

IX. NIETZSCHE ON PHILOSOPHY AND
POLITICS (OF THE FUTURE)

‘Holding on to the Sublime’: Nietzsche on Philosophy’s Perception and Search for Greatness

Keith Ansell Pearson

Whoever has become wise
concerning ancient origins, behold, he
will in the end seek out sources of the
future and new origins. –

O my brothers, it will not be long
before new peoples arise and new
sources rush downward into new depths
(Z III Tablets 25)

Whoever discovered the country
‘Human’ also discovered the country
“Human Future” (Z III Tablets 28)

Introduction: Nietzsche as political educator?

Nietzsche poses a challenge to his readers when in SE he argues that any philosophy which believes that the problem of existence can be changed or solved by a political event is a sham and pseudo-philosophy (SE 4 1.365). However, when we read this statement in the wider context of the project Nietzsche undertakes in his *Untimely Meditations* a different, more adequate, appreciation of it emerges. Far from being the reflection of an unpolitical or non-political man, Nietzsche’s statement in SE gives expression to his view that the essential ‘political’ function of philosophy, the task of creating a public and reforming humanity, is best served when it operates in an untimely or unfashionable manner, resisting the ‘blind power of facts’ and ‘the tyranny of the real’ (HL 8 1.311), working against the time and having an effect on it for the benefit of a time to come (HL Foreword 1.247). Nietzsche’s ‘anti-political’ statement, which has been so often read out of context and hence *not* read, is part of his commitment to the untimely character of philosophy, the activity which devotes itself to the discovery and invention of the superior forms

of human existence. The fact that the philosopher enjoys only a chance-like existence is the more reason to value this existence: ‘The philosopher is the rarest form of greatness because human beings arrived at knowledge only by coincidence, not as an original endowment. But for this reason, also the highest type of greatness (19[195] 7.479). Philosophy for Nietzsche is bound up with the legislation of greatness, conceived as a ‘name-giving’ that elevates (*erhebt*) the human being, and it has its origins in the legislation of morality (*Gesetzgebung der Moral*) (19[83] 7.447–8)¹.

Nietzsche’s philosophy is a *project* in search of a new life, new individuals, and even a new people or peoples. Precisely why this is so and what it entails – an appreciation of ‘greatness’ I shall seek to show – is what I wish to explore in this essay. When Nietzsche attacks the idea that a political event can solve ‘the problem of existence’, and that a ‘political innovation’ could ever be sufficient to make human beings contented dwellers on the earth (SE 4 1.365), he has something very specific in mind, namely, the pseudo-event of the founding of a nation state such as the *Reich*. When we flatter the idols of the modern age we don’t simply trade our higher sensibilities for optimism but ‘for journalism, the wit and dimwit of the day and the dailies’ (ibid.). Philosophy’s perception or vision runs a different course, not restricted by the present moment or the present day. This is why, as we shall see, Nietzsche conceives philosophy as an untimely power which, although it has definite empirical sources and beginnings, can be used for ‘suprahistorical’ ends. It also explains his antipathy towards Hegelianism or any form of ‘state philosophy’. For Nietzsche, philosophy is ‘spiritual perception’ (or vision) (BGE 252), that is, ‘the power [*Macht*] of philosophical vision [*Blick*]’ that is able to judge in all the most important matters and does not

1 In the later Nietzsche philosophy’s legislation takes the form of an ‘extra-moral’ imperative simply because of what ‘morality’ has become for us moderns – the domain of the closed and the static that *makes the present live at the expense of the future* (GM Preface 6 5.253) – and that requires a self-overcoming ‘out of morality’ (D Preface 3.16). The key concept Nietzsche puts to work to demonstrate the need for this self-overcoming is *Redlichkeit* (integrity), which strives for elevation: ‘These are the demands I make of you [...] that you subject the moral valuations themselves to a critique. That you curb the impulse of moral feeling, which here insists on submission and not criticism, with the question: “Why submission?” That you view this insistence on a “Why?”, on a critique of morality, as being your present form of morality itself, as the most sublime kind of probity [*die sublimste Art von Rechtschaffenheit*], which does honour to you and your age’ (2[191] 12.161–2; see also D Preface 3.16). For the necessary insight into ‘integrity’ see Wurzer 1975.

hide under the mask of 'objectivity' (TI Expeditions 3 6.113). In short, philosophy is lawgiving and creative positing which endeavours to hold on to 'greatness' and the question 'what is noble?' It is a sublime exercise and operation in that it entails elevating individuals to greatness and nobility and creating a people, or a humanity, equal to this concept.

For me it is this radically untimely and unfashionable Nietzsche that merits our continued interest and engagement today. If Nietzsche has significance for 'politics' or the 'political', as I believe he does, it will be found in his conception of philosophy and its tasks, and nowhere else. I do not pretend that his project is without difficulties or that it does not have its limits. However, I shall not attend to these in this particular exercise but instead aim to bring out the potential power of Nietzsche's spiritual vision or perception.

1. Nietzsche on philosophy and the possibilities of life

In the writings and unpublished materials of his early period Nietzsche's focus is on what philosophy is and what kind of being the philosopher is: what is his relation to nature, is there a teleology of nature in the case of the philosopher? What is his relation to a people? What does he offer to others? (29[205] 7.712; and 29[223] 7.719–20, 'On the Vocation of the Philosopher'). Nietzsche's reflections on this 'vocation' (*Bestimmung*) take place in the context of his consideration of the early Greek philosophers and the situation of modern philosophy after Kant.

For Nietzsche, the most powerful and fruitful era for thinkers of ancient Greece is the time before and during the Persian wars (499–448 BC). This is the period when, he says, 'possibilities of life' are discovered, a time when philosophers appear who do not resemble deformed and ruined figures, scrawny desert hermits, theologizing counterfeiters, or depressed and pale scholars (6[48] 8.117). The 'tragic age' is thus something of a golden or flourishing and vital age for Nietzsche, with the Greeks on the point of discovering a type of human being higher than any previous type. He sees all the early Greek philosophers as self-liberators struggling with the constraints of Greek customs, making the effort to create a Panhellenic way of thinking which required an alteration of the concept of the *polis* (6[49] 8.118). This was the focal point of the Hellenic identity (its 'will', says Nietzsche) that had its basis in myth. If philosophy is to break with local myths and superstitions then such a break necessarily en-

tails abandoning the old concept of the *polis* (ibid.). Nietzsche notes that Thales, the first philosopher he will consider in his essay on *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, was also a statesman who proposed the foundation of a league of cities. It was the isolating power of myth that kept the Greek cities in a state of division and conflict. If Thales' plan had been successful, Nietzsche thinks this would have spared the Greeks the Persian wars and the eventual rise to dominance of Athens. Heraclitus, he argues, sought to tear down the barrier separating the barbaric and the Hellenic so as to create a greater freedom and broaden parochial perspectives. Myth is dangerous, Nietzsche argues, because it coddles people and makes them superficial. The struggle against myth makes comprehensible something like the extreme point of view of Parmenides in his distrust of deception and attempt to conquer once and for all the entire mythical way of looking at the world. The aim is to liberate the human from political passion so it can become a lawgiver. Nietzsche notes that although for a thinker like Anaxagoras the world is fundamentally irrational (or beyond human reason), it is nevertheless something measured and beautiful which, he says, is how human beings should be (6[50] 8.119). Even those who have become liberated and have no need of laws still require legislation or measure. Empedocles is described by Nietzsche as a rhetor with political aims (23[34]7.554), a democrat seeking popular reform through a republican transformation of life and Panhellenic reforms aimed at creating a new mythology in the form of great Hellenic festivals. Empedocles is the master of two vocabularies, the Pythagorean-Orphic doctrine and the natural, scientific one.

The Persian wars represent a 'national misfortune' since the success is too great and all the bad drives are free to break loose (6[27] 8.108). There takes place a tyrannical desire on the part of individuals and cities to rule over all of Hellas. The domination of Athens exacerbates the problem and prevents a Greek reformation from taking place. In short, Nietzsche locates a historical tendency towards political centralisation – seized by both Sparta and Athens – moving from an attack on parochial myths to the establishment of Athenian hegemony. The emergence of this political hegemony brings to an end the possibility of a reformed cultural Panhellenism. Nietzsche argues that centralising tendencies did not exist between 776 and 560, 'when the culture of the *polis* blossomed. I think that, if it had not been for the Persian wars, they would have hit upon the idea of centralization through spiritual reform' (6[30] 8. 110)². This anal-

2 For an English translation of this material see Breazeale 1979 138–9.

ysis of ancient Greece mirrors his understanding of Germany's political unification under Bismarck taking place at the expense of a spiritual reform of Europe. It is the politics of empire (*das Reich*) that Nietzsche consistently opposes throughout his writings from *Schopenhauer as Educator* to *Ecce Homo*³.

According to Nietzsche, the Greek philosophers had a degree of confidence in knowledge that will never be seen again. He calls this knowledge 'ultimate knowledge', and holds that the early Greeks at least believed they possessed it (6[7] 8.99). The early philosophers are not confronted with the danger and difficulty of knowing, which are later developments and shape the present day (Kant, etc.). For them, the task is to free oneself from the power of myth and then to endure the darkness one falls into. One option is to embrace science (*Wissenschaft*) and to gradually augment knowledge; the other option is offered by philosophy and the 'ultimate knowledge' (*letzte Erkenntniss*). Nietzsche doesn't spell out what this consists in, but I think we can take it to refer to 'decisive' knowledge on the most important matters, matters of value for example. According to Nietzsche's conception, the early Greek philosophers understood that the philosopher's right to existence is revealed when he gives focus to the limitless knowledge drive and controls it by giving it a unity. This still exists in Socrates to a certain extent but takes the form of a concern with individuals and an individualizing ethics at the expense of Hellenic life (19[2] 7; 19[20] 7; 19[28] 7). Socrates is held to be 'abstractly human' who eradicates the healthy instincts (21[23] 7.530). In Socrates philosophy becomes attached to the worst kind of abstractions (the good, the just, the true) and anxiety over oneself becomes the soul of philosophy. In addition, he destroys science, has no feeling for art, wrenches the individual from its historical bonds, and promotes dialectical verbiage and loquaciousness. Post-Socratic ethics is superficial and optimistic (19[60] 7.438; see also 6[15] 8.103).

In one note Nietzsche provides a potted history of philosophy's relation to science. It concerns the Middle Ages, the rise of political economy, Kant and his influence, and finally the appearance of a philosopher like Schopenhauer from whom, for the early Nietzsche, we learn the importance of philosophy's controlling influence over science and the scholar (19[28] 7.425). The task is to determine the value and goal of the knowing of science (*Wissenschaft*). This is to be taken in the much wider sense than we conceive it in English as denoting the practise of rigorous, disci-

3 See EH (CW) 2 6.360.

plined, and systematic inquiry, and as bound up with the so-called scholarly virtues of being value-free and objective. Nietzsche argues that the difference between the effect of philosophy and that of science, as well as their different genesis (*Entstehung*), must be made clear (19[23] 7.423). Science is dependent upon philosophical questions for all its goals and methods, though it easily forgets this (19[24] 7.24). He poses the question: is philosophy an art or science? His answer is that in its aims and results philosophy is an art, but that it uses the same means as science (conceptual representation). He writes: 'Philosophy is a form of poetic artistry' (*Dichtkunst*). In fact, philosophy cannot be categorized, so it is necessary to invent and characterise a species for it (19[62] 7.439). Philosophy has no common denominator, it is sometimes art and sometimes science (23[8] 7.540). He commits himself to certain key positions, such as that philosophy is invention (*Dichtung*) beyond the limits of experience. Nietzsche does not mean this in a Kantian sense, although he has taken cognizance of Kant's transcendental turn by this point and accepted large parts of it. For Kant, although all our knowledge must have reference to experience it does not follow that all of it arises out of experience. Something else is at stake for Nietzsche. The word Nietzsche uses is poetry or invention (*Dichtung*) and what he is getting at is the fact that philosophy continues and sublimates the impulse or drive (*Trieb*) of the mythic. The philosopher knows (*erkennt*) in so far as he invents or poeticizes (*dichtet*), and he invents in so far as he knows. There is, then, an exchange of poetry and knowledge in the philosopher (19[62] 7.439). It is the continuation and refinement of the mythical drive and is essentially pictorial (thinking in terms of concrete images).

What does Nietzsche mean here when he credits philosophical thinking with 'poetry'? On one level he simply means that it makes imaginative and illogical leaps, which are also evident in science, for example in the form of conjectures ('Philosophical thinking can be detected at the core of all scientific thought'). This 'flight of imagination' – Nietzsche uses the word *die Phantasie* – involves leaping from possibility to possibility, with some possibilities being taken temporarily as certainties (19[75] 7.443–4). This kind of 'possibility' is something like a sudden intuition ('it might perhaps...' for example), and this gives rise to a process of amplification⁴. This leads Nietzsche to ask whether philosophical and scien-

4 It is important to appreciate that Nietzsche's thoughts on philosophy and its re-

tific thinking are to be distinguished by their dosage or by their domain. Philosophy is close to art but it cannot exist without science: 'there is no distinct philosophy separated from science'. But then he argues: 'the reason why indemonstrable philosophizing retains a higher value than a scientific proposition lies in the aesthetic value of such philosophizing, in its beauty and sublimity [*Erhabenheit*]' (19[76] 7.444). His idea is that a construction of philosophy cannot prove itself in the same way a scientific construction can. Such constructions of philosophy are best approached in terms of aesthetic considerations to do with artistic value. In the culture of a people it is the imagination that controls the knowledge drive. And it is this which fills the philosopher with 'the supreme pathos [feeling, ardour] for truth' since it is the value of his knowledge that serves as the guarantee of its truth (ibid.). This is a different kind of 'truth' from the one that drives science (unconditional, infallible, 'objective', etc.).

Philosophy's value lies in its purifying tasks, such as cleansing muddled and superstitious ideas. To this extent it is a science, but to the extent that it is at the same time anti-scientific – for example in opposing scientific dogmatism (what today we would call scientism) – it is 'religious-obscurantist' (23[10] 7. 542). Nietzsche gives the example of Kant's discrediting of the theory of the soul and rational theology. Philosophy opposes the fixed value of ethical concepts and the hatred of the body. It shows us what is anthropomorphic: the translation of the world into the care or concern of the human being. Philosophy is harmful since it dissolves instinct, cultures, and customary moralities. In terms of the present, philosophy encounters the absence of a popular ethic, the absence of any sense of the importance of discriminating, a mania for history, and so on. The sciences are studied without practical application, whilst classical antiquity is studied in a way that fails to relate it to any practical attempt to learn from it. In the case of the philosopher we have a physician – the physician of culture – who must heal himself (29[213] 7.715). This is because, according to Nietzsche, the philosopher must first become a thinker for himself before he can educate others. Schopenhauer provides the lesson needed here: the need to achieve genuine independence in relation to the present age (SE 3 1.361). Nietzsche thinks this is an especially pressing task for the thinker today who is faced with the claims of a 'new age' (*Neuzeit*) (HL 8 1.306)⁵. Schopenhauer's 'greatness' consists in the fact

lation to science and art at this time are worked out in the context of his attempt to inquire into the beginnings of philosophy amongst the pre-Socratics.

5 The composite concept *Neuzeit* was first used by the German poet Ferdinand Freiligrath (1810–76) in 1870, that is, around the time Nietzsche produces

that he deals with ‘the picture of life as a whole in order to interpret it as a whole’, and he does so without letting himself become entangled in a web of conceptual scholasticisms (SE 3 1.356). The problem with the present is that it is ‘importunate’ (*zudringlich*), being something that is always unintentionally overvalued (ibid. 361). This is especially felt by the philosopher, says Nietzsche, whose peculiar task is to be the lawgiver of ‘the measure, mint, and weight of things’ (ibid. 360). The philosopher seeks to pronounce a judgment that is valid for the ‘entire fate of humanity’, that is for ‘the highest fate’ (*Loos*) that can befall an individual human being or an entire people and not just the average fate (ibid. 361).

In relation to science, philosophy draws attention to its ‘barbarizing effects’, that is, the fact that it so easily loses itself in the service of practical interests. The ‘laissez aller’ (let it go) attitude of modern science resembles the dogmas of political economy: it has a naïve faith in an absolutely beneficial result. In addition, it employs artistic powers in an effort to break the unlimited knowledge-drive and in order to produce a unity of knowledge. The primary concern of philosophy is with the question of the value of existence, with what is to be revered. ‘For science there is nothing great and nothing small – but for philosophy! The value of science is measured in terms of this statement’ (19[33] 7. 426). And then, he adds: ‘Holding onto what is sublime! [*Das Festhalten des Erhabenen!*]’ (see also 19[22] 7.423). For Nietzsche, the sublime refers to the (aesthetic) concept of greatness, and the task of philosophy is to educate people to this concept⁶. To hold on to it is to keep in one’s view, as a kind of

his reflections on history in the second *Untimely Meditation*, which commence in fact with BT. It can denote the ‘modern’ or the contemporary *Zeit* in the sense ‘of today’, and it can also assert a qualitative claim, such as being new, even better, than what has gone before, so attributing to the new an epochal character. Nietzsche has registered these meanings and is taking to task the pretensions of the modern to be something new, better, and epochal. For further insight into the concept of *Neuzeit* see Koselleck 1985 chapter 13.

- 6 This is not the place for me to explore the sources of Nietzsche’s thinking on the sublime, which extends from Longinus to Kant and Schopenhauer, or to engage with recent attempts to understand Nietzsche as a thinker of the sublime. See, for example, Battersby 2007 chapters eight and nine and Nabais 2006 chapter one. Neither of these authors treat the material I focus on in this essay, and yet it is this material, I would contend, that provides us with the most essential insights for understanding Nietzsche on the sublime. Battersby in particular provides many interesting insights and her reading is informed by an incisive knowledge of Nietzsche’s relation to the romantics and to figures such as Kant and Schiller. I would not deny that Nietzsche’s thinking on the subject has affinities with Kant’s conception of the sublime, such as the experience of awe, feelings of admiration,

superior perception or vision, the 'spiritual mountain range' that stretches across the centuries and thus the 'eternal fruitfulness of everything that is great' (19[33] 7.426). In the essay of 1872 entitled 'The Relation of Schopenhauer's Philosophy to German Culture', one of the 'Five Unwritten Prefaces', Nietzsche appeals to the sublime as a way of drawing attention to the narrowness of life, discerning, and judging that prevails in German scholarship, including its reliance on domestic and homely virtues, and he contrasts the elevation to greatness afforded by the sublime with what he calls 'Philistine homeliness' (KSA 1.778–782, especially 779–780).

In a later notebook from 1875 on the struggle between science and wisdom, Nietzsche claims that whilst science can probe the processes of nature it can never 'command' human beings: 'science knows nothing of taste, love, pleasure, displeasure, exaltation or exhaustion. Man must in some way interpret, and thereby, evaluate, what he lives through and experiences' (6[41] 8.113). Nietzsche claims that the sciences – natural science and history – explain but do not command; or where they do command, it is always in the name of utility. By contrast, 'every religion and every philosophy has somewhere within it [...] a sublime [*erhabene*] breach with nature, a striking uselessness' (29[197] 7.710). He then asks whether this is all that there is to it. In short, how can value be given to that which exists outside of utility? Nietzsche considers this question in the context of several notes that bear the title, 'The Afflictions of Philosophy [*Die Bedrängnis der Philosophie*]' . These 'afflictions' are both external (natural science and history) and internal (the courage to live according to a philosophy is breaking down). Nietzsche notes that the demands made on philosophy in the present age are greater than ever, and so are

reverence, and astonishment, the expansion of our mental powers of comprehension, respect for our higher vocation, and so on. However, what is clear is that Nietzsche deploys the sublime in an original manner, one that is congruent with the tasks of the project of philosophy as he conceives it. It is not that Nietzsche breaks the link between the aesthetic and the moral in his thinking on the sublime, as is widely supposed; it is rather that he has a specific conception of the moral and, contra Kant, place the emphasis on the need for each individual to become its own self-legislator and self-creator (see GS 335 and AC 11). I concur with James Conant who argues, contra the lazy reading of Nietzsche as an aestheticist, that Nietzsche is seeking to transform our understanding of the categories 'aesthetic' and 'ethical', including our conception of them as resting upon distinct and mutually independent kinds of valuation. See Conant 2000 221 f.. The Preface to D contains the essential ideas for understanding Nietzsche's critique of Kant and has to be read – and heard – extremely carefully.

the attacks; and yet philosophers find themselves weaker than ever (29[198] 7.710; see also HL 5 1.282 and BGE 204).

In these early reflections Nietzsche seeks to provide philosophy with a specific *raison d'être*. The demand Nietzsche places on philosophy is that of 'concentrating' the human being, but he is unsure whether philosophy can do this today (29[211] 7.714). He maintains that 'the people need abnormalities, even if they do not simply exist for the people's sake' (23[19] 7.546). Philosophy is wedded to the creation of what he calls (beautiful) 'possibilities of life' (6[48] 8.115–16)⁷. With regards to, say, Heraclitus, it is important to know and appreciate that such a human being existed. This involves a sublime recognition of what some human beings can achieve and do, achieving extraordinary states of mind and action, practising an affirmation of life under dangerous conditions and attaining spiritual growth and mastery. Nietzsche notes that there comes a time, an hour, when we stand before ourselves with wonder or surprise, even anxiety, and ask 'how do we manage to live at all?' It is true that, factually one does live, and yet one is confronted by something else with respect to life. It is at this 'hour' that we begin to comprehend that we possess a faculty of *invention*, one that is similar to what we identify in plants: it grows by twisting and climbing until it forcibly secures a ray of light for itself and a small earthly kingdom. Our own little portion of delight takes root in barren soil. We are amazed that we can continue to live and that life has this unflinching vigour. Now compare this life with the thinker in whom the difficulties of life have become enormously great. When we learn of the lives of the philosophers, we must listen attentively since what we can learn is something about the fact that there are *possibilities* of life. But these are not just any possibilities. Here we encounter a rare and impressive resourcefulness, a daring that is both desperate and hopeful, it is life pushing itself further and further, upwards and ever higher or more encompassing, as if the thinker possessed the spirit of one of the globe's great circumnavigators. This is what the great thinker is, a circumnavigator of 'life's most remote and dangerous regions' (6[48] 8.115–16)⁸. In the life of the

7 Ibid. 144–5. Nietzsche holds these possibilities to be 'beautiful' because in beauty we see the mirror image in which we can behold nature's delight in the discovery of a new, fruitful possibility of life. This is the source of the beauty of the ancient Greeks; in contrast, *our* ugliness is an image of nature's self-discontent in which the art of enticing us to life has been put into doubt.

8 Ibid. 143.

thinker two hostile drives press in opposite directions, the drive which desires knowledge (*das Erkennen*), which requires that we venture forth into the unknown (*ins Ungewisse*: the uncertain) and leave behind inhabited lands, and the drive which desires life and in order to remain attached to life must grope its way back to some secure place on which it can stand (*ibid.*).

There is an important question to consider here: does nature show purposiveness and is Nietzsche claiming that this purposiveness finds its culminating point in the philosopher? He holds that philosophy is one of the preservatives of value and discrimination, but it has no specific existence of its own. With regards to the culture of his people, the philosopher seems to be: an indifferent hermit; a teacher to a few select spiritual and abstract minds; or a destroyer of popular culture (28[2] 7.615). He is a hermit, or this is his appearance, owing to the fact that there is a *lack* of purposiveness in nature. His work, however, remains for later ages. It is not that there is no purposiveness in nature, only a lack or deficit of it; nature cannot be relied upon as a result. It ruins countless seeds but also manages to produce a few great examples, such as Kant and Schopenhauer (the step from the one to the other, Nietzsche says, is a step towards a freer culture). Nature, Nietzsche says, is wasteful not out of extravagance but out of lack of experience (29[223] 7.720; see also SE 7). Thus, the artists and the philosopher both bear witness against teleology. Nevertheless, Nietzsche thinks it is legitimate for us to conceive of the philosopher as a kind of self-revelation of nature's workshop (19[17] 7.421).

How can philosophy and the philosopher connect with a people? Are not a people by definition something contingent and accidental (for example, when it finds itself in an accidental political situation)? Nietzsche's claim is that the people finds its uniqueness in this superior individual who, although he or she appears, is in fact 'timeless', not merely an accidental 'wanderer'. The philosopher exists in order to harness the 'unselective knowledge-drive' by setting goals, determining measure, and making value judgements concerning existence (for example, defining what is great, rare, singular, even though these are mutable). Perhaps under modern conditions it is the philosopher's fate to be a wanderer who is looking for a people that is missing (this appears to be the narrative of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). If today there is an absence of noble popular philosophy, Nietzsche thinks this is because we have no noble concept of the people as a *publicum*; rather, our popular philosophy is for the *people*, not for the public (19[26] 7. 424). In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche notes that 'pub-

lic (*Publicum*) is merely a word that cannot be taken to denote a uniform and constant entity (BT 11 1.79). What he is resisting is the view that the artist and genuine philosopher should accommodate themselves to a force or power that is strong simply by virtue of its numbers or the loudness of its opinions. Public opinion should not be pandered to; rather, the task is to raise the public to a higher level of insight and being: ‘Create for yourselves the concept of a “people” [*Volk*]: you can never conceive it to be noble and lofty enough’ (HL 7 1.302).

2. Nietzsche on perfecting *physis*

Today philosophy can no longer serve as the foundation of a culture; it has become too professionalized and allowed itself to be drawn into the current of modern education. In the best cases it has become a science, though this is also to call it a day so far as genuine philosophy is concerned (Nietzsche refers to Friedrich Trendelenburg in 29[199] 7.710 and 30[15] 7.738). The task instead is to allow ourselves to be inspired by Schopenhauer’s example and employ his worldly wisdom for practical matters, and thus fight for an ‘improved *physis*’. For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer is the significant figure in modern philosophy after Kant because he sweeps away scholasticism. Although Nietzsche expresses his admiration for Schopenhauer in these terms, there is no indication even in this early period that he subscribes to Schopenhauer’s doctrine on the denial of the will to life; the contrary is in fact the case. Schopenhauer purified himself of the opinions and valuations of his age, making himself unfashionable (SE 3 1.362). He can serve as a model (*Vorbild*) in spite of all his scars and flaws. The fact that the greatest human being can be dwarfed by his ideal does not serve to devalue it (*ibid.* 359). Nietzsche astutely addresses the dangers of Schopenhauer’s philosophizing, which consist in his pessimism and his disgust with becoming.

Nietzsche notes that the powerful promoter of life longs for release from his own, exhausted age and for a culture (transfigured *physis*); but this longing can result in disaffection and disappointment, encouraging the philosopher to become the judge of life who condemns it as unworthy of our attachment (*ibid.* 362). The Greek philosophers had life before them in ‘sumptuous perfection’; the same cannot be said of us moderns, where our sensibility is caught between the desire for freedom, beauty, and greatness of life and the drive for truth that asks only, ‘Of what value is existence [*das Dasein*] at all?’ (*ibid.* 361). In short, our danger

is pessimism and the need for a metaphysical resolution of the problem of existence (in the form of 'truth' – be it God, the Good, Nirvana). Schopenhauer lacked belief in the future since it would bring only the eternal return of the same. For him, then, 'eternal becoming is a deceitful puppet play over which human beings forget themselves', and for whom the 'heroism of truthfulness consists in one day ceasing to be its plaything' (SE 4 1.374). If everything that 'is' finds itself caught up in the process of becoming, and this becoming is 'empty, deceitful, flat', worthy only of our lofty contempt, then the riddle presented to the human being to solve can be solved only in being (ibid.).

Given that Nietzsche also aspires to be unfashionable, to not be a thinker of his time, and given that, as we shall see, meaning and value are not to be located for him in a process of history or evolution, how will he avoid the temptation of being and Schopenhauer's solution to the problem of existence? We tend to conceive this in terms of Nietzsche expressing an affirmation of life, and such an affirmation is indeed signalled in SE as something 'metaphysical'. This is used not in a pejorative sense by Nietzsche (rightly so, I would maintain), but indicates the fact that the affirmation which is 'profound' is 'of another, higher life' and at the cost of the 'destruction and violation of the laws of this life': only in this way can the affirmation be untimely or unfashionable (SE 4 1. 372). In short, if the affirmation of life is to be meaningful, and not just an empty projection, it has to be wedded to a promise, namely, the promise of the future. This is what I take Nietzsche's 'Dionysian faith' to amount to, from first to last (TI Ancients 4). This is not a creed of personal salvation since it is not the 'I' or ego that is the site of salvation or redemption; rather, the redemption refers to life itself. As we shall see, this is not just any life for Nietzsche. The individual is important for Nietzsche and accorded, in contrast to Schopenhauer's metaphysics, a paramount role: 'Individuals are the bridges upon which becoming is founded [...] In an individual, everything down to the smallest cell is individual' (19[187] 7.477). This is what enables the individual to become what it is. However, this becoming also refers to what it is *not* and cannot be, since it requires expression in actions and events. Moreover, what the individual is, as its 'true' or authentic self, it empirically is not except as a potential. This is what Nietzsche means when he uses the word 'genius' (SE 1 1.338), which needs to be heard in the Greek sense of 'daimōn' conceived as an individual fate and organic potentiality⁹.

9 See the helpful note by William Arrowsmith, in his edition of *Unmodern Obser-*

In the later Nietzsche this gets reworked as the doctrine of the innocence of becoming in which what one is, is a 'piece of fate [*Verhängniss*], one belongs to the whole, one *is* in the whole [*im Ganzen*]' (TI Errors 8). Fate, however, gets its meaning not simply from what empirically or factually one is but from what one has the potential to become. For Nietzsche this denotes the promise of new life, and remains in operation, I would maintain, in the later Nietzsche, such as GS 335. Nietzsche's conception of the self is that of the lawgiver who occupies a place in the 'whole' and for this reason is something 'fateful'. For this other self to come into being it is necessary to engage in the task of purification. This word runs throughout the *Untimely Meditations* and is at the centre of Nietzsche's thinking in GS 335¹⁰. In SE it is expressed as the 'law' of the authentic self and higher life: 'your true being does not lie deeply hidden within you, but rather immeasurably high above you, or at least above what you commonly take to be your ego' (SE 1 1.340). In SE it is the job of conscience to awaken the self to its task: "Be yourself! You are none of the those things that you now do, think, and desire" (ibid. 338); in GS 335 it is the job of the 'intellectual conscience', the superior form of conscience to the moral conscience, what Nietzsche calls the conscience behind our conscience¹¹. Whatever the name of this conscience, the end is the same: to become what one 'is' where this refers to what is 'unique, singular, incomparable'. However, one is not simply a lawgiver for the sake of oneself. Nietzsche is inviting the empirical individual to elevate itself, to become equal to what is best in life and in itself, and for the sake of life. For Nietzsche, then, an affirmation of life without the promise of new life and a new culture is empty and vain.

ventions (1990 163–4 note 1). See also the excellent insights on genius in Nietzsche in Conant 2000 209 f., and Schopenhauer's chapter on genius in Schopenhauer 1966 vol. II 376–399.

- 10 'Let us therefore limit ourselves to the purification of our opinions and valuations and to the creation our own new tables of what is good [...] We, however, want to become those we are – ones who are new, unique, incomparable, self-legislating, self-creating' (GS 335). This aphorism is entitled 'Long Live Physics' where 'physics' refers to 'knowledge' and is, I would argue, of Empedoclean inspiration.
- 11 Nietzsche is treating the moral conscience as the all-too timely conscience we have internalised as a result of habits of socialisation and education, whereas the intellectual conscience is more uniquely our own and is the means through which we are able to become the one that we are (unique, singular, incomparable), to become 'untimely'.

Nietzsche makes this clear in his discussion of the dangers of uniqueness (*Einzigkeit*) in section 3 of SE. If we suppose, as Nietzsche does, that each individual bears within itself a 'productive uniqueness as the kernel of its being', then this means that a strange aura – 'the aura of the unusual' – surrounds it (SE 3 1.359). This uniqueness is taken to be unbearable by many people since attached to it is a chain of efforts and burdens (this uniqueness may in fact be our *greatest* weight). The individual finds that the desert and the cave are always within it, so that solitude is given to it as a fate (*Loos*). Several dangers now confront this individual. First, there is the danger of pure science, in which one allows oneself to be educated by an 'inhuman abstraction' (pure knowledge) and neglects the need for moral exemplars and models. Second, there is the danger of complexity: modern humans are so complex and many-sided that they become dishonest whenever they speak and try to act in accordance with their assertions. The task is to become 'simple and honest in thought and life'. Third, there is the danger of leading a ghostly life, obliged to live without courage or trust, in denial and doubt, agitated and discontented, always expecting to be disappointed: 'No dog would go on living like this' (ibid. 360). Finally, there is the danger of petrification: one is reduced to ruin by one's uniqueness when it becomes an icy rock.

Nietzsche recognizes that it is necessary to show how the Schopenhauer-inspired 'ideal' of the philosopher – the ideal that encourages purification and liberation from the fashions and idols of one's time – can educate and a new set of duties be derived from it (SE 5 1.376). Failure to do this leaves us only with a vision that enraptures and intoxicates. The 'lofty goal' of the philosopher must be brought near to us so as to educate us and draw us upward (ibid.). The challenge is this: how can the loftiness and dignity of the Schopenhauerian human being transport us beyond ourselves but not, in so doing, take us outside a community of active people in which the coherence of duties and the stream of life would vanish? Nietzsche's answer is the 'fundamental thought of culture [*der Grundgedanke der Kultur*]'. The new duties cannot be those of the solitary individual and they must enable us to get beyond the hatred that is at the root of Schopenhauer's pessimism, including the hatred of individuality and its limitations (ibid. 382–3). Let me show how he argues for this idea.

Nietzsche develops his thought of culture in the context of a discussion of the ends of nature and culture which seeks to contest rival conceptions of them that predominate in the modern period. The fundamental task for Nietzsche is the perfection of nature. What unites individ-

uals and can hold them together in a community is the idea of culture conceived as the transfiguration of *physis*. The perfection of nature through culture entails fostering the production of philosophers and artists (and saints) ‘within us and around us’. These three types or modes of being constitute a ‘most sublime [*erhabensten*] order’ (ibid. 383). Why is this to perfect nature? The philosopher bestows upon nature the idea of a ‘metaphysical purpose’, whilst the artist enables nature to attain ‘self-enlightenment’ by presenting an image in which it can recognise itself and which in the normal course of things – what Nietzsche calls ‘the tumultuousness [*Unruhe*] of its own becoming’ – it never has the opportunity to do (SE 5 1.382).

Nietzsche, then, is inviting us to value the rare and the unique, in which humanity works towards the production of great individual human beings as its most essential task (SE 6 1.383–4). This can be given a metaphysical or supra-empirical justification by reflecting on evolution and how it can be accorded significance and value. We can reflect on species of animal and plant life and understand that what matters is the superior individual specimen – ‘the more unusual, more powerful, more complex, more fruitful specimen [*Exemplar*]’ (ibid. 384)¹². Evolution, then, is to be valued in terms of an aesthetic judgment understood as a superior kind of perception of nature and its products: ‘the point at which it [a species – KAP] reaches its limit and begins the transition to a higher species’ (ibid.). The goal is neither a large number of specimens and their well-being nor those specimens that are the last to evolve. Rather, it is ‘those scattered and random existences that arise here and there under favourable conditions’ (ibid.). Great human beings ‘redeem’ nature and evolution. Life, including an individual’s life, can obtain the highest value and deepest significance ‘by living for the benefit of the rarest and most valuable specimens, not for the benefit of the majority’ (ibid.). The individual may be a ‘miscarried work of nature’, but it can also bear ‘testimony to the greatest and most amazing intentions of this artist’

12 James Conant argues against translating *Exemplar* as ‘specimen’ and seeks to show that Nietzsche’s argument is, in fact, about the nature of exemplarity and what it means for Nietzsche to be an exemplar. However, it is quite clear that ‘specimen’ is correct when one looks at the whole context of Nietzsche’s treatment which is centred on a consideration of the evolution of species and on how we might plausibly construe the *significance* of evolution. One might say that whilst *Exemplar* is best translated here as ‘specimen’ it is best *interpreted* as ‘exemplar’. Nietzsche is using the language of biology in order to promote a non-biological ‘reading’ of the nature and culture of the human. See Conant 2000 191 f.

(ibid. 385). When thinking about individuals and the role they play in the 'circle of culture', Nietzsche's focus is on the longing for the 'whole' (ibid. 386; compare HH 292 2.236 on the 'rings of culture'). Our longing cannot simply be for our personal redemption but needs to turn outward in order to rediscover in the world the desire for culture which demands of us not only inner experiences, or even an assessment of the external world that surrounds us, but 'ultimately and primarily action'; that is, it demands he fights for culture and oppose those influences, habits, laws, and institutions in which he does not recognize his goal: the production of genius' (SE 6 1.386).

Whilst there may be an 'unconscious purposiveness' at work in nature, the production of redeeming human beings cannot be left to chance and accident, to what Nietzsche at this time calls 'the "dark drive"' (*jenes "dunklen Drangs"*) but must be replaced with a 'conscious intention' (ibid. 387; compare BGE 203). This is on account of the fact that today we are ruled by a culture of power (Nietzsche refers to 'the cultured state [*Kulturstaat*]', ibid. 389) that misuses and exploits culture for perverted ends. The public, civil, or social life of the present age amounts to nothing more than an equilibrium of self-interests. It does well what it does, namely, answering the question of how to achieve a mediocre existence that lacks any power of love, and it does this simply through the prudence of the self-interests involved. The present is an age that hates art and hates religion: it wants neither the beyond nor the transfiguration of the world of art (19[69] 7.441). Science has become a source of nourishment for egoism, and state and society have drafted it into their service in order to exploit it for their purposes. In order to promote a new seriousness in the face of these lamentable developments Nietzsche states the need for a fundamental alteration of the world through 'images' that will make us shudder. The object of attack is 'the perversity of contemporary human nature' and its subjection to misguided notions such as "progress", "general education", "nationalism", "modern state", "cultural struggle" (SE 7 1.407).

Nietzsche comes up with a deeper explanation for this idea of a 'metaphysical' completion of nature, which centres on how we can think the human in its relation to the animal. On the one hand, the human feeds productively on the animal and its own animality (for example, animal vigour and the power of forgetting); on the other hand, it enjoys a supreme advantage over the animal in that it is able to understand its existence metaphysically. The animal by contrast is the site of 'senseless suf-

fering' since it is subject to hunger and desires without having any insight into the nature of this mode of life:

To cling so blindly and madly to life, for no higher reward, far from knowing that one is punished or why one is punished in this way, but instead to thirst with the inanity of a horrible desire for precisely this punishment as though it were happiness – that is what it means to be an animal. (SE 5 1.378)

Although it is a speculative claim to make, without empirical sanction or justification, we can say that the human animal represents, at least potentially, the salvation of animal existence, in which life itself *appears* 'in its metaphysical meaninglessness' (ibid.)¹³. Of course, in actuality it is difficult to know where the animal ceases and where the human begins, and many human beings do not transcend, for whatever reason, an animal existence. The salvation of the animal is also the salvation of the human animal. Nietzsche readily acknowledges that for the greatest part of our lives most of us live the way of the animal, desiring with more awareness what the animal craves out of blind instinct (we call this a life of 'happiness'). The 'sublime' is the moment of perception or vision when we experience the elevation of the human beyond the merely animal, when life raises itself up through the conquering and overcoming of need and makes 'the leap of joy' (ibid. 380). This is a supremely sovereign experience and moment, one which in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche will define as a moment of 'eternity' as that which names a superior 'want' or 'will', the will that 'wills its own will' (Z I Transformations 4.31; Z III Seven Seals 4.287–91)¹⁴. As he puts it in SE:

[...] there are moments when we understand [*begreifen*] this; then the clouds break and we perceive how we, along with all of nature, are pressing onward toward the human being as toward something that stands high above us. (SE 5 1.378)

By contrast, in ordinary time and becoming, or what Nietzsche calls the 'tremendous mobility of human beings on the great earthly desert', which consists in the waging of wars, a ceaseless gathering and dispersing, an

13 My view is that the metaphysical deduction of the human being Nietzsche provides in SE is defensible. It should not be confused with the criticism of metaphysics he launches in HH 1 and 2 (2.23–25), which is directed at the unconditioned and the thing in itself, and it is quite different to the problematic 'artist's metaphysics' Nietzsche espouses in BT (5 1.47–8).

14 In several sections of this discourse we encounter the refrain: 'Oh, how should I not lust after Eternity and after the nuptial ring of all rings – the ring of recurrence!'

imitation of one another, as well as a mutual outwitting and trampling underfoot, we find only 'a continuation of animality', as if we were being cheated out of our metaphysical disposition and made to regress to the unconsciousness of pure animal instinct (ibid.). It is a sublime vision of the human being, in the sense just outlined, that Nietzsche offers in contrast to other images of the human we find in modernity, such as the image that glorifies its descent into bestiality or the image that seeks to tell us that nothing more or other is at work or operating in the **human** than a robotic automatism (SE 4 1.368).

3. Nietzsche on history

A similar lesson on the sublime and the moment is provided by Nietzsche in the *Untimely Meditation* on history. Unless history is given the grand treatment it will only create slaves, Nietzsche says, being nothing more than a fatal curiosity. Not every form of life or society that comes into existence can be considered worthy of existence, and yet the tendency of history is to make everything that does come into existence appear rational and purposive. Nietzsche notes, with reference to the excessive character of history's concern with development, that human cattle can destroy themselves by means of rumination (*Wiederkäuen*); this is to practice rumination without a higher existential goal and end (29[32] 7.638)¹⁵.

History should speak of what is great and unique, of the exemplary model (19[10] 7.419; see also 19[1] 7.417). The current practice of **history** is part of our modern indiscriminate drive for knowledge, and like all things that are unable or fail to discriminate, it is vulgar (19[11] 7.419). Although he never endorses the denial of the will (to life), Nietzsche is certainly influenced by Schopenhauer's concern over the allure of the temporal and of becoming. Thus, he says that the task of the philosopher is to consciously combat all the temporalizing elements so as to support the 'unconscious task of art' (19[12] 7.419). It is in this sense that he is constructing a present task directed against the sciences. The questions that confront human beings or a humanity are eternal ones (19[9]

15 In the Preface to GM Nietzsche demands rumination from the readers of his text, but this centres on the attempt to open up existential tasks and questions: Why are we knowers unknown to ourselves?

7.418–19). Plato's procreating in the realm of the beautiful shows us the way: 'the overcoming of history [*Überwindung der Historie*] is necessary for the birth of genius, history must be immersed in beauty and made eternal' (19[10] 7.419). By procreation Nietzsche means 'an excess of love beyond love of self', that is, giving birth to something that goes beyond ourselves and makes possible something higher and stronger. The focus is not on the self; love by definition involves creating beyond oneself (as in religion) (5[22] 8.46).

In the realms of history and mathematics, Nietzsche notes, the most trivial matter is to count as more valuable than all the ideas of metaphysics taken together. The sole attachment, as that which determines value, is to the degree of certainty that can be acquired. Our attachment is to ever smaller objects of inquiry, focus, and value (19[37] 7.429). Nietzsche identifies several problems with the emergence of history conducted as a science (29[40–42] 7.207–9):

- It becomes a matter of laws where individuals do not matter and all that does matter to the historian is determinism. The individual is merely a pawn, a sufferer but without any philosopher present to educate him in the lesson as to how to release himself from this victim-like status and to attain resignation.
- The problem with these laws is that they are without value. This is because they come from the needs of the masses. In short, Nietzsche is claiming that only the lower forms of life are governed by regular and predictable behaviour; by contrast, the strong and great human beings are unpredictable and irregular!
- It allows itself to get bogged down in statistics and statistical analysis, as a way of supporting this approach to history as the science of laws. Statistics, however, show only how vulgar and uniform large masses of **humanity** are in their tastes and behaviour.
- Nietzsche questions the nature and status of the so-called laws of **history**: do they have the same status as a law of nature or a law of justice? It cannot take the form of a 'thou shalt', but only, 'that's how it was in the past' or in that part or time of the past. It is no more than the expression of an 'inane factual relation'.

Finally, two more errors are identified: first, that history often confuses quantity with quality (by supposing that any historical power that has an enduring effect and on large numbers, then by definition it must be great), and by teaching an idolatry of success. Why should success be the criterion of praise? The strong and noble does exist and occasionally

prevail, but so does, and much more successfully, the stupid and evil. This attack on the methods and pretensions of scientific history is something Nietzsche continues in a late text such as GM. Especially relevant here is his attack on the 'plebeianism of the modern spirit' (GM I 4) which Nietzsche associates with positivist and naturalistic historians such as Henry Thomas Buckle (1821–62). Buckle was the author of a multi-volume *History of Civilization in England* and a pioneer of the scientific and statistical approach to history in which human actions are held to be governed by laws as fixed and as regular as those we find in the physical world. In a note of 1888 Nietzsche states that an 'agitator of the mob' like Buckle is incapable of comprehending the concept 'higher nature' (16[39] 13.497–8).

As his plans show, Nietzsche had a clear idea of what he wished to demonstrate in the *Meditation* (30[1–2]) 7.725 f.). His starting point is to be a simple one: history (*Historie*) has its uses but it can also be detrimental. Nietzsche notes that it is possible for us to perish from any hypertrophied virtue (30[2] 7.730). History can serve life in the three forms of the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical. History is hostile to life when it has its source in a cult of inwardness, has a supposition of justice and claim to objectivity (for Nietzsche we only get the appearance of justice through the study of history), invites us to think of ourselves as mere latecomers (epigones), and places the meaning of individual existence within a world process. The remedies to the historical malady include the study of Plato (in which we find no history), and the powers of the ahistorical and the suprahistorical, including writing in 'praise of art' on account of its power to create atmospheres (29[162] 7.699). The ahistorical (*Unhistorische*) refers to powers such as forgetfulness and illusion (*Wahn*). The suprahistorical (*Überhistorische*) refers to art and religion but also to nature, compassion (*Mitleid*), and philosophy (29[194] 7.709). Art and religion are esteemed by Nietzsche as important instruments by which we can take possession of ourselves and organize the 'chaos' we are, so discovering what our genuine needs are (on this 'chaos' and the need to organise it see also HL 10 1.333). The aim is to do this in a way which does not make us fear cultivation or respond to the summons to become what are in a brooding manner: religion 'provides love for the human being', art the 'love for existence' (29[192] 7.708)¹⁶.

16 This should not be taken to mean Nietzsche does not entertain suspicions about art and religion at this time. In one sketch he notes that they stem from the desire

The power of forgetting, associated with the animal and named as part of the ahistorical, is what enables us to have confidence in our own being by limiting our horizon and without which we would be condemned to see everywhere in all things only a becoming (*Werden*), losing ourselves in the stream of becoming like pupils of Heraclitus (HL 1 1.250). This aspect of Nietzsche's argument has been well understood and is often emphasized. However, his argument on the role of the **supra-historical** is of equal importance: not only is there the animal grace of **forgetting**, there is also a superior perception and a superior power of **memory** capable of inspiring human action and the task of becoming what one is. In SE Nietzsche notes that haste is universal in modern times with people seeking to flee from themselves in order to avoid the confrontation with voices and demons that wish to speak to them and make them still. We live in a state of 'fear of memory [*Erinnerung*]' (SE 5 1.379): 'When we are quiet and alone, we are afraid that something will be whispered into our ear, and hence we despise quiet and drug ourselves with sociability (ibid.).

In essence, the suprahistorical is the attitude which holds that the past and the present are one and the same, and this means that history teaches us nothing new but only gives us the appearance of difference (30[2] 7.728). It is this attitude we find expressed in Schopenhauer's reflections on history¹⁷. Nietzsche, however, draws a different lesson from the **supra-historical** from the one taught by his educator. In the *Meditation* Nietzsche refers to the suprahistorical in two sections, in the opening section and then again in the essay's final section. The meaning he ascribes to it seems to change in the course of the essay. In section 1 it refers to a negating attitude to life that reflects a world-weariness and deep disgust; in section 10 it refers to 'eternalising powers' that provide us with a point of stability and anchorage (HL 10 1.330). The key to understanding this shift in Nietzsche's argument, whereby he is able to make productive use of the suprahistorical, consists in appreciating the difference between the ahistorical and the suprahistorical: the former has the character of grace, but the latter, if it is to be historically and temporally effective (as Nietzsche desires), must be made to work as part of culture and cultural training. Together the ahistorical and the suprahistorical enable us to divert our

to leap 'beyond this world by condemning it wholesale' and want only 'the peace of the One' (29[224] 7.720–1).

17 See Schopenhauer, 'On History', in Schopenhauer 1966 vol. II 439–447.

gaze from what is in the process of becoming and solely of empirical or natural value.

Initially Nietzsche takes the suprahistorical to refer to the kind of superior vantage point described by the historian Georg Niebuhr (1776–1831), which consists in history enabling us to recognize the entirely chance form of the ways in which the greatest and highest spirits of the human race have seen the world and then sought to compel others to see it (HL 1 1.254). From its vantage point the viewer of history no longer feels the need to respond to the temptation of life and to take part in history. This is simply because they see the blindness and injustice of agency; they see this everywhere and only this. For the suprahistorical person the task of knowing how life is to be lived is not to come from history, be it from the first century or the nineteenth century. Nietzsche invites us to consider a question as a way of disclosing who we are, **historical** or suprahistorical: 'do we wish to relive the past ten or twenty years of our lives?' Some may answer no because for them the truth of existence does not reside in time; others will answer no because they pin their hopes for life not on the past ten or twenty years but on the *next* ten or twenty years (Nietzsche cites some words from Hume that mocks the latter group of people) (ibid. 255)¹⁸. Nietzsche says these agents can be called 'historical' since when they look to the past they are impelled to the future. However, they are in fact unhistorical agents because their preoccupation with history (*Geschichte*) stands in the service of life, not pure knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). Although Nietzsche never shares their commitment to a process of history, it is clear that he is of this kind. In fact, Nietzsche is negotiating his own position *between* the historical and the suprahistorical: he shares the latter's disregard for the process of history from which a meaning might be found, and he is drawn to their view that the world is complete at each and every **moment**; however, he also shares the commitment of the historical human beings to the future, only that it is not the future of a developmental process. The history Nietzsche is keen to promote is that which requires the active human being and is written by the person with the richest experience:

Only from the highest power [*Kraft*] of the present can you interpret the past [...] The voice of the past is always the voice of an oracle; only if you are

18 Nietzsche is quoting from part 10 of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Hume is, in fact, citing from a play by John Dryden).

seers into the future and familiar with the present will you be able to interpret the oracular voice of the past. (29[96] 7.675–6; see also HL 6 1.294)¹⁹

What is the future Nietzsche has belief in? It is a belief in the idea of the (eternal) return of the possibilities of life. In section two of the *Meditation* Nietzsche refers to the belief of the Pythagoreans that when the constellation of the heavenly bodies repeats itself so must the same events, down to the smallest, on earth. Nietzsche is not taking this as true, it should be noted, and so no licence can be given to the attempt to construct monumental history in the manner of an icon-like veracity. This will only happen, he notes, when astronomers once again become astrologers. Until this day comes history of this type must have recourse to artistic powers²⁰. In fact, Nietzsche says that the historian of the monumental will not examine the causes of what comes into being but rather focus exclusively on ‘effects’, that is, events (think of what a popular festival or a military anniversary does). An examination of the historical connexus of causes and effects would only demonstrate that the dice-game of chance and the future ‘would never again produce something wholly identical to what it produced in the past’ (HL 2 1.262; compare SE 1 1.339).

There is, then, a basic contrast between Nietzsche’s valuation of, and commitment to the suprahistorical and that which we find in pessimists such as the great Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837) and Schopenhauer. Nietzsche cites from Leopardi: nothing lives that is worthy, the agitation of life does not deserve even a sigh, and our being is pain and boredom only and the world is dirt, so be calm. Nietzsche is not looking for meaning in a process of becoming or history, only the appearance now and again of the highest exemplars of human existence who discover and fashion possibilities of life (modes of being that are different to how the mass of humanity lives). He now advises his readers to leave the suprahistorical human beings to their own nausea at existence. Our task is to rejoice in our own lack of wisdom (the wisdom that leads to nausea) and to attempt to make progress with the valuation of the historical, even though it may be nothing more than an occidental prejudice: this is not any kind of history but that which can show us that possibilities of life have once existed and may exist again. Whilst the suprahistorical

19 Compare Z II Redemption 4.179 on this point: ‘I should not be able to live if I were not also a seer of that which must come’.

20 Compare the take on this prospect of astronomy becoming astrology (the art of prophecy) Nietzsche has in Z Tablets 9.

human being may be in possession of more wisdom, those who do not feel the disgust have the greater attachment to life and its promise.

It is the task of the monumental or exemplary to occupy itself with the search for greatness. The great moments in the struggle of the **human** individual constitute a chain and this chain can unite humanity across the millennia 'like a range of mountain peaks'. It thus gives expression to a certain *faith in humanity*, the faith in the best and the highest exemplars. This provides the human being with a unique kind of **memory**. In his notes for the *Meditation* Nietzsche insists that these individuals do not form, and are not part of, a process; instead, 'they live conjointly and concurrently, thanks to history, which permits such a collaboration' (29[52] 7.648–9). If the goal of humankind is not to be located in its end stage, but only in the highest specimens, those 'dispersed throughout millennia, conjointly represent all the supreme powers that are buried in humanity' (ibid. 649)²¹. It is this elevated conception of humanity that brings the monumental into conflict with another fundamental faith that dominates most easily and is the most widespread, namely the apathetic habit, everything that is base and petty, and that says 'no' to the claims of the monumental. Life cannot be so extravagant, superfluous; rather, life has to be justified at its basest and lowest points only (the need for comfort and security, the need for the satisfaction of our basic animality at the expense of everything else, etc.). It is this base attachment to life that the exceptional or extraordinary human being treats with Olympian laughter and sublime derision (*erhabenen Hohne*: HL 2 1.60); they even descend to their grave with an ironic smile because they know that there is in fact nothing of them left to bury other than the dross, refuse, vanity, and animality that had always weighed them down whilst alive. What lives on is the signature of their most authentic being, such as a work, an act, or a creation. Fame denotes not the tastiest morsel of our egoism, as Schopenhauer thought, but the belief in the solidarity and continuity of the greatness of the ages and a protest against the passing away of the generations and the ephemeral quality of existence.

Nietzsche introduces the idea of the sublime in the *Meditation* in the context of a treatment of the problem of the 'weak personality' which refers to a human being that has developed the habit of no longer taking

21 See note 12 above on specimen.

real things seriously²². What is real and existent makes only a slight impression on such a personality who becomes more and more negligent and indolent with respect to outward things. It is content so long as its memory is repeatedly stimulated anew, 'as long as new things worthy of knowing, which can be neatly placed in the pigeonholes of that memory, keep streaming in' (HL 5 1.279). The human being becomes a strolling spectator of life living in the midst of a cosmopolitan carnival of gods, arts, and customs. Great wars and revolutions can hardly detain such a human for more than a fleeting moment. Moreover, war seems to only exist for the sake of history and the journalism that consumes it. We want only more history and never real events. Nietzsche expresses it morally (*moralisch*): we are no longer capable of *holding onto the sublime* (*das Erhabene festzuhalten*) because our deeds are merely sudden claps (*Schläge*) of thunder and not *rolling* thunder (HL 5 1.280). What is the point he is making in this lesson on the sublime?

I think it is the following: when we allow our deeds to become concealed or cloaked with the canopy of history we are unable to see ourselves as we should – with distance, delay, and echo and resonance – and art takes flight. We do not comprehend ourselves in our originality which can only take the form of the prolonged awe associated with the sublime conceived as the domain of the incomprehensible²³. Nietzsche argues that whilst it is perfectly rational to assume we can comprehend and calculate in a moment (*Augenblick*), this is in fact short-sighted since under such conditions we in fact fail to see and hear many things²⁴. The rational person:

-
- 22 Nietzsche borrows the notion of 'weak personality' from the Austrian dramatist and critic Franz Grillparzer (1791–1872) (see 29[68] 7.659). He continues to deal with it in his late writings; see, for example, GS 365; 10[59] 12.491–3 and 10[145] 12.199–200 (cf. WP 886; WP 1009).
- 23 See also 6[48] 8.116: 'I never tire of placing before my mind a series of thinkers in which each individual has within himself that incomprehensibility [*Unbegreiflichkeit*] which forces us to wonder just how he discovered this possibility of life'.
- 24 The well-known appeal to the 'moment' (*Augenblick*) in the discourse 'On the Vision and the Riddle' in part three of *Z* is, I would argue, a special kind of **moment**. For example, just before Zarathustra has his encounter with the dwarf and recounts the memory of the 'gateway' that bears the inscription 'Moment', Nietzsche writes: 'courage is the best of killers, courage that attacks: it even strikes death dead, for it says: "Was that life? Well then! One more time!" But in such a saying there is much ringing play. He that hath ears, let him hear. –' (*Z* III Vision 1 4.199). See also *Z* III Tablets 16 4.258: 'Willing liberates: for willing is creating; thus I teach. And only for the sake of creating shall you

[...] fails to see some things that even a child sees; he fails to hear some things that even a child hears. And it is precisely these things that are important. Because he does not understand this, his understanding is more childish than a child, simpler than simple-mindedness – in spite of the many clever wrinkles in his parchment like features and the virtuosity of his fingers when it comes to unangling what is entangled. (HL 5)

Nietzsche appeals to the 'incomprehensible' not in order to indicate that something irrational or ineffable is at play, but rather as a way of showing that the self we need to disclose to ourselves is quite different to the ordinary, habitual comprehension of ourselves produced for us by a false historical cultivation. Under modern conditions of cultivation and 'bourgeois universality' (HL 5 1.281) the individual sees itself not as an agent but as an actor²⁵:

The individual [...] can no longer believe in himself; he sinks into himself, into his interior, which in this case means into nothing but the cumulative jumble of acquired knowledge that has no outward effect, of learning that fails to become life. If we take a look at the exterior, we notice how the expulsion of the instincts by means of history has nearly transformed human beings into mere abstractions and shadows: no one runs the risk of baring his own person, but instead disguises himself behind the mask of the cultivated man, the scholar, the poet, the politician. (Ibid. 280)

What would it mean to comprehend ourselves? For Nietzsche this takes place in a special kind of moment. The moment is, for him, the site of a contestation by the different forces or powers of life (base and noble, inferior and superior)²⁶. In SE, for example, Nietzsche draws our attention to the haste and 'breathless seizing of the moment [*Augenblick*]' that characterizes the modern (the fashionable), namely, 'the rat race and chasing that now cuts furrows into people's faces and places its tattoo, as it were, upon everything they do' (SE 6 1.392). We moderns are becoming the 'tortured slaves' of three M's: moment [*Moment*], majority opinion, and modishness (ibid.). The 'other' moment Nietzsche is after is the

learn! And even learning shall you first learn from me, learning well! – He that hath ears, let him hear!

25 Of course, the problem of the actor continues to occupy Nietzsche in his later writings. See, for example, from 1887, GS 356 and 361.

26 See 19[196] 7. 479: 'We should learn in the same way that the Greeks learned from their past and their neighbours – for life, that is, being highly selective and immediately using all that has been learned as a pole on which one can vault high – and higher than all one's neighbours. Thus, not in a scholarly way! Anything not fit for life is not true history. To be sure it depends on how high or how base you take this life to be'.

one where we hear something unfashionable about ourselves and communicate with ourselves in an untimely fashion (this is the moment which in his later writings Nietzsche calls the hour of our most solitary solitude, e.g. GS 341)²⁷. It is the moment where we seek to discover our genuine needs and give expression to a superior want, will, or desire (as in the question asked of us by the demon in GS 341: do you want to do this again and again?)²⁸. This is echoed in *Zarathustra*: ‘If you believed in life more, you would throw yourselves away less on the moment’ (Z I Preachers 4.56–7; see also Z II Grave-Song 4.142–5). As it is, at present we are in the grip of a spurious cultivation in which the moment is caught up in a predatory striving, an insatiable acquisition, and a selfish and shameless enjoyment (SE 6 1.392). One kind of moment is overestimated whilst another kind is concealed from us (ibid; see also 4 1.368). In WB Nietzsche says that we are ‘mindlessly contemporary’, ‘spurred onward by the whip of the moment [*Augenblick*]!’ (RWB 5 1.458–9; see also RWB 6 1.462).

What are we doing when we value and admire greatness? Is the great a mere quantity or is it a quality? For Nietzsche, the great is that which departs from the normal and the familiar: ‘Our estimation of value refers to quantities, not to qualities. We venerate what is great. To be sure, that is also the abnormal’ (19[80] 7.446). Our veneration of the great effects of what is small, Nietzsche argues, is only amazement at the result and the disproportion of the smallest cause. We only arrive at the impression of greatness when we add together a large number of effects and view them as a unity, and it is by means of this unity that we produce greatness (ibid.). Humanity, he further states, can only grow through admiration for what is rare and great, and this is the domain of the sublime: ‘Fright is the best part of humanity’ (ibid. 447). The danger of the science of history is that it encourages us to confuse quantity and quality, valuation and veneration; for it whatever is a ‘historical power’ and held to have a historically lasting effect is to be called ‘great’ (29[41] 7.643).

27 Solitude is never posited by Nietzsche as an end in itself. At the end of the second essay of GM, for example, Nietzsche writes of the ‘creative spirit’ having a solitude that is misunderstood as being a flight or retreat from reality (GM II 24 5.336). In BGE 284 5.232 solitude is said to be ‘a sublime bent and craving for cleanliness [*ein sublimier Hang und Drang der Reinlichkeit*]’.

28 See also Z I Afterworldsmen: ‘A new will do I teach human beings [...]’. See also BGE 203.

Conclusion: The Nietzschean sublime

I wish to conclude with some reflections on the conception of the sublime we find put to work in Nietzsche, taking note of some of the different uses of the concept we encounter in his later writings, and indicating in what sense Nietzsche uses it to denote human greatness.

Nietzsche has recourse in his late writings to another conception of the sublime, which is the ('aesthetic') taste of subtle knowledge (*sublim*) (see, for example, BGE 230 5.168). His concern remains with the elevation or enhancement (*Erhöhung*) of the human animal, both in terms of a species-development and in terms of the spiritual growth of individuals, and the problem remains one of perception and insight. The so-called knowledge of our Christian-moral culture amounts to a calamitous piece of arrogance since it involves human beings not high and hard enough to be permitted (*dürfen*) to form the human animal as artists, and not strong and far-sighted enough to let 'the foreground-law of thousandfold failure and ruin prevail' because they were unable to exercise 'sublime self-control [*erhabenen Selbst-Bezwungung*]' (BGE 62). Human beings have not been noble enough to see the diverse hierarchy in the gulf between human and human. Instead, what has controlled the 'destiny' (*Schicksal*) of Europe so far is the 'ludicrous' vision of the human as a herd animal (we are all 'equal in the eyes of God').

The notion of the 'possibilities of life' is one that continues to feature in Nietzsche's later writings. A change seems to take place in volume one of *Human, All Too Human* (1878) when he argues that the age of the spiritual tyrants of the past – for example the age of the great philosophers of antiquity – is over and this means that the task of fashioning 'possibilities of life' now belongs to the 'oligarchs of the spirit', by which he means the new free spirits (HH 261). However, this change, and the appeal to free spirits, has already been signalled in SE (SE 7 1.407). In HH Nietzsche commits himself to 'scientific philosophy' at the expense of the independence of philosophy. However, by the time of *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche once again conceives the philosopher as a lawgiver (BGE 211), is preoccupied with 'greatness' (BGE 212), and has a renewed focus on the 'possibilities' of the human animal (BGE 61). The aim is to combat the 'degeneration and diminution of man into a perfect herd animal' (BGE 203). This requires that we recognize 'that man is the animal that has not yet been fixed' and that it is possible for man to be something other than a 'sublime deformity' or miscarriage (*sublime Missgeburt*: BGE 62). Nietzsche's great question is: 'how shall the earth as

a whole be governed? And to what end shall “man” as a whole – and no longer a people, a race – be raised and trained?’ (37[8] 11.580; cf. WP 957). The focus now is on a new cultivation of the human animal. What seems to be animating the preoccupation with *Züchtung* that characterizes Nietzsche’s late writings is the problem of European nihilism, notably the fact that we appear to be growing tired of the human being and are on the verge of giving up on it (as a kind of European Buddhism). Nietzsche stresses that the peculiar problem we face now is it is the ‘sight [*Anblick*] of the human being’ that makes us tired and this tiredness about the human is what constitutes nihilism (GM I 12 5.278). Humanity’s ‘most sublime seduction [*sublimste Lockung*]’ resides in the temptation to nothingness (GM Preface 5 5.252). The *Übermensch*, then, is the being that remains true to the earth *and to the human*. But this is a promise for the future, as Nietzsche readily acknowledges when, at the end of the second essay of GM, he looks ahead to another kind of spirit than those we encounter in the present age, one that has become acclimated to ‘thinner air higher up’, to ice and mountains, and needs a ‘sublime wickedness [*sublimere Bosheit*]’ or ‘self-assured wilfulness of insight’ that belongs to a ‘great health’ (GM II 24 5.336).

In the epilogue to CW Nietzsche posits two different needs for sublime (*sublimen*) symbols and practices: on the one hand, there is the Christian need which affirms decadence and which is a need for redemption conceived as an escape from the human and from the world; on the other hand, there is the need of the noble morality which ‘is rooted in a triumphant self-directed yes, – it is self-affirmation, self-glorification of life, it needs sublime symbols and practices too, but only because “its heart is too full”’. We might call this ‘self-affirmation’ the sublime strength of *amor fati* which denotes not a fatalism, in the sense of a resignation to the blind power of the real or reality, but an affirmation of the capacity of our existence in the real for *sublimation* or self-overcoming²⁹. It is reality that provides the ground (earth) for our testing and recognition. It is this relationship to, or dwelling in, the real Nietzsche wants us to cultivate and to *love*, and it entails a devotion to the closest and small-

29 See EH Clever 10 6.297: ‘My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: not wanting anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity’. Nietzsche’s point is that reality provides sufficient ground (earth) for all we want as our highest desire – we do not need the beyond or the thing in itself or morality incarnate. This is Nietzsche’s essential lesson contra Kant and all idealism.

est things, because without this devotion our desire for the higher things is pure idealism. The love of fate for Nietzsche always denotes a *task* and a promise. In truth, this attitude towards the real is at work in the so-called early Nietzsche, such as the *Untimely Meditations*. 'They prove', Nietzsche reflected in 1888, 'that I was no daydreamer "with his head in the clouds"' (EH (UM) 1 6.316). In a note of 1872–3 Nietzsche writes: 'You should not flee into some metaphysics [...] I am strictly against dreamy idealism' (19[154] 7.467).

It can be further noted: the sublime, whether *das Erhabene* or *sublim*, involves 'ecstasy'; sometimes this is the ecstasy of the supreme moment in which we become the ones that we are and is in evidence in the UM, in GS, Z, and so on; at other times it involves what Nietzsche calls the ecstasy of learning, and we find this in two important places in his writings – his very first sketch of the eternal recurrence of the same of August 1881 and EH Books 4. In the first he writes of 'the various sublime states [*erhabenen Zustände*]' he has experienced in his 'knowledge' of humanity's incorporation of errors and passions and expresses the desire to 'go still higher!' (11[141] 9.495–6; see also D 449 and D 553 for similar deployments of the sublime). In the second he claims that, 'The art of great rhythm, the great style of phrasing, as the expression of a tremendous rise and fall of sublime [*sublimier*], of superhuman [*bermenschlicher*] passion, was first discovered by me' (EH Books 4 6.304–5).

When Nietzsche criticises the sublime, notably in *Zarathustra*, he does so when it involves a failed attempt at elevation:

A sublime one [*Einen Erhabenen*] I saw today, extremely solemn, penitent of the spirit: oh how my soul laughed at his ugliness! [...]

Laughter he still has not yet learned, nor beauty. Gloomily this hunter came back from the forest of knowledge [*Erkenntniss*].

From battle with wild beasts he has returned home: but from out of his seriousness there still peers a wild beast – one not overcome! (Z II Sublime 4.150)

This is no different from the teaching we find in the *Untimely Meditations* and serves, in fact, to confirm it. Nietzsche's criticism of the sublime one in Z is focused on the fact that it has withdrawn into itself (its shadow), attaining a standpoint only of contemplation and resignation, not action and creation. It is not enough to be the hero of oneself; rather, one needs to become the 'over-hero [*der Über-Held*]' (ibid. 152). I think there can be little doubt that the figure Nietzsche is criticising in this discourse is the Schopenhauerian hero-pessimist who remains 'a wild beast'.

Nietzsche's thinking abounds with new images and new combinations of concepts designed to shock, disturb, and provoke us in our thinking, away from the habitual, the customary, and the conventional. One example is his conception of 'the Roman Caesar with the soul of Christ' (27[60] 11.289; cf. WP 983), which, one might suggest, operates in the element of the incomprehensible – difficult to recognise – he is after with the sublime. The task is not only to elevate the human being but to do so in way that genuinely stretches human comprehension. This is why Nietzsche insists that thinking should not aim at a picturesque effect and that 'beautiful feelings' cannot constitute an argument (AC 12)³⁰. The presentation of the death of God in GS 125 is, I would contend, best approached in terms of the Nietzschean conception of the sublime I have been seeking to highlight here. The madman, for example, speaks of the *greatest* deed having been committed in which, to be worthy of it, we must ourselves become gods (that is elevated). In addition, there is the effect of (momentous) time – the time of the untimely event – and its delay: 'This tremendous event is still on its way and still wanders [...] Lightning and thunder require time [...] deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard' (GS 125 3.481).

The concept of the sublime is aesthetic since it is a form of perception and insight, but it is also moral since it concerns greatness and the coming into existence of new possibilities of life. This is what Nietzsche has in mind when at the end of the essay on history he refers to the 'higher power of moral nature [*die höhere Kraft der sittlichen Natur*]' (HL 10 1.334). This is a form of perception that serves to elevate human beings to their task (becoming what they are) and in a way that does not leave them satisfied with a merely picturesque creation. Nietzsche pronounces the death of God, a sublime and 'monstrous event [*diess ungeheure Ereigniss*]', as a deliberate attack on bourgeois universality. Whether this pronouncement remains untimely for us today is not an issue I wish to decide upon here and now in this essay³¹. But what we should not forget is that Nietzsche pronounced this death in the name of a noble cause, what he calls, taking over a Biblical motif (Isaiah 65), that of the coming into being of a new earth and new peoples:

Therefore, O my brothers, there is need of a new nobility that is the opponent of all rabble and everything despotic and writes anew on new tablets the word "noble". (Z III Tablets 11 4.254)

30 See EH Clever 10 6.296: 'Beware of all picturesque people!'

31 See Caputo/Vattimo 2007.

Although it is abundantly clear that it is impossible to testify to such an earth and people as being in existence today, the power of Nietzsche's promise, which rests on a spiritual perception and involves a love of fate (which is also a love of the future), can only be denied at the cost of our self-oblivion and twilight.

Bibliography

- Ansell Pearson, Keith, 2009, 'Superior Empiricism: Nietzsche on the Utility and Liability of History for Life', in: Ken Gemes / John Richardson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook on Nietzsche*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. Forthcoming.
- Battersby, Christine, 2007, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Breazeale Daniel (ed.), 1979 *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870 s*, New Jersey: Humanities Press.
- Caputo, John / Vattimo, Gianni, 2007, *After the Death of God*, Jeffrey W. Robbins (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press.
- Caygill, Howard, 1993, 'Philosophy as Cultural Reform in the Early Nietzsche', in: Keith Ansell Pearson / Howard Caygill (eds.), *The Fate of the New Nietzsche*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 109-22.
- Conant James, 2000, 'Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of *Schopenhauer as Educator*', in: Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude to Philosophy's Future*, Cambridge & New York, Cambridge University Press, pp. 181–257.
- Deleuze, Gilles, 2001, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, Anne Boyman (trans.), New York: Zone Books.
- Koselleck, Reinhart, 1985, *Futures Past: On the Semantic of Historical Time*, Keith Tribe (trans.), New York: Columbia University Press.
- Nabais, Nuno, 2006, *Nietzsche and the Metaphysics of the Tragic*, Martin Earl (trans.), London and New York: Continuum.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur, 1966, *The World as Will and Representation*, in two volumes, E. F. J. Payne (trans.), New York: Dover.
- Wurzer, Wilhelm, 1975, 'Nietzsche's Dialectic of Intellectual Integrity: A Propaeudetic Study', in: *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 13, 2, pp. 235–45.

