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“Consecration to Culture”: Nietzsche on Slavery and Human Dignity

ANDREW HUDDLESTON *

*“There are some who threw away their last worth [Werth] when they threw away their servitude [Dienstbarkeit].”
—Thus Spoke Zarathustra, I, “On the Way of the Creator.”*

I. INTRODUCTION

IN THE INFAMOUS OPENING SECTIONS from Part IX of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche celebrates a strident kind of elitism and countenances, in however attenuated a form, the institution of slavery. “Every enhancement of the type ‘man,’” he writes, “has so far been the work of an aristocratic society—and it will be so again and again—a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and difference in worth [*Werthverschiedenheit*] between man and man, and that needs slavery [*Sklaverei*] in some sense or other” (257). In the section that follows, Nietzsche describes a “good and healthy aristocracy” as “accept[ing] with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, *for its sake* [um ihretwillen], must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves [*Sklaven*], to instruments [*Werkzeugen*]” (258). From these passages taken in isolation, an unsavory picture can emerge of Nietzsche as a defender, indeed a champion, of exploitation of the worst sort: Nietzsche appears to praise a world in which a small elite enhances itself through the subjugation of the rest of mankind, who bear this yoke of servitude and get nothing in return.

The assumption undergirding this reading is a natural one: namely, that whatever benefits it may bring to an elite, whatever cultural achievements it may make possible, slavery is not in the interest of the slaves themselves. But it is not, as I shall argue here, Nietzsche’s own way of looking at things. Far from thinking it is contrary to the interests of “the masses” that they be subjugated, Nietzsche argues that ironically it is *in being* “reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings,

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to slaves, to instruments" (*BGE* 258) that most people—those not part of the tiny aristocracy of Nietzschean great individuals—can come to live what Nietzsche regards as the most flourishing life for them. As I hope to make clear in what follows, the idea of "slavery in some sense or other" (*BGE* 257) that Nietzsche envisages is far more subtle than one might at first suppose from the connotations of this deliberately shocking word he chooses. In this paper I will spell out what conception of a person's flourishing Nietzsche is working with, what sense of "slavery" he has in mind, and why he thinks this form of "slavery" is the best sort of life for all but a few exceptional great individuals. My aim here is primarily to explicate Nietzsche's views, not to evaluate them. But I do hope to suggest that Nietzsche's remarks about slavery are less odious than they can sometimes seem, even if they ultimately leave us unsettled.

2. MORALITY AND "THE SLAVE REVOLT"

Nietzsche casts himself as a critic of morality. In speaking of "morality" in the pejorative sense with which he often uses that word, Nietzsche has in mind an institution that gradually comes to social prominence in the long span of time between the birth of Christianity and the fall of the Roman Empire.¹ Mention of this "morality" should, however, come with two main caveats. First, the "morality" that is in Nietzsche's critical sights is not a unified set of doctrines, but a disparate family of worldviews. It begins with Christianity and later comes to branch into divergent and often more secularized forms, encompassing views as different, both in spirit and in explicit prescription, as those of Aquinas, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Mill. Second, in his charges against "morality," Nietzsche does not mean to include all non-prudential systems of, broadly-speaking, ethical evaluation under the banner of the morality that he attacks.² His criticism of morality in fact arises out of his own perfectionistic value commitments. These valorize what is in his view a *higher* form of life, one in which beauty, creativity, nobility, honesty, striving, self-mastery and self-overcoming, strength of body and of spirit, affirmation of world and of self, exceptional artistic and intellectual accomplishment, and so on, take center stage.³ Indeed, in addition to its lineage, what unifies the morality that Nietzsche

¹Brian Leiter refers to this morality that Nietzsche denigrates as "MPS" or "Morality in the Pejorative Sense," *Nietzsche on Morality*, 74. Following Nietzsche's own, if somewhat misleading usage, I will just use the term 'morality' here.

²Various commentators have noted that Nietzsche is not attacking all ethical systems in attacking morality more narrowly; see, for example, Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 466–69; Simon May, *Nietzsche's Ethics*; Raymond Geuss, "Nietzsche and Morality," 170; James Conant, "Nietzsche's Perfectionism," 218–19; and Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 74. Nietzsche, as some of these commentators note, sometimes uses the term 'morality' both for his positive value system and for that which he is attacking (see, for example, *BGE* 202; *D* 4 and *D* 103).

³There is considerable dispute about what form of perfectionism Nietzsche accepts. At one end of the interpretive spectrum, Nietzsche is thought to champion a teleological theory that seeks to "maximize" certain cultural goods and to promote the welfare of the few at the expense of the rest of mankind. (See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §50; and Thomas Hurka, "Nietzsche: Perfectionist" for this reading.) At the other end of the interpretive spectrum, he is read as holding a more inclusive form of perfectionism that concerns itself with spurring everyone, and not just a select few, on to a higher form of life. (See Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*; and Conant, "Nietzsche's Perfectionism" for a reading in this spirit.) My paper seeks to reconcile Nietzsche's apparently anti-galitarian praise for a form of slavery (evident in *BGE* 257 and elsewhere) with his inclusive emphasis

denigrates is not a consistent set of doctrines that all forms of it have in common, but rather a blindness, sometimes even an active hostility, to many of these values that for him take ethical priority.

In his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche offers a speculative story about the genesis of morality. According to Nietzsche's quasi-allegorical, quasi-historical narrative, morality comes into being at a particular time in history as the result of something he calls "the slave revolt" (*GM I. 10*). I do not have the space here to discuss in depth the details of this genealogical account of Nietzsche's, let alone its pretensions to historical accuracy or its claims to philosophical importance. But, in short, most readers interpret the revolt that Nietzsche describes as a cunning ploy on the part of the weak and oppressed "slaves" themselves to topple "the nobles" from power—with the invention of morality being the slaves' weapon of choice. I read Nietzsche's genealogical account differently.⁴ The slaves, as I see it, are in fact the pawns of those Nietzsche calls "the priestly people," who foment this revolt by creating a new religion—Christianity—and a new system of values—morality—and foisting them on nobles and slaves alike, who in turn eventually come to organize their lives by these new ideals.⁵

Interpreters of Nietzsche who accept the former reading, and thus see the slave revolt as the strategic work of the slaves, often conclude that the morality system that thereby gets its start must be one that is in the interests of the slaves, since, on this reading, the slaves create morality with the instrumental aim of benefiting themselves and harming the nobles.⁶ For interpreters who incline toward the latter reading, according to which these new values are a priestly creation, this assumption comes less naturally, since the demagogic priestly instigators might not have the slaves' best interests at heart. But it is important to note that whatever stance we take on the exegetical issue of what role the slaves in Nietzsche's story are supposed to play in inventing morality, it is an open question whether the values that get inaugurated are actually by Nietzsche's lights in the slaves' best interests. (For even if the slaves did invent these values, they might be mistaken about what is in their interests. And even if the priests did invent these values for their own calculating purposes, the slaves might nonetheless be the fortunate beneficiaries.)

Nietzsche doubtless gives us reason to think that morality, on *some* level, is beneficial for the slaves and for those he calls "the weak" more generally.⁷ In helping

on the potential for a higher form of life for everyone, made possible through participation in the shared social endeavor of culture.

⁴To forestall confusion on a point of terminology: note that there are at least two different (albeit overlapping) senses in which Nietzsche uses the term 'slave' and related words. One use of it, particularly in the plural, is as a label for a certain historical group of people ("the slaves") who are characters in the *Genealogy*. 'Slave,' in the second, broader sense, works to pick out a functional role in a culture that one can play, as I discuss in section 5 of this paper. Typically, Nietzsche refers to the practice "slavery" rather than to the people when he has this second sense in mind (see *BGE* 257). Someone can be a slave in the first sense without being enslaved in the second sense and *vice versa*. The extension of the second sense is far more expansive: it will include some of the slaves in the first sense, but also many others in addition.

⁵Others who read Nietzsche in this way include Bernard Reginster, "Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation"; and R. Jay Wallace, "*Ressentiment*, Value, and Self-Vindication," 122–24.

⁶See e.g. Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 105–12 and 203–4; Rüdiger Bittner, "*Ressentiment*."

⁷The slaves who are characters in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* are one important particular historical example of his more general category of "the weak." This division of the strong [forms of *stark*] and the weak [forms of *schwach*] is one of Nietzsche's most basic ways of classifying people; see

to turn the aggressions of the nobles inward, this new morality system serves to protect the weak from direct physical harms. In valorizing the character traits of the weak and demonizing those of the strong, it affords the weak what R. Jay Wallace has aptly called a “vindicatory” self-conception.⁸ In establishing the ascetic ideal, it gives the weak a reason, however dismal, to go on living. But should we infer from these apparent benefits that Nietzsche takes morality to be an ideology in the best interests of the weak?⁹

3. OBJECTIVE INTERESTS, FLOURISHING, AND FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

To answer the above question, we must ask what it is for a value system, and in particular, a way of life it recommends, to be in someone’s interest. There is one sense of the term ‘interest’ in common and in academic parlance alike, according to which what is in one’s interest is getting what one happens to want. If one wants to lead a life free from all struggle and toil and to spend one’s days loafing around in a pleasurable beery haze, then that is in one’s interest. Interest, glossed in this way, is simply a function of one’s contingent desires. This is *not* the sense of the term ‘interest’ I am using when I ask what, on Nietzsche’s view, is in the interests of a given set of people. I have in mind what in colloquial terms is instead the more paternalistic, “Father-Knows-Best” sense of “interests,” where the word ‘interest’ often gets prefaced by ‘best.’ (Father *knows* what is in your “best interest” even when you yourself do not.) In more technical terms, this often goes by the name of ‘objective interest.’ What is in one’s interest, in this sense, is what is actually beneficial for one’s flourishing.¹⁰ It is “objective” because (in an important sense) it is independent both of what one happens to want and of what one happens to believe about what is in one’s interest. The point of describing these interests as “objective” is not to suggest their complete mind-independence, but simply to signal that they are a subject about which one could sometimes have false beliefs or in connection with which one could have inappropriate desires.¹¹ Some people

GMI.13. Unfortunately, Nietzsche is never clear about just what strength and weakness, in the relevant senses, are supposed to consist in. It is at least clear that Nietzsche does not mean by ‘strength’ simply brute physical prowess, nor by ‘weakness’ does he necessarily mean its lack. For strength of spirit or mind [*Geist*], according to Nietzsche, is just as, if not more important (BGE 39; EH, “Preface,” 3). About Nietzschean strength, one can say little that is informative: it is a package of capabilities (both physical and mental), special talents and skills, along with dispositions reliably to behave in certain ways (for example, ways that manifest one’s strength in strong deeds [GMI.13]).

