-human life-forms,

¹⁵⁰ BGE 20.

¹⁵¹ Cf. BGE 20 (translation modified) with BGE 213.

¹⁵² BGE 20. Translation modified.

such that “philosophizing” is a kind of “recollection” of the collective *inheritance* of our species (“a homecoming to a remote, primordial and inclusive household of the soul”¹⁵³), how can we account for the validity and autonomy of philosophical (or any other) truth-claims? By this stage in the inquiry, Nietzsche has already argued (in BGE 17-19) that although the human perspective *does* involve a “falsification” of the world necessary for “the preservation of such beings as we are,” this falsification makes possible qualified insight into how things are. Accordingly, he says here that philosophizing is “*less* a discovery” than a kind of recollection; i.e. properly conducted, such “recollection” *does* involve genuine “discovery” or insight.¹⁵⁴ Since my concerns here are primarily interpretive, I restrict myself to noting that this is a genuine difficulty for Nietzsche’s enterprise, arguably a fatal one. A philosopher such as Hegel or Husserl would contend that Nietzsche falls prey to “psychologism.”

If philosophizing is a kind of “atavism,” a return to the “household of the soul out of which [philosophical] concepts grew originally,” what is the character of this primordial “household”¹⁵⁵? In BGE 2, Nietzsche proposed that there are two possible *kinds* of answer to the question of human origins, the “metaphysical” or transcendent and the naturalistic or immanent. Each kind of answer permits of many variants, but the alternative which Nietzsche surely has in mind above all is that between free creation by God and a natural process of evolution: Did God create the human species and endow us with the capacity for philosophical thinking (the image of the “primordial household” calls to mind Adam and Eve sharing the garden with God the Father) or did we develop this capacity through an evolutionary process? If philosophizing is a

¹⁵³ BGE 20.

¹⁵⁴ BGE 20. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁵ BGE 20.

kind of recollection of origins, the character of those origins will determine the character of the “recollection” itself. If philosophizing is a recollection of what we learned in a past life when we enjoyed a direct vision of the Platonic Ideas, or what it was like to enjoy direct communion with God before we were separated from Him by original sin, such a recollection will have a very different character to a “recollection” of the evolutionary process through which we first developed the capacity to think philosophically or (put differently) through which we first acquired our very humanity.

In describing philosophizing as a return in thought to the original experiences of the human species, Nietzsche seems to presuppose knowledge of human origins. How else could he be in a position to describe philosophical thinking as a recollection of these primordial experiences? He seems, then, to assume that he possesses a phenomenological account of our evolutionary origins which renders those origins intelligible *as* origins. But does he ever provide us with such an account, in *BGE* or elsewhere, e.g. in Book 3 of *The Gay Science* or in the second treatise of the *Genealogy*? Or does he rely on the empirical work of Darwin and his followers, one of those “respectable but mediocre Englishmen” who was “particularly skillful at determining and collecting many small and common facts and then drawing conclusions from them”¹⁵⁶?

I would like to make two suggestions about the implications of BGE 20 for the question of origins. First, in pointedly, albeit somewhat obliquely, raising the question of origins (the primordial “household of the soul”) without addressing it directly, Nietzsche indicates that it is most likely impossible to render intelligible the original emergence of the human out of the pre-

¹⁵⁶ BGE 253.

human or non-human. Neither the theologian nor the evolutionary biologist can intelligibly reconstruct (or “recollect”) the process by which God created human beings instantaneously out of nothing or by which human beings gradually emerged from pre-human ancestors into a recognizably human shape. In this sense, the question of origins transcends the limits of our knowledge. But it could be answered *indirectly*, through the demonstrative *exclusion* of one alternative – either the theological (or broadly “metaphysical”) or the evolutionary and naturalistic. Accordingly, in the next aphorism, Nietzsche will turn to the question of theology. To anticipate, Nietzsche will argue that the theological alternative can be excluded based on what *the philosopher* can know about *the human being*, i.e. the physio-psychology he has already presented in BGE 17-19. Accordingly, the philosopher (*not* the empirical scientist) *can* know that the human species *must somehow* have evolved or emerged from the pre-human, from “the lower.” However, all attempts to *describe* this process or render it *intelligible* will have an unavoidably problematic and mythical-imaginative character. This applies no less to Nietzsche’s attempts (e.g. in Book 3 of *The Gay Science* or the second treatise of the *Genealogy*) than to those of the Darwinists, the difference being that Nietzsche (like Rousseau in the second *Discourse*) is aware of the inherently problematic character of such an enterprise, while Darwinists usually take for granted a dogmatic nominalism and materialism, as if such a stance makes the epistemological issues disappear.

Secondly, this qualification need not vitiate Nietzsche’s description of philosophy itself as a recollection of original experiences. Unlike the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis*, to which he alludes, Nietzsche’s description of philosophical thinking as a kind of “atavism” isn’t meant to answer the question of how knowledge is possible – an answer which in the Platonic case

provokes an obvious circularity objection: How was knowledge of “the Ideas” possible for pre-existent souls in the first place? Rather, Nietzsche’s proposal is a *further elaboration* of the *nature* of philosophical thinking, the possibility of which he has already established in BGE 17-19 (I note in passing the intimation that the Platonic doctrine, when freed of its mythical trappings, may have been meant to serve the same purpose). The philosopher renders self-conscious and explicit the process by which concept-formation takes place in every recognizably human soul, a reflective “recollection” of a process which takes place primarily and for the most part in an unreflective fashion. Such a “recollection” is *analogous* to a historical-cosmological recollection of the childhood of the human species, even if the light it sheds on the latter is inevitably limited and indirect. Nietzsche concludes the aphorism thus: “So much by way of rejecting Locke’s superficiality regarding the origin [*Herkunft*] of ideas.”¹⁵⁷ He is about to supply us with an account of the origin of the idea of God, *the* metaphysical origin or first principle *par excellence*.

The question of cosmology, then, leads naturally to the question of theology, the question of the first, highest or most perfect being in (or beyond) the cosmos, out of which all other beings emerged and upon which they are metaphysically dependent, in the next aphorism, BGE 21. As we have come to expect, Nietzsche introduces his theme in a somewhat oblique fashion. In a way which has perplexed commentators,¹⁵⁸ Nietzsche seems to return abruptly to the theme of free will, as if he suddenly remembered, having just written BGE 20, that he hadn’t

¹⁵⁷ BGE 20.

¹⁵⁸ For example, cf. Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 52. Lampert claims that BGE 21 “completes” the refutation of free will started in BGE 19, after the “intervening” aphorism BGE 20, without supplying an explanation for why Nietzsche chose to interrupt his refutation of free will with an aphorism-long digression, thereby breaking it into two non-contiguous parts.

“refuted” it thoroughly enough in BGE 19. Nietzsche had already warned us in BGE 18 that this “theory” provokes refutation after refutation. However, Nietzsche now slyly identifies the idea of free will in the “superlative metaphysical sense” with Spinoza’s definition of God as *causa sui*, something which is its own cause.¹⁵⁹ Nietzsche describes this concept as “the best self-contradiction that has been conceived so far, a kind of logical rape and perversion [*eine Art logischer Nothzucht und Unnatur*].”¹⁶⁰

Kaufmann claims that the formula *causa sui* was “traditionally applied to God,”¹⁶¹ but this theological concept was rather an innovation of Spinoza’s – traditional theology understood God as the necessary and thus *uncaused* being, the being whose existence is identical with His essence and is therefore according to the classic Thomistic doctrine not strictly speaking “a being” but rather Being Itself,¹⁶² the “absolute act” of “pure being.” No less than Nietzsche, a theologian such as Anselm, Aquinas or Scotus would have rejected the idea of a self-causing being as nonsensical. Indeed, Aquinas writes, “Being itself cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of a thing (by ‘caused’ I mean by an efficient cause), because that thing would then be its own cause and it would bring itself into being, which is impossible.”¹⁶³

Rather than addressing the question of “the will” immediately, as he does in BGE 19, Nietzsche begins BGE 21 by introducing the concept of *causa sui*, seeming to accept Spinoza’s *definition of God* as though it were obviously the correct definition. But rather than describing

¹⁵⁹ BGE 21.

¹⁶⁰ BGE 21.

¹⁶¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), 23, footnote 20.

¹⁶² “There can only be one reality that is identical with its being.” Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer, 2nd. ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1968), 56 (Chapter 4, Section 6).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 56 (Chapter 4, Section 7).

God so understood as the necessary being, the being whose essence is identical with His existence (on this point, Spinoza's definition agrees with traditional theology), Nietzsche suggests that God (the *causa sui*) is the self-contradictory or impossible being *par excellence*, the being whose very concept implies its non-existence. Rather than necessary, Nietzsche implies, the existence of God is impossible.

It is only in the *second* sentence of the aphorism that Nietzsche introduces the idea of free will, as a gloss on the idea of the *causa sui* which at the same time supplies a genetic (psychological, not historical) account of its origin: "The desire for 'freedom of the will' in that superlative metaphysical sense, which unfortunately still holds sway in the heads of the half-educated, the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one's actions oneself and to absolve God, world, ancestors, chance, and society is nothing less than to be that very *causa sui* and, with more than Münchhausean audacity, to pull oneself out of the swamp of nothingness [*aus dem Sumpf des Nichts*] by the hair into existence [*in's Dasein zu ziehn*]." ¹⁶⁴

After beginning with Spinoza's definition of God as *causa sui*, Nietzsche now alludes to the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, reminding the reader that Spinoza's doctrine of "God or Nature" (*deus sive natura*) as *causa sui* constitutes an attempt (of questionable coherence) to split the difference between the traditional Christian doctrine of God as existing necessarily but creating the world freely, through a free creative act of love differentiable from the absolute act of pure being through which He exists or in which His very Being consists, and ancient (especially pre-Socratic) notions of natural order and necessity. Nietzsche now suggests that the idea of divine freedom, however exactly it is understood, is a projection onto nature or being

¹⁶⁴ BGE 21. Translation modified.

(“the in-itself”) of a certain human desire or longing (*Verlangen*) and a certain kind of *self-misinterpretation* which accompanies that desire. The desire for free will *is* “nothing less than to be that very *causa sui*” (*nichts Geringeres, als eben jene causa sui zu sein*).¹⁶⁵ Kaufmann’s understandable translation of “is” (*ist*) as “involves” obscures Nietzsche’s intentionally awkward formulation, in which the subject “desire” is identified with the predicate clause. Nietzsche doesn’t say that the desire for free will is *the desire to be* “that very *causa sui*,” although he presumably implies that too – rather, he says that the “desire” for free will *is* “to be that very *causa sui*.”

Nietzsche suggests, then, that the “effectual truth” of the idea of a self-causing being is the human desire to think of oneself as absolutely free and responsible for one’s actions in the radical voluntarist sense. Nietzsche has already “refuted” the latter notion in BGE 19; here, he merely *draws the conclusion* that human beings subsequently create God in their own distorted image. While Feuerbach had argued that human beings project onto God their own *real* characteristics, Nietzsche suggests that human beings form the concept of God by unreflectively projecting their *imagined* characteristics, in particular the capacity for freedom “in that superlative metaphysical sense,” onto the image of their creator.

Of course, radical voluntarists such as Augustine or Kant don’t claim that the exercise of free will involves causing oneself to come into being, just as theologians like Aquinas don’t define God as the “cause of Himself” and Spinoza himself certainly didn’t mean to suggest that God or Nature brings itself into being out of nothing. Indeed, there is a profound irony in Nietzsche’s identification of Spinoza’s concept of *causa sui* with free will “in that superlative

¹⁶⁵ BGE 21. Translation modified.

metaphysical sense,” given that Spinoza was notorious precisely for his comprehensive rejection of that notion.

I suggest that Nietzsche’s polemical approach in this aphorism presupposes his prior refutation of free will in BGE 19, which I discuss in the next chapter. His purpose in BGE 21 is to draw a (negative) conclusion about the possibility of theology as a legitimate science. Nietzsche’s refutation of theology whether natural or revealed is very simple – if the very idea of free will (non-necessitated, spontaneous causal agency) is demonstrably incoherent, the postulate of God as an absolutely free creator who endows human beings with an *analogous* capacity for free agency is demonstrably false, however great the difference between God’s infinite freedom and the freedom possessed by finite human beings “created in the image” of such a God. But what about Spinoza’s doctrine of God (and its “Averroist” antecedents), according to which divine freedom consists only in wholly unimpeded but inexorably *necessary* causal agency, in contrast to the gratuitous act of love through which the Christian God brings the world into being? The rest of BGE 21 is devoted to showing that the very idea of efficient causality and *causal* “necessity” is derivative from the idea of free will in the “superlative metaphysical sense,” as a kind of “reification” and partial (but only partial) negation of that idea. I will return to this part of the aphorism in the next chapter, when I discuss BGE 19. Here I want only to note the irony in Nietzsche’s suggestion that deterministic conceptions of natural necessity (or nature as a closed causal network), even if they represent in one respect an advance on theological “mythology,” at the same time involve a kind of disguised theology.

Having excluded the possibilities that we can “know the whole” in the sense of acquiring a comprehensive picture of our cosmological origins or “know the whole” in the sense of

knowing God or the causal origin and first principle of the cosmos itself, Nietzsche turns in BGE 22 to the question of whether we can “know the whole” in the sense of “knowledge of being as such” – knowing what *everything that is* has in common merely by virtue of the fact *that it is*. Having made a distinction between “nature” and “life” when he first introduced the will to power as a human phenomenon in BGE 9, and having claimed that “life itself is will to power” in BGE 13, Nietzsche now draws the conclusion (note that $9 + 13 = 22$) that nature itself is will to power. To be is to be will to power. Nietzsche addresses this conclusion directly to modern mathematical physicists (“you physicists”), just as he directly addressed the Stoics (“you noble Stoics”) in BGE 9.

Modern physicists share Nietzsche’s “atheism,” his denial that the cosmos was created by a God who rules freely over His creation as a benevolent king rules over his kingdom, and his concomitant denial that God created human beings in His own image, endowing them with free will. They are “proud” of their doctrine of “nature’s conformity to law,” their version of the disenchanted conviction that all natural events (and there are only natural events strictly speaking) follow a “necessary and calculable course.”¹⁶⁶ However, Nietzsche suggests that their proudly anti-anthropomorphic stance in fact involves an anthropomorphizing “interpretation” of the available phenomena, which reflects their “democratic,” egalitarian morality.¹⁶⁷ If traditional theology involves a kind of cosmic monarchism, the modern conception of “natural law” involves a cosmic republicanism motivated by a “plebeian antagonism to everything privileged

¹⁶⁶ BGE 22.

¹⁶⁷ BGE 22.

and autocratic”: “Everywhere equality before the law – nature doesn’t have it any different or better than we do.”¹⁶⁸

In BGE 14, Nietzsche had already contrasted Platonic sophistication and delicacy with the philosophical coarseness of modern physicists, citing a passage from Plato’s *Laws* or *Conventions (Nomoi)*.¹⁶⁹ But if the idea that natural events “conform to laws” or “conventions” (*nomoi*) is a “naively humanitarian dressing-up and contortion of meaning” with unconscious *moral-political* motives, what about Nietzsche’s alternative “interpretation”¹⁷⁰? Nietzsche writes, “But, as said before” – I suggest that he refers here, not just to the beginning of BGE 22, but also back to BGE 14 – “that is interpretation, not text; and someone could come along who, with the opposite intention and art of interpretation, would be able to read out of the same nature [*aus der gleichen Natur*] and with regard to the same phenomena [*Erscheinungen*] rather the tyrannically inconsiderate and relentless enforcement of claims of power – an interpreter who would bring the invariability and unconditionality in all ‘will to power’ so vividly before his eyes that almost every word and even the word ‘tyranny’ itself would finally seem unusable or even seem to be a weakening and attenuating metaphor – being too human... Supposing that this also is only interpretation – and you will be eager enough to make this objection? – well, so much the better.”¹⁷¹

The emphasis throughout BGE 22 is on the contrast between “text” and “interpretation,” a contrast analogous to that between “nature” and “convention,” the crucial difference being that a “text” is *itself* a human construct, reliant for its unity on the conventions of language.

¹⁶⁸ BGE 22. Translation modified.

¹⁶⁹ BGE 14. The formula “mob of the senses” occurs in Plato, *Laws* 689a-b.

¹⁷⁰ BGE 22. Translation modified.

¹⁷¹ BGE 22. Translation modified.

Nietzsche's concession that the doctrine of *nature or being itself* as "will to power" (in scare quotes) is also "only interpretation" suggests that this doctrine is in some sense an exoteric teaching. But the more interesting implication concerns his approach to the question of ontology itself. Nietzsche also thereby indicates that the concept of "nature" or "being" is primarily a concept of distinction. As Strauss puts it, "The philosophic quest for the first things is guided by that understanding of 'being' or 'to be' according to which the most fundamental distinction of manners of being is that between 'to be in truth' and 'to be by virtue of law or convention' – a distinction that survived in a barely recognizable form in the scholastic distinction between *ens reale* and *ens fictum*."¹⁷² The concept of nature or being serves above all to distinguish nature from convention or *that which is* from that which merely pretends to be. In the preceding aphorism, Nietzsche suggested that God exists only by convention – the "effectual truth" of this *ens fictum* is a certain kind of human desire. But if one asks *what being as such is* or *what nature is*, no longer in contrast to convention (as in BGE 21), but rather "in-itself," there is no longer anything determinate to say or think, because there is no longer any "interpretation" with which one might contrast the "text." Rather, there is only a blank conceptual canvas, onto which human beings cannot help but project their desires, whether unreflectively, as in the case of the ancient Stoics and the modern physicists, or self-consciously, as in the case of Plato or Nietzsche. Nietzsche ends this part of *BGE* with the question of ontology, because being is the "most universal" and "emptiest" of concepts, "the last wisp of evaporating reality," the concept which "comes at the end – unfortunately, for it should never come at all!"¹⁷³

¹⁷² Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 91.

¹⁷³ TI "Reason" in *Philosophy* 4.

Chapter 4

Nietzsche's Argument for the Philosophical Life

§1. Introduction

Nietzsche is often regarded as the first philosopher to have questioned the will to truth or the value of knowledge in a truly radical way. This view of Nietzsche implies a certain view of the history of philosophy as primarily the history of dogmatism, in particular dogmatism about the value of knowledge. This form of dogmatism might be described as a kind of “metaphysical faith,” insofar as it takes for granted *a priori* that knowledge and truth are inherently good or “valuable” regardless of what “the truth” turns out to be. That Nietzsche himself held such a view of the history of philosophy seems to be confirmed by such passages as the following from Book 5 of *The Gay Science*: “It is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests... even we knowers of today, we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take *our* fire too from the flame lit by the thousand-year-old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato’s faith, that God is the truth, that the truth is divine.”¹ On the other hand, that Nietzsche regarded himself as the first philosopher to have questioned this universal “faith” seems to be confirmed by such passages as the first aphorism of *BGE*: “Though it scarcely seems credible, it finally almost seems to us as if the problem had never been posed so far – as if we were the first to see it, fix it with our eyes, and *risk* it.”²

¹ GS 344. Translation modified.

² BGE 1. Translation modified.

On this view of the history of philosophy, faith in the inherent value of knowledge is the common “prejudice” shared by all pre-Nietzschean philosophers, from ancient Greece to late modernity, whatever their doctrinal disagreements in ethics, epistemology or metaphysics. The one thing which Socrates never seems to question in any of the Platonic dialogues, whether “early” and aporetic or “late” and metaphysical, is the assumption that the philosophical life is the only life worth living, that devoting one’s life to philosophizing is “the one thing needful,” as Strauss puts it, making use of a Christian formula to characterize a Socratic stance.³ Of course, in their books ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle presented *arguments* for the superiority of their way of life, but (on this view) they were unwilling to face up to the possibility that “the truth,” rather than being “valuable,” might in fact be “ugly” and “terrifying” – the possibility raised in the young Nietzsche’s letter to his sister. Accordingly, such arguments, however sophisticated and compelling they might be, are really after-the-fact justifications for a dogmatically held premise. Even materialistic and hedonistic philosophers such as Epicurus and Lucretius, whose doctrines are more openly subversive of traditional religion and popular morality than are those of Plato and Aristotle, refused to question *this* assumption, the common “prejudice of the philosophers,” ancient or modern.

In the passage cited above, Nietzsche describes this common “faith,” seemingly shared by ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle with Christian theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas, as the faith that “God is the truth” or that “the truth is divine.” However, these claims aren’t quite identical – for a philosopher might reject the existence of God while still regarding “the truth” as “divine” in the sense of supremely important or

³ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 74-75. Cf. also 5, 36.

valuable. This distinction helps us understand why Nietzsche might regard this “faith” as resurfacing in a novel form among the “godless anti-metaphysicians” of late modernity. For post-Enlightenment thinkers who reject the existence of God may nonetheless take for granted that “the truth” is “divine” in the sense of supremely valuable, whether for the individual investigator or for the progress of the human species.

To complicate matters further, even a philosopher who courageously faces up to the possibility that “the truth” might be “ugly” and “terrifying” may nonetheless regard the truth as “divine” if he unthinkingly assumes that we have a *moral duty* to as it were “obey” the truth as though it were a goddess who issues commands that must be followed regardless of the consequences. On the one hand, in the second *Untimely Meditation*, Nietzsche suggested (quite presciently, given the political catastrophes of the 20th century) that the injudicious dissemination of dangerous doctrines may have devastating results: “If... the doctrines of sovereign becoming, of the fluidity of all concepts, types and species, of the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal – doctrines which I consider true but deadly – are thrust upon the people for another generation with the rage for instruction that has by now become normal, no one should be surprised if the people perishes of petty egoism, ossification, and greed, falls apart and ceases to be a people; in its place systems of individualist egoism, brotherhoods for the rapacious exploitation of the non-brothers, and similar creations of utilitarian vulgarity may perhaps appear in the arena of the future.”⁴ On the other hand, in BGE 10, Nietzsche introduced us to “puritanical fanatics of conscience” who would rather “lie down

⁴ UDHL 9.

and die” on a “certain nothing” than live contentedly with “an uncertain something.”⁵ These “puritanical fanatics” *do* have an authentic (albeit limited and abortive) “will to truth,” suggests Nietzsche, but they fail to question its value, to turn their own will to truth against itself.

In previous chapters, I argued that Nietzsche’s rhetoric of novelty is deliberately misleading. The view of the history of philosophy as the history of dogmatism which it seems to imply involves intentional exaggerations and outright distortions. It supplies the careless reader with a new, oversimplified vision of the history of philosophy, according to which after Nietzsche’s revolutionary proposals “everything will be different,” while provoking the careful reader, once he has recovered from his initial shock and delight at Nietzsche’s provocations, to approach the history of philosophy anew, asking difficult questions and probing the points of tension that Nietzsche’s rhetoric brings to light. For example, how could Socrates have sustained such a paradoxical mixture of radical questioning and naïve dogmatism? Such a reader will then read Nietzsche’s text again more carefully, as a guide to pursuing these questions.

Even the most careless reader cannot help but have some awareness of the tension between the rhetoric of radical originality which Nietzsche often employs and the praise he bestows on many figures he seems to regard as precursors of some kind. These include philosophers such as Heraclitus and Spinoza as well as thinkers not conventionally included in the history of philosophy proper, such as Thucydides, Xenophon, Machiavelli, Montaigne and Lessing. The most penetrating of Nietzsche’s “post-structuralist” admirers is surely Deleuze, who makes a provisionally helpful distinction between a theological tradition of “transcendence” (including such figures as Plato, Descartes and Hegel) and a “subterranean,”

⁵ BGE 12.

naturalistic tradition of “immanence” (including Lucretius and Spinoza), suggesting that Nietzsche does not intend to make a radical break with the history of philosophy, but is rather better understood as taking up and continuing the latter tradition.⁶ But even Deleuze regards Nietzsche’s enterprise not so much as the continuation but rather as the culmination of the “tradition of immanence.” Nietzsche is the first philosopher to have liberated himself altogether from the residues of theological or metaphysical ways of thinking which can still be found in even his most radical precursors.⁷

Although Deleuze describes this tradition as “subterranean,” i.e. in some sense persecuted and hidden, he is blind to the question of esotericism, even as his best insights point in that direction. In previous chapters, I argued that esotericism was profoundly important for Nietzsche, as it would later be for Strauss. Nietzsche regards many of the figures who seem to belong to what Deleuze calls the tradition of “transcendence” as belonging rather to a tradition of “immanence,” even as their exoteric teachings suggest otherwise. The most important of these figures are Socrates and Plato. One is tempted rather to refer to a single figure, Socrates-Plato, due to the difficulty of distinguishing what is authentically “Socratic” from what is

⁶ Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 43: “Whenever there is transcendence, vertical Being, imperial State in the sky or on earth, there is religion; and there is Philosophy whenever there is immanence, even if it functions as an arena for agon and rivalry.” See also Gilles Deleuze, “Plato, the Greeks,” in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Michael A. Greco and Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 137: “Every reaction against Platonism is a restoration of immanence in its full extension and in its purity, which forbids the return of any transcendence... Only the philosophies of pure immanence escape Platonism – from the Stoics to Spinoza or Nietzsche.”

⁷ For example, in *Difference and Repetition*, he claims that the last residue of theology in Spinoza consists in the “difference between substance and the modes” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 40), which Nietzsche finally overcomes through the doctrine of the eternal return (ibid., 35-42). However, he occasionally privileges Spinoza over Nietzsche, e.g. when he characterizes Spinoza’s understanding of immanence as “the purest, the one that does not hand itself over to the transcendent or restore any transcendent, the one that inspires the fewest illusions.” Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 60.

“Platonic” in the Platonic dialogues, even with the external help supplied by Aristophanes and Xenophon. Nietzsche himself occasionally points to this difficulty, thereby suggesting to the careful reader that he ought to be cautious on those occasions when Nietzsche seems confidently to separate that which is Socratic from that which is Platonic and even to oppose them to one another: “There is something in the morality of Plato that does not really belong to Plato but is merely encountered in his philosophy – one might say, in spite of Plato: namely, the Socratism for which he was really too noble.”⁸

I suggest that throughout *BGE*, Nietzsche means to indicate a certain parallel between Plato’s relationship to Socrates and *Nietzsche’s own relationship to Socrates*. Just as it is difficult (although perhaps not impossible) to separate Plato from Plato’s Socrates when reading the Platonic dialogues, as one gradually begins to recognize the ironic character of Nietzsche’s anti-Socratic pose, it becomes steadily more difficult to separate *Nietzsche himself* from Nietzsche’s Socrates. If Plato was “really too noble” to become a Socratic, he became one nonetheless – just like Nietzsche.

I suggest that when Nietzsche questions the will to truth at the beginning of *BGE*, he doesn’t take himself to be engaged in a radically new, nor even a distinctively modern enterprise. Rather, he takes himself to be undertaking a “repetition of antiquity at the peak of modernity,” to use Karl Löwith’s celebrated formula.⁹ Nietzsche takes himself to be repeating the ancient Socratic-Platonic turn to the “human things,” which consisted above all in asking the question: Why philosophy? Are reason, knowledge and reflective self-awareness better, more

⁸ BGE 190.

⁹ This formula supplies the title for the fourth chapter of Karl Löwith, *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1956).

“valuable for life,” than unreflective instinct, the illusions to which it gives rise and the ignorance it sustains? Nietzsche’s version of this enterprise may differ in subtle ways from the ancient version, just as Platonic philosophizing might differ in subtle ways from Socratic philosophizing, and some of these differences may be due to the influence (whether instructive or distorting) of late modern, post-Christian culture. But it is far more difficult to pinpoint these differences than is generally recognized.

Socrates gave the impression of being a naively dogmatic moralist – a pose which enraged men like Callicles and Thrasymachus (Nietzsche imitates this kind of rage in his anti-Socratic rhetoric), while leaving many of his admirers, men like Glaucon and Adeimantus, puzzled and frustrated. They expected from him a clear and rationally satisfying defense of “the just speech” against “the unjust speech,” which would show that the philosophical life is *both* the happiest life *and* the most just or morally virtuous life, a defense he never quite seems able to supply. However, in Nietzsche’s view, this prudently cultivated impression was a stratagem of “that famous old serpent”¹⁰ and “great ironist, rich in secrets.”¹¹ This stratagem served a complex mixture of political and pedagogical purposes, enabling Socrates to found a “subterranean tradition of immanence,” as Deleuze would put it, which Nietzsche takes himself to be re-founding over two thousand years later.

Rather than taking the inherent goodness or “value” of knowledge for granted and assuming that there cannot *possibly* be an irreconcilable tension between knowledge, happiness and justice or moral virtue, Socrates was the paradigm of the philosopher who turned the will to

¹⁰ BGE 202.

¹¹ BGE 191.

truth against itself in the very manner which Nietzsche advocates in the first aphorism of *BGE*. Socrates questioned popular religion and morality, but he also questioned the “pre-Socratic” assumption that such questioning *must* result in a way of life fundamentally superior to (“more valuable than”) the instinctually governed life of illusion and ignorance. In a truly radical fashion, Socrates raised the Nietzschean question “Why knowledge at all?” and grasped the reflexive complexity of this question.

However, in Nietzsche’s estimation, Socratic questioning of the will to truth resulted in a reflexive *justification* of the will to truth, a *non-dogmatic* argument for the philosophical life as the best way of life. I suggest that *BGE* as a whole represents Nietzsche’s most comprehensive attempt to reconstruct what he regards as the core of the Socratic argument for the philosophical life as a “trans-moral” life. In this sense, it belongs to the ancient literary genre of “Socratic discourses” (*logoi Sokratikoi*), like Plato’s *Republic* or Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*. Nietzsche describes the latter in a notebook entry from July 1879 as “the most attractive book of Greek literature,”¹² a formula echoed by his description of Plato himself in the Preface to *BGE* as “the most beautiful growth of antiquity.”¹³ At the same time, Nietzsche occasionally hints at certain subtle differences between his conception of the philosophical life and that of Socrates, just as Plato arguably hints at a subtle critique of Socrates in some of the dialogues, implying that he is somehow more “erotic,” more attuned to the importance of beauty in human life, than was his “amusical” teacher.

¹² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human II and Unpublished Fragments*, 393.

¹³ *BGE* Preface.

In this chapter, my aim will be to reconstruct Nietzsche's argument for the philosophical life, building on the results of the two preceding chapters. As I argued earlier, this argument has two core elements, corresponding to the double meaning of "psychology" as a "physio-psychology" or "critique of the elements of consciousness," which establishes the very possibility of philosophy as a kind of reflexive inquiry into the human soul, and a typology of different human types or ways of life, which comprehends "the hierarchy [*Rangordnung*] of valuations according to which a people, a society, a human being has lived."¹⁴ These elements are united in Nietzsche's description of his psychology as a phenomenology or "morphology" of "the will to power."¹⁵

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I present an interpretation of BGE 19. This is the longest and most theoretically dense aphorism in the first chapter of the book. It presents Nietzsche's "physio-psychological" account of what he elsewhere calls "the will to power," although in *this* highly theoretical aphorism he carefully avoids that popular, doctrinal formula. In presenting my interpretation, I will go back in some detail over much of the ground covered in the last chapter, where I discussed Nietzsche's "physio-psychology" as a whole (BGE 13-22), and also conduct a close reading of the famous "lightning-flash" passage in OGM 1:13, which is supposed (as the verso of the title page in the first edition of the *Genealogy* explicitly claims) to "clarify" the argument of the earlier book. In the second section, I discuss the sequence of aphorisms 24-29, which present a *philosophical ascent* to the surface ("the foreground") now properly comprehended *as* "the surface," after the theoretical depths explored

¹⁴ BGE 224.

¹⁵ BGE 23.

in aphorisms 13-22, and at the same time a *political descent* from the private domain of philosophical thinking to the public world of common political life – “the crowd,” “the average man,” “the herd.” Although Socrates isn’t mentioned by name, this sequence is replete with allusions to “that famous old serpent,” allusions which supply further evidence that Nietzsche regarded himself as a kind of Socratic. I argue that in one sense Nietzsche’s task is complete by the time he reaches BGE 29, while in another sense, it only then begins. In the third section, I depart from the aphorism-by-aphorism procedure I have been following through most of the dissertation and present a brief concluding overview of Nietzsche’s conception of the philosophical life itself.

My primary aims have been interpretive. I have tried to understand Nietzsche as he understood himself, a task which requires one to enter as sympathetically as possible into his thought and reconstruct it as coherently as one can without departing from the meaning of the text as Nietzsche himself can plausibly be regarded as having understood it. Furthermore, although there are good reasons (from many different perspectives, both secular and religious, both “liberal” and “conservative”) to regard him as a dangerous and irresponsible writer, whose influence on late modern culture and politics has been more destructive and pernicious than liberating or salutary, a merely moralistic dismissal of his ideas is not only insufficient but, especially in a liberal arts context, itself irresponsible. Not only can one learn a great deal from reading Nietzsche, but one cannot combat his influence effectively without understanding his captivating appeal, not only for crude demagogues and their followers, but also for many of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century. As I have tried to show, it is easy to be seduced by Nietzsche, but far more difficult to understand his methods of seduction. For this reason, it is far

more difficult to criticize Nietzsche effectively, in a non-facile way, than his detractors tend to assume.

However, as Nietzsche himself would insist, the tasks of “interpretation” and “evaluation” are inseparable. The sympathetic reader who reconstructs Nietzsche’s thought as coherently as possible must also highlight the places where Nietzsche runs into difficulties for which he appears to have no resolution. To accept Nietzsche’s authority when he runs out of reasons would be a violation of his own Socratic principle of “the intellectual conscience.” Accordingly, I will also be concerned with such questions as these: Is Nietzsche’s argument for the philosophical life truly “non-dogmatic”? For all its complexity and sophistication, does Nietzsche’s thought ultimately lapse into a kind of dogmatism – or does it simply fail to establish any conclusions at all?

In this concluding chapter, then, while my concerns remain primarily interpretive, I will also touch on the questions of what one can learn from Nietzsche and what might be the inherent limitations of his mode of philosophizing – which, I have argued, Nietzsche regarded as a kind of late modern recovery of Socratic-Platonic thought. While a completely satisfying treatment of these issues is beyond the scope of my dissertation, as I proceed with my reconstruction of Nietzsche’s argument, I will highlight the places where he runs into difficulties for which he appears to have no resolution, while also addressing the question of what one might be able to learn from Nietzsche if one is compelled to regard his enterprise as in some fundamental sense misguided.

Confronted by this question, Nietzsche’s most respectful and sympathetic critics often give some version of the following response – Nietzsche was the most consistently and radically

modern philosopher, whose thought is a kind of unintentional *reductio ad absurdum* of “the Enlightenment project” itself, which thereby brings to light the need for a new beginning involving some form of creative recovery of our pre-modern past, whether Christian, Socratic or even pre-Socratic. One can find versions of such a claim in secular critics of modernity, such as Heidegger, as well as Christian critics of modernity, such as Alasdair MacIntyre. Although this kind of approach can yield interesting results, I suggest that Nietzsche is better understood in a way broadly similar to Kierkegaard’s understanding of Socrates – as the philosopher who took the idea of the philosophical life understood in *contradistinction* to a religious life to its furthest limits, thereby manifesting, not the impossibility of philosophy, but its ultimate dependence on, and subordination to, “religion” or “faith.”

§2. Nietzsche’s Account of “The Will to Power” in BGE 19

In the previous chapter, I argued that Nietzsche grounds his physio-psychology, his “new” form of first philosophy, in BGE 13-22, thereby “entitling” him to demand that psychology again be recognized as queen of the sciences. I argued that this sequence is divided into three sub-sections – a section on methodology (13-16), on psychology proper (17-19) and on the question of nature or being as a whole (20-22). But while BGE 17-19 concern psychology proper, in an important sense, the other sub-sections are also psychological.

In the first sub-section, Nietzsche shows that our primary experience of ourselves and the world involves an interpretive framework which lends itself to being understood in three different ways – materialistic, dualistic and idealistic. Materialism is easily dismissed (in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche will emphasize this point, describing himself as “the strictest opponent of

all materialism”¹⁶). Dualism and idealism are not so easily dismissed, but the attempt to render them reflectively transparent and coherent leads to difficulties which cannot immediately be resolved. These difficulties motivate a “retreat into the ground” of the interpretive framework itself, which is undertaken in BGE 17.

In the third sub-section, Nietzsche examines the question of the whole from three different perspectives – cosmological (20), theological (21) and ontological (22). However, the question of the whole was already present, although not directly thematic, in BGE 13-16. Nietzsche’s claim that “life itself” (not just human life or even sentient life) is “will to power” already indicated *both* that we cannot begin to understand ourselves without addressing the extent of our relatedness to the other animals *and* that we cannot address the question of animal or sentient life without keeping in mind the place of “life itself” in nature as a whole. Aphorisms 14 and 15 showed that materialism, dualism and idealism are not just self-interpretations, but also interpretations of “the world.” The difficulties which compel us to dismiss materialism and question dualism and idealism arise from the attempt to make sense of how we can simultaneously distance ourselves from “the world” in thought while remaining “a part” (*ein Stück*) of the world from which we distance ourselves. In a sense, the question of the whole disappears from view in BGE 16, on “immediate certainty,” but that is only because Nietzsche has already established that anything we say about ourselves *or* “the world” can only be evaluated philosophically through a reflexive consideration of the interpretive framework to which we are subject – *or to which we unreflectively subject ourselves*.

¹⁶ OGM 3:16. Translation modified.

Nietzsche's methodological reflections in BGE 13-16 culminate in a kind of "knowledge of ignorance." His critique of materialism in BGE 14 doesn't so much "refute" materialism as show that any such refutation would be superfluous – as a "world-interpretation" with no room for the activity of "interpretation" itself, materialism cannot account for its own possibility. The mere "clarification" of its meaning dissolves the doctrine itself. Nietzsche's provisional critiques of dualism and idealism in BGE 15 don't aim to refute these doctrines, but to render them *questionable* by showing the confusion and ignorance of his interlocutors. But as BGE16 makes clear, his interlocutors aren't so much Descartes, Berkeley or Kant as "the people" *as such*. Nietzsche shows that the interpretive framework taken for granted by "the people" and articulated reflectively by "metaphysical laborers" is not "immediately certain." Even if its "objective validity" could somehow be justified, the *knowledge* supplied by such a justification would not be "immediate."

But this aphorism also makes clear that the philosopher's examination of the opinions of "the people" is at the same time a kind of "self-examination." As Nietzsche later says, the philosopher must "go *down* and above all... go 'inside.'"¹⁷ In grasping the ignorance of "the people," the philosopher also grasps his own ignorance, insofar as he unavoidably remains one of "the people." BGE 16 presents the philosopher as engaged in a dialogue with himself, which results in the insight that "the people" have *at best* false opinion, not knowledge, whenever they "instinctively" assume that they possess intuitively grasped knowledge of wholes ("the people believe" that knowing something is knowing it "to the very end"). The most important of these objects of "immediate knowledge" are "the self" and "the world," putative knowledge of which

¹⁷ BGE 26.

is typically supplied by religions, taken in the broadest possible sense (including the *Weltanschauung* of modern materialistic physics, which BGE 22 suggests has a kind of egalitarian political motivation).

As I argued in the previous chapter, Nietzsche's procedure is helpfully contrasted with that of metaphysicians such as Aquinas. While "metaphysicians" take themselves (not in all their philosophical work, but in its primary thrust) to be rendering explicit what "the people" already know, Nietzsche renders explicit what "the people" *unreflectively assume they know* in order to question it properly. Such a conception of method demands a more radical form of cognitive reflexivity than "metaphysicians" assume is possible, while the contrast between "the people" and "the philosopher" raises the question of empirical knowledge in an urgent way. Does Nietzsche's procedure imply that, strictly speaking, "the people" don't *know* anything, even about particular empirical questions? For example, if I believe that I am in pain, or that I am perceiving a tree or a chair in my field of vision, does this procedure imply that I merely have "opinion" until I have clarified the meaning of "I," the meaning of sensation or perception, the meaning of "object" or "thing," and so on?

In BGE 2, Nietzsche proposed that the metaphysician, not the philosopher, posits absolute, mutually exclusive antitheses. Thus the difference between the metaphysician and the philosopher must *itself* be a "graded" difference. Even if the metaphysician takes for granted the "objective validity" of our "foreground perspective," and in doing so assumes that we have "a kind of intuitive knowledge,"¹⁸ while the *real philosopher* questions the framework itself, and rejects *the very idea* of "intellectual intuition" or "immediate knowledge," this need not imply

¹⁸ BGE 16.

that “the people” don’t know anything about the world. However, it does imply that “the people” only have knowledge *to the extent that* they are incipiently “philosophical.”

Even if there is a sense in which “I know that I am in pain,” for example, *not only* is it the case that this empirical knowledge is *bound up with* a great deal of confusion and unjustified assumption (for example, about the meaning of “I,” about the immediate accessibility of a given sensation as a localizable “object” of experience, etc.), but it must also be the case, if Nietzsche is right, that “the people” only have knowledge *to the extent that* ordinary experience isn’t only far more *passively* mediated than it appears to be, but also more *actively* mediated, i.e. that we are not only *subject to* “interpretations” we have pre-reflectively produced, but also that we are always already *in the process of using* these “interpretations” to gain epistemic purchase on the world. Put differently, “the people” don’t merely assume that they have far more knowledge than they really have; they also assume that the knowledge which they actually *do* have is “intuitive” rather than a kind of “result.”

Nietzsche’s methodological reflections in BGE 13-16, then, do not establish that “the people” don’t know anything, but rather that they take for granted an interpretive framework which is questionable and thus cannot be “immediately certain.” On the one hand, this leaves open the possibility that the “objective validity” of this framework might be given reflective justification by the philosopher. On the other hand, even if it turns out, as Nietzsche will argue, that this framework involves an unavoidable *misinterpretation* of the world, this doesn’t simply exclude the possibility of merely empirical knowledge. It would surely imply that ordinary experience is “constructed” or shot through with illusion in a far more radical sense than, say, Kant or Hegel would allow. However, it leaves open the possibility that the conventions by

means of which we instinctively interpret the world nonetheless make possible a partial or limited epistemic purchase on the world. Put differently, even as our foreground perspective is primarily an “invention” rather than a “discovery,” which screens the world from us more than it reveals it to us (leads us to misinterpret our own experience), this is not *unqualifiedly* true. Our foreground perspective may involve a certain qualified kind of knowledge of the world, which however is made possible through (and bound up with) the illusions of which it is primarily constituted. As Nietzsche puts it in BGE 24, the will to knowledge emerges out of the will to “the untrue,” as its “refinement” or “perfection” (*Verfeinerung*).¹⁹

One might object that Nietzsche has from the outset dogmatically excluded the mere possibility of intellectual intuition, however interesting his alternative hypothesis might be. At the end of BGE 16, Nietzsche says that “a philosopher today” would respond to this objection with “a smile and two question marks.”²⁰ He would be “ready” to *say* (a philosopher in the past may have had such a *thought*, and smiled *to himself*, but prudently refrained from expressing his skepticism too openly) that it is “improbable” (*unwahrscheinlich*) that such an objector is not mistaken – and he would further ask why he insists on pursuing such inquiry at all: *Aber warum auch durchaus Wahrheit?*²¹

I suggest that Nietzsche’s point is twofold. First, he acknowledges that he has not yet excluded the bare possibility of intellectual intuition, but merely shown, in Socratic fashion, that all claims to “immediate knowledge” seem to be rendered questionable upon examination. To exclude the possibility of intellectual intuition *decisively*, he will have to take a step beyond the

¹⁹ BGE 24.

²⁰ BGE 16.

²¹ BGE 16.

“knowledge of ignorance” established in BGE 13-16 and undertake a reflexive examination of the nature of thinking itself, which he undertakes in BGE 17. As I argued in the previous chapter, this aphorism is meant to show that the idea of intellectual intuition is not merely “improbable,” but incoherent – thinking is *essentially* a process or activity, not a kind of mental state or affect, whether noetic or sensory. Secondly, Nietzsche also wants to make a point very similar to that of Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, when Hegel argues that appeals to foundational and self-certifying insight, which cannot further be discursively articulated, rather than resolving philosophical disputes “like a shot from a pistol,” merely result in an endless series of competing claims, which therefore demand a further criterion (other than “immediate knowledge”) by which one may adjudicate between them.²² Similarly, Nietzsche suggests that there is something absurd, even risible, about the attempt to answer “metaphysical questions at once by an appeal to a kind of intuitive knowledge,” because such attempts bring philosophical questioning to an abrupt halt while implying that it was superfluous in the first place.²³

Nevertheless, as Nietzsche’s two uncharacteristically non-pejorative references to “metaphysics” in BGE 16 indicate, his method will not differ *in every respect* from that of the “metaphysicians.” He will in one sense also try to “save the appearances,” even if there is an equally important sense in which he will be willing to sacrifice far more of the “appearances” than, say, Aquinas, Kant or Hegel.

Nietzsche says that when the philosopher questions the Cartesian belief in “immediate certainty” (and everything that follows from it), he is presented with “a series of metaphysical

²² Cf. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 17-8 (Preface, Section 27). Cf. also 6-8 (Preface, Sections 6-10).

²³ BGE 16.

questions.”²⁴ These questions concern (a) *the origin or derivation* of the concepts we instinctively use to understand the world (thereby alluding back to the question of derivation raised in BGE 2, where he first distinguished metaphysicians from philosophers), (b) *the reasons why* we believe that such concepts track reality or are objectively applicable to the world (“why do I believe in cause and effect?”) and (c) *the right with which* we “speak” about the world in this way: “What gives me the right to speak of an ‘I,’ and even of an ‘I’ as cause, and finally of the ‘I’ as the cause of thought?”²⁵

Unless we are able somehow to bypass these questions by a direct appeal to intellectual intuition (this is “improbable” and seems risible, like an appeal to an ineffably authoritative revelation) or by understanding concepts reductively as weak after-effects of sensation in a naively Humean fashion (an approach which seems to leave no room for the activity of interpretation itself while also being unable to account for either *why* we believe in the “objective validity” of these concepts or *how* they result in knowledge or even in merely putative knowledge or illusion), we must reflexively examine thinking itself as the activity which somehow generates or “derives” these concepts in the first place. We cannot assume from the outset that such an enterprise will result in “absolute knowledge” or perfect self-transparency, but “method demands” that we take it as far as we can.

At the same time, Nietzsche’s inquiry into the origin or derivation of our concepts raises the question of the material (sensory or otherwise) *upon which* our activity of thinking “works” in order to generate these concepts, *that which is given to “interpretation” to interpret*, and the

²⁴ BGE 16.

²⁵ BGE 16.

co-constitutive role that such “material” plays in their generation or derivation. Or is there “no text, only interpretation”? But such Nietzschean dicta can be understood in different ways. They could be taken to imply that the sheer activity of thinking, as a kind of “frictionless spinning,”²⁶ generates a world out of nothing (“the most spiritual will to power” understood as “the drive to the creation of the world”²⁷), such that there is no “text” which might serve as a criterion to distinguish true from false interpretations. But they could also be taken merely to mean that whatever “text” we find is “always already” interpreted. This would leave open the possibility of a method which reliably distinguishes between true and false interpretations of the world *from within* the activity of interpretation itself or, as Nietzsche puts it (in a formulation that cannot be cited often enough when trying to make sense of his epistemology) that “the will to knowledge” *emerges out of* “the will to ignorance.”²⁸

While aphorisms 13-16 show the need for such a method, aphorisms 17-22 carry it out. In the previous chapter, I argued that the transition from Nietzsche’s methodology in BGE 13-16 to his psychology proper in BGE 17 is analogous to the transition from empirical consciousness to “pure thinking” carried out by Hegel at the beginning of the *Logic*. But Nietzsche’s method is dualistic in a way in which Hegel’s is not – rather than beginning “science” proper with a principle which is equally “objective” and “subjective” (“pure being” taken as indistinguishable from “the pure I,” purified of all empirical determinations), for Nietzsche there remains an irreducible difference between the *question* of “the pure I”

²⁶ I borrow this formulation from John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 11: “We need to conceive this expansive spontaneity as subject to control from outside our thinking, on pain of representing the operations of spontaneity as a frictionless spinning in a void.”

²⁷ BGE 9.

²⁸ BGE 24.

(addressed in BGE 17-19) and the *question* of being itself or the whole (addressed in BGE 20-22), even as they are mutually implicated. One might say that the relationship between “mind” and “world” remains a problem for Nietzsche, while for Hegel it is ultimately a pseudo-problem. Put differently, for Nietzsche “first philosophy” is a kind of psychology, rather than a kind of “logic.” Hegel’s method is nonetheless dualistic in a way Nietzsche’s is not – Hegel posits a radical difference between freedom as *Geist* and nature as *geistlos*, which Nietzsche would regard as a kind of “metaphysical” dualism. In one important sense, Nietzsche is closer to Kant – the relationship between BGE 17-19 and BGE 20-22 is analogous to the relationship between the Analytic and the Dialectic in the first *Critique*. Although “self-interpretation” and “world-interpretation” are mutually implicated, they are formally separable, and “method demands” that one *first* undertake a kind of “self-examination” and *only then* ask what conclusions about the world can be drawn on its basis.

In the previous chapter, I cited Copleston’s contention that Aquinas’ method consists primarily in rendering explicit that which “ordinary people” implicitly *know*, albeit not in the reflectively self-conscious *way* in which a philosopher such as Aristotle or Aquinas comprehends it. The most important exception concerns Aquinas’ doctrine of God, although one must still make a distinction between natural and revealed theology, the latter being a discursive articulation of that which we intuitively know about God insofar as our natural reason is supernaturally illuminated by revelation. However, Aquinas’ philosophical arguments for the existence of God (or the prime mover) surely go beyond a “clarification” of ordinary experience to involve inferences about what can (or cannot) *further* be known on the basis of such knowledge concerning that which transcends our (natural) experience. Similarly, in BGE 20-22,

Nietzsche addresses the problems of cosmology, theology and ontology. As I argued in the previous chapter, his method in these aphorisms consists in drawing inferences about what can be known about the cosmos as a whole, God and being as such *on the basis of the deconstruction and reconstruction of ordinary experience* offered in BGE 17-19. Nietzsche concludes that while a certain kind of knowledge can be acquired through such inquiry, it is primarily negative and problematic. As knowledge of the cosmological, theological and ontological *problems*, rather than dogmatic metaphysical knowledge of the cosmos, God or being as such, it remains in a sense psychological in its character.

Accordingly, the core of Nietzsche's first philosophy is neither his preparatory methodology (13-16) nor his problematic treatment of the whole (20-22) but his physio-psychology proper (17-19). In BGE 190, Nietzsche asks: "What is the Platonic Socrates if not *Plato in front, Plato behind, a chimera in between?*"²⁹ While the first and third parts of his physio-psychology supply a kind of Socratic "knowledge of ignorance," which result in no positive doctrines even as they involve a certain comprehension of fundamental problems which imply refutations or "dissolutions" of materialism (14) and theology (21) through clarifications of the very meaning of the ideas of "(imperceptible) matter" and "(absolutely free) God," it is the central part which grounds his conception of the human being as "will to power" – Socrates in front, Socrates behind, and Nietzsche in between. But is the will to power an ontological doctrine or a kind of illusion ("chimera"), a monstrous reconstruction of ordinary experience or rearrangement of its immediately given elements, "natural wholes" like lions, serpents and goats?

²⁹ BGE 190.

As I argued in the previous chapter, aphorisms 17 and 19 have parallel and complementary structures. BGE 17 takes something which seems to be complex, the naturally given world of subjects, objects, things, powers, causes and effects, and reveals its origin in “a small concise fact” – not the “I think,” nor even the “it thinks,” but rather the sheer creative or productive activity or process of thinking itself, a kind of “empty grasping.”³⁰ By contrast, BGE 19 takes something which seems to be simple (“the will,” “this manifold thing for which the people have only one word”) and brings out its “interpretively” concealed complexity: “Willing seems to me to be above all something *complicated*, something which is a unit [*eine Einheit*] only as a word.”³¹ BGE17 deconstructs the cognitively “simplified” world of ordinary experience and shows its origin in the “interpretive” activity which results in the “appearance” that its elements are naturally given and immediately knowable *as* a complex of causally interrelated “wholes,” which lend themselves to being understood (materialistically, dualistically or idealistically) as causally interrelated “things” or “substances.” BGE 19 reconstructs the world of ordinary experience in a manner which comprehends its constructed or interpretively generated (as opposed to naturally given or intuitively accessible) character, while showing how it nonetheless coheres *as* a “world,” as “the world in which we believe we live,” “the world *which concerns us*.”³²

BGE 19, then, which is the longest aphorism in the first chapter, presents Nietzsche’s most *philosophical* account of what he means by saying that “life itself is will to power,” the programmatic axiom or “principle” with which he began his physio-psychology. Nietzsche

³⁰ BGE 17. The formula “empty grasping” is borrowed from the discussion of Kant’s discursivity thesis in Robert Pippin, *Kant’s Theory of Form* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 35.

³¹ BGE 19.

³² BGE 34. Translation modified.

circles back to his provisional description of life itself as “will to power” and, armed with the deconstruction of ordinary experience carried out in BGE 17, now presents a reconstructive account of *what it would mean* to characterize the human being in this “non-dualistic” way and how it might be justified.

I recall that the “series of metaphysical questions” Nietzsche raised at the end of BGE 16 concerned (a) the origin or derivation of our concepts, (b) the doxastic hold they have over us and (c) the right with which we apply them to the world and to ourselves (the Kantian *quid juris* question).³³ But while Nietzsche focuses in BGE 16 on the question of whether the fundamental concepts of “thinking,” “cause,” “effect” and “the I” can legitimately be applied to the self (*Selbst*) and its various forms of activity (*Thätigkeit*), the context established by BGE 13-15 makes clear that he is at the same time concerned with the question of whether such concepts can be found “in the ‘in-itself’” (*im ‘An-Sich’*) or are not rather mere “fictions” (*Fiktionen*) we illegitimately project or “poeticize onto” (*erdichten*) “real life” or “the in-itself” for the purpose of “designation” (*Bezeichnung*) and “communication” (*Verständigung*), “not clarification (*Erklärung*),” as he puts it in BGE 21.³⁴ As he suggested in BGE 15, the self is differentiable from yet in some problematic sense also “a part” (*ein Stück*) of the world, such that the question of self-interpretation is inseparable from that of world-interpretation, even as the former has a certain *methodological* priority to the latter.³⁵

In the previous chapter, I argued that Nietzsche’s initial “retreat into the ground” in BGE 17 leaves open the broadly Kantian possibility that “the world in which we believe we live,”

³³ BGE 16.

³⁴ Cf. BGE 16 with 21.

³⁵ BGE 15.

despite being generated through the co-constitutive operation of thinking and sensibility, remains “objectively valid” (this would however raise a series of notoriously difficult issues concerning the possibility of empirical knowledge, the derivation of empirical as opposed to “pure” concepts, the relationship between “appearance” and “thing-in-itself” or between “the manifest image” and “the scientific image” of the world, and so on) rather than a kind of “illusion” or “construction” in a more radical sense. It is only in BGE 19 in which Nietzsche *subsequently* introduces the role of “sensing” or “feeling” (*Fühlen*) and shows how it *works together with* the activity of thinking to generate the world as we experience it – which he later (in BGE 186) describes as “a world” whose “essence” is “will to power” (*in einer Welt, deren Essenz Wille zur Macht ist*).³⁶ As I argued earlier, although Nietzsche’s concern with the *transition* from empirical consciousness to “pure thinking” in BGE 17 is oddly Hegelian, he remains closer to Kant insofar as he relies on the naturally given “fact” (*Thatbestand*) of “sensing” or “feeling” to *complete* his reconstruction of experience, a reliance which Hegel would regard as a naively empiricist premise *inconsistent* with Nietzsche’s prior insistence that experience is always already “interpreted,” just as Hegel regards Kant’s reliance on the “pure intuitions” of space and time as a residually empiricist premise which generates an irresolvable dualism between mind and world.

The intervening aphorism 18 tells the reader something about what this reconstruction will look like. As I argued earlier, this aphorism conveys an important lesson about the relationship between “the philosopher” and “the people.” It is impossible to free oneself (let alone the human race) permanently from the belief in free will, even if one refutes it “a hundred

³⁶ BGE 186.

times.” And yet it *is* “refutable.”³⁷ But the insight into the illusory character of free will is also an insight into the inescapability of this illusion, and thus also an insight into the constitutive reality of this illusion as a natural structural dimension of human consciousness, which possesses determinate phenomenal reality *as an illusion*. What BGE 18 teaches about free will applies *a fortiori* to all the “fundamental errors” of the human species.³⁸ But if Nietzsche means to convey this general lesson about the constitutive role of “fundamental errors” (including substance, causality, etc.) in the being of the human, why does he only mention free will *explicitly* in this aphorism? Why also the abrupt transition from the “I think” in BGE 17 to the “I will” in BGE 18-19, even as they *both* represent putative instances of *theoria* or “a kind of intuitive knowledge”?

I recall that in BGE 13, Nietzsche described the “living thing,” and thus also the human being, not as *res extensa* or *res cogitans*, nor even as a kind of “body” or “soul,” but as “will to power”: “A living thing [*etwas Lebendiges*] wants above all to *discharge* its force [*seine Kraft auslassen*].”³⁹ Nietzsche provisionally characterizes the living “thing” or “something” (*etwas*) not as a corporeal or incorporeal substance, but rather in terms of its “cardinal drive” or instinct, as an erotic or desiderative being. I argued that, in denying the existence of a “drive to self-preservation” strictly speaking, Nietzsche means to propose the *hypothesis* that human life can be understood as continuous with animal life in general, that we can dispense with “*superfluous* teleological principles,” above all “intellect” and “free will,” understood as independent of the desires or instincts and capable of controlling or directing them “from without.” Nietzsche’s

³⁷ BGE 18.

³⁸ Cf. GS 110 with OGM 1:13.

³⁹ BGE 13.

identification of philosophy itself with the “most spiritual” or “most intellectual” (*geistigste*) will to power in BGE 9 already intimated that “spirituality” or “intellectuality” (*Geistigkeit*) is not a faculty (“the intellect”) independent of desire, but rather a certain “graded” characteristic of *desire itself*, which in BGE 13 Nietzsche virtually identifies with “the will to power.”⁴⁰ To philosophize is a certain *form* of desire, *a certain way of relating erotically to “the world,”* a radicalization of a tendency incipient in all human beings, an intensification or “becoming-more-powerful” of an impulse to reflective awareness of the world present in all human desire. In BGE 252, Nietzsche claims that Carlyle’s “passionate grimaces [*Fratzen*]” concealed “that which was *lacking* in him” – “real *power* of intellectuality, real *depth* of intellectual insight, in short, philosophy.”⁴¹

But even as Nietzsche identifies the living “thing” or “something” (*etwas*) with its cardinal drive or instinct, suggesting that what it means to be a living thing is *to be* a certain kind of self-organizing desire, in identifying *this* “cardinal” desire (the will to power) with the desire to “discharge,” “release” or “express” (*auslassen*) one’s strength or force (*Kraft*), Nietzsche implicitly distinguishes the desire to express one’s strength from *its actual expression* and thus from the antecedently possessed “strength” itself. This distinction presumably applies regardless of whether or not one *fails* to express one’s “strength” or “force” – either because one “freely chooses” to refrain from doing so (as a “voluntarist” proponent of “free will” might argue, at least in the case of the human being, as the only living being not wholly governed by its instincts) or merely because one is prevented from expressing one’s “strength” or “force” by

⁴⁰ Cf. BGE 9 with 13.

⁴¹ BGE 252.

external causes which interfere with its unimpeded expression (as a “determinist” proponent of “unfree will” might argue).

But it is precisely the *distinction* between “strength” or “force” itself (*Stärke* or *Kraft*) and its external “expressions” (*Äusserungen*) which Nietzsche notoriously *attacks* in the first treatise of the *Genealogy*. The verso of the title page of the first edition informs us that the *Genealogy* was meant to “clarify” *BGE*, the only book in which Nietzsche describes his enterprise as “the queen of the sciences,” i.e. as a kind of first philosophy.⁴² In OGM 1:13, Nietzsche notoriously claims that “the people” mistakenly separate or differentiate “strength” (*Stärke*) from its “expressions” or external manifestations. Despite many ambiguous and extremely odd formulations, which render it an unusually difficult passage to translate (even by Nietzsche’s standards!), OGM 1:13 surely helps to “clarify” what he is up to when, in BGE 19, he “scientifically” reconstructs the “foreground perspective” provisionally articulated in BGE 13 with the programmatic doctrinal claim that “life itself is will to power”:

To demand of strength [*Stärke*] that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should *not* be a desire to overpower, a desire to suppress, a desire to become master [*ein Überwältigen-Wollen, ein Niederwerfen-Wollen, ein Herrwerden-Wollen*], a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as nonsensical [*widersinnig*] as to demand of weakness [*Schwäche*] that it should express itself as strength. A quantum of force [*ein Quantum Kraft*] is just such a quantum of drive, will, action [*ein eben solches Quantum Trieb, Wille, Wirken*] – in fact, it is nothing at all other than precisely this very driving,

⁴² BGE 23.

willing, acting itself [*eben dieses Treiben, Wollen, Wirken selbst*], and only under the seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it [*der in ihr versteinerten Grundirrhümer der Vernunft*]), which understands and misunderstands [*versteht und missversteht*] all action as conditioned by something acting, by a ‘subject’ [*welche alles Wirken als bedingt durch ein Wirkendes, durch ein „Subjekt“*], can it appear otherwise. For just as the people [*das Volk*] separate the lightning from its flash and take the latter as a *doing* [*als Thun*], as the effect of a subject [*als Wirkung eines Subjekts nimmt*], which is called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from the expressions of strength [*so trennt die Volks-Moral auch die Stärke von den Äusserungen der Stärke ab*], as though there were a neutral substratum [*ein indifferentes Substrat*] behind the one who is strong [*hinter dem Starken*], which was free to express strength or alternatively [*auch*] not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, the acting, the becoming [*es giebt kein „Sein“ hinter dem Thun, Wirken, Werden*]; ‘the doer’ [*„der Thäter“*] is merely poetically added-on to the doing [*zum Thun bloss hinzugedichtet*] – the doing is everything [*das Thun ist Alles*]. The people at bottom double the doing [*das Volk verdoppelt im Grunde das Thun*]; when they allow that lightning is flashing, that is a doing-doing [*wenn es den Blitz leuchten lässt, das ist ein Thun-Thun*]: they posit the same happening once as cause and then once again as its effect [*es setzt dasselbe Geschehen einmal als Ursache und dann noch einmal als deren Wirkung*]. Naturalistic researchers [*die Naturforscher*] do no better when they say ‘force moves, force causes [*die Kraft bewegt, die Kraft verursacht*]’ and the like – despite all its dispassionateness [*trotz aller ihrer Kühle*], its freedom from

affect, our entire science [*unsre ganze Wissenschaft*] remains under the seduction of language and has not ridden itself from those changelings foisted upon it [*die untergeschobenen Wechselbälge*], the ‘subjects’ (the atom for example is such a changeling, likewise the Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’).⁴³

How to reconcile this apparent contradiction? In BGE 13, Nietzsche characterizes the “will to power” as the desire (drive or instinct) to “express” or “release” one’s strength, using a formulation which implies that one may or may not succeed in fulfilling one’s desire or reaching one’s goal, thereby implying a distinction between *strength itself* and its “*expression*” or “*release*.” He appears to leave open the possibility that the failure to “express” or “release” one’s strength may in a given case result from the free choice of the (human) agent, who *voluntarily* refuses to express his strength, whether for moral or merely for prudential reasons, while also leaving open the possibility that such failure results rather from one’s being *overpowered* from without by “the one who is stronger” – as a warrior defeated in combat, or merely as an animal subdued as prey. In other words, Nietzsche’s initial formulation in BGE 13 appears to leave open the “voluntarist” possibility that one’s “will to power” might be restrained or controlled by an independent faculty of “free will” no less than the “determinist” possibility that the “expression” or “release” of one’s strength might be restrained or thwarted by the necessary operation of external causes.

⁴³ OGM 1:13. I have heavily modified Kaufmann’s translation of this passage and will use my translation whenever I cite this passage in the rest of this chapter.

However, Nietzsche's very identification of what he later calls the "essence" (*Essenz*) of "life itself" with "will to power" (*Leben selbst ist Wille zur Macht*), with no special "kingdom within a kingdom" exception made for the human being, already points towards his rejection of the "voluntarist" possibility.⁴⁴ Quite apart from the context in which it appears (not to mention Nietzsche's consistent rhetorical hostility towards the Christian and Kantian conception of freedom), the very formulation "will to power" as a characterization of the "essence" of the human already suggests that our "will" is always already directed towards "power," whether or not we have the "strength" or "insight" to admit this to ourselves, rather than an independent faculty with the "capacity" or "power" *to set ourselves different ends* (whether according to moral or prudential criteria, "categorical" or "hypothetical" imperatives) and pursue the most "effective" means *to the end we freely choose* to pursue. Indeed, the very use of the word "will" (*Wille*) suggests that Nietzsche means to *oppose* "the will to power" to "the free will," to suggest an *alternative* "interpretation" of *what it means to be a will*, what we are *really* talking about when we talk about "the will."

The definition of "life itself" and thus also of the human being as "will to power" appears, then, to be intended as a programmatic alternative to the Christian or Kantian conception of the human being as a radically free agent, a "kingdom within a kingdom," a "deterministic" proposal which grasps the human being as continuous with the rest of nature and subject to the same inexorable "laws." In other words, Nietzsche's "will to power" (the drive to express or release one's strength) serves the same function, broadly speaking, as Spinoza's "conatus" (the drive to preserve oneself in one's being). Indeed, in the famous letter from 1881

⁴⁴ Cf. BGE 13 with 186.

to his friend Franz Overbeck, Nietzsche mentions Spinoza with great enthusiasm as his main *precursor* in such an enterprise, a naturalistic “philosophy of immanence,” as Deleuze would call it: “I am utterly amazed, utterly enchanted! I have a *precursor*, and what a precursor! I hardly knew Spinoza: that I should have turned to him just now, was inspired by ‘instinct.’ Not only is his comprehensive tendency [*Gesamttendenz*] like mine – making knowledge the *most powerful* affect – but in five main points of his doctrine I recognize myself; this most unusual and loneliest thinker is closest to me precisely in these matters: he denies the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world-order, the unegoistic and evil. Although the divergences are admittedly tremendous, they are due more to the difference in time, culture and science. *In summa*: my aloneness [*Einsamkeit*], which, as on very high mountains, often made it hard for me to breathe and made my blood rush out, is now at least a twosomeness [*Zweisamkeit*]. Strange [*wunderlich*]!”⁴⁵

Once we call to mind this affinity, then, it ought to come as no surprise that, in the very aphorism in which Nietzsche begins to “posit” (*ansetzen*) the axioms or “principles” (*Principien*) of his “philosophy of immanence” or “physio-psychology,” he pays tribute to his “precursor” by citing him by name. Furthermore, it ought to come as no less a surprise that this is also the place where he *opposes* his signature principle of “the will to power” to Spinoza’s signature principle of “conatus,” and emphasizes what he calls “Spinoza’s inconsistency.”⁴⁶ For this is just the place where one would expect Nietzsche to allude to his main “precursor” (“his comprehensive tendency is like mine”) while at the same time emphasizing his central

⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche to Franz Overbeck, July 30, 1881, in Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 177. Translation modified.

⁴⁶ BGE 13.

disagreement (“the divergences are admittedly tremendous”), the decisive respect in which he regards Spinoza as still too “inconsistent,” still too wedded to the dualistic or “metaphysical” assumptions the dismantling of which is their common enterprise. In Deleuze’s language, it would only be natural for Nietzsche to pay tribute to his most important “precursor” in establishing a tradition of immanence by citing him in this pivotal aphorism, while at the same time identifying the final residue of “transcendence” in his precursor’s system. Nietzsche will be still more methodologically “economical” than Spinoza, the most forward-looking or “futuristic” among “the philosophers of the past.”

Nietzsche’s definition of the “living thing” as “will to power,” then, just like Spinoza’s notion of “conatus,” is proposed as an *alternative* to the Cartesian or Christian conception of the human being as a metaphysically free agent, able to control and direct its desires by a “higher” faculty or power, including its “noble” desire to express its strength and dominate others (*ein Überwältigen-Wollen, ein Niederwerfen-Wollen, ein Herrwerden-Wollen*) no less than its “base” desire to ensure its survival and calculate the most efficient means to this end. Even if Nietzsche doesn’t explicitly *argue* against the “theory” of “free will” until BGE 19, his rejection of this idea is already intimated in BGE 13.

Furthermore, as I argued in the previous chapter, Nietzsche’s claim that there is strictly speaking no such a thing as a “drive to self-preservation” (Spinoza’s “conatus” or Darwin’s “struggle for existence”) alludes obliquely to the issue of free will. When read in conjunction with other aphorisms which serve to unpack and to clarify this denial (especially GS 3 on “the

noble and the base” and GS 349, which I argued was a kind of commentary on BGE 13⁴⁷), Nietzsche’s primary target in BGE 13 can already be recognized as “freedom of the will in that superlative metaphysical sense,” which he elsewhere suggests is conceptually implied (contra what either Spinoza or Darwin themselves appear to have recognized) in the very idea of a “drive to self-preservation” or a “struggle for existence”).

In the previous chapter, then, I argued that in GS 349, Nietzsche suggests that the Darwinist “struggle for existence” (at least as it is *popularly* understood) in fact implies the existence of “free will” (it implies that animals “struggle to survive” either as individuals or as species in a way essentially no different from the “base man” who takes himself to be freely calculating the most efficient means to his own survival or the “utilitarian” who calculatively aims at “the greatest happiness for the greatest number”), and thus implies an anthropomorphic view of nature as a whole (as though not just humans, but even “the lower animals” and indeed all living organisms possessed “free will” or “practical reason”), even as Darwinists themselves, who surely belong among the *Naturforscher* disparaged in OGM 1:13, pride themselves on their rigorously disenchanting view of nature *and* man. In BGE 13, Nietzsche intimates that the same “inconsistency” vitiates Spinoza’s concept of “conatus.” In sum, he suggests that the very concept of a *Selbsterhaltungstrieb* implies the existence of “freedom of the will,” even as it is often utilized (by scientists as well as by philosophers) as a naturalistic *replacement* for the latter notion.

⁴⁷ Cf. BGE 13 with GS 3 and 349. Contrast TSZ 2:12 On Self-Overcoming, where rather than identifying “the will to power” with “the will to life,” Zarathustra explicitly *contrasts* them and claims that there is in fact no such thing as “the will to life.”

But couldn't the same thing be said about Nietzsche's notion of "will to power," at least as it is popularly understood? For Nietzsche surely knew that this provocative doctrinal formula would be taken by most readers as implying in the first instance that human beings in general devote all their energy or strength, not to the end of mere survival, but rather to that of subjugating their fellows in "a constant zero-sum game struggle for dominance and mastery," as Robert Pippin puts it,⁴⁸ *calculatively* amassing as much "power" as they can to achieve this goal as effectively and as comprehensively as possible, in the fashion exemplified by political leaders such as Napoleon, Bismarck, Hitler or Stalin, yet no less operative (albeit in inconspicuous and self-deceived ways) in the motivating drives of those who appear to repudiate this ugly "game" – the charitable, the humble and the innocent; the priests, the humanitarians and the "Good Samaritans." As Pippin puts it, "Nietzsche *seems to be* referring to a new sort of fundamental doctrine or teaching," according to which "all of nature, especially organic nature, most especially human psychological nature, is to be understood as the expression of a basic drive to dominate and exert power over as much as possible, not to be subject to any other will or drive. This almost seems to amount to a psychologizing of being itself, attributing to everything what seems in itself a psychological drive."⁴⁹

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of Nietzsche's *Genealogy* as a whole, but I note that the "masters" appear to believe in *their own* "free will" no less than do the "slaves," even if they don't formulate this belief in the form of a reflectively worked-out "theory," as Christian theologians such as Augustine, and post-Christian philosophers such as Kant, felt

⁴⁸ Robert Pippin, Introduction to *Introductions to Nietzsche*, ed. Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

⁴⁹ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 4-5.

themselves compelled to do, for their own historical reasons. Even if the “masters” unleash their primitive instincts on the “slaves” whom they assume with good reason are in no position to offer much resistance, Nietzsche emphasizes that they also engage in ceaseless competition *amongst themselves*,⁵⁰ an “agon” which may take the form of sheer violent struggle when they engage in direct physical combat with other “masters,” but which usually involves “base” self-restraint and calculative “means-to-end” thinking of exactly the kind which Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes involves an implicit belief in “free will in that superlative metaphysical sense,” the assumption that one’s “commanding thought” can achieve rational control “from without” over one’s “drives” or “instincts.”⁵¹

In other words, Nietzsche’s argument that Spinoza’s doctrine of conatus as it is *popularly* understood (and perhaps misunderstood) implies the existence of free will, a “metaphysical” principle “inconsistent” with Spinoza’s naturalistic “tendency,” and even implies a kind of “psychologizing of being itself” (Pippin), could just as easily be applied to Nietzsche’s *own* doctrine of “will to power” *insofar as it is popularly misinterpreted* as a drive to achieve domination and control. The notion of “inconsistency” is akin to that of “stupidity.” In BGE 8, Nietzsche emphasized that “in every philosophy,” there comes a point when the philosopher’s dogmatic “conviction” (*Überzeugung*) “steps out on stage,” i.e. appears abruptly in the exoteric presentation of his thought, like a stupid but load-bearing ass, “beautiful and very courageous” – just before Nietzsche’s *own* signature “conviction,” the will to power, appears “on stage” for the very first time in the very next aphorism.⁵² Perhaps, then, Nietzsche means to

⁵⁰ Cf. OGM 1:10.

⁵¹ Cf. GS 3 with BGE 19.

⁵² Cf. BGE 8 with 9.

imply that “Spinoza’s inconsistency” was *deliberate*, belonging to the exoteric presentation of his thought, as a Straussian might argue, rather than *unintentional*, the final residue of “transcendence” in his thought, as a Deleuzean might suppose.

This suggestion is reinforced if we juxtapose Nietzsche’s overtly dismissive treatment of Spinoza in BGE 13 with his polemic against Spinoza in BGE 5, the first aphorism in which his “precursor” is mentioned by name (Spinoza doesn’t appear again until BGE 25, seemingly only to be disparaged once more, this time by being named alongside Giordano Bruno, the religious heretic notorious for his execution by fire in 1600 after his stubborn refusal either to recant his teachings or to engage in any form of ironic or exoteric accommodation with the theological-political authorities).⁵³ In aphorisms 5 and 13, Nietzsche appears to be criticizing Spinoza for concealing his self-deceptive dogmatism behind a display of systematic rigor – the “hocus-pocus of mathematical form” in which he “clad his philosophy” (5) or the postulate of a drive to self-preservation “inconsistent” with what naturalistic “method demands” (13). Nietzsche seems to contrast his own higher self-consciousness with Spinoza’s self-deceptive lack of rigor. However, in both aphorisms, Nietzsche also draws implicit parallels between Spinoza and himself and intimates that the “divergences” between them do not reflect differences in their “comprehensive tendencies,” but rather (in addition to differences in personal taste and temperament) differences “in time, culture and science,” above all the different theological-political contexts in which they published their books. As I argued earlier, while in BGE 5 Nietzsche appears to draw a *comparison* between Spinoza and Kant, as self-deceived moralists, a close reading suggests that he means to *differentiate* Spinoza, as a cunning and deceptive “real

⁵³ Cf. BGE 5 and 13 with 25.

philosopher,” from Kant, as a servile “metaphysical laborer” who sincerely believed in the postulate of “free will in that superlative metaphysical sense,” required to underwrite the “categorical imperative” he was unwilling to question.⁵⁴ Closely read, then, especially in the context established by BGE 5, BGE 13 supports my suggestion. The opposition of “will to power” to “conatus” need not imply that Spinoza was still too much of a dualistic “metaphysician,” but rather that he was a “physio-psychologist,” who presented “his philosophy” in a way appropriate to his epoch of revolution and persecution.

In an important essay on the *Ethics*, Deleuze makes a point about the book’s style similar to that made by Nietzsche: “On a first reading, the *Ethics* can appear to be a long, continuous movement that goes in an almost straight line, with an incomparable power and serenity, passing again and again through definitions, axioms, postulates, propositions, demonstrations, corollaries and scholia, carrying everything along in its grandiose course... And Spinoza’s Latin, which appears so scholarly, seems to constitute the ageless ship that follows the eternal river. But as emotions invade the reader, or after a second reading, these two impressions prove to be erroneous. This book, one of the greatest in the world, is not what it seems at first glance; it is not homogeneous, rectilinear, continuous, serene, navigable, a pure language without style.”⁵⁵ On a close reading, then, “the *Ethics* of the definitions, axioms and postulates, demonstrations and corollaries,” the “river-book that develops its course,” reveals itself as a “subterranean book of fire,”⁵⁶ which makes artful and suggestive use of “a passional form of expression that operates through signs.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Cf. GS 3 with BGE 19.

⁵⁵ Gilles Deleuze, “Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics,’” in Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 138.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

This “language of fire”⁵⁸ – concealed by the bloodless and almost skeletal presentation, as Nietzsche elsewhere describes it⁵⁹ – is “alone capable of bringing about the indispensable selection” between “joy in living” and “sadness” or “guilt,” the contrast between philosophical playfulness and religious moralism which Nietzsche made in 1879 by contrasting Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* with the Bible.⁶⁰ By drawing an explicit contrast *and* an implicit parallel between himself and Spinoza, Nietzsche intimates that his own book, which appears “on a first reading” as a “book of fire,” a book of “passionate grimaces (*leidenschaftlichen Fratzen*),”⁶¹ need not for this reason betray a *lack* of “dialectical severity and necessity which never makes a false step”⁶² (as in the case of Carlyle’s books), but may rather conceal “real *power* of intellectuality, real *depth* of intellectual insight, in short, philosophy.”⁶³ (Carlyle’s involuntary or self-deceived *Fratzen* surely allude also to Plato’s self-consciously theatrical *Fratzen*.⁶⁴) Nietzsche’s readers must locate and connect the “principles” and “corollaries” of his “physio-psychology” by paying careful attention to his hints and allusions. By contrast, Spinoza’s readers must follow *his* hints to discover the deeply personal psychology, “the love of *his* wisdom,” encased “in mail and mask”⁶⁵ by the geometrical presentation: “There is thus a *selection* of the passional affects, and of the ideas on which they depend, which must liberate joys, vectorial signs of the augmentation of power, and ward off sadnesses, signs of diminution.”⁶⁶

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵⁹ GS 372.

⁶⁰ Cf. Deleuze, “Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics,’” 145 with WS 86.

⁶¹ BGE 252.

⁶² BGE 213.

⁶³ BGE 252.

⁶⁴ Cf. BGE 252 with Preface.

⁶⁵ BGE 6.

⁶⁶ Deleuze, “Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics,’” 144.

If the “passional language” of Spinoza’s *Ethics* “operates in the shadows,”⁶⁷ in Nietzsche it is the “language of fire” which appears on the surface, while the “dialectical severity” is located mostly off stage or in the wings, a conceptual shadow-play reflected by the artful gestures and movements made by Nietzsche the “rhetorician” and “dancer” who appears “on stage” and discernible only by the “slow readers” or “proper spectators” in his audience: “The proper spectator... always had to remain conscious that what he saw before him was an artwork and not an empirical reality [*der rechte Zuschauer... sich immer bewusst bleiben müsse, ein Kunstwerk vor sich zu haben, nicht eine empirische Realität*].”⁶⁸ The “art of interpretation” which Nietzsche recommends makes explicit the conceptual distinctions he leaves implicit while drawing out the broader implications of those he on occasion makes (relatively) explicit, as in the physio-psychology of BGE 13-22 or in the ontological excursus of OGM 1:13, for how the “passionate grimaces” he customarily employs ought to be understood in a properly philosophical way.

Deleuze claims that the “ostensive and polemical” scholia in the *Ethics* form “a specific chain,” distinct from that of the demonstrative and discursive elements: “It is like a broken chain, discontinuous, subterranean, volcanic, which at irregular intervals comes to interrupt the chain of demonstrative elements, the great and continuous fluvial chain.”⁶⁹ They are “inserted into the demonstrative chain, even though the reader quickly realizes that they have a completely different tone. They have another style, almost another language.”⁷⁰ One might juxtapose Deleuze’s observation with Nietzsche’s remark about the hidden “chains of thought”

⁶⁷ Ibid., 146.

⁶⁸ BT 7.

⁶⁹ Deleuze, “Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics,’” 146.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 145-146.

(*Gedanken-Ketten*) which connect aphorisms which appear more “volcanic” than “dialectical” in their manner of transition: “[In] aphorism-books like mine... many lengthy, forbidden things and chains of thought stand between and behind short aphorisms.”⁷¹ Deleuze suggests that the apparent bloodlessness or “vampirism,” as Nietzsche calls it,⁷² of Spinoza’s geometrically presented philosophy conceals “a more secret book made of flesh and blood,” which the reader must discover for himself.⁷³ There is nothing “bloodless” about Nietzsche’s books, but I suggest that in his case, in contrast with that of Spinoza, what is hidden from view is the “skeletal” structure which holds together the living organism of the text. Although Nietzsche’s *BGE* is surely more “ostensive and polemical” than Spinoza’s *Ethics*, it is also more “discursive” and even “demonstrative” than it appears.

Deleuze claims that “the two *Ethics* co-exist” – they “have one and the same meaning but not the same language, like two versions of the language of God.”⁷⁴ These artfully interwoven and “co-existent” books “send out bridges” between thought and passion or concept and affect, physio-psychology and the art of living, “in order to cross the emptiness that separates them” and form a “third *Ethics*,” “an aerial book of light,” an integrative synthesis of volant and birdlike instinct with reflective clarity.⁷⁵ In *BGE* 191, Nietzsche proposes that Socrates exemplified just such a reconciliation of *Vernunft* with *Instinkt*.⁷⁶ One might say that Nietzsche’s two books, “the fluvial book” and “the book of fire,” must also be reconciled and

⁷¹ Quoted in Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2010), xiv.

⁷² GS 372.

⁷³ Deleuze, “Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics,’” 150.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁷⁶ *BGE* 191.

united, as he intimates in the beautiful *marital* image with which he concludes *BGE*, alluding to the far cruder erotic image with which it began (“truth is a female [*Weib*]”), suggesting that the true philosopher’s love for this “woman” may achieve a certain kind of formal stability, despite the images of whimsical flirtation and “unrequited love”⁷⁷ he tends elsewhere to prefer: *Die Hochzeit kam für Licht und Finsterniss*.⁷⁸ Nietzsche’s popular name for this synthetic perspective is not “God,” but “Dionysos.”

Just as Spinoza’s “ostensive and polemical” scholia seem to appear out of nowhere, interrupting the “fluvial chain” of propositions, demonstrations and corollaries, Nietzsche’s epistemological-ontological excursus in OGM 1:13 seems to appear out of nowhere, interrupting the “passional language” of the first essay of the *Genealogy*, before he returns to the anti-Jewish, anti-Christian and anti-democratic “polemic” he was carrying out, like an angry orator who pauses suddenly to subject his inflamed and excited audience to a moment of professorial pedantry, before returning to his harangue as he begins to lose their attention.

What, then, are the implications of *BGE* 13-22 and OGM 1:13 (and the apparent contradiction between *BGE* 13 and OGM 1:13) for how the *philosophical* reader ought to understand Nietzsche’s rhetoric, which as Pippin notes is “everywhere hortatory and condemnatory”⁷⁹? Are we to conclude that Nietzsche, like Spinoza, was not just a naturalist but also a determinist, whose “hortatory and condemnatory” rhetoric must be understood as *merely* ironic or exoteric or (given the implausibility of *this* suggestion) somehow be reconciled with his comprehensive causal determinism, just as Spinoza tried to reconcile his use of evaluative

⁷⁷ Cf. D 184.

⁷⁸ *BGE* From High Mountains: Aftersong.

⁷⁹ Robert Pippin, “Doer and Deed: Responses to Acampora and Anderson,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 44, no. 2 (2013): 187.

language – especially the notions of “perfection” and “virtue” – with his dual rejection of Cartesian voluntarism and Aristotelian final causes?

However, as we have already seen, Nietzsche rejects the “metaphysical” (either/or) distinction between “free will” and “unfree will,” insisting that *both* concepts are “mythologies,” in favor of the “graded” distinction between “*strong* and *weak* wills.”⁸⁰

Nietzsche is neither a voluntarist nor a causal determinist. Thus, even if Nietzsche and Spinoza are both naturalists who reject “free will” while proposing “exoteric doctrines” (“the will to power” and “conatus”) which they anticipate will be understood in different ways by “the people” and by “the philosophers,” the most fundamental “divergence” between Nietzsche and his “precursor,” despite the convergence of their “comprehensive tendencies,” would seem to consist in Spinoza’s metaphysics of causal determinism and Nietzsche’s rejection of the very idea of causality. Spinoza’s real “inconsistency,” then, would consist in his dualistic reification (*Verdinglichung*) of “cause” and “effect.”⁸¹

However, there is no further evidence in *BGE* itself that Nietzsche regarded Spinoza as a dualistic “metaphysician.” Indeed, even in the letter to Overbeck of 1881, Nietzsche praises his “precursor” for his *denial* of free will, not for his *affirmation* of causal necessity as a metaphysical feature of the world. Of course, it would be an *extremely* controversial reading of Spinoza to suggest that his “doctrine of determinist causation” was itself a kind of “exoteric teaching,” designed to free his readers from their beliefs in free will and divine providence, thereby preparing them for a deeper, more Socratic-Platonic dimension of his thought.⁸²

⁸⁰ BGE 21.

⁸¹ BGE 21.

⁸² For such a reading of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, which argues that it resembles a Platonic dialogue in its “deployment of philosophic masks and rhetorical maneuvers” in its manner of instruction, see Richard

Nevertheless, given Nietzsche's emphasis on Spinoza's esotericism, which amounts to a *partly rhetorical employment of geometrical presentation itself*, it's not implausible to suggest that he means to intimate such a reading of his "precursor." I do not have space here to enter into a detailed discussion of Nietzsche's complex and changing relationship to Spinoza in the 1880s. My point here is that Spinoza, like Socrates and Plato (and in contrast with Kant and Hegel), plays the role of a "real philosopher" in the drama enacted by *BGE*, such that Nietzsche's intimations about Spinoza's intentions *must* involve an element of self-explication. We ought therefore to be cautious about Nietzsche's *own* intentions (and attentive to possible allusions to Spinoza) when he presents his argument about the "intelligible character of the world" as "will to power" in BGE 36. Nietzsche there claims that *if we take as given* "our belief [*Glaube*] in causality itself" and at the same time imitate the "method" of "a mathematician," who posits "definitions" then draws conclusions from them, we will "earn the right" to determine "*all* efficient force [*alle wirkende Kraft*] univocally as – *will to power*."⁸³

With these considerations in mind, then, let us return to BGE 13 and its apparent contradiction with OGM 1:13. In the earlier aphorism, Nietzsche claims that "an organic entity" (*eines organischen Wesens*) or "living thing" (*etwas Lebendiges*) wants "above all" to release, discharge or express (*auslassen*) its "strength" or "force" (*seine Kraft*), implicitly distinguishing the antecedently possessed strength or force from its subsequent discharge or expression. By contrast, in OGM 1:13 Nietzsche seems to attack the very distinction between "strength" (*Stärke*) and its "expressions" (*Äusserungen*) which he takes for granted in the earlier aphorism.

Velkley, "The Model of Human Nature and the Revision of Premises in Spinoza's *Ethics*," in *In Search of Humanity: Essays in Honor of Clifford Orwin* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 263-78.

⁸³ BGE 36.

At the same time, he explicitly draws out the *connection* between the metaphysical issue of causality (the relationship between strength or force and its expressions is typically understood in causal terms, whether voluntarist or determinist) and the closely related metaphysical issue of substance or subjectivity (the status of the identifiable “substance” or “subject,” whether corporeal or incorporeal, which possesses “strength” or “force,” and its relationship to its properties, potentialities, actions, effects and so on), by claiming that it is essentially the same popular error or unreflective way of thinking which (in an everyday or moral-humanistic context) *differentiates* “strength” from its “expressions” which also, in like fashion, differentiates “the doer” (*der Thäter*) from his “deed” or “doing” (*das Thun*). Strikingly, Nietzsche then claims that it is essentially the *same* popular error or way of thinking which (in the context of natural-scientific research) differentiates the material thing or substrate (the imperceptible “atom” or “thing-in-itself”) from its properties (whether essential or accidental, primary or secondary) and which differentiates “force” (*Kraft*) itself from its property of causal efficacy and its causally efficacious interactions or manifestations (‘*die Kraft bewegt, die Kraft verursacht*’ und *dergleichen*), with “matter” or “force” presumably taken as basic elements of nature itself understood as a closed causal network. From a strictly philosophical perspective, such coolly detached scientists “do no better” (*machen es nicht besser*) than the fired-up, angry slaves who blame their masters for mistreating them.

However, this dense, complex and justly famous passage provides no argument for its claims, appearing as an ontological digression in the midst of an angry polemic. It thereby refers us back to the physio-psychology of BGE 13-22 (recall that the purpose of the *Genealogy* is to “supplement” and “clarify” the earlier book, the results of which it presumably takes for

granted, even as it tends now to be read as a “stand-alone” work of “political theory”). Yet at first, rather than “clarifying” this physio-psychology, OGM 1:13 seems to *contradict* Nietzsche’s “principle” of will to power as he introduced it programmatically in BGE 13, which I argued constituted the real “starting-point” of Nietzsche’s first philosophy in *BGE*. Furthermore, not only does Nietzsche’s explicit denial of the difference between strength and its expressions in OGM 1:13 contradict his implicit affirmation of such a difference in BGE 13, by bringing out the connection between the causality issue and that of substance or subjectivity, he thereby raises the question of how he means us to understand the ontological status of the living “thing” or organic “entity” *itself*. Does he mean to propose that “living things” are substances whose essential property is “will to power,” the desire to express their strength? Or if the very distinction between a substance and its properties is no less “fictional” than that between strength and its expressions, how are we to understand the claim that the cardinal drive of an organic entity is will to power?

Robert Pippin has made the interesting suggestion that, contrary to appearances, Nietzsche does *not* mean to deny the real difference between strength and its expressions, or the related difference between the subject and his “deeds,” in OGM 1:13, but rather to propose an alternative, non-causal understanding of the relationship between them, which Pippin calls “expressivist”: “Nietzsche... is not denying that *there is* a subject of the deed. He is just asserting that it is not *separate*, distinct from the activity itself. He is not denying that strength ‘*expresses itself*’ in acts of strength. He is in fact asserting just that, that there is such an *expression*, and so appears to be relying on a notion of expression, rather than intentional causality, to understand how the doer is in the deed. (‘To demand of strength that it should *not*

express itself as strength' is the expression he uses. He does not say, 'There are just strength-events.' There is still some sort of dyadic logic to his claim.)"⁸⁴ If Pippin's suggestion is correct, this would make it easier to reconcile OGM 1:13 with BGE 13.

However, there are two main problems with Pippin's interpretation of OGM 1:13. First, when Nietzsche says that it is absurd "to demand" or "to desire" (*verlangen*) of "strength that it should *not* express itself as strength," he is giving voice to the kind of thing that a "slave" might say, think or feel ("the master *shouldn't* express his strength, he *shouldn't* use his strength to oppress me, he *should* refrain from doing so!"), not speaking in his own voice. In describing *this demand or desire* as "absurd," irrational, Nietzsche surely speaks in his own voice. But he doesn't then go on to say, "One should *rather* believe that strength must express itself as strength, just as weakness necessarily expresses itself as weakness." In ridiculing the slave's demand, Nietzsche himself doesn't make a distinction between "strength" and its "expressions" *in his own voice*. He merely ventriloquizes the demand made by the slave and the assumptions this demand involves. The slave speaks or thinks "as though there were a neutral substratum behind the one who is strong which was free to express strength or alternatively not to do so."⁸⁵ Pippin is surely right that Nietzsche's initial "claim" (i.e. that the slave's demand is "absurd") doesn't *thereby* commit him to a *rejection* of a real distinction between "strength" and its "expressions." Nietzsche could be on the verge of proposing an alternative way of understanding this relationship, a *different kind* of "dyadic logic," a non-causal conception. But

⁸⁴ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 75-76.

⁸⁵ OGM 1:13.

he could just as well be preparing to attack the distinction itself as merely fictional or conventional.

Secondly, although it's true that in OGM 1:13, Nietzsche never quite says that "there are just strength-events," he also never directly asserts in his own voice that "strength expresses itself in acts of strength." *This is what the slaves believe*, while also having the *additional* belief that it *need not* be that way, that the masters could be persuaded (for example, by Christian moral preaching) freely to refrain from expressing their strength. *This* belief then involves the *further* assumption that there is a "doer" behind the "doing," a subject who possesses (a) strength, (b) the desire to express that strength *and* (c) the metaphysical capacity ("free will") to choose whether or not to act on that desire. However, as Nietzsche goes on to elaborate the popular error or illusory, "embellishing" or "add-on-poeticizing" way of thinking involved *both* in the metaphysical positing of a free agent "behind" the deed *and* in the natural-scientific positing of imperceptible but causally efficacious material substrates or forces operative in the physical world, it seems to me that one must attribute to Nietzsche himself a more radical "critique of subjectivity," which involves the rejection of a real distinction between "strength" or "force" and its "expressions" or "manifestations" (and, indeed, the very distinction between potentiality and actuality itself) as ultimately conventional or fictional, than Pippin's interpretation would allow.

I begin with the observation that in OGM 1:13, Nietzsche presents the conflict between the masters and slaves as a conflict between irreconcilable *desires*. Let us recall that in aphorism 21 of *BGE*, he replaced "free and unfree will" with "*strong* and *weak* wills," which it wouldn't

be much of a stretch to translate as “strong and weak desires.”⁸⁶ After articulating the slave’s demand or desire (the verb is *verlangen*) that “strength *not* express itself as strength” (a thought which surely involves a kind of “dyadic logic”), *in his own voice* Nietzsche then glosses *the meaning of strength itself* as a kind of desire or “wanting” (*Wollen*), which he characterizes in a threefold way – as a desire to overpower, to suppress and to “become master” (*Herrwerden*). Of course, the slaves themselves, no less than Nietzsche, are well aware that the masters have the desire to suppress others – after all, they are its primary victims. But it is the slaves, not Nietzsche, who distinguish “strength” (*Stärke*) from its “expressions,” while it is Nietzsche, *not* the slaves, who *identifies* “strength” with a *kind of desire* which cannot be other than the kind of desire that it is. The slave’s demand “that strength *not* express itself as strength” ultimately amounts to the futile desire that the masters have desires *other than those* they actually have. The master cannot help but *want* to overpower, to suppress and to “become master.” One might think of the “two diverse appetites” which Machiavelli claims can be found “in every city”: “The people desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great, while the great desire to command and oppress the people.”⁸⁷

However, Nietzsche’s threefold characterization of masterly desire suggests that there is something equally futile and self-deluded about *their* desire. If to *be* a master consists essentially not merely in wanting to suppress others, or in wanting to rule *as* a master (*herrschen*), but also in wanting to *become* a master (*Herrwerden*), this suggests that “the masters” were never really masters to begin with, that there is something delusory about their

⁸⁶ BGE 21.

⁸⁷ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 39 (Chapter 9).

habitual self-interpretation as “masters.” There is an unbridgeable gap between who or what the master takes himself to be and who or what he actually is. In short, *to be* a master is *to want to become a master* while *taking oneself* to have become one already. Elsewhere, Nietzsche says quite explicitly that the slaves and the masters necessarily misunderstand *each other*, implying that it is only the philosopher (Nietzsche) who understands them both from a higher perspective.⁸⁸ Thus, when Nietzsche says as if in passing that it is “just as nonsensical” (*gerade so widersinnig*) to demand of weakness that it express itself as strength, I suggest that he implies that the *contempt* that the master feels for the slave for being “weak” is *no less* confused and irrational than the *indignation* that the slave feels at the master for being “strong.”

Nietzsche describes the master’s desire as a “thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs.”⁸⁹ The word “thirst” suggests that the master’s desire is a kind of *lack*, perhaps alluding to the Socratic account of *eros* in the *Symposium* as a kind of poverty or neediness. The master’s self-delusion consists in the discrepancy between his unreflective self-satisfaction in simply *being* a master and his insatiable thirst and constant struggle to *become* a master, which never reaches a stable goal. Only if the master starts to become reflectively aware of the inherently unreachable nature of this goal, and the unavoidable gap between his nature as a needy human being and the socially recognized role he plays as a “sovereign individual,” will he cease to be a “master” and start to become a philosopher. Plato depicts Alcibiades as a kind of “master” whose association with Socrates makes him painfully aware of this gap, an awareness he finds both humiliating and intoxicating, such that he is perpetually as it were on

⁸⁸ Cf. OGM 1:10.

⁸⁹ OGM 1:13.

the verge of becoming a philosopher, but never quite has the “strength” to remain on the Socratic path.⁹⁰

The philosopher might also be described as a kind of “master” – Nietzsche speaks of “the masterly task and masterfulness of philosophy”⁹¹ – but in a very different, more refined and self-aware sense: “Philosophy is... the most intellectual will to power.”⁹² On the other hand, if the master’s “strength” is really a kind of “desire” or “thirst,” this is presumably also the case for the slave’s “weakness,” which is a desire, not for “resistances and triumphs” (of whatever kind – for example, military, political, erotic or intellectual), but rather merely that he no longer be overpowered and suppressed, that he no longer be compelled to struggle and “resist.” In BGE 200, citing Augustine as an example, Nietzsche says that the “most fundamental desire” (*gründlichstes Verlangen*) of “a weaker human being” (*ein schwächerer Mensch*) is for “the happiness of resting, being undisturbed, satiety, finally attained unity, as a ‘Sabbath of Sabbaths.’”⁹³ Among the many profound ironies in the contrast Nietzsche draws between the master and the slave is the fact that they *both* fail to recognize the inherently unsatisfiable nature of their “desires” or “thirsts” – it is only the philosopher who recognizes and comes to terms with the neediness of the human being, which Aristophanes and Socrates each in their own ways depict so beautifully in Plato’s *Symposium*.

In his response to Christa Davis Acampora’s critical remarks on his interpretation of OGM 1:13, Pippin writes that “the language of doer-deed is not dropped; a strong person’s ‘strength’ is expressed in ‘a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become

⁹⁰ Plato, *Symposium* 215a-222b.

⁹¹ BGE 204.

⁹² BGE 9.

⁹³ BGE 200. Translation modified.

master.”⁹⁴ However, the point I want to emphasize in that in OGM 1:13, Nietzsche himself doesn't say that “a strong person's strength is *expressed in* his desire to overcome.” Rather, Nietzsche *identifies* “strength” itself with “a desire to overcome.” It is the *slave* who, in desiring that strength *not* “express itself as strength,” assumes a difference between strength and the desire to express that strength in deeds, in “acts of strength” – just as Nietzsche himself seemed to assume such a distinction (between the concomitantly possessed strength and the desire to express it) in BGE 13. But in OGM 1:13, Nietzsche replaces the dyadic (or even triadic) logic of the slave (strength vs. the desire to express it, which might then be restrained by the *additional* postulate of the master's “free will”) with the *identification* of strength *itself* with a certain kind of desire. Nietzsche glosses the slave's desire “that strength should *not* express itself as strength” with the formulation “that it [strength] should *not* be a desire to overcome, a desire to suppress, a desire to become master.”⁹⁵

Of course, desire itself possesses a “dyadic logic,” between desire and the fulfillment at which it aims. Indeed, as Pippin emphasizes, part of Nietzsche's lesson in “erotics” is “a psychological realization of the ineliminable need for self-overcoming,”⁹⁶ which I have suggested that not just the slaves, but also the masters fail to grasp. The crucial interpretive question is how exactly Nietzsche understands this “ineliminable need” or lack, or how Nietzsche understands *desire itself*. I have suggested that he regards the master's contempt for the slaves, which treats their weakness as though it *could* express itself as strength, as no less irrational than the slave's indignation at the masters, which treats their strength as if it *could*

⁹⁴ Pippin, “Doer and Deed,” 184.

⁹⁵ OGM 1:13.

⁹⁶ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 116.

express itself as weakness. In the next sentence, Nietzsche begins to explain *just why* he regards *both desires* as equally “absurd” or “nonsensical.”

Nietzsche now switches abruptly from talking about *Stärke* to talking about *Kraft*: “A quantum of force [*ein Quantum Kraft*] is just such a quantum of drive, will, action [*ein eben solches Quantum Trieb, Wille, Wirken*] – in fact, it is nothing at all other than precisely this very driving, willing, acting [*eben dieses Treiben, Wollen, Wirken selbst*], and only under the seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it), which understands and misunderstands all action as conditioned by something acting, by a ‘subject’ [*welche alles Wirken als bedingt durch ein Wirkendes, durch ein „Subjekt“*], can it appear otherwise.”⁹⁷ While the word *Stärke* is nearly always used in an everyday or human context, for example when one speaks of the “strength” of someone’s body, someone’s desires or someone’s beliefs, or the “strength” of someone’s character, the term *Kraft* is far more flexible and multivalent. It could just as easily be used in an everyday context, to refer to the “strength” or vigor of a human being, but it could also be used in a far more abstract sense, in a natural-scientific context, where it would more accurately be translated as “force”: “Naturalistic researchers... say ‘force moves, force causes’ and the like.”⁹⁸

Nietzsche’s abrupt switch from *Stärke* to *Kraft*, and his use of the highly abstract formulation “a quantum of force,” language one would expect from a mathematical physicist rather than from a “French” psychologist like La Rochefoucauld, Stendhal or even (in much of his prose) Nietzsche himself, raises the question of “economy of principles” (*Principien-*

⁹⁷ OGM 1:13.

⁹⁸ OGM 1:13.

Sparsamkeit), the theme of BGE 13, where he spoke not of *Stärke* but more ambiguously or broadly of *Kraft* in defining the cardinal drive of an organic entity as “the will to power,” the instinct to express its “strength” or “force.” By means of this abrupt switch, Nietzsche likely alludes to the earlier aphorism and surely raises the question that Pippin rightly insists that Nietzsche is interested in: Can human actions or “doings” be reduced to natural events like any other? Is there no fundamental (“metaphysical”) difference between events like “an animal stalking its prey,” “a plant’s turning toward the sun,” or even “iron ore rusting,” and events like “a master striking a slave” or “a soldier volunteering for a risky mission”? Is it only “the seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it)” which makes things “appear otherwise”? In BGE 24, Nietzsche says that “*language... cannot get over its awkwardness [Plumpheit], and will continue to talk of opposites [Gegensätzen] where there are only degrees and various subtleties of gradation [Grade und mancherlei Feinheit der Stufen].*”⁹⁹ Most comprehensively, can one explanatory “principle” be used to understand everything there is “univocally” (*eindeutig*), as Nietzsche seems to argue in BGE 36?

Nietzsche’s position on this set of issues is very subtle and difficult to pin down (and arguably incoherent or at least inconclusive), but as Pippin emphasizes, it is first of all important to keep in view the alternatives that he wants to *avoid*. Nietzsche clearly wants to avoid any kind of “metaphysical dualism” on the one hand (free and unfree wills or mind-body substance dualism), but he also wants to avoid any kind of naturalistic reductionism which regards “degrees and subtleties of gradation” as *themselves* merely illusory. This is yet another reason to suspect that his argument in BGE 36 that all of “reality” (*Realität*) can be understood

⁹⁹ BGE 24. Translation modified.

“univocally” (*eindeutig*) as “will to power,” as though humans, animals, plants and minerals were just different parts or “modes” of a single all-encompassing “substance,” is a kind of “exoteric doctrine” or (if one prefers) a thought-experiment.

So what is Nietzsche’s position? The fact that he appeals to the very meaning of “a quantum of force” *to explain why* the slave’s indignant demand that strength not express itself as strength is “absurd” (and, I suggested, also to explain why the master’s contemptuous demand that weakness not express itself as weakness is “just as nonsensical”) suggests that he wants to understand human “strength” or “desire” as *somehow* continuous with natural “force” in general, i.e. that he wants to supply a naturalistic (“economical”) explanation of human deeds or “doings” as continuous with natural events in general. However, it is equally clear that Nietzsche doesn’t want to reduce human deeds or “doings” to “mere bodily movements,” as Pippin says, especially if “bodily movements” are understood in the manner of reductionistic physicalism or what Nietzsche likes to call “modern physics.”¹⁰⁰ This is clear for exactly the two reasons that Pippin emphasizes.

First, Nietzsche nearly everywhere relies on psychological explanations (often appealing to the phenomenon of self-deception) to comprehend human behavior. It would indeed be absurd to accuse a plant of self-deception or to refer to “the plant’s view of what it needs and why” to explain the phenomenon of phototropism, and Nietzsche surely “shows no tendency to do that,”¹⁰¹ except perhaps very obliquely or indirectly in a handful of passages like BGE 36,

¹⁰⁰ Pippin, “Doer and Deed,” 186.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

most of which are located in the *Nachlass*, and which I have already suggested deserve to be treated with caution, not simply as “Nietzsche’s doctrine of panpsychism.”

Secondly, as Pippin says, OGM 1:13 does “not appear to leave room for *corporeal* states causing various body movements, as if, for example, a subject’s socially habituated fear for his reputation (where fear is understood as some sort of corporeal state) were ‘behind’ his stepping out of line and acting in a way he knew would count for others as volunteering. If that model were adopted, we would still be pointing to some determinate causal factor ‘behind’ and ‘before’ the deed. The ‘lightning’ simile is unequivocal, though, and we would not be following its suggestion if we merely substituted a material *substance* (such as the brain or brain states) for an immaterial soul. Moreover, such a naturalist account relies on the material continuity through time of some identical substance in order to attribute to it various manifestations and expressions as interconnected properties.”¹⁰² It is presumably for this reason that Nietzsche goes on to say that “naturalistic researchers” who supply explanations like “force moves, force causes, and the like” are “under” *essentially the same illusion* as the slaves who posit a metaphysically free subject.

However, it seems to me that Pippin moves a little too fast, or assumes too much, in formulating his most general point by saying that Nietzsche doesn’t want to reduce human actions “to mere bodily movements like natural events.”¹⁰³ Nietzsche wants to challenge the very idea that *any* “natural events” can *themselves* be understood as “mere bodily movements” as a natural scientist would describe or explain them. “Modern physics” is “just an

¹⁰² Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 74.

¹⁰³ Pippin, “Doer and Deed,” 184.

interpretation.”¹⁰⁴ So both Pippin’s incisive and helpful interpretive points are compatible with the claim that Nietzsche nonetheless regards human actions as *in some sense* “natural events like any other,” even as this raises the further question of how (or whether) Nietzsche can supply some account of how the “various subtleties of gradation” that distinguish human “doings” from other “natural events,” and indeed “nature” from “life itself,” can be understood in a “graded” fashion, especially if (*pace* Lampert¹⁰⁵) Nietzsche didn’t regard BGE 36 as a serious resolution of the cosmological problem.¹⁰⁶

Returning to OGM 1:13, then, the crucial question in this passage is just what Nietzsche *means* by “a quantum of force”: “A quantum of force is just such a quantum of drive, will, action [*ein eben solches Quantum Trieb, Wille, Wirken*] – in fact, it is nothing at all other than [*gar nichts anderes als*] precisely this very driving, willing, acting itself [*eben dieses Treiben, Wollen, Wirken selbst*].”¹⁰⁷ In a way characteristic of his literary style, Nietzsche’s formulation is arresting, but highly complex and difficult to unpack if one reads it “slowly,” as he would recommend. When Nietzsche says that “a quantum of force” *is* “just such a quantum of drive, will, action,” the immediate referent of “*just such* a quantum” is initially unclear. He clearly refers back to the preceding sentence, but to which element of it? Nietzsche could be referring back *either* to the master’s “strength” (*Stärke*) which the slave demands or desires that the master refrain from expressing in acts of strength *or* to the master’s “desire” (*Wollen*) to suppress the slave. Indeed, although this suggestion seems less plausible at first, he could even be referring back to the slave’s “weakness” (*Schwäche*), the slave’s futile desire *not* to be

¹⁰⁴ BGE 22.

¹⁰⁵ Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 84-88.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. BGE 24 with 36.

¹⁰⁷ OGM 1:13.

suppressed. The abrupt transition between the sentences, and the ambiguity of the referent, leaves all three possibilities open.

However, the ambiguity of the referent (“*just such* a quantum”), if we take it as deliberate and carefully intended, supports my contention that in the preceding sentence, Nietzsche *identifies* the master’s “strength” with his “desire” or “thirst” to suppress others (thereby “correcting” the slave, who wants to distinguish the master’s strength not only from its “expressions” but *also* from his *desire* to express that strength, a desire which the slave feels that the master *ought* freely to restrain), and suggests that Nietzsche has *both* referents in mind, precisely because he regards them as indistinguishable (“in real life,” although not from the “fictional” perspective of the slave), and perhaps *also* even the *third* possible referent, the slave’s own “weakness,” if it is true that Nietzsche regards the conflict between them as a conflict of *irreconcilable desires*. The master’s strength (or desire) *and* the slave’s weakness (or desire) are each “just such a quantum.” Indeed, given that Nietzsche is about to explain the slave’s confused indignation, not merely through his suffering and impotence (after all, weaker animals are made to suffer by those who are stronger, e.g. “little lambs” are made to suffer by “birds of prey,” but they do not become metaphysically confused as a result, nor do they become morally indignant at the predators), but also through his subjection to “the fundamental errors of reason” itself, it would be strange if the masters were not *also* subject to these “fundamental errors,” *even if* they lack the exceptionally festering and malignant forms of resentment characteristic of the slave, and the vivid compensatory fantasies (e.g. Tertullian’s depiction of hell) which accompany such affects, and thus do not make use of these “errors” to fulfill such needs, at least not in the same hyperbolic and fantastical way. Accordingly, it is

likely that “just such a quantum” refers *both* to the master’s strength (desire) *and* to the slave’s weakness (desire). Nietzsche’s basic point might then be rephrased: It is absurd either to be indignant at the strong or to be contemptuous of the weak *because* “strength” and “weakness” consist in *nothing more than* certain kinds of desires or “appetites” which cannot help but be what that they are: “The people desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great, while the great desire to command and oppress the people.”¹⁰⁸

The sentence under discussion identifies the “fundamental error” involved both in the slave’s indignant desire that strength not express itself as strength and in the master’s contempt for the slave (whenever he punishes or humiliates the slave, the master unthinkingly acts as though “weakness need not express itself as weakness”) as the assumption that “all action [*alles Wirken*]” is “conditioned by something acting [*bedingt durch ein Wirkendes*], by a ‘subject.’”¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche wants to suggest that “action” can take place *without* being “conditioned” (*bedingt*) by a causally efficacious subject. However, although Nietzsche’s purpose is clearly to provide an explanation of *why* the slave’s desire is “absurd” or “nonsensical” (like wanting cancerous cells to treat their host with benevolent empathy), the sentence doesn’t proceed by first identifying then attacking the assumption that every “action” is caused by a “subject.” A noteworthy oddity of this passage, which brings out the elusiveness of Nietzsche’s naturalism, is that he proceeds to explain the slave’s confusion *not* by proposing *a definition of human desire* as “nothing more than a quantum or expression of force” (as one might expect a “bloody-minded” naturalist to do at this point), but rather by proposing *a definition of force itself* as

¹⁰⁸ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 39 (Chapter 9).

¹⁰⁹ OGM 1:13.

“nothing more than” a quantum of instinct or desire. One might say that Nietzsche’s “graded” naturalism, insofar as it is a kind of “reductionism,” proceeds dialectically, in two directions at once – he implies that to understand the distinctive character of *human desire* (and the “fundamental errors” or self-misinterpretations which are “almost” constitutive of our humanity itself¹¹⁰), one must first give a definition of “force” in general, only then to propose that *force itself* must be understood as instinct or desire or – better – pure desiring, the sheer activity of desiring: “A quantum of force is just such a quantum of drive, will, action [*ein eben solches Quantum Trieb, Wille, Wirken*] – in fact, it is nothing at all other than precisely this very driving, willing, acting [*eben dieses Treiben, Wollen, Wirken selbst*].”¹¹¹

Why does Nietzsche proceed in this very odd way? If my suggestion is correct that, in the preceding sentence, Nietzsche means to attack the slave’s “dyadic logic” between strength and its expressions by replacing the slave’s conception of “strength” as a capacity possessed by the master which he may or may not use to oppress the slave with a “non-dyadic” conception of strength as nothing more than a kind of desire (or striving) which cannot help but *be* the kind of desire that it is, then Nietzsche must explain why the distinction between “strength” (as an antecedently possessed potentiality) and its expressions in actual “acts of strength” is confused or “fictional” and *also* give an alternative account of the “dyadic logic” of *desire itself* (the difference between desire and the *telos* or fulfillment at which it aims) which avoids committing him to what he regards as a merely conventional distinction between “potentiality” (e.g.

¹¹⁰ Cf. GS 110.

¹¹¹ OGM 1:13.

“strength” as a power or capacity that can be possessed without being used or expressed) and “actuality” (e.g. “acts of strength”).

But even if what we call “strength” *really* consists in nothing more than a certain kind of desire or “desiring,” must one not suppose that such “desiring” may or may not fail to reach its goal, just as strength may or may not be expressed? However, the relevant difference between these two “dyads” (strength vs. expression and desire vs. fulfillment) is that while they both surely *seem* to involve a distinction between the *subject* who possesses strength or desire and succeeds or fails in expressing or fulfilling it, the former dyad (strength vs. expression) implies a distinction between potentiality and actuality (one can actually possess strength whether or not one expresses it at a particular time – indeed, one rarely makes *full* use of one’s strength), thereby raising the Aristotelian question of how to understand “the being of the potential *qua* potential,” while the latter dyad (desire vs. fulfillment) does not *by itself* seem necessarily to require a distinction between potentiality and actuality.

Of course, in commonsensical “folk-psychology” (what Nietzsche calls *Volks-Moral* in OGM 1:13), the two distinctions are closely *related* – it is natural to speak of the relation between desire and its *possible* fulfillment and to supply causal explanations of why some particular desires reach or fail to reach their goals. But everyone would agree that at least *some* desires are *never* fulfilled, but remain in a continuous state of “actual desiring” or striving which never reaches its goal. As Machiavelli writes, “Nature has created men so that they are able to desire everything and are unable to attain everything. So, since the desire is always greater than the power of acquiring, the result is discontent with what one possesses and a lack of

satisfaction with it.”¹¹² Aristotle says that one can wish for impossible things, such as immortality.¹¹³ Accordingly, although the distinction between desire and its fulfillment is commonsensically or “intuitively” *related* to the question of whether or not we have the “strength” or “power” to fulfill our desire, and thereby closely related in “popular” speech and thought to the distinction between potentiality and actuality, the latter distinction is not itself implied in the distinction between desire and its fulfillment – at least not in the obvious or immediate way in which it is directly implied in the distinction between *antecedently possessed* but *pro tempore* unused or unexpressed “strength” and its *subsequent* expression in particular “acts of strength.”

The relevant question for grasping what Nietzsche means by “a quantum of force” or “a quantum of action” is whether he regards *the temporal transition itself* from one *actual* state of desiring to another in a broadly “Aristotelian” fashion as the actualization of an antecedently possessed potentiality (the being of the potential *qua* potential) or in a broadly “Megarian” fashion as simply the transition from one actual state to another, such that the very distinction between actuality and potentiality is inherently conventional or confused (one of the “fundamental errors of reason” which are “petrified” in language itself), in a way analogous to Spinoza’s proposal that the very concept of “contingency” or “possibility” is rooted in our lack of empirical knowledge of causes as well as our conceptual confusion about “essences” (“a thing is termed ‘contingent’ for no other reason than the deficiency of our knowledge”¹¹⁴) or Kant’s proposal that the concepts of “fortune” and “fate” are “usurpatory” concepts “which

¹¹² Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 78 (Book 1, Chapter 39).

¹¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1111b.

¹¹⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 54 (I, P. 33, Scholium 1).

circulate with almost universal indulgence” despite the fact that “one can adduce no clear legal ground [*Rechtsgrund*] for their use either from experience or from reason.”¹¹⁵ One must also raise the *further* question of whether he regards the transition from one state of desiring to another in *causal* terms (as in Spinoza’s “doctrine of determinist causation”) or in *non-causal* terms (as in Hume’s empiricist skepticism about causality).

The metaphysical assumption which Nietzsche wants to *attack* in OGM 1:13 is the assumption that “all action” (*Wirken* – a term sufficiently flexible and multivalent to include human “deeds” as well as natural “events,” but which in any case usually implies that some kind of causality is at work) is caused by something “acting” or “effective” or “operative” (*ein Wirkendes*), by a “subject.” But the very odd procedure Nietzsche adopts in attacking this assumption, *beginning* abruptly from what he presents as a definition of “a quantum of force,” manifests his awareness that the doer-deed issue, which all commentators rightly see as central to OGM 1:13, is *itself* closely related, not *only* to the issue of causality, but *also* to the issue of actuality and potentiality.

I would like to make the following suggestion. By defining “a quantum of force” as “just such a quantum of drive, will, action” *and nothing more*, Nietzsche signals his *rejection* of the very concept of potentiality as a metaphysical feature of the world, the concept implicit in the equally “nonsensical” demands of the slaves *and* the masters (that strength and weakness “express themselves” as *something other than* the kind of *desires* they *are*), as merely conventional or fictional, a kind of “embellishment” (*hinzudichten*) of actuality, the actuality of “force” or “desire.” One might say that Nietzsche’s initial definition of “a quantum of force”

¹¹⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A84/B117.

signals both his “Spinozism” *and* his “Megarianism,” his rejection not *just* of free will and therewith of real “contingency,” but *also* of the very idea that potentiality has its own distinctive form of actuality, “the being of the potential *qua* potential.” However, having just proposed this ontologically “reductive” definition of “force itself,” Nietzsche then *distinguishes* the first conceptual triad by which he defined “a quantum of force” (“just such a quantum of drive, will, action”) from the second triad (“precisely this very driving, willing, acting itself”), *but only in order to emphasize* that the actual referent of the first triad is “in fact” (*vielmehr*) “nothing at all other than” (*gar nichts anderes als*) that of the second triad – it can only “appear otherwise” (to the slaves *and* to the masters) as a result of the “fundamental error” that “all action” is conditioned by a “subject.”

In other words, the assumption which Nietzsche wants to attack (that all action is caused by a subject) *amounts to* the illusion that “a quantum of drive, will, action” is *something more than* the sheer activity of “driving, willing, acting itself.” Through his very odd and dialectically complex procedure of emphatically insisting on a certain definition of “a quantum of force,” then emphatically distinguishing *this* definition from *another* definition, then (finally) insisting no less emphatically that the distinction between them which he has just made is really no distinction at all, Nietzsche doesn’t *retract* his initial definition of “a quantum of force” as “just such a quantum of drive, will, desire.” Rather, he warns the reader against a subtle but prevalent *misinterpretation* of such a “quantum” *as he initially formulated it*, an “embellishment” which “poetically adds on” (*hinzudichten*) the conventional concept of “potentiality” (e.g. strength or force as commonsensically understood, as a power or capacity one may possess whether or not one is actually using it) to the sheer activity of desiring itself.

One way to formulate Nietzsche's point would be to say that although the *sense* of these conceptual triads is subtly but importantly different, their *reference* is the same – “a quantum of force.” Nietzsche's procedure bears a certain resemblance to that of a “logical positivist” who aims to clear up the metaphysical confusions to which “ordinary language” gives rise (the classic example is Rudolf Carnap's critique of Heidegger as naively assuming that because *das Nichts*, “the nothing,” is a noun which can serve as the subject of a predicate clause, it must refer to something out there in the world, a phenomenon which can be thematized contentfully¹¹⁶). However, the crucial difference is that Nietzsche is *neither* a “logical positivist” *nor* an “ordinary language philosopher.” Although he shares Carnap's concern with “overcoming” the metaphysical confusions “petrified” in “ordinary language,” he doesn't believe that one can simply “overcome” such “fundamental errors” through mere “logical analysis”; at best, one can achieve a certain critical distance on them, accompanied by a kind of ironic meta-level awareness that one *remains* subject to them even in the cognitive act of recognizing them as “errors.” Yet, on the other hand, like Heidegger, Nietzsche *also* has a more positive view of the philosophically revelatory power of “ordinary language” – including its rhetorical or “literary” elements as well as its grammatical nuances – than Carnap would allow, despite Nietzsche's penchant for dramatic utterances such as “I'm afraid that we won't get rid of God because we still believe in grammar.”¹¹⁷ Paradoxically, this is because Nietzsche has a more radical perspective than either an “ordinary language philosopher” or a “logical positivist” – unlike the former, he believes that “ordinary language” is embedded with “metaphysical

¹¹⁶ Cf. Rudolf Carnap, “Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache,” *Erkenntnis* 2 (1931): 219-241.

¹¹⁷ TI “Reason” in *Philosophy* 5.

assumptions,” but unlike the latter, he believes that these assumptions are ultimately the “fundamental errors” of “reason” itself. Accordingly, the philosopher must exploit both the dialectical-analytical and the rhetorical or literary resources of human speech in order to overcome these “fundamental errors” to the deepest extent one can, while at the same time reflectively acknowledging the *inherent* limitations of such a project.

This is exactly Nietzsche’s procedure in OGM 1:13. The crucial albeit subtle difference between the first triad (*ein eben solches Trieb, Wille, Wirken*) and the second triad (*eben dieses Treiben, Wollen, Wirken*) – triads which Nietzsche first *distinguishes*, just before he emphatically *identifies* them by *denying* that the former is “anything more than” the latter! – is that the first triad consists of three ordinary nouns, which might be translated as “drive, will, action,” while the second triad consists of three verbal nouns or substantivized verbs, which might be translated as “driving, willing, acting” (importantly, the only *word* which is identical in each triad is *Wirken*, which might also be translated as “activity”). By drawing attention to the subtle difference between the “senses” of these two conceptual triads, then insisting that they have the same “reference,” and only “appear” to have different referents due to “the seduction of language” and “the fundamental errors of reason,” in particular the metaphysical assumption that all “action” (*Wirken*) is caused by “something acting, effecting or operative” (*ein Wirkendes*), Nietzsche makes the *slow reader* aware of his intention – to draw out the intimate connections between the issues of potentiality (the metaphysical dualism between actuality and potentiality), causality (the metaphysical dualism between cause and effect) and substance (the metaphysical dualism between a substance or thing and its properties or accidents). Nietzsche adopts this highly compressed, oblique and rather poetical manner of presenting his thought

because he recognizes that these dualistic assumptions are so deeply embedded in human thought and speech (it is impossible to speak without seeming to take them for granted – and Nietzsche knows, more than Carnap and even more than Heidegger, that his *own* language is inevitably no exception) that in order to compel the reader to undertake the act of radically reflexive questioning required to gain critical distance on them, in order to teach the reader to “slow down” and think in a way that is more “severe” or “rigorous” than either that of the quick-witted sophist (cf. the disparaging reference in BGE 244 to “Berlin wit and sand”¹¹⁸) or the ploddingly methodical scholar, he *must* write in such a way. Nietzsche tries to compel the reader to engage in such a counter-intuitive form of thinking, to resist the “will to mere appearance, to simplification, to masks, to cloaks, in short, to the surface,” which comes so naturally to us.¹¹⁹ Nietzsche’s attitude towards “ordinary language,” then, is not more “naively poetic” than that of someone like Carnap – it is in fact both more critically sophisticated *and* less condescending at the same time.

In the next sentence, Nietzsche switches back from talking about *Kraft* to talking about *Stärke*. He claims that “the people” (*das Volk*) separate or distinguish (*abtrennen*) “strength” from its “expressions” (*Äusserungen*). By now, we can see that “the people” includes everyone insofar as they are not a philosopher – “masters” as well as “slaves.” In distinguishing strength (potentiality) from its expression (actuality), one thinks about oneself and about others “as though there were a neutral substratum [*ein indifferentes Substrat*] behind the one who is strong [*hinter dem Starken*], which was free to express strength or alternatively [*auch*] not to do so.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ BGE 244.

¹¹⁹ Cf. BGE 230.

¹²⁰ OGM 1:13.

Folk-psychology or “popular morality” (*die Volks-Moral*) includes both “master morality” and “slave morality.” Recall that the slaves do not think of *themselves* as weak, but rather as strong in their own way. Rather than saying “it is good if we do nothing *for which we are not strong enough*,” they think of their “weakness” as a kind of strength, as a voluntarily restrained power or capacity to act otherwise. The “self-deception of impotence” leads them to treat their own weakness – what Nietzsche calls “their *essence*, their action, their sole entire unavoidable, non-dischargeable reality [*sein Wesen, sein Wirken, seine ganze einzige unvermeidliche, unablösbare Wirklichkeit*]” – “as if” it were “a voluntary [*freiwillige*] achievement, something desired [*Gewolltes*], chosen, a *deed*, a meritorious service [*ein Verdienst*].”¹²¹ A “slave” thinks of himself as a strong man, not a weak one – hardly surprising, given the eager willingness of many early Christians to embrace excruciatingly painful forms of martyrdom. Furthermore, if the distinction between “strong and weak wills” is not meant as a “metaphysical” (either/or) distinction, but rather as a “graded” distinction, then *from Nietzsche’s own perspective* we shouldn’t understand the distinction between “strong” masters and “weak” slaves as “a picture of fixed natural types,” just as Pippin warns us against,¹²² but rather as a distinction between *more or less strong wills* or (if my line of interpretation is correct) *more or less strong desires*. “Weakness” consists in a “quantum” or “gradation” of strength or desire.

When the slave posits a “neutral substratum” behind “the strong man,” he surely thinks of *himself* as a strong man too, indeed as *stronger* than the masters. It is *Nietzsche* who describes the slave as “weak,” although this must surely also be qualified – in BGE 51, Nietzsche refers to

¹²¹ OGM 1:13.

¹²² Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 59.

the “superior force” (*überlegene Kraft*) of “the saint” or “the holy man” (*dem Heiligen*), the “strength of will” (*Stärke des Willens*) and “masterly desire” or “enjoyment” (*herrschaftliche Lust*) contained in such an “enigma of self-conquest”: “The most powerful [*mächtigsten*] human beings... honored their own strength [*Stärke*]... they honored something in themselves when they honored the saint.”¹²³ On the other hand, although I do not have space here to provide a lengthy treatment of this question, there is plenty of evidence in the *Genealogy* that the master believes in his own “free will,” in his “sovereign” capacity to distribute or withhold punishments and favors as he sees fit. In an interesting article, Thomas Meredith argues that the account of “the sovereign individual” in OGM 2:1-3 is meant to correct the one-sided portrayal of “the master” in the first treatise by showing how the master comes to believe in his own “free will,” his capacity to “take responsibility for himself,” to make or refuse to make promises, a self-interpretation no less delusory than that of the slave, ascribing to himself an exaggerated “power” that disguises his metaphysical impotence.¹²⁴

Returning to OGM 1:13, then, Nietzsche suggests that the merely conventional distinctions between potentiality and actuality on the one hand, and a “neutral substratum” (the German *indifferent* is much more unusual, and more abstract, than the English *indifferent*, and doesn’t necessarily carry the psychological connotations usually carried by the English word, and is thus better translated as “neutral”) and its causally efficacious “actions” or “effects” (*Wirken*) on the other, are mutually implicated. This is clear if one thinks about “strength” as a kind of “potentiality” in a commonsensical (*Volks-Moral*) fashion. A “quantum of strength”

¹²³ BGE 51.

¹²⁴ Thomas Meredith, “Bound Sovereignty: The Origins of Moral Conscience in Nietzsche’s ‘Sovereign Individual’” (unpublished manuscript, 2021), typescript.

doesn't *choose* whether or not to express itself – this whole model assumes a subject who possesses such a “quantum” and decides what to do with it, e.g. to punish or to reward a slave, to obey a master's orders or to resist them.

But as Pippin emphasizes, Nietzsche obviously doesn't *only* have the “incorporeal subject” who possesses “free will” in his target range. Rather, he wants to reject the whole model of causally efficacious substances, and the dualistic “reification” of cause and effect, “root and branch.”¹²⁵ This much is clear both from the lightning-flash simile and from the attack on “naturalistic researchers,” who presumably operate with a deterministic or necessitarian model of causality when they say “force moves” or “force causes,” as subject to essentially the *same* illusion as metaphysicians such as Augustine or Kant. This is presumably why Nietzsche uses the highly flexible and multivalent words *Wirken* and *Wirkendes* (not, say, *That* or *thätig*), and the highly abstract formula “a neutral substratum,” in characterizing this “fundamental error.” But if the point of his definition of “a quantum of force” as “nothing more than” a quantum of “action” is partly to reject the commonsensical distinction between potentiality (e.g. strength) and actuality (e.g. acts of strength), formulated by Aristotelians as “the being of the potential *qua* potential,” as merely conventional, even if this rejection is incompatible with “our belief in the ontologically distinct subject as agent, separable from, supervising, and willing into existence, and individually responsible for her particular actions,” as Pippin puts it,¹²⁶ a subject free to actualize her potential (express her strength) when and how she sees fit, why is it *also* incompatible with a network of causally efficacious *corporeal* substances whose “motions” (*not*

¹²⁵ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 74.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

deeds) and “reactions” (*not* passions or affects) follow one from another according to the laws of nature?

However, Nietzsche’s point is that if “a quantum of force” is really *nothing more than* “a quantum of action,” then to distinguish its (the quantum’s) property of causal efficacy (or passive receptivity to the causal efficacy of a different quantum “acting on” the former) from the sheer actuality of “force” or “action” would imply a real distinction between potentiality and actuality *internal to force itself*, even if there is no real (as opposed to conventional or merely instrumental) question about *whether or not* a particular potentiality possessed by this quantum actually *will* be actualized (as Spinoza would say, such a question would merely reflect our lack of knowledge, the fact that “the chain of causes is hidden from us”¹²⁷).

But what about the “neutral substratum”? Couldn’t one posit one “infinite substance” which is fully actual at all times, like Spinoza? Or even a plurality of finite substances with different properties or accidents, inter-related in a non-causal (or, to use Leibniz’s parlance, “windowless”) network? Here we must come back to the third moment in Nietzsche’s dialectical definition of “force.” Not only is “a quantum of force” *nothing more than* “a quantum of action,” but “a quantum of action” is “itself” *nothing more than* “driving, willing, acting” itself, the sheer *activity* of wanting or desiring, which permits of no *real* distinction between *pro tempore* “inactive” or unexpressed potentiality and actively used or expressed potentiality. The mathematical language of “quanta” is now dropped, because it has served its purpose – to indicate that “potentiality” is a merely “fictional” concept, like “cause” or “effect,”

¹²⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 54 (I, P. 33, Scholium 1).

useful for the purpose of “designation” and “communication,” “*not* clarification.”¹²⁸ Nietzsche now makes fully explicit what I suggest was already implicit in the third moment of his dialectic (the claim that not only is force itself “nothing more than” a quantum of desire or action, but a “quantum” of desire or action is also “nothing more than” the sheer activity of desiring itself): “But there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, the acting, the becoming [*es giebt kein „Sein“ hinter dem Thun, Wirken, Werden*]; ‘the doer’ [„*der Thäter*“] is merely poetically added-on to the doing [*zum Thun bloss hinzugedichtet*] – the doing is everything [*das Thun ist Alles*]. The people at bottom double the doing [*das Volk verdoppelt im Grunde das Thun*]; when they allow that lightning is flashing, that is a doing-doing [*wenn es den Blitz leuchten lässt, das ist ein Thun-Thun*]: they posit the same happening once as cause and then once again as its effect [*es setzt dasselbe Geschehen einmal als Ursache und dann noch einmal als deren Wirkung*].”¹²⁹

This passage makes it clear that Nietzsche’s denial of a “neutral substratum,” whether incorporeal or corporeal, “behind” causally efficacious “actions” (whether “freely caused” deeds or “causally determined” motions or events), is rooted *both* in his denial of “the being of the potential *qua* potential” (the implication of the first conceptual triad through which he defined “a quantum of force”) *and* in his conception of actuality *itself* as a kind of *activity* (the implication of the second triad). The abandonment of the mathematical language of “quanta” in the final moment of the dialectic in favor of sheer “verbal” activity recalls Nietzsche’s striking proposal in BGE 4 that logic and mathematics involve an unavoidable “falsification” of the

¹²⁸ BGE 21.

¹²⁹ OGM 1:13.

world: “Without accepting logical fictions... without a constant falsification of the world by means of numbers, the human being could not live.”¹³⁰ In a manner which anticipates the later Heidegger (and his distinction between an *Überwindung* and a *Verwindung* of metaphysics¹³¹), Nietzsche attempts to use human speech and reason “against themselves,” in order to overcome the “errors” *inherent* in human speech and reason (“logic”), an inevitably tortuous and complexly reflexive procedure.

It will now be helpful to return to the questions raised by Pippin’s interpretation of OGM 1:13. It is true that Nietzsche uses the somewhat ambiguous word *abtrennen*, which could mean either “separate” or “distinguish.” Nietzsche could mean that “the people” treat as *separable* two phenomena which are distinguishable but inseparable, mutually implicated and reciprocally conditioning (like “sensibility” and “thinking” in Kant); the people’s “error” would then consist merely in assuming that one phenomenon (“the doer”) could exist *independently* of the other (“the deed”). But he could also mean that the *distinction* made between these two phenomena (“the doer” and “the deed”) is merely conventional or “fictional” – *either* because these phenomena are in fact indistinguishable (two words for the same thing) *or* because one phenomenon (“the deed”) is natural or real (in scholastic language, an *ens reale*) while the other (“the doer”) is illusory, exists merely by convention or social fiat (an *ens fictum*, like “the free

¹³⁰ BGE 4.

¹³¹ For example, see Martin Heidegger, “On the Question of Being” (1955), in Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 291-322. See the helpful discussion of this late Heideggerean theme in Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 114-143. Pippin notes that “Heidegger claims to be able to ‘turn’ or ‘twist’ away from the metaphysical tradition, to have achieved in his ‘destruction’ or ‘deconstruction’ (*Abbau*) of the metaphysical tradition, not a new beginning, a *Überwindung*, itself a ‘metaphysical’ notion, but a *Verwindung*, a much trickier and more elusive notion.” (121)

will” or the *causa sui*¹³²). It is also true that Nietzsche’s spatial metaphor – the denial of a doer “behind” the deed – could mean that there is simply “no doer at all,” just as Nietzsche clearly believes that there is “no free will at all” (at least in the “superlative metaphysical sense”) and “no God at all” (at least in the sense of “Christian monoton-theism”¹³³). But it could also mean, as Pippin suggests, that the doer is somehow expressed “in” the deed, rather than existing “behind” and “before” the deed, implying an “expressive” relation between doer and deed which must be understood in a complexly dialectical fashion, much as Hegel arguably understood the phenomenon of human agency.¹³⁴

Pippin’s suggestion is philosophically interesting in its own right, although I do not have the space to explore it further here. However, as an interpretation of OGM 1:13, it is difficult to reconcile with Nietzsche’s claim, not merely that there is “no ‘being’ behind the doing, the acting, the becoming,” but also with his *further* claim that “the doer” is “poetically added-on” (*hinzugedichtet* – in everyday contexts, *hinzudichten* often just means “to embellish”) to “the doing.” The use of *hinzu* suggests that, in denying that there is a doer “behind” the deed, Nietzsche means to suggest that “the doer” is somehow “added on” to the deed (as an *ens fictum*), *not* to suggest that the doer-deed *relationship* ought to be conceived in a different, “expressive” rather than causal and “dualistic” fashion. Furthermore, although it is true that Nietzsche doesn’t *quite* say that “there are just strength-events,” it is surely no accident that he speaks of *das Thun* (a verbal noun or substantivized verb) rather than *der That*. Given the care

¹³² Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 91.

¹³³ AC 19.

¹³⁴ Cf. Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 77-78: “The determinate meaning of... an intention cannot be made out isolated from a much larger complex of social and historical factors... Intention formation and articulation are always temporally fluid, altering and transformable ‘on the go,’ as it were, as events in a project unfold.”

with which this important passage is written, I suggest that *das Thun* is better translated as “the doing” rather than “the deed” – “the doing is everything,” there is nothing other than the sheer event of doing – rather than the more conventional translation “the deed is everything.” Furthermore, Nietzsche’s claim that the people “double the doing” (*verdoppelt das Thun*) supports my suggestion that *abtrennen* is better understood here as “distinguish” rather than merely “separate.” When the people “allow” (unreflectively take as self-evident) “that lightning is flashing,” they posit the *same* “event” or “happening” (*dasselbe Geschehen*) as “cause” and as “effect” – in “doubling” this “event,” they at the same time dualistically reify it, divide what is really a kind of sheer “happening” into two “things” or “objects.”¹³⁵

Much as in BGE 4 (and again in BGE 230), Nietzsche suggests that in order to think about the world at all, “the people” must first *simplify* it, which is not a reflectively instrumental process (even if “naturalistic researchers” in a way *continue* this process in a reflectively instrumental way in their scientific procedures, while remaining in the thrall of the same *fundamental illusions* operative in ordinary speech and thought – in this rather ironic sense, Nietzsche converges with the kind of analytic philosopher who takes unreflectively inconsistent pride *both* in his commonsensical empiricism *and* in his critical-scientific detachment from the illusions of “folk-psychology”), as if one were on a daily basis to one confront a world of sheer “chaos” and *decide* that one had better reshape it into an ordered “cosmos” with whatever conceptual tools one finds at hand in order to find one’s way around and achieve one’s practical objectives, even if Nietzsche sometimes speaks in this way (as if one could simply *choose* to

¹³⁵ OGM 1:13.

stop “simplifying” and “falsifying” the world, even as such a course of action would be inadvisable – this is how Brian Leiter reads BGE 4¹³⁶).

In short, Nietzsche’s language here is unequivocal – “there is no ‘being’ behind the doing,” “the doing is everything,” when the people posit a “doer” distinguishable from a “deed” (his strikingly bizarre phrase *ein Thun-Thun* draws attention to his deliberate use of a verbal noun and the radically counter-intuitive point he wants to make), they misinterpret a single phenomenon, an “event” or “happening” (*Geschehen*), *as though there were two distinguishable phenomena*, whether they are understood as separable or merely as distinguishable – the deed or event and the causally efficacious “subject” or “neutral substratum” which it presupposes. But “the subject” or “neutral substratum” is a “fiction,” a mischievous “changeling” foisted upon the sheer “event” or “happening,” who takes refuge in the household of modern natural science (*unsre ganze Wissenschaft*) now that the traditional edifice in which such “changelings” found shelter, that of dogmatic-theological metaphysics, has been demolished in the territory of “our” European high culture. Indeed, one purpose of the lightning-flash simile is to emphasize the element of *continuity* or “gradation” between human “doings” and natural “happenings” which I have been arguing Nietzsche is indeed concerned with as a serious *problem*, as Pippin insists, in contrast to the “thoughtless naturalists” whom he so often disparages.

Earlier, I suggested that the abrupt switch from *Stärke* to *Kraft*, from the political conflict between masters and slaves to a highly abstract definition of a “quantum of force,” indicated Nietzsche’s “Spinozist” conviction that the “falsifications” involved in the conflict of strivings or desires which makes up the texture of human life can only be “clarified” to the

¹³⁶ Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 159-160.

extent possible by means of a “proper physio-psychology.” In the crucial, most notorious sentence in OGM 1:13, Nietzsche’s concern with the *ontological* problem of the nature of actuality itself as a kind of activity (and its *relationship* to the proposal that psychology – not cosmology, theology or ontology – ought to be recognized “again” as the real “first philosophy”) is made almost directly explicit: “There is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, the acting, the becoming [*es giebt kein „Sein“ hinter dem Thun, Wirken, Werden*]; ‘the doer’ is merely poetically added-on to the doing – the doing is everything.”¹³⁷ It is surely no accident that in this pivotal sentence, the only two elements supplied with scare quotes are “being” (*Sein*) and “the doer” (*der Thäter*). By contrast, the concept of “action” (*Wirken* – action or activity in the broadest sense, including “deeds” as well as “motions” or “operations”) is virtually identified with the concept of “becoming” (*Werden*) itself, which has no scare quotes at all, no oblique indication that the very concept of “becoming” (in contrast to the closely linked concepts of “being” and “the doer” – or the parallel concepts of “thing-in-itself” and “subject,” which are also supplied with scare quotes a little further on in the same passage) involves a conventional “add-on-falsification” or poetic “embellishment” of the world.

Deleuze expresses Nietzsche’s central ontological thought by saying that “the only being is that of becoming,”¹³⁸ namely “the being which is affirmed of becoming as such.”¹³⁹ Deleuze describes this thought as the “secret” which Dionysos whispers in Ariadne’s ear, which is rather odd, given the forceful and seemingly dogmatic manner in which Nietzsche presents this claim

¹³⁷ OGM 1:13.

¹³⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: Athlone Press, 1983), 188.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

in OGM 1:13.¹⁴⁰ However, the careful reader has been prepared for this claim by Nietzsche's dialectical elaboration of the meaning of "strength" or "force" itself and the dropping of the mathematical language of "quanta" in its final moment. In BGE 4, Nietzsche spoke of the "constant falsification of the world by means of numbers [*durch die Zahl*]." ¹⁴¹ "Primarily and for the most part," to use Heidegger's parlance, we cannot help but think about the world "mathematically"; not only do we tend to find ourselves compelled to think about or describe "qualia" in quantitative terms, but even more fundamentally, we tend to think of ourselves and other phenomena in the world around us as numerically distinct and self-identical "things," "entities," "substances" or (in Leibniz's helpful parlance) "monads": "Without a measuring of reality against the purely invented world of the... self-identical [*ohne ein Messen der Wirklichkeit an der rein erfundenen Welt des... Sich-selbst-Gleichen*]... the human being could not live."¹⁴² For "methodological" reasons, then, Nietzsche *begins* to clarify the confusions involved in the conflict between masters and slaves (i.e. the confusions involved in political life as such, whether ancient or modern) by accepting our naturally "mathematical" way of thinking as provisionally unavoidable and defining what he calls a "quantum" of force as nothing more than a "quantum" of instinct or desire, the actual *experience of desire* itself, which is the very "essence" of the master's strength or the slave's weakness. The distinction between actuality and "unexpressed" or inactive potentiality is an illusion; in Kant's language, "potentiality" is a "usurpatory" concept. Having made *this* point, Nietzsche *then* claims that a "quantum" of force or desire is *itself* nothing more than the actual *experience of desiring* itself, the experience of a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 188.

¹⁴¹ BGE 4.

¹⁴² BGE 4.

temporally extended, non-punctuated *activity* (hence the transition from ordinary nouns to verbal nouns), which is “falsified” through being described in “mathematical” terms (in the broadest sense), as though one could isolate and categorize self-identical “quanta” of desire and the “subjects” who possess them.

Nietzsche says that “a quantum of force” *just is* “a quantum of action,” while “a quantum of action” can only appear as something *more than just* “a quantum of action” under the assumption that “all action is conditioned by something acting [*Wirkendes*], by a ‘subject.’”¹⁴³ I have argued that *this* “appearance” (that a quantum of force is *more than just* a quantum of action) amounts to the illusion that “force” or “action” *itself* can be divided into actuality and potentiality (i.e. the potential either to be causally effective or to undergo changes as a result of being acted upon), potentiality itself understood as having its own kind of actuality (the being of the potential *qua* potential). Nietzsche implicitly raises the question: *Why* is it only under the assumption that all action is “conditioned” by a subject that a quantum of action can “appear” to be more than just a quantum of action or, put differently, that “potentiality” itself isn’t a merely “usurpatory” concept? But Nietzsche *also* says that “a quantum of action” can *itself* only “appear” as *something more than sheer activity or becoming* (*Wirken* or *Werden*), i.e. that “action” itself can be “quantified” at all or described in terms of “quanta of action,” as a result of the *same* assumption, namely that “all action is conditioned by something acting [*Wirkendes*], by a ‘subject.’”¹⁴⁴ In other words, in the process of developing his definition of “a quantum of force,” Nietzsche ends up concluding that the very subject of his definition as he

¹⁴³ OGM 1:13.

¹⁴⁴ OGM 13.

initially formulated it (a *quantum* of force) can only be *formulated* in such a way as a result of the assumption that one can think about the world in “mathematical” terms (*durch die Zahl*) without thereby “falsifying” our experience – even as *this falsification itself* belongs to our experience. The human being “cannot live” without it.¹⁴⁵ Put differently, only on the “Aristotelian” assumption that “measuring reality against the purely invented world of the self-identical” is *not* a falsification of the world, but rather an accurate ontological “measuring” (*Messen*) of the world, can one strictly speaking talk about (let alone define) “a quantum of force.”¹⁴⁶ So, ultimately, the “fictional” or “usurpatory” concepts of “contingency,” “possibility” *and* “potentiality” (the idea that “the being of the potential *qua* potential” is a real phenomenon, whether it is understood through a voluntarist or a determinist model of the relation between cause and effect or potential and its actualization) are rooted in our “constant falsification of the world by means of numbers,” which *amounts to* the illusion of “thinghood,” “substance” or “being.”¹⁴⁷

We are now in a better position to appreciate how OGM 1:13 “clarifies” the “physio-psychology” of BGE 13-22, despite (in fact, *because*) Nietzsche’s denial of the difference between strength and its expressions in the lightning-flash simile does indeed *contradict* his doctrinal (i.e. programmatic and preliminary) formulation of “the will to power” in BGE 13, as the desire of a living “thing” or organic “entity” to express its (antecedently possessed) force or strength (potential), which is the *starting-point* of this physio-psychology. In a highly compressed fashion, OGM 1:13 articulates the “chain of thought” which Nietzsche develops

¹⁴⁵ BGE 4.

¹⁴⁶ BGE 4.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. BGE 4 with OGM 1:13.

between aphorisms 13 and 22. Starting from the world as it appears to us, “the world in which we believe we live,” the world of natural and political conflict (between stronger and weaker animals and between masters and slaves), which on closer examination is “really” the world of *internal* conflict and psychic instability (between freedom and instinct or between desire and the fulfillment at which it aims), Nietzsche “deconstructs” and then immediately “reconstructs” this world (“only under the seduction of... the fundamental errors of reason... can it appear otherwise”) in a handful of carefully constructed sentences, which appear at first to be little more than a series of dogmatic utterances.¹⁴⁸

Nietzsche suggests that it is only “under” the illusion or “appearance” that mathematical – “quantifying” or “atomizing” – thinking captures the world as we really experience it that the world can be divided into “self-identical” substances or entities, whether “corporeal” or “incorporeal,” material “atoms” or immaterial “subjects.” Recall Nietzsche’s reference in BGE 12 to the “atomistic need,” which “still leads a dangerous afterlife in places where no one suspects it.”¹⁴⁹ This “need” (*Bedürfnis*), this “will to simplification,” is indeed humanly inescapable – it is a “fundamental error of reason.” Yet in making this claim, Nietzsche implies (one might argue incoherently) that it remains possible to gain critical distance on this “error” – one can *achieve* a certain reflective *awareness*, through a proper *phenomenology of becoming* (*Werden*) *itself*, that the division of the world into “monads” (whether material things or “soul atoms”) is a “simplification” of the sheer *activity* of becoming itself. In order to render the world thinkable, we “need” to “atomize” it, but this “atomization” or “simplification” involves an

¹⁴⁸ OGM 1:13.

¹⁴⁹ BGE 12.

instinctive or unreflective “doubling” of the experience of activity (*Wirken*) or becoming itself into “cause” and “effect” *and* an unreflective “doubling” of the “action” (the event or happening) into the causally effective neutral substratum “behind” the experience (whether corporeal or incorporeal) and the experience itself, e.g. the lightning-flash (Nietzsche likely alludes to the idea that Zeus causes lightning-bolts to flash, the classic European pagan example of “mythological thinking”) or the master’s act of strength (whether viewed from the perspective of the master or the slave, as the pleasure one takes in the act of punishing or “disciplining” oneself or others or the pain one suffers in being punished).

From OGM 1:13 itself, it is unclear which of these two errors (the doubling of the phenomenon itself into cause and effect or into “phenomenal experience” and “neutral substratum”) is more “fundamental.” Is one error derivative from the other, or are they “equi-primordial”? However, it is clear that *both* errors are *more* fundamental than the “foreground” assumption, which Nietzsche seems to take for granted in BGE 13, that being itself can be divided into “the actual” and “the potential” or that there is such a thing as “the being of the potential *qua* potential” (less abstractly formulated, that one can possess strength even when one isn’t *pro tempore* “discharging” or “releasing” it). In OGM 1:13, Nietzsche suggests that *this* “foreground” assumption is ultimately *derivative* from the closely related ideas of “causality” and “substance,” or the “fundamental errors” that the “doublings” cause-effect and substratum-property simply “track reality,” rather than being “useful fictions.”

It thus makes sense, then, that Nietzsche *begins* from this “popular assumption,” the distinction between strength and its expressions. OGM 1:13 “clarifies” why Nietzsche begins his physio-psychology with a definition of “a living thing” as “will to power” and “will to

power” itself as the instinct to release, discharge or express one’s strength.¹⁵⁰ The world as we initially understand and confront it is primarily a world of instinctually driven or desiderative beings which *want* to “release” or “discharge” their “strength” or “force,” i.e. their accumulated “potentialities,” and which we know may or may not achieve their goals. *This* world, “the world in which we believe we live,” is the world from which we must begin; to simply ignore it as the world of “folk-psychology” and redescribe our experience in natural-scientific terms would be a philosophically (even if not technologically) arbitrary procedure; as BGE 14 makes clear, Nietzsche would have agreed unhesitatingly with Strauss’ claim that “positivism may be said to be more dogmatic than any other position of which we have records.”¹⁵¹ On the other hand, “method demands” that we attempt to understand this world and the desiderative “entities” that comprise it (including ourselves) without appealing to “superfluous metaphysical principles,” unless they can be shown to be *philosophically* necessary, not merely pre-requisites for some particular moral ideal. This “Occamite” principle is what Bernard Williams fittingly calls Nietzsche’s “minimalism,” although Williams appears not to appreciate that Nietzsche regards reductionistic naturalism as *itself* typically *no less* motivated by moral-political concerns or “ideals” than, say, the Christian or Kantian view of the free subject.¹⁵² As aphorisms 21 and 22 make clear, Nietzsche would also have agreed with Strauss when he writes, “Not indeed positivism but many positivists possess a heart. Moreover there is a certain affinity between... positivism and sympathy for a certain kind of democracy; that affinity is due to the broad, not

¹⁵⁰ BGE 4.

¹⁵¹ Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 26.

¹⁵² Cf. Bernard Williams, “Nietzsche’s Minimalist Moral Psychology,” in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s “On the Genealogy of Morals”*, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 237-247.

merely methodological, context out of which positivism emerged or to the hidden premises of positivism which positivism is unable to articulate because it is constitutionally unable to conceive of itself as a problem.”¹⁵³

As I argued earlier, BGE 14 suggests that the attempt to understand “the world” in materialistic terms is easily refuted – or not so much refuted as dissolved through “clarification” of its very meaning. By contrast, BGE 15 suggests that the attempt to understand the world in dualistic or idealistic terms is not so easily refuted, but easily rendered “questionable.” Recall that in BGE 12, Nietzsche described “materialistic atomism” as one of the most thoroughly “refuted” ideas there are.¹⁵⁴ By contrast, “soul atomism” – “which Christianity has taught best and longest,” i.e. which was not *invented* by Christianity, but given a certain doctrinally effective form by this religion – must *still* be “expelled from science.”¹⁵⁵ One must *now* “declare a relentless war of the knife” (a kind of cognitive self-vivisection) against “the atomistic need,” which I have suggested is virtually identical with “the will to simplification,” and “finish off” (*den Garaus machen*) the atomistic conviction that “the soul” is an indivisible, self-identical substance, entity or thing, a “monad.”¹⁵⁶

As a historical diagnosis of the condition of philosophy and science in late modernity, this is very odd, especially in the immediate rhetorical context. Hasn’t Nietzsche been emphasizing that traditional metaphysics (including “rational psychology”) has been dealt a kind of *historical* death blow, even as new forms of dogmatism (materialist, positivist and “German Idealist”) have arisen to take its place? But Nietzsche now seems to imply that “we

¹⁵³ Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 26.

¹⁵⁴ BGE 12.

¹⁵⁵ BGE 12.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. BGE 12 with 229-230.

moderns” *still* believe in the *immaterial* substance or “monad,” even as we recognize that the *material* “atom” is at best an “abbreviation of the means of expression,” such that an essential task of the “psychologist” *today* is to “declare war [*den Krieg erklären*]” against the belief in the substantial soul.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, this claim is in direct tension with the claim further along in the same aphorism, in which Nietzsche upbraids “clumsy naturalists,” who certainly seem to have “expelled soul atomism from science,” for abandoning the very idea of “the soul” altogether, rather than proposing new and experimental “soul-hypotheses.”¹⁵⁸

I suggest the following explanation. The verb *erklären* can mean “to declare,” especially in a formula such as *den Krieg erklären*, but it can also mean “to explain” or “to clarify” (for example, one could “explain” the causes of a war, as Thucydides does in the first book of his history). I suggest that Nietzsche doesn’t mean that one must “declare war” on “soul atomism” in order to “expel” this idea once and for all from “science.” Rather, he means that one must *clarify* or *explain* the “war” itself, the procedure or “method” through which one undertakes the critique of “soul atomism.” Furthermore, Nietzsche’s formulation suggests that the direct target of this “war” isn’t soul atomism itself, but the atomistic need or will to simplification which gives rise *both* to “materialistic atomism” *and* to “soul atomism.”

This still doesn’t explain why one he says that must “first of all” (*zunächst*) “finish off” soul atomism, given that most “naturalistic researchers” today seem to regard “soul atomism” as even more thoroughly “refuted” than “materialistic atomism.” However, as Nietzsche frequently emphasizes, empirical scientists tend not to be philosophers as well, even if “first philosophy”

¹⁵⁷ BGE 12.

¹⁵⁸ BGE 12.

itself is a kind of “science,” and in BGE 54, Nietzsche says that “the whole of modern philosophy” (i.e. philosophy proper) from Descartes onwards has been a kind of “epistemological skepticism [*Skepsis*]” engaged in a long-drawn-out “assassination attempt” on the “old” or “ancient concept of the soul” (*den alten Seelen-Begriff*), which is “the fundamental presupposition of the Christian teaching.”¹⁵⁹ Whatever “clumsy naturalists” (or thoughtless, dogmatic atheists) might assume, for Nietzsche, the core of first philosophy, “the queen of the sciences,” is a kind of psychology, *not* a kind of “physiology” or “physics” in the sense of neurophysiology or “modern physics.” Furthermore, if “the whole of modern philosophy” has been engaged in an extended campaign of murderous warfare against “soul atomism,” even if Nietzsche *partly* has in mind the political war against Christianity waged at the level of “propaganda” by writers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza and their successors, it also suggests that *philosophizing itself* consists in a kind of inner spiritual warfare or (to make free use of Trotsky’s convenient terminology) a “permanent revolution” against “the atomistic need” or “the will to simplification,” a never-ending dialectical process which doesn’t culminate in a simple, decisive “victory.”

Nietzsche’s point, then, is not that one must publically “declare war” on soul atomism, as a hasty reading suggests (this has already been done many times, with historically increasing degrees of frankness, such that writers in Nietzsche’s time were no longer compelled to use the accommodatory rhetoric used by Descartes, Spinoza or to an extent even Kant¹⁶⁰), but rather, as a “slow reading” of the aphorism suggests, that one must “clarify” the nature of this “war” or

¹⁵⁹ BGE 54. Translation modified.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. BGE 6 with 54.

explain the procedure or method by means of which one attempts to understand, analyze and criticize the traditional concept of the soul. One must address the three inter-related questions raised in BGE 16, concerning (a) *the origin or derivation*, (b) *the doxastic hold* and (c) *the epistemic right of application* of the soul-concept or subject-concept itself (“the I” as substance) and the closely related concepts of “thinking,” “cause” and “effect.” Having disposed of the idea that these “metaphysical questions” might be answered by direct appeal to intellectual intuition, in BGE 17, Nietzsche undertakes a “retreat into the ground” of the activity of thinking which generates these concepts.

The result of this act of reflection is the insight that “thinking substance” in the Cartesian sense cannot possibly exist, not merely because we don’t have immediate awareness of “the I” as a “thing,” but more radically because “thinking” itself in the *Cartesian* sense doesn’t exist – we don’t have immediate access to “thoughts” in the sense of punctuated and “monadically” categorizable “objects” of conscious awareness. The next aphorism (BGE 18) makes it clear that Nietzsche *also* regards “free will” in the voluntarist sense as susceptible of “refutation.” At the same time, Nietzsche also implies that “free will” is a *fundamental* illusion, which can never be disposed of “once and for all” in the realm of ordinary experience, such that “more subtle minds [*feinere Köpfe*]”) must reflect “again and again” on this “constant falsification” of our experience.¹⁶¹ As I argued earlier, this applies *a fortiori* to all the “fundamental errors” of “popular morality.”

We are now in a better position to grasp why Nietzsche rather strangely claims that one must expel soul atomism from science *just before* he attacks “clumsy naturalists,” who regard

¹⁶¹ BGE 18.

“soul atomism” as a long-since refuted superstition, for thereby “losing” the soul altogether.” Nietzsche’s point is that such naturalists are *philosophically* “clumsy” – they fail to recognize how deeply embedded “the atomistic need” is in human nature and thus also in their *own* thinking. As BGE 18 (and OGM 1:13) suggests, the fundamental errors of language and reason cannot simply be “expelled” once and for all – to this extent, Nietzsche’s demand is ironic. Without recognizing it themselves, these naturalists *still* believe in “the soul” or “the subject,” just as the Enlightenment propagandist who believes that the popular diffusion of the results of neurophysiology will result in a revolutionary transformation of human life in which “the people” no longer believe in “free will” is not only politically naïve, but self-deluded – he still believes in free will himself every time he decides on a course of action, whether out of moral (“noble”) or prudential (“base”) reasons.

Taken together, then, aphorisms 17 and 18 help us understand just what Nietzsche takes himself to be doing in BGE 19, where he finally “refutes” free will. Nietzsche’s “refutation” won’t rely on neurophysiological experiments, which are themselves philosophically “clumsy.” Rather, it will rely on a phenomenology of becoming (*Werden*) itself, what Husserl would call a “phenomenology of internal time-consciousness.” Although OGM 1:13 doesn’t provide an *argument* against free will or thinking substance, it helps to *clarify* the unusual character of Nietzsche’s method, just as the verso of the title page of the first edition of the *Genealogy* had promised. From early in his career, Nietzsche located the difference between humans and other animals primarily in our reflexive awareness of the passing of time, the phenomenon of temporal passage in which our very “being” consists, an awareness which *belongs to* the temporal passage itself, rather than in the possession of “metaphysically distinct” faculties such

as “free will” or “intellect.” Thus the early Nietzsche’s affirmation of the “sovereignty of becoming” is closely tied to his denial of “any cardinal difference between man and animal.”¹⁶² OGM 1:13 suggests that this awareness primarily and for the most part takes the form of an instinctive “doubling” of the phenomenon of becoming itself from a sheer, non-punctuated (albeit internally complex) “happening” (*Geschehen*) into cause-effect on the one hand and phenomenon-substrate on the other, which themselves give rise to the derivative and “usurpatory” concept of “potentiality” (e.g. “strength” understood as distinguishable from its “expressions”) which then “circulates with universal indulgence” in the texture of ordinary human life. While “metaphysicians” take the results of this “doubling” as immediately given, formulating “theories” of free will, determinist causation, incorporeal substances or material forces, or “the being of the potential *qua* potential,” the real philosopher learns to write in such a way as to compel the slow reader to become reflectively aware of the “falsificatory” character of this “doubling” and the “fictional” character of the postulates to which it gives rise.

Furthermore, BGE 18 indicates that Nietzsche doesn’t expect his “refutation” to result in a revolutionary transformation of society, as Nietzscheans such as Deleuze seem to hope for, after which the very concepts of “punishment” and “responsibility” will end up in the dustbin of history. Indeed, Nietzsche doesn’t even conceive of the philosophical life *itself* as a straightforward “break” with “popular morality,” after which “everything is wholly different,” if not for “the vulgar,” then at least for the philosopher. Although the beginning of such a life will be experienced as a radical break with the world of common sense (“we sail right *over* morality, we crush, we destroy *perhaps* the remains of our own morality by daring to make a voyage

¹⁶² UDHL 9.

there!”¹⁶³), the budding philosopher’s intoxicating experience of liberation will gradually transform itself into a subtler and more mature awareness of the character of such a life as a continual “self-overcoming of morality,” a “lengthy secret labor,”¹⁶⁴ a process which has no end other than death itself.

But if Nietzsche wants to make this *general* point about the need to overcome the fundamental errors of speech and reason “again and again,” why does he *only* mention “free will” in BGE 18? Why also the abrupt transition from the “I think” in BGE 17 to the “I will” in BGE 18-19?

I suggest the following explanation. Once we have established that “the world in which we believe we live,” the world of living things or organic entities with properties and potentialities inhering in “substrata” interrelated in a network of causally efficacious interactions, is a *result* of the interpretive activity of thinking itself, not an immediate perception of how things are, we must undertake a phenomenological inquiry into time-consciousness itself (the experience of *Wirken* or *Werden*) from within the very activity of interpretation which aims to show (to the extent possible) whether (or the extent to which) our “foreground perspective” is a “simplification” or “falsification” of *our own experience* “from the beginning” (BGE 24) or (on the other hand) captures “real life” or “the text.”¹⁶⁵

However, “activity” has two basic meanings in Nietzsche – the activity of *desiring* and the activity of *interpreting* – which he regards as inseparable and mutually conditioning, much as Kant understood the relationship between “sensibility” and “thinking.” The sheer activity of

¹⁶³ BGE 23. Emphasis added.

¹⁶⁴ BGE 32.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. BGE 17 with 24 and OGM 1:13.

desiring is that which is always already “given” to the activity of interpreting to interpret. Thus Nietzsche identifies what he initially calls a “quantum” of “force” or “strength” first with a quantum of “drive, will, action [*Wirken*],” then with “this driving, willing, acting [*Wirken*]” itself – only *then* to claim that things can only “appear otherwise” if one posits “being” (*Sein*), in scare quotes, “behind” the sheer “doing, acting, becoming [*hinter dem Thun, Wirken, Werden*],” with no scare quotes. As BGE 13 made clear, Nietzsche conceives of the sentient “thing” or “entity” primarily as erotic or desiderative, driven by instinct. Accordingly, his “revisionary” phenomenology of “becoming” (time-consciousness) will be a phenomenology of self-(mis)interpreting desiring. As OGM 1:13 makes clear, human beings (“masters” or “slaves”) primarily and for the most part” interpret their own “desiring” or “willing” (the ambiguity of the German *wollen*, which can mean “to will” or “to want,” serves Nietzsche’s purposes well) as “free,” as a “sovereign” capacity to make or withhold promises, to command, submit or resist. There is thus a sense in which free will, “the I will,” is *the* fundamental illusion at the root of all the others. Nietzsche indicates this point in a rather amusing fashion in “The Four Great Errors” section of the *Twilight of the Idols*, where all “four” errors ultimately boil down to the error of “free will.”¹⁶⁶

The purpose of BGE 19 is to give a “scientific” (phenomenological) reconstruction of the foreground perspective articulated in BGE 13 by means of the programmatic claim that “life itself is will to power.” While BGE 13 implied that a living thing which desires to express its strength may or may not fail to do so, BGE 19 argues that (as OGM 1:13 “clarifies”) *strictly speaking* there is no such thing as a living thing (human or animal) which *desires* to “express”

¹⁶⁶ Cf. TI The Four Great Errors 1-8.

or “discharge” (*auslassen*) its “strength” but *refrains from* doing so or even *simply fails* to do so, because “strength” and “desire” are “at bottom” two words for the same phenomenon. They only appear to be different because “the people” unreflectively “double” (*verdoppeln*) the phenomenon of activity or becoming itself into potentiality-actuality, cause-effect and phenomenon-substrate.

BGE 19 begins in a curious way: “Philosophers are in the habit of speaking about the will as if it were the best-known thing in the world [*die bekannteste Sache von der Welt*]; indeed, Schopenhauer has given us to understand that the will alone is really known to us, wholly and completely known, without subtraction and addition. But again and again it seems to me that in this case, too, Schopenhauer only did what philosophers are in the habit of doing – he took up a *popular prejudice* [*Volks-Vorurtheil*] and exaggerated it.”¹⁶⁷ Schopenhauer is a strange example to illustrate this point, because (like Spinoza) he was notorious for *denying* “freedom of the will in that superlative metaphysical sense,” exactly the “popular prejudice” Nietzsche has in his sights. We have already learned that a philosopher’s speech is often quite misleading as to his real thought. Could Nietzsche’s doctrine of “the will to power” be an exoteric teaching, an “exaggeration” of a “popular prejudice” (“the I will”) which provokes us to think it through and ultimately to abandon it? I suggest that it is *because* BGE 19 is meant to supply an account of what Nietzsche means by “will to power” at the “esoteric” or truly philosophical level that he carefully avoids using this popular or doctrinal formula in *this* aphorism.

¹⁶⁷ BGE 19. Translation modified.

BGE 19 is more carefully structured than it appears to be on a first reading. Nietzsche observes that all “willing” or “desiring” (*Wollen*) has an internal complexity which it doesn’t initially seem to possess. We can appreciate the care with which he elaborates this point if we recall the three “metaphysical questions” he raised in BGE 16, concerning the derivation, doxastic hold and right of applicability of the concepts “I,” “thinking,” “cause” and “effect,” as well as the suggestion in OGM 1:13 that the distinctions potentiality-actuality, cause-effect and phenomenon-substrate arise from a “doubling” of the sheer activity of “desiring” or “becoming,” concepts he virtually *identifies*. Nietzsche now claims that the apparently simple phenomenon of “willing” is in fact a “complex” of *three* “ingredients,” which correspond to the three “metaphysical questions” he has just raised.

First, in all “willing” or “wanting” (*Wollen*) there is “sensing” or “feeling,” indeed “many kinds of sensings” or “feelings” (*Fühlen und zwar vielerlei Fühlen*).¹⁶⁸ Secondly, there is also “thinking” (*Denken*) and in particular a *single* “commanding thought” (recall the “simple concise fact” of thinking or interpreting itself emphasized in BGE 17): “In every act of the will [*in jedem Willensakte*] there is a commanding thought – let us not imagine it possible to sever this thought from the ‘willing’ [or ‘wanting’ – *Wollen*] as if any will [*Wille*] would then remain left over!”¹⁶⁹ Thirdly, “the will is not only a complex of sensing [or feeling] and thinking [*ein Complex von Fühlen und Denken*], but it is above all an *affect*, and specifically that affect of the command [*jener Affekt des Commando*’s].”¹⁷⁰ This unusual and incongruous military term calls to mind a *group* of soldiers, a squadron or platoon, who have been given a particular mission to

¹⁶⁸ BGE 19. Translation modified.

¹⁶⁹ BGE 19. Translation modified.

¹⁷⁰ BGE 19. Translation modified.

carry out, which temporarily holds them together or unifies them as a group – a group which may disperse and be resolved into its elements after the mission is complete. Having analytically broken this apparently simple phenomenon (“the I will”) down into its three constituent “ingredients,” Nietzsche concludes: “That which is termed ‘freedom of the will’ is essentially the affect of superiority in relation to him who must obey: ‘I am free, ‘he’ must obey’ – this consciousness is present in every will, and equally so that straining of the attention, the straight look that fixes itself exclusively on one thing, that unconditional evaluation that ‘this and nothing else is necessary now,’ the inward certainty that obedience will be rendered.”¹⁷¹

I mentioned that activity has two primary meanings for Nietzsche – that of desiring and that of interpreting. I suggest that the purpose of this passage is to show how they are complexly interrelated in our experience of temporal passage itself (*Wirken* or *Werden*) – “sensing” or “feeling” corresponds to the activity of desiring, that which is given to interpretation to interpret, while “thinking” corresponds to the activity of interpreting itself. Nietzsche emphasizes the *plural or manifold* character of the first “ingredient,” “sensing” or “feeling” (*Fühlen*), and the *unifying or simplifying* character of the second ingredient, “thinking” (*Denken*) – there is a *single* “commanding thought.” It is the *combination* of this manifold of sensations or feelings with this unifying thought that results in or amounts to “the affect of command.” Furthermore, it is no accident that Nietzsche’s taxonomy of the “manifold of sensings” or “feelings” involved in all “desiring” (*Wollen*) involves different modes of *temporal* experience – the feelings of passing-from, passing-to and the in-between-feeling of temporal passage itself: “In all desiring [*Wollen*] there is, first, a plurality of feelings, namely the feeling

¹⁷¹ BGE 19. Translation modified.

of the state ‘*away from which,*’ the feeling of the state ‘*towards which,*’ the feeling of this ‘*from*’ and ‘*towards*’ themselves.”¹⁷² Nietzsche’s account of desiring emphasizes its temporally extended, non-punctuated character (recall his claim that thinking in terms of “number” or “quanta” or “atoms” is unavoidable, but involves a falsification or simplification of the sheer experience of becoming). Finally, it is important that Nietzsche adds, in what initially seems like a slightly whimsical or arbitrary afterthought, that *in addition to* the *temporally* taxonomized “plurality” of this experience there is “an accompanying muscular feeling” (*ein begleitendes Muskelgefühl*).¹⁷³ Nietzsche means thereby gently to emphasize that our experience of willing or desiring is inseparable from our sense of ourselves as *embodied* beings. Even if a few eccentrically sophisticated philosophers, such as Leibniz and Berkeley, have tried to separate them, our instinctive interpretation of ourselves as beings with desires directed or controlled by “free will” is bound up with our instinctive interpretation of ourselves as beings divided into “mind” or “soul” (the seat of free will) and “body” (the part of ourselves which *obeys* the “free commands” we issue – “I am free, ‘he’ must obey”).

When Nietzsche says that “the will” (*der Wille*) is “not only a complex of feeling and thinking,” but “above all an *affect*,” he suggests that what we take for something simple (the faculty of “will,” distinguishable from “intellect” and “desire”) is in fact an “affect” which *consists in* the complex and simultaneous inter-relation of two kinds of activity (the temporally extended activity of desiring and the *simplifying* activity of interpreting). Nietzsche thereby answers the three questions he raised in BGE 16 – concerning the derivation, the doxastic hold

¹⁷² BGE 19. Translation modified.

¹⁷³ BGE 19. Translation modified.

and the epistemic right of application of the interrelated concepts by means of which we instinctively think of ourselves in “Cartesian” fashion, as causally efficacious thinking things, somehow connected with or related to our “bodies.” Ultimately, it is the “affect” (“the complex state of delight of the person exercising volition, who commands and at the same time identifies himself with the executor of the order – who, as such, enjoys also the triumph over obstacles, but thinks within himself that it was really his will that overcame them”¹⁷⁴) resulting from or consisting in this very “complex of feeling and thinking” which leads us to interpret ourselves as causally efficacious thinking things. But a psychological analysis of this apparently unitary phenomenon as a “complex of feeling (sensing) and thinking (interpreting)” shows (a) that we derive the concept of “the ego as cause” from the complex experience of desiring itself, (b) that the simplifying character of the activity of thinking or interpreting leads us to believe in “the ego as cause” as though it were an “immediately accessible” entity and (c) that we have no *philosophical* right to interpret ourselves in this “simplified” way.

Nietzsche claims that the experience of “willing,” in addition to the experience of space (embodiedness) and time, involves an internal duality between “command” and “obedience,” which corresponds to the distinction between *desire itself* (interpreted by *der Wollende* as the “free command” or mental act of volition which he issues) and *the action at which it aims* (interpreted by *der Wollende* as the obedient subject or “bodily movement” which executes the command). Yet “we are accustomed to disregard this duality, and deceive ourselves about it by means of the synthetic concept ‘I.’”¹⁷⁵ I argued earlier that while the dyadic logic of desire is

¹⁷⁴ BGE 19.

¹⁷⁵ BGE 19.

usually related (in commonsensical speech and thought) to an implicit distinction between potentiality and actuality (one has the potential to fulfill one's desire, which one may or may not succeed in actualizing), OGM 1:13 suggests that "potentiality" (e.g. strength) is a "usurpatory" concept, as Kant would say, while Nietzsche identifies *strength itself* with *desire itself*. The distinction between free and unfree will must be replaced by the distinction between stronger and weaker desires. But this means that Nietzsche must provide an *alternative* account of the dyadic logic of desire as *internal* to desire itself.

Nietzsche writes, "We are accustomed to disregard this duality [the fact that "we are at the same time the commanding *and* the obeying parties"] and to deceive ourselves about it by means of the synthetic concept 'I,'" such that "a whole chain of erroneous conclusions... has become attached to willing [*Wollen*] – to such a degree that he who wills believes in good faith [*mit gutem Glauben*] that willing *suffices* for action [*Wollen genüge zur Aktion*]." ¹⁷⁶ The idea that "willing" or "desiring" (*Wollen*) suffices for action is a strange candidate for "an erroneous conclusion." The ambiguity of *Wollen* is crucial here. Nobody thinks that desiring is sufficient for "action" (*Aktion*). One might desire something intensely without taking any steps towards fulfilling one's desire – for example, because one is too lazy or cowardly to try or because one sincerely believes that one's goal is simply unachievable. But insofar as one believes in "free will," one believes that "willing" (making a free decision) "suffices" for action, whether or not it achieves its goal. It is clearly *this* assumption Nietzsche regards as an "erroneous conclusion." Since "in the great majority of cases" (e.g. getting out of bed, opening a door, vocalizing a sentence) the "command" is successfully executed, "the *appearance* [*Anschein*] has translated

¹⁷⁶ BGE 19. Translation modified.

itself into the feeling [*Gefühl*], as if there were a *necessity of effect* [*Nothwendigkeit der Wirkung*].”¹⁷⁷ One therefore ascribes the successful carrying out of the action to one’s “willing” (deciding or “commanding”) and misinterprets one’s willing (desiring) as “cause” and the event which follows in the temporal sequence as an “effect.”

Nietzsche here gives a phenomenology of the “doubling” of the sheer activity of desiring into “cause” and “effect” to which he referred in OGM 1:13. Nietzsche’s account is very complex – he suggests that the people believe that “will and action are somehow one [*Wille und Aktion irgendwie Eins seien*],”¹⁷⁸ even as his point is that the *distinction* between “willing” and “action” *itself* is a falsificatory “doubling.” The people make a false distinction between free “willing” and the “acting” which follows from it while also *identifying* that which shouldn’t have been distinguished in the first place (“the willing” and “the acting”),¹⁷⁹ insofar as they believe that willing (free volition) *suffices* for action. Nietzsche wants to suggest that the initial distinction is merely conventional, an “appearance” which has “translated itself” into the “feeling” that there is a “necessity of effect,” such that the subsequent (or simultaneous) identification is *itself* a “falsification” of the sheer experience of desiring itself. In short, Nietzsche wants to *reduce* “willing” to “desiring” through an analysis of the complex manifold of confusions involved in distinguishing between them, in “adding” the faculty of “the will” to the sheer activity of desiring.

Nietzsche writes, “He who wills [*der Wollende*]... ascribes the success, the carrying out of the willing, to the will itself, and thereby enjoys an increase of the feeling of power which

¹⁷⁷ BGE 19.

¹⁷⁸ BGE 19.

¹⁷⁹ Like the distinction made by “the people” between strength (which Nietzsche identifies with “desire” or “will”) and its expressions in OGM 1:13.

accompanies all success.”¹⁸⁰ Nietzsche proposes that the idea of free will is a misinterpretation of the activity of desiring itself. Yet he doesn’t suggest that this belief is somehow “hard-wired” into our brains. Rather, he gives a *psychological* account of this belief, *internal to the activity of desiring itself* – it is *motivated* by the desire to increase “the feeling of power” at which our desire “always already” aims (cf. BGE 13). This account thus dovetails perfectly with his depictions of the masters and the slaves in the *Genealogy*, each of whom (not just the masters) are driven by an “instinct” of “self-affirmation.”¹⁸¹ In ascribing to oneself a sovereign freedom over one’s desires (the faculty of free will), rather than simply *taking oneself* as an instinctually driven “animal” whose actions couldn’t have been otherwise than one’s instincts directed, one *increases* one’s “feeling of power.” Indeed, Nietzsche suggests that this self-misinterpretation comes about through *self-deception* – we “deceive ourselves” *by means of* “the synthetic concept I,” but the *end* at which we thereby aim is an “increase” of the feeling of power “which accompanies all success.”¹⁸²

BGE 19, then, completes the “chain of thought” begun in BGE 13. After the proper preparations (BGE 14-18), it supplies a reconstruction of the “foreground perspective” naively articulated in BGE 13 with the claim that “life itself is will to power,” that “a living thing wants above all to discharge its strength,” a reconstruction which shows how this perspective can be understood “economically,” without appealing to metaphysical principles such as “will” or “intellect,” but merely as a “complex” of the inter-related *activities* of desiring and interpreting, which together constitute sentient “activity” (*Wirken*) or “becoming” (*Werden*) as such. The

¹⁸⁰ BGE 19. Translation modified.

¹⁸¹ Cf. OGM 1:13.

¹⁸² BGE 19.

claim that “a living thing wants above all to discharge its strength” is *philosophically* “translated” into the claim that “a living thing wants above all to increase its feeling of power.” Nietzsche shows how the “dyadic logic” of desire and fulfillment can be understood as *separable* from the “dyadic logic” of strength and expression or potentiality and actuality and internal to the complex structure of desire itself. All desire *really* aims, not at an “objective” or “external” *telos* like “the Idea of the Good,” but at *self-overcoming*, an intensification of the pleasurable “feeling” which accompanies the successful achievement of greater mastery *over itself* and thereby a feeling of *partly* satisfying itself, the desire, thirst or lack (*eros*) which is never fully satisfiable because it constitutes the very being of human and animal life itself: “A philosopher should claim the right to subsume [*fassen*] desiring as such [or willing – *Wollen an sich*] within the sphere of morality [*unter den Gesichtskreis der Moral*] – morality understood namely as the doctrine [*Lehre*] of the relations of supremacy [*Herrschaft-Verhältnissen*] under which the phenomenon ‘life’ comes into being.”¹⁸³

But if the “dyads” cause-effect and potentiality-actuality are merely “doublings” of sheer “activity” or “becoming” itself, what about the dyad substrate-phenomenon (or substance-property)? Can what we call a “living thing” or “organic entity” be described as a “thing” or “entity” at all? It is no accident that in BGE 19 Nietzsche returns, in a way which seems strangely abrupt, to the question of mind-body dualism: “He who wills [*der Wollende*] adds the feelings of pleasure [*die Lustgefühle*] of his executive, successful instruments, the useful ‘under-wills’ or under-souls – indeed, our body [*Leib*] is only a social structure of many souls [*ein*

¹⁸³ BGE 19. Translation modified.

Gesellschaftsbau vieler Seelen] – to his feeling of pleasure as commander.”¹⁸⁴ Surprisingly, perhaps, Nietzsche suggests that he is a kind of idealist (recall his rejection of all radically dualistic ways of thinking in BGE 2 and his description of himself as “the strictest opponent of all materialism” in OGM 3:16) – the body is reducible to the soul, or rather to a “structure” composed of “many souls.” But his referring to “souls” and “under-souls” (*Unter-Seelen*) in the plural is no accident. Nor is the *identification* of “under-souls” with “under-wills,” which in context could also be taken as “under-desires” or “subordinate desires,” i.e. weaker desires subordinated to stronger ones. If Nietzsche is an “idealist,” he is an idealist for whom the fundamental *phenomenon* is that of *self-interpreting desire* – understood not as a “material” or “corporeal” state, but rather as an irreducibly complex form of temporally extended experience (becoming), which is always already in the process of interpreting itself – not Leibnizian “monads” or Berkelyean “spirits.”

Nietzsche claims that “we deceive ourselves” about the complexity of “the I will,” simplifying this phenomenon into a unitary “act of the will” carried out by a unitary subject, distinguishable both from the “sovereign” *faculty* of “the will” which it possesses and from the particular act it carries out or decision it executes, *by means of* “the synthetic concept I.”¹⁸⁵ But how does this self-deception occur and in what sense is the concept “I” an *inherently* “synthetic” concept? Presumably this concept is generated by the activity of interpreting – BGE 17 suggested that “thinking” consists primarily in an unconscious or pre-reflective “synthesizing” of given material, which BGE 19 suggests is “desiring” itself, rather than an “intellectual

¹⁸⁴ BGE 19. Translation modified.

¹⁸⁵ BGE 19.

intuition” of immediately given “wholes,” as “the people” assume, even as this synthesizing activity itself gives rise to the latter *illusion*. Accordingly, the philosopher *achieves* knowledge not through a special faculty of intuition, but through an analytical breakdown and reflective reconstruction of such “wholes,” which comprehends them as synthetic “constructions” rather than as “gifts” to which we are immediately receptive. In BGE 16, Nietzsche closely linked the Cartesian “I think” with Schopenhauer’s “I will,” suggesting that these are different formulations of the *same* “superstition.”¹⁸⁶ In BGE 19, Nietzsche virtually identifies “the synthetic concept I” with “the commanding thought” which is the second “ingredient” (thinking) involved in “all willing” – they both result in the *same* self-deception (*l’effet c’est moi*), thereby helping us understand why he regards “free will” as *the* fundamental error – it underlies the error of “the I” and thus of substance or “being” itself. Rather than possessing a direct intellectual intuition of “the I” as a naturally given whole, the activity of interpreting generates this concept and *synthesizes* conflicting desires and under-desires, grouping them together into a hierarchically organized whole, the *unity* of which is “constructed” rather than “discovered” – it is a simplification of a profounder and irreducible plurality.

But doesn’t desiring imply the existence of a subject who *has* desires, just as interpreting implies the existence of a subject *doing* the interpreting? Even if “potentiality as such,” and even “cause” and “effect,” might “experimentally” be thought of as “usurpatory” concepts, is it even a thinkable hypothesis to posit the sheer activity of desiring or interpreting (or desiring-interpreting taken together as the internally complex reality of *Affekt*, *Wirken* or *Werden*) without also positing a subject who *possesses* desires or *undertakes* (even if “instinctively”

¹⁸⁶ Cf. BGE 16.

rather than deliberately) the activity of interpretation? To say that “we deceive ourselves” into believing that we are causally efficacious unitary selves “by means of the synthetic concept I” almost amounts to the claim that *we each deceive ourselves into believing that we are distinct selves at all*. Does Nietzsche supply a satisfactory argument for this position? Indeed, is this a coherent position at all? Of course, the mere idea that illusion might possess reality *as* an illusion is not just a coherent idea, but an indispensable one – it is difficult to make sense of politics and history, and indeed much of our inner lives, without it. But Nietzsche pushes this thought so far that one wonders whether he has any philosophical ground left to stand on. As Stanley Rosen argues,¹⁸⁷ if Nietzsche wants to show that the world of common sense is a kind of “coherent illusion,” he must give an account of how it coheres *as* an illusion (the reality of the illusion itself) that doesn’t beg the question, that doesn’t take for granted the reality of the phenomena constitutive of this “world” *as* they are interpreted from the perspective internal to this world, “the world in which we believe we live.” This world is the object of Nietzsche’s very peculiar form of reductionistic analysis of ordinary experience, which is not materialistic but idealistic, albeit in a very peculiar, neo-Heraclitean way.

I have tried to show that Nietzsche isn’t merely aware of this problem – he also *attempts* to solve it, in a surprisingly careful and methodical fashion. Presumably Nietzsche would respond to criticisms of the kind I have briefly adumbrated by emphasizing that although “fundamental concepts” such as “thing” and “cause” are errors which simplify the phenomenon of becoming, such concepts do not *wholly* falsify the phenomena they purport to capture –

¹⁸⁷ Rosen, “Poetic Reason in Nietzsche,” 214.

rather, they enable a qualified grasp of such phenomena *as they are*, not just for the philosopher, but even for “the people” (i.e. empirical knowledge).

My concerns here are primarily interpretive, so I will not pursue such questions further. I restrict myself to the following suggestion. If my critical remarks are on the right track, this might suggest three possible responses to Nietzsche’s enterprise. One might turn to another thinker who accepts the “interpretivity thesis,” such as Kant or Hegel, but who tries to show that it can “save” far more of the “appearances” than Nietzsche would allow. Or one might regard Nietzsche’s enterprise as a kind of unintentional *reductio* of the “interpretivity thesis” itself and (as secular “Platonists” such as Stanley Rosen and religious “Platonists” such as Josef Pieper have proposed) turn back to the ancient Platonic-Aristotelian (and medieval scholastic) thesis that intuitive (receptive) and discursive (synthesizing-analyzing) thought (*noesis* vs. *dianoia* or *intellectus* vs. *ratio*) are inseparable aspects of human reason itself.¹⁸⁸ Or one might turn the way of Heidegger and explore the possibility that the entire debate as it is framed in terms of the ancients and the moderns, “noetics” and “dianoetics,” is a misguided result of our historical fate, which consists in a falling-away from a more primordial experience of *what it means “to be”* – not “being” or *that which is (to on or das Seiende)*, but *Sein* itself.¹⁸⁹

I want to conclude this section with some brief suggestions about how OGM 1:13 “clarifies” why psychology is first philosophy for Nietzsche – more precisely, why psychology *replaces* the three traditional candidates of cosmology (BGE 20), theology (BGE 21) and ontology (BGE 22), each of which are meant to supply “knowledge of the whole.” Nietzsche

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Stanley Rosen, “Logic and Dialectic,” in *The Ancients and the Moderns*, 118-159 and Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Faber & Faber, 1952).

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Oliva Blanchette, “Are There Two Questions of Being?”, *Review of Metaphysics* 45, no. 2 (1991): 259-287.

intimates that while the cosmological, theological and ontological *questions* or *problems* (concerning the nature of the cosmos, God and being as such) must be addressed by the philosopher – indeed, they are implicit in the problem of the soul itself – they cannot be *answered*, even in the qualified sense in which the question of the nature of the soul can be answered. Rather, one can at best achieve a certain negative and deflationary understanding of the *problems* themselves.

To begin with the central problem, the theological problem, Nietzsche's claim that "there is no 'being' behind the doing, the acting, the becoming [*es giebt kein „Sein“ hinter dem Thun, Wirken, Werden*]; 'the doer' is merely poetically added-on to the doing," isn't merely a claim about human subjectivity, but *also* (as the ostentatiously metaphysical declaration that there is no *Sein* behind *Werden* suggests) a claim about the cosmos itself. Nietzsche implies – there is no causally efficacious "free" creator God (the doer) "behind" Creation (the deed), no "intransitory Being" behind "this transitory world,"¹⁹⁰ out of which the latter emerged and upon which it remains causally dependent for its enduring existence. If my suggestion is correct, it supports my argument in the previous chapter that Nietzsche's critique of theology is closely related to his critique of the very idea of "the free subject." If "the doing" doesn't require a self-identical, causally efficacious "free doer," then endlessly changing nature doesn't require an eternally self-identical "free creator."

But what about the cosmological problem itself? Even if the exclusion of the creator God means that the cosmos cannot be understood as the "deed" of a benevolent creator, which has certain *negative* implications for how we understand the cosmos and its ingredients (the

¹⁹⁰ Cf. BGE 2.

absence of “particular providence,” for example, or the idea that human beings are “created in the image of God” or subject to “divine commands”), it doesn’t give us much if any positive knowledge about the cosmos. While it removes one possible (causal) explanation for how “life” emerged out of (inanimate) “nature,” to recall the suggestive but obscure distinction to which Nietzsche sometimes appeals in *BGE*,¹⁹¹ by itself Nietzsche’s denial of the creator God tells us virtually nothing about how to understand the distinction itself. Nietzsche’s phenomenology of activity or becoming itself is meant to show how human beings can be understood as continuous with sentient life – they don’t possess metaphysical “faculties” (free will or intellect) which involve a “cardinal difference” with other animals and from which one might be led to infer the existence of a God who endowed us with them. Even the world of animal experience is a kind of instinctive “construction”; the difference between humans and other animals consists not in the *absence* of “interpretation” in the desiderative activity of animals, but rather in the fact that such activity only becomes (relatively) *self-conscious* in human life.¹⁹² On the other hand, what about non-sentient life, such as plant life? Or inanimate materials? While Nietzsche sometimes argues (the *locus classicus* is *BGE* 36) that they too must be understood “as a more primitive form of the world of affects,” “as a *pre-form* of life,”¹⁹³ we have already seen many reasons to suspect that he meant such arguments merely as “exoteric teachings” or “thought-experiments.”

I suggest that Nietzsche’s distinction between “nature” and “life” points to the *limits* of our knowledge. The philosopher can neither show how nature and life can be brought together as an intelligible whole nor render intelligible how life “emerged” temporally out of inanimate

¹⁹¹ “Nature” is *explicitly* contrasted or juxtaposed with “life” in *BGE* 9 and 49.

¹⁹² For example, cf. *GS* 127, 354 and *OGM* 2:12.

¹⁹³ *BGE* 36.

nature. The dizzyingly unintelligible world-picture of “the eternal return,” which simultaneously attracts and repels the mind which tries to grasp it, makes this point implicitly. While the concept of “nature” can do a lot of interpretive work (primarily as a concept of categorization and distinction) for the philosopher or scientist in rendering intelligible “the world of affect” *from within* (e.g. in comprehending the difference between humans and animals, or the differences among human types, human passions, etc.), when baldly contrasted with “life,” the concept of “nature” serves primarily to remind us of the *problem* of the whole which the philosopher must face but which he cannot resolve. Nietzsche is obviously not a skeptic about “other minds” in the Cartesian sense; he seems to assume, much like Heidegger but without addressing the issue thematically,¹⁹⁴ that we share our world with other sentient beings and that any attempt to cast this primordial inter-relatedness into doubt inevitably begs the question – even though Nietzsche, unlike Heidegger, would probably describe this as a kind of inexplicable “natural fact.” However, in an important respect, Nietzsche is more Cartesian (or even Berkelyean) than Heidegger, in that he identifies this shared world with the *phenomenal* “world” of desire and affect (“doing, acting, becoming,” as he puts it in OGM 1:13) – we cannot say anything positive about “nature” insofar as it is distinguishable from *this* world, even if what we *do* know about “becoming” allows us to *exclude* certain postulates, such as the creator God. The question for the critical reader is whether Nietzsche’s distinction between “nature” and

¹⁹⁴ For Heidegger, “being-with” is equiprimordial with “being-in-the-world”: “The world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*].” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 155. Concerning the external world, Heidegger writes, “The ‘scandal of philosophy’ is not that this proof [of an external world] has yet to be given, but that *such proofs are expected and attempted again and again.*” (249)

“life” amounts to a form of “metaphysical” dualism, where “nature” functions in Nietzsche’s thinking in a manner analogous to Kant’s “thing-in-itself.”

But what about the ontological question? Does Nietzsche have a “general ontology,” an answer to the question of “the nature of being as such,” what *everything that is* shares merely by virtue of the fact *that it is*? Here we must be cautious and tread a middle path. On the one hand, Deleuze’s claim that Nietzsche’s fundamental ontological thought is “the only being is the being of becoming as such” is a plausible interpretation of his claim in OGM 1:13 that “there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, the acting, the becoming.”¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, Stanley Rosen’s claim that for Nietzsche *all* “ontology” amounts to a kind of “nonsense” derives support from the scare quotes in which he puts the word “being” (*Sein*).¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, it derives support from Nietzsche’s distinction between “nature” and “life.” For if this distinction indicates the qualified sense in which Nietzsche remains a kind of Kantian about the limits of our knowledge, must we not draw the conclusion that “general ontology” is impossible, because it assumes that “nature” is simply “given” in a “naively realist” fashion which both Kant and Nietzsche reject? Wouldn’t any attempt to capture the nature of being *as such* under “the proud name of ontology” involve what Nietzsche calls the “ridiculous immodesty” of assuming that the human perspective is the *only* perspective in the cosmos¹⁹⁷?

Nietzsche addresses this question in GS 374, “Our New Infinite.” There he claims that it is futile to inquire how far “the perspectival character of existence [*der perspektivische Charakter des Daseins*] extends,” whether there is such a thing as “existence without

¹⁹⁵ OGM 1:13.

¹⁹⁶ Stanley Rosen, “Nietzsche’s Revolution,” in *The Ancients and the Moderns*, 199.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. GS 374 with Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A247/B303.

interpretation” (*Dasein ohne Auslegung*), or whether “all existence is not essentially an interpreting existence” (*nicht alles Dasein essentiell ein auslegendes Dasein ist*).¹⁹⁸ Such an enterprise would be pointless, because “the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself under its perspectival forms and *only* under them.”¹⁹⁹ Richard Velkley observes that Nietzsche’s “advice” here seems “contradictory”: “Let us not bother with thinking about non-human perspectives, but all the same let us not suppose that human perspectives are the only possible ones.”²⁰⁰ Velkley suggests that this tension might be, if not resolved, at least made less stark by taking up Nietzsche’s suggestion that “the human is typically not just to itself, in that its linguistic-conscious interpretations are usually shallow, reflecting the herd’s basic requirements. Within itself the human has a wealth of hidden thought and perception, the vast pre-conscious realm that surrounds the tiny island of consciousness. Efforts of critical self-reflection can disclose more of that realm but still only in a human way.”²⁰¹ Nonetheless, Nietzsche’s formulation “the perspectival forms of the human intellect” – and the qualification “still only in a human way” – suggests that *the human perspective as such* cuts across the distinction between “the philosopher” and “the herd.” The most the philosopher can do is render “the vast pre-conscious realm” *relatively* more self-conscious *from within the human perspective itself*, thereby showing the questionable or shallow character of the self-interpretations of “the herd,” as Nietzsche takes himself to have done in BGE 17-19. Nonetheless, the philosopher’s openness to the whole compels him to *ask* the question of being as such, and even to propose hypothetical answers

¹⁹⁸ GS 374.

¹⁹⁹ GS 374.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Richard Velkley, “The Chains of the Free Spirit: Seven Aphorisms on Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*, Book 5” (unpublished lecture, 2019), typescript, 5.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

(e.g. “to be is to be will to power”), even as he recognizes (cf. BGE 22) that all such answers involve a projection of one’s desires onto the blank canvas of “the infinite” and “the unknown.” This is the explanation for Nietzsche’s “contradictory advice.”

However, Deleuze’s attempt to develop, on the basis of Nietzsche’s scattered proclamations, a general ontology according to which “to be is to become” and “becoming itself” is grasped as a “univocity of differences” is not without value in understanding Nietzsche’s intentions. Although I have been emphasizing the exoteric character of BGE 36, it is surely not “merely exoteric” – Nietzsche is serious that the philosopher *ought* to pursue the “experiment” of *trying* to understand how “life” could emerge out of “nature” while avoiding appeal to “metaphysical” dualisms. Even as Deleuze is inattentive to Nietzsche’s ironic humor and subtle art of writing, he brings out Nietzsche’s concern with cosmological and ontological *problems* as a crucial dimension of the philosophical life. Nonetheless, Velkley’s suggestion captures Nietzsche’s intentions better. Deleuze’s approach is more dogmatic than Nietzsche’s (I don’t mean this in a pejorative sense, merely in a technical one – he entirely lacks Nietzsche’s Socratic concern with finding a middle way between dogmatism and skepticism), because he regards the fundamental ontological problem as resolvable, while Nietzsche does not. Most importantly, Deleuze’s approach makes nonsense of Nietzsche’s claim that *psychology* is first philosophy – not cosmology, not theology, and not ontology, not even “the ontology of becoming as such.”

§3. Nietzsche’s Ascent to the Surface in BGE 24-29

After the theoretical depths plumbed in BGE 13-22, Nietzsche returns to the surface in BGE 24-29 – one might say, he comes up for air. In between, one finds the important transitional aphorism 23, which links Nietzsche’s physio-psychology with his Socratic psychology, his account of the philosopher or “free spirit” as the man who wanders among “the herd,” challenging and provoking them, while also learning to conceal himself from them, to preserve his inner detachment and yet, in his own way, to continue learning from them, even as *they* are generally unable to learn what *he* has to teach. BGE 23 expresses the vertiginous sense of liberation experienced by the young philosopher who first becomes aware, in a vivid and even frightening fashion, that the results of his inquiries, and indeed the nature of philosophizing itself, when grasped in their most unvarnished form, are in irreconcilable tension with the shared assumptions of “the herd,” which enable them to live together in peace. But the sequence of aphorisms 24-29 articulate in a highly compact (and comical) way the most important preliminary lessons the philosopher must learn from his “return to the surface” about what it really means to lead a philosophical life.

BGE 24 begins: “O *sancta simplicitas!* In what strange simplification and falsification the human being lives! One can never cease marveling once one has acquired eyes for this marvel! How we have made everything around us clear and free and easy and simple! How we have known how to give our senses a passport to everything superficial [*einen Freipass für alles Oberflächliche*], our thinking a divine desire for wanton leaps and mistaken inferences! How from the beginning [*von Anfang an*] we have contrived to retain our ignorance in order to enjoy

a scarcely comprehensible freedom, harmlessness [*Unbedenklichkeit*], lack of caution, heartiness and cheerfulness of life [*Heiterkeit des Lebens*] – in order to enjoy life!”²⁰²

As we have come to expect from Nietzsche, this passage is far more carefully constructed than its boisterous, carefree tone suggests, while also being darkly humorous. “O holy simplicity!” With this exclamation, Nietzsche identifies himself with the Czech heretic or “free thinker” Jan Hus *at the particular moment* when he was firmly bound at the stake, unable to move freely, and burning to death. Hus was supposed to have cried these words out as a pious old woman added a bundle of wood to the fire to keep it burning. Lest there be any doubt that Nietzsche knew of this story or meant to allude to it here (the phrase “holy simplicity” took on a life of its own, to refer to any foolish thing done by a simple person in the belief that they are acting righteously), I cite an aphorism from 1878: “*Sancta simplicitas of virtue*. – Every virtue has its privileges; for example, that of supplying to the pyre of a condemned person its own little bundle of wood.”²⁰³ It is crucial that Jan Hus (Nietzsche), “the free mind,” *knows that he is unable to move freely*, while the old woman, the simple pious person, “the bound mind,” *moves freely* and surely acts in the belief that she can.

Nietzsche implies, then, that the position of the “The Free Mind” (the title of the second chapter) or the true philosopher in relation to “the herd” or “the crowd,” the “bound minds,” is *analogous* to that of Jan Hus at the stake, unable to *move* “freely,” but freely *observing* those around him, at whose hands he suffers, and commenting humorously on the “strange simplification and falsification” in which the average human being, the simple “believer,” lives.

²⁰² BGE 24. Translation modified.

²⁰³ HATH 67.

The image of the philosopher bound at the stake in BGE 24 contrasts starkly with the image of the philosopher on the verge of undertaking a risky and exciting sea journey, whose destination remains unknown, in BGE 23. Does Nietzsche mischievously imply that this is where the journey will end, with the philosopher condemned and publically executed by “the vulgar”? Yet, while the register of BGE 23 is full of gravitas, emphasizing danger and the need for heroism and sacrifice, BGE 24 is written in a contrastingly light-hearted tone, emphasizing the carefree enjoyment “we” take in life, the “wanton leaps” made by “our senses,” a cheerful tone which becomes darkly comic when the implications of the allusion to Jan Hus are brought to the surface.

The “holy simplicity” of the non-philosopher consists in their lack of awareness of the fact that “the world in which we believe [*glauben*] we live,” as Nietzsche puts it in BGE 34 (one might say, the world in which we have *faith* that we live) is “from the beginning” a “falsification.”²⁰⁴ Nietzsche appeals implicitly to a distinction between an apparent (falsified) and a real (unfalsified) world – the contrast between what he called in the first chapter our foreground perspective and what he called real life. In “real life,” there are no free and unfree wills, just stronger and weaker desires.²⁰⁵ But isn’t Nietzsche famous for refusing any contrast between an “apparent” and a “real world,” however it might be understood, as exemplifying the “dualistic” way of thinking he wants to overcome? “In abolishing the true world, we have also abolished the apparent one!”²⁰⁶ However, as with all of Nietzsche’s notoriously dramatic declarations (“God is dead,” “life itself is will to power,” and so forth), one must be very careful

²⁰⁴ BGE 34. Note the reference to “constant falsification of the world” in BGE 4.

²⁰⁵ BGE 21.

²⁰⁶ TI How the “True World” Finally Became a Fable. Translation modified.

with how one takes them. As a rule of thumb, one can assume that the first impression they produce is intentionally misleading. Nietzsche surely wants to abolish the contrast between the apparent and the real world if this contrast implies that the world of affect and desire is somehow “less real” and ontologically or causally derivative from a “higher” world “behind the phenomena,” not directly accessible to us, or accessible only through, e.g., revelation, mystical experience, “moral sense,” or *a priori* metaphysical reasoning. BGE 2 makes this perfectly clear. However, as we have already seen, a different *kind* of contrast between an “apparent world” and a “real world,” a contrast *internal* to the phenomenal world itself, is indispensable for his conception of philosophizing.

The world in which we believe we live, shot through with “fundamental illusions” such as “free will,” and the world in which we actually live, are the *same* world, viewed from two different perspectives – the commonsensical and the philosophical. The switch from “one” (*man*) to “we” (*wir*) indicates the switch from one perspective to the other: “In what strange simplification and falsification the human being lives! *One* can never cease marveling once one has acquired eyes for this marvel! How *we* have made everything around us clear and free and easy and simple!”²⁰⁷ The philosopher possesses a double-consciousness equidistant from the Platonic image of the philosopher as achieving insight into a transcendent sphere of reality and the Aristotelian image of the philosopher as merely rendering common sense reflectively explicit. The distinction between “our senses” (in the plural) and “our thinking” (in the singular) refers back to Nietzsche’s conception of human experience as self-misinterpreting desire, a “complex” of feeling and thought, a *plurality* of “feelings” and a *single* “commanding thought,”

²⁰⁷ BGE 24. Emphasis added.

which “from the beginning” we habitually misinterpret as “the sovereign and independent subject exercising its capacity of free will.”²⁰⁸ In this aphorism, Nietzsche again indicates that philosophical “wakefulness” consists in becoming reflexively aware of the manner in which our experience is constituted by these “fundamental errors” without ceasing to be human and thus subject to them.

But Nietzsche’s intentions are no longer the same. In BGE 13-22, especially in aphorism BGE 19, Nietzsche wanted to show how such a conception of “the philosopher” could be rendered epistemologically coherent. But now he is concerned with drawing out the implications of such “wakefulness” for the philosopher’s way of life – his inner life and his social or political life, which the allusion to Jan Hus suggests are inseparable even as they involve inevitable tensions. Nietzsche is now concerned with the effect which *insight* into the “falsifications” to which we subject ourselves “from the beginning” has on our experience of the world and on our relationships with others.

Significantly, BGE 24 (unlike 23 or 25) contains no exhortation whatsoever, merely a kind of phenomenology. Nietzsche doesn’t say, “Let’s learn to enjoy life!” Rather, he says that human beings in general (“we”) have always already (“from the beginning”) “falsified” their experience *in order to* be able to enjoy life. Again, as in BGE 19, he suggests a psychological, not a neurophysiological, explanation for our habitual self-misinterpretation. Gradually, the notion of “the will to power,” introduced in aphorisms 9 and 12, has come to be mean the desire for an increase in the pleasurable feeling of power which accompanies all action, or even just

²⁰⁸ BGE 19.

the desire to enjoy life, which may come down to the same thing, depending on how exactly “enjoyment of life” is understood.

What initially appeared as a bizarre, univocal reduction of all human desire to a desire for domination and control, accompanied by an even more bizarre suggestion that such a desire is operative throughout the physical world, has gradually come to appear as Nietzsche’s “exoteric” way of formulating the far more plausible, albeit initially far more indeterminate, Epicurean or Aristotelian thought that all human beings desire happiness or pleasure. BGE 24 also contains Nietzsche’s version of the Aristotelian thought that philosophy begins in wonder: “One can never cease marveling [*man kann sich nicht zu Ende wundern*] once one has acquired eyes for this marvel [*dies Wunder*]!”²⁰⁹ Nietzsche would surely also agree with Aristotle that very few human beings can be expected to have this experience of wonder, to “acquire eyes for this marvel.” They simply go about their merry (or not so merry) way, like the pious old woman adding her bundle of wood to the pyre.

Of course, Aristotle also claimed that all human beings desire knowledge, even if very few become philosophers. Nietzsche by contrast seems to claim that all human beings desire ignorance and illusion, precisely because their *instincts* lead them to recognize (unconsciously) that they are unable to “enjoy life” without them. On the other hand, when Nietzsche then goes on to claim that “the will to knowledge” emerges out of “the will to ignorance,” not as its antithesis but rather as its “refinement” or “perfection,” he doesn’t explicitly *restrict* “the will to knowledge” to the philosopher, to the rare few who have “acquired eyes for this marvel” (we have already seen, e.g. in BGE 10, how Nietzsche regards the will to knowledge as operative in

²⁰⁹ BGE 24.

authentic even if partial and abortive ways in non-philosophers). Conversely, Aristotle surely recognized the need for illusion, or at least rhetoric and persuasion, in political life. Perhaps the difference between Nietzsche and Aristotle on *this* question, at least, is more one of emphasis than substantive disagreement.

Furthermore, Nietzsche doesn't draw an overly simplistic contrast between the philosophers, who need knowledge and *nothing else* "to enjoy life," and "the herd," who need illusion and *nothing else* "to enjoy life" in their own, rather different way. Rather, "the human being" (whoever he or she might be) "cannot live" without a complex, dialectical interplay of knowledge and illusion. This applies to "the philosopher" as well as to "the herd" – the important question concerns the difference between the *forms* this interplay takes in the philosophical and in other ways of life, understood not as "fixed types" (however immense the difference in "gradation" between, say, someone like Plato and someone like Carlyle) but as "ideal types," even as certain uniquely "philosophical states" (as he calls them in BGE 213) produced by philosophical inquiry are inaccessible to most of us. "Even if the inveterate Tartuffery of morals, which now belongs to our unconquerable 'flesh and blood,' twists the words even of those of us who know [*uns Wissenden*] – here and there we grasp this and laugh at how precisely even the best science [*wie gerade noch die beste Wissenschaft*] seeks most to keep us in this *simplified*, through-and-through artificial, suitably constructed [*gedichteten*] and suitably falsified world – how it willingly-unwillingly [*unfreiwillig-freiwillig*] loves error, because, being alive – it loves life!"²¹⁰ The formula "those of us who know" finally brings the "one" who marvels at the falsification in which we live (the philosopher) together with the "we"

²¹⁰ BGE 24. Translation modified.

who unreflectively simplify their experience (the herd), qualifying without negating the difference between them.

Nietzsche suggests, then, that the philosophical life will involve neither a willful *creatio ex nihilo* of “life-affirming illusions” nor a decision to believe in propositions one knows in advance are false but rather a knowing, ironic acquiescence in the impossibility (contra the rhetoric of BGE 23) of simply “sailing right over” the illusions of popular morality, combined with a critical distance from those illusions and the private, largely incommunicable “enjoyment” which accompanies this complex union (“marriage”) of acquiescence in “inconquerable” illusions (“darkness”) with critical awareness of their illusory character (“light”).²¹¹

One final point about BGE 24. Nietzsche’s use of Jan Hus bound at the stake, commenting humorously on the foolish actions of the simple believers around him, as an image for the philosopher’s place in human society supports my earlier contention that “free will” is in a sense *the* fundamental illusion in Nietzsche’s eyes. Although Nietzsche is not a causal determinist, and his position on the problem of determinism is very difficult to articulate and resistant to any kind of labeling (because the very concept of causality is so deeply bound up in our speech and thought, as Nietzsche himself would emphasize), nevertheless, if we need a label for his position, it seems to me less misleading to describe him as a highly unusual kind of determinist, than as a “compatibilist.” One might say that, as a philosophical thesis, determinism has two basic elements – the postulates of *causality* (causal power) and *necessity* (cause follows necessarily from effect, there is no such thing as an action or event that “could have been

²¹¹ Cf. BGE From High Mountains: Aftersong.

otherwise”). What is unusual about Nietzsche is that he tries to reject the former element (causality) and preserve the latter (inexorable necessity in the temporal unfolding of events), while retaining the concept of “freedom” as a *purely psychological* (not ontological) concept, which tends to (but not does not always) refer to freedom of mind, i.e. freedom from illusion or convention.

Numerous citations throughout his corpus, especially from *Human, All-Too-Human* and *Daybreak*, support the ascription of such a view to Nietzsche. I will just cite two passages from the earlier book, which make his point in a helpfully forceful and vivid way. In HATH 107, Nietzsche writes, “The complete irresponsibility of a human being for his behavior and his nature [*sein Handeln und sein Wesen*] is the bitterest drop that the knower [*der Erkennende*] must swallow... Just as he loves but does not praise a good work of art because it cannot help being what it is, just as he stands before a plant, so he must stand before the actions of human beings, before his own actions. He can admire the strength, beauty and fullness of them, but he can find no merits [*Verdienste*] therein: the chemical process and the strife of elements, the agony of the sick person who thirsts for recovery, are as little merits [*sind ebensowenig Verdienste*] as those struggles of the soul and states of distress in which we are torn this way and that by various motives until we finally decide on the most powerful one.”²¹² In the preceding aphorism, Nietzsche writes, “We would certainly be able to calculate every individual action [*Handlung*] in advance if we were omniscient, likewise every step forward in knowledge, every error, every act of malice. The agent himself is admittedly stuck in the illusion of willfulness [*Willkür*]; if at some moment the wheel of the world were to stand still, and an omniscient,

²¹² HATH 107. Translation modified.

calculating understanding were to make use of this pause, it could tell the future of every creature, on into the most distant times, and describe every track on which that wheel had yet to roll. The agent's delusion about himself, the supposition of free will [*die Annahme des freien Willens*], is itself part of this still-to-be-calculated mechanism."²¹³

Nietzsche implies that from a philosophical perspective, human life has an unavoidably *farcical* character – we all rush around trying to get things done, concerned about our success or failure, when nothing we do really makes any difference to the outcome, which is fixed “in advance,” not by mysterious or divinely ordained “fate” or “destiny,” but by the inexorable movement of temporality or becoming itself. Like Jan Hus, the philosopher knows that he “cannot move,” and that he is slowly and inexorably dying, and he cannot help but suffer from this knowledge. But he also learns to take an ironic and even “cheerful” pleasure from *contemplating* the foolishness and self-delusion of those around him, who are in a profound sense no less “bound in place” than he is, but are wholly unaware of this fact, or continually forget it: “O holy simplicity!”

Bernard Williams objects to such a reading of Nietzsche because it attributes to him the “uninviting” idea that “we never really do anything.”²¹⁴ To this my response is twofold. First, Nietzsche *emphasizes* that this idea is “uninviting” – indeed, it is “the bitterest drop that the knower must swallow.”²¹⁵ For Nietzsche, that an idea is “uninviting” is not a reason to reject it, but to be suspicious of our motivations in *wanting* to reject it. Secondly, everything depends on what we mean by “do.” In support of Williams, Pippin helpfully points out that, in OGM 2:12,

²¹³ HATH 106. Translation modified.

²¹⁴ Williams, “Nietzsche’s Minimalist Moral Psychology,” 241.

²¹⁵ HATH 107. Translation modified.

Nietzsche proposes *Aktivität* as his most “fundamental concept.”²¹⁶ But if my line of interpretation is correct, by “activity” Nietzsche means primarily the activities of *desiring* or *interpreting*, or both activities taken as a complex unity. There remains an important sense in which “we never really do anything” – we never really causally effect anything. As Nietzsche puts it in a passage which Williams himself cites: “*You are being done [du wirst getan]* in every moment. Mankind has at all times mistaken the passive for the active: it is their constant grammatical mistake.”²¹⁷ I agree with Williams and Pippin that there are good reasons to be *philosophically* suspicious of such a radically counter-intuitive position (and to ask – has Nietzsche really done enough to justify it?), but there is a great deal of textual support to ascribe it to him.

This brings us to the notoriously tricky interpretive question of how to reconcile Nietzsche’s “determinism” (such as it is) or (perhaps better) “necessitarianism” with his exhortatory rhetoric.²¹⁸ However, it seems to me that there is no formal incoherence here; presumably, Nietzsche would regard exhortatory or prescriptive language, whether moralistic or merely prudential, as an *unavoidable* feature of human speech, as “itself part of this still-to-be-calculated” temporal flux, even as the philosopher possesses a reflexive detachment on the human perspective *from within* the human perspective, which alters the character of his rhetoric and gives it an inevitably ironic, reflexive tinge, even when he goes about his daily life, but especially when he writes his books. Furthermore, it suggests that Nietzsche’s exhortatory

²¹⁶ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 75. Cf. OGM 1:12.

²¹⁷ D 120.

²¹⁸ The problem is formulated clearly in Brian Leiter, “The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche,” in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche’s Educator*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 217-257.

speech must be “philosophically translated,” as it were, by the careful reader into a phenomenology of the inner lives of the philosopher and those around him – or, as Nietzsche puts it, into “a morphology of the will to power.”²¹⁹

It is surely no accident that Nietzsche carefully avoids such rhetoric in the very aphorism (BGE 24) in which he makes the “Jan Hus” point, while the directly preceding and succeeding aphorisms are among his most exhortatory or prescriptive, albeit in very different ways. After the pure phenomenology of BGE 24, Nietzsche returns to an exhortatory register in BGE 25. But while his exhortation to “sail over morality” in BGE 23 made use of a *heroic*, “noble” and indeed (ironically) almost moralistic pathos (“what do *we* matter!”²²⁰ – let’s destroy morality even if we have to destroy ourselves in the process!), his exhortations in BGE 25 have a *prudential* or “base” character, replete with ironic notes of deflationary caution (don’t get too worked up about “the truth”!) and advice about self-preservation (there’s no need to be a martyr!) and the preservation of one’s cheerfulness and serenity (don’t worry if you can’t persuade others of “the truth” – after all, what did you expect?).

Jan Hus was a martyr to his cause – he could easily have saved his life, but he stubbornly *refused* to recant his teachings. In this sense, he was a voluntary martyr, like Giordano Bruno. While the image of Jan Hus *at the particular moment* when he was bound at the stake and commenting sardonically on the actions of the “simple believers” around him serves Nietzsche’s purposes in BGE 24 very well, the choice of a *voluntary* martyr as an image for the philosopher also raises the question: Does the real philosopher “choose” to be a martyr, like a religious

²¹⁹ BGE 23.

²²⁰ BGE 23. Translation modified.

heretic who refuses to recant? Or does the philosopher have an equally sardonic perspective on the “holy simplicity” of voluntary martyrs such as Jan Hus and Giordano Bruno, whose “heresies” Nietzsche would regard as expressing “relative” freedom of mind (relative to the orthodoxy of the epoch), not truly philosophical thinking, just as Socrates regarded Euthyphro as a kind of independent-minded fanatic?

Nietzsche addresses this question in BGE 25, which begins: “After such a joyful opening [*fröhlichen Eingang*], a serious word wouldn’t like to go unheard: it is directed towards those who are most serious [*es wendet sich an die Ernstesten*]. Take care, you philosophers and friends of knowledge, and beware of martyrdom! Of suffering ‘for the truth’s sake’! ... You knights of the most sorrowful countenance, dear corner-loiterers [*Eckensteher*] and cobweb-spinners of the intellect! After all, you know well enough that nothing should rest on [*nichts daran liegen darf*] whether *you* of all people are proven right; you know that no philosopher so far has been proven right [*bisher noch kein Philosoph recht behalten hat*]; and that there might be a more praiseworthy truthfulness in every little question mark that you place behind your favorite words and doctrines [*Liebwort und Lieblingslehren*] (and occasionally behind yourselves) than in all solemn gestures and trump-cards [*Trümpfen*] before accusers and law courts. Rather, go away! Flee into concealment! And have your masks and refinement [*Feinheit*], that you may be mistaken for what you are not! Or feared a little!”²²¹

There is much to be said about this important aphorism, almost every nuance of which contains thoughts which the “slow reader” must bring to the surface and make explicit. I will restrict myself to some of the most salient, which bring out its place in the sequence 24-29. It is

²²¹ BGE 25. Translation modified.

important that Nietzsche describes philosophers as “those who are most serious,” without thereby retracting his suggestion in the preceding aphorism that they are *also* those who are most cheerful, that first philosophy is “the joyful science.” Much like Plato, Nietzsche regards philosophy itself as the highest form of the combination of seriousness and play. Nonetheless, as he indicated obliquely in BGE 24, and will emphasize again in BGE 29, philosophy brings with it unique forms of suffering (“bitter drops” of knowledge), alienation from others and even from oneself, even as it also constitutes the highest form of “cheerfulness.” Thus in GS 183, Nietzsche refers to “the sadness of the deepest happiness” (*die Traurigkeit des tiefsten Glückes*), the sadness which unavoidably *accompanies* such happiness.²²² Nietzsche does not deny this. But he guards the reader against temptations which accompany the philosophical impulse but may ultimately undermine it – including inner disturbances, such as seething personal rancor against one’s enemies, as well as external persecutions, from relatively mild varieties such as social ostracism all the way to crucifixion or *auto-da-fé*: “Danger, slander, expulsion and still rougher consequences of enmity.”²²³

Nietzsche already touched on this question in BGE 5, where he used the example of Spinoza to intimate that “real philosophers” always make use of “masks and refinement,” to conceal themselves and “strike terror” into their audience (here, he speaks more urbanely of being “feared a little”), in order to protect themselves from persecution. As I noted in my analysis of BGE 5, Nietzsche thereby provoked the question: Why is esotericism necessary *now*, when philosophers are no longer “imprisoned or exiled,” and “not even our books will be

²²² GS 183.

²²³ BGE 25. Translation modified.

banned”²²⁴? (I note in passing that freedom of speech is never absolute, that even in Nietzsche’s own time it was largely restricted to the Western world, and that Nietzsche himself appears to have predicted and in some respects even rhetorically encouraged, in a reckless way, the rise of late modern totalitarian orthodoxies such as fascism and communism.) In BGE 25, Nietzsche as it were “looks under the philosopher’s mask” and links the question of esotericism in the cruder sense of protective self-concealment (“have your masks and refinement, that you may be mistaken for what you are not!”) with the deeper questions of the *inner life* of the philosopher and how he conducts himself generally in relation to others.

The simplest point that Nietzsche wants to make is that although the philosopher begins his journey moved *in part* by what he takes to be the “noble” impulse that he has a duty to discover the truth and preach it to others upon discovery, as he begins to learn that the “results” of philosophical inquiry undermine the very existence of categorical “duty” (whether understood aristocratically or democratically) as the “noble man” or the “moral man” want to understand this notion, a crucial dimension of “incorporating” (*einverleiben*) knowledge involves recognizing both that one has no duty to preach “the truth,” as though one were a proselytizer with a mission to convert the nations, and that the “the herd” are in any case incapable of grasping “the truth,” which is inherently resistant to doctrinal formulation, as the philosopher understands it. As he says in BGE 40, even if a “profound intellect” refuses to wear a “mask,” he will find that one has been “growing constantly” around him, due to the inevitably “superficial” and distorted form in which “the herd” grasps the thoughts he tries earnestly to communicate (perhaps Nietzsche has in mind experiences from his own youth, or perhaps he

²²⁴ GS 379.

thinks of the incautious conduct which resulted in the young and still immature Spinoza being publically excommunicated by his synagogue and which led to an attempt on his life, an incident to which Nietzsche clearly alluded in BGE 5).²²⁵ Yet the philosopher cannot help but continue to *feel* this impulse – to believe that his exceptional thirst for knowledge is somehow dormant in every human being, waiting to be actualized by the right teacher. In GS 2, Nietzsche describes this feeling as “my type of injustice.”²²⁶

However, the philosopher must resist this impulse, for more than one reason. If he regards successful persuasion of those who fail to understand him, conversion of “the herd” to philosophy, as indispensable to his way of life, the inevitable failure of such a mission will “brutalize” him, fill him with indignant rage and “poison” his cheerfulness and good humor: “The foolishness of moral indignation... is the unmistakable sign in a philosopher that his philosophical humor has left him.”²²⁷ But most importantly, it will “spoil” the “subtle neutrality” of his “conscience,” i.e. his *intellectual* conscience.²²⁸ Nietzsche implies that the belief that one has a duty to convince others of “the truth,” even to the point of martyrdom, is psychologically akin to the belief that the *philosophical* success of one’s *own* inquiries is dependent upon their acceptability to “the herd.” Looked at from the outside, the stubborn proselytizer or heretic who rages against “the herd” until he is trampled upon and crucified by them is the antithesis of the American conformist famously depicted by Tocqueville, who refuses to trust his own reason whenever it contradicts public opinion. But looked at from the inside, Nietzsche implies, these psychological types are very similar – one may even transform

²²⁵ BGE 40. Translation modified.

²²⁶ GS 2.

²²⁷ BGE 25. Translation modified.

²²⁸ BGE 25. Translation modified.

into the other, but in any case, they are equally unphilosophical. Thus the philosopher who cannot control “his type of injustice” will cease to be a philosopher – or, Nietzsche perhaps implies, such a person will never become a philosopher in the first place, even as the “mature philosopher” must never cease learning this lesson.

When Nietzsche says that no philosopher has ever been “proven right” (*Recht behalten*), this is very ambiguous. It could mean that no philosophical argument has ever reached a successful, non-trivial conclusion, i.e. that philosophy has no “results.” But while Nietzsche often employs rhetoric that encourages such a reading, it is difficult to reconcile with much of what he has said already, such as his claim in BGE 18 that free will *can* be “refuted,” or his claim in BGE 23 and 24 that philosophy is a “science,” not only a way of life devoted to ceaseless questioning. However, Nietzsche’s claim that no philosopher has ever been “proven right” could mean that the results of philosophical inquiry, while contentful and “well-grounded,” have never been transformed into an established body of knowledge in the way that, say, the empirical sciences have achieved this status in the modern world. Of course, “the herd” are for the most part not scientists of any kind (although modern scientists usually belong to “the herd”), but as Nietzsche emphasized in BGE 14, “modern physics” appeals to their “plebeian taste,” which regards only that which one can “see and touch” as real.²²⁹ In any case, the well-groundedness of modern science (however one might interpret its epistemic status at a meta-level) is evident from its *technological* results, the vast transformation of the conditions of human life it has produced.²³⁰ A modern soldier, sailor or medical patient has good enough

²²⁹ BGE 14.

²³⁰ BGE 14.

reasons to “believe” in modern science. Nietzsche’s point in BGE 25 is that, although “metaphysical laborers” such as Kant and Hegel hoped that their systems would in like fashion become recognized sciences or established bodies of knowledge, in a manner analogous to the modern empirical sciences (or even as their “queen”), such a hope is futile in the case of philosophy: “You know well enough that nothing should rest on whether *you* of all people [i.e. philosophers] are proven right.”²³¹ In other words, it betrays a radical misunderstanding of the nature of philosophical inquiry and its results to expect them ever to become an established body of knowledge, “provable” to others (i.e. “the herd,” or even just “the republic of letters” or “the scholarly community”) in an uncontroversial fashion. No philosopher has ever been “proven right” because philosophy provides no immediate results of a kind which could be displayed to “the herd” or even to the average scholar, its deepest insights can only be communicated obliquely (by “torturing” language and reason, using them against themselves) *and* because philosophizing undermines “popular morality” in such a radical way that even the minority of people with the rare *intellectual* gifts which may otherwise have enabled them to undertake such a tortuous form of self-reflection (e.g. Kant or Hegel) generally lack the strength of will to stomach its “trans-moral” implications.

This train of thought would seem to have Epicurean implications – find a “garden” into which one can retreat, “keep a low profile,” and enjoy the pleasures of philosophizing, if not altogether in private, perhaps with a few carefully selected friends. And sure enough, a garden pops up a moment later: “And don’t forget the garden, the garden with golden trelliswork! And have people around you who are like a garden – or like music over the waters in the evening-

²³¹ BGE 25. Translation modified. Cf. BGE 211.

time, when the day is already turning into a memory – choose the *good* solitude, the free, mischievous, delicate solitude.”²³² But the complexity of this aphorism is only just beginning. First of all, the bracing tempo of Nietzsche’s rhetoric leads the hasty reader to overlook the abruptness with which the advice to retreat into a garden *immediately* follows the advice to strike fear into others. How does one combine striking fear into others with hiding in a garden? Does one put up a sign saying “beware of the blond beast”? Douglas Burnham claims that Nietzsche advises the reader to *avoid* waging war against society and striking the pose of an “outcast,” as did Spinoza,²³³ but aside from the fact that this is exactly the pose that Nietzsche strikes much of the time, it is important to note that he says that one should find one’s “garden” and “choose the good solitude” in order to *counter-act* the inevitable dangers of waging a “long war,” which “cannot be waged openly, by means of violence!”²³⁴ The war itself is unavoidable; the question is how to wage it “cheerfully.”

Just as the philosopher counter-acts the *outward* dangers of this “war” (persecution, censorship – or, as in Nietzsche’s own life, simply being ignored) with a mixture of seductive and fear-inducing theatrics, he must counter-act its *internal* dangers, poisonous *ressentiment* and “vengeance-seeking,” by means of “the garden,” “the good solitude” and friends who are like a garden (perhaps they are themselves “the garden”). Furthermore, in the very next aphorism, Nietzsche emphasizes that the philosopher must *not* retreat into pure solitude and avoid all contact with “the herd.” Nietzsche doesn’t offer us a choice between “war” and “solitude,” then counsel solitude. Rather, he suggests that the philosopher *combine* outward “war against

²³² BGE 25. Translation modified.

²³³ Burnham, *Reading Nietzsche*, 46-47.

²³⁴ BGE 25. Translation modified.

convention,” the attempt to “legislate” new values for the herd, with the private pleasures of philosophizing, itself a kind of “spiritual warfare,” and the semi-private pleasures of friendship and intimacy. The philosopher seeks to have a revolutionary impact on “culture,” while ironically acquiescing in the fact that his efforts will inevitably lead to new dogmas, if not among his best readers, certainly among most of his readers.

We are now in a better position to understand the curious *dénouement* of this aphorism. Having emphasized that real philosophers do not seek, but rather seek to avoid martyrdom, Nietzsche ends with a description of “the martyrdom of the philosopher, his ‘sacrifice for the sake of the truth.’”²³⁵ Given what Nietzsche has just said, isn’t this a self-contradictory formula in his mouth, as if he were to speak of “the dogmatism of the philosopher”? Or if real philosophers are always in some way dogmatists in their exoteric self-presentation, could Nietzsche be suggesting that, if not at all, then at least some philosophers (including Spinoza – and Nietzsche himself much of the time) seek to have an impact by striking the *pose* of a “martyr for the truth”? Of course, Nietzsche could not have predicted his collapse into mental and physical paralysis, which would contribute to his mythology and would be interpreted as a kind of martyrdom.

The specter of Socrates haunts this aphorism, although he isn’t mentioned by name. Nietzsche addresses philosophers as *Eckensteher und Spinneweber des Geistes*. The word *Eckensteher*, impossible to translate into English, seems to allude to Socrates. The term suggests someone who “loiters,” more literally someone who stands around on street “corners,” perhaps just to pass the time (as Kaufmann’s “loafer” suggests, but if this was Nietzsche’s intended

²³⁵ BGE 25.

emphasis, *Müßigganger* would have been more apt), but perhaps also in the hopes of being noticed, striking up a conversation and maybe being offered a job. It is a bizarre word to apply to “philosophers and friends of knowledge,” but when paired with “cobweb-spinner,” it suggests that the philosopher’s “webs” aren’t just conceptual webs, but include conversations and even books, by means of which he seeks to “catch flies in his web” and also to gain employment (cf. BGE 7 – or think of Machiavelli’s *Prince*). But does the spider’s prey consist in dogmatic disciples or in potential philosophers? However exactly that may be, the philosopher notorious for being a kind of *Eckensteher* in the streets of his hometown was the plebeian hustler or “pimp”²³⁶ Socrates, not the aristocratic Plato (whose books are nonetheless *logoi Sokratikoi*) or the professorial Aristotle.

But of course, Socrates wasn’t only the most famous street-hustler in the history of philosophy, but also its most famous and revered “martyr,” whose condemnation and execution “for the sake of the truth” has often been compared with the condemnation and execution of Jesus. Nietzsche gently alludes to this famous parallel by referring to “the Spinozas *or* Giordano Brunos” of this world.²³⁷ The reference to “solemn gestures and trump-cards before accusers and law-courts” calls to mind both Jesus’ conduct towards Pilate and Socrates’ conduct before the Athenian jury. But was Socrates really a “martyr for the truth,” any more than Spinoza was a religious heretic rather than a philosopher? Certainly Socrates, like Jan Hus and Giordano Bruno, accepted a death at the hands of his enemies which he could most likely have avoided. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche emphasized Socrates’ freely chosen death as the decisive event

²³⁶ As Socrates describes himself in Xenophon, *Symposium* iii.10.

²³⁷ BGE 25. Emphasis added.

in the *tradition* he established: “The *dying Socrates* became the new, hitherto unknown ideal of noble Greek youth.”²³⁸ Interestingly, Nietzsche there claims that Socrates intentionally provoked his death sentence, when he would otherwise most likely merely have been exiled, “and posterity would have had no right to accuse the Athenians of a shameful deed,” but he is silent as to *why* Socrates did this.²³⁹ The context suggests, however, that Socrates sought the *appearance* of “martyrdom” in order to found a tradition of rational inquiry by his courageous example and forever to besmirch the enemies of philosophy in the eyes of posterity, thereby creating the political conditions for the flourishing of such a tradition. In BGE 25, Nietzsche claims that the philosopher’s “martyrdom” (which is typically rhetorical and figurative rather than literal – think of Rousseau’s eloquent whining about how nobody wants to be his friend) “forces into the light whatever of the agitator and actor lurks in him,”²⁴⁰ and is thus a kind of comic stage-play, conducted playfully, not earnestly. Xenophon’s *Apology* (in contrast with Plato’s *Apology* and *Phaedo*) emphasizes the *playfulness* with which Socrates went to his death, joking with his friends and teasing them as they wept.²⁴¹ Yet the death of Socrates remains a problem, for the philosopher who follows Nietzsche’s counsel in BGE 25 would presumably prioritize the pleasures of philosophizing and friendship over “acting,” “agitation” and “cultural legislation,” even as he seeks to combine them, and would not be willing to die “merely” for the sake of establishing a tradition.

BGE 24 and 25 belong together. They both concern the difference and the relationship between the philosopher and “the average human being,” BGE 24 emphasizing inner experience

²³⁸ BT 13.

²³⁹ BT 13.

²⁴⁰ BGE 25.

²⁴¹ Xenophon, *Apology* i.28.

(“science” vs. “simplification”) and BGE 25 emphasizing outward conduct (“solitude” vs. society, “war” vs. conformism), even as the opening Jan Hus simile indicates their unavoidable inter-relatedness. They both suggest that this difference must be understood in a complex, dialectical fashion – the philosopher doesn’t simply transcend the “simplified” world “in which we believe we live,” even as he understands it *as* simplified *from* within, and he doesn’t simply shun contact with “the herd,” or avoid seeking to influence them, even as he keeps his distance, has an ironic awareness of the limitations of any such attempt and doesn’t take his efforts at revolutionary agitation *too* seriously.

At the same time, taken together BGE 24 and 25 raise the question: Is philosophy really the best life, as Nietzsche intimated earlier in the book, especially in aphorisms 6, 9 and 10? If “the average human being” loves illusion and ignorance *because* he loves life, *in order to* “enjoy” life, what about the philosopher? Does the philosopher hate life? Much later on (in BGE 229 and 230), Nietzsche will suggest that there is a kind of masochistic element, the “enjoyment” of “cruelty turned *against oneself*,” in all truly philosophical inquiry, which resists the “will to simplification” which comes naturally to us (although he suggests that “cruelty turned against oneself” is *also* essential to moral or religious “self-denial”).²⁴² Furthermore, if the human is a political or social animal, who needs the society of others to flourish, and if protracted solitude or enmity poisons the soul with resentment, and philosophy alienates one not just from others but even from oneself, does the philosopher stand convicted of self-destructive hatred of our shared humanity? BGE 24 and 25 propose that the answer is “no” – philosophy is

²⁴² Cf. BGE 229-230.

the best way of living *in* our simplified, artificial world, which enables the most pleasant forms of solitude *and* friendship or intimacy with others.

The next set of aphorisms continue to develop the theme of the philosophical life, the lessons the philosopher must learn as he emerges from the theoretical depths explored in BGE 13-22 and ascends to the surface of our shared life-world. BGE 26-29 belong together as a group; in their own way, they reprise the themes explored in a provisional or introductory way in BGE 5-7. In the second chapter, I argued that aphorisms 5-7 present the philosopher as he appears from three different perspectives – to non-philosophers (5), to himself (6) and to other philosophers (7). Analogously, BGE 26 (like 5) concerns the philosopher’s relationship to non-philosophers, BGE 27-28 (like 7) concerns his relationship to other philosophers and BGE 29 (like 6) concerns the philosopher’s self-relation. But the sequence in which these perspectives appear has changed, because the most important theme of *BGE* isn’t “cultural legislation,” nor even the friendship and (and playful enmity) enjoyed by philosophers as they communicate across the centuries (one might think of Machiavelli’s letter to Vettori), but rather the inner life of the philosopher himself. Nietzsche wants to *end* his “ascent to the surface” with a return to the depths, not of “nature” or “life,” but of the philosopher’s own soul.

BGE 24 spoke of “those of us who know” (*uns Wissenden*), who possess “the best science” (presumably the psychology of BGE 23), while BGE 25 is addressed to “philosophers *and* friends of knowledge.”²⁴³ But while philosophers are assuredly friends of knowledge, are all “friends of knowledge” philosophers? Could Nietzsche be making a *distinction* between the philosopher (“the knower”) and the *mere* “friend of knowledge” (reversing the grand rhetorical

²⁴³ BGE 25. Emphasis added.

move by which Plato contrasted dangerous “sophists” who claimed to impart knowledge with responsible and civic-minded “philosophers,” who claim merely to be “lovers” or “friends of knowledge”), thereby preparing us for BGE 26? Everyone knows that Nietzsche is concerned with the cultivation of “higher types” in general, who include not just philosophers, but also great artists, statesmen, scientists, *homines religiosi* and so forth, and that he is perturbed about the leveling tendencies of modern egalitarianism, which prioritizes “the rule” over “the exception.” But BGE 26 suggests that the philosopher is “the exception among the exceptions,” as Lampert aptly puts it,²⁴⁴ *because* he is concerned not only with “the exception” but *just as much* with “the rule.”

BGE 26 begins with the observation that “every exceptional human being” (*jeder auserlesene Mensch*) will “instinctively” strive after a “fortress” (*Burg*) and a “privacy” (*Heimlichkeit*) where he will be “redeemed” from “the crowd, the many, the great majority.”²⁴⁵ Nietzsche immediately glosses this “redemption” as the ability to *forget* the mere existence of the average man, in order to focus all his attention on himself and on other exceptions – exactly the stance so often attributed to Nietzsche himself. Nietzsche says that anybody who isn’t “occasionally” (this word ought to be emphasized in bold type!) disgusted and wearied by the mediocrity of the average human being surely doesn’t possess “higher taste.”²⁴⁶ But Nietzsche then adds that if he doesn’t *also* possess an “even stronger instinct” which pushes him towards “the rule” and leads him *voluntarily* to take upon himself the “burden” of prolonged association with “the crowd” – “one day” to exclaim that “the rule is more interesting than the exception –

²⁴⁴ Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 65.

²⁴⁵ BGE 26. Translation modified.

²⁴⁶ BGE 26. Translation modified.

than I, the exception!” – then such a person is surely *not* a “knower in the great and exceptional sense,” someone “made” and “predestined” (*vorherbestimmt*) for knowledge.²⁴⁷ The irony is that the “proud” exception, who remains in his elite circle and tries to forget about the *hoi polloi*, is for this very reason not quite so exceptional (or so interesting) as he thinks. At the same time, Nietzsche doesn’t quite say in his own voice without equivocation that the rule is simply more interesting than the exception. Indeed, he says that “the study of the *average* human being” is “perhaps” the most disagreeable and *disappointing* “part” of the philosopher’s education, but nonetheless “a necessary part of the life-history [*Lebensgeschichte*] of every philosopher.”²⁴⁸ As Lampert points out,²⁴⁹ Nietzsche surely alludes above all to Socrates, the philosopher famous for being an *Eckensteher*, mingling with passers-by in the *agora* (although, as Strauss dryly notes, while Socrates often talks *about* common people, stupefying an aristocrat like Alcibiades who is amazed to find such poor taste in such an exceptional person,²⁵⁰ he is rarely seen talking *with* them²⁵¹).

While in BGE 5, Nietzsche was concerned with how the philosopher *appeared to* non-philosophers (exceptional or average, noble or base), in BGE 27, he is concerned with what he can *learn from* non-philosophers. Nietzsche performs an important dialectical inversion in this

²⁴⁷ BGE 26. Translation modified.

²⁴⁸ BGE 26.

²⁴⁹ Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 65.

²⁵⁰ Plato, *Symposium* 221d-222a.

²⁵¹ “According to the suggestions of the *Apology of Socrates* one would expect to find more Platonic dialogues presenting Socratic conversations with Athenian common men and in particular with Athenian politicians, craftsmen, and poets than Platonic dialogues presenting Socratic conversations with foreign sophists, rhetoricians, and the like. The Platonic Socrates is famous or ridiculed for speaking about shoemakers and the like; but we never see or hear him speaking to shoemakers or the like. He converses in deed (as distinguished from his self-presentation in his sole public speech) only with people who are not common people – who belong in one way or the other to an elite.” Strauss, *The City and Man*, 57.

aphorism. Nietzsche initially contrasts the exceptions (most of whom are not philosophers) with “the rule.” But then, in characterizing the philosopher as “the exception among the exceptions,” without taking back his initial contrast (there are many non-philosophers who are worthy of study *as exceptions*), he makes a more important and comprehensive contrast between the philosopher and *everyone else* (recall how in BGE 6, he made a similar move, where he initially contrasted the philosopher with “the scholar,” only then to develop this thought in such a way that the more important contrast became that with *everyone* who is not a philosopher). If the philosopher is “the exception among the exceptions,” there is an important sense in which all other exceptions belong to “the rule” or (as he rephrases it) “the average man.” Thus, when he speaks of “the study of the average man” as an essential part of the philosopher’s education, he says as if in passing that this involves much “second-rate association” (*schlechter Umgang*) because “all association is second-rate other than that with one’s equals [*ausser mit Seines-Gleichen*].”²⁵² But the philosopher’s association with proudly *soi-disant* “exceptions” who refuse to associate with “the rabble” (while often remaining dependent on their applause) – for example, Socrates’ association with Alcibiades – surely isn’t association with his “equals” or with those who are “of his kind” (*seinesgleichen*). On the contrary, Alcibiades was Socrates’ inferior – in comparison with him, Alcibiades was a very “average man.” Alcibiades exerted a fascinating charm on those around him, but his basic motivations are quite easy to understand. Indeed, the most “interesting” thing about Alcibiades is his fascination with Socrates. It will soon become even clearer that the basic theme of BGE 26 isn’t what the philosopher can learn from associating with the common people, as if Nietzsche were suggesting that philosophers

²⁵² BGE 26. Translation modified.

ought to slum it for a while, to see “how the other half lives.” Rather, the basic theme of BGE 26 is the contrast between the noble and the base, understood as the complexly interrelated poles of non-philosophical self-understanding in general.

Nietzsche intimates his intention by means of various oddities of this aphorism, which strike the reader who examines it closely. When the philosopher undertakes his study of “the average man,” he should be on the lookout especially for “so-called cynics”: “Those who simply recognize the animal, commonness [or baseness – *die Gemeinheit*] and ‘the rule’ in themselves, and at the same time still have that degree of spirituality [*jenen Grad von Geistigkeit*] and that ticklish thrill [*Kitzel*] which makes them talk of themselves and their like [*ihres Gleichen*] *before witnesses* – sometimes they even roll around in [*wälzen sie sich*] in books, as if in their own dung. Cynicism is the only form in which base souls [*gemeine Seelen*] touch upon honesty [*Redlichkeit*]; and the higher man should open his ears in the presence of every coarser and subtler form of cynicism [*bei jedem gröberen und feineren Cynismus*] and each time congratulate himself [*sich Glück wünschen*] if a buffoon [*Possenreißer*] without shame or a scientific satyr speaks out precisely in front of him.”²⁵³

But why should the higher man not merely listen closely, but also congratulate *himself* (or more literally: “wish himself luck”) whenever such a “cynic” speaks out “precisely in front of him”? Is it because cynics need a little coaxing to be “honest before witnesses,” even if they already have the “thrill” or sense of “titillation” (*Kitzel*) which pushes them to do so? But some “even” publish books in their own name (or do some of them merely “roll around in” *other people’s* books *as if* in “their own” dung?) – including the only “cynic” mentioned by name, the

²⁵³ BGE 26. Translation modified.

Abbé Galiani. Nietzsche praises this writer hyperbolically as the “most profound” and “most clear-sighted” man of his century, who (strangely) was also extremely “taciturn” (*schweigsam*), despite publishing his cynical thoughts in books which the whole world could read. At any rate, he was surely much more than an “average” man who was unusually honest and frank about his own “commonness” or “baseness” – in describing him as the “most profound” man of the eighteenth century, Nietzsche seems to suggest that he was a philosopher, like the ancient “so-called cynics.” At any rate, he was clearly a *highly exceptional* human being: “There are even cases where fascination [*Bezauberung*] mixes with the disgust – namely, where through a freak of nature [*Laune der Natur*] genius is bound to some such indiscreet billygoat and ape, as in the case of the Abbé Galiani.”²⁵⁴ One might wonder not only how nature placed “a scientific head” on “an ape’s body [*einen Affenlieb*],” but also how the Abbé Galiani himself somehow learned to write in such a way as to combine “taciturnity” with shameless “indiscretion,” remaining silent while *simultaneously* publishing his thoughts for the whole world to read.²⁵⁵ If every profound intellect desires a mask, then surely the Abbé Galiani (an “abbot” of the Catholic Church whose private thoughts were profoundly cynical and “filthy,” *schmutzig*) was an esoteric writer, who employed “masks and refinement.”²⁵⁶

Nietzsche’s intimation that the Abbé Galiani might have been a real philosopher may be playful, or it may be serious (one would have to study his books to find out how plausible it is), but his claim that this rather obscure figure was the most profound man of his century is surely

²⁵⁴ BGE 26. Translation modified.

²⁵⁵ BGE 26. There is surely an element of self-explication in this description. Stanley Rosen points out that Nietzsche’s rhetoric is characterized by “a unique mixture of frankness and ambiguity,” or candor and taciturnity. Rosen, “Nietzsche’s Revolution,” 190.

²⁵⁶ Cf. BGE 26 with 25 and 40.

hyperbole. But it serves to make the serious point that “cultural legislation” on a world-historical scale of the kind engaged in by Plato or by Nietzsche isn’t “a necessary part of the life-history of every philosopher” – anybody who reads a Platonic dialogue, or *BGE* itself, and partly grasps its argument is to that extent a real philosopher, even if he would be incapable of *writing* such a book. As Nietzsche says in BGE 39, one shouldn’t “restrict” “the concept philosopher” to those who “write books” or produce “great philosophies.”²⁵⁷ Nietzsche isn’t like the kind of Straussian who over-idealizes “philosophers,” treating them as divine beings who ought to be venerated, only a handful of whom have ever existed – even though he often employs this kind of rhetoric, even more than Strauss himself.

On the other hand, the lengthy study of “the average man” *does* constitute an essential part of the philosopher’s ascent to the surface, his learning to lead a philosophical life after exploring the fascinating albeit “filthy” depths of human nature and “life itself”: “It is not when the truth is filthy, but when the truth is shallow, that the knower is reluctant to step into its water.”²⁵⁸ But the philosopher doesn’t go about this so much by slumming it with the commoners (although in his letter to Vettori, Machiavelli emphasizes that he does just that *every day* before putting on his “regal and courtly garments” *alone by himself* and reading the great books *every night*²⁵⁹) as by carefully studying “the rule” in himself (“he would go *down*, and above all, he would go ‘inside’”²⁶⁰) and in everyone (living or dead) whom he encounters, guided at every step by the careful study of esoteric books written by exceptional men such as

²⁵⁷ Cf. BGE 39 with 6.

²⁵⁸ TSZ 1:13 On Chastity. Translation modified.

²⁵⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori, December 10, 1513, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, appendix to *The Prince*, 109-110.

²⁶⁰ BGE 26.

the Abbé Galiani, who help him understand the complex interplay of the noble and the base. BGE 26 thus prepares us for BGE 27 and 28, which belong together and concern how the philosopher communicates with “their like” (*ihres Gleichen*) across the centuries.

But what exactly does the philosopher learn about the noble and the base? Nietzsche clearly alludes to the Cynical school of philosophers in antiquity, who were indeed notorious both for wallowing in various forms of filth (Diogenes the Cynic masturbated in public) and for rarely writing books at all. Nietzsche thus refers us back to the early aphorisms in the first chapter, where he discussed various ancient schools of philosophy (Platonists, Epicureans, Stoics), and where he implied that in all these schools there was a distinction between mere disciples, who accepted the “exoteric dogmas” of their school in a quasi-religious way, and “real philosophers,” who combined taciturnity with indiscretion in their self-consciously *theatrical* art of writing (Plato’s *mise-en-scène* or “the stage” onto which “the ass” steps out), just as they combined seriousness with play in their art of living. Thus when he discussed the Stoics, Nietzsche distinguished between “actors” and “self-deceivers,” i.e. real philosophers acting the part of the Stoic on the public stage and self-deceived dogmatists for whom Stoicism was a kind of moralistic religion.²⁶¹ Nietzsche’s allusion to the “so-called [*sogennanten*] cynics” and his distinction between “coarser and subtler” forms of cynicism suggests that he has something analogous in mind here.²⁶²

But here Nietzsche has in mind not so much the distinction between real philosophers and mere disciples in the ancient Cynical school of philosophy, as the distinction between what

²⁶¹ BGE 9.

²⁶² BGE 26. Translation modified.

one can learn from the careful study of profound thinkers such as the Abbé Galiani (whose books might stem from the eighteenth century or from any other) and what one can learn from listening to and observing a more ordinary kind of “cynic”: “Whenever anyone speaks without bitterness, but rather guilelessly [*harmlos*] of the human being as a belly with two needs and a head with one; whenever someone only sees, seeks and *wants* to see hunger, sexual desire and vanity, as if they were the real and only motivating forces in human actions [*Triebfedern der menschlichen Handlungen*]; in short, whenever one speaks ‘badly’ [*schlecht*] – and not even *wickedly* [*schlimm*] – of the human being, the lover of knowledge should listen discriminatingly and diligently [*fein und fleissig*].²⁶³

The first thing that someone who reads *this sentence* “discriminatingly and diligently” notices is that the desire *to see* hunger, sexual desire and vanity as the only real motives of our actions isn’t the same as the desire for food, sex or recognition of one’s worth in the eyes of others. Such a desire thus betrays a certain confusion or lack of self-knowledge, because the cynic who sees, “seeks” and *wants* to see nothing but hunger, sexual desire and vanity in others and in himself inevitably fails to recognize his *own* second-order desire to find such motives and no others, itself a far more “interesting” desire, which calls for further explanation: *Why* does the cynic *want* to reduce all motives to base motives? Does he want to have a sense of superiority to others, which consists in a clear-sightedness that others are too weak to stomach or too naïve to achieve? Does he have a genuine desire for knowledge of human nature, even as he lacks the self-knowledge to achieve his goal and “guilelessly” (*harmlos*) deceives himself into believing that he has understood himself and others? The philosopher can learn two things

²⁶³ BGE 26. Translation modified.

from such a cynic – that much of what pass for “noble motives” are indeed reducible to base ones (the lesson of “French psychologists” such as La Rochefoucauld), but much more importantly, that our psychology is far too complex to be reduced simplistically to “the base.” The very attempt to do so is self-defeating or inevitably un-self-aware.

Nietzsche immediately contrasts such a cynic, not with “the noble man,” as one might expect, but with “the indignant man”: “He should altogether have his ears open whenever people talk without indignation.”²⁶⁴ He continues: “For the indignant man, and whoever is always tearing and lacerating himself with his own teeth (or as a substitute, the world, or God, or society) may indeed morally considered stand higher than the laughing and self-satisfied satyr, but in every other sense he is a more ordinary, more indifferent and less instructive [*unbelehrende*] case. And no-one *lies* as much as the indignant man.”²⁶⁵ One should first note that insofar as the indignant man “stands higher” than the cynic “morally considered,” Nietzsche affirms that he *is* indeed a *less* ordinary, *less* indifferent and *more* instructive case. It is only in every *other* sense that he is not. Secondly, one should note that Nietzsche characterizes the indignant man as indignant primarily *with himself* and only secondarily (“as a substitute”) with others. While indignation is typically directed outward, at those whom one regards as having done one an injustice, here the emphasis is on indignation which is directed primarily at oneself, and only secondarily on indignation at others, as a kind of “substitute.” Thirdly, one should note that while BGE 26 is outwardly about what is “instructive” in the study of the average man *as*

²⁶⁴ BGE 26. Translation modified.

²⁶⁵ BGE 26. Translation modified.

such, here Nietzsche suggests that insofar as the indignant man is less “instructive” than the cynic, it is *because* he is in every other sense “more ordinary.”

Nietzsche offers an important hint when he says that “morally considered,” the indignant man is indeed not only “more instructive” than the cynic, but also “less ordinary” (*gewöhnlicher*), more exceptional. But isn’t indignation at least as common, probably even more common, than cynicism, especially cynicism “without bitterness”? For cynicism, insofar as it is not complacently “self-satisfied,” tends to be accompanied by a bitterness which shades easily into moral indignation. There is a lot of truth to the cliché that the cynic is the disappointed idealist. And even from a strictly moral perspective, isn’t it a little odd to say that the indignant man *as such* “stands higher” than the cynic? For it is a notorious fact of human psychology that one tends to become most indignant at injustices committed against oneself; indeed, one often becomes laughingly “self-satisfied” when one gets away with committing the same injustices against others. But if Nietzsche has in mind above all the psychology of the man who is indignant with himself for failing to meet the impossible standards which he sets himself and which he believes he has a duty to meet (e.g. the man who believes he has a duty to wage war against the injustices of “the world,” “society,” or even God Himself, like a militant atheist or “Petersburg nihilist” willing to be martyred for his cause), then Nietzsche’s contrast between “the cynic” and “the indignant man” starts to look more and more like a contrast between “the base” and “the noble.”

I suggest that the primary lesson that one learns (and which one must never stop learning) from the prolonged study of ordinary human life is that “the noble and the base” are the two primary forms of self-misinterpretation characteristic of sub-philosophical psychology

in general. Rather than simply two “fixed natural types,” the noble and the base are dialectically inter-related in endlessly complex ways (nobody is purely noble or purely base), even as certain exceptional types bring out the structure of this dialectic in unusually instructive ways. Like Socrates, the philosopher must not retreat into his fortress, but must constantly observe those around him, paying attention both to “the average man” and to instructive exceptions, and always guided by the study of the great thinkers of the past.

Above all, he must learn that he cannot simply transcend “the noble” *or* “the base.” Rather, philosophy represents the most self-conscious form their dialectic takes in the human soul, which recognizes their unavoidable inter-relatedness. I have already argued that for Nietzsche, “free will” constitutes *the* fundamental illusion constitutive of our falsified and simplified world. It is thus to be expected that this illusion is equally essential to both “the base” and “the noble” as they understand themselves. The base man believes that he possesses “free will” when he prudentially calculates the most efficient means to the “lower” ends we cannot help but pursue, while the noble man believes that he possesses “free will” when he chooses to carry out the duty to which we (or at least *he*) is unavoidably subject, but which one may seek “basely” to avoid. Put differently, the base man believes that he has the freedom to seek the best *means* to his ends, and takes pride in his cunning and “clear-sightedness,” while the noble man believes that he *also* has the freedom to choose the right *end* and to shun the lower ones, and takes pride in his disinterestedness. Yet the base man is always more noble than he believes (like the cynic who cannot recognize that his own desires transcend his understanding of human motivations in general), while the noble man is always more base than he believes (not realizing that he too is driven above all by the desire for a special kind of *pleasure* or *enjoyment*, even if

only the enjoyment of self-laceration or “cruelty against oneself”). The element of truth in “the base perspective” is that noble actions are no more “selfless” or “unegoistic” than base actions (no less instinctively driven), while the element of truth in “the noble perspective” is that human beings indeed possess instincts or desires other than (and irreducible to) hunger, sexual desire and vanity.

The deeper theoretical dimensions of Nietzsche’s analysis of the noble and the base are not overtly present in this aphorism, but that is because he has already dealt with them in their proper places. If my interpretation of the argument of the book so far (and the role of the “Jan Hus” analogy in BGE 24) has been correct, it is not implausible to suggest that they are just under the surface in this aphorism. BGE 26 is helpfully supplemented by GS 3, on “the noble and the base,” which I analyzed in the previous chapter. However, in BGE 26 Nietzsche does allude, somewhat obliquely, towards the “physio-psychological” issues involved in this contrast. Not only does he emphasize that exceptional human beings are driven away from the crowd by “instinct,” not by free choice, and that philosophers are driven back towards the crowd by “an even stronger instinct”; he also tells us that the cynic speaks of the human being as “a belly with two needs and a head with one.”²⁶⁶ The two needs of the belly are presumably nutrition and excretion, but the “need” of the “head,” given the unwillingness of the cynic to ascribe to the human mind (which he understands in crude, materialistic terms as “the head”) any “higher desires,” such as the love of knowledge, presumably consists in the need to calculate the means to the end of physical survival.

²⁶⁶ BGE 26. Translation modified.

I conclude my discussion of BGE 26 with a note on the problem of Socrates. As Lampert points out, the suggestion that the philosopher must “go down” is an unmistakable allusion to the beginning of the *Republic*, one of the few Platonic dialogues narrated by Socrates in the first person (“I went down”), and more generally to the image of Socrates as the philosopher who regularly descends into the marketplace, to mingle with the commoners.²⁶⁷ The philosophical ascent to the surface is also a kind of political descent, as the “fortress” image makes clear (one might also think of Zarathustra coming down from his cave). But it is important to note that this political descent, a kind of move *outwards* – preceded by the exclamation, “the rule is more interesting than the exception – than I, the exception!” – is at the same time a reflexive movement “inside,” deeper into the philosopher’s own soul.²⁶⁸ Paradoxically, the political descent or move away from oneself or beyond one’s inner circle is a way of learning more about oneself, increasing one’s self-knowledge. This aphorism thereby helps us understand the motivations behind the Socratic turn to the human phenomena as Nietzsche himself understood those motivations.

This descent helps the philosopher understand himself because, as we have already learned, he doesn’t simply transcend our “suitably” simplified and artificial world (as Platonic poetry often suggests), but rather learns the best way to live within it and enjoy living within it. The philosopher is the only human type capable of properly understanding “the animal” or “the rule” in himself – he remains “base” or “common” in his own way, but he is the only common soul able to be clear-sightedly honest with himself about his own “commonness” (*Gemeinheit*)

²⁶⁷ Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 65. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 327a.

²⁶⁸ BGE 26. Translation modified.

and understand *what it means* to be “common,” i.e. what it means to be human. *This* is what renders him exceptionally exceptional. The philosopher’s natural desire to associate with others, those like himself *and* those unlike himself (recall Zarathustra’s declaration “I love man!”), doesn’t simply disappear, but takes on a new, ironic and theatrical form. The philosopher tends to have a ticklish thrill or titillating itch (*Kitzel*) to display himself “before witnesses,” unworthy and worthy, whether in the manner of the Socratic gadfly who teases and provokes others (think of Socrates’ flirtation with Alcibiades), or the outwardly mad and filthy acts of the ancient Cynic, or simply through writing seductive and provocative books. Yet his association with others is the part of his life which is “most rich in disappointments” (*an Enttäuschungen reichste*) because, as Nietzsche emphasized in the preceding aphorism BGE 25 (and more clearly in GS 2 on “my type of injustice”), the philosopher cannot help but *want* to find his own exceptional “thirst for knowledge” in everyone he encounters (just as the coarser kind of cynic *wants* to find base desires in everyone and even to deny the elements of nobility in himself), even after he has long since learned the lesson “again and again” that it’s just not there most of the time.

Finally, I note that the Socratic allusions in this aphorism go deeper than Lampert suggests. However serious the suggestion that the Abbé Galiani was a real philosopher (the most profound *and* the most self-aware man of his century) may or may not be, he surely serves as a symbol for Socrates himself (one might also recall the ancient anecdote that Plato described Diogenes the Cynic as a Socrates gone mad, which perhaps meant a Socrates *feigning* madness,

because otherwise he would no longer be “a Socrates” at all²⁶⁹). The formulas “buffoon without shame” and “scientific satyr” cannot help but remind us of the buffoonish and notoriously ugly Socrates, whose likeness the beautiful Alcibiades compared to that of a satyr.²⁷⁰ The remark that a “scientific head” attached to an ugly “ape’s body” is an occurrence common among “doctors and physiologists of morality [*Moral-Physiologen*]” also reminds us of Socrates, especially the Aristophanic portrayal of Socrates in the *Clouds*.²⁷¹ BGE 25 raised the problem of Socrates the martyr, the theme of Platonic tragic artistry – is such a *degree* of self-sacrificing “nobility” compatible with “real philosophy”? BGE 26 raises the problem of Socrates the base, ugly, flea-and-gnat-examining doctor and physiologist, the theme of Aristophanic comic artistry – is such a *degree* of “baseness” and wallowing in filth compatible with “real philosophy”? Will Nietzsche’s conception of the philosophical life solve the problem of combining the noble and the base, the tragic and the comic, in a more humanly satisfying way than his most important enemy and friend?

BGE 27 and 28 are concerned with how the philosopher relates to other philosophers, and I will discuss them together. This pair of aphorisms reprises the theme of BGE 7, but while in that introductory aphorism, the outward emphasis was on how the relationships among philosophers *appeared* on the stage of world-history, primarily as a kind of bitter enmity among schools and individuals (Epicurus venomously mocking Plato and his disciples), in this pair of aphorisms, the emphasis is rather on how such relationships are understood by philosophers

²⁶⁹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 1.34. I am grateful to Jeremy Bell for suggesting this interpretation of Plato’s apocryphal remark. If the Abbé Galiani is a stand-in both for Socrates and for Nietzsche himself, this must be taken as a further sign of the connection which Nietzsche wants the “slow reader” to draw between Socrates and the author of *BGE*.

²⁷⁰ Plato, *Symposium* 215b.

²⁷¹ BGE 26.

themselves, as a kind of trans-historical friendship.²⁷² Philosophers communicate with one another primarily through *writing*, which enables a kind of friendship across the centuries. But the theme of philosophical writing raises three central questions, each of which are in different senses questions of “translation.”

First, if the deepest insights are resistant to doctrinal formulation and can only be communicated obliquely, as Plato claimed in the Seventh Letter and as Nietzsche frequently suggests, how can philosophical thought be “translated” into speech? Secondly, if philosophers communicate primarily through books, i.e. conversations upon which others may “eavesdrop,” others who may be friendly, hostile or indifferent, but who will inevitably misunderstand what they overhear and may be harmed by whatever they do manage to take from it (“what serves the higher type of man as nourishment or refreshment must almost be poison for a very different and inferior type”²⁷³), and may want to harm the philosopher in retribution (or deify him for what really constitutes a kind of damage inflicted upon their souls, as some fascists deified Nietzsche for inspiring their love of wanton cruelty), such that the philosopher must write exoterically not only for pedagogical reasons, but also for political ones, how can his exoteric self-presentation be “translated” into his authentic self-understanding? Thirdly, if philosophical thought is authentically trans-historical, but not in the relatively straightforward sense in which mathematical thought is trans-historical, how can the philosophy which emerges in one “epoch” be “translated” into the language of another? Even if Nietzsche isn’t a radical linguistic (or racial) relativist, but rather wants to advocate a kind of perennialism which recognizes the

²⁷² Cf. BGE 7 with 27-28.

²⁷³ BGE 30. Translation modified.

“systematic structure and inter-relatedness” of the fundamental concepts which are the universal inheritance of the human family,²⁷⁴ he clearly recognizes a historically diagnostic element as indispensable for philosophical thought (in contrast to, say, geometry or chemistry). One must *overcome* the conventions of one’s age, not simply ignore them, in order to discover the “fundamental conventions” which underlie them. But if philosophy is *more than* “its own time comprehended in thought,” yet unavoidably involves the latter, how can, say, Aristophanic or Platonic thought be “translated” into, say, the language of Machiavelli, Lessing or Nietzsche?

BGE 27 is rather short: “It is difficult to be understood, especially when one thinks and lives *gangasrotagati* among human beings who think and live differently – namely, *kurmagati*, or at best ‘according to the pace of the frog [*nach der Gangart des Frosches*],’ *mandukagati* – am I doing everything in order to be difficult to understand myself? – and one should be grateful from the heart for the good will to some subtlety of interpretation [*Feinheit der Interpretation*]. Concerning ‘the good friends,’ however, who are always too comfortable [*bequem*] and believe that precisely as friends they have a right to be comfortable [*ein Recht auf Bequemlichkeit*]: one does well to allow them a play-space and stumping ground [*einen Spielraum und Tummelplatz*] for misunderstanding – then one can even laugh – or abandon them altogether [*ganz abuschaffen*], these good friends – and still laugh!”²⁷⁵

In BGE 30, Nietzsche emphasizes that “the distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric,” employed by philosophers in widely different times and places (“among the Indians as among the Greeks, Persians and Muslims”), “does not *so much* consist” in the difference

²⁷⁴ Cf. BGE 20.

²⁷⁵ BGE 27. Translation modified.

between “the outside” and “the inside,” i.e. the exoteric dogmas and the “secret teachings,” as in the difference between “the lower” and “the higher” *perspectives* (i.e. philosophical and non-philosophical ways of life).²⁷⁶ In other words, it consists in *both* distinctions (“not so much”), but the latter distinction is the more important one. This helps us to understand Nietzsche’s point in BGE 27, which concerns how thought (*theoria*), practice (*praxis*) and literary production (*poesis*) are inter-related in a philosophical book.

Nietzsche contrasts three ways of thinking and living, which correspond to three ways of reading a book like *BGE*. He suggests that how one reads and understands an exoteric-esoteric book will depend on one’s way of thought and life. He uses three Sanskrit words, initially incomprehensible to most readers, to characterize three basic human types (and their ways of thinking, living and reading), words which must *literally* be translated word-for-word (he helps us by translating one of them). He thereby playfully indicates that a rather crude or political distinction between “the outside and the inside” *is* a crucial element of his art of writing – there are times when Nietzsche simply lies, forcefully expresses opinions he knows are not just questionable but false, *encourages* the crudest forms of misinterpretation or overtly contradicts himself. One cannot ignore this dimension of his esotericism if one wants to understand him. To a limited but important extent, reading Nietzsche’s books “esoterically” is comparable to the mechanical process of looking up a word in a dictionary – one must simply *break through* “the outside” to reach “the inside.” However, it is only then that the truly interesting “art of interpretation” begins. For “the inside” doesn’t consist in a simple doctrine which *could have been* presented explicitly had Nietzsche lacked a whimsical desire to make himself “difficult to

²⁷⁶ BGE 30. Emphasis added.

understand” (Kaufmann mistranslates Nietzsche’s *question* about himself as if it were a simple *assertion* that he is trying to be “difficult to understand,” replacing the question mark in the original with an exclamation mark). Rather, “the inside” consists of Nietzsche’s psychology, which we have already learned involves endless complexities.

The threefold distinction between those who think and live “according to the pace of the river Ganges,” “the pace of the tortoise” and “the pace of the frog” cannot help but remind us of the threefold distinction between the philosopher, the noble and the base, thematic in the preceding aphorism and present throughout Nietzsche’s writing. At first, the reader will assume that the philosopher thinks, lives and presumably reads like the river Ganges. But what about the frog and the tortoise? Given that Nietzsche emphasizes that the frog’s way is *not* the highest way (he qualifies it with “at best”), yet *seems* to place it above the tortoise, are we to conclude that “the frog” is the second-best (the noble) and “the tortoise” is at the bottom of the hierarchy (the base)? Yet Nietzsche doesn’t *explicitly* claim that the Ganges-like way is superior to the tortoise-like way. Furthermore, the preceding aphorism ended with an overt (albeit qualified) praise of “the base,” even as we saw that the picture which emerged “between the lines” was rather more complex. What is going on here?

It is important to note that the preceding aphorism emphasized the difficulty of understanding *the rule*: “The rule is more interesting than the exception – than I, the exception!”²⁷⁷ Insofar as philosophical books are inherently difficult, it is partly because they involve a proper analysis of “the animal, commonness, the rule” in the human being, which is in a certain sense the primary theme of philosophy and the most difficult thing for us to

²⁷⁷ BGE 26. Translation modified.

understand. The philosopher is “the average man” who understands himself and *for this reason* is “the exception among the exceptions.” He transcends the artificial world “in which we believe we live” only in the sense that he understands it as artificial from within, not because he has special access to a transcendent world. Furthermore, isn’t it the non-philosopher who rushes through life like the river Ganges, driven by his noble or base objectives, never stopping to reflect on the “strange simplification and falsification” in which we live²⁷⁸? Isn’t it the philosopher who moves slowly and carefully, like a tortoise, and protects himself from “assailants” (cf. BGE 5) with a hard shell of exoteric caution?

In BGE 28, Nietzsche asks: “How could the German language, even in the prose of a Lessing, imitate the *tempo* of Machiavelli, who in his *Principe* let us breathe the dry, fine air of Florence and cannot help but present the most serious subject matter [*die ernsteste Angelegenheit*] in a boisterous *allegriissimo*, perhaps not without a malicious artist’s sense of the contrast [*Gegensatz*] he risks – thoughts which are long, heavy [*schwer*], difficult [*hart*], dangerous, and the *tempo* of the gallop and the very best, most mischievous temper?”²⁷⁹ Machiavelli’s peculiarity consists precisely in the *contrast* between “the *tempo* of the gallop,” “a boisterous *allegriissimo*,” of his rhetorical style and the “long,” “heavy” and “difficult” thoughts he presents (“the most serious subject matter” – cf. BGE 25), which are accessible presumably only to the reader who *slows down* and undertakes the difficult but enjoyable burden of working through these thoughts, not the reader who enjoys the more superficial pleasure of getting

²⁷⁸ BGE 24.

²⁷⁹ BGE 28. Translation modified.

carried away by the boisterous gallop of Machiavelli's prose and his provocative apothegms, rushing from page to page with speed of a fast-flowing river.

I suggest that the contrast between those who *read* Nietzsche's books "according to the pace" (*nach dem Gangart*) of the river Ganges and those who his read his books according to the pace of the tortoise *favors* the latter. The latter are the "slow readers" Nietzsche insists that he requires in the 1886 Preface to *Daybreak* – and which in the very next aphorism he implies that Machiavelli also requires.²⁸⁰ But what about those who read his books "according to the pace of the frog"? These are the readers who "hop" from aphorism to aphorism like a frog, reading his books more carefully than the impassioned "Nietzscheans" who are merely carried away by the force of his rhetoric, and trying but largely failing to understand the hidden "chains of thought" which connect them as rigorously as the propositions in Spinoza's *Ethics*. And surely we must admit that most of the time we "friends of Nietzsche" are "at best" comparable to frogs when we read his "indiscreet" yet infuriatingly "taciturn" books, even with the heartiest "good will to some subtlety of interpretation."²⁸¹

Nietzsche is nevertheless "grateful" to us from his very "heart" for trying our best to understand him, and he allows us plenty of space to "play" around in his books as in our own "stomping ground" (what Nietzsche scholar or enthusiast doesn't regard Nietzsche's corpus as his own private "stomping ground"?), creating a beautiful artificial world in which we can "live," even as we are scarcely able to understand it. But Nietzsche also "laughs" at our incapacity to understand him as he understood himself, and turns away (in the next aphorism) to

²⁸⁰ Cf. D Preface 5.

²⁸¹ BGE 27. Translation modified.

share some time with his *real* friends, the great thinkers of the past, such as Plato, Machiavelli and Lessing.

I suggest, then, that insofar as BGE 27 refers to three different ways of *reading* Nietzsche's books (and esoteric texts generally), the tortoise stands atop the hierarchy, followed by the frog, with the river Ganges at the bottom. While the tortoise is the philosopher, the distinction between the two lower types of *reader* doesn't correspond directly to the noble and the base more generally – although given that “frogs” are often scholars (a base type) and “rivers” are often active, political men attracted by what Georg Brandes called (with Nietzsche's mildly ironic approval) the “aristocratic radicalism” of his political tendency,²⁸² there is a certain limited correspondence (remember also that Nietzsche often suggests that the base are more cunning, and frequently more intelligent, than the noble). But as in the preceding aphorism, the more important contrast is between the philosopher and everyone else.

However, in Nietzsche's esotericism, the surface impression is rarely *altogether* misleading – that would make things too easy. To add to the complexity we have come to expect from him, everything I have just said must be qualified by the sense in which the thought and life of the philosopher *is* indeed comparable to the fast-flowing river Ganges, and not the shuffling tortoise or the hopping frog. It is precisely the unique *combination* of gravity and levity, “slowness” and “speed,” “taciturnity” and “indiscretion,” “necessity” and “freedom of the will,” characteristic of the philosopher which those who do not think or live in a philosophical way find so difficult to grasp: “That genuinely philosophical co-presence [*Beieinander*] of a bold, exuberant spirituality which runs *presto* and a dialectical severity and

²⁸² Friedrich Nietzsche to Georg Brandes, December 2, 1887, in Nietzsche, *Selected Letters*, 280.

necessity which takes no false step is unknown to most thinkers and scholars from their own experience.”²⁸³ Thus the “contrast” or “contradiction” (*Gegensatz*) which Machiavelli “risks” between the brisk *tempo* of his rhetoric and the gravity of his thought (“the most serious subject matter”), and which Nietzsche imitates in his own remarkable use of the German language, reflects *both* the contradiction between “the outside and the inside” (accessible to the careless and to the slow reader respectively) *and* the contrast between “the lower and the higher,” insofar as such a literary style manifests the unique combination of seriousness and play characteristic of the *highest* perspective.

The latter point is emphasized in the next aphorism, in which Nietzsche once again seems to espouse a kind of linguistic and racial relativism,²⁸⁴ although this time at the expense of his own language and race: “What allows itself to be translated most poorly [*am schlechtesten*] from one language into another is the *tempo* of its style, which has its basis [*Grund*] in the character of the race, or to speak more physiologically, in the average *tempo* of its ‘metabolism.’ There are honestly meant translations which are almost falsifications, as involuntary vulgarizations of the original... The German is almost incapable of *presto* in his language; thus, as may reasonably be inferred, also of many of the most delectable and audacious nuances of free, free-spirited thought... And just as the buffoon and the satyr are foreign to him in body and conscience, so Aristophanes and Petronius are untranslatable for him.”²⁸⁵

²⁸³ BGE 213. Translation modified.

²⁸⁴ Cf. BGE 20.

²⁸⁵ BGE 28. Translation modified.

Nietzsche claims that some “races” are incapable of “free-spirited thought,” and thus presumably of philosophy itself, because of the “tempo of their metabolism,” which is reflected in the languages they speak. Yet Nietzsche’s example is not (as one might expect from a nineteenth century racist like Gobineau), say, the Chinese or the African race, but the German “race.” Nietzsche is obviously being playful; indeed, he puts “metabolism” in scare quotes, qualifies his claim with “almost” (*beinahe*), and then goes on to cite an exception: “Lessing is an exception.”²⁸⁶ What made Lessing an exception? *His singular personal nature*, more precisely his “actor-nature” (*Schauspieler-Natur*), “which understood much and understood how to do much.”²⁸⁷ Again, we learn that philosophers are actors – they have a reflective distance from the socially recognized roles they inhabit which most people lack, which enables them to understand the world around them and also to write esoterically. Nietzsche then *asks the question* of whether Machiavelli’s style, which combines the seemingly incombable, could be “imitated” in (not “translated” into) the German language, “even in the prose” of an exception such as Lessing, and implicitly answers his own question in the affirmative – Nietzsche’s own style constitutes such an “imitation.”

The serious point behind Nietzsche’s “venomous joke” about the German race is that the *natural* difference between those who are endowed with a philosophical “nature” and those who are not is more fundamental than the differences among races, languages and even historical epochs, even the difference between antiquity and modernity. I suggest that the “involuntary vulgarizations” (*unfreiwillige Vergemeinerungen*) to which Nietzsche refers are not attempts to

²⁸⁶ BGE 28.

²⁸⁷ BGE 28. Translation modified.

translate, say, a Greek or Latin book into, say, German or English, which inevitably fail due to the spiritually constipated “metabolism” of the Germans or the English. Rather, they refer to the attempts of the unphilosophical reader to “translate” the philosopher’s speech into his thought, which however earnestly intended will invariably result in an “involuntary vulgarization” of the philosopher’s deepest insights: “Nowadays all the world talks of things of which it *cannot* have any experience, and this is most true, and in the worst way, concerning philosophers and philosophical states [*philosophischen Zuständen*]: only the fewest of the few [*die Wenigsten*] know them, are permitted to know them, and all popular opinions about them are false.”²⁸⁸ Thus when he says that Aristophanes is “untranslatable” for the German, what he means is that Aristophanes’ deepest thoughts are inaccessible to most of us.

Nietzsche says that it was “not for nothing” that Lessing was “the translator of Bayle” and that he “liked to flee” to “the vicinity” (*die Nähe*) of Diderot and Voltaire and “still more” to “flee among” (or “conceal himself beneath [*unter*]”?) the Roman “writers of comedies” (*Lustspieldichter*).²⁸⁹ Then he adds, “Lessing also loved free-spiritedness in its *tempo* [*liebte auch im tempo die Freigeisterei*], the escape from Germany.”²⁹⁰ He virtually *identifies* free-spiritedness or philosophy itself with “the escape from Germany.” The surface suggestion is that Lessing loved to escape from Germany *because* he loved free-spiritedness and Germans are “metabolically” incapable of philosophy. But we have seen that this is a “venomous joke.” Furthermore, why did Lessing escape to “the vicinity” (or as Kaufmann translates it, “the neighborhood”) of Diderot and Voltaire, as Nietzsche carefully says? Was it to enjoy the

²⁸⁸ BGE 213. Translation modified.

²⁸⁹ BGE 28. Translation modified.

²⁹⁰ BGE 28. Translation modified.

company of Diderot and Voltaire themselves? But in BGE 26, Nietzsche already emphasized that Voltaire was not a deep thinker, and he will emphasize this still more strongly in BGE 35: “Oh Voltaire! Oh humanity! Oh stupidity!”²⁹¹ Diderot and Voltaire were the archetypal *philosophes* or “free thinkers” in the modern Enlightenment sense which Nietzsche *contrasts* with “free, *very* free spirits” such as himself: “We ‘free spirits’... *are* something other than ‘*libres-penseurs,*’ ‘*liberi pensatori,*’ ‘*Freidenker*’ and whatever else all these goodly advocates of ‘modern ideas’ like to call themselves.”²⁹²

Nietzsche’s claim that Lessing loved “free-spiritedness” *and* “the escape from Germany” to France (and to ancient Rome), seeming virtually to identify these two things or at least to suggest that one follows ineluctably from the other, finds its parallel in his claim that Machiavelli “in his *Principe* lets us breathe the dry, fine air of Florence” *and* “cannot help but present the most serious subject matter in a boisterous *allegriissimo*.”²⁹³ The hasty reader who is carried along by Nietzsche’s galloping rhetoric will get the sense that Machiavelli’s allowing us to “escape” to Renaissance Florence when we read *The Prince* is part and parcel of his presenting the deepest, most difficult thoughts in a mischievously boisterous *tempo*, as if such a “combination” were characteristic of “the dry, fine air” of Florence itself. But did the average Florentine (or Italian) of the Renaissance epoch possess the uniquely philosophical combination of seriousness and play which constitutes “the very best, most mischievous temper [*Laune*]”²⁹⁴? Or was Machiavelli, as a philosopher, not just as much of an exception among the Italians as Lessing and Nietzsche were among the Germans?

²⁹¹ Cf. BGE 26 with 35. Translation modified.

²⁹² BGE 44. Translation modified.

²⁹³ BGE 28. Translation modified.

²⁹⁴ BGE 28. Translation modified.

BGE 28 isn't primarily about different "races" or "cultures" and how free-spirited they may or may not be. Nietzsche was neither a Gobineau nor a Burckhardt. Rather, this aphorism is about the unique form of friendship enjoyed by philosophers as they communicate with one another across the centuries. Closely read, aphorisms 27 and 28 suggest that "translation" of philosophy is indeed possible – from speech into thought and from one language or epoch into another. A philosopher may have closer "friends" among the dead and the not-yet-born than among the living, share a more real intimacy with those whose books he reads and those whom he anticipates will read *him* than with his "good friends" in the present (or his *merely* "good friends" among his future readers, people like you and me). While the dialogue he has with "his kind" (*Seines-Gleichen*) in the past and future will in a literal sense be one-sided (his friends in the past can't reply to his questions, while his friends in the future can't hear them yet), if he learns to read *and* write "esoterically," there will be an important albeit metaphorical sense in which it is a "real dialogue" in both directions. The model for such trans-historical conversation is the Platonic dialogue, which was inspired by real conversations with Socrates. Plato's founding of an enduring tradition ensured that all trans-historical conversations between philosophers would in a way be conversations with Socrates. Nietzsche acknowledges this when he says that "the buffoon and the satyr" are foreign to the unphilosophical German "in body and conscience."²⁹⁵ This pairing continues the series of allusions to Socrates in this sequence of aphorisms, while the idea that a "buffoon" or a "satyr" would have a distinctive "conscience"

²⁹⁵ BGE 28.

(*Gewissen*) is startlingly odd – unless Nietzsche has in mind the *intellectual* conscience of a Socrates.²⁹⁶

In reading this aphorism, then, one ought to keep in mind Nietzsche's famous claim that some men are "born posthumously."²⁹⁷ The final sentence mentions Plato's "deathbed," under the "pillow" of which was found, not "a Bible" or anything comparably mystical, "Pythagorean" or "Platonic," as one might expect given the influence of Plato's "exoteric doctrines" on the emergence of Christianity ("Platonism for the people"), but rather a volume of Aristophanes: "How could even a Plato have endured life – a Greek life, to which he said 'no' – without an Aristophanes!"²⁹⁸ Nietzsche's point is *not* that "even" an ascetically-inclined thinker like Plato, who repudiated the luxuriant Hellenic world around him (in fact, Nietzsche speaks here with uncharacteristic disgust of the pestiferous "swamps" of the "ancient world"²⁹⁹), needed "comic relief" from time to time by enjoying the lewd humor of a bawdy playwright, like a monk with a stash of pornography hidden under his bed. Rather, Nietzsche's point is that *all philosophers* in one sense say "no" to the invariably common, vulgar world which surrounds them, whatever epoch they might find themselves in (one might think of Borges' remark about Juan Crisóstomo Lafinur – "like all men, he was given bad times in which to live"³⁰⁰), but they still need friendship with other philosophers, even the great Plato, who possessed more "strength" than any other philosopher in history.³⁰¹ The human need to be among one's kin isn't destroyed by

²⁹⁶ Cf. GS 2.

²⁹⁷ EH Why I Write Such Good Books 1.

²⁹⁸ BGE 28. Translation modified.

²⁹⁹ BGE 28.

³⁰⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, "A New Refutation of Time," trans. James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, eds. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 218.

³⁰¹ Cf. BGE 191.

philosophy, but given a new form. Plato was fortunate enough to know Aristophanes and Socrates personally, whereas we know them only through books.

However, as I indicated earlier, the theme of trans-historical friendship among philosophers doesn't exhaust this very rich aphorism. It is also concerned with the closely related question of *Zeitdiagnose* or what Nietzsche calls "the historical sense." It is no accident that Lessing not only "translated" Bayle, but also "fled to the vicinity" of France and ancient Rome, or that Machiavelli not only presented us with "the most serious subject matter" in a highly artistic fashion, but also "let us breathe" the air of Florence, just as *BGE* is both a treatment of the philosophical life *and* a diagnosis and "critique of modernity."³⁰² Nietzsche suggests that a historically diagnostic task was not introduced into philosophy by Hegel – philosophers have always recognized the need "to comprehend their own time in thought," not because this task *exhausts* philosophy, but rather because one must comprehend one's "culture" (the conventions of one's time and place) if one wants to overcome it properly: "What does a philosopher demand of himself first and last? To overcome his time in himself, to become 'timeless'... I am just as much as Wagner a child of my time... but I understood this, I resisted it. The philosopher in me resisted it."³⁰³

It is for this reason that philosophers are impelled to flee into "vicinities" other than their own, in order to gain distance on their "culture," whether they do this after the fashion of Herodotus, or only in thought, like Socrates, who remained in Athens for his entire life (when he wasn't on military campaign), but was always eager to speak with interesting visitors who were

³⁰² EH: *Beyond Good and Evil* 2.

³⁰³ CW: Preface. Translation modified.

passing through. There is even a remarkable letter to his friend Köselitz where Nietzsche toys with the idea of spending a year or two in a Muslim country: “I want to live for a while among Muslims, in the places moreover where their faith is at its most devout; this way my eye and judgment for all things European will be sharpened.”³⁰⁴ It is also for this reason that a philosopher’s literary corpus will tend to combine *Zeitdiagnose* with psychological analysis of the philosophical type, sometimes in the same book (think of Plato’s *Republic*, in many ways the model for *BGE* – they both end with a mystical poem or a kind of religious myth³⁰⁵). But the deeper epistemological dimensions of this problem (and the points of tension which a radically historical philosopher such as Hegel or Heidegger would want to exploit) are only hinted at obliquely in *BGE* 28, with the playful reference to “physiology” and the emphasis on the singular “natures” of Lessing (the “actor”) and Plato (the “sphinx”), which *enabled* them to overcome their times in themselves.

Perhaps the most beautiful description of philosophical friendship across the ages occurs in Machiavelli’s letter to Vettori, to which I suspect Nietzsche alludes: “I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them lovingly, I feed on the food that alone is mine and that I was born for. There I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reasons for their actions; and they in their humanity reply to me. And for the space of four hours I feel

³⁰⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche to Heinrich Köselitz, March 13, 1881. In Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe in 8 Bänden. Bd. 6: Januar 1880 – Dezember 1884*, eds. Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari, 2nd. ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 200. Nietzsche formulates the plan, which never came to fruition, to spend “one or two years” in Tunisia with his friend Gersdorff. Translation is my own.

³⁰⁵ Laurence D. Cooper argues in persuasive detail that the nine books of *BGE* and its Aftersong are loosely modelled on the ten books of Plato’s *Republic*. Cf. Laurence D. Cooper, *Eros in Plato, Rousseau and Nietzsche: The Politics of Infinity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 203-302.

no boredom, I forget every pain, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me.”³⁰⁶

Machiavelli’s description of his “loving” reception by those who are long dead through the solitary activity of reading ends with an allusion to his own “being-towards-death,” as Heidegger would call it, the distinctive character of the philosopher’s interior self-relation and his relation to the “end” of human life in the twofold sense of its purpose – “the food that alone is mine and that I was born for,” i.e. *knowledge* – and its conclusion, its abrupt passing into nothingness: “Death does not frighten me.”³⁰⁷ Nietzsche raises the same set of questions by his reference to Plato’s “deathbed” at the end of BGE 28, which implicitly contrasts Plato’s gentle, “natural” death, while sleeping on a “pillow,” with Socrates’ “martyrdom,” thereby preparing us for the theme of the next aphorism – the philosopher’s solitude.

BGE 29 completes the philosopher’s return to the surface with a turn inwards, into the “labyrinth” of his own soul: “It is the matter proper to the fewest of the few [*die Sache der Wenigsten*] to be independent – it is a prerogative [*ein Vorrecht*] of the strong. And whoever attempts it, even with the best right to it, but without *having* to [*auch mit dem besten Rechte dazu, aber ohne es zu müssen*], thereby proves that he is probably not only strong, but also daring [*verwegen*] to the point of ebullience [*Ausgelassenheit*]. He enters into a labyrinth, he multiplies thousandfold the dangers which life already brings with it; among which not the least is that nobody sees with their eyes [*Keiner mit Augen sieht*] how and where he goes astray, grows lonely and is torn piecemeal by some cave-minotaur of conscience. Supposing that such a person perishes [*geht zu Grunde*], it happens so far from the comprehension of human beings

³⁰⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori, December 10, 1513, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, in *The Prince*, 109-110.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

that they can neither feel it nor sympathize with it [*fühlen und mitfühlen*] – and he can no longer go back! He can no longer go back to the pity of human beings!”³⁰⁸

Lampert argues that this aphorism is above all a *warning* – Nietzsche exhorts those who aren’t strong enough to handle the “dangers” of philosophizing to spend their lives doing something else, instead.³⁰⁹ However, while its ominous tone certainly makes it sound like a warning, it is important that this aphorism, unlike BGE 26 and 27, contains no direct exhortation, only pure description. Furthermore, the aphorism begins in a very curious way. Having ended the preceding aphorism by emphasizing the philosopher’s dependence on his friends (even Plato *needed* Aristophanes to endure “a Greek life” to which he said “no,” just as Nietzsche says “no” to late modernity), Nietzsche says that “to be independent” is a “prerogative of the strong,” by which he must mean *those who have the strongest desires*. BGE 6, which was also concerned with the philosopher’s peculiar self-relation, suggested that the “strongest” desire of all is the godlike drive to philosophize, the only drive capable of hierarchically ordering the other drives in a way which enables the type governed by such a drive “to become who he is,” while all other human types “are who they are not,” are somehow radically alienated from themselves. But having said that independence is the “prerogative” (*Vorrecht*) of the strong, he then says that if someone attempts “to be independent,” attempts to philosophize, *without having to* yet while *still* possessing the best “right” (*Recht*) to do so, he thereby “proves” that he is “probably” not only strong, but also “daring to the point of ebullience.”³¹⁰ If Nietzsche means this as a warning, it is a warning against philosophizing (or

³⁰⁸ BGE 29. Translation modified.

³⁰⁹ Cf. Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 70.

³¹⁰ BGE 29. Translation modified.

being as independent as humanly possible) directed towards *those who have the best right to philosophize*. How is it possible to have the “best right” to philosophize while lacking the “prerogative” to do so? Furthermore, Nietzsche doesn’t say that these reckless types (on Lampert’s interpretation, those who foolishly start philosophizing without realizing what they’re letting themselves in for) are *weaker* than “the fewest of the few” mentioned in the first sentence. Rather, he says that they are “not only strong,” but *also* “daring [*verwegen*] to the point of ebullience,” a formula which reminds us of the “most daring [*verwegensten*] nuances of free-spiritedness” (a rather incongruous juxtaposition – “nuances” suggest care and subtlety, not daring or recklessness) mentioned in the preceding aphorism, as well as the description of Machiavelli’s “boisterous *allegriissimo*” and his “very best, most mischievous temper.”³¹¹

However, Lampert is surely right that Nietzsche intends this aphorism to *sound like* a warning, and the reference to those who begin philosophizing “without having to” (Kaufmann mistranslates *ohne es zu müssen* as “without inner constraint,” as if Nietzsche means those who keep philosophizing even when they really ought to take a break) reminds us of BGE 23, where he said that there are “a hundred good reasons” (note the “thousandfold” multiplication of dangers in BGE 29) for those who “can” avoid the dangerous “domain” of philosophy to “keep away” from it.³¹² However, the closely paired incongruities of someone who has “the best right” to do something while lacking the “prerogative” to do so and someone who “proves” that he is “probably” over-daring, and the fact that Nietzsche distinguishes not between those who are strong enough to philosophize and those who are too weak but rather between those who are

³¹¹ BGE 29. Translation modified.

³¹² Cf. BGE 29 with 23.

merely strong and those who are *also* “daring to the point of ebullience,” suggests that the rhetoric of caution (itself at odds by the rhetoric of riskiness – who doesn’t feel insulted by the advice that what he most wants to do is too dangerous *for him personally?*) is intentionally misleading. Although Nietzsche surely does believe that “a little bit of philosophy” can be a dangerous thing for those *unable* to go “all the way” (he makes this point in the very next aphorism), his intention *here* is not to warn a certain reckless kind of person away from philosophizing, but rather to thematize the peculiar solitude or self-relation of the philosopher himself.

Nietzsche says that philosophy multiplies “thousandfold” the dangers which life brings with it already. What are these “dangers” – those proper to life itself and those peculiar to the philosopher? Nietzsche says that among the latter, “not the least” is the peculiar isolation of the philosopher, the inability of most people to comprehend or sympathize with him. The formula “not the least” is ambiguous – does Nietzsche mean that this is the “greatest danger” faced by the philosopher? Nietzsche alludes back to the very first aphorism, which concluded by suggesting that questioning the will to truth “perhaps” involves the greatest of all “risks”: “It does involve a risk, and perhaps there is none that is greater.”³¹³ Nietzsche then immediately (in BGE 2) contrasts theological or transcendent “metaphysics” with immanentist naturalism, a contrast closely related to that between religion and philosophy.³¹⁴

I suggest that the “risk” (*Wagnis*) which Nietzsche mentions alludes to Pascal’s wager – the famous argument that the unbeliever who lacks *certainty* ought to take a “leap of faith,”

³¹³ BGE 1. Translation modified.

³¹⁴ Cf. BGE 2 with 61-62.

because “the greatest danger” faced in a godless world is merely the loss of transient enjoyments when one “perishes,” while the “the greatest danger” faced in a world governed by the omnipotent God is eternal punishment. This suggestion is supported by Pascal’s prominent role in the first two aphorisms of the third chapter, the only chapter explicitly devoted to the theme of religion. In BGE 45 Nietzsche describes Pascal’s “intellectual conscience” as “profound,” “wounded” and “monstrous” (a minotaur is a kind of monster), while in BGE 46 he describes Pascal, not as an example of “holy simplicity,” but rather as an exceptional intellect whose life constituted a prolonged self-destruction of his unusually “tenacious” and “long-lived” reason – a “suicide [*Selbstmord*] of reason” which was both “continuous” and “terrifying.”³¹⁵ Among other things, here too Nietzsche surely has Pascal’s wager in mind, the purpose of which was to strike “terror” into his unbelieving readers: “Men despise religion, they hate it and are afraid it might be true.”³¹⁶

In BGE 51, Nietzsche says that the “most powerful human beings” have stopped short before the “saint” or “holy man” as before a living “question-mark”: “Such a monstrous enormity of denial, of anti-nature [*Wider-Natur*] will not have been desired for nothing, they said to themselves and asked themselves. Is there perhaps a reason for it, some very great danger [*eine ganz grosse Gefahr*] about which the ascetic, thanks to his secret benefactors [*Zusprecher*] and visitors, might have inside information? Enough – the powerful of the world learned a new fear when confronted by him.”³¹⁷ Nietzsche probably has in mind both political men who converted themselves and their nations to Christianity in the early centuries of its

³¹⁵ BGE 45-46. Translation modified.

³¹⁶ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 12.

³¹⁷ BGE 51. Translation modified.

growth and also *intellectually* “powerful” men, some of whom ended up like Augustine or Pascal, as Nietzsche would see it choosing religious fear over philosophical curiosity, while others ended up like Nietzsche – they used their analysis of revealed religion to deepen their grasp of “the human soul and its limits... and its as yet unexhausted possibilities.”³¹⁸ The “very great danger” to which Nietzsche refers is the danger of eternal punishment, the fear of which played a crucial role in the growth of Christianity, as Nietzsche frequently emphasizes.³¹⁹ I suggest that the doctrine of the eternal return (to which he alludes in BGE 56), as well as being a kind of doctrinal representation of the *problem* of cosmology, is Nietzsche’s playful response to Pascal’s wager – the third alternative which Pascal failed to consider, the hypothesis that *this life* will repeat eternally.

When Nietzsche says in BGE 1 that philosophy “perhaps” carries the greatest risk, he delicately alludes to the most famous “religious argument against philosophy,” Pascal’s wager. By the time we have reached BGE 29, however, Nietzsche has disposed of “theology” by means of his “physio-psychology.” Like Machiavelli (“death does not frighten me”), Nietzsche’s philosopher is no longer “terrified” by religion, even in his most solitary moments. What, then, are the “dangers” he has in mind?

The question of death hangs over this aphorism. Nietzsche says that when the philosopher “perishes” (*geht zu Grunde*), nobody will understand what happened, just *who* really died: “It took a hundred years until Greece found out who this garden god, Epicurus, had been. – Did they find out?”³²⁰ It is no accident that the preceding and succeeding aphorisms

³¹⁸ BGE 45.

³¹⁹ For example, cf. HATH 132, D 72, OGM 1:14-15 and AC 58.

³²⁰ BGE 7. Translation modified.

touch on the philosopher's posthumous reception in books which "the people" inevitably misunderstand. But death is an unavoidable "danger" of life itself – it is hardly peculiar to the philosopher, although, as we have learned, if he seeks to communicate his thoughts to his contemporaries or to "legislate new values" for them, he is likely to bring upon himself "danger, slander, expulsion and still rougher consequences of enmity."³²¹ Plato's *Phaedo*, which ends with the execution of Socrates, arranged by his enemies in the *polis*, is replete with allusions to the Theseus myth, which intimate that Socrates is a new Theseus, a kind of minotaur-slayer. The minotaur in question is the fear of death, which appears to be closely linked with the equally monstrous phenomenon of the hatred of *logos* (*misologia*).³²² Given the series of allusions to Socrates in this sequence of aphorisms, and the reference to Plato's outwardly very different kind of death at the end of BGE 28, it is likely that Nietzsche alludes here to the resonances of this myth in the *Phaedo* and thus also to the execution of Socrates.³²³ I note that Socrates' primary interlocutors in the *Phaedo*, Simmias and Cebes, are Pythagoreans who earnestly want to believe in the immortality of the soul – in BGE 28, Nietzsche said that nothing "Pythagorean"

³²¹ BGE 25. Translation modified.

³²² Cf. Ronna Burger, *The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984). "Socrates... can overcome the minotaur that consists in the fear of death only by discovering a safe thread leading through the twisted passages of the logos in which that monster hides. And that very effort is itself threatened by another danger: Socrates will have to overcome the many-headed monster of misology, which consists in distrust... of the power of logos in general." (21-22) "The outermost frame of the dramatic prologue, alluding to Socrates' trial as the background of his death, encloses an internal frame, linking the Athenian mission to Delos, as a ritual enactment of the Theseus legend, with the Socratic mission, as a philosophically reconstructed enactment of that legend." (23) "In the mythical context first established by the dramatic frame of the dialogue, Socrates/Theseus engaged in a heroic mission to overcome the Minotaur, which consists in the fear of death." (114-115)

³²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 213: "At the moment he took the cup so steadily, *Phaedo* adds, Socrates looked up at the man from under his brows, bull-like... Socrates suddenly turns into an image of the Minotaur, the mythical monster symbolizing the fear of death... For this brief moment, perhaps, Socrates succumbs to the fear of death."

could be found under Plato's pillow after he "perished." But as Lampert points out, the German idiom *zu Grunde gehen* literally means "get to the bottom of things," to the "ground" or the "reason" (*Grund*) for things.³²⁴ It is surely a "danger" peculiar to the philosopher that most people, even his "good friends," fail to understand his "highest insights" (mentioned in the first line of the next aphorism), his retreat into the ground of life itself.³²⁵ In completing Nietzsche's ascent to the surface, BGE 29 also returns to the depths.

In the manner we have come to expect from Nietzsche, the surface impression of BGE 29 (as a kind of warning) isn't *altogether* misleading. The reference to the "cave-minotaur of conscience" which tears the daring thinker apart "piecemeal" is very ambiguous. Is the daring thinker likened to Theseus, who must confront and slay imaginary beings like the minotaur (or the holy God – or "the free will"), encountered in the labyrinth of his own "conscience," presumably the intellectual conscience of a Socratic "satyr" (itself a kind of mythical being or demigod)? Or is the thinker's conscience *itself* a kind of "minotaur," which tears *itself* apart "piecemeal," as Pascal's "monstrous" "intellectual conscience" slowly tore itself to pieces? Although Nietzsche doesn't earnestly intend to "warn" anyone away from philosophy (or religion) in this aphorism, he does want to hint at the subtle and complex relationship between these phenomena in the philosopher's soul, which is reflected in an inverted form in the soul of Pascal and those like him. In BGE 45, he calls the latter theme "the problem of knowledge and conscience [*Wissen und Gewissen*]... in the soul of the *homines religiosi*."³²⁶ Nietzsche hints at the danger that an incisive and profoundly "independent" intellect such as that of Pascal (one

³²⁴ Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 70, footnote 13.

³²⁵ Cf. BGE 29 with 27, 28 and 30.

³²⁶ BGE 45. Translation modified.

might also think of Kierkegaard), whose faith he *contrasts* in BGE 46 with “that ingenuous and grumpy subaltern-faith [*Unterthanen-Glaube*] with which, say, a Luther or a Cromwell or some other northern barbarian of the intellect, clung to his God and to Christianity,” will end up using its own extraordinary resources to subject its independence to imaginary beings, duties and fears which it refuses to see are its own creations.³²⁷

But if the greatest danger for someone with Pascal’s “wounded” intellectual conscience is eternal punishment, or the tormenting fear of eternal punishment, and the protracted and gruesome self-destruction of reason resulting from such fear, BGE 29 appears to suggest that “not the least” of the dangers faced by someone with Nietzsche’s Theseus-like or Socratic conscience, who has slain the imaginary beings encountered in the “labyrinth” of his soul, is a uniquely intense form of *loneliness* – contemporary and posthumous incomprehension by others and isolation in the “labyrinth” of his books. BGE 29 implicitly contrasts the afterlife imagined by a religious type like Pascal, where he will be confronted either with eternal punishment or with eternal salvation, with the “afterlife” anticipated by a philosophical type like Nietzsche, where he will be confronted with the “reward” of posthumous comprehension at the hands of a few readers and the “punishment” of incomprehension at the hands of everyone else, even his “good friends.” Nietzsche wryly suggests that he will receive a great deal more “punishment” than “reward” in *his* “afterlife.”

But just how much of a danger is this for the philosopher? Is it really a “danger” at all? Like the “holy man” of BGE 51, Nietzsche has “secret benefactors and visitors,” not saints and angels, but writers like Plato and Machiavelli, who supply him with “the food that alone is his

³²⁷ BGE 46. Translation modified.

and for which he was born.” Like the rest of us, the philosopher has a need for community, even with his “good friends” among the vulgar, but above all with the philosophers of the past and even the future. But what about the philosopher’s own peculiar self-relation – his ineluctably private relation to the two “ends” of his life, the highest object of his desires and his own inevitable death? As Nietzsche would put it, what does it mean to “incorporate” (*einverleiben*) “science” into one’s mortal and transient life? In the terms raised by aphorisms 6 and 9, how does the philosophical drive enable a kind of uniquely godlike self-mastery? In what sense does the philosopher alone become “who he is” (a formula which alludes both to Pindar and to Exodus 3:14) or “live according to nature”?

Like many of the earlier aphorisms (especially the sequence 5-9), this aphorism again hints that the philosopher is a kind of god: “Supposing that such a person [*ein Solcher*] perishes, it happens so far from the comprehension of human beings that they can neither feel it nor sympathize with it – and he can no longer go back! He can no longer go back to the pity of human beings!”³²⁸ The implication (“so far from the comprehension of human beings”) is that “such a person” is *not* a human being, but something higher and more incomprehensible, presumably a god. But while it is characteristic of a god to be immortal, Nietzsche’s paradoxical theme is the *death* of a god and the inability of human beings to understand what has happened when a god “perishes.”

Lampert notes that the German *Mitleid der Menschen* is ambiguous – it could mean the pity one receives *from* human beings or the pity one has *for* human beings.³²⁹ Nietzsche alludes

³²⁸ BGE 29. Translation modified.

³²⁹ Cf. Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 70-71, footnote 14.

to what in BGE 46 he calls “the paradoxical formula” of “God on the cross,”³³⁰ the mind-boggling Christian notion that because God died on the cross out of infinite compassion *for us*, we are enjoined to respond with a kind of compassion for the omnipotent God Himself, as we meditate on the mystery of the suffering and death of Jesus, to “join” our sufferings with those of Jesus (the verb he uses is *mitfühlen*). In BGE 202, Nietzsche speaks of “the outrageous excess of a ‘pity for God’ [*die Ausschweifung eines „Mitleidens mit Gott“*].”³³¹ Nietzsche implicitly compares (and contrasts) the meditation of the believing Christian on the mystery of Christ’s death with the reader’s meditation on the “mysteries” of the esoteric books which the godlike philosopher writes or (in the case of Socrates) inspires others to write. The *next* aphorism, i.e. the aphorism which as it were comes immediately *after* the philosopher’s death, is the only place where Nietzsche explicitly mentions “the difference between the exoteric and the esoteric,” which is so important for the book as a whole.³³² In BGE 29, Nietzsche implicitly compares (and contrasts) the posthumous reception of Jesus as God in the Christian tradition with the posthumous “divination” it is the fate of every great philosopher to receive, while implying that such posthumous idealization, while it involves a distorting embellishment of “who the philosopher really was,” nonetheless conveys something authentic about the uniquely elevated form of life he enjoyed. At the same time, Nietzsche suggests that, just as philosophers such as Socrates are not *literally* “immortal,” they are also not *literally* “omnipotent” – even as they create a literary world for others to inhabit and enjoy, no matter how much pity or even love they may have for “the average human being,” they cannot transform them into

³³⁰ BGE 46.

³³¹ BGE 202. Translation modified.

³³² BGE 30.

philosophers, only cultivate those who are born with a nature akin to their own and help them “bear fruit.” Finally, BGE 29 again hints at the disquieting question of why Socrates chose to accept a kind of literal “martyrdom,” a question raised throughout this sequence of aphorisms without receiving a clear answer. Was Socrates driven by “some cave-minotaur of conscience,” or by an authentically philosophical impulse, a decision to allow himself to be executed that was somehow both serious and playful?

Whatever may have been the real difference between “the historical Socrates” and the figure one is tempted to call “the Socrates of faith,” who has exerted so powerful and so various an influence on European and world history, the most important question raised by BGE 29 *for Nietzsche* is whether the philosopher’s peculiar solitude poses a real threat or “danger” to his “cheerfulness.” The sequence of aphorisms 24-29 has been characterized by a constant back-and-forth between a cheerful tone and a more serious tone, which imitates the combination of gravity and levity characteristic of the philosophical life. While the first aphorism (BGE 24), whose theme was life itself and the enjoyment of life, was the most joyful and ebullient in its register, the last aphorism (BGE 29), whose theme is solitude and death, has an appropriately solemn, even portentous tone. But just as the allusion to Jan Hus in BGE 24 in a way undercuts its surface impression, or transforms its carefree humor into a kind of Machiavelli-like black humor, in BGE 29 the incongruous reference to “ebullience” (*Ausgelassenheit*) reminds us that in the preceding aphorism, Nietzsche had characterized the “tempo” of the philosopher or free spirit’s own distinctive manner of life as a “boisterous *allegriissimo*,” a musical term which means “extremely cheerful” or “extremely happy.” Nietzsche implies that even if the philosopher is in a way the loneliest of men, comparable to a god who creates a world the

inhabitants of which can only uncomprehendingly worship or resentfully rebel against their creator, he is nonetheless also the happiest.

Concluding Remarks

While BGE 29 emphasized the philosopher's solitude, the sense in which he is radically solitary and detached from others even in the midst of society, BGE 24 emphasized the continuity between philosophers, "those of us who know," and the vulgar, the sense in which they are *both* driven by an instinct "to love life" or "to enjoy life," an instinct which leads them *both* to love ignorance and illusion as well as driving them *both* to seek knowledge. This instinct for "enjoyment" motivates the noble as well as the base and is in one sense "essentially the same" (*wesensgleich*) as the instinct which drives the other animals unreflectively in pursuit of the objects of their desires, even as this instinct only becomes reflectively aware of itself *as* instinct in human consciousness and *for this reason* takes on far more complex and internally differentiated forms in human life than in sentient life more generally. This instinct is "the will to power," Nietzsche's name for the desire we all have to *increase* the "feeling of power" or "enjoyment" which accompanies *all our actions* (cf. BGE 19), even the feeling of "success" when we do something as simple as opening a door or vocalizing a sentence, but which takes on an endlessly complex variety of forms and intensities. This variety of forms nonetheless has a certain inherent structure which the philosopher can render intelligible by means of a "typology" or "morphology of the will to power."

I have been arguing that throughout the first twenty-nine aphorisms of the book Nietzsche repeatedly indicates, in a variety of places and ways, that he doesn't beg the Socratic question – that he doesn't assume that *because* the philosopher comprehends human life and life itself better than anyone else, he *must* lead a life that is not only more self-conscious, but also

somehow “better,” more “life-affirming,” than any other way of life, in contrast to Leo Strauss, many of whose formulations seem to suggest that even if the mere *possibility* of philosophy can be rendered questionable by the *hypothesis* of “revelation,” philosophy itself – *if* it is possible – *must* be the best or the happiest life. The irony is that Nietzsche might well have regarded Strauss as a kind of “pre-Socratic” philosopher, who dogmatically assumed that “philosophy cannot possibly lead up to the insight that another way of life apart from the philosophic one is the right one.”¹ From Nietzsche’s perspective, such a formulation begs the decisive question: “Why knowledge at all?”² How can the philosopher guarantee *in advance* that he won’t discover that we are so constituted that, despite being the only animals capable of self-consciousness and knowledge, the life governed by illusion (or even self-deception) is in the best cases happier and more “life-affirming” than the life of the philosopher, even as only he has the tragicomic misfortune to *comprehend* this fact: “Wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you *not* to hear?”³ Yet were this to be true, he could “no longer go back,” because such a “return to illusion” is psychologically impossible – one cannot choose to believe something one knows or sincerely believes is false. Once lost, “innocence” cannot be regained through a sheer act of will.

However, while Nietzsche often reminds us that there is no *a priori* guarantee that philosophy will turn out to be the best life, he also indicates, sometimes rather obliquely and sometimes more directly, that he *nonetheless* regards philosophy (for those who really are

¹ Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” 113.

² BGE 230. Translation modified.

³ BT 3.

capable of leading such a life) as the best way of living *in* “our suitably constructed and suitably falsified world.”⁴ In the best cases, “the lucky strokes,” the questioning of the will to truth *does* lead to a justification of the will to truth, albeit as a “prerogative” of “the strong,” those whose philosophical drive is strong enough to organize their desires in a hierarchical fashion. Although in GS 183 he claims that “the deepest happiness” – a “boisterous *allegrissimo*” – is accompanied by a *unique* form of sadness, he doesn’t say that *this* sadness is correspondingly “the *deepest* sadness.”⁵ On the contrary, much like Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus, Nietzsche often intimates that unphilosophical forms of life (whether “noble” or “base,” governed by honorable principle or mere sensual indulgence) are themselves disguised forms of sadness and inner slavery. Although the philosopher suffers from a *unique* form of solitude and even self-alienation (insofar as philosophy consists in the “overcoming” of morality and morality itself belongs to “our unconquerable flesh and blood”), only the philosopher becomes who he is in a godlike sense that other human beings only dimly approximate or comprehend.⁶

However, even if one assumes that Nietzsche’s physio-psychology in BGE 13-22 has accomplished what I have argued it is supposed to accomplish, one might well ask whether Nietzsche has really *shown* this to be the case, really “proven” that the philosophical life is the best life. One might also ask exactly in what sense the philosophical life is the best life, what it means for Nietzsche “to become who one is.”

I would like to conclude with the following interpretive suggestions, which would require a detailed interpretation of the entire book to substantiate adequately. Such a project

⁴ BGE 24.

⁵ GS 183.

⁶ Cf. BGE 6 with 24 and 32.

would itself obviously require a book (or several long books) to accomplish even in a minimally adequate fashion, but one cannot exhaust the riches of a text like *BGE* in a single dissertation, and I hope my line of interpretation so far will have rendered these suggestions plausible.

I suggest that there is an important sense in which Nietzsche's project in the book as a whole comes to an end in BGE 29 (appropriately, given that this aphorism is concerned with the philosopher's being-towards-death), which completes his philosophical ascent to the surface, while there is an equally important sense in which it only begins in earnest after this aphorism (appropriately, given that philosophers are "born posthumously"). Nietzsche has completed his preliminary elaboration of the fundamental problems of philosophical psychology in its more humanistic (as opposed to "physio-psychological" or epistemological sense) – the problem of the philosopher's inner (psychic) and outward (political) difference from and relatedness to "the herd" or "the crowd" (BGE 24-25), the problem of what he can learn from "studying" ordinary human beings (the word Nietzsche uses is *Studium*, odd in this context, suggesting that the philosopher treats his daily interactions with other people in a somewhat detached fashion, as a kind of scholarly "course of study"), namely the dialectic between the noble and the base (BGE 26), from studying the books of other philosophers, as a kind of trans-historical friendship with kindred spirits and also a journey into other times and places in order to gain distance on his own (BGE 27-28), and from his solitary reflection on the twofold "ends" of his life (knowledge and death) and the complex relationship between philosophy and religion in the human soul – the "minotaurs" he slays, Theseus-like, in the labyrinth of *his* fearless intellectual conscience, which he contrasts, with a mixture of "sympathy" and "curiosity" (cf. BGE 45), with the "monstrous" or minotaur-like conscience of someone like Pascal or Kierkegaard, who in his

solitary moments employs his sharply incisive reason to tear *itself* apart (“the subjection of such an intellect *hurts* indescribably... the whole past and habits of such an intellect resist the *absurdissimum* which ‘faith’ represents to it”⁷), rather than enjoying the godlike solitude of “a profound and godless man.”⁸

This sequence of aphorisms has supplied us with a preliminary, but already *somewhat* determinate sense of what the philosophical life – “the Nietzschean ideal” – will look like, which he will spend the rest of the book fleshing out. There is a sense in which this process is inherently unfinishable and never reaches a stable conclusion, because the Socratic quest itself is unfinishable, and because Nietzsche conceives of the philosophical life in such a way that any attempt to present either the deepest insights of the philosopher or the distinctive affective tonality of his inner life will inevitably be somewhat figurative, indirect and thus incomplete and even misleading, demanding some form of qualification. There are three basic dimensions to Nietzsche’s esotericism. First, there is the crudely political dimension, “the difference between the outside and the inside.” Secondly, there is the sense in which the deepest “physio-psychological” insights are inherently resistant to doctrinal formulation. Even if one rejects Nietzsche’s unusually radical view on the “falsification” in which we live, anyone with any experience of thinking through philosophical problems will recognize that there is some truth to this view – that philosophical claims are not like ordinary empirical claims, they cannot be made into objects of thought in a straightforward fashion, and any attempt to formulate them in speech will immediately invite misunderstanding and require some form of qualification, if one is not

⁷ BGE 46. Translation modified.

⁸ BGE 239.

merely to repeat them as empty dogmas but truly to “make them one’s own.” Nietzsche makes this point in his own way in BGE 289: “The hermit... will doubt whether a philosopher could *possibly* have ‘ultimate and real’ opinions, whether behind every one of his caves there is not, must not be, another deeper cave – a more comprehensive, stranger, richer world beyond a surface, an abyss [*Abgrund*] behind every ground [*Grund*], under every ‘grounding [*Begründung*]’... Every philosophy also *conceals* a philosophy; every opinion is also a hiding-place, every word also a mask.”⁹ Thirdly, if philosophy is fundamentally not a set of doctrines, nor even a set of “insights” resistant to doctrinal formulation, but a *way of life* devoted to the quest for such insights and their “incorporation” into one’s daily existence, then philosophy itself cannot be given a definitive, systematic form in the orderly fashion of Kant or Hegel. Rather, a book about the philosophical life will resemble a great novel, which inevitably reflects the disorderliness of life itself, even if it is well-patterned and has a beginning, middle and end, a compelling plotline and an interesting cast of characters.

BGE is a kind of *Bildungsroman* about the self-education of Nietzsche the philosopher, with a clear over-arching structure which lends itself to being interpreted in a certain somewhat simplistic, but not entirely misleading fashion. The first chapter presents Nietzsche’s liberation from the dogmatic philosophy of the past and the theoretical grounding of his own novel kind of first philosophy, “the morphology of the will to power” understood as “the queen of the sciences.” The second chapter presents Nietzsche’s account of the philosophical life itself – the psychology of “the free mind.” The third chapter presents Nietzsche’s account of the religious life, understood in Strauss-like terms as *the* alternative to the philosophical life, and ends with

⁹ BGE 289. Translation modified.

two aphorisms which present the opposition between philosophy and religion as a political contest for “rule” or “sovereignty,” the first of which (BGE 61) emphasizes the uses and advantages of religion for the philosopher and for everyone else, while the second (BGE 62) emphasizes the “off-set” (*Gegenrechnung*) of “these religions,” “their uncanny dangerousness.”¹⁰ Having “defeated” religion at the theoretical level, then judiciously assessed its political benefits and liabilities, Nietzsche takes a breather (the fourth chapter of pithy “sayings and interludes”) before descending in the last five chapters into the world of morality, politics and history, armed with this knowledge, in order to undertake the legislation of new values for the modern age.

However, the close reader will notice that the book appears to reach a certain *conclusion* in the closely linked aphorisms BGE 229-230, perhaps the most important pair in the book as a whole. At the end of BGE 230, Nietzsche implies that *only now* has he finally *answered* the question: “Why knowledge at all?” Characteristically, though, he leaves the decisive sentence unfinished: “Everybody will ask us that. And we, pressed this way, we who have put the same question to ourselves a hundred times, we have found and find no better answer —”¹¹

I do not have space to do full justice to these two important pairs of aphorisms (BGE 61-62 and 229-230), but I will conclude with a brief discussion of some of their most important points, supplemented by consideration of another important pair, BGE 190-191, which concern the relationship between Socrates and Plato. Together, in the context of the interpretation of

¹⁰ BGE 61-62. Translation modified.

¹¹ BGE 230.

BGE 1-29 which I have already provided, they will help us bring more clearly into view Nietzsche's conception of – and argument for – the philosophical life.

BGE 61 begins: “The philosopher as *we* understand him, we free spirits – as the man of the most comprehensive responsibility, who has the conscience for the over-all development of the human being [*die Gesamt-Entwicklung des Menschen*] – this philosopher will make use of religions for his works of cultivation and education [*seinem Züchtungs- und Erziehungswerke*], just as he will make use of whatever political and economic conditions are at hand. The selective, cultivating [*züchtende*] influence, always destructive as well as creative and formative [*gestaltende*], which can be exerted with the help of religions, is always multifarious and different according to the human beings who are placed under its spell and protection.”¹² Nietzsche speaks in magisterial terms, as if he were a philosopher-king or even a world-emperor, or an advisor to such an emperor, or perhaps even a kind of prophet (“this philosopher will...”), giving counsel or simply predicting how “the philosopher” will *use* religion politically as a means to the end of “cultivating” (or “breeding”) different human types. The passage goes on to suggest how religion will serve this purpose in different ways for different human types, aiding the strong and noble in their “ability to rule” while providing consolation to the weak and “lowliest,” who are destined for hardship and insignificance.¹³ By contrast, BGE 62 emphasizes the dangers that occur “when religions do *not* want to be a means of education and cultivation in the philosopher's hand but insist on having their own *sovereign* way, when they themselves want to be ultimate ends and not means among other means.”¹⁴

¹² BGE 61. Translation modified.

¹³ BGE 61.

¹⁴ BGE 62.

It is difficult to appraise the precise combination of seriousness and play in BGE 61-62. Nietzsche's suggestion that philosophers will be in a position to influence the religious future of mankind directly, whether as global political leaders or merely as their counselors, surely involves a good deal of hyperbole, but he also didn't underestimate the kind of "indirect rule" or cultural and even political influence which could be exerted by a writer of his rhetorical abilities, particularly in late nineteenth century Europe, where people were growing "more atheistic" but also "more religious," as he puts it provocatively in BGE 53, and thus increasingly felt a need for new, secular substitutes for religion, such as communism and fascism.¹⁵ Many of Nietzsche's own doctrines (the will to power, the eternal return, the death of God, the overman, "Dionysos"), insofar as they are not starting-points for philosophical reflection, are surely meant in part to satisfy the desire for a kind of "atheistic religiosity."

A crudely Straussian reading of BGE 61-62 would assume that the philosopher simply looks down on "religion" from above in magisterial detachment, from the intellectual and political heights which he inhabits, deciding how to move ordinary human beings around as if they were pieces on a chessboard or shaping them as if they were clay in the hands of a potter, his own soul entirely free from any form of religiosity. While such a reading would not be *altogether* mistaken (as I have just suggested), it is far too simplistic or one-sided. The more interesting question I want to address here is the internal, psychological and dialectical sense in which the philosopher uses "religions" (always in the plural in BGE 61-62) to "cultivate" his *own* soul, to exert a "creative" and "formative" influence on *himself*.

¹⁵ Cf. BGE 53.

It is important that although Nietzsche gives a handful of definitions of “philosophy” throughout *BGE*, he never gives a definition of “religion.” He wants to compel the reader to figure out its *meaning* for himself. I suggest that “religion” has three primary meanings for Nietzsche. First, it has a conventional or everyday meaning, which refers to the belief in supernatural entities and phenomena – gods, spirits, miracles and the like. In this sense, “the religious life” of a Luther or a Pascal is an alternative to “the philosophical life” of a Socrates or a Nietzsche – they are ways of life given shape by a dominating instinct, “the passion for God” or “the passion for knowledge,” parallel formulas each of which Nietzsche uses only once in *BGE*, to indicate they are contradictory but parallel antitypes.¹⁶ It is significant that every example of “the passion for God” which he gives in the aphorism devoted to this theme (*BGE* 50) is Christian, even as he emphasizes the differences among the kinds of people who are inspired by this passion.¹⁷ Christianity was unique in being able to inspire a “passion for God” *analogous* to the philosophical “passion for knowledge,” a *thought* able to provide a unifying *telos* for a way of life: “The greatest thoughts are the greatest events.”¹⁸ This is presumably connected with the fact that Christianity, unlike say the worship of Zeus or Apollo, was able to inspire a protracted and systematic “suicide of reason” in great intellects such as Pascal. Secondly, “religion” refers to what is sometimes called “religion by other means,” secular or non-supernaturalist forms of single-minded fanaticism or devotion to a cause more universal or abstract than simple patriotism or “love of one’s own.” Nietzsche clearly regards forms of radical egalitarianism such as anarchism and communism as kinds of “religion” in this sense,

¹⁶ Cf. *BGE* 50 with 210.

¹⁷ Cf. *BGE* 50.

¹⁸ *BGE* 285.

and he often seems to regard moderate or “liberal” forms of democratic egalitarianism in the same way. He surely regards all such phenomena as historical after-effects of Christian egalitarian “values.” Finally, there is a third, more diffuse or abstract sense in which “religion” refers to the fundamental illusions constitutive of human life itself, “the world in which we believe we live” or “in which we have *faith* [*glauben*] that we live.”¹⁹

Nietzsche often uses religious language to describe the “fundamental errors of language and reason” – he describes “free and unfree wills” as “mythologies,” the *cogito* as a kind of “superstition,” and so on. When Nietzsche speaks like this, it isn’t mere rhetoric. Rather, it points to a crucial dimension of his conception of philosophy, which has a certain affinity with Hegel’s notion that the *content* of philosophy is identical with that of religion, the difference consisting in their *form* – philosophy itself is merely religious consciousness comprehended reflexively in conceptual form.²⁰ Strauss points out that Nietzsche deems the Hebrew Bible worthy of “reverence,” not as a record of God’s deeds in human history, but as a “monstrous remnant” of what *human beings* once were: “The Old Testament shows forth the greatness, not of God, but of what man once was. The holy God no less than the holy man are creatures of the

¹⁹ BGE 34.

²⁰ “Religion is the form and manner of consciousness in which the truth is present for all men or for all levels of education; but scientific cognition is a particular form of the consciousness of truth, and not everyone, indeed only a few men, undertake the labor of it. *The content is the same*, but just as Homer says about certain things that they have two names, one in the language of gods, and the other on the languages of us men, the creatures of a day, so, too, there are two languages for that content: the language of feeling, representation, and the thinking that nests in the finite categories and one-sided abstractions of the understanding, and the language of the concrete concept... What is implied by all that we have said so far is that there may be religion without philosophy, but there cannot be philosophy without religion, because philosophy includes religion within it.” G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic (with the Zusätze). Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 11-12. Translation modified.

human will to power.”²¹ The “effectual reality” of “the holy God” was a certain form of human life, which somehow created such a “monstrous” phenomenon. For Nietzsche, precisely *because* supernatural phenomena are imaginary, products of the unreflectively creative activity of human desiring, imagining and thinking (“the will to power”), it is arbitrary to stop with a provisional definition of “religion” as a set of dogmas about supernatural phenomena (even if it is expanded to include secular dogmas which serve an analogous political function) – rather, one must go further and understand “religion” more profoundly as *the human activity* which “creates” or “gives birth to” such phenomena. Thus in a notebook entry from 1888, Nietzsche defines “the religious instinct” as “the god-forming instinct.”²²

The title of the third chapter, *Das Religiöse Wesen*, is impossible to translate into English without losing some of its many nuances, but one natural rendering would, “The Religious Being,” thereby prompting the question, “*Which* being is *the* religious being?” The question answers itself – the human being is *the* religious being. Not only is it the case that no other animals have “religions,” but the very texture of human life (“the world in which we have *faith* that we live”) is in a profound sense “religious” (cf. BGE 24). For Nietzsche, religion is ultimately based on human *self*-misinterpretation. Our false image of ourselves (deeply embedded in political or everyday life) as spontaneously initiating causal chains and claiming persistent self-identity over time is a kind of “god,” a being no less imaginary than Zeus or Apollo, with “powers” no less supernatural or miraculous than Zeus’ capacity to shape-change or to hurl lightning-bolts at those who have displeased him. Insofar as we instinctively think of

²¹ BGE 52 (translation modified) and Strauss, “Note on the Plan of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*,” 179.

²² WP 1038: “The religious, that is to say god-forming, instinct.”

ourselves and those around us primarily and for the most part as “gods” of this kind, we are all naturally religious – we are all “polytheists,” who believe in a pantheon of living gods to which we belong and with whom we have daily interactions.

Despite the hyperbolically exhortatory character of this pair of aphorisms – BGE 61 and 62 contrast a glorious future in which “the philosopher” rules wisely over the entire globe and a miserable future in which “religions” have their “sovereign” way, whether resurgent Christianity or (even worse) leveling secular egalitarianism, and exhort the reader of noble taste and inclination to do everything he can to bring about the utopian possibility and save us from the dystopian alternative – Nietzsche’s deeper concern is with a *phenomenology* of the inner lives of the philosopher and the religious man (cf. BGE 29 with 45-46) and even more so with philosophy and religion *themselves* understood as complexly intertwined powers in the human soul, mutually implicated “forms of the will to power.” Nietzsche intimates that the philosopher doesn’t simply “transcend” religion, any more than he “sails over” morality. In its deepest sense, “religion” no less than “morality” belongs to “our unconquerable flesh and blood.”²³ Philosophy is a continual “self-overcoming of religion,” as well as a “self-overcoming of morality.” Just as the philosopher will reflectively acquiesce in the fact that he cannot simply free himself from moral passions, but merely achieve a certain playful detachment from them which most human beings lack, so he will acquiesce in the fact that he cannot simply free himself from “religious conventions.” Rather, he lives playfully *in* our simplified, falsified world, and uses his freedom of mind to give it a certain shape, to some extent doing self-consciously what most human beings do instinctively or unreflectively (one might think of how for Spinoza the imagination

²³ BGE 24.

plays a subordinate but important role in the rational life, even as it no longer “governs” the rational life as it does the superstitious life). This is the deepest sense in which religions cease to be “sovereign” and become “means among other means.”²⁴

But isn't “the self-overcoming of morality,” like atheism itself, a distinctively post-Christian phenomenon, made possible by “the death of God,” the result of “a two-thousand-year-long disciplining in truth [*Zucht der Wahrheit*] that finally forbids itself the lie involved in *belief in God*,”²⁵ to cite one of Nietzsche's most famous formulations? The pair of aphorisms BGE 190-191, on Socrates and Plato, suggest otherwise. While Nietzsche surely had a diagnostic interest in giving a quasi-Hegelian account of how the Christian form of life transformed *itself* over many centuries into the mass phenomenon of modern atheism and openly secular political life (in the Preface to *BGE*, Nietzsche describes this historical process, not as “waking up from a nightmare,” but rather as a distressing nightmare *deepening* into a “healthier sleep,” from which one is perhaps less likely to wake up quickly, just as the “last men” take care to sleep deeply and well²⁶), he surely didn't believe that atheism itself was a *uniquely* modern phenomenon, even as his rhetoric sometimes suggests so. In BGE 190-191, he suggests that “the problem of faith and knowledge” and the closely related problem of “the self-overcoming of morality” were both addressed by ancient philosophers, even as Socrates and Plato couldn't have predicted exactly what “Platonism for the people” would look like, any more than Nietzsche could have predicted that his anti-nationalist and anti-socialist “aristocratic radicalism” would be taken up by “national socialists.”

²⁴ BGE 62.

²⁵ OGM 3:27. Translation modified.

²⁶ Cf. BGE Preface with TSZ 1 Prologue 5.

In BGE 190-191, Nietzsche engages in a favorite pastime of “old philologists” such as himself, distinguishing what is authentically Socratic in the Platonic dialogues (he alludes first to the *Meno* and to the *Protagoras*) from what is innovatively Platonic (he alludes then to the *Republic* and to the *Symposium*).²⁷ However, Nietzsche immediately casts doubt on his procedure by suggesting that Plato “took the whole Socrates thing” (*den ganzen Sokrates nahm*) as if it were “a popular theme and folk-song” (*ein populäres Thema und Volkslied*) – even though Plato knew “his teacher” intimately, not merely by popular reputation – and transformed this theme into a mysterious enigma of his own creation, “the Platonic Socrates.”²⁸ Nonetheless, Nietzsche confidently attributes to Socrates the “proposition” (*Satz*) that nobody brings harm upon himself willingly, implies that this teaching is base and plebeian (“smells of *the rabble*”), presumably because the noble man does what is proper whatever harmful consequences may befall him as a result (but isn’t this the view that Socrates defends *against* the “noble” Callicles in the *Gorgias*?), then claims that Plato *was* “really too noble” to accept such a “proposition.”²⁹ Yet Plato accepted it anyway, almost in spite of himself, Nietzsche suggests. Did Plato thereupon *cease* to be noble? Nietzsche seems here to give an account of Plato’s “corruption” at the hands of Socrates.

BGE 191 begins with one of the most important sentences in the entire book: “The ancient theological problem of ‘faith’ and ‘knowledge’ – or, more clearly, of instinct and reason [*Vernunft*] – thus the question whether regarding the valuation of things instinct deserves more authority than reasonableness [*Vernünftigkeit*], which wants to know how to evaluate and to act

²⁷ BGE 190 alludes to *Meno* 77b-78c and *Protagoras* 345d-e, while BGE 191 alludes to *Republic* 508e-509a and *Symposium* 210e-212a.

²⁸ BGE 190. Translation modified.

²⁹ BGE 190.

according to reasons, according to a ‘why?’, thus according to expedience and utility – this is still the ancient moral problem which first stepped forth in the person of Socrates and divided intellects long before Christianity.”³⁰ I have space here to note only a few salient points. Nietzsche emphasizes that the problem of faith and knowledge was addressed *long before* Christianity by ancient philosophers, although it first “stepped forth” in “the person of Socrates.” Throughout *BGE*, Nietzsche has used the language of “theatrics,” “stepping forth” onto a public “stage,” and so on, to depict the public or “exoteric” self-presentation of philosophy. He seems to imply that “the Socratic turn” may well have consisted more in philosophy taking on a novel kind of public presence or political role, rather than in a purely philosophical innovation (a question difficult to address given that pre-Socratic thought is available to us only in fragmentary quotations and reports) – or, put differently, that its theoretical aspect (the reflexive turn to the human phenomena) may *already* have been accomplished by some of the pre-Socratic philosophers. Furthermore, Nietzsche implies that even Christianity didn’t *fundamentally* change the nature of the problem – the problem of faith and knowledge “divided intellects” (*die Geister gespaltet hat* – Kaufmann translates this as “divided thinking people”) long before the emergence of “Platonism for the people.” This striking formula seems to have a double meaning. Nietzsche implies, as Kaufmann’s translation suggests, that the ancient world was already full of debates between those who took the side of philosophy against religion and vice versa, as well as those who believed that philosophy and religion could be reconciled, a position which would be given a novel and extremely powerful and sophisticated form by the Christian religion. But Nietzsche *also* implies that the problem of

³⁰ BGE 191. Translation modified.

“faith and knowledge,” which ultimately boils down to “instinct and reason,” divides the intellect or the spirit *against itself*, and that this internal division can take a variety of forms – we have already seen the difference between the forms it takes in someone like Pascal and in someone like Nietzsche himself. Finally, Nietzsche implies that this problem has always been (and continues to be) both a *moral* problem and a *theological* problem – a problem about how to lead one’s life, and the place of morality in one’s life, but also a problem about what it means to be a “god.”

What about Socrates and Plato themselves? Nietzsche glosses “reason” (*Vernunft*) as “reasonableness” (*Vernünftigkeit*), identifying the latter with “base,” “means-to-end” thinking, which aims at “expedience” and “utility.” Unexpectedly, he intimates that there is something essentially base about philosophy (but cf. BGE 26) and something essentially noble about religion (but cf. BGE 60 – “to love man *for the sake of God* – that has so far been the noblest... feeling attained by human beings”³¹), even as these two oppositions are not simply identifiable. We have already seen that philosophy involves a dialectical interplay of “the noble” and “the base.” Does it also involve such an interplay of “reason” and “instinct”? BGE 191 contrasts Socrates and Plato in a way which seems at first to *favor Socrates over Plato* by *aligning* him with Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche, Socrates “had at bottom seen through the irrationality involved in moral judgment” (*im Grunde hatte er das Irrationale im moralischen Urteile durchschaut*)³² – as Nietzsche puts it elsewhere, he recognized that “there are no moral phenomena at all, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena.”³³ Like Nietzsche, Socrates recognized that he was

³¹ BGE 60. Translation modified.

³² BGE 191. Translation modified.

³³ BGE 108. Translation modified.

driven to “ask after reasons” (to have an “intellectual conscience”) by a rationally uncontrollable “faith” or instinct – like Nietzsche, he became reflectively conscious of the priority of instinct in all human activity, even in that of asking after reasons. Like Nietzsche, he recognized that philosophy itself just *is* the form in which instinct becomes reflectively conscious of itself *as* instinct. Yet Socrates kept *this* “secret” to himself, “laughing at himself in private,” while “ironically” striking the pose of an advocate of pure reason and disinterested morality.³⁴ Nietzsche by contrast ironically strikes the pose of a disciple of Dionysos, the god of intoxication.³⁵

Nietzsche writes, “That was the real *falseness* of that great ironist, so rich in secrets; he managed to bring his conscience to be satisfied with a kind of self-trickery [*eine Art Selbstüberlistung*].”³⁶ Is this meant to be a critique of Socrates? Having just emphasized Socrates’ uniquely complex form of reflectivity and its kinship with his own (“his more subtle conscience and self-interrogation [*seinem feineren Gewissen und Selbstverhör*]”³⁷), Nietzsche uses the unusual term *Selbstüberlistung*, which might be translated as “self-circumvention,” rather than the commonly used word “self-deception” (*Selbsttäuschung*). I suggest that this strange choice of word is supposed to capture the unique “self-circumvention” or what I have called the “double-consciousness” of the philosopher, who transcends our simplified world only insofar as he understands it *as* simplified, *as* governed by instinct, from within. Interestingly, Nietzsche also applies *Selbstüberlistung* to Alcibiades in BGE 200, indicating that he always

³⁴ BGE 191. Translation modified.

³⁵ Cf. Rosen, “Nietzsche’s Revolution,” 190: “Nietzsche identified himself as a disciple of Dionysus, the pagan god of intoxication. That he may have done so ironically, namely, as a concealed disciple of Apollo, the pagan god of lucidity, does not mitigate the disastrous consequences of the public assertion.”

³⁶ BGE 191. Translation modified.

³⁷ BGE 191. Translation modified.

has the Socrates-Alcibiades *connection* in mind, while the formula *eine Art Selbstüberlistung* (a particular kind of “self-trickery” or “self-circumvention”) used in BGE 191 points to the *difference* between Socrates and Alcibiades. Kaufmann translates *Selbstüberlistung* as “self-trickery” in BGE 191 and as “self-outwitting” in BGE 200, obscuring the connection between these aphorisms. The repetition of this unusual word in BGE 200 supports my contention that Nietzsche doesn’t mean to ascribe ordinary “self-deception” to Socrates in BGE 191, where he also emphasizes that (like Alcibiades) Socrates wasn’t a “merely moral man.” Rather, Socratic “self-circumvention” involves an inevitably partial and incomplete “self-overcoming of morality.”

But what about the noble Plato? Nietzsche writes, “Plato, more innocent in such things and lacking the roguishness of the plebeian, wanted to employ all his strength – the greatest strength any philosopher so far has had at his disposal! – to prove to himself that reason and instinct of themselves tend towards one goal, the good, ‘God.’ And since Plato, all theologians and philosophers are on the same track – that is, in moral matters it has so far been instinct, or what the Christians call ‘faith,’ or ‘the herd,’ as I put it, that has triumphed.”³⁸ Nietzsche’s reference to Plato’s “innocence” contrasts strangely with the “concealment and sphinx nature,” and the preference for Aristophanes over “the Bible,” which were attributed to him in BGE 28.³⁹ But it also calls to mind Nietzsche’s claim that Plato was “corrupted,” i.e. *lost his innocence*, at the hands of his “teacher” Socrates.⁴⁰ Much like Nietzsche, Plato was in a sense “too noble” to become a Socratic, but he was “corrupted” anyway. Just as Nietzsche abandoned his youthful

³⁸ BGE 191. Translation modified.

³⁹ BGE 28. Translation modified.

⁴⁰ Cf. BGE Preface with 190.

faith (he *wanted* passionately to become a Christian pastor) for philosophy, so Plato abandoned his youthful nobility (he *wanted* to become a tragedian) under the influence of Socrates. The accent or emphasis in this passage is on the past tense – Plato, *when* he was more “innocent,” “wanted” to prove to himself that faith and reason, philosophy and theology (a word coined by Plato in the *Republic*⁴¹), could be reconciled. But due to his philosophical *nature* (the “strength” or godlike desire for knowledge with which he was endowed), he soon abandoned his faith that faith and knowledge could be reconciled or that “nobility” could withstand Socratic questioning. Nietzsche describes Plato as a “philosopher” only to *distinguish* between “theologians and philosophers” in the next sentence. Yet, just like Socrates (and Nietzsche), Plato discovered that the questioning of religion and morality *does* in a sense lead to a reconciliation of “faith and knowledge,” or rather “instinct and reason” – the life driven by “the passion for knowledge” *is* “the human good,” although “at bottom” it is no less driven by instinct than any other way of life. Plato presented this thought exoterically in his doctrine of “the Idea of the Good,” which served both as a kind of mystical or poetic image for the goodness of the philosophical life and also as a metaphysical doctrine which would be taken up by Christian theology, with fateful consequences for world-history.

A hasty reading of this passage suggests that Plato was both a philosopher *and* a theologian – that “the Christian faith” was merely a less noble, more vulgarized form of “Plato’s faith, that God is the truth, that the truth is divine,” as he puts it in GS 344.⁴² But a close reading (note the scare quotes around “God” in BGE 191) suggests that the mature Plato, like the mature

⁴¹ Plato, *Republic* 379a.

⁴² GS 344.

Nietzsche, was a Socratic philosopher and *not* a theologian – except in his exoteric speech, like Nietzsche, who acknowledges that he sometimes speaks “as a theologian.”⁴³ But if the philosophical life itself is the good life, in what sense is it “good”?

I suggest that Nietzsche not only rejects the idea of “the good in itself” in any transcendent or metaphysical (“Platonic”) sense; like Epicurus, he also identifies the good with pleasure (*Lust*) or enjoyment (*Genuss*). If the philosophical life is the best life, the only thing this could ultimately *mean* on Nietzsche’s view is that it is the most pleasant life, as both Epicurus and Plato argued, although unlike Epicurus, Plato didn’t openly maintain that this is the most important reason *why* philosophy is the best life. But what about Nietzsche’s many remarks to the effect that human beings don’t strive after happiness, “only the Englishman does that”⁴⁴? However, the concluding aphorism in the series of very short aphorisms in which this famous jibe appears supplies Nietzsche’s *own* “formula” for attaining “happiness.”⁴⁵ Does this mean that Nietzsche himself is a kind of “Englishman”?

Nietzsche takes up this set of questions in the pair BGE 229-230. As Heinrich Meier has observed,⁴⁶ this pair is unique in that BGE 230 begins by acknowledging emphatically that the preceding aphorism 229 “may not readily [*ohne Weiteres*] be understood.” Nietzsche proceeds to give a further elaboration of the central thought in the preceding aphorism (“permit me an explanation [*Erläuterung*]”), explicitly connecting this pair of aphorisms in a way he does nowhere else in the book, indicating their unusual importance. BGE 229 presents Nietzsche’s notorious doctrine that “almost everything we call ‘higher culture’ is based on the

⁴³ EH *Beyond Good and Evil* 2: “Listen closely, for I rarely speak as a theologian.”

⁴⁴ TI *Epigrams and Arrows* 12.

⁴⁵ TI *Epigrams and Arrows* 44.

⁴⁶ In a seminar on *Beyond Good and Evil* at the University of Chicago, Spring 2018.

spiritualization and deepening [*Versgeistigung und Vertiefung*] of cruelty,” which he calls “my proposition [*mein Satz*].”⁴⁷ A few aphorisms earlier, in BGE 225, Nietzsche had conducted an indignant, morally charged polemic against egalitarians who want “if possible – and there is no more insane ‘if possible’ – to abolish suffering.”⁴⁸ But in BGE 26, Nietzsche claimed that “no-one *lies* as much as the indignant man,”⁴⁹ warning the careful reader to be particularly cautious whenever Nietzsche himself adopts a pose of indignation. As so often, Nietzsche’s heroic rhetoric is undermined, or radically qualified, by his analysis of noble “self-denial” in all its manifold forms as a kind of pleasure-seeking impulse which prefers not to recognize itself as such. BGE 225 begins: “Whether it is hedonism or pessimism, utilitarianism or eudaemonism, all these ways of thinking that measure the value of things in accordance with *pleasure* [*Lust*] and *suffering*, which are mere epiphenomena and wholly secondary, are ways of thinking that stay in the foreground.”⁵⁰ But what is “cruelty,” which Nietzsche claims is “almost” the basis of human culture itself, if not taking *pleasure* in someone else’s *suffering* – or, as Nietzsche emphasizes with his notion of “cruelty turned *against oneself*,” “over-abundant enjoyment [*überreichlichen Genuss*] at one’s own suffering, at making oneself suffer”⁵¹? Nietzsche’s deeper view is akin to that of Georg Büchner’s Danton: “We are all Epicureans, some blatant, some subtle – Christ was the subtlest of all.”⁵²

⁴⁷ BGE 229. Translation modified.

⁴⁸ BGE 225.

⁴⁹ BGE 26. Translation modified.

⁵⁰ BGE 225.

⁵¹ BGE 225.

⁵² Georg Büchner, “Danton’s Death,” in *Complete Plays, Lenz and Other Writings*, trans. John Reddick, (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 23.

Nietzsche's perspective isn't identical with that of "the coarser kind of cynic." He doesn't deny that human beings sincerely act from "higher" impulses, but he interprets such impulses differently than noble individuals themselves generally do, as "instincts" directed towards unusually refined forms of pleasure, including the "cruel" pleasure of "self-denial in the *religious* sense."⁵³ Thus one shouldn't be surprised that Nietzsche describes "Henri Beyle" (Stendhal), "France's last great psychologist," an "explorer and discoverer" of the soul, as a "strange Epicurean" – certainly a strange Epicurean, given that he also "ran with a Napoleonic tempo through *his* Europe," rather than sheltering in a garden.⁵⁴ Nietzsche wouldn't have been able to run "with a Napoleonic tempo" through *his* modern world without his call for a "new nobility," a call to arms which would have been ineffective had he *emphasized* his many points of agreement with English philosophers such as Bacon and Hume, whom he sometimes praises, but more often disparages in the strongest terms. Accordingly, his famous *aperçu* about Englishmen should be approached cautiously, as should his depreciation of pleasure and suffering as "epiphenomena." Nietzsche's deeper analysis of human motivation is a hedonistic one. Even the desire for difficulty and struggle – for "overcoming resistances" – is the desire for a particular kind of *enjoyment*. His emphasis on "cruelty against oneself" is his response to one of the basic problems faced by all hedonistic accounts of human motivation, "coarse" or "refined" – the fact that we certainly *seem* to be capable of genuine self-sacrifice, not just in extraordinary instances of "self-denial in the *religious* sense,"⁵⁵ but also in simple, everyday acts

⁵³ BGE 229.

⁵⁴ BGE 254.

⁵⁵ BGE 229.

of charity, in which one puts the good of another before one's own, or fulfills one's duties even when they are onerous or unpleasant.

Nietzsche includes "eudaemonism" along with "hedonism" and "utilitarianism" as ways of thinking that take pleasure and suffering as ultimate criteria of value. Thus although, like Epicurus and unlike crude modern utilitarians, he distinguishes happiness from pleasure (eudaemonism from hedonism), he also implies that happiness itself is ultimately reducible to pleasure or "enjoyment." Furthermore, like Epicurus, he is concerned with the unity and sustainability of a whole way of life (happiness), rather than merely with momentary pleasures: "It is not the intensity, but the duration, of exalted sensation which makes exalted men."⁵⁶ Already in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche identified the "pleasure in understanding" (*not* frenzied intoxication) as the most powerful "goad to life."⁵⁷ But he doesn't conceive of philosophy as demanding an "Epicurean" withdrawal from politics for the sake of secluded inquiry into nature, shared with a few friends in a garden. Rather, he conceives of the ambition to understand the world as interacting in a complex, dialectical way with the ambition to change the world and impose one's "values" on others (cf. BGE 25), in different ways both amplifying this ambition to a grandiose height and moderating it with ironic detachment.

Nietzsche's emphasis on cruelty in BGE 229 is in a way hyperbolic – he calls it "my proposition" (*mein Satz*), suggesting it is a kind of exoteric doctrine, which will be taken over-eagerly by his hasty readers as a novel insight into the terrible omnipresence of cruelty in human motivations, while his "slow readers" will recognize that it must be his way of making a subtler

⁵⁶ BGE 72.

⁵⁷ Cf. BT 18 (emphasis added) with 15.

point. Conversely, his dismissal of pleasure and suffering as mere epiphenomena isn't *simply* "noble rhetoric," although it *is* undermined by the emphasis on cruelty in BGE 229. Rather, Nietzsche also wants to make the point that the *experience* of pain and pleasure or "enjoyment," which are indeed omnipresent in our consciousness, are no more "immediate objects of consciousness" than are putatively intuitive "thoughts" (cf. BGE 17), but rather *results* of the instinctive activity of "interpretation" and "valuation" (cf. BGE 19), which is "always already" taking place beneath the threshold of consciousness: "Even in the 'simplest' processes of sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*], the affects *dominate* [*herrschen*]." ⁵⁸ As he puts it in GS 127, "That a violent stimulus [*ein heftiger Reiz*] is felt [*empfunden*] as pleasure or as displeasure [*Lust oder Unlust*] is a matter of the *interpreting* intellect, which, to be sure, generally works without our being conscious of it [*uns unbewusst*]; and one and the same stimulus *can* be interpreted as pleasure or as displeasure." ⁵⁹

After discussing a variety of human types from different times and places, BGE 229 ends with a description of the philosopher as motivated, too, by a kind of cruelty: "Even the knower [*der Erkennende*], insofar as he compels his intellect to know *against* the inclination [*Hang*] of his intellect and often enough also against the wishes of his heart... acts as an artist and sublimater of cruelty; indeed, every grasping of something in a profound and thorough way [*jedes Tief- und Gründlich-Nehmen*] is a violation, a desire to inflict pain on the fundamental will of the spirit, which relentlessly desires appearance [*Scheine*] and the surface – already in

⁵⁸ BGE 192. Translation modified.

⁵⁹ GS 127. Translation modified.

every wanting to know [*in jedem Erkennen-Wollen*] there is a drop of cruelty,” i.e. cruelty against oneself.⁶⁰

Nietzsche’s description of the fundamental inclination of the human intellect as an inclination to “appearance” and “the surface” alludes to BGE 24, where Nietzsche claimed that human beings in general “falsify” and “simplify” the world *in order to enjoy life*. Philosophy thus involves a kind of masochistic or “self-lacerating” *resistance* to this fundamental human desire. As Nietzsche goes on to elaborate this point in BGE 230: “*This* will to mere appearance, to simplification, to the mask, to the cloak, in short to the surface... is *resisted* by that sublime inclination of the knower who wants to take and does take things profoundly, in their multiplicity, thoroughly: as a kind of cruelty of the intellectual conscience and taste, which every courageous thinker will recognize in himself... He will say: ‘there is something cruel in the inclination of my spirit’; let the virtuous and the kindly try to talk him out of that!”⁶¹

Nietzsche describes “the will to appearance,” the basic inclination of the intellect, in terms which unmistakably recall “the will to power” – as a desire “to feel that it is master” (recall the “commanding thought” in BGE 19), “to appropriate the foreign” and “to simplify the manifold,” *in order to* heighten “the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of increased power.”⁶² Nietzsche virtually identifies the universally human will to simplification with “religion” in its deepest sense (the habitual and constant self-misinterpretation of ourselves as little “gods” with the miraculous powers of “free will” and the ability to “shape-shift” over time while remaining identical with ourselves), in contrast to the philosophical impulse towards depth and

⁶⁰ BGE 229. Translation modified.

⁶¹ BGE 230. Translation modified.

⁶² BGE 230.

multiplicity, while suggesting that they are *both* driven by the natural desire for “self-enjoyment” (*Selbstgenuss*), “in order to indicate the common origin of both belief in gods and knowledge of nature”⁶³ in “the will to power.”

In its deepest sense, then, “religion” (belief in gods) is identical with “the will to simplification,” while philosophy is identical with “the will to depth and multiplicity,” as the two basic capacities of the “interpreting intellect.” For the impulse to *resist* our will to falsification and “translate the human being back into nature” is also a uniquely reflexive form of the desire to “increase the feeling of power,” a will to “*become master* over the many vain and rhapsodic [*schwärmerischen*] interpretations and supplementary meanings [*Nebensinne*] that have so far been scrawled and painted over that eternal basic text of *homo natura*,” i.e. the truth that “man is [continuous with the rest of] nature,” *not* something “higher,” “of a different origin.”⁶⁴ Nietzsche describes the philosophical task as an “insane task,” which raises the question: “Why knowledge at all?” Why not enjoy life in our simplified, artificial world? Why not remain “religious,” if not in the “gruesome” sense of a Pascal or a Kierkegaard, or even in the hearty and “ingenuous” sense of a Luther, then in the more prosaic sense of enjoying the pleasures furnished by this world, both noble and base, without asking difficult questions which are liable to bring “danger and slander” upon us while compelling us to abandon the deepest “wishes” of “our heart,” whether these include the wish for immortality or merely the desire to believe in the reality of “moral phenomena” in general as well as in the local myths and traditions which allow us to live together peacefully and enjoy a sense of community with

⁶³ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 219.

⁶⁴ BGE 230. Translation modified. Emphasis added.

others? And if the philosopher who has set out on this “insane” journey “cannot help” but pursue it as far as he can, due to the “cruel” nature with which he had the fortune (or misfortune) to be endowed by life itself, can he “give a reason” (to others or even to himself) *why* this life is *better* than that of other human beings, whether “average” or “exceptional”?

BGE 229-230 end with the claim that “we” knowers or free spirits have already “put the same question to ourselves a hundred times” – reminding us of the “rendezvous” (*Stelldichein*) of “questions and question-marks” in the first aphorism of the book, where the “insane task” of questioning the will to truth was first proposed,⁶⁵ as well as the two hundred aphorisms through which we have journeyed since Nietzsche implicitly asked the same question in BGE 29, which I argued in one sense constitutes the proper beginning of the entire book, the argument for the philosophical life *as* the best life, after the proper “physio-psychological” and “psychological” preparations, which were carried out in BGE 12-22 and 23-29 respectively. At the same time, there is a sense in which a literary presentation of such a life as is inherently unfinishable, like a great novel – however carefully written it might be, and however satisfying the conclusion, one can always ask for a sequel, or a whole series of sequels, to deepen one’s understanding of the protagonist and to pursue the questions left hanging: “There is something arbitrary that *he* should stop *here* to look back and around, that he doesn’t dig deeper... there is also something suspicious about it.”⁶⁶

Nonetheless, a close reading of the early aphorisms of the book already gives the careful reader a compelling and seductive sense of just how Nietzsche conceived of the philosophical

⁶⁵ Cf. BGE 1.

⁶⁶ BGE 289. Translation modified.

life and why he (or anybody) might regard it as the best life, the most satisfying way to live in our unavoidably simplified and falsified world, enjoying a subtle form of critical detachment from the illusions constitutive of this world, while playfully acquiescing in their inescapability, the fact that they belong to “our unconquerable flesh and blood.”⁶⁷ I will conclude with two general remarks about “the Nietzschean ideal,” which I hope the foregoing analysis will have rendered plausible, and a suggestion about what the reader who remains “unseduced” might learn from the study of Nietzsche.

First, I would like to make a remark about “the foundation of Nietzsche’s ethics and theology,” to use a formula Nietzsche himself applies to Spinoza in BGE 25 (“the foundation [*Grund*] of Spinoza’s ethics and theology”⁶⁸) – rather comically, as he had already intimated that Spinoza was both an immoralist and an atheist. We have already seen that Nietzsche’s “theology” has two basic elements. On the one hand, “the average human being” (whether noble or base) thinks of himself as a kind of god, with the supernatural powers of “shape-shifting” over time and sovereign authority over his “freely caused” deeds. On the other hand, Nietzsche also intimates that there is something “godlike” about the philosopher – if the concept “God” refers to the most perfect being, philosophers are the closest phenomenon in nature to *real* gods, “living gods,” rather than “imaginary gods.” Perhaps the most succinct way to capture Nietzsche’s position is to say that the difference between philosophers and “the herd” is *analogous* to the difference between human beings and other animals. Our self-awareness and

⁶⁷ BGE 24.

⁶⁸ BGE 25. Translation modified. This phrase might also be translated “the reason for Spinoza’s ethics and theology,” i.e. the reason why Spinoza constructed an “ethics” and a “theology,” despite being an immoralist and an atheist. The pairing of “ethics” with “theology” in BGE 25 anticipates the description of the problem of faith and knowledge as both a “moral” and a “theological” problem in BGE 191.

our reflective awareness of time, which unite in our awareness of death, and our sociality, subject us to intense, prolonged and complexly interrelated sufferings of which the lower animals, driven by *unreflective* instinct, are blissfully free. Think of the gloomy portrait of human life presented by Demea in Hume's *Dialogues*: "Though the external insults from animals, from men, from all the elements, which assault us, form a frightful catalogue of woes, they are nothing of comparison of those, which arise within ourselves... Remorse, shame, anguish, rage, disappointment, anxiety, fear, dejection, despair; who has ever passed through life without cruel inroads from these tormentors?"⁶⁹ However, the reflective consciousness which renders human life uniquely wretched also enables us to enjoy the "higher pleasures" of which the lower animals are necessarily deprived – the delights of friendship, love, knowledge, glory or fame and the arts. Analogously, Nietzsche suggests that although philosophical knowledge is accompanied by a uniquely distressing form of sadness and alienation from others and even from oneself, in liberating the philosopher from "religion" and "morality" (in a highly qualified fashion), it rewards him with the most intense and durable form of happiness or prolonged "enjoyment of life." This cannot be "proven" in the manner of a mathematical theorem, but it can be "enacted" or "demonstrated" *ad oculum* in a book like Xenophon's *Memorabilia* or Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, for those who have eyes to see (cf. BGE 29). Nietzsche's philosopher is reflected in Strauss' beautiful *image* of how "the statesman who has acquired knowledge, like Pericles, as opposed to the fickle multitude, *represents*

⁶⁹ David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71 (Part 10, Sections 13-14).

superhuman rest in the midst of human motion – rest confronting, understanding and mastering motion.”⁷⁰

Secondly, we have seen that the Nietzschean ideal of “self-mastery,” “becoming who one is” or “living according to nature” is characterized by a “a distinct sort of psychological self-relation, both attitudinal and dispositional,” as Pippin puts it.⁷¹ Pippin says that Nietzschean “freedom” in this sense is “the achievement of an intellectual and an erotic attitude,” akin to “the intellectualist account of freedom” found in Socrates or in Spinoza: “For Nietzsche, too, there *is* a kind of knowledge that will set one free, but it is not knowledge of the human good and not, or at least not wholly, the Spinozist knowledge of necessity. It appears to be a psychological realization of the ineliminable need for self-overcoming.”⁷² I would say rather that Nietzschean “psychology” is *all three of these things together*. Neither the master nor the slave comes to terms with the “self-dissatisfaction” constitutive of human *eros* – the master (such as Pericles or Alcibiades) constantly struggles “to become a master” (*ein Herrwerden wollen*), while taking himself simply “to be” one already, while the slave (such as Augustine) hopes for a “settled state,” a “peace of soul” (“Sabbath of Sabbaths”) impossible to achieve in “a world whose essence is will to power,”⁷³ and which would anyway consist merely in the cessation of all desire rather than in its permanent fulfillment. Neither the master nor the slave understands *the way in which* “the human as such is essentially” needy and “incomplete,” while Socrates grasps “that in its incompleteness, it is in order and good,” as Seth Benardete puts it.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Strauss, *The City and Man*, 160. Emphasis added.

⁷¹ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 112.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 116.

⁷³ Cf. OGM 1:13 with BGE 186 and 200.

⁷⁴ Seth Benardete, “On Plato’s *Symposium*,” in *The Argument of the Action: Essays on Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, eds. Ronna Burger and Michael Davis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 173.

The distinction between master and slave morality, introduced in BGE 260 and elaborated in the first treatise of the *Genealogy*, doesn't correspond in a simple or direct way to the distinction between the noble and the base, and even less to the distinction between philosophy and religion. While Nietzsche's Ganges-like rhetorical speed encourages the hasty reader to allow such distinctions to blur confusedly in their mind, all the most important psychological distinctions with which he operates are dialectically interrelated in endlessly complex ways, and it would take me too far afield to pursue the set of questions they raise any further than I already have.

I will conclude, then, with a final remark about the distinctive form in which "self-overcoming" takes in the philosophical life, as the highest form of the combination of seriousness and play, tragedy and comedy, in which the element of "comedy" predominates but the pathos of "tragedy" doesn't entirely disappear. Pippin writes, "Achieved freedom involves achieving a capacity both to sustain a wholehearted ideal (an ideal that is worth sacrificing for, that provides the basis for a certain hierarchical unity among one's interests and passions) and what appears at first glance to be a capacity in some tension with such wholeheartedness – a willingness to overcome or abandon such a commitment in altered circumstances or as a result of some development."⁷⁵ As Pippin notes, "Nietzsche can speak out of both sides of his mouth on this issue, praising *both* irony and wholeheartedness... The tension created by such passages is not an oversight by Nietzsche. He very deliberately wants to claim both aspects as essential."⁷⁶ The self-relation characteristic of the philosopher is one of "extreme tension," yet

⁷⁵ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 112-113.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 110, footnote 4.

paradoxically also a kind of calm: “One is neither as passionately identified with one’s projects as Goethe’s Werther nor as ironically detached from them as Denis Diderot’s Rameau’s nephew. To be in such a state of tension is to be capable of self-overcoming, genuine freedom, or, one might better say, to be capable of bearing the burden of such self-overcoming and of affirming under its condition.”⁷⁷ I think this is exactly right, but I would add something Pippin under-emphasizes – that this ideal is that of *the Socratic philosopher*. In BGE 73, Nietzsche writes, “Whoever achieves his ideal, thereby transcends it.”⁷⁸ I suggest that for Nietzsche, the Socratic ideal is the only “ideal” which can never be “transcended,” because it can never fully be attained. More precisely, the Socratic ideal is that of “the knower” who grasps *why* no human ideal can ever *really* be attained (there is always an ineliminable “gap”) and who takes as *his* ideal the lifelong “incorporation” of this “knowledge” and learns to delight in this fact, who succeeds in making the “female” (*Weib*) spoken about crudely and prosaically in the first sentence of the Preface his lifelong partner in the “marriage” (*Hochzeit*) beautifully celebrated in the final line of the Aftersong.

Finally, what about the reader who remains “unseduced” by Nietzsche’s argument for the philosophical life? I have argued that Nietzsche’s conception of this way of life is inseparable from his “critique of metaphysics” or his “physio-psychology,” even as the latter can be understood neither in radically “postmodernist” nor in crudely “naturalistic” terms, neither as a radical skepticism about the self-undermining nature of all truth-claims nor as a kind of reductionistic materialism. Rather, it is a very subtle, yet highly problematic attempt to steer a

⁷⁷ Ibid., 119-120.

⁷⁸ BGE 73.

middle course between dogmatism (Nietzsche speaks unambiguously of the “resolution [*Lösung*]” of fundamental problems⁷⁹) and skepticism (there is always a cave beneath every cave, an “abyss” concealed by every “ground” or attempt at “grounding”⁸⁰), which results in an extremely counter-intuitive view about the “falsification” of the world in which we have *faith* that we live, a view which not only undermines moral judgments in a disquieting way but also undermines common sense in a dizzyingly radical way.

Pippin claims that Nietzsche “wants to free us” (in a psychologically qualified sense, I have argued) from “the powerful picture of a subject separable from and in effect ‘commanding’ his or her deeds, a distinct causal force responsible for actions occurring... without introducing another picture just as inappropriate, that of some sort of subjectless play of anonymous forces.”⁸¹ Pippin writes, “If there were no substance or subject of any kind underlying these various events, it is hard to see how we might individuate these expressions of force, and even if we could, how we might distinguish a universe of episodic, atomistic events from the world that Nietzsche himself refers to, a world of *slaves, masters, institutions, priests* and so on.”⁸² I have argued that a close reading of Nietzsche’s physio-psychology in BGE 13-22, supplemented by consideration of the lightning-flash passage in OGM 1:13, suggests that Nietzsche *does* regard the world in which we *actually* live as ultimately a kind of “subjectless play of anonymous forces,” which nonetheless have a determinate phenomenal structure and organization, including the structure of the illusions to which this “subjectless play” gives rise in human consciousness. Put differently, I have argued that Nietzsche is a far more “ancient” philosopher than Pippin

⁷⁹ Cf. BGE 23 with 213.

⁸⁰ BGE 289. Translation modified.

⁸¹ Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 47.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 74.

allows, not just in his Socratic concern with the question of the best life (Pippin emphasizes *this* affinity), but in what might be called his “pre-Socratic” willingness to accept that philosophical inquiry may lead to *radically* counter-intuitive conclusions, even as it is then incumbent on the philosopher *both* to supply an account of how the illusions of “common sense” arise at all (in the language of Parmenides, how “the way of truth” can be reconciled with “the way of opinion”) *and* to supply an account of how the philosopher learns to embrace and “incorporate” these conclusions to the extent humanly possible.

Even if it is possible to imagine or conceive, as a thought-experiment, a world in which “free will” and even “responsibility” are illusions, a world in which “life is the farce which everybody must perform,” as Rimbaud puts it,⁸³ it seems impossible even “experimentally” to imagine or conceive that *our* world, “the world of masters, slaves, priests, institutions, and so on,” is *really* a world in which the concepts of “subject,” “substance” and even “unity” itself are mere “simplifications” of a more fundamental and irreducible multiplicity, a world in which humans and other animals don’t *have* desires but *are* the sheer activity of “desiring” and “interpreting” and in which thinghood and personhood are simplifying “misinterpretations” of “a subjectless play of anonymous desires,” let alone to render intelligible how “the will to simplification” or “the atomistic need” could emerge in such a world. Yet Nietzsche implies that this is the case, that there is no “being” or “subject” either “behind” or even “in” the sheer “doing.”

⁸³ Arthur Rimbaud, “A Season in Hell,” in *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. Wallace Fowlie, rev. Seth Whidden (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 275. Translation modified.

If my line of interpretation is correct, then for Nietzsche this radical conclusion follows unavoidably from the rejection of “intellectual intuition” – or, what in a way amounts to the same thing, from the assumption that “religion” and “philosophy” are in *fundamental* tension. In addition to the wealth of psychological and historical insight that even the “frog-like” reader can garner from studying Nietzsche, the “tortoise-like” reader can also bring more clearly into view the intimate connection between the problem of “knowledge and faith” or “philosophy and religion” in the more conventional or “foreground” sense emphasized by Strauss with the profoundly epistemological, metaphysical and even theological question of the nature of reason itself. Ultimately, the question of whether “philosophy” and “religion,” or an authentically philosophical and a sincerely religious life, can *in principle* be reconciled or harmonized (quite independently of debates between adherents of particular “religions” such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam) is inseparable from the question of whether human reason is *purely* discursive or “dianoetic,” and thus in some sense essentially “creative” or “productive,” or also contains an irreducible element of sheer receptivity to immediately given objects of thought (*noemata*), however exactly the latter might be understood.

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