THE CASE FOR ANTHRO-CULTURALISM: A NIETZSCHEAN REJOINDER TO MACINTYRE’S CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

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THE CASE FOR ANTHRO-CULTURALISM: A NIETZSCHEAN REJOINDEER TO MACINTYRE’S CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT

By means of an in-depth exegesis of the works of Alasdair MacIntyre and Friedrich Nietzsche, my dissertation argues that the fundamental pathology afflicting Modernity in the West is not a crisis of values—whether valuelessness or value-anarchy (i.e., an axiological crisis)—as MacIntyre claims, but meaninglessness and willlessness (i.e., a practical-existential crisis), the latter having profound cultural and political implications in Nietzsche’s view and prognosticating cultural passivity and total nihilism for the West. With his emphasis on the ‘revaluation of all values’, I argue that Nietzsche proposes a positive program designed to counteract this general decline in the cultural health of the West unleashed by the décadent and ressentimental instincts and their domination (for millennia) of the Western form of life (i.e., ‘culture-complex’) within different corruptive/degenerative paradigms. By means of a distinctive tragic and visionary realism that emphasizes the natural condition of human life (as one shaped in relation to suffering, disorder and flux and in an incessant search for meaning) and the differential ‘psycho-physiology’ (or ‘nature’) of various human types (in terms of their capacity for mythopoetic activity), Nietzsche hopes to reaffirm the dominance of the (healthy) ‘pathos of Distanz’ embodied in the Übermenschlich types of persons and to do so within an epoch-transforming project that is informed by a novel ‘philosophy of life’ and deemed attainable within a new ‘politics of culture’. Under the aegis of what he calls ‘great politics’ and conceives of as an ‘agonistic aristocracy’, Nietzsche envisions
the radical possibility for profound cultural transformation and regeneration, anticipated since the Enlightenment, to finally be effected as the ‘destiny of task’ of those higher and exceptional types of men—the Übermenschen, bringing about a new dawn in (higher) culture. Nietzsche’s emphasis on culture as the source of symbolic and practical meaning (i.e., semiotic order) for human life and his insistence on the dynamic transformation of ‘culture-complexes’ within continuous cycles of ascent and decline, a process informed by the willpower of outstanding human agents or the Übermensch (exemplifying the strongest spirits in mankind), betrays his critique of Modernity as well as his overarching life-affirming philosophy and theory of (cultural) agency—all within a distinctive form of realism and of ‘dispositional-spiritual’ (or perspectival) orientation’ we can label “anthro-culturalism”.
To the living memory of my beloved grandfather,
Babayi Jaan
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PROLOGUE

“With what, in this modern democracy, will you meet the demands of your soul?”

Saul Bellow, Ravelstein

This dissertation follows in the long-standing tradition of meta-normative critiques of Modernity. Why have so many distinguished thinkers been so uneasy with Modernity’s normative commitments and its professed value system? Is there something inherently defective about the Modern system of values that makes it susceptible to nihilism? If so, to what kind of nihilism is the Modernist program most vulnerable? And still further, does the Modern form of life suffer from a problem of values alone or is there something deeper at play problematizing the “substance” and “meaning” of life itself for the Modern man? And finally, what could all this discussion about meaning and value mean practically and normatively? how would it relate to our daily lives in the West, and more significantly for us political theorists, how could it impact and perhaps even transform our political practices? This project seeks to engage with precisely such questions by juxtaposing the thought of Alasdair MacIntyre with that of Fredrich Nietzsche, who despite their many differences both critique Modernity ideationally from a meta-philosophical and meta-normative perspective.

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1 Whenever the term Modernity is capitalized in this treatise, it is meant to refer to a distinctive cultural and philosophical program which comes to crystalize in the West as a form of life post-Enlightenment. As such, it is used in its substantive and philosophical meaning signifying a particular belief system and worldview. It is thus differentiated from the term modern, or modernity in its generic use and understood in its temporal sense as new or contemporary. For the sake of clarity, where quoted, I have capitalized the term whenever the author’s usage has implied the substantive meaning.

2 The use of the term meta throughout this work is by design. It reflects the author’s intuition that Modernity along with its outlook and commitments must be understood as a sui generis paradigm which can thus be transcended. The term meta underscores the Nietzschean notion (Kulturkritik) that it is the formative task of the intellectual to stand above and outside the dominant paradigm and investigate it with a bird’s eye view in order to critique it effectively. Nietzsche writes in Twilight of the Idols (VII-The Improvers of Mankind), “One knows my demand of philosophers that they place themselves beyond [paradigms of] good and evil—that they have the illusions of moral judgment...
This project is therefore at least methodologically an exegetical study of the works of MacIntyre and Nietzsche on the subject of Modernity’s value disposition, which both authors take to be fundamentally flawed. Substantively, this dissertation is an attempt to illustrate the nature and character of this primary discontent of Modernity and its *weltanschauung* (i.e., its defective value system) and advance one possible remedy to it. Surely, there are many different kinds of critiques directed at Modernity, many from materialistic and Marxist standpoints, which tend to focus on the economic strains of Modern life, problematizing its fetishized consumerism or its push for rationalization and routinization of life (the Frankfurt School chief among them). I approach the problem *ideationally*, meaning I believe the fundamental problems of Modernity must be sought in its system of ideas and its *weltanschauung*. Hence, the focus on Nietzsche and MacIntyre, who share this meta-philosophical approach even if they do not ultimately agree on the nature of the problematic or how to resolve it.³ Specifically, this study will build on MacIntyre’s scheme which in my mind provides the best systemic framework on which to ground our discussion and will then bring the Nietzschean corpus to bear on the MacIntyrean account, ultimately finding it unpersuasive. In doing so, the project looks to advance a novel case for what I understand to be Nietzsche’s distinctive outlook on the topic of Modernity’s discontent and how to resolve it.

Whereas MacIntyre characterizes Nietzsche’s outlook as a source or at least a manifestation of the *value* problem of Modernity as he understands it, I pace MacIntyre, take

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³ Incidentally, Leo Strauss is another who engages in a meta-normative approach in his critique and treatment of Modernity and identifies normative chaos (arbitrariness of *right* and *wrong*), moral nihilism, and disintegration of our values as the chief discontent of Modern life.
Nietzsche to be an invaluable and illuminating resource and one whose views on Modernity and nihilism have been gravely misunderstood and misrepresented by MacIntyre. In the course of this study, I will argue that far from being a voice of nihilism and radical individualization (or “subversion”) of values or an acquiescing hopeful harbinger of to-each-his-own egoism and normative anarchy, as he is cast by MacIntyre, Nietzsche is more defensibly read as a staunch enemy of nihilism, whose main, rather hopeful, project is the recovery of cultural agency for the Western civilization. As the greatest critic of Modernity, Nietzsche actively attempts to negate and subvert the Modern paradigm—that bit I concede to MacIntyre. Yet, as I will argue, he “subverts” in order to re-imagine. He destroys in order to create. He un-does in order to re-do. He is not resigned to the Modern condition, but rather actively tries to transform and transcend it through a new politics and a new philosophy grounded on a new (non-Moralistic) ethics that is informed by principles derived from life itself—one that is attuned to the value and salubrious nature of culture and cultural communities (for human life) and takes seriously the salutary role of great and exceptional persons (Übermenschen) for and in the historical becoming of each culture.

Recovering this will to agency (a distinctive form of communal agency embodied by the Übermensch) which breeds cultural vitality, I will assert, is Nietzsche’s personal will to power, his distinctive and creative project which embodies his affirmative will to life.

Accordingly, by problematizing Modernity as a distinctively Western experience, I hope that this study will also implicitly speak to the issues relating to global cultural pluralism and the inherent value of cultural difference to the human being-in-the-world, with each cultural body

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4 The idea of cultural agency and the will of a culture-complex is deeply tied to the notion of cultural growth and ascendancy which is its ultimate effect. Consistent with his use of physiological and physiognomic language and his anti-metaphysical and pragmatist framework, Nietzsche habitually refers to the concept of cultural growth and the flourishing of a “body-culture” under physiognomic labels as (cultural) vitality, health, strength or even dynamism. Such ideas are raised in direct opposition to notions of (cultural) sickness, deterioration, weakness, and exhaustion, and ultimately perishing and death, best characterized by Nietzsche’s use of the French term décadence, by which Nietzsche highlights cultural and personal decline as a result of loss of quality and vigor.
representing one possible and concrete, albeit dynamic, instantiation of the human (or even human reality), and so problematize, on a specifically Western ground,⁵ the conventional universalist, globalist, and absolutist approaches to Modernization and development theory that has been so prevalent in the liberal West over the past decades.

⁵ As this study will hopefully illuminate, I believe that each culture (in this case the West) must arrive at new understandings and outlooks, if it is to do so, internally and using its own distinctive philosophical terrain in a homeodynamic fashion. In this way, I would specifically differentiate myself from the post-colonialist approaches to affirming cultural difference.
ACT I

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE
AND HIS CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY
What is the MacIntyrean Position?

Perhaps more than any other contemporary thinker, Alasdair MacIntyre has been concerned about Modernity, making it into the central theme of his intellectual life and the common thread behind his lifelong projects. No matter what one thinks of MacIntyre’s academic journey, he remains unequivocal on one point: that ours is “a time for resisting as prudently and courageously and justly and temperately as possible the dominant social, economic, and political order of advanced modernity.”6 This sentiment along with the conviction that understands our Zeitgeist as the “time of waiting for new and unpredictable possibilities of renewal”, underpins not only the project of Alasdair MacIntyre discussed in this section but also motivates the larger undertaking attempted in this dissertation.”7

MacIntyre is both troubled by the kind of reality Modernity represents as well as anxious about the ethics underwriting it. His critical position vis-à-vis the Modern paradigm and his radical search for a substitute program explains both his attraction to Marxism in his youth as well as his captivation by one version of Aristotelianism or another in his mature thought—all raised up as possible alternatives to the Modern Weltanschauung.8 His relationship to Modernity also helps account for his evolving position on the question of religion and faith in modern life. A proud young atheist (fideist) turned devout Catholic, his conversion (motivated in part by his philosophical affirmations) gives a powerful indication of the direction of his intellectual journey from an avid proponent of (philosophical) secularism in his early years to an enthusiastic defender

6 After Virtue, Prologue to the Third Edition, p. xvi
7 Ibid.
8 For a more elaborate discussion of the MacIntyrean project see John Horton and Susan Mendus’ article, “Alasdair MacIntyre: After Virtue and After” in After MacIntyre, University of Notre Dame Press (1994)
of theism. In time, this *theism* becomes a fundamental component in MacIntyre’s analysis of Modernity; so much so in fact, that one scholar observes that MacIntyre’s mature philosophical position cannot be read but against its “Augustinian Thomist” backdrop. Others have celebrated his resuscitation of the Catholic intellectual tradition in his response to the challenges of Modernity.

Moreover, MacIntyre’s discontent with Modernity is informed by a deep antipathy toward Enlightenment and *liberal* thought echoed throughout the MacIntyrean project, and this is a sentiment wholeheartedly shared by the anti-Enlightenment and anti-liberal German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche. This already makes Nietzsche an interesting counterpoint to MacIntyre; that MacIntyre himself singles Nietzsche out and contests what he believes to be the Nietzschean solution to their common problematic (i.e. Modernity) only buoys Nietzsche’s relevance and significance for any thorough discussion of the MacIntyrean project. While most of the literature attempts to evaluate MacIntyre’s position vis-à-vis contemporary liberal thought, my assessment

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9 For more on this topic contrast MacIntyre’s 2010 lecture, “On Being a Theistic Philosopher in a Secularized Culture” to his writings of the 60s and 70s such as *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (with Paul Ricoeur, 1969) and *Secularization and Moral Change* (1967). In an essay in 1963, “God and the Theologians”, MacIntyre differentiates between the limited, passive (English) atheism of the likes of Hume and Russel and the activist, transformative atheism of Marx and Feuerbach, mocking the hypocrisy that “lies in the combination of atheism in the practice of the life of the vast majority, with the profession of either superstition or theism by that same majority.” (p.10) MacIntyre attributes his early Fideist phase (1950s) with the influence of Karl Barth’s writings on him (cf. MacIntyre’s “The Logical Status of Religious Beliefs” in his edited vol. *Metaphysical Beliefs*, 1957), a position which he later repudiates (along with Christianity as a whole) to become a full-on atheist in his middle period (60s and 70s) in part due to his reading of Hans Urs von Balthasar and the latter’s critique of Barth (1951), which allows MacIntyre to achieve a better understanding of Wittgenstein.

10 David Solomon, *Lecture 9: After Virtue*

11 Although MacIntyre’s thought has been enthusiastically welcomed in Catholic circles, MacIntyre himself has continuously reiterated his position as a secular philosopher whose philosophy has only reaffirmed his faith and not the other way around. I believe he is justified to make that claim. In response to an interview question on whether his intellectual journey and later philosophy betrays “a reassertion of Christianity”, MacIntyre responded, “It is false, both biographically and with respect to the structure of my beliefs. What I now believe philosophically I came to believe very largely before I reacknowledged the truth of Catholic Christianity. And I was only able to respond to the teachings of the Church because I had already learned from Aristotelianism both the nature of the mistakes involved in my earlier rejection of Christianity, and how to understand aright the relation of philosophical argument to theological inquiry. My philosophy, like that of many other Aristotelians, is theistic; but it is as secular in its content as any other.” (*The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight, 1998, p.265-266)
of MacIntyre is focused predominantly on two less-covered aspects of MacIntyreen thought: one, I examine the merits and internal coherence of the MacIntyreen position not in relation to liberalism but as a stand-alone project, and two, I will critically assess its relationship with and reading of Nietzsche (specially in terms of the negative radical skepticism which MacIntyre attributes to Nietzsche), a discussion that informs the proceeding sections. In the process, it will become clear that what ultimately underlies the critical projects of both men is their profound disillusionment with the state of meaning in Modernity, which they both express as trepidations over the notion of ‘nihilism’ and as ‘crisis’, although only one thinker (Nietzsche) is actually aware of this primary driver of their agitations and seeks to build his philosophical program around it.

Background

From a Hegelian perspective, MacIntyre’s intellectual life can be characterized in three phases: the first stage is marked by early MacIntyre’s (1951-1958) embrace of both Marxism and Christianity as possible alternatives to Modernity (thesis), the second stage corresponds to his middle period (1958-1977) of philosophical wandering and self-doubt underscroing his increasing skepticism and disillusionment with both philosophies and ending with his discovery of Aristotle (anti-thesis), the third and final stage is that of the After Virtue (1981), a project that has dominated the rest of his intellectual career and where by means of a detour to Thomas Aquinas and his own Neo-Thomism MacIntyre manages to mostly harmonize and to come to new terms with both
Christian and Marxist thought as well as offer a philosophical alternative to (the liberal version of) Modernity (synthesis).\(^\text{12}\)

Beginning with his seminal work *After Virtue* (*AV*), the thrust of MacIntyre’s critique of Modernity is directed at what MacIntyre sees as the dominant moral philosophy and normative paradigm at the heart of the Modern system going back to the Enlightenment. As such, he labels the Modernist normative order the “Enlightenment project” and “liberalist individualism” in *AV*, finally settling on “Encyclopedia” or simply “Morality” in later writings.\(^\text{13}\) Perhaps the early MacIntyre’s most profound observation that sets him on this later course to expose the shortcomings of the Modern ethical order is his realization that *ethics* cannot be delinked/detached from its development in a particular social and historical milieu, as well as from the *instrumental* role an ethical system plays in sustaining human community and sociability in general—allowing us to live together. This social, historical, and cultural setting—contingent and contextual, both undergirds an ethic and provides “space” for its practice. Following in the tracks of R.G. Collingwood, MacIntyre understood early that norms and values cannot be separated and abstracted from their cultural context and history in concrete *practice* in communities (an observation that to MacIntyre applies not just to normative inquiry but, more generally, to philosophical inquiry as well). This position is later [in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (WJWR)*] enhanced and wedded to MacIntyre’s idea of ‘traditions of thought’ and his observation that intellectual debates about ethics (and progress on these normative questions) should be and indeed are conceptualized along different schools/traditions of rational normative inquiry, whose common teloi is *understanding*—given to “that attainment of truth which constitutes the telos of

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\(^{12}\) See the preface to MacIntyre’s *Marxism and Christianity* (1968), p. vii-viii. See also his response to an interview in *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight, 1998, p. 268-269

\(^{13}\) MacIntyre introduces the term “encyclopaedia” in *Three Rival Versions of Normative Inquiry* (1990) and resorts to calling the entire scheme capital *M* “Morality” in his latest work *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (2016).
[all] rational inquiry”, a finality which however elusive and unreachable in real life should nonetheless at least in theory remain the goal of all intellectual enterprise, or else inquiry itself would be meaningless.¹⁴

Indeed, having stressed the historicity and evolving nature of ethics and its conceptualization in various ‘traditions of rationality’, MacIntyre is able to successfully historicize liberalism, revealing it to be an ideology in need of a narrative which in MacIntyre’s estimation it has so desperately lacked since the Enlightenment. For MacIntyre, the post-Enlightenment rise of the Encyclopedist normative category includes various schools of moral philosophy such as Contractarian, Kantian, Natural Rights, and Utilitarian—all of which MacIntyre groups together as having been oblivious to history and context. More profoundly, these schools all succumb to the universalistic fallacy in their scope, to be expected from the MacIntyrean point of view given their ahistorical and abstract nature. Put simply, MacIntyre remains highly skeptical that the Encyclopedist normative position could ever achieve the internal consistency and the claim to (internal) practical rationality required to sustain the Modern world order or any other paradigm for that matter, precisely because being meta-historical, these Modern moral philosophies completely disregard the foundation of rationality itself in the (pre-rational) mythical, and the (meta-rational) historical. He finds that the Modern constellation of values being (exclusively) rules-based, deontological, and abstract does not match well with the concrete demands of life, causing a moral confusion in Modern culture (that reflects the fragmentation of moral life)—opening the door to ethical nihilism.¹⁵

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¹⁵ Specifically, one version of ethical nihilism called ‘expressivism’ is what MacIntyre finds most threatening to Modern Western societies. For more on MacIntyre’s explicit views on expressivism see his final work, Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity published by Cambridge University Press (2016).
In short, the picture one is left with after reading *After Virtue* is that the Modern form of life suffers from a grave moral crisis—a *crisis of values*, and that Modern moral theories in particular and Modern moral philosophy in general remain divided and *inadequate* to provide an authoritative solution to the resulting problems—a “profoundly pessimistic” proposition.\(^\text{16}\) MacIntyre’s future works are meant to offer that recourse through a *positive* program rooted in neo-Thomism. In contrast with Modernity’s abstract deontological ethics and its view of man as a free and independent agent living a detached/delinked solipsistic life, MacIntyre emphasizes teleology, the social embeddedness of teloi, and their independence from the individual will: norms are “given” in a social context, made significant within a narrative, and made practicable through the virtues. They are determined, practiced, and judged through practical reason (cf. *phronesis*).

In this account, the roots of the Modern conundrum go back to the West’s entry into a post-theological world, as the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment come to reject a metaphysical view of the cosmos in favor of a naturalistic and materialistic view grounded on a new ‘earthly’ epistemology and ontology. The ‘death of God’ (for all practical purposes), as Nietzsche famously called it, would clearly undermine the picture of a divinely-ordained *moral* law that God was taken to have sanctioned and made obligatory by *His power*. Thus, the Enlightenment thinkers, in the view of MacIntyre and correctly so, found themselves with no choice but to confront this *moral* void, galvanizing the Enlightenment project—a project of “discovering new rational secular foundations for morality” best exemplified by Kant.\(^\text{17}\)

On this path, various Enlightenment thinkers and liberals whom MacIntyre later lumps together under the term Encyclopedist believe themselves to have a monopoly on Truth and on


\(^{17}\) AV, p.117
‘practical reason’. When they use their endeared term *rationality*, “their” version is meant. Using this very concept of “rationality”, Immanuel Kant sees it as inevitable that all rational agents (exercising their reason correctly) would arrive at the very same set of “categorical imperatives” and rules of conduct— “a morality *exclusively* of rules”. The same can also be said of “Contemporary analytic philosophers, who often take themselves to be representing the timeless form of practical reasoning as such, when they are in fact representing the form of practical reasoning specific to their own liberal individualist culture”.\(^{18}\) Despite their different names, what unites these different groups with their different normative theories for MacIntyre is their intractable belief in the absolutism and universalism of their doctrine.

In this exercise, what is lost for MacIntyre in Modernity and indeed animates modern moral disagreements is the “context in which moral judgments were understood as governed by impersonal standards justified by a shared conception of the human good” as well as the *historicity* of these conceptions.\(^ {19}\) In coming to terms with this, MacIntyre, as professor Terry Pinkard observes, comes to develop a “historicized form of moral realism”, and when all is said and done this historicization of Morality might be MacIntyre’s most enduring legacy.\(^ {20}\) For now, the paramount task for any contemporary moral philosopher, so MacIntyre thinks, is to reunify the *fractured* picture of Modern moral life by recovering and reintroducing that ‘shared conception of the human good’, an inquiry that is at one and the same time analytic and historical. But what would such an “analytico-historic” inquest look like?

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\(^{19}\) *AV*, Prologue to the Third Edition, p. ix

12
MacIntyre’s Analysis of the Modern Condition

The MacIntyrean problem succinctly stated by MacIntyre himself is, “We still, in spite of the efforts of three centuries of moral philosophy and one of sociology, lack any coherent rationally defensible statement of a liberal individualist point of view”. And, we are unlikely to get one. Indeed, part of the problem is that the liberal position invites and revels in precisely such ethical disagreements. It is also clear from the discussion above that any philosopher who wants to attempt at remedying our Modern moral conundrum must accomplish two primary things: first, he/she must reaffirm the concept of a ‘shared human good’; and second, he/she must also engage in the more preliminary task of recovering ‘context’—i.e. to reiterate the sociality and historicity at the heart of human ethics. MacIntyre believes both of these tasks can only be performed if scholars “understand the dominant moral culture of advanced modernity adequately from a standpoint external to that culture.” And if they do so, MacIntyre argues, they will understand that all the different and rival conceptions in human sciences (Geisteswissenschaft) “are intimately bound up with the antagonistic confrontation of the [few] alternative ways of viewing the human world”. Thus, before we can proceed any further, we must outline some fundamental paradigms that inform human worldviews and orient human action (at least in the West), within and through which the (normative) rivalry occurs.

Accordingly, as he develops and finetunes his meta-normative analysis, MacIntyre (1990) speaks of “three very different and mutually antagonistic conceptions of moral inquiry”

21 AV, p.259
22 And for that matter the sociality and historicity at the heart of all human praxis among which lies ethics (Gr. Sittlichkeit).
23 AV, Prologue to the Third Edition, p. ix
24 AV, p. 259
(extending beyond moral philosophy into “historical, literary, anthropological, and sociological questions”) which he traces to three “seminal” texts of 19th century Europe. These three rival conceptions he calls 1) “Encyclopedic” after the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* by which MacIntyre refers to the paradigm he had earlier called the “Enlightenment Project”, 2) “Genealogic” after Nietzsche’s *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, and 3) “Traditional/Thomistic” after *Aeterni Patris*, Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical (letter) of 1879 calling for the revival of Thomistic philosophy. In his own formulation, MacIntyre’s project essentially is to recognize “two radically different alternative and rival conceptual schemes” comprising the Modern Weltanschauung, and “to produce a characterization of this antagonism from some external, third vantage point” (i.e. Tradition/Thomism) which he holds to be superior to the first two in addressing the inadequacies and discontents of Modernity. To this end, the Thomistic/Traditional category is presented “as a via media between the bogus universalism of the Encyclopedist and the radical skepticism of the Genealogist.”

It is clear that for MacIntyre the Encyclopedic paradigm, the liberal ‘tradition’, and the ‘Enlightenment Project’ all stand for the dominant ‘mode of thought’ as well as the (enframing) ‘form of life’ of Modernity, and that to MacIntyre there is something highly problematic with this picture. We therefore must unpack what is so troubling in them for MacIntyre. To begin with, the Enlightenment was confronted with the ardent task of having to rationally justify morality in a post-theological world whose epistemology was highly skeptical and rejecting of all pretenses to the metaphysics which had under Christianity underwritten Western morality. And yet,

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26 MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, p.2-3
27 In MacIntyre’s own words, “Aeterni Patris summoned its reader to a renewal of an understanding of intellectual inquiry as the continuation of a specific type of tradition that which achieved definitive expression in the writings of Aquinas”. (*Three Rival Versions*, p. 25)
28 MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, p. 43
29 Horton and Mendus, p.4
notwithstanding the highly deductive/ foundationalist, ahistorical methodology of the Enlightenment thinkers, due to the complete lack of appreciation for what underwrites the practice of norms (i.e. context), their project was always destined to fail in MacIntyre’s view:

The Enlightenment “project of constructing valid arguments [moves] from premises concerning human nature as [Enlightenment writers] understand it to be to conclusions about the authority of moral rules and precepts. I want to argue that any project of this form was bound to fail, because of an ineradicable discrepancy between their shared conception of moral rules and precepts on the one hand and what was shared—despite much larger divergences— in their conception of human nature on the other. Both conceptions have a history and their relationship can only be made intelligible in the light of that history.”

The Enlightenment theorists’ greatest shortcoming was their erroneous understanding of the relationship between the human and the moral. As MacIntyre argues, in their attempt at justifying the authority of moral principles and by extension of morality itself, the philosophes suffered from two inter-dependent problems: one involving their view of human nature, the other concerning the distinctive conception of practical reason—on which their new (secular) morality was to function and their whole justification be made defensible/valid.

First, the problem of the Enlightenment was its ‘shared’ collective rejection of the teleological view of human nature. In their non-teleological (or perhaps anti-teleological) philosophical anthropology, the Enlightenment writers broke the age-old “potentiality-actuality” nexus which bounded and made intelligible all human practice and on which all ethics was grounded. Without telos, moral precepts would become irrelevant. Morality was meant to “improve” man allowing it to ‘reach’ its ‘true end’ in actuality; but with no telos in mind, it becomes utterly meaningless and indeed irrational to attempt any improvement or to even speak of it sensibly. As MacIntyre points out, the teleological scheme provides a “fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature,” a

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30 AV, p.52
structure within which “ethics” comes to be defined as “the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter.” The following passage is particularly illuminating in this regard:

The moral scheme which forms the historical background to [Enlightenment] thought had…a structure which required three elements: untutored human nature, man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos and the moral precepts which enable him to pass from one state to the other. But the joint effect of the secular rejection of both Protestant and Catholic theology and the scientific and philosophical rejection of Aristotelianism was to eliminate any notion of man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-telos. Since the whole point of ethics—both as a theoretical and a practical discipline—is to enable man to pass from his present state to his true end, the elimination of any notion of essential human nature and with it the abandonment of any notion of a telos leaves behind a moral scheme composed of two remaining elements whose relationship becomes quite unclear.

In other words, classic essentialism, which the Modern mindset (in its celebration of the natural and the scientific) so vehemently opposed, turns out to have had at least one distinct benefit—it ordered life for man. Christianity interpreted the classic telos as eschaton, and as Löwith remarks, this “eschatological compass [continued to] give orientation in time by pointing to the Kingdom of God as the ultimate end and purpose.” Equally, essence is a ‘life-ordering’, and hence, a ‘life-affirming’ principle. And so, irrespective of their profound disagreements in the area of philosophical anthropology, Enlightenment writers from Hume and Kant to Diderot, Smith, and Kierkegaard “all reject any teleological view of human nature, any view of man as having an essence which defines his true end”, and in that they were digging their own philosophical grave.

Moreover, as mentioned above, MacIntyre’s underlying critique of Modernity is also partly directed at its distinctive view of reason (specifically as practical reason) going back to the Enlightenment thinkers and before them Pascal and Descartes, whom he regards as a primary cause.

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31 AV, p. 52  
32 AV, p. 54-55  
33 Karl Löwith, Meaning and History, p. 18  
34 AV, p. 54
of the ‘value-confusion’ of Modernity. As such, the second reason why MacIntyre finds the Enlightenment project of vindicating Morality futile is the fundamental and epistemological transformation of the nature of (practical) *reason* itself, and one which has substantial ontological repercussions. In this view, the nature and understanding of *reason* and its role in the teleological order changed drastically from the time of ancient Greece to the Enlightenment. For Aristotle, practical reason was viewed first and foremost as having a *substantive* quality. In the teleological architecture, this meant that ‘substantive reason’ had a primary relationship with the *telos*; it was an *end-setter*, a *meaning-creator*—*significative reason*. That is, in addition to instructing one on how to realize his ‘true end’, it had a formative say in determining what constituted those ‘true ends’—a *noetic* or *intellectual* form of rationality. \[35\] With the advent of Christianity as a monotheistic religion, (reaching) the kingdom of God became the only justified and authoritative ‘end’—thus divinizing and theologizing the notion of *telos* as the *sole* ‘True end’ and monopolizing meaning around His *eschatological* judgement. As such, the domain of practical reason and thereby its qualifying properties were significantly curtailed. The demands made on practical reason no longer required pondering and conceiving the ‘ends’ or the grand meaning of life (both of which were contained in the Divine and accessible through only Him and His revelations), but specifically to comprehend and to follow the divine commandments—accepting

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\[35\] In fact, those who deliberated these normative/teleological issues and decided on the questions of *truth* and *ends* Aristotle honored as *Spoudaios*. Before Aristotle, Plato also emphasized this *substantive/noetic* nature of reason although specifically and problematically from the Aristotelian point of view, Plato did so from the vantage point of *speculative* (substantive) reason—i.e. *Theoria*, rather than anchoring ‘substantive reasoning’ in *praxis* as Aristotle preferred—i.e. *practical* (substantive) reason. Max Weber refers to the reasoning involved in meaning-creation as “Intellectual Rationality”. But problematically, Weber’s conception of ‘intellectual rationality’ follows along the Platonic line as *theoria* which he also interprets as the realm of science and mathematics. In my view, Canadian Professor Barry F. Cooper has spoken in a much more lucid fashion of ‘noetic rationality’ which he distinguishes from calculative-technical reasoning: “Technical-pragmatic reason guides rational action in the sciences of the external world of nature, in technological developments, and, in general, in the efficient and calculative coordination of means and ends. Noetic reason guides rational action in the sciences of human, society, and history, and in the formation or development of the psyche and of social order.” See his *Action into Nature: An Essay on the Meaning of Technology* (1991), p. 68-69.
His words as the Moral utterance. And although the Thomistic MacIntyre seems specially dismissive of this fact or not fully grasping its implications, for Aquinas, practical reason was already solely a tool for comprehension of divine directives and for deciphering “what the law, ordained by God and comprehended by reason, enjoins.”

Reason then had to be hermeneutical and discursive (specifically in the domain of the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church). Reason had also to be efficient, bringing about the desired pre-conceived union with the divine as the Good (cf. telos). As such, even in Catholic thought (which in contrast with Protestant thought maintained its adherence to teleology), practical reason had already (and pre-Enlightenment) undergone significant alterations, becoming more procedural, instrumental, and efficient to be utilized primarily as a hermeneutical instrument in deducing the moral precepts of God.

All this anticipates the subjectivization and internalization of ‘practical reason’ in the self and the latter’s resurrection as the ‘autonomous agent’, a proposition that gets its full articulation first in Oakhamism and later in what MacIntyre calls ‘Protestant-cum-Jansenist’ thought—which MacIntyre holds (correctly) to be the most consequential and problematic change in the conception of practical reason. And it is not by chance that this “Protestant-cum-Jansenist conception of reason is in important respects at one with the conception of reason at home in the most innovative seventeenth-century philosophy and science.”

As such, practical reason completes its

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36 AV, p.53
37 In a similar vein, it has been argued by some, see for example Daniel DiLeo, “Thomas Aquinas and the Overlapping Consensus”, Commonwealth: A Journal of Political Science, 13 (1), (2007), that for Aquinas, within the hierarchy of the Church, “the creation of an overlapping consensus is a positive good in itself” and that this in fact is consistent with essential tenets of political liberalism and political pluralism as depicted by the likes of John Rawls and William Galston, although the Thomistic version of deliberation and consensus-building (over divine doctrine) is certainly and specially not democratic. DiLeo argues “that Aquinas’ understanding of virtue as a multi-tiered category allows his commitment to a single, comprehensive doctrine of the good to allow space for a considerable range of heterodox views as long as he does not see those views as a direct threat to the souls of the faithful. Aquinas may differ with liberal democracy on the question of widespread political participation and other matters, but his views on pluralism are remarkable for their similarity to those of Rawls himself.”
38 AV, p.54. Note for instance that even Pascal’s Wager for proof of God was itself an example of prudential reasoning.
metamorphosis from being the *substantive* component of human life to an instrument in service of individual *autonomy*. With respect to the original question of moral authority, this signifies that such authority can now only be generated from the self, from the dependent-subject-turned-independent-agent becoming a law unto itself independent of all context and history (a process which in itself would exhaust teleology). And yet, in practice, the pragmatic consideration of ‘social order’ means that practical reason understood *autonomously* must also contrive *uniformity*, thus doubling as ‘deontological reason’ as to hold all so-called ‘agents’ accountable to generalizable, universalizable, and categorical standards. After all, since they are generated solipsistically, *ends* must be *unanimous* and ‘agreeable to all’ or else they will be falsified. No difference or deviation from the universal norm shall be tolerated in the ‘kingdom of ends’.\(^{39}\) Moral reason has to be exclusively *formalistic* as to breed ‘certainty’ and ‘conformity’ and dispel ‘doubt’ and ‘divergence’. And because appealing to agents’ sense of (rational) duty (i.e. *déon*) to one another (and to their own subjective reason) will likely not suffice to keep agents in check, autonomous practical reason must also turn *legalistic*. Such a conception unites a diverse breed of Modern thinkers with disparate philosophies from Hobbes to Locke, and from Hume to Kant. In fact, after Kant, the lines between ‘autonomous rationality’ and ‘rational autonomy’ are so blurred that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between *reason* and *will*.\(^{40}\) Practical reason (thus understood), *will*, and human nature all collapse into one another in such a formulation. It is from this vacuous totality that we are to both derive our moral commitments and to proffer a secular rationale for ‘Morality-as-such’ in Modernity—a bleak venture.

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39 It should not surprise that Kantian ethics with its highly formalistic conception of practical reason produces the most paradigmatic example of ethical formalism to date.

40 This had already taken place with Hume for whom autonomous reason had already collapsed into *autonomy* and practical rationality was already supplanted by the *will*—understood as the individual’s passions and sentiments.
Moreover, both these conceptual tacks (‘non-teleological human nature’ and ‘practical reason as autonomous will’) were conjoined in the philosophy of Protestantism by means of a new (theological) ontology ushered by the rise of nominalism and its professed ‘theological voluntarism’. Despite its modified and more limited conception of practical reason compared to the classical view, Medieval Christian philosophy, mostly Catholic, had managed to create a “theistic version of classical morality” and keep the classical constellation of values ‘largely’ intact.\textsuperscript{41} As MacIntyre remarks, what of classicism survived the coming of Christianity in the Western world and its ordering of values was its teleological worldview (albeit in a theological form and as eschatology). Through teleology, morality was more or less harmoniously both a product of divine revelation and of reason.

Not only was the nexus between teleology and practical reason of the ancient world retained in the Medieval period as one of teleology/eschatology and divine reason, but it was now mediated by a more procedural/discursive practical reason.\textsuperscript{42} The main formula of, “untutored human nature” as a potentiality to be instructed by ethics and have its powers unleashed (in actuality) by the application of one’s practical reason resulting in the ultimately complete or perfect human-being, was largely preserved—except now the idea of telos revolved around the Transcendent and his “divinely ordained law” while perfection was attained as salvation outside this (temporal) world and in the afterlife. In this way, teleology persisted and with it “each of the three elements of the [teleological] scheme—the conception of untutored human nature, the conception of the precepts of rational ethics and the conception of human-nature-as-it-could-be-

\textsuperscript{41} AV, p.53
\textsuperscript{42} One can exercise prudence on the behalf and for the interest of a community (Classic), or religion (Catholic), or oneself (Enlightenment). What Kant calls prudential practical reasoning has already within itself a subject-centered understanding of reason. It is thus contained to the individual and autonomous from all non-solipsistic consideration). So that for Kant the greatest challenge is to manage and control that autonomous rationality of the individual subject from acting prudentially in its own interests, and hence to deontologize it.
This was no longer to be the case with the advent of Protestantism and Jansenist Catholicism and their new conception of reason, a fact which is partly to be traced to their origins in (Oakhamist) nominalism and its strict literalism and voluntarism, but also to be found in a separate strand of thought influencing medieval Christianity—that of Stoic philosophy. And in order to understand the ‘original sins’ of the Enlightenment and the main reasons for its failure, it is with Protestantism and Stoicism that we need to come to grasp.

Both the creation of the ‘autonomous self’ and the renunciation of teleology that found ultimate expression in the Enlightenment were first and foremost driven by a theological shift preceding the Enlightenment. In the Catholic ‘realist’ tradition, God was understood as Divine wisdom, omniscient above all else. He was cosmic order, an order which we humans would attempt to make sense of via our own practical reason (even if a limited deficient human form of the divine reason). God had to be universal (essence). He was Reason itself. Protestantism with its focus on divine Will and individuation changes all that. Now, God is viewed as the ultimate will and emphasis is placed on his omnipotence. He is individual existence. That is, God is not an (abstract) metaphysical entity; He really exists in the world. For man, Protestantism explained life in terms of the absolute freedom of an absolutely omnipotent being who could be both tyrannical and merciful for no reason at all, at least for no reasons fathomable to us. He is not to be sought in the mind for He is not of the mind. The world is no longer an ‘ordered whole’ whose order we have to perceive and try to emulate; it is a ‘disordered chaos’ where our only hope rests in the grace of God. For the first time, reason had lost its enshrined place and even risked becoming irrelevant in the West. Man's highest quality was no longer prudence and practical reason (interpreting divine

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43 AV, p.53
44 AV, p.53. See as well Ch. 13
reason) but ‘agency’ (as agent of God) which stemmed ironically from absolute submission and faith. So, at once, with Protestantism the West completes its millennial transition from the ancient/classical to the Modern, from metaphysical realism to (meta-)physical nominalism, from reason to voluntarism, and from substantive to autonomous rationality.\(^{45}\)

If the ‘cosmic order’ in the (metaphysically) realist view was understood as a constraining fixity, then it follows that under nominalist voluntarism, the will shall be ‘freed’ from this constraint (and any remaining association with substantive reason). No wonder freedom emerges as the obsession of the Modern era. What is more, freedom can no longer be understood in its Aristotelian fashion as free-minded and rather critical inquiry directed at discovering the tenets of this perennial order (through a reflective substantive reason), a fixed cosmic order on which (practical) life must be ordered. In its new form, freedom “entails breaking loose from any external authorities in order to be governed solely by one’s own reasoning procedures”, as Charles Taylor so aptly puts it.\(^{46}\) After all, if God could be freed and disencumbered from this cosmic fixity—why not man? This transition is the source of the idea of the autonomous self for which both MacIntyre and before him Nietzsche show such profound contempt: the shift from obligation to sources of authority outside the self and in accordance with the “cosmic order without” to the internalization of that authority in the self as a “sovereign reasoning being” or an independent agent.\(^{47}\)

\(^{45}\) As noted, it is this autonomous view of reason that is later to be interpreted formally and be made formalized under Kant. For an independent account of this theological transformation and its consequences for the genesis of Modernity outside of AV see Michael A. Gillespie’s Theological Origins of Modernity, (2008) and his Nihilism before Nietzsche (1995) both by University of Chicago Press. Incidentally, Gillespie argues that this theological shift which is inspired by Nominalism and its new understanding of both God and Metaphysics anticipates the rise of Nihilism in the West (which MacIntyre recognizes in Modern emotivism and expressivism and traces to Nietzsche).

\(^{46}\) For More on this topic also see Karl Löwith, Meaning in History: Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History, University of Chicago Press (1949).

\(^{47}\) Charles Taylor, “Justice After Virtue”, After MacIntyre, p. 19
What is more, Stoicism anticipates Protestant nominalism, and its inherent individualism and the idea of freedom precede William of Oakham. For the pantheistic Stoic, all is turned inside the man as the best reflection of the Natural universal monistic order; the moral is internalized unto the will identified not as virtues but as (one) monistic Virtue (to be authoritative over all as a common egalitarian standard), with character and reason seen as external to the will. With the emphasis on act of will as more important than possession of virtue or vice, “the true arena of morality [becomes] that of the will and of the will alone.”\textsuperscript{48} Per the MacIntyrean account, in Augustine, the Neoplatonist (reason) and the Stoic (will/Virtue) are synthesized. And since Aquinas, the Roman Catholic Church represents the synthesis of the \textit{universal} (Augustine) and the \textit{particular} (Aristotle) best articulated in Thomistic philosophy. It was Augustine who, in line with Stoicism, first saw “the evil of human nature in the consent which the will gives to evil, a consent prior to” any particular action and (practical) reasoning, where “to consent to evil” is also precisely “to will to offend against the law”—whether divine or human.\textsuperscript{49} This is because for Augustine, who was committed to the Platonic doctrine of free will, the \textit{freedom} of the will necessitated the \textit{existence} of evil (not just as absence of good). For Augustine, the freedom to choose wrongly demands that there be positive evil associated with the \textit{will}, or else freedom would be meaningless and unintelligible. Overall in the archaic and even the Aristotelian accounts, which is also emphasized later by Machiavelli in the Renaissance, what needs to be tamed or otherwise managed as best as possible is the external world, impetuous Nature and Fortuna, which could frustrate the achievement of our \textit{eudaimonia} and impede us from fulfilling our purpose in the teleo-cultural architecture (or in the political sphere for that matter); in the Socratic, Stoic, and Augustinian and overall the Christian account, what needs to be tamed is internal to us—it is our \textit{will} that we need

\textsuperscript{48} AV, p. 168
\textsuperscript{49} AV, p. 175
to master (i.e. the problem is not Nature but ourselves). In the Christian rendition, we are our own greatest enemies, so that literally we need to be saved from ourselves.

Furthermore, one of the first implications of the new ‘subject-centered’ ‘epistemological’ view of reason (i.e. ‘rational autonomy’) posited by the likes of Pascal and Calvin is that teleological reasoning is discredited. Reason, understood scientifically, could provide “no genuine comprehension of man’s true end” (not even a hermeneutic understanding of ends); taken religiously, its power is “destroyed by the fall of man”—or “on Calvin's view, reason might have played the part that Aristotle assigned to it, but now reason is powerless to correct our passions.”

In this negative view of reason postulated by both the Scientific Revolution as well as Protestantism, “reason does not comprehend essences or transitions from potentiality to act; these concepts belong to the despised conceptual scheme of scholasticism”. And we should add that nominalism in its rejection of the universals could not help but to reject essences. Reason, then, is strictly limited to the world of ‘objective’ facts and mathematical relations. Only our passions, and the desires of our individual will, dictate our ends. Teleology is expunged and reason is now thoroughly solipsized, instrumentalized and secondary to achieving our individual ends. A means-end tool, reason can answer only the how (which informs the method) but never the why (which animates beliefs).

It should hopefully be evident by now that the rise of what I call ‘autonomous rationality’ corresponds with two principal philosophical developments in Christian doctrine, the rise of

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50 In the Stoic tradition, our will, if Virtuous, should be in harmony with Nature. If it is not, it is down to us to bring it back to natural equilibrium.
51 A.V, p. 53-54
52 Ibid., p. 54
53 The process of instrumentalization of reason is finally completed when reason turns solipsistic and autonomous. At this final stage, reason is autonomized and thus supplanted by the will. Reason is limited and restricted to instrumental calculation of the individual. It is thus reduced to mathematics and formulas (ratio) losing its adjudicative practical and noetic quality. It is a practical tool, a means. Will on the other hand is exalted and ‘freed’.
(theological) ‘voluntarism’ which emphasized (divine) will over (divine) reason and ‘nominalism’, which supplanted the universal with the individual. And that the internalization of practical reason (i.e. as autonomous/deontological reason) precedes and anticipates the interiorization of moral life in high Modernity.\textsuperscript{54} Moreover, the Modern idea of freedom itself—at the heart of liberal thought—betrays its origins as a theological concept rooted in a Christian notion of theological voluntarism where Freedom of God gets to be understood as ‘potentia Dei absoluta’, a truly Transcendent notion independent of both context (praxis) and reason (theoria).

All this of course has a further epistemological and practical consequence, which is to abstractify and decontextualize all inquiry into and understanding of the normative/ethical, preparing ground for the likes of Kant to later universalize and absolutify the ethical, disembedded from its place in practice, context, and history—in other words, disencumbered from its sociality. It follows that in this process, the birth of the notion of a ‘disengaged rationality’ is a natural consequence to the development of the rational autonomy of the individual, which takes us back to where we started—

The Enlightenment.

Given their philosophical skepticism and epistemological naturalism, the Enlightenment writers found themselves in a very precarious position at the beginning of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. On the one hand, being secular and anti-religious, they were prepared for the first time to challenge Christianity and even question the very existence of God. On the other, nominalism’s perception of the world as a unity and a totality, made explicable (and ordered) only through God meant that without the omnipotent absolutist Sovereign at the helm, the entire moral and metaphysical scheme would collapse. In their justification of secular Morality, the philosophes also had to confront a very real and practical problem that had been unleashed by Protestantism—that of ‘autonomous

\textsuperscript{54} Cf. AV, p. 168
reason’, which in theory gave the individual license to act however he willed. Thus, practically-speaking and ironically, social order and considerations of social harmony meant that the individual agency had to be reined in somehow and perhaps by a new ‘sovereign’.

The Enlightenment thinkers’ solution was to philosophize a return to the *universality* and teleological absolutism that characterized much of Christian thought since Paul of Tarsus (absent the biological teleology). The Enlightenment writers, seeking to produce a new authoritative standard to hold over and above the (autonomous) self, did that in such a way that ‘universalist absolutism’ became a common aspect of all Enlightenment thought (which is precisely why MacIntyre labels all Enlightenment moral doctrines *encyclopedic* stressing their universalist orientation). In other words, the Enlightenment thinkers sought to recreate the (divine) totalism characteristic of the Reformation in a secular way, a task upon which they proceeded in one of two ways. From the teleological/eschatological universalism of Catholic realism (cf. Aquinas), Immanuel Kant appropriated the universal *essence* of man as the ‘rational agent’, while utilitarians like J.S. Mill as well as Hegelians and Marxists all adopted from that doctrine the progressive notion of history—the Christian faith in the promise of a universally-achievable ‘better world’. The ahistorical and non-teleological Kant sought unity and universalism in man’s *present*, i.e. in man’s shared and perennial universal status as a ‘rational agent’ and looked to engender *universality* by deriving universal laws from what is to be man’s common nature using man’s shared practical reason as a new sovereign. Kantian philosophy therefore was anchored on the ‘eternal now’ and the perennial/immutable ‘categorical imperatives’. The utilitarians, meanwhile, forsook any hearkening to a common essence/nature and instead aimed to recreate the former theological unity by emphasizing man’s common *finis* in history through the notion of a universal progress of ‘mankind’. And yet, both groups go astray, for as Löwith points out, ‘mankind’ is not
a concrete and real concept but an abstract one: it “has not existed in the historical past, nor can it exist in any present: it is an idea and an ideal of the future, the necessary horizon for the eschatological concept of history and its universality.”  

Put differently, humanity is the stuff of Christian imaginary which is why a true philosophical atheist (like Nietzsche) would have difficulty in finding it credible. In all this ‘reordering’, the fact that the Catholic religion survived the religious wars and the Reformation to stand available to the Enlightenment thinkers as a resource and an alternate doctrine in their struggles with the deficiencies of nominalism is not something to be taken lightly.  

Enlightenment thinkers thought themselves to have a monopoly on practical reason, perceiving it, as I stated previously, autonomously and deontologically. MacIntyre casts a giant doubt on this by completely challenging and deconstructing this Enlightenment notion of practical reason, revealing it to be a shell of its former self neither bounded in praxis nor grounded in reason. Historical analysis indicates, MacIntyre contends, that the Enlightenment project does not have a monopoly on practical reason not just because such a monopoly is in itself impossible given the interpretive nature of human sciences (cf. Geisteswissenschaft), but also because the real object of inquiry of the philosophes is neither practice nor reason but the will. In this light, different moral theories whether Kantian, Utilitarian, natural rights or Contractarian appear to operate not on

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55 Karl Löwith, Meaning and History, p. 18

56 This is of note particularly given a similar circumstance transpired centuries earlier (12th) in the Perso-Islamic world of the medieval East where Mohammad Ghazali (Algazel), in anticipation of William of Oakham, in his Incoherence of the Philosophers advanced just such a nominalist understanding of God in opposition to the “philosophers” (i.e. falasifa) who following the Perso-Hellenic tradition defended the realist teleological position. There, however, Ghazali with support of the political leadership was able to secure a monopoly/dominant position for his doctrine to the increased marginalization and persecution of the philosophers. With the backing of the state, Ghazali’s school of thought is institutionalized through the centralized Madrasa scholastic system he co-founded and headed with the support of Persian vizier Nezam-al-Mulk known after him as the Nezamiyeh schools (its flagship being the Nizamiya of Baghdad where Ghazali taught). The monopoly on Truth, Islamic nominalism comes to enjoy, ultimately culminates in the advancement of theological occasionalism as the correct interpretation of Islam which effectively halts intellectual inquiry in medieval Iran at least until the advent of Shiism in the 16th century and the emergence in the 17th century of Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra.
different conceptions of practical reason but on this very same conception of autonomous reason albeit in its different manifestations—whether the formalistic/deontological view of Kant or the means-end, instrumentalist, and utilitarian view of utilitarians and contractarians.

MacIntyre posits that, in our time, rival traditions to the Enlightenment-inspired “Encyclopedic” (i.e. “Genealogic” and “Thomistic”) account of inquiry have advanced a “radical criticism” of the unitary absolutist conception of rationality dominant in nineteenth-century modernity and the Ninth Edition” which espouse claims to certainty. In contrast to the “Encyclopedic” view, following in the footsteps of Wittgenstein, R. G. Collingwood, Thomas Kuhn, and even Nietzsche, MacIntyre acknowledges the inescapability of conflict between the “multiplicity” of ‘modes of interpretation’ offered by these (intellectual) “traditions” and even the incommensurability and untranslatability of these ‘rival’ traditions, each with its own internal logic and a “substantive conception of rationality”. As I have suggested, it is in his fundamental critique of the Enlightenment conception of reason and the universalism of the Modern paradigm that MacIntyre most resembles Nietzsche. If morality is truly a historical phenomenon, then its standards of rationality are not always predictable, nor are they immutable, universal, and timeless. Continuity and discontinuity, not stasis, underpin the historicity of thought.

According to MacIntyre, these alethic unitarians, by claiming the oneness of reason, will, and truth “imputed to contingent features of their own morality a universality which they took to be the mark of rationality”. From within “the enclosing framework of a unified encyclopedic rationality” (i.e. formalistic reason), universal progress in history toward the ultimate Truth does

57 Belief in the oneness of truth tethered to one conception of reason, suggesting universal Truth with a capital T: “that there is a single…conception of what the standards and the achievements of rationality are.” (Three Rival Versions, p. 14)
58 MacIntyre, Three Rival Versions, p. 25
59 MacIntyre, Three Rival Versions, p. 23-24, and p. 4-5
60 Ibid., p.28
indeed seem possible and even “expected”, but MacIntyre, following in the wake of Nietzsche, realizes that this is only so from a perspective that is already within the “encyclopedic” paradigm—an “endemic” stance from one who is already a believer.\textsuperscript{61} Put differently, they generalized from their own premises and called it Truth, instead of seeking truth via an open (even if agonistic) rational inquiry. Of course, as a good Catholic and an astute philosopher, MacIntyre still believes that at least in theory all rational inquiry should be directed to the pursuit of Truth, but he rightly recognizes that in practice this alethic quest occurs by means of multiple traditions and schools of thought.

This is what MacIntyre finds most objectionable in Kant and his universalist categorical imperative: “what Kant took to be the principles and presuppositions of morality as such turned out to be the principles and presuppositions of one highly specific morality, a secularized version of Protestantism which furnished modern liberal individualism with one of its founding charters,” which as we saw is not even a workable proposition absent teleology; “Thus, [its] claim to universality foundered.”\textsuperscript{62} That is, the move from the empirical is to the normative ought (any normative proposition let alone any universal ones) without recourse to teleology (or a ‘functional concept’) is not warranted and could not be sustained in any system of practical rationality. By defending ‘practical judgment’ and ‘practical reasoning’ through his notion of ‘transcendental idealism’, Kant attempts a synthesis of the realist and nominalist traditions but his failure to embrace teleology and his persistence to cling to a negative view of reason mean he is ultimately unsuccessful. Moreover, Kantian Transcendental Idealism is an early example of the Ideal Observer Theory in meta-ethics which purports to move from the perspective of an individual agent (albeit a perfectly rational and informed agent) and extrapolate in order to arrive at a set of

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p.42

\textsuperscript{62} AV. P. 266
universal law-like precepts (*Grundsätze*) as (synthetic) *a priori*, a standpoint that is embraced and advanced further in contemporary times by John Rawls. Kant and Rawls might have provided the most elaborate renditions of this scheme, but that would not make the project, as a whole, any less absurd or any more intelligible.

In other words, the Enlightenment project had to fail because it had inadvertently repudiated the true substantive form of ‘practical reason’ that is at the heart of the historical genesis of the conception of norms and ethical judgments itself. In part a legacy of different strands of thought (i.e. nominalism, Stoicism, and textualism) of the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment turned away from *practice* and hence all context and history, while in its substance it moved from the primacy of *reason* to the primacy of acts of will. The classical emphasis on practical wisdom (of operational necessity to realize the ethical ideal) was thus replaced with a Modern fascination with a disembodied will and abstract rules (to control it). Its crystallization as liberal Modernity meant an unbounded, deontological, categorical, and universalist Modern morality (i.e. *Encyclopedic*) paradoxically coupled with an individualist, voluntarist, solipsistic (*self*-as-all), and autochthonous (*self*-forming) ontology and view of human nature. It is clear to MacIntyre that once one discards

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63 Of the Kantian *a priori*, Robert Hanna writes: “Kantian innateness is essentially a procedure-based innateness, consisting in an a priori active readiness of the mind for implementing normative rules of synthesis, as opposed to the content-based innateness of Cartesian and Leibnizian innate ideas, according to which an infinitely large supply of complete (e.g., mathematical) beliefs, propositions, or concepts themselves are either occurrently or dispositionally intrinsic to the mind...[and] in contrast to both Rationalists [c.f. Plato] and Empiricists [Hobbes], who hold that the human mind has only one basic cognitive faculty—reason or sense perception, respectively—Kant is a cognitive-faculty dualist who holds that the human mind has two basic cognitive faculties: (i) the “understanding” (*Verstand*), the faculty of concepts, thought, and discursivity, and (ii) the “sensibility” (*Sinnlichkeit*), the faculty of intuitions/non-conceptual cognitions, sense perception, and mental imagery ” (Robert Hanna, “Kant’s Theory of Judgment”, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

64 Such an ontology proclaims to the individual: you (the individual) is all that matters. In you lies the origin of all values (*individualism*). You are a law unto yourself (*autonomy*). Your will is *free* and boundless (*voluntarism*). The world is only what you perceive it to be or rather as you will it to be. You, *alone*, are all that could ever *truly* be known and further, all that exists (*solipsism*). And ultimately, you, the individual and your mind, are the source and cause of reality itself (*autochthony*). In short, God has been individualized and the individual is divinized in the ultimate act of *apotheosis*. 
the teleological glue (which holds the classical system of morality together), he or she has succumbed to the Humean ‘is-ought paradigm’ and it is no longer possible to derive morality in its evaluate, prescriptive, and normative quality from descriptive, empiricist facts of (human) nature whether understood as (autonomous) reason or as (rational) will.

Despite failing at its project of providing a rationale to Morality, the Enlightenment did successfully accomplish four things however, at the heart of which lies its invention of the individual.\textsuperscript{65} It individualizes through the idea of autonomy, it abstracts and disembodies via its decontextualized and ahistorical approach, it universalizes in its hunt for a new absolute, and finally by repudiating God and metaphysics (cf. “We have killed God”), it subverts what had become enjoined with this metaphysics since the Middle Ages and through scholasticism—the notion of teleology. Thus, the Enlightenment philosophy emerged at once proudly individualistic, abstract, universalist, and non-teleological. It also had a further consequence that emerged out of these, which was to propagate the myth of the self-sufficient, independent ‘agent’ as the ‘standard’ human being which in itself reinforced the devaluation of context and the exaggeration of the abstract.

MacIntyre insists that “it is only from the standpoint of a very different tradition, one whose beliefs and presuppositions were articulated in their classical form by Aristotle, that we can understand both the genesis and the predicament of moral modernity.”\textsuperscript{66} From the perspective of Aristotelianism, it becomes evident that Enlightenment writers all rejected the traditional teleological view of human nature, adopting a voluntarist view of human nature in its stead and in so doing advanced a (negative) view of reason that at its conclusion turns out to be nothing but the

\textsuperscript{65} AV, p.61
\textsuperscript{66} AV, Prologue to the Third Edition, p. x
will. In an environment hostile to all meaning, ideals, ends, essences, teleology, and in short, all things substantive, it should come as no surprise then that Modern morality has become exhausted, resource-less, ‘sterile’ and above all discordant, confused, and incoherent in the face of the rival normative ‘traditions’ postulating different moralities. It turns out that ultimately what unites the so-called liberal order (the dominant moral and political culture of Modernity) is in fact its indiscriminate permissiveness—its sanctioning of all these diverging schools of moral inquiry (be it Kantian, utilitarian, natural rights, or contractarian) which populate the moral horizon of Modernity whose “incompatible commitments” manifest as “a set of continuing and unresolvable conflicts and debates, so that the basic agreements” constituting the liberal order become agreements about disagreements. 67

In sum, MacIntyre argues that in Modernity no ethical system is definitive enough to provide a ‘shared conception of human Good’ necessary for an ordered moral life, and that different traditions of normative inquiry, namely under the rubric of three different conceptions (Encyclopedic, Genealogic, and Thomistic), are allowed to incessantly disagree without any incentive or means to find reconciliation. None have (moral) authority and this could only result in normative disorientation for us in the West. As the dominant form of life in Modernity, liberalism (given its liberality) has proved an abject failure in cohering, harmonizing, or otherwise adjudicating among these rival normative conceptions, lacking the resources to justify or otherwise commit to any one normative tradition as its ‘moral compass’, instead remaining unremittingly eclectic and hence inconsistent. A form of life needs to discriminate (normatively) and commit to a certain vision of the world before it can ever engage in the kind of self-criticism that for MacIntyre is the true abode and vocation of ‘practical reason’. As it stands, MacIntyre believes, it

67 Alasdair MacIntyre, “A Partial Response to my Critics”, p. 291-292
should come as no surprise that the state of moral life under Modernity is so fragmented and partitioned, and further that under such profound disorder and disharmony, the rise of morally nihilistic conceptions (particularly as *Emotivism* and *Expressivism* in Analytic Philosophy and *Existentialism* in Continental Philosophy) should be fully expected. Finally, MacIntyre warns that given this morally dissonant and ethically nihilistic condition, we are all in danger of witnessing the disintegration and dissolution of Modern culture as we know it (a depiction not unlike Hegel’s interpretation of the Sophocles’ tragedy of *Antigone* and what it augured for the breakdown of Hellenic culture). It is also important to note that MacIntyre’s critique holds even as individuals subscribe and adhere to ‘set’ and ‘rigid’ moral codes, finding them authoritative in their personal lives, as the problem is above all cultural; individuals simply do not and cannot know that they often “choose” their moral principles eclectically, randomly, and rather inconsistently.

Nevertheless, so far it appears MacIntyre has only used his neo-Aristotelianism *negatively* as to disprove liberal Modernity. But is there a *positive* project to be sought in Thomistic ideas and if so, what would that positive project look like? Is there a ‘solution’ to the moral malaise of Modernity from the MacIntyrean standpoint?

**The MacIntyrean Solution in Thomism**

MacIntyre is unequivocal on what he deems the remedy to our Modern discontent: “*The Aristotelian tradition can be restated in a way that restores rationality and intelligibility to our own moral and social attitudes and commitments.*”\(^{69}\) As such, MacIntyre’s positive program

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\(^{68}\) MacIntyre is doubtful whether choice in these matters is ever a real possibility for the Modern man given the handicapped understanding of the self as ‘disembedded’ and ‘without narrative’. If anything, it is this very ‘choice’—a promise under liberalism—that has to be rehabilitated and made embodied under MacIntyre’s program.

\(^{69}\) *AV*, p. 259
presented in his neo-Thomistic philosophy is above all a restorative program. It aims to recover the proper Thomistic understanding of the self as a communal and ‘dependent’ rational animal’ in the hierarchy of being, to restore the Aristotelian attention to context and praxis, and to find a renewed synthesis between the universal and the particular (cf. Hegelian “concrete universal”).

All of this can be accomplished, MacIntyre is convinced, by turning to and redeeming “Virtue Ethics”. On this path, MacIntyre’s principal conception is his idea of ‘tradition’, a complex and nuanced notion both illuminating his philosophy and instrumental in realizing its positive vision. MacIntyre’s ambitious project is to offer up the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition as the alternative mode to liberalism generally and the two Modern modes of thought he outlines, i.e. Encyclopedia and Genealogy. This tradition (particularly in its Thomist version) MacIntyre believes could provide authoritative guidance to our moral practices in the West—to be the ‘moral compass’ we so desperately lack—and to present a rationally defensible conception of the Good life. We are told to embrace the kind of moral life embodied in the virtues and their practice—one based on the ethics of character. Failing to do so, MacIntyre warns, we will be left to grapple with the socio-cultural (if not personal) dangers of emotivism—the (‘postmodern’) “doctrine that all evaluative

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70 MacIntyre refutes the charge of Hegelianism of his philosophy that many commentators have directed at him claiming that Hegel proposes an absolute standpoint, the very notion that he MacIntyre is hoping to transcend. MacIntyre however misunderstands the Hegelian position in my view, as for Hegel the absoluter Geist was not tantamount to a universal standard or ‘tradition’ in the MacIntyrean sense, but an understanding of the universal that only emerges in time and through the historical process. The Absoluter is only manifest in history and can only be perceived retrospectively from the human (subjective Geist) perspective. It is not ultimately clear from Hegel’s own body of work when and if ever the teleological history, as the universal, is to find its finis. Different perspectives on this issue is precisely what divided the young and the old Hegelians in the 19th century. The only thing Absolute here it seems to me is the inevitability of continuity and dynamism in history in its processual capacity—that life must go on, so to speak—which MacIntyre champions in his own philosophy.

71 MacIntyre points out in Whose Justice (p.7) that the Enlightenment made us “blind” to the fact that “standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors with the history of that same tradition.” Here, MacIntyre’s language is reminiscent of Hegel’s notion of sublation which for Hegel explains how traditions evolve in time and place, always seeking to resolve the “contradictions” they inherit, negating the past and transcending the present.
judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.”

_Normatively_, MacIntyrian Thomism entails a rejection of the deontological/Kantian and consequentialist/utilitarian ethics typically associated with the Modern weltanschauung for a return to the ethics of character and virtue emblematic of Aristotelian normative theory. It means refocusing on _excellence_ (arête) and _character_ of individuals developed through practical reason in concrete settings and thus meaningful, personal, and shared, rather than emphasizing the isolated individual acts of persons derived from the kind of _decontextualized_ reason (whether utilitarian or deontological) which problematizes the personal narrative of a person and thus threatens the sustainability of the normative commitments in the long term (cf. _praxis_ vis-à-vis _theoria_). The emphasis here is therefore on _tradition_ and the nexus of normative actions as a whole to communities, “whose central bond is a shared vision of and understanding of goods” and have as their _telos_ the community-large project of achieving some shared good as the community’s common good to which all members contribute assisted by _their_ virtues (such communities in aggregate pave the way to the achievement of the ultimate human good whatever it proves to be).

Now, Aristotelianism (or MacIntyre’s neo-Thomist interpretation of it) as a tradition of thought, MacIntyre notes, does not possess a “rational superiority in terms of…theoretical contests of Modernity” or its substantive content to put it over and above the rival normative schools such as contractarian, Kantian, Utilitarian, and Nietzschean. Its advantage lies in it being the only normative category defiantly wedded to _praxis_ and hence mindful of _context_, as well as recognizing the primacy of (practical) _reason_ necessary for any successful ethical order. Neo-

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72 _AV_, p. 11; MacIntyre of course holds that postmodernism and the ‘Genealogical’ mode of thought that underpins it are both better understood as the final phase of Modernity. I agree with this assessment.

73 _AV_, p. 258

74 _AV_, Prologue to the Third Edition, p. x
Thomism could therefore be hoped to resolve the ‘discrepancy’ that was pointed out earlier, holding out the promise of *rationally* ‘defeating’ its rivals particularly in the West. The tradition of inquiry which underwrites Virtue Ethics is not substantively superior then, but it is to be preferred to the liberal/Encyclopedic position because its normative theory is internally coherent given its own standard of rationality in addition to satisfying the *practical* conditions expected of ethics. Indeed, as MacIntyre himself argues, “it is the central thesis of *After Virtue* that the Aristotelian moral tradition is the best example we possess of a tradition whose adherents are rationally entitled to a high measure of confidence in its epistemological and moral resources.”

This is a strong and provocative argument that skillfully escapes the charge of relativism that liberals level at MacIntyre over the latter’s belief in the *incommensurability* and *untranslatability* of traditions of thought and artfully reconciles with his denial of a neutral universally absolute standard of rationality, but as it will be argued later, all of these conditions are also met by the Nietzschean (cf. *Anthro-cultural*) normative category (not to be confused with MacIntyre’s Genealogic category). Nietzsche, I will contend, advances a positive normative outlook that is equally, if not more, concrete, *praxis*-centered, action-oriented, and grounded in actionable virtù (a set of qualities aiming for ‘action’ that would also include practical wisdom), while meeting his own standards of rationality in a consistent and coherent fashion.

The notion of *tradition* that MacIntyre employs is one that perhaps requires some further elaboration on its own. MacIntyre’s use of *tradition* is twofold. In one sense, he uses *tradition* traditionally to mean cultural and customary practices of a historical people; this is often denoted via qualifying adjectives—viz. *social* tradition or *cultural* tradition. More often than not though, MacIntyre utilizes *tradition* to signify an ‘intellectual’ tradition, akin to a ‘school of thought’—

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75 *AV*, p. 278
only that this school is not technically institutionalized and so the adherents or participants in this
historical line of inquiry need not be aware that they are in fact party to that particular tradition.\footnote{Incidentally, MacIntyre’s social theory entails that living intellectual traditions should perhaps be so institutionalized along different universities and thus be institutionally embodied as different ‘school’ perhaps inspired by Plato’s *Akademia* and Aristotle’s *Lyceum*}

It is this second meaning that we are most concerned with here. In this sense, MacIntyre
understands traditions as *living* and dynamic schools of thought where common standards of
rationality and excellence form and are applied through a continuous process of critical reflection,
the origin of which he traces to Aristotle (cf. *Spoudaios*).

A further distinction MacIntyre makes is between *living* and *dead* traditions. *Living*
traditions of inquiry are those within which normative debates, having been animated in history,
are still continuing in our day (case in point *Thomism*). MacIntyre explains of *living* traditions that
“it is indeed a feature of all those traditions with whose histories we have been specifically
concerned that in one way or another all of them have *survived* so as to become not only possible
but actual forms of practical life within the domain of modernity. Even when marginalized by the
dominant modern social, cultural, and political order, such traditions have retained the allegiance
of the members of a variety of types of community and enterprise [so that] the past of such
traditions is encapsulated in the *present* and not always only in fragmented and disguised form”
typical of extinct traditions.\footnote{Whose Justice, p. 391 (my emphasis)}

This is not to say that ‘dead’ traditions are irrelevant, for we have
lots to learn from the Augustinian tradition for instance—just that their value to us is instructive
and theoretical rather than practical. With regards to *praxis*, it is these *living* traditions which are
most significant in the MacIntyrean account for they present the only alternative standards of
rationality and discourse available to us. “A living tradition then”, as MacIntyre expounds, “is an
historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the
goods which constitute that tradition. Within a tradition, the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations.”

What MacIntyre seems less interested in is the degree to which these (intellectual) traditions themselves are not autochthonous given that they are in fact bounded and embodied in a particular cultural life—itself equally dynamic, alive, and historical. On this intersection of the two meanings of tradition, as he uses the term, he remains generally silent. Nonetheless, it is justified to argue, and he himself does, that there is nothing conservative in his idea of tradition as for him they are not essentialistic habits, rituals, and customs passed down and habituated unreflectively and as a monistic whole. Rather, with MacIntyre, we must come to terms with an idea of the Western tradition where the West is not a unity but a multiplicity in its own right (at the same time as he critiques this multipolar status quo and attempts to order these plural traditions under the uniting authority of Thomism, which Horton and Mendus have appropriately called “interestingly Janus-Faced”). In the MacIntyrean picture, the West in its collective worldview (like any way of life) is comprised of a few different traditions of thought, a plurality of rational modes of inquiry and thought and hence multiple rationalities each with its own standards of excellence and justice all competing for sovereignty over the Western form of life by means of rationally defeating one another. As such, MacIntyre advocates a kind of inquiry among intellectuals which results in any one of these paradigms or traditions “suffering rational defeat at the hands of another” in a quest for an ultimately impersonal and universal practical reason to be authoritative over our moral practices—succeeding where the Enlightenment failed. The question lingers about how these traditions are themselves connected with and constitutive of a

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78 AV, p.222
79 Horton and Mendus, p. 13
80 AV, p. xiv
larger unity called (Western) culture. So, while they are all in competition with one another and on a quest for truth and justice if we accept MacIntyre’s word on this, what we might end with is still not Truth as such—as a universal and absolute (albeit grounded in practical) standard, but at best a Western Truth!

The quest for a common uniting rational standard as an anchoring normative authority becomes an inescapable reality when one recalls again that for MacIntyre we in the West are on the precipice of a moral crisis. While others who have made similar claims (cf. Leo Strauss) have worried that owing to historicism and relativism our values have been depleted, concluding that our moral confusion emanates from having too few or not any workable moral standards, MacIntyre’s critique is of a different kind entirely. Because, he argues that we in the West today as a result of the liberality and indiscrimination of liberalism are grappling with too many different and conflicting moral standards, so that the source of our value disorder is not ‘value-exhaustion’ as Strauss suggests but ‘value-discrepancy’—a case of value chaos that is, at its core, a crisis of moral authority. The younger MacIntyre characterized this as a “moral wilderness” and I have called it elsewhere “normative disorientation”. What MacIntyre’s scheme aims at therefore is a way of properly ordering our existing normative commitments, recalibrating the Western hierarchy of values. Thomism, he believes, is the intellectual compass with which to rediscover the now forgotten state of moral equilibrium, to reconfigure our ‘constellation of values’, and to recover the notion of a ‘shared human Good’.

81 And a quest it is, for the best we can hope for is to partake in that journey for Truth which for MacIntyre must animate all traditions of inquiry; ‘truth-seeking’ is inherent in the definition of the term ‘tradition’ despite the many often incommensurable differences in both substance and standards of rationality among traditions.

82 See MacIntyre’s essay “Notes from the Moral Wilderness” in New Reasoner (1958). Cited in Mark Murphy, Alasdair MacIntyre, (2003), p. 5. There MacIntyre finds problematic the fragmentation of knowledge into a bunch of divided specialized disciplines and the pretense to the autonomy of moral philosophy from other fields of inquiry in human sciences (as well as biological sciences). This is a common underlying theme in MacIntyre’s works.
Another feature of the MacIntyrean conception of virtue ethics is its insistence on the *embedded* and *embodied* nature of ethics—both in its practice as the virtues and as moral thought. By stressing *embeddedness*, MacIntyre reiterates the historical, contextual, and social element in the ‘normative’, writing “Morality which is no particular society’s morality is to be found nowhere”.\(^83\) Within his ‘narrative’ scheme, this essentially means that “every particular view of the virtues is linked to some particular notion of the narrative *structure* or structures of human life,” which itself has a history and is coupled with an intellectual tradition which also has history.\(^84\) In this context, “a history is an enacted dramatic narrative in which the characters are also the authors. The characters of course never start literally *ab initio*; they plunge *in medias res*, the beginnings of their story already made for them by what and who has gone before.”\(^85\) Accordingly, “moral philosophies, however they may aspire to achieve more than this, always do articulate the morality of some particular social and cultural standpoint: Aristotle is the spokesman for one class of fourth century Athenians, Kant…provides a rational voice for the emerging social forces of liberal individualism.”\(^86\)

The *embodiedness*, meanwhile, underscores the relationship between virtues and praxis and their embodiment in both the historical narrative of a tradition of inquiry and the life of a ‘narrated’ *self*, what MacIntyre calls the “narrative unity of a human life and of a moral tradition”.\(^87\) Every morality rests on some concept of ‘human nature’ which is itself conditioned in history, ‘narrated’, and altered in time within a tradition of thought. Given his emphasis on the interdependence of ethics and human nature, MacIntyre posits a new (or rather a more ancient)

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\(^83\) *AV*, p. 265-6  
\(^84\) *AV*, p. 174  
\(^85\) *AV*, p. 215  
\(^86\) Ibid., p. 268  
\(^87\) *AV*, p. 258
conception of the self. Under this new conception, man is “essentially a story-telling animal” with ‘selfhood’ (and thus humanity) intrinsically dependent on the formation of a narrative. S/he is “a teller of stories that aspire to truth” (notwithstanding final attainment); it is this predisposition that generates ‘traditions of thought’ in the first place. To the MacIntyrean self, in sharp contrast to the liberal individual, “the key question for men is not about their own authorship”. This classically-constituted self realizes, “I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'.” In this account, one finds such stories and answers from among the available menu of options provided by the various intellectual traditions—equally embodied (in history)—which are homes to distinctive weltanschauungs. This self also recognizes that, “We enter human society…with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted.” In this sense, the ‘embodied’ (self and tradition) achieves unity with the ‘embedded’ (the social and contextual).

MacIntyre believes that “the unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest.” He also rightly understands that this narrative quest and unity are only possible within a social and cultural context to substantivize the quest and unite the distortive practices of a person into a single identity corresponding to a single human life which suggests that it is false to view man as autochthonous. A social form that discounts narrative (as does liberalism) is one where the individuals can no longer consciously choose their moral commitments. At best, they stumble onto a medley of moral codes or are socialized and indoctrinated into one of the available moral traditions. Absent narrative, we cannot have an ordered human life (viz. identity) nor could we have morality as anything practicable and concrete. This notion of ‘narrated self’ is also chained

88 AV, p. 216
89 Ibid., p. 216
90 Ibid., p. 216
91 Ibid., p. 219
to the idea of cultural context. The *embodied* self is itself *embedded* and the morality of the virtues *situated* in a community, which is why some critics have called MacIntyre’s philosophy *communitarian*. As MacIntyre asserts, after all, I must “understand the enacted narrative of my own individual life as embedded in the history of my country” and cannot simply manufacture it out of thin air and from my free will.\(^92\)

Yet, while he derides the notion of ‘self-authorship ‘and ‘individual autonomy’ at the heart of Modernity in a manner which in its face is not unlike the communitarian critique of the modern ‘atomistic’ and ‘self-sufficient’ self advanced by the likes of Michael Sandel and Charles Taylor, MacIntyre utilizes his notion of ‘tradition’ in such a way as to circumvent a strictly communitarian interpretation.\(^93\) His notion of the *self* is thus more nuanced, allowing the person to, in response to her experiences within a particular community, *choose* (or rather “find”) her own story from among a collection of stories made available to her by those living traditions of thought she encounters. A child of the ‘subject-centered’ Modernity, MacIntyre subjectivizes and thereby reduces the “story-telling” element he exposes into an individual’s personal quest, understanding it specifically as a “personal narrative” where each person finds his or her story through living his or her own unique experience and interactions with traditions. It follows that the development of a personal narrative corresponds to the “unity of an individual life”.\(^94\) And this way, MacIntyre is able to specifically “reject a conception of a person as *principally* a chooser and a decider”—not

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94 *AV*, p. 218
all choice as such, and thus to simultaneously endorse the person’s latitude in discovering a personal identity for herself from within the array of stories available to her—as an ‘embodied’ choice. To MacIntyre, the highest ends are always personal and human, and it is man that has to reach them—community is always a means.

What is of note here is that neither MacIntyre’s notion of narrative (which he understands both personalistically and intellectually) nor his notion of tradition (in his technical usage as a school of inquiry) really concern themselves too much with culture at large—that is, (to borrow MacIntyre’s vocabulary) a theory of “cultural tradition” or “cultural narrative” is conspicuously absent. MacIntyre speaks of narratives embodied in particular human lives, which he distinguishes from the narrative structures or forms which provides the general context for the self-narration (viz. frame this narration). The narrative structure of the medieval period, for example, MacIntyre identifies as “the tale of a quest of journey” where “man is essentially in via”. In my view, this narrative structure argument (a faint nod to social and cultural structure) needs to be expanded. In MacIntyre’s own ‘subject-centered’ account (like all products of the Modern order), the only truly substantive narrative is still that of the individual and even MacIntyre in his level-headedness only sees the extra-individual cultural and communal as the structure or form, or at best, the context for the subjects (whether as a person or as a group of persons) to realize the telos inherent in their (substantive yet personal) narrative. This is still a rather reductionist (or, gesellschaftlich) way to conceive of the relationship between man and community and especially not an Aristotelian approach, which involves a more organicist and holistic (or, gemeinschaftlich) relationship. The extra-personal category of culture and

95 Horton and Mendus, p.9
96 AV, p. 174-175
community does not receive in MacIntyre’s presentation a substantive account of its own, a “meta-narrative” if you will, within and in relation to which the subjects embark on their personal journeys of narrative. My view is that it would be helpful to consider this meta-narrative at the cultural level to couple with and enrich the personal and intellectual narrative accounts of MacIntyre: to say instead that while all narratives are equally substantive, interdependent, and interactive, they all exist in a never-ending dance with one another only so long as that culture-complex exists.

One of the most important lessons of the MacIntyrean project is that “abstract changes in moral concepts are always embodied in real, particular events”; that “there ought not to be two histories, one of political and moral action and one of political and moral theorizing, because there were not two pasts, one populated only by actions, the other only by theories. Every action is the bearer and expression of more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts; every piece of theorizing and every expression of belief is a political and moral action.” It is in this light, for example, that the Enlightenment should not and cannot be severed from its roots in the secularization of Protestantism and the epistemological questions it unleashed—what MacIntyre calls “change in the modes of belief”. Moral questions are the domain for the entire Geisteswissenschaft, not to speak of biology. Moreover, human sciences inquire into human practices. And Practices, in MacIntyre’s view, are wedded to the “internal” genuine goods and combine (theoretical) concepts with (normative) actions; history is the account of changes in practices. It follows then that ultimate goods (virtues) are always internal to practices, and (although there is a place for goods external to practices that are ‘integrative of’ the goods of community and individual life and those internal to particular practices), there can be no goods and hence no virtues that exist outside the realm of

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97 AV, p. 61
those concrete practices. To ‘transcend’ those practices would imply that the goods/virtues in question would ‘transcend’ reality itself. To speak of transcendent, decontextualized, abstract (standards of) justice or (more generally) of virtues is to enter into realm of fantasy.\textsuperscript{98} Practices being “a universal feature of all human cultures” all generating their own standards of excellence, “justice”, MacIntyre holds, is “a practice-based virtue, to which the notion of desert is central”, and yet and at the same time, the manifold proliferation of ‘not always compatible’ goods in the sphere of human life means that one has to at same time endorse “a multiplicity of understandings of justice” (at least until such time that such plural accounts the good can be brought under some order and harmony via a new kind of rational discourse mindful of the (first-)principle differences of normative traditions).\textsuperscript{99}

What needs to be pointed out with respect to MacIntyre’s account of practices however is the extent to which internal goods originally emerge \textit{subsequent} to some external (although not practice-transcending) goods, the deriving of which corresponds to what can be characterized the ‘culturization’ of human associations and the practices that take place within as well as sustain these associations. In MacIntyre’s favorite example of the fishing crew for instance, although “attaining excellence in the activities of fishing and in one’s role within the crew” as well as his contribution to the common life of the crew could all be deemed goods internal to the practice and a source of virtues of excellence and pursuit of common good, the activity of fishing at its starting point in time could not have been conducted for the sake of these virtues \textit{(a priori)}, but for some real external good of the community—in this case, sustenance.\textsuperscript{100} With practices being catered to

\textsuperscript{98} Alasdair MacIntyre, “A Partial Response to my Critics”, \textit{After MacIntyre}, p. 286-287
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., p. 285-288 (these original external goods are life-sustaining, and hence purposive goods. They are to be contrasted with other kind of external goods which are socially-contrived, non-purposive, and contingent external goods such as money and status which MacIntyre appears to misconstrue as the \textit{only} external goods.)
the ‘common good’, all (genuine) goods (internal and external) must be viewed as interacting with and interdependent on both—with virtues outlining the precise relationship between and ordering of the practices to the common good as to make a collective whole. As illustrated by the example, the virtues are discovered then only in practice and in carrying out the activity, but once recognized are immediately elevated above the (original/purposive) external good (i.e. sustenance) to a higher plane, as valuable and elevating in themselves and as sources of human meaning. As such, it is reasonable that goods internal to practices—qua virtues—come to take precedence over the prior (external) purpose behind the performance of the practice, but we should be mindful of the real, concrete reasons behind our tasks and practices—as formative to the sustaining of communal life. In other words, substantive reasons intrinsic to practices follow the prudential reasons already incumbent in them. In fact, in the nexus of the two lies the origin and the raison d’être of all culture. Accordingly, in this process of “culturization”, virtues originally instrumental to the pragmatic needs of the community are gradually perceived as inherent to that community (differentiating that particular community from another as a distinctive culture), yet one should never forget the order in which virtues emerge for the sake of community and not vice versa, as MacIntyre and the Thomistic tradition incorrectly stipulate. In fact, this processual order explains why the ideals of a (cultural) community remain dynamic and why its constellation of values and of virtues change and evolve in the course of its history, rather than staying permanent, fixed, and perennial as is often presumed.

Having overlooked this vital point about the nature of practices, MacIntyre, akin to Aquinas, “sets himself the task of giving an account of the good which is at once local and particular—located in and partially defined by the characteristics of the polis—and yet also cosmic
And it is in this light that MacIntyre’s project, in its full force, comes into view as an attempt to reaffirm some version of Augustinian/Platonic perennial-universal reason while recovering the Thomistic/Aristotelian notion of the particularity of praxis by means of an appeal to the discursive “practical reason” achieved through the recovery of (social) teleology—a concretization meant to sustain the Western normative commitments (whatever they might be) while saving it from (liberal) individualism. This is MacIntyre’s (strikingly Hegelian) approach to solving what he takes to be the normative crisis in Modernity caused by absence of normative authority and too much abstractification and decontextualization, i.e. the disembodiment of values. Under MacIntyrean Thomism, the authority and credence of norms, previously presumed objective and absolute as a universal through ‘formal reason’ (in Enlightenment), are now made authentic by a social web of meaning, practice, and narrative maintained by traditions striving (through rational competition) for normative shared-ness.

To this end, MacIntyre presents a new picture of Catholic/Thomistic meta-ethics which successfully denies moral universalism and affirms cultural difference/plurality while still preserving the idea of a perennial theistic spirit (as practical reason) holding timeless truths about our universal human goods. Intriguingly, this recalls Hegel’s idea of a Universal (cf. absoluter Geist) as an abstract notion that only becomes “immanent” and “real” to us within cultural communities and in intellectual traditions, a view, MacIntyre believes, one can also find in Aristotle and Aquinas. Here, the Aristotelian distinction between the detached speculative reason (decontextualized) cherished by the Enlightenment and practical reason (contextualized) is key because it means alternative conceptions of substantive rationality are possible. In Thomism, MacIntyre calls for a third possibility where one conceives of reason as not solely universal and

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101 _AV_, p.148
abstract ("encyclopedic") nor solely individualistic, instrumental, particular, and concrete ("genealogic"), but both at the same time: “reason can only move towards being genuinely universal and impersonal insofar as it is neither neutral nor disinterested” in the concrete particular. The focus on practical reason and multiple forms of substantive rationalities also implies that what is ultimately True (cf. Aquinas’ notion of “natural law”) must still be interpreted within particular contexts and different cultural milieus so to become immanent and actualized (cf. Aquinas’ notion of “human law”).

While the “Encyclopedic” paradigm is founded on the oneness and “unity of truth and reason” (i.e., one universal substantive standard rationality) and aims at the actual convergence of all intellectual inquiry on this supposed ideal, the “genealogist” alternative, as MacIntyre describes it (wrongly), embodies (substantively at least) anti-reason and the irrational (the practical unreason), which then runs the risk of normative nihilism (via rational nihilism) so that what has been so far a normative impasse becomes full-on moral/cultural degeneration—the breakdown of our form of life. The Nietzschean position also represents for MacIntyre the “possibility of the existence of radically incommensurable standards”, ones that could never be rationally reconciled even in theory: this is not a possibility MacIntyre is willing to entertain for it could perpetuate the inherent divergence and autonomy of all traditions of thought and hence further the kind of value anarchy that MacIntyre is looking to resolve.  

But why, one might wonder, does MacIntyre adhere to such a negative view of Nietzsche? After all, MacIntyre and Nietzsche have many things in common—their views on the Enlightenment chief among them, where as we saw, MacIntyre effectively rejects the Encyclopedic paradigm just as Nietzsche had done before him. Yet the questions remain: why

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102 Three Rival Versions, p. 59-60
103 MacIntyre, Three Rival Versions, p. 41
should we embrace MacIntyre’s version of Thomism? Why not the Genealogic paradigm, or to borrow MacIntyre’s language, why should serious thinkers choose Aristotle over Nietzsche? MacIntyre’s answer here is in my view much less persuasive, and I will treat it more critically later in this section and more so in later sections when I deal with Nietzsche specifically. But suffice it to say here that for MacIntyre, the Genealogist fails by being so thoroughly negative in his approach, so lacking in an alternative in fact as to be regressive. Remember that in the MacIntyrean conception, Modernity is the heir to two not-always-complementary developments—both Christian and rooted in the notion of autonomous rationality and the Enlightenment’s response to it: one is the liberal individualist notion of the autonomous self, the other the universalism (in an either historical-progressive or perennial-absolutist formulation) that Enlightenment writers reintroduced from (Catholic) Christian thought in order to counteract the debilitating effects of the emergence of the autochthonous individual as part of their collective efforts to justify morality on new secular terms. The Genealogist founders for his vision is not affirmative. Having successfully repudiated Modernity’s liberal form of life and encyclopedic mode of thought, he retreats for there is nothing positive in his conception. And having rejected the Enlightenment’s legacy of universalism, he ends up back at the autonomous self, back at the pre-Enlightenment status quo—back in the bosoms of the ego. MacIntