

POLITICS AND TIME: THE OVERCOMING OF THE PAST

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Husserl has somewhere used the fine word *Stiftung*, that is: foundation or establishment, ... that is, ... the power to forget origins and to give to the past not a survival, which is the hypocritical form of forgetfulness, but a new life, which is the noble form of memory

— Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La prose du monde*

Foundings have, since the earliest days of political thought, occupied a central and problematic position. They claim a new beginning, a new constellation, and present themselves as if broken from and separate from the past. Yet what happens to that past? All humans live in a world with its own past (or pasts) and asserting one's separation from the past will likely do no more than to reaffirm it. Machiavelli was well aware of the difficulty, to the point of noting that were a prince to take over a city in which the memory of the past is strong (he names republics) the most advisable procedure will be to kill off all of those with authority to speak for the past, failing which the memory of that past will surely defeat his every effort. (I shall want to return to the question of violence at the end). Hobbes hoped that clarity of speech and method should constitute a reality not subject to the distortions consequent to the difficulties humans had of knowing what they actually wanted, distortions consequent to what they had been. Rousseau developed a theory of sovereignty that existed legitimately only in its own present and presence, and hence had no temporal dimension.¹ The past is clearly a political matter, calling on occasion for the most ruthless and revolutionary measures.

How to deal with the past? For Marx, the past "lay like a nightmare on the brain of the living." For James Joyce's Stephen Daedalus, the past "was a nightmare" from which he was trying to awake. For Freud, the culminated weight of childhood experiences distorted present agency into neurotic behavior. Joyce tries to make that past available in the odyssey of Leopold Bloom and in Molly's ecstatic affirmation. Marx theorized revolution, which he saw as necessarily sundering the integument that held the new world in the ashes of the old. For Freud, the point of psychoanalysis is to re-form the past, so as to keep it from distorting the present. The sense that what drives humans is what they have been, that they have been driven willy-nilly into behavior that they neither intend nor want, is a major concern of philosophical thought after the French Revolution. Indeed, the

Revolution had shown a stunned Europe that what had started as a minor *jacquerie* over the price of bread could have as consequence the imposition of the metric system on continental Europe.

Part I

We know that from early in his career, Nietzsche was concerned with the possibility of transforming the present by changing its past. Thus he can write in *Use and Misuse of History for Life*:

For since we are the outcome of earlier generations, we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible to free oneself wholly from this chain. If we condemn these aberrations, and regard ourselves free of them, this does not alter the fact that we originate in them. The best we can do is to confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge of it, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away. It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were a posteriori, a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate: — always a dangerous attempt because it is so hard to know the limit to denial of the past and because second natures are usually weaker than first. What happens all too often is that we know the good but do not do it, because we also know the better but cannot do it. But here and there a victory is nonetheless achieved, and for the combatants, for those who employ critical history for the sake of life, there is even a noteworthy consolation: that of knowing that this first nature was once a second nature and the every victorious second nature will become a first. (*On the Use and Misuse of History for Life*, 3)²

Not only does this passage presage Zarathustra's wish to replace fatherlands and motherlands with his "children's land," but we might even say that Nietzsche's entire life project is contained in this paragraph. The task is to implant in ourselves a "new habit, a new instinct, a second nature." If, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche argued, we are creatures of our past — whether as fetishes, totems, or idols — then it is only in changing the past that one creates a new present. If we are the children of our parents then it is only in changing parents, in engendering oneself that we become what we are.³

The concept of changing the past is not as strange as it might seem. I am no longer what I was because of certain acts that I have undertaken, and while I *was* such and such a person, because of those acts I am clearly no longer that person.⁴ We are here to some degree in the realm of what J.L.Austin called the "performative,"⁵ that is, the realm of describing or naming something in such a manner that that actualizes what it is. To say "I promise" is actually to promise, not to refer to something. It is also to transform one's condition according to a set of expectations and obligations that you have the right to claim as your own and that others may acknowledge in you. To say "I do" in certain conditions is to move from being a person who was single, to being one who is married. The single person no

longer exists. But how does such a transformation effectuate itself — how does one hold oneself as one's own future?

The problem Nietzsche thus sets for himself in the above citation is the production of conditions that make performance of a new present possible, i.e. overcome the hold that a particular past has on us.⁶

Part II

One might think that such a transformation is a matter of will — as many of the standard interpretations of Nietzsche would lead one to believe. However, in Nietzsche's account of this transformation — of how one nature replaces a prior one — what is precisely not central to him is will. Nor does the idea of will play any role in the understanding of performatives. It is, however, tempting to think it might, for will is our faculty for shaping the future and corresponds temporally to memory, our faculty for shaping the past.⁷ What is in fact the role of the will in these matters and why is it precisely not in play in the matter of the transformation of the past?

Here, a consideration of what Nietzsche has to say about the will in the chapter "On Redemption" is apposite. The chapter opens with a scene that parodies Matthew's gospel.⁸ Zarathustra is approached by a host of cripples and beggars who ask him to cure them of their illnesses. Zarathustra responds by saying that those who are crippled from some lack are not that badly off. Those who are truly badly off are those "inverse cripples" victims or products of the division of labor such that they have become a huge eye, or a huge leg with the rest of the body attached as a stalk.⁹

We are launched with this strange introduction headlong into the problems of dealing with one's genealogy and one's past. Zarathustra has reached the second, willing, metamorphosis of the spirit: he is, as he says, a cripple at the bridge, and also, as Heidegger notes, a *Fürsprecher*, still preparing the way for eternal return. The reason that he cannot be anything except a herald, that is, can only *announce* the new without realizing it, has to do with the structure of the will. Accordingly, he enters into a long discussion of the nature of the will.

The will is the faculty that humans have for shaping their future. It is the temporal inverse of memory. We recall here that the will is characteristic of the lion stage and that "the lion must become a child." In a note from the middle 1880's Nietzsche's attitude towards the will is made explicit: "The will itself to be overcome... All feelings of freedom [are] no longer to be conceived in opposition to constraint" (KGW VII-1, 624; cf. VII-1, 198). The reason that the will needs to be overcome is that it will inevitably shape the future in terms of the structure of its own present. The will thus reproduces — and this is particularly vicious in the case of the will to power of slave morality.

The realization that our will inevitably reproduces our life should actually not be a difficult understanding as it lies precisely at the heart of a doctrine like original sin. Augustine's argument for the reality of original sin was the realization that human being would do evil "just for the hell of it," as it were, meaning that they did evil for no reason in particular and for no goal. If that were so, then there was nothing that could be done about it: sin was hardwired, so to speak, into the human self. From this it followed that the only way to be released from sin was to be released from one's sinful self — and that this could precisely not be achieved by willing to be released, as that will would retain the quality of sin. Original sin thus implied a necessity for redemption and this in turn was rested on an inability to move outside a repetitive temporal process. This chapter in *Zarathustra* is a chapter on redemption and redemption is first and foremost a religious manner of dealing with the past. To be redeemed means no longer to have one's past count in determining what one is. Thus Christ redeems the world through His crucifixion and washes away our sins: they may no longer count. What redemption implies is the possibility of a radical break with one's past: I cannot, however, redeem myself, as my willful and sinful nature makes that impossible.¹⁰

Here I need to recall the citation from the second *Untimely Consideration*.

The best we can do is to confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge of it, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away. It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were a posteriori, a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate: — always a dangerous attempt because it is so hard to know the limit to denial of the past and because second natures are usually weaker than first. (UM II, 3).

How is this to be done? This is the central problem the past poses for Nietzsche. As he says: "The past in us is to be overcome: instincts are to be newly combined — a very difficult matter" (WKG VII-, 545). The attempt to deal directly with the past — to annihilate it, or to escape from it through redemption — is dangerous or impossible, destruction rather than transformation. Nietzsche continues in *On Redemption*: "The will, the liberator, became one who harmed; and on all who can suffer he wreaks his revenge for his inability to go backwards. This, indeed this alone, is what revenge is: the will's ill will against time and its 'it was'."

The attempt to take revenge on the past presumes that there is something wrong with the past, some particular thing that should not have been what it was. And this in turn presumes that we can change our present by virtue of getting rid of that portion of the past that we find offensive. There are a variety of ways that one may try to deal with this problem and as the chapter continues we find that Nietzsche surveys each of them. One is the attempt to solve the problem of a "bad" past by locating value precisely in the phenomenon of change itself. Hegel had done this, accepting the claim that since history was eventually leading to a unity of actuality and potentiality, all of the past must be seen as good. Yet we know that for Nietzsche it is possible to be deeply and completely flawed — such was slave

morality. Secondly one might posit an unattainable world that was not subject to the problems of the past. For Kant, determining it to be the necessary a priori of the human mind solves the problem of time. Redemption is to be found in the world that is not subject to time.

Schopenhauer, who claimed that in the end all that could finally be really truly willed was nothingness, attempted a third solution. There is truth to this for Nietzsche, but he thinks it true only of slavely moral men. In effect, as he writes, Schopenhauer had deeply probed his own psyche and, unable to find any other alternative, has determined the end of the psyche in general. Yet, Nietzsche notes, one is not forced to say that the “world is Schopenhauer writ large” (WKG IV-2, 509). Schopenhauer’s conception of the will remains “fatefully aporetic” as Jean Granier has remarked, in that it is tied to the “old thing in itself.”¹¹ For Nietzsche, the problem of humankind in relation to the past, is not to be found in willing something new, or in not willing, but by changing the form of life that wills.¹² Nietzsche is thus able to say that a “pure act” — one that leads neither consciously nor unconsciously to any unintended results — can only be an “unconscious one”; in fact, all “perfect acts are unconscious and no longer willed” (WKG VIII-3, 102). It was in Wagner that Nietzsche found the most important analysis of the relation of conscious to unconscious acts — accordingly the next snippet in “On Redemption” is about Wagner. For Wagner, at least by the time he gets to *Parsifal*, “the will at last redeems itself and becomes non-will.” (One could here give an analysis of the stages by which Wagner reaches the conclusion as his thought develops from the *Flying Dutchman*, through *Lohengrin*, *Die Meistersinger* and the *Ring* tetralogy).

Yet Nietzsche himself took a while to extricate himself from the notion that the will was the answer to the problem of dealing with the past. The chapter continues with a reference (as I read it) to *The Birth of Tragedy*. “I led you away from all these fables when I taught you the ‘will is a creator’.” ‘it was’ is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident — until the creative will says to it ‘But thus I willed it... But has the will already spoken thus? And when did that happen?’ (Z, *On Redemption*).

At this point, Zarathustra breaks off and will remains silent for along time. Presumably the point is that previous attempts at dealing with the past are all deficient. These other conceptions of the will “do not exist at all” for “instead of grasping the formulation of a single wiling into many forms, [in them] one eliminates the character of willing by subtracting from the will its content, its “whither” (WKG VIII-3, 43). The point, presumably, is that there is nothing to the will except the particularities of its “whithers.”

Part III

If the world is nothing but will to power and will to power is nothing but its particular whithers (its $\pi\alpha\theta\omicron\iota$, as Nietzsche calls it) the world is thus made of out

of “dynamic quanta: their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta, in their ‘working’ on these”(WKG VIII-3, 51). Nietzsche here, in a late note, has picked up the notion of time he had advanced in his youth. In a section of a notebook from 1873, he writes: “time is not a continuum, for there are only totally differentiated time-points, no line.” He refers to this as his “time-atom teaching” (WKG III-4 177).¹³

If time past is a set of quanta, whose unity is due only to the bringing of a particular perspective (i.e. the will to power) how then is its relation to a particular present to be changed for, strictly speaking, it has no actual reality? Nietzsche avers that this means that one can no longer speak of time: “One is to speak only of points of time, no longer of time.”¹⁴

If one speaks only of points of time that means that all points are in a similar relationship to each individual. This means that each is present, or potentially present, to each individual in the same manner, i.e. that they are not necessarily organized as a temporal sequence. Their organization must therefore correspond to the attitudes that the individual might have. Thus, as early as 1873, Nietzsche can write: “Time-atomics in the end falls in with a teaching of emotions or perception. The dynamic point of time is identical with the point of perception. For there is no simultaneity of attitude.”¹⁵

Even “A people with history is not redeemed from time/for history is a series/of timeless moments,” wrote Eliot in *Little Gidding*. One can here, I think, understand what Nietzsche means by eternal return as an attempt to deal with the power of time past and so to effectuate the replacement of a present problematic first nature by a new now second nature.

Eternal return is, notoriously, the apparently most difficult, if not most problematic, element in Nietzsche’s teaching. One can say, I think, the following. First, whatever Nietzsche means by eternal return, he does almost always associate it with change in human beings. The shepherd who bites the head of the snake in “On the Vision and the Riddle” is transfigured and laughs “like no man has ever laughed *before*.” Once Zarathustra goes through his convalescence after this passage he is said to “be awake and . . . stay awake eternally.” Nietzsche warns that one “must guard against [thinking of eternal return on the example of] on the false analogy of the stars, or the ebb and flow, day and night, seasons . . .”(KGW V-2, 400) and when “you incarnate the thought of thoughts it will change you.”¹⁶

Secondly, when the “thought of thoughts” comes it cannot mean that that there is no change. If I experience something as having experienced it before then I am having a new experience: the old one plus the new consciousness. Nietzsche speaks of eternal return as “the pivot point of history” and sees himself, notoriously, as “breaking history in two” (KGW VII-1, 540). In any case, “eternal” does not mean “infinite in time and duration” but “always present.”

If the chapter *On Redemption* establishes that humans cannot escape time and yet that time is for them a problem as it binds them to a form of life that is nihilistic, then they will have to find some way of being-in-time such that the past no longer poses a problem for the present. What would a form of life in which the past was never a problem — that is, it did not compel cyclical compulsive repetition (what Freud was to call the discontents or malaise of civilization) — and in which humans were, as opposed to animals, nevertheless self-conscious? The thought must “sink in slowly over many generations so that they will be fruitful and build on it (Two thousand years for Christianity — many thousand for this) ...”¹⁷

The above establishes, I hope, that eternal return is thought by Nietzsche to be a solution to the compulsions of the will, to the weight of a misbegotten past on the present, and that it is intended to transform human relation to a past that has become compulsive and nihilistic. It is, we might say, a means to change the structure of the unconscious. When in the last sentence of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche notes that humans would rather “will the void than be void of will” he is indicating that the hold that the present past has on humans is such that they will continue to work within its structure, even when it no longer is sensuously alive.

Eternal return then occurs when an action embodies itself, that is, makes itself flesh in and by its performance. When you “incarnate the thought of thoughts, it will change you,” was the citation above. Eternal return, however, is a mode of transformation or transfiguration, not the substance of it. In this sense, eternal return is in no ways the imposition of a particular substantive standard. Thus we find, set as a “task”: “My teaching says live such that you must wish to so live again... To whom striving gives the highest feeling, let him strive; to whom peace gives the highest feeling, let him be peaceful; to whom ordering, following, obedience give the highest feeling, let him obey. May he only become conscious about that which gives him the highest feeling, and not balk at any means. It is a matter of eternity.”¹⁸

Part IV

I have claimed that the question of eternal return sheds light on the transfiguration of a present.¹⁹ I have further claimed that this problem is centrally one of the hold that the past has on the present.. It is clear that Nietzsche saw extensive possibilities for this. “The coming history: this thought will always conquer more — and those who do not believe in it must eventually, due to their nature, die out. Only he who holds his existence (*Dasein*) capable of eternal repetition will remain: amongst such beings however conditions such as no utopians have ever attained are possible.”²⁰ Such words tend to underplay the actual magic the humans have available to themselves. I spoke above of the quality of transfiguring one’s past that language makes available to us by the availability of the performative. There is, however another element, or perhaps a few more elements to this. When Austin

discusses the “infelicities” or “unhappinesses” of performatives, he apparently brings them down to the question of “non-responsibilities.”²¹ By this he appears to mean the quality of being able actually to mean what you say, to speak in such a manner that one’s words are transparently one’s own.

This is the role that Nietzsche thinks may be reserved for the philosopher-legislator who can authentically use the words, “thus shall it be,” where “authentically” means that they become actual. How might it work in Nietzsche’s understanding? What is the process by which one can bind oneself in fact to one’s words? To make one’s words one’s own is to be able actually to mean what one says. The question of making one’s words one’s own is the question that Nietzsche pursues in the second essay in the *Genealogy of Morals*, most especially in the first several sections on the “right to make promises” and the “sovereign individual.”

The movement of the text in the first three sections is a first key.²² In each of them Nietzsche describes the possibility of a particular kind of being-in-the-world (the right to make promises, the sovereign individual, the acquisition of conscience) and then circles back to give an account for the genealogy of that quality. Thus the right to make promises requires first the development of calculability, regularity, and necessity (GM II: 1). The sovereign individual requires the development of a memory. And so forth. Each of these qualities is what Nietzsche calls his “late” or “ripest” fruit,” the coming into being of which required ripening.

Nietzsche is quite clear that these earlier developments are the *means to making possible* a “sovereign individual” (for instance). Nietzsche refers to this as “a preparatory task” and includes in it what he calls human “prehistory.” What is key here is the understanding of history: the past has made possible the present, but it has not monotonically determined it. The resources for a variety of presents are in the past, if we can deconstruct the past we have received and reassemble it.

What quality does the sovereign individual — whom I take here to be an individual who has earned the right to say what s/he is — have? Nietzsche details a number of qualities in GM II: 2, all of which sound like or are intended to sound like the *megaloψυχος* of Aristotle.²³ Yet there is a difference between Nietzsche’s sovereign individual and the great soul in Aristotle, for the sovereign individual is the result of an achievement, a process by which a consciousness has become instinct. (Here there is of course an echo of the passage from “Use and Misuse of History”). What is important though for us here is the insistence that Nietzsche places on the “*right to make promises*.”²⁴

We are returned with that consideration to the question of performatives — of which promising is the standard example. Yet what Nietzsche has done is to make the matter much deeper. When he asks as to the *right to make a promise*, it is as if the expectation is that I will be tempted to act weakly. But what would/could keep me from being weak of will if rationality is of no actual avail? Nietzsche says it requires that I have “mastery over circumstances, over nature, and over all more

short-willed and unreliable creatures" (GM II: 2). Those who have the right to promise are like "sovereigns," because they can maintain their promise in the face of accidents, even in the "face of fate." To have the right to a promise is to have taken upon oneself, as oneself, all the circumstances present and future in which the promise may occur. It is to maintain that promise — the requirement that the present extend into the future — no matter what befalls. Thus when Kaufmann translates the key passage — "*für sich als Zukunft gut sagen zu können*" as "able to stand security for his *own* future," one may pass by Nietzsche's point, which is that one should be able to "to be able to vouch for oneself *as a* future." One must earn entitlement to one's "own."

In this, and despite obvious echoes, Nietzsche's position is not Kant's. In the *Grundwerk* and elsewhere Kant argues that one cannot break a promise because to do so would in effect deny the point of the entire institution of promising. Kant took this position with its very strong denial of the relevance of intentionality because, as he argued, any breaking of a promise or uttering of a lie for contingent reasons (say, as with Sartre, you were being asked by the Gestapo where the partisan whom you were hiding was) implied that you could claim to know precisely what the consequences of your action would be. Since such a claim was epistemologically impossible, it followed that one must be bound by the only certainty one might have, that of reason.

Kant's reason for keeping a promise or not telling a lie implied the existence of a fixed and unproblematic self and of an incompletely graspable world. The difference in Nietzsche's analysis of the right to keep promises comes in his insistence that not only is the external world not knowable but so also is the self. Hence the binding of the self to a promise can only be rightfully accomplished by power "over oneself and over fate" and must penetrate below the level of assessment — where it remained with Kant — to become part of the assessing itself, what Nietzsche calls "instinct," or *das Unbewusste*.

Nietzsche is also clear — here contra Kant, and post-Kantians from Rawls to Habermas — that the self that is so committed is committed also to all the pain and all the reversals that will and may occur — pains that can be seen in his exploration of what he calls mnemotechnics. In this, the sovereign individual in Nietzsche will find an instantiation in Weber's person who has the vocation for politics and who can remain true to his vocation, "in spite of all." (One might note here that the insistence on the pain and cruelty of existence was already central to the argument in the *Birth of Tragedy*). Pain and cruelty have been endemic to life.²⁵

In a note from 1885 he writes: "Basic idea: new values must first be created — we must not be spared that! The philosopher must be a lawgiver to us. New types. (As earlier the highest types [e.g., Greeks] were bred: this type of 'accident' to be willed consciously.)"²⁶ Elsewhere Nietzsche writes that one will "have to change all

ones ideas about politics." For it seems that we "lack all political passion" (KGW VIII-1, 86). For Nietzsche this seems to mean that whereas in the past humans competed inside an arena for advantage and superiority, for the re-division of what was. Now they will compete to define what might in fact give superiority and advantage. The breakdown of a common world, which Nietzsche sees as characteristic of modernity,²⁷ means that humans increasingly will have no idea of what really counts to be fought for. Hence the new idea of politics will be conflict and war to say what does count, what the standards by which humans measure themselves shall be. This is politics to define the world, not gain control of more of it.

Nietzsche's conception of politics, I have argued, is shaped by the problematic of dealing with the weight of time-past. This is a politics that is revolutionary, revolutionary in a cultural sense, not in or by culture but of culture. It involves reforming what it means to be in the world, changing not just one's assessment of the world, but the very quality of one's assessing.

One can read Nietzsche's life project as an attempt to accomplish this. Initially he was quite clear about his intentions. In December 1871, the first copies of *The Birth of Tragedy* came off the press. His intentions, however, went already far beyond this first book. He had, as he wrote to Rohde, "cultural regeneration on his mind."²⁸ His friendship with Wagner had convinced him of the possibility of a collegial enterprise in recovering what he called in the *Birth* a "mythic" understanding of the world: his cultural criticism would prepare the public and intellectual stage and Wagner's music would engender the questioning or search for which a new culture would be the language. In order to initiate this cultural revolution, he elaborated extensive and enthusiastic plans. The *Birth* was but part of a first volley in a war for the reorientation of German culture, a war that he had already announced in the January letter to Rohde in which he had doubted of his suitability for the vocation of philologist (signing himself "The Mounted Gunner with the Heaviest Gun"). The next shot was also prepared. In the first three months of 1872 he gave set of lectures "On the Future of Our Educational Institutions" in order, he indicated to his teacher, the great German philologist Friedrich Ritschl, to "carry out the practical consequences of my views."

Nor were his horizons bordered by academia. The letter to Ritschl indicates also that he is preparing a memorandum to the German Chancellor Bismarck asking him to explain what an opportunity has been "shamefully" let go by when one might have established the institutions that might have provided a foundation to a regeneration of German culture. (The opportunity here was to found a proper university in Strasbourg, on territory newly acquired in the Franco-Prussian War). Nietzsche's appreciation of Bismarck during this period is in fact one of increasing disenchantment. In 1866 he had admired Bismarck's handling of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis in order to found a unified Germany, but had worried to his mother and sister that Bismarck "undervalues the moral strengths in the people."²⁹ What

is important is not only that he thought during this period that he might be able to have help in his project from the dominant political forces in Germany, but that he saw this as necessarily rooted in the populace at large. The overwhelmingly negative reception of the *Birth of Tragedy* brought this course to a halt. Nietzsche began to have doubts about the viability about the project of cultural regeneration that he saw himself undertaking with Wagner. The scene at the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in where the inhabitants of the town embrace precisely that against which Zarathustra wishes to warn them recreates this realization: it is a distress with the possibility of the success of simply teaching what is needed for cultural health.

Importantly, the texts from this period — *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, the lectures on educational institutions, “Wisdom and Science in Conflict,” “On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense,” the material that makes up what is called *Das Philosophenbuch* — are all incomplete and by their very incompleteness signal the grave doubts that Nietzsche came to have about the viability of his project as he then conceived of it. His doubts are intensified by the incomprehension afforded his first published book by the very people whom he had thought would grasp it. It requires from him that he pursue another direction: a resounding and radical critique of all the institutions and forms that keep his contemporaries from acknowledging philosophy, tragedy and the possibility of a culture. In a note from 1886, written as he was preparing to write the “Attempt at a Self-Critique” that would become the preface to the new edition of the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes that he “overvalued the German species;...[and] ... did not understand the source of the modern desolation”(KGW VIII-1, 115). Bismarck, it turns out, had not undervalued the resources in the German people. And if Bismarck were right, what would prepare the cultural revolution he had envisaged?

The remedy of this lack becomes his project from the middle 1870's until the end of his life, and all of his work from that period must be understood in these terms. The work of *Human-All-Too-Human*, *Dawn*, and the first four books of *The Gay Science* are all investigations into his own blindness's and obscurities, what it was in him that led him to be surprised by the reception of the project that centered on the *Birth*. Following that the work of the 1880's may be read as systematic investigations into various human realms. *Zarathustra* is (among other things, to be sure) an exploration of various human institutions. *Beyond Good and Evil* is a study of how it is possible to make a claim to knowledge in various areas. *The Genealogy of Morals* is a study of what it in fact means when one claims a moral stance. In a like manner, *Twilight* is a study of the nature of claims to authority and *Ecce Homo* a critique of what it means to make a claim, that is to write at all as an author.³⁰

By 1888, Nietzsche had accomplished his critique. He is aware of coming to its end and begins to prepare the work of the new tablets. In a phrase he repeats several times, eternal return is to function as a kind of hammer, that is at once to

test, sound out and ring true what is.³¹ What is telling is that as he moves out of his sane life, his thoughts and prescriptions are now explicitly and specifically political. To break out of the prison of our present being is both difficult and dangerous. Nietzsche will thus speak often of the attractions that his doctrines have for humans and will be afraid that they will seize on these attractions as justification for behavior to which they are not entitled. He writes: "You must have lived through every degree of skepticism and have bathed with delight in ice-cold streams — otherwise you have no right to this thought. I must defend myself against the easy-to-believe and the enthusiasts."³² Success here requires that these thoughts and this discipline become a "great tree, which overshadows all of coming humanity." The advantage of the discipline he proposes, he notes, is that it will be "gentle against those who do not believe in it, it has no hell and no threat. Who does not believe lives cursorily in his own understanding."³³ Conditions must be created such that the doctrine can "sink in slowly" (KGW V-2, 401) failing which there will be "thirty years Gloria, with drums and fifes and thirty years of grave-digging and then an eternity of deathly silence...."³⁴

At the end of his life, with one foot into madness, Nietzsche undertakes to write a series of political letters — to various friends, to the Kaiser, Bismarck and so forth.³⁵ He hopes also that war will not be necessary as "there are still other ways to bring physiology to honor besides military hospitals... Well and good, very good in fact: after the old God is abolished, I am ready to rule the world"(KGW VIII-3, 420). If in annihilating the Hohenzollern, Nietzsche claimed to be annihilating lies, it is because changing ideas is not in the end possible without changing lives. Wittgenstein wrote that the sickness of a time is cured not by a medicine but by an alteration in the mode of life of human beings.³⁶ Response to the problem of the weight of time past on what we are is only achieved through such an alteration. It was to make possible that alteration that Nietzsche wrote and thought.

Endnotes

1. For elaboration see Tracy B. Strong, "How to Write Scripture: Hobbes, Words, and Authority," *Critical Inquiry*, 1993; *Jean Jacques Rousseau and the Politics of the Ordinary* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1995, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), Chapter 3.
2. (I cite by work, internal division with reference to the page number in the *Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (WKG), section (roman) and volume number (arabic) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966ff;)) Material from the *Nachlaß* is simply cited in WKG): "Denn da wir nun einmal die Resultate früherer Geschlechter sind, sind wir auch die Resultate ihrer Verirrungen, Leidenschaften und Irrthümer, ja Verbrechen; es ist nicht möglich sich ganz von dieser Kette zu lösen. Wenn wir jene Verirrungen verurtheilen und uns ihrer für enthoben erachten, so ist die Thatsache nicht beseitigt, dass wir aus ihnen herstammen. Wir bringen es im besten Falle zu einem Widerstreite der ererbten, angestammten Natur und unserer Erkenntniss, auch wohl zu einem Kampfe einer neuen strengen Zucht gegen das von Alters her Angezogene und Angeborne, wir pflanzen eine neue Gewöhnung, einen neuen Instinct, eine zweite Natur an, so dass die erste Natur abdorrt. Es ist ein Versuch, sich gleichsam a posteriori eine Vergangenheit zu geben, aus

- der man stammen möchte, im Gegensatz zu der, aus der man stammt — immer ein gefährlicher Versuch, weil es so schwer ist eine Grenze im Verneinen des Vergangenen zu finden, und weil die zweiten Naturen meistens schwächer als die ersten sind. Es bleibt zu häufig bei einem Erkennen des Guten, ohne es zu thun, weil man auch das Bessere kennt, ohne es thun zu können. Aber hier und da gelingt der Sieg doch, und es giebt sogar für die Kämpfenden, für die, welche sich der kritischen Historie zum Leben bedienen, einen merkwürdigen Trost: nämlich zu wissen, dass auch jene erste Natur irgend wann einmal eine zweite Natur war und dass jede siegende zweite Natur zu einer ersten wird." WKG III-1, 261
3. See Tracy B. Strong, "Oedipus as Hero: Family and Family Metaphors in Nietzsche" *boundary 2* IX, 3 and X, 1 (Fall/Winter 1981): 311–336.
 4. The most extensive versions of this come in David Hume's chapter "On Personal Identity" in the *Treatise on Human Understanding* and Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
 5. J.L. Austin, *How To do Things With Words*, J. O. Urmson, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) and an immense literature.
 6. For a discussion of performatives in relation to these matters see Joseph Lima and Tracy B. Strong "Telling the Dancer from the Dance: On the relevance of the Ordinary for Political Theory," in Andrew Norris, ed., *Stanley Cavell and the Claim to Community* (forthcoming).
 7. I have explored an understanding of political theory in these terms (as well as that of vision) in Strong, *The Idea of Political Theory* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1990).
 8. Matthew xv, 29. And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the Sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. 30. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: 31. Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.
 9. Nietzsche's image here is also drawn from Emerson's "The American Scholar." Emerson writes: "The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the waist and strut about like many walking monsters — good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man." Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 54.
 10. I have investigated this problem in terms of Nietzsche's own life and its relation to his thought in Strong, "Oedipus as Hero."
 11. Jean Granier, *Le problème de la vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 386.
 12. For similar comments see Hannah Arendt, *Willing*, chapter on Nietzsche. *The Life of the Mind: Volume II* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).
 13. WKG III-4 177, Thomas Brobjer (unpublished paper delivered at the British Nietzsche Society Conference, September 2001) thinks that this passage is a copied quotation, probably from African Spir, whose work Nietzsche read assiduously. He has not been able, however, to find it despite extensive research.
 14. "Es ist nur von Zeitpunkten zu reden, nicht mehr von Zeit" (KGW III-4, 177).
 15. "...die Zeitatomistik fällt endlich zusammen mit einer Empfindungslehre. Der dynamische Zeitpunkt ist identische mit dem Empfindungspunkt. Denn es giebt keine Gleichzeitigkeit der Empfindung." (Ibid.)
 16. "Wenn du dir den Gedanken der Gedanken einverleibst, so wird er dich verwandeln" KGW V-2, 394.
 17. Ibid. A much more extensive elaboration of several of the arguments here can be found in chapter 9 of Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

18. KGW V-2, 402 [Meine Lehre sagt: so leben, daß du wünschen muß, wieder zu leben ist die Aufgabe — du wirst es jedenfalls! Wem das Streben das höchste Gefühl giebt, der strebe; wem Ruhe das höchste Gefühl giebt, der ruhe; wem Einordnung Folgen Gehorsam das höchste Gefühl giebt, der gehorche. Nur möge er bewußt darüber werden, was ihm das höchste Gefühl giebt und kein Mittel scheuen! Es gilt die Ewigkeit!]
19. It is worth noting that the Greek for transfigured in Matthew 17, 2 and Mark 9, 2 is *metamorphon* („metamorphosed”).
20. KGW V-2, 471. [Nur wer sein Dasein für ewig wiederholungsfähig hält, bleibt übrig: unter solchen aber ist ein Zustand möglich, an den noch kein Utopist gereicht hat!]
21. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 238-240.
22. It is worth noting that most readings of the second essay of *On The Genealogy of Morals* pass over the first two sections and go immediately to section 3 on conscience. See eg. Werner Stegmaier, *Nietzsches Genealogie der Moral* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994) p. 131ff. He gets to the question of the sovereign individual on p. 136, without however the sense of the genealogical development that Nietzsche sees.
23. See Aristotle, *Magna Moralia* I 25, 26.
24. One of the few English language commentators to focus on this is Randall Havas, *Nietzsche's Genealogy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 193ff who does so with an eye to the move from “animality” to “humanity,” which I think misleading. He is on sounder, if perhaps too Cavellian, ground on p. 196 where he relates to idea of “right” to that of the responsibility for intelligibility.
25. One might raise here the question of exclusion. For a consideration see my “Contract, Contingency, and Governance,” in Henrik Bang, ed. *Governance as Social and Political Communication* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
26. KGW VII-3, 255 [Grundgedanke: die neuen Werthe müssen erst geschaffen werden — dies bleibt uns nicht erspart! Der Philosoph muß wie ein Gesetzgeber sein. Neue Arten. (Wie bisher die höchsten Arten (z.B. Griechen) gezüchtet wurden: diese Art „Zufall” bewußt wollen).]
27. I make this argument at length in chapter seven of my *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*.
28. Nietzsche to Rohde 1/28/72, *Nietzsche Sammelte Briefe* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), Vol. iii, 279–280.
29. Nietzsche to Fransiska and Elizabeth, beg. July 1866, NSB ii, 134–135.
30. For an elaboration of this see my “Nietzsche's Political Aesthetics” in M. Gillespie and T. Strong, eds. *Nietzsche's New Seas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 153–174.
31. See KGW VIII-1, 214; TI, *Preface*, KGW VI-3, 51; KGW VII-2, 295.
32. KGW V-2, 471. [Seid ihr nun vorbereitet? Ihr müßt jeden Grad von Skepsis durchlebt haben und mit Wollust in eiskalten Strömen gebadet haben — sonst habt ihr kein Recht auf diesen Gedanken; ich will mich gegen die Leichtgläubigen und Schwärmerischen wohl wehren!] Nietzsche continues: „Ich will meinen Gedanken im Voraus vertheidigen! Er soll die Religion der freiesten heitersten und erhabensten Seelen sein — ein lieblicher Wiesengrund zwischen vergoldetem Eise und reinem Himmel! [I want to defend my ideas in advance. My thought should be the religion of the freest, most joyful and noblest souls – a fragrant meadow between golden ice and pure sky.]
33. KGW V-2, 401. [Diese Lehre ist milde gegen die, welche nicht an sie glauben, sie hat keine Hölle und Drohungen. Wer nicht glaubt, hat ein flüchtiges Leben in seinem Bewußtsein.]
34. *Die Unschuld Des Werdens* II (Stuttgart: Kroner edition, 1978), Vol. 2, pp. 478-479.
35. See my account in Strong, “Nietzsche's Political Aesthetics.”
36. L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), p. 196.