⁸Wallace (“*Ressentiment*, Value, and Self-Vindication”) does not come down decisively one way or another on whether this vindicatory self-conception is in the best interest of the slaves or whether the slaves simply *think* that it is in their interest.

⁹Leiter, for example, attributes to Nietzsche the view that “moral values are, in fact, *in the interest* of certain types of people, namely ‘lower men’” (*Nietzsche on Morality*, 124; see also 52–53).

¹⁰For a similar sense of ‘objective interest,’ see Peter Railton, “Facts and Values,” and “Moral Realism.” This is also how Leiter in his work on Nietzsche uses the term; see *Nietzsche on Morality*, 109.

¹¹They are “in an important sense” independent of beliefs and desires because there is an obvious way in which objective interests should not be cast as wholly belief and desire independent: that one happens to believe *p* as opposed to *q*, or to want *r* as opposed to *s*, will often affect what is in one’s objective interests. The important point for the defender of objective interests is that the relevant conditionals are true: “If you believe *p*, then *a* is in your interest” is true, and “If you want *r*, then *b* is in your interest” is true, regardless of what you happen to believe about the truth of those conditionals or to desire in the face of them—or, for that matter, in ignorance of them. (For those with certain

believe things to be good for them that are not and desire things that are not really good for them. We will shortly be considering what Nietzsche takes human flourishing to consist in, but it is important to bear in mind that “interest,” in the specific sense at issue in this paper, bears this intimate conceptual connection with the promotion of flourishing.¹²

Something can be in one’s best interest in ways ranging from the more constitutive to the more instrumental.¹³ Accomplishing an exalted goal, on many conceptions of human flourishing including Nietzsche’s, is a paradigm case of something constitutively beneficial. It is itself one of the goods of a flourishing human life. Eating adequate nutrients is at the instrumental end of the spectrum. It makes possible the attainment of other goods that are themselves constitutive of the good life. Without consuming a certain amount of protein and carbohydrates, one will simply not have the energy to undertake one’s projects. While Nietzsche neither explicitly makes this distinction himself nor uses the term ‘interest’ in this technical way, he nonetheless tries to work out what is in a person’s interest in both the instrumental and the constitutive senses.¹⁴

This question of interests is pressing in the interpretation of Nietzsche, because he sees morality as celebrating ways of life that are hostile to human flourishing. Along these lines, a prominent reading of Nietzsche would have it that the spiritual aristocracy of nascent great individuals is under the sway of a “false consciousness”

Humean commitments, the account of objective interests would need to be more complicated still, grounded as it would need to be in certain idealized desiderative attitudes. But, so far as I can tell, there is not a strong textual case to be made that Nietzsche shares these Humean commitments himself.)

¹²Here ‘flourishing’ is translating Nietzsche’s ‘*Gedeihen*’ (*GM*, “Preface,” 3). ‘Flourishing,’ in particular its Aristotelian and Thomistic resonances, could be taken to suggest that Nietzsche is deriving a conception of human flourishing from a conception of what human beings fundamentally are, so that their flourishing amounts to action in accordance with their essence. For a reading in this essentialist vein, drawing especially on Nietzsche’s notebooks, see John Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, chs. 1 and 3. I am more reluctant to draw on this notebook material, as a matter of exegetical outlook, and so, as I read Nietzsche, it is more controversial whether Nietzsche thinks humans (or any other entities) *have* an essence, and it is just as controversial whether he takes their good to consist in acting in accordance with their essence (assuming they have one). In any event, I cannot treat these difficult issues adequately here. But in using the term ‘flourishing,’ I do not mean to be taking a stance one way or another regarding Nietzsche’s view on this issue about human essence and the strong relation of the human good to it. I am simply using ‘flourishing,’ as I think Nietzsche at the very least uses it, to describe human lives that are well lived. Kaufmann renders this term ‘*Gedeihen*’ as ‘prosperity’ instead. This does not have the Aristotelian connotations, but it has an unfortunately Benjamin-Franklin-esque ring to it, with suggestions of worldly financial success.

¹³Leiter uses the term ‘facilitates,’ which, to my ear, lends itself primarily to an instrumental reading; see *Nietzsche on Morality*, 106. We should be careful not to assume that what is important to a person’s flourishing is exhausted by what is *instrumentally* important.

¹⁴About what is more instrumentally in one’s interest, Nietzsche, for example, writes, “I am much more interested in a question on which the ‘salvation of humanity’ depends far more than on any theologians’ curio: the question of *nutrition*. For ordinary use, one may formulate it thus: ‘how do *you*, among all people, have to eat to attain your maximum of strength, of *virtù* in the Renaissance style, of moraline-free virtue?’” (*EH*, “Clever,” 1). About what is more constitutively in one’s interest, he asks, “[H]ow can your life, the individual life, receive the highest value, the deepest significance? How can it be least squandered? Certainly only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable exemplars, and not for the good of the majority, that is to say those who, taken individually, are the least valuable exemplars” (*UM* III.6).

about what is in their best interest.¹⁵ They wrongly take the way of life that morality (in the pejorative sense) extols—that of, for example, comfort, safety, and “green-pasture happiness of the herd” (*BGE* 44)—to be the flourishing life for them. This approach to Nietzsche, drawing on these notions of interests and false consciousness, is a promising one. But it should be pressed much further, I think. Instead of confining this false consciousness to the Nietzschean elite, we should, I will be arguing here, see the rest of mankind—“the weak”—as afflicted by it as well. For although it is right that the weak benefit from the morality system in several ways, on another, more important level Nietzsche sees them as its victims. Contrary to the illusions fostered by the priestly class on the one hand, and by Kant, along with Bentham and other more “secular” thinkers on the other, the flourishing life does not consist in the accumulation of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, or in pitying all that suffers, or in cultivating one’s moral virtue, or in the worship of God, or in anything else that versions of morality laud above all else.¹⁶ The “benefits” gained by the weak are meretricious when set against what Nietzsche regards as needed if they are truly to flourish: and that is to be “slaves”—in some attenuated sense, at least—as I shall make clear in what follows.

Marx famously claims that religion is “the opium of the people,” and Nietzsche, though he would add morality along with Christianity into this intoxicating mix as well, is similar to Marx at least in the idea that the masses are beset by a form of false consciousness.¹⁷ To be sure, the form this false consciousness takes is by Nietzsche’s lights very different: seduced by Christianity (and the morality it spawns) into accepting the delusion that they are atomic individuals of infinite worth, most people, Nietzsche thinks, shirk the role that would really lend their lives the highest significance they can have.¹⁸ Whatever a person may regard as the best

¹⁵See Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 176. Leiter, as noted above, draws on Railton’s work (“Facts and Values” and “Moral Realism”) in clarifying the sense of objective interest he employs (*Nietzsche on Morality*, 106–12).

¹⁶This is not to say that the flourishing life cannot involve any of those things. They simply, on Nietzsche’s view, are not the key elements of the flourishing life, according to his strenuously heroic conception of the flourishing life as one in which one struggles and suffers in the pursuit of greatness.

¹⁷This famous remark about religion being the “opium of the people” is from Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: An Introduction,” 57. Especially given the hermeneutical apparatus that Leiter brings to bear (*Nietzsche on Morality*, 176, 185)—one drawing on the notions of ideology and false consciousness, terms more familiar from Marxist thought, but highly illuminating for interpreting Nietzsche as well—we should be all the more suspicious about whether the majority of mankind, just as much as the elite, know what is in their best interest. The familiar lesson from Marx is that the systematic distortions of ideology can render opaque to one just what is in one’s best interest.

¹⁸From the fact that they are under the sway of this false consciousness, one should not assume that Nietzsche thinks they must be freed from it and informed about what sort of life is best for them. Nietzsche, in general, is doubtful that it is always beneficial for one to believe what is true (*BGE* 4). From the standpoint of leading a worthwhile life, while it is far from the ideal scenario, it may well be better for many to go on living as they do and not be aware of what lends their lives genuine significance. For if, say, they mistakenly believe that the best life for them is one of devoted and obedient service to God, this may render them willing to fulfill the role that actually will endow their lives with significance. This is the (rather misleading) grain of truth to the idea that the ways of life praised by slave morality are in the best interest of the slaves. What is actually in their interest is not this way of life *per se*, but rather *the false belief* that this way of life is in their interest. And this false belief is valuable only because it is indirectly beneficial in fostering the way of life that actually is in their interest.

life for himself, and whatever we, with our contemporary liberal sensibilities, may regard as the best life for a person, it is the better *Nietzschean* life—provided one cannot be a great Nietzschean composer or philosopher—to be a slave building the pyramids, a medieval serf laboring on Chartes cathedral, or a peon sweeping Beethoven's floor than to be a comfortable, "free" person in the culturally decadent modern West.

Now Nietzsche, as many rightly observe, is adamant that there is not a single mode of life best for everyone.¹⁹ But this can mislead interpreters into overstating the asymmetry between what constitutes the flourishing life for "the strong" (basically a small elite) and for "the weak" (the mass of mankind).²⁰ For the strong, the best life is thought to be one of creative struggle and suffering, one in which they expend themselves, maybe even sacrifice themselves, in the pursuit of something great. "I know of no better aim of life than that of perishing, *animae magnae prodigus*, in pursuit of the great and the impossible" (*UM* II.9). He lauds those who are inured to "difficulties, hardships, privation, even to life itself," those "prepared to sacrifice human beings for one's cause, not excluding oneself" (*TI*, "Skirmishes," 38). In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche counsels those who would achieve greatness to "*live dangerously!* Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas!" (*GS* 283). Yet for the weak, it is often thought, given their lack of wherewithal and creative potential, the best sort of life is one of simple pleasures and comforting illusions. But although there is a grain of truth to this way of reading Nietzsche, as will become clear in what follows, this also, as I see it, amounts to a serious misunderstanding of his views. Nietzsche certainly thinks that the weak *do* seek comfortable, safe lives—a choice rendered vivid in Nietzsche's depiction of the "last man" in the Prologue to *Zarathustra*. But that is a far cry from thinking that the *best life for them* is of this sort. On the contrary, Nietzsche thinks that their highest calling is a strenuous one that they will try to avoid. The best life is one of participation in, or in the service of, the cultural sphere, whether it be through promoting the lives of a few great individuals or in aiding the flourishing of the cultural whole.²¹ The best life for a weak person is in this respect not so different from the best life for a strong person. *Both* are called to a higher form of life.

¹⁹Alexander Nehamas, "Who Are 'The Philosophers of the Future'?", 57; Geuss, "Nietzsche and Morality," 173–74; Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 112; and Julian Young, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 298.

²⁰For doubts about whether Nietzsche relativizes his conception of human flourishing to different "types" of people, as Leiter proposes (*Nietzsche on Morality*, 124), see Reginster, "Review of Brian Leiter's *Nietzsche on Morality*." Nietzsche, as Reginster notes, is apparently interested in what is the best life for "the type man" (*GM* "Preface," 6), not in the differential interests of various *types* of men.

²¹We must be cautious in interpreting what, for lack of a better word, might be thought of as Nietzsche's *ontology* of culture. The idea that cultural goods are something to be "maximized" (Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §50; and Hurka, "Nietzsche: Perfectionist") has an economicist connotation that suggests a certain picture of what culture is. It can make it seem as if "culture" consists in various commodities and quasi-commodities (paintings, symphonies, the rarified few worthy of hero-worship, etc.) and that cultural excellence is a simple function of how many such high-quality commodities there are. Yet it is not obvious that Nietzsche thinks the world would be five hundred times better if only we had five hundred more great composers or five hundred more great symphonies. His approach is far more nuanced and holistic. (I discuss these matters further in my "Nietzsche's Cultural Perfectionism.") Culture, relatedly, is not simply an aggregation of cultural commodities wholly external to the average person, but an entire form of life, a collective social achievement in which, ideally, all can participate and through which a person comes to flourish.

Talents of course vary widely, and, accordingly, what one can sensibly be expected to contribute to the perfectionistic enterprise of culture varies widely as well. Most, on Nietzsche's view, will be incapable of writing masterful string trios. In this belief, Nietzsche is deeply elitist. But nonetheless he also thinks a higher form of life is open to the ordinary person, and that is one in which they aid in the flourishing of intellectual and artistic excellence—whether lugging the stones to build the cathedral or even more indirectly, creating the material and (just as importantly) the spiritual conditions that permit a leisured class the chance to participate more directly in endeavors of the spirit. This is because human lives, Nietzsche thinks, have their highest worth and dignity when they are “consecrat[ed] to culture” (UMIII.6)—when they are lived, indeed even sacrificed, in its service.²² It is not that they are called to *tender their own flourishing* on the altar of culture. It is rather that *in devoting their lives to the collective project of culture, they truly come to flourish*. Nietzsche's most extended discussion of this topic comes in the *Untimely Meditations*, but the theme is one that had been percolating since his early essay “The Greek State,” and it is one we continue to see reverberate all the way through to his final works of 1888. In the section to follow, I will explain the unusual notions of human worth and dignity that Nietzsche relies upon in spelling out the sort of flourishing life he takes it to be in a person's best interest to lead.

4. HUMAN WORTH AND DIGNITY

To modern sensibilities, one of Nietzsche's most unsettling claims is to raise doubts about whether human beings all have equal and innate worth and dignity—as children of God, ensouled beings, rational agents, or anything else.²³ This account about the equal worth of all people is particularly appealing to the lowliest, he thinks. Among other reasons, this is why the Christian concept of the soul, as something to underwrite this worth, is so tantalizing for them to accept. As Nietzsche caustically puts in *The Antichrist*,

That everyone as an “immortal soul” has equal rank with everyone else, that in the totality of living beings the “salvation” of every single individual may claim eternal significance, that little gnats and three-quarter-madmen may have the conceit that the

²²Geuss notes that even after giving up faith in God and morality, Nietzsche retained his faith in culture. Geuss, however, suggests that this is a failing on his part: “Nietzsche was a believer neither in God nor in morality, but he sometimes showed the tendency to be a naive believer in culture [*Nietzsche war weder gottgläubig noch moralgläubig, aber er zeigte gelegentlich die Tendenz, naiv-kultur-gläubig zu sein*]” (“Kultur als Vorbild und als Schranke,” 38).

²³As Leiter notes, “The egalitarian premise of all contemporary moral and political theory—the premise, in one form or another, of the equal worth or dignity of each person—is simply absent in Nietzsche's work” (*Nietzsche on Morality*, 290). Keith Ansell-Pearson, in a similar spirit, writes, “Unlike liberalism, Nietzsche does not hold that the individual person is inviolable and that human life [is] sacrosanct” (*Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, 11).

In BGE 257, Nietzsche says that it is *belief* in an order of rank and differences in value between man and man that characterizes aristocratic society. This formulation is neutral on whether such a belief is accurate (even if socially beneficial). Elsewhere, however, he is more explicit in the idea that social stratification can be a “sanction of a *natural order*” (A 57). In the very same passage, however, he writes, “When the exceptional human being treats the mediocre human being more tenderly than himself and his peers, this is not mere politeness of the heart—it is simply his *duty*” (A 57). Pace Kant, obligations to others thus do not seem to presuppose all people being of equal worth and dignity.

laws of nature are constantly broken for their sakes—such an intensification of every kind of selfishness into the infinite, into the *impertinent*, cannot be branded with too much contempt. And yet Christianity owes its triumph to this miserable flattery of personal vanity: it was precisely all the failures, all the rebellious-minded, all the less favored, the whole scum and refuse of humanity who were thus won over to it. The “salvation of the soul”—in plain language: “the world revolves around *me*.” (A 43)

Yet we should not allow Nietzsche’s apparent doubts about *equal* and *innate* human worth to mislead us into thinking that Nietzsche rejects the notions of worth (and the dignity it underpins) entirely as a status potentially open to everyone.²⁴ Although Nietzsche’s conception of human worth and dignity is alien to more traditional Christian and Kantian conceptions of these terms, the idea of human worth and dignity, as the grounds on which a person merits respect, plays a central role in his value theory. The most basic difference between Nietzschean worth and dignity on the one hand and Christian and Kantian worth and dignity on the other is that Christian and Kantian worth and dignity is something humans have equally and innately. Nietzschean worth and dignity, by contrast, is inequalitarian and achieved: humans do not have it equally; they must earn it, and earn the respect it merits, by what they do.

It will be helpful to begin by discussing the conception of dignity at issue in the Judeo-Christian moral tradition against which Nietzsche is reacting. A representative codification of the Christian idea of human dignity can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, though similar views are shared in the Protestant denominations as well: “The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God.”²⁵ “The divine image is present in every man.”²⁶ “Endowed with ‘a spiritual and immortal’ soul, the human person is ‘the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake.’”²⁷ In what respect are we all similar to God? The most important, according to several branches of this tradition, is that we have freedom of some sort.²⁸

This emphasis on freedom or autonomy as the ground of dignity continues into the Enlightenment, where one finds in Kant a restatement of these same basic ideas. Although Kant’s own moral philosophy is still very much bound up with a religious picture of God, the immortality of the soul, and free will as the metaphysical posits of practical reason, it is also distinctively modern in claiming that we are the self-

²⁴I have so far been using the terms ‘worth’ (*Wert(h)*) and ‘dignity’ (*Würde*) in tandem. (As we shall see in sections 6 and 7 of this paper, Nietzsche uses both terms himself.) In German, they are etymologically related. How, though, are they conceptually related? ‘Dignity,’ in a basic definition, is the state of being worthy of honor or respect. One would thus seem to have dignity *because* one has worth. In turn, one has this worth (or value) in virtue of certain features one has. Just what those features are, whether they are innate or earned, natural or non-natural, whether all humans have them in equal degrees, what moral demands follow from the possession of such features, and so on, are all open questions, on which Christians, Kantians, Nietzscheans, and others can disagree. In what follows, I will be using both the terms ‘dignity’ and ‘worth,’ but it is important to bear in mind this direction of apparent dependence.

²⁵*Catechism*, §1700.

²⁶*Catechism*, §1702.

²⁷*Catechism*, §1703.

²⁸“Man is rational and therefore like God; he is created with a free will and is master over his acts” (St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*; quoted in *Catechism*, §1730).

legislators of the moral law that we obey. Kantian dignity consists in this capacity to exercise rational autonomy—in particular to prescribe laws for ourselves and to make those laws the maxims on which we act.²⁹ In virtue of having this capacity, a person has claims on you to treat her as an end-in-herself. Whatever beneficial consequences it may have, it is wrong to do something if doing so would violate a person's dignity. We cannot, to use a common contemporary example, harvest and redistribute her organs, even if it would have the benefit of saving many more lives. To do so is to treat her as a mere means and not as a creature of inviolable worth. Even among those who would not describe themselves as Christians or as Kantians, this conception of human dignity continues to exert a powerful influence on the modern moral imagination.³⁰

If we simplify things considerably, we might see the Christian and Kantian conception of human worth and dignity prominent in the moral tradition as having these very general features:

- (1) Innate, or else tied to the possession of features or capacities that virtually all humans possess or will possess;³¹
- (2) Thus, independent of contingent, external circumstance and accomplishment;³²
- (3) Had in equal degree by humans of vastly different abilities;³³
- (4) Grounded in non-natural (that is, supernatural) features that humans allegedly have;³⁴

²⁹*Groundwork*, Ak. 4:439–40.

³⁰See, for example, George Kateb, *Human Dignity*, 29–35.

³¹In the Christian tradition, the possession of a soul and the fact of being made in the likeness of God are what ground this dignity (*Catechism*, §1700–1703). According to Kant in the *Groundwork*, the important thing is the capacity for rational autonomy: “Autonomy is therefore the ground of the dignity [*Würde*] of the human and of every rational nature” (Ak. 4:436); see also Ak. 4:439–40. (It is, of course, a notorious problem for Kantians to explain how, say, humans with severe mental disabilities nonetheless have dignity, hence the philosophically-unsatisfying qualification of ‘virtually.’)

³²There is a perfectionistic strand in Kant's moral philosophy, having some affinities with Nietzsche's, according to which one has a duty not to let one's natural talents rust; see *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:423; see also *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 6:386–94. On the “new circle of duties” relating to self-perfection, see *UMIII*, 5; see also *BGE* 188, where Nietzsche makes clear that the imperative exhortation to make something of ourselves is not categorical in form. The key difference between Nietzsche and Kant is that according to Kant there is the safety net of dignity that everyone has equally in virtue of having the capacity for rational agency. Nietzsche, as I read him, calls into question whether *simply having this bare capacity* actually grants one dignity—that is, makes one truly worthy of the respect of others.

³³For further discussion of why Kant must deny that dignity comes in degrees, see Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, 121.

³⁴Kant's noumenally free self and the Christian soul are examples of such non-natural features. Of course, one could develop an account in a Kantian spirit that divested Kant's view of metaphysical baggage and grounded a person's dignity in wholly natural traits, for example the capacity for rational agency understood as a naturalistic feature of human animals. What is of relevance to this paper, however, is the historical Kant, *as Nietzsche understands him*, and that is as someone committed to a supernaturalist metaphysics underwriting his moral philosophy; see, for example, A 10. Nietzsche, in contrast to Kant, stresses that humans are continuous with the rest of nature (*BGE* 230) and do not, in addition to this empirical animality, also have dual citizenship in some supernatural noumenal realm. In noting this, however, I do not mean to prejudge the issue of whether Nietzsche is a naturalist or a non-naturalist in the *contemporary senses* of those terms (in, for example, thinking that the methods of respectable philosophical inquiry need to be modeled on those of the natural sciences). For competing views on this question, see Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, and Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* respectively.

- (5) A strong constraint on whether a person can be used as a mere means;³⁵
- (6) Intimately connected with autonomy;
- (7) Of greater importance than the accumulation of pleasure or the satisfaction of desires;³⁶
- (8) The proper grounds on which one is worthy of respect.³⁷

Nietzsche is doubtful that people have any such property that makes them *inherently* worthy of the respect of others.³⁸ Nietzsche regards it as an unfortunate cheapening of dignity that the standards are lowered so that every person is easily able to meet them in this way, with absolutely no effort on his or her part whatsoever. As he writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, “[W]hatever can be common [*gemein*] always has little value” (43). In order to be something that *all* people have in common and have in equal degree, it is itself going to need to be common (in the sense of something that even the most “common,” “base” people can have).

Yet rather than consigning the notions of worth and dignity to the dustbin of moral and theological error, Nietzsche, as I read him, presents an alternative. He proposes that accomplishment is the real ground of dignity—and thus the basis on which people properly merit respect. Dignity is something we can gain or lose based on how we lead our lives and on what fate befalls us.³⁹ Nietzsche, as we shall see, thus conceives of human worth and dignity in a drastically different way, agreeing only with the last two characteristics—namely, that achieving or maintaining it is of the utmost importance for a human life to be well-lived and that it is the grounds on which we are worthy of respect. On Nietzsche’s view, human worth and dignity are

- (1’) Not innate, but achieved;
- (2’) Thus, tied to contingent, external circumstance and accomplishment;
- (3’) Had in differing degrees by different people;
- (4’) Grounded in natural traits and deeds of human beings;
- (5’) Gained (in the case of most people) precisely through being treated as a means;

³⁵*Catechism*, §2270; Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:429.

³⁶In Kant’s famous formulation: “So act that you use humanity [*Menschlichkeit*], whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as end, never merely as means” (*Groundwork*, Ak. 4:429). This stricture against transgressing dignity is incumbent on you, even it deprives you of what would give you most pleasure and even if it is not what you want to do.

³⁷For Kant, “dignity (an absolute inner worth) [is that] by which [one] exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world” (*Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 6:434–35).

³⁸In Kantian moral theory, dignity serves a key role in grounding the obligations we have to others. Nietzsche, for his part, wants to detach normative claims from the grounding they have thus far had (presumably including this Kantian grounding as well). After claiming in *Daybreak* that he is a denier of morality, he goes on to add, “It goes without saying that I do not deny—unless I am a fool—that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done and encouraged—but I think the one should be encouraged and the other avoided *on other grounds than hitherto*” (*D* 103).

³⁹Even within the past few hundred years, there is a strong philosophical tradition (in, for example, Hobbes and Burke) of seeing dignity as something hierarchical. As Kwame Anthony Appiah writes, “To most thinkers before the democratic revolutions, the idea of the inherent dignity of each person would have seemed absurd” (*The Honor Code*, 128). Yet as Michael Rosen points out in his brief but magisterial genealogy of dignity, there are already hints as early as Cicero of dignity being a property that humans as such have; see *Dignity*, 12.

- (6') Not necessarily connected with autonomy;
- (7) Of greater importance than the accumulation of pleasure or the satisfaction of desires;
- (8) The proper grounds on which one is worthy of respect.

In the sections to follow, we will trace the textual underpinnings of these ideas in Nietzsche's work. For now, these enumerated claims are a promissory note for what is to come. Before we move on, however, it will be helpful to tie together a few terms that have thus far been in play. The truly flourishing life, and thus, the life that is in one's best interest, is for Nietzsche the life of worth and dignity *in their Nietzschean senses*. It is the life in which one has dignity—one merits respect—because of one's human worth. And this comes through achievement and is not an innate endowment. We see the germ of these ideas as early as Nietzsche's 1870s essay "The Greek State." He develops them further in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, and they persist into his later writings as well. In the section to follow, I will spell out Nietzsche's views in greater detail and explain why he thinks that the enslavement of the weak, rather than being incompatible with their Nietzschean dignity, can in fact be the way in which that dignity is achieved.

5. NIETZSCHE ON "SLAVERY IN SOME SENSE OR OTHER"

One recurring theme in Nietzsche's corpus of work is that a flourishing culture of human excellence requires an underclass to render its achievements possible; there must be "slavery in some sense or other" (*BGE* 257). Although this aspect of Nietzsche's thinking remains constant from his early essays ("The Greek State") to his final works of 1888 (*A* 57), Nietzsche's attitude toward this "slavery in some sense or other" changes.

First, however, a word about the term 'slavery' [*Sklaverei*]: in using the extraordinarily provocative term 'slavery,' Nietzsche is, among other things, seeking to remind his readers about the functional similarity between the role filled by the slaves in ancient Greece and Rome and the role filled by those who create the material and spiritual conditions that make cultural achievement possible more generally.⁴⁰ When he refers cagily to "slavery in some sense or other" (*BGE* 257), Nietzsche uses the term to pick out the condition of those who, in the following passage, he goes on to describe as forming the "foundation and scaffolding [*Unterbau und Gerüst*]" (*BGE* 258) that makes for a culture of exceptional human excellence. His discussion of this servile underclass of "mediocrity" in *The Antichrist* suggests that he construes it very broadly indeed (57). It would appear to extend far beyond those who are the legally-sanctioned chattel of others, and it would appear to extend beyond even a proletariat working class, conventionally understood: "A high culture," he writes in *The Antichrist*, "is a pyramid: it can stand only on a broad base; its first presupposition is a strong and soundly consolidated

⁴⁰After describing "high culture" as a "pyramid" dependent on a base of "mediocrity" in *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche goes on to echo Aristotle's discussion of natural slavery from the *Politics* 1254a18–23. Nietzsche writes, "To be a public utility, a wheel, a function, for that one must be destined by nature: it is *not* society, it is the only kind of *happiness* [Glück] of which the great majority are capable that makes intelligent machines of them. For the mediocre, to be mediocre is their happiness; mastery of one thing, specialization—a natural instinct" (*A* 57).

mediocrity. Handicraft, trade, agriculture, *science*, the greatest part of art, the whole quintessence of *professional* activity, to sum it up, is compatible only with a mediocre amount of ability and ambition" (A 57). Everyone from doctors and accountants to menial laborers and professors would seem to be included (HHI.283). To be a slave "in some sense or other"—that is, to be at the base of this pyramid of high culture—need not involve being the *literal possession* of someone else, though it can take that form in some societies. It need not, likewise, be a socio-political designation, enforced by government authority, though it of course can be in some societies. It primarily is a *functional role* that one fills in the cultural whole.

Given that Nietzsche sees this "broad base" (A 57) as necessary for a flourishing culture, it is tempting to see Nietzsche as giving only the following sort of justification for this "slavery in some sense or other": there are certain goods having to do with cultural excellence that slavery, broadly construed, makes possible.⁴¹ And he does appear to think that this slavery is beneficial at the very least on these grounds. But there is a scholarly danger of projecting our views onto Nietzsche, in ways more and less subtle. These days we find slavery, of the sort practiced in ancient Greece and Rome and in the antebellum South, morally repugnant, indeed one of the clearest examples of the morally repugnant. And insofar as we take freedom, in some broader sense as self-direction or autonomy, to be one of our moral and political ideals, we might have qualms about even the more subtle kind of servitude or "slavery in some sense or other" that Nietzsche envisages. Even though this perfectionistically-motivated, instrumentalist-style argument often attributed to Nietzsche in defense of slavery would callously countenance the enslavement (in some sense) of many, ironically it can prove reassuring in its own way to our liberal moral sensibilities, since it allows us to enlist Nietzsche in the view most of us now think is obvious: that whatever cultural goods slavery may secure, it would nonetheless be in the interest of the slaves if they were not slaves. But I think this reading is a misunderstanding of Nietzsche's actual view. His idea, as I have said, is not simply that it is socially or culturally useful to have slaves, or useful to the privileged few to have slaves, but that the sort of slavery he is envisaging is actually in the best interest of the slaves themselves. Such lives might (though need not) be dangerous, painful, and unpleasant. Some slaves may actually perish. But such lives, he thinks, are actually better than ones frittered away in pursuit of idle pleasures or chasing one's own private (and perhaps debased) conception of the good. While this view may be completely anathema to our moral sensibilities, it has certain affinities with the paternalistic views about slavery held both by Plato and Aristotle.⁴² Nietzsche builds on these views, but makes the notion of slavery

⁴¹This, for example, is how Rawls (*A Theory of Justice*, §50) interprets Nietzsche. See also the more measured and subtle remarks of Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, 36–37.

⁴²Plato, *Republic* 590c–d; Aristotle, *Politics* 1254a18–23. For both Plato and Aristotle, it is because the slave does not know what is good for him that he is best subjected to the rule of one who knows better; see Nietzsche's discussion at A 54 and 57. In a now infamous passage in the *Politics*, Aristotle writes, "But is there any one thus intended by nature to be a slave, and for whom such a condition is expedient and right or rather is not all slavery a violation of nature? There is no difficulty in answering this question, on grounds both of reason and of fact. For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule" (1254a18–23). On Plato, see Gregory Vlastos, *Platonic Studies*, ch.7. On Aristotle, see Malcolm Heath, "Aristotle on Natural Slavery"; and Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle*, 199.

much more attenuated and much less obviously political in import.⁴³ He adds a further modern twist by bringing in the notions of human worth and dignity, yet imbuing them with a classical heroic flavor, updated to reflect an aristocracy of merit rather than birth. In doing so, he turns these modern ideas of worth and dignity completely inside out: rather than seeing it as detrimental to human worth and dignity to be a slave, Nietzsche argues that it is *in being* a slave that most secure the sort of genuine worth and dignity that is possible for them. As Nietzsche's character Zarathustra puts it, "There are some who threw away their last worth [*Werth*] when they threw away their servitude [*Dienstbarkeit*]" (*TSZ*, I, "On the Way of the Creator"). Being slaves is the way that most can flourish. In order to establish this reading, I will explain Nietzsche's position in "The Greek State" and spell out how his view changes as his thought develops. As I shall argue, we see in "The Greek State" a nascent idea about human dignity that Nietzsche develops further in his later work.

6. "THE GREEK STATE" AND *THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY*

Nietzsche's argument in "The Greek State" goes like this: Slavery is essential to a flourishing human society, one in which great cultural and artistic achievement is possible. But this slavery, especially in the form it took in ancient Greece, is tremendously bad, because of the suffering it inflicts on the slaves. Thus, Nietzsche supposes, we are faced with an unattractive dilemma: we are left either with a highly primitive human society, incapable of any sort of cultural accomplishment, or we are left with a world in which there is cultural accomplishment and yet there is slavery. When it comes to either horn of the dilemma, existence is deeply wanting, because it will be rife with suffering. If there is no culture, there will be no bulwark against suffering, as can be had through the arts and other rarified cultural pursuits.⁴⁴ But if there is culture, then there will be slavery and the atten-

⁴³Perhaps this is simply a semantic dispute, but Nietzsche's thinking on these issues is not political in the sense that Nietzsche never thinks systematically about what role *contemporary* governments or states should play in instituting or maintaining this slavery "in some sense or other." Only by stretching the notion of "the political" so far that it becomes tantamount to what I think would be more accurately described as the social, can one see Nietzsche as having worked-out "political" ideals connected with his ambitious aims for the betterment of humanity. Employing this expansive notion of the political that is characteristic of much recent work on Nietzsche's political philosophy, Yannis Constantinidès observes that "it is not the state, as is the case with the majority of other thinkers, that is at the center of Nietzsche's political philosophy, but the will to ennoble man [*ce n'est pas l'État, comme chez la plupart des autres penseurs, qui est au centre de la philosophie politique de Nietzsche, mais la volonté d'ennoblir l'homme*]" ("Nietzsche législateur," 219). Nietzsche of course has things to say about the modern state, denigrating its worship by petty nationalists (*TSZ*, I, "On the New Idol") and lamenting the threat it poses to culture (*TI*, "Germans," 4). (On the latter point, see the helpful discussion in Tamsin Shaw, *Nietzsche's Political Skepticism*, ch. 1.) But given that he has no vision for what positive role modern nation states should play in securing his cultural goals, other than to keep their meddlesome tentacles out of the way, it can be misleading to describe his ideal of ennobling man as a *political* as opposed to simply a *social* or *cultural* ideal.

⁴⁴Nietzsche at this point sees the main role of art as providing us existential comfort in the face of suffering. Schopenhauer of course thinks that there is another path to salvation as well: It is through a form of saintly resignation. If we cease to desire anything at all, then we will cease to suffer (*WWRI*, §68). Nietzsche does not mention this possibility, perhaps because he regards it as highly impractical.

dant suffering of the slaves. Whether this is a genuine dilemma is not my concern here, for Nietzsche, in any event, appears to think that it is.

Coming from Nietzsche of all people, this attitude toward suffering may seem surprising. Yet at this point in his career, Nietzsche had not yet begun the full-throated celebration of suffering so characteristic of his later work (for example, *BGE* 225). Indeed, he at least appears to bemoan the suffering of the slaves and to think that this suffering is a black mark against human existence.⁴⁵ When we see this dilemma of culture or slavery that “existence” forces upon us, Nietzsche thinks that we have all the more vindication for the Schopenhauerian view that “existence” should be condemned:

Accordingly, we must learn to identify as a cruel-sounding truth the fact that *slavery belongs to the essence of a culture*: a truth, though, which leaves open no doubt about the absolute value of existence. *This truth* is the vulture which gnaws at the liver of the Promethean promoter of culture. The misery of men living a life of toil has to be increased to make the production of the world of art possible for a small number of Olympian men. (“The Greek State,” 178–79)

Yet as so often with Nietzsche’s works in this period, we find a curious sort of tension within the text.⁴⁶ At the same time that Nietzsche is condemning slavery and an existence that contains it for the suffering it brings in tow, he is also cognizant of the benefits of that very slavery. He goes on to argue at the end of “The Greek State” that the following is “valid in the most general sense”:

[E]very man, with his whole activity, is only dignified to the extent that he is a tool of genius, consciously or unconsciously [*hat nur soviel Würde, als er, bewußt oder unbewußt, Werkzeug des Genius ist!*]; whereupon we immediately deduce the ethical conclusion that “man as such,” absolute man, possesses neither dignity nor rights nor duties: only as a completely-determined being, serving unconscious purposes [*völlig determinirtes, unbewußten Zwecken dienendes Wesen*], can man excuse [*entschuldigen*] his existence (185).⁴⁷

This is an early glimmer in Nietzsche’s thinking that there is a way in which a slave (in the broad sense of someone playing a certain functional role) can be

⁴⁵Ken Gemes and Chris Sykes (“Nietzsche’s Illusion”) have argued that Nietzsche, both in his early and his late work, is concerned more with the existential lack of meaning in life than with the problem of suffering. While I certainly agree that Nietzsche is concerned throughout his career with existential meaninglessness, this interpretation, in downplaying the problem of suffering, is difficult to square with the surface argumentative logic of “The Greek State” concerning slavery. But in defense of their view, one might, as Ken Gemes has suggested to me in conversation, see Nietzsche as taking up, for argument’s sake, two *Wagnerian* positions in “The Greek State”—on the one hand, a Schopenhauerian attitude toward suffering and existence, and, on the other hand, a commitment to the goal of cultural rebirth—and seeking to expose the internal tension between them.

⁴⁶One explanation—similar to the one proposed by Gemes (see n. 45)—is that Nietzsche felt he needed to tread very carefully around this issue, since his then-idol and mentor Richard Wagner deplored slavery; see Nehamas, Introduction to *Nietzsche’s Writings from the Early Notebooks*, xxii.

⁴⁷Why does Nietzsche use the word ‘excuse’ here? One hypothesis is the following: On the Schopenhauerian way of looking at things, which Nietzsche at this point either accepts himself or simply adopts for the sake of argument, it is better never to have been born. (This, as Nietzsche mentions in *The Birth of Tragedy* [3], is the wisdom that Silenus imparts to King Midas.) The best sort of apologetic to be made on behalf of individual lives that *do* get lived is that they indirectly contribute to the reduction of human suffering: they enable culture, culture allows for the arts, and the arts free people from suffering.

dignified, precisely *in being* a slave. Nietzsche's departure from the Christian and Kantian philosophical tradition surrounding dignity is here notable. Whereas this tradition would have it that being used as a mere means is incompatible with a person's innate dignity, Nietzsche appears to be suggesting that being used as a means (maybe even a mere means) is how most can attain dignity. Moreover, that one freely or knowingly allows this to happen is not at all necessary. Nor is it necessary that one recognize it *has* happened; for one can be dignified "unconsciously."

This theme of being dignified "unconsciously" resurfaces in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where Nietzsche outlines a slightly different, but similarly radical, conception of human dignity. Whereas the moral tradition would have it that our dignity comes from having a soul or from our capacity for rational agency, Nietzsche takes it that our dignity consists (to some extent anyway) in *ourselves* being works of art (or parts of them), components in the aesthetic spectacle of existence, whether or not we are conscious of the role we play. Nietzsche proposes that as a heuristic we think of ourselves as if we were the instruments—the playthings, in fact—of an artistically-minded demiurge who creates humans for its own entertainment:

For what must be clear to us above all, both to our humiliation *and* our elevation, is that the whole comedy of art is certainly not performed for us, neither for our edification nor our education, just as we are far from truly being the creators of that world of art; conversely, however, we may very well assume we are already images and artistic projections for the true creator of art, and that our highest dignity [*Würde*] lies in our significance as works of art—for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*—although, of course, our awareness of our significance in this respect hardly differs from the awareness which painted soldiers have of the battle depicted on the same canvas. (*BT* 5)

Because Nietzsche in his early work—"The Greek State" and *The Birth of Tragedy*—still seems to follow Schopenhauer in seeing suffering as a serious obstacle to having a good life, he regards this dignity as (a) of no real significance in comparison to the suffering one must endure to attain it; and (b) of no value *to us* to the extent we are unaware of it.⁴⁸ But as Nietzsche's thought develops, his attitude toward suffering changes.⁴⁹ Lives can contain a great deal of suffering and still be good lives. In fact, far from seeing suffering as a hindrance to having a good life, he comes to see it as necessary for the greatness of what he regards as the best lives—those of creativity, challenge, and accomplishment.⁵⁰ When it comes to having a good life, what we do matters more than what we feel.

⁴⁸Nietzsche, I take it, does not think that there really is an artistic demiurge, creating the world for its own entertainment. Nietzsche uses this fictional posit as a heuristic to help us grasp the aesthetic perspective from which our lives, on his view, really do matter.

⁴⁹"Whether it is hedonism or pessimism, utilitarianism or eudaimonism—all these ways of thinking that measure the value of things in accordance with *pleasure* and *pain*, which are mere epiphenomena and wholly secondary, are ways of thinking that stay in the foreground and naïvetés on which everyone conscious of *creative* powers and an artistic conscience will look down not without derision, nor without pity" (*BGE* 225). Nietzsche obviously must have in mind here a more Epicurean rather than Aristotelian notion of eudaimonia.

⁵⁰"You want, if possible—and there really is no more insane 'if possible'—*to abolish suffering*. And we? It really seems that *we* would rather have it higher and worse than ever. Well-being as you understand it—that is no goal, that seems to us an *end*, a state that soon makes man ridiculous and contemptible—that makes his downfall [*Untergang*] *desirable*. The discipline of suffering, of *great*

7. SCHOPENHAUER AS EDUCATOR

In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, the third essay in his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche takes up and develops his earlier ideas about human dignity, transforming them into an account of what grants one's life greatest worth. He expands on the idea that he first toyed with in "The Greek State." This is the thought that the highest calling of most people is to serve as the instruments of someone else:

[H]ow can your life, the individual life, receive the highest value, the deepest significance? How can it be least squandered? Certainly only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable exemplars, and not for the good of the majority, that is to say those who, taken individually, are the least valuable exemplars. And the young person should be taught to regard himself as a failed work of nature but at the same time as a witness to the grandiose and marvelous intentions of this artist: nature has done badly, he should say to himself; but I will honor its great intentions by serving it so that one day it may do better. (*UM*III.6)

Nietzsche speaks of a two-stage process here. The first stage would seem to be internal, in the sense of taking place within individual people. In seeing a great person, one becomes aware of the great person's greatness, one has shame at one's relative worthlessness, and one gets called to a higher form of life in which one contributes to the flourishing of culture by aiding in the promotion of the great person's excellence (and thereby, in doing so, enhances one's own far more modest excellence).⁵¹ "[O]nly he who has attached his heart to some great man receives thereby the *first consecration to culture*" and acquires this insight (*UM*III.6).⁵² The second stage is external, involving a person's actually working to promote a flourishing culture, the sort carried forward by a few great individuals who serve as "exemplars" to everyone else. What is best, as Nietzsche sees it, is a harmony of the first and second stages. One has the inner transformation and takes up the higher form of life, not because one is compelled by a whip, but *because* one has this inner transformation and takes up this form of life oneself. Imagine a minor merchant in fifteenth century Florence. He has a comfortable, safe life peddling trinkets on the Ponte Vecchio. But he is inspired by Brunelleschi and comes to see that his life, as he is living it, is middling. He sees the promise of a higher form of life. He follows Brunelleschi's lead and joins in the building of the Duomo. His life is much harder than it would otherwise be. He suffers from the back-breaking labor. But he also has the sense that he is doing something important, and he comes to take great pride in what he does.

This inner transformation can thus serve an existential function. It makes one aware of *why* one's life is significant. For unreflective animals, there is no such

suffering—do you not know that only *this* discipline has created all enhancements of man so far?" (*BGE* 225). The attitude that Nietzsche takes toward suffering in his mature work is one of the central themes considered in Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*.

⁵¹Nietzsche writes, "It is true that, as we usually are, we can contribute nothing to the production of the man of redemption: that is why we *hate* ourselves as we usually are" (*UM*III.5).

⁵²Cavell (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*) and Conant ("Nietzsche's Perfectionism") draw on these passages from *Schopenhauer as Educator* and use them to argue that Nietzsche is more friendly to a sort of inclusive perfectionism than he has often been perceived to be. Although I do not agree with all aspects of this line of interpretation, I am in basic agreement with them when it comes to the idea that a higher form of life is open to everyone, even if most ignore its call.

capacity to make sense of suffering and “understand their existence metaphysically” (UM III.5) But unlike these animals, we are able find meaning in suffering by contributing to some worthwhile project. And it is in entering into this higher, heroic form of life that we transcend the lower forms of animality (UM III.5).

As Nietzsche acknowledges, it will still be a difficult pill for most to swallow. “[T]hough one may be ready to sacrifice one’s life to a state, for instance, it is another matter if one is asked to sacrifice it on behalf of another individual. It seems to be an absurd demand that one man should exist for the sake of another man” (UM III.6). (It is, after all, *Brunelleschi* who will be remembered by history and memorialized in a statue gazing on the completed Duomo.) But this sacrifice, Nietzsche thinks, will make a person’s life better along one particularly vital dimension. It will give his life “highest value [or worth] [*Werth*]” and “deepest significance [*Bedeutung*]” to sacrifice himself for the sake of another in this way (UM III.6). Paradoxically, though, what he is doing, although in some sense for the sake of another, is also in a roundabout way for his own sake, in that this sacrifice is what endows his life with direction and meaning.

Nietzsche, throughout this essay, is navigating his own conflicted relationship with Schopenhauer’s teachings. Nietzsche, as I have alluded to already, expresses his qualms about Schopenhauer’s metaphysics quite early.⁵³ At this point, I suspect, he begins to distance himself from Schopenhauer’s stark condemnation of suffering. But he does so in a subtle way, by seizing on and transforming a strand of thinking from one of Schopenhauer’s own late essays (itself rather in tension with the hedonistic assumptions predominant in Volume I of *The World as Will and Representation*, though anticipated somewhat in that text’s Fourth Book). Schopenhauer writes, in a passage that Nietzsche quotes,

A happy life is impossible: the highest that man can attain is a *heroic one*. He leads it who, in whatever shape or form, struggles against great difficulties for something that is to the benefit of all and in the end is victorious, but who is ill-rewarded for it or not rewarded at all. Then, when he has done, he is turned to stone, like the prince in Gozzi’s *Re corvo* [sic⁵⁴], but stands in a noble posture and with generous gestures. He is remembered and is celebrated as a hero; his will, mortified a whole life long by effort and labour, ill success and the world’s ingratitude, is extinguished in nirvana.⁵⁵

Schopenhauer suggests that one can attain this heroic posture through resignation: by ceasing to will, one not only ceases to suffer (his point in *WWR I*), but attains a certain nobility. Nietzsche, by contrast, claims that one gets this vestige of nobility not by the cessation of willing, but by participation in culture. Nietzsche talks now about what sorts of lives he thinks really matter: those of great individuals first

⁵³See, for example, the sketch in his notebooks entitled “On Schopenhauer” (October 1867–April 1868), in *WEN* 1–8.

⁵⁴This is a conflation of the titles of two of Carlo Gozzi’s plays: *Il Re Cervo* and *Il Corvo*. The mistake is in Schopenhauer’s text.

⁵⁵Quoted in *UM* III.4; from Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. II, “Nachträge zur Lehre von der Bejahung und Verneinung des Willens zum Leben,” §172a. Schopenhauer compiled and published the essays in *Parerga and Paralipomena* in 1851 (on this point of chronology, see Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*, 352), but it appears that he wrote or at least revised this particular essay after the publication of Volume II of *The World as Will and Representation* in 1844, since he mentions Volume II of *WWR* in §173 of the same essay.

and foremost of course, but *in addition*, the lives of those who have “consecrat[ed]” themselves “to culture” (UM III.6) to bring to fruition the creative visions of these few great people.

While Nietzsche is probably not ever wedded to Schopenhauerian hedonism, his view in *Schopenhauer as Educator* puts a considerable premium on the subjective or phenomenal dimension of our experience. In addition to *doing* something great, or *participating* in something great, you have to have the awareness that you are doing so and take a kind of subjective satisfaction in this noble enterprise. This, I suggest, is in large part why Nietzsche places such an emphasis on *inner* transformation of the self in this essay. Yet as he works out the implications of his own views—in embryonic form in this passage, as well as in “The Greek State” and *The Birth of Tragedy*—Nietzsche comes to recognize that this awareness of the significance of one’s life, however subjectively satisfying and important, is not strictly necessary to have a good life. Whether you have lived a good life may well depend on events that come far after your death or from a role that you are not yourself aware of playing. (The soldiers on the painted canvas, remember, are not aware of the role that lends their lives highest dignity [BT 5]; and the prince turned to stone surely cannot appreciate the nobly heroic posture in which he is frozen for perpetuity [UM III.4].) Actual accomplishment is what matters in the first instance to living the best life, not one’s knowledge about and attitudes toward this accomplishment.⁵⁶

8. NIETZSCHE’S LATER WORK

Although Nietzsche does not continue to harp on “dignity” as such—perhaps because he realizes that the word is so heavily freighted with what for his purposes are misleading Kantian and Christian implications—his sense of what sort of lives are best, and why they are best, remains congruent with his earlier thinking. Nietzsche’s prose grows increasingly more vitriolic, and he characterizes the worth and dignity of humans more frequently in negative terms. He shows us what humans utterly devoid of dignity (in his sense) are like and tries to disgust us with their utterly debased conception of the human good. They are lazy creatures meriting not *Achtung*, but *Verachtung*. Consider his discussion of the being he calls “the last man” in the Preface to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable [*verächtlichsten*] man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise [*verachten*] himself. Behold, I show you the *last man*.

“What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?” thus asks the last man, and he blinks.

The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea-beetle; the last man lives longest.

“We have invented happiness,” say the last men, and they blink. They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one’s neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth.

⁵⁶Nietzsche’s central objections to the utilitarian tradition as well as to (early) Schopenhauer is that they fetishize the phenomenal states of sentient creatures (particularly states of pleasure and pain) as the only thing of axiological significance; see *BGE* 225.

One still works, for work is a form of entertainment. But one is careful lest the entertainment be too harrowing. One no longer becomes poor or rich: both require too much exertion. Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both require too much exertion.

“We have invented happiness,” say the last men, and they blink. (*TSZ*, “Prologue,” 5)

What Nietzsche finds particularly baleful is that these sorts of creatures are so satisfied with their lives that they have lost all motivation to strive for anything higher. As he puts it in the *Genealogy*, using the same imagery of bugs, the “maggot ‘man’ . . . the hopelessly mediocre and unedifying [*unerquickliche*] man, has already learned to feel himself as the goal and zenith, as the meaning of history” (*GM I.11*). In contrast, Nietzsche wants to redirect attention to great human beings as models and as those from whom value radiates. Nietzsche expresses this longing in the *Genealogy*:

But grant me from time to time—if there are divine goddesses in the realm beyond good and evil—grant me the sight, but *one* glance of something perfect, wholly achieved, happy, mighty, triumphant, something still capable of arousing fear! Of a man who justifies *man*, of a complementary and redeeming lucky hit on the part of man for the sake of which one may still *believe in man!* (*GM I.12*)

But we should be hesitant to conclude from this emphasis on great individuals that *only* a few great individuals are capable of living worthwhile lives.⁵⁷ They of course matter most; redemption of the human species is up to them. But the mass of humanity has the capability for ennoblement as well. The basic idea from “The Greek State” through *Schopenhauer as Educator*—that the highest calling of most people is to be in the service of culture—is one Nietzsche never renounces. When seen in the light of Nietzsche’s philosophy as a whole, the passages (257–58) from *Beyond Good and Evil* with which we began take on a different meaning than they might if viewed in isolation. Nietzsche, as we have seen, is indeed an unrepentant elitist. He agrees, for reasons I have already discussed, with the aristocratic idea that there is a “long ladder of an order of rank” and that there are “differences in worth between man and man” (257). He goes on to write,

The essential characteristic of a good and healthy aristocracy, however, is that it experiences itself *not* as a function (whether of the monarchy or the commonwealth) but as their *meaning* and highest justification [*Sinn und höchste Rechtfertigung*]—that it therefore accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, *for its sake*, [um ihretwillen] must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments. Their fundamental faith simply has to be that society must *not* exist for the sake of society [*die Gesellschaft nicht um der Gesellschaft willen dasein dürfen*] but only as the foundation and scaffolding on which a choice type of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and to a higher state of *being*—comparable to those sun-seeking vines of Java—they are called *Sipo Matador*—that so long and so often enclasp an oak tree with their tendrils until eventually, high above it but supported by it, they can unfold their crowns in the open light and display their happiness. (*BGE* 258)

Complexities here abound, since this is a statement of the self-centered and self-infatuated attitude the great have toward themselves, viewing themselves as that

⁵⁷As Hurka would seem to suggest, “Nietzsche: Perfectionist,” 18.

for the sake of which all else is done.⁵⁸ But they are not entirely wrong: Nietzsche thinks that the best examples of humanity, those called to “higher task[s]” and to a “higher state of *being*,” are thereby capable of “justif[ying]” the human species.⁵⁹ Here his thinking in *Beyond Good and Evil* is continuous with his earlier and his later work (*TSZ*, “Prologue,” 3; *GMI*.12). And it also true that Nietzsche, in some sense, agrees with their idea that society does not exist for society’s sake. But this is not a new development either. Recall what he says in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. There he is scornful of the idea that a society should live for the “good of the majority . . . those who, taken individually, are the least valuable exemplars [*Exemplare*]” (*UM* III.6), as opposed to living for the best individuals. But, as we have seen, he nonetheless sketches a way in which this higher calling can be beneficial for everyone. It lends greatest worth to a human life to be “sacrificed” to promote the flourishing of great individuals.⁶⁰ To be “the foundation and scaffolding” on which a great individual can arise, however much it may be a burden, is in fact one’s highest calling. “Being reduced and lowered” to “slaves” or “instruments” (*BGE* 258) is thus a gift in disguise. There is no evidence in *Beyond Good and Evil* or elsewhere in this period that Nietzsche’s views on this score have changed at all from the *Untimely Meditations*.

What Nietzsche *does* give up is the confidence that people would ever be satisfied with being this. Even in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, he recognizes that people will try to evade this heroic form of life. The trouble is that most are so caught up in the whirl of the prosaic that they do not hear the call of something higher.⁶¹ “In individual moments, we all know how the most elaborate arrangements of our life are made only so as to flee from the tasks we ought to be performing” (*UM* III.5). “[T]he *Zeitgeist*,” Nietzsche says,

whispers insinuatingly: “Follow me and do not go there! For there you are only servants, assistants, instruments, outshone by higher natures, never happy in being what you really are, pulled along in bonds, laid in chains, as slaves, indeed as automata; here with me you shall, as masters, enjoy your free personality, your talents may glitter by their own light, you yourselves shall stand in the foremost rank, a tremendous following will throng around you, and the public acclamation will surely please you better than a noble assent bestowed from the cold ethereal heights of genius. (*UM* III.6)

Many, Nietzsche notes, will succumb to such individualistic enticements and thus evade their highest calling (*UM* III.6). By Book V of *The Gay Science*, he appears to think that hope is utterly in vain. No one is content anymore to be a mere part of something greater than himself. People want to pursue their own private plans of life, their own conceptions of the good, their own personal paths to happiness.

⁵⁸Julian Young (*Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Religion*, 135) stresses this dimension of the passage.

⁵⁹Conway puts this well: “Superlative human beings contribute to an enhancement of the species as a whole, for they embody, and thus reveal, heretofore unknown perfections resident within the human soul” (*Nietzsche and the Political*, 10).

⁶⁰Recall that Nietzsche says that it is not just the weak who are called upon to sacrifice themselves for a noble cause. The great are those “prepared to sacrifice human beings for one’s cause, *not excluding oneself*” (*TI*, “Skirmishes,” 38; my emphasis).

⁶¹Noting Richard Rorty’s remark that Nietzsche consigns “the vast majority of humanity to the status of dying animals,” Conant notes that “if we are relegated to such a status, it is because we relegate ourselves” (“Nietzsche’s Perfectionism,” 198).

What is “dying out,” Nietzsche writes, is the “fundamental belief [*Grundglaube*] . . . that man has value and meaning only insofar as he is *a stone in a great edifice*” (*GS* 356). Nietzsche’s pregnant architectural images reflect his conception of the worth of most people. Most are of significance in virtue of providing support for something that is worth more (“*a great edifice*”) than they are alone (and that atomic worth Nietzsche takes to be little to nil). This imagery further suggests that they are a fundamental part—if not the most beautiful, justificatory part—of the edifice they compose (*GS* 356), or of the pyramid of which they are the base (*A* 57), or of the structure of which they are the foundation (*BGE* 258). Their highest form of life consists in playing this role. Dignity is not their innate endowment. It is won through servitude, not preserved through freedom.

Whereas Nietzsche thinks in *Schopenhauer as Educator* that he can give ordinary people a satisfying *and* true vision to replace the illusions of the past as something to propel their lives meaningfully forward, he becomes increasingly doubtful that it is possible to do so. Delusion is not optimal, but it may well be beneficial:

To ordinary human beings, finally—the vast majority, who exist for service [*zum Dienen*] and the general advantage [*zum allgemeinen Nutzen*], and who *may* exist [*dasein dürfen*] only for that, religion gives an inestimable contentment with their station [*Lage*] and their nature [*Art*], manifold peace of the heart, an ennobling of obedience, one piece of joy and sorrow more to share with their fellows, and some transfiguration of the whole everydayness, the whole lowliness, the whole half-bestial poverty of their souls. Religion and religious significance spread the splendor of the sun over such ever-toiling human beings and make their own sight tolerable to them . . . teaching even the lowliest how to place themselves through piety in an illusory higher order of things and thus to maintain their contentment with the real order, in which their life is hard enough—and precisely this hardness is necessary. (*BGE* 61)

Moreover, Nietzsche chastises those who sow the seeds of rancor among these workers. “Whom do I hate most among the rabble of today?” Nietzsche asks. He answers, “The socialist rabble, the chandala apostles, who undermine the instinct, the pleasure, the worker’s sense of satisfaction with his small existence—who make him envious, who teach him revenge. The source of wrong is never unequal rights but the claim of ‘equal’ rights” (*A* 57). In a passage entitled “*The labor question*” (*Arbeiter-Frage*), Nietzsche similarly writes,

I simply cannot see what one proposes to do with the European worker now that one has made a question out of him. He is far too well off not to ask for more and more, not to ask more immodestly. In the end, he has numbers on his side. The hope is gone that a modest and self-sufficient kind of man, a Chinese⁶² type, might here develop as a class: and there would have been reason in that, it would almost have been a necessity . . . If one wants an end, one must also want the means: if one wants slaves [*Sklassen*], then one is a fool if one educates them to be masters. (*TI*, “Skirmishes,” 40)

⁶²Nietzsche’s persistent denigration of the Chinese (cf. also, *GS* 24; *GM I.12*; *BGE* 210, where he calls Kant “the great Chinaman of Königsberg”) was likely due to the influence of the ludicrous racial and phrenological theories of Count Arthur de Gobineau, the acquaintance with whose themes Nietzsche probably made during his time in Wagner’s inner circle. (That Nietzsche, later in his career, was at least minimally familiar with Gobineau is clear from his postcard to Köselitz of 10 December 1888; see *KSB*, 8:516.) Gobineau’s absurd idea in his *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaine* (1855) is that the Chinese (or “the Yellow Race”) seek to live in the easiest and most comfortable way possible, but even so are useful types for carrying out social grunt work. For further discussion of these influences, see Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology, and Metaphor*, 125–26.

Although it can seem that Nietzsche is recommending here that the workers be made docile for the benefit of the elite alone, he, on my reading, is instead recommending that (in certain cases anyway) they be kept in the dark for a goal that, even if they do not recognize it, is in *their* best interest as well. Most people, Nietzsche comes to think, simply do not know what is good for them. The best life for them is not the one *they* would choose, if left to their own devices. On this point, Nietzsche is in strong agreement with both Plato and Aristotle. In his highly paternalistic way, he takes himself to know what is best for the masses. In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, he flirts with the prospect that the great exemplar could convert people to a higher form of life, so that people willingly choose such a life and even relish it. In his later work, this optimism disappears.

So the true Nietzschean story about why one's life matters, even if correct, is going to prove utterly unsatisfying for most, yet religious illusions rendering workers content with their station (*BGE* 61) are also growing increasingly unstable in the modern era. In this predicament, people will lose all motivation to strive for anything higher. In Nietzsche's image (*BGE* "Preface"), the bow, with which we could shoot for distant goals, will become slack and the arrows will not reach their targets.⁶³ Nihilism looms as the result. And for this affective brand of nihilism, there is no clear remedy, either from the truth *or* from lies. Therein lies the rub. The prospects for making our contemporary culture a flourishing one are thus dim to none. But even if Nietzsche gives up hope that this will be a practical success in our era of apparently terminal decadence, he still maintains this cultural flourishing as an ideal, against which we compare unfavorably.

9. CONCLUSION

If we follow the line of interpretation that I have presented, we recognize that Nietzsche holds that it is actually a better world in which there are "slaves" (in a certain sense) who contribute to something great, as opposed to a world in which all are free (in a certain correlative sense). And it is not just better because we have the wonders of culture, but it is better for those slaves individually, to a certain extent regardless even of how they feel about things. Thus, it is wrong to hold that the ways of life lauded by morality are in the best interest of the weak. What is *really* in the interest of the weak is a heroic life whose strenuous call they will naturally seek to evade. Once we realize this, we see that Nietzsche's view is at least more admirable than thinking that slaves are expendable tools to be exploited, mere instruments who get nothing in return for their servitude. That is how Nietzsche has often been understood, and it is a serious misconception that I have here tried to correct.

But even so, one remains deeply unsettled with Nietzsche's ideas. This is so even once one puts aside all practical questions (which Nietzsche never seriously considers) about how all this might be implemented in a society. This is so even once one puts aside a sobering history of convenient paternalistic claims that slavery (albeit in forms much worse) is actually in the interest of the enslaved. This is so even once one puts aside the horrors of Third Reich, who, however grotesquely

⁶³For this characterization of nihilism, see Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*.

and ironically misguided they were in their misreadings of Nietzsche, had more points of affinity with him than many scholars are willing to admit in their zeal to turn Nietzsche into someone less frightening and dangerous.

Setting all of these serious practical and historical issues aside, whose importance I would not want to diminish, one is still left with qualms about the details of Nietzsche's view itself. There is little place on his view, after *Schopenhauer as Educator*, for most of us setting our own course of life in accordance with our conception of the good (our conception once we are awakened to it anyway). Indeed, though it is not ideal, we can in principle live a great Nietzschean life without realizing and taking satisfaction in the fact that we have done so. Moreover, the dignity that most of us take to serve as the basis for how we should treat others is something Nietzsche implies is a convenient fantasy of the weak. He time and again calls into question so many things we hold dear as the cornerstones of the good life and of moral solidarity. And yet, however much he seems to overstate his case, however much he repulses us with his ideas and his rhetoric, he can leave us with the uncomfortable fear that he may be on to something, that our lives, as we are living them, do not actually matter; that we are like the "last men" in our diminished aspirations; that the value we place on our private projects and our personal fulfillment is somehow misplaced; that, insofar as we have not made a significant mark on the world or have not participated in something greater than ourselves, no important trace of us lives past our death. In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche speaks of George Eliot with withering disdain (TI, "Skirmishes," 5). But, as so often with those Nietzsche attacks most viciously—Wagner, Kant, and Socrates most notably—his hostility conceals important points of affinity: Even the multitude who will "rest in unvisited tombs," to quote the eloquent words that close *Middlemarch*, can, Nietzsche thinks, have lives worthy of great respect when they aid in flourishing of those exceptional artists and statesmen whose tombs *are* visited in droves. In their toil these workers get their "consecration to culture" (UM III.6) in the monuments that outlast us all, most beautifully evident in the cathedrals that will never more be built, whose spires tried in vain to soar to heaven, but managed to reach a more fragile and earthly sort of permanence.⁶⁴

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ABBREVIATIONS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Nietzsche are cited using the following abbreviations and translations, which I have modified where I have thought appropriate.

A *The Antichrist*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1954.

BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.

⁶⁴I owe a great debt to Ken Gemes and Alexander Nehamas for their conversation on these topics. My thanks as well to Anthony Appiah, Anthony Cross, Jeremy Forster, Des Hogan, Mark Johnston, Marco Lopez, Errol Lord, David Nowakowski, Whitney Schwab, Jack Spencer, Nick Stang, Rahel Vilinger, an anonymous referee and the editorial staff for this journal, and the participants in the Spring 2011 Princeton Dissertation Seminar—either for their comments on this paper, their thoughts on the topics I discuss here, or both.

- BT* *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- D* *Daybreak*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- EH* *Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- GM* *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- GS* *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
- "Greek State" "The Greek State." Translated by Carol Diethe. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 176–186. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- HH* *Human, All Too Human*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- TI* *Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1954.
- TSZ* *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1954.
- UM* *Untimely Meditations*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- WEN* *Writings from the Early Notebooks*. Translated by Ladislaus Löb. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. [Cited by page number]

In works that comprise several individual essays, after the abbreviation is the essay number as a Roman numeral and section number as an Arabic numeral. For example, *GMI.2* is *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay I, Section 2. In works that include titled main sections, I include a keyword for that section, followed by subsection numbers, if applicable. For example, *TI*, "Socrates," 1 is the *Twilight of the Idols* section "The Problem of Socrates," subsection 1.

GERMAN EDITIONS OF NIETZSCHE

- KSA* *Kritische Studienausgabe*. Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967. [Cited by volume and page number.]
- KSB* *Kritische Sämtliche Briefe*. Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975. [Cited by volume and page number.]

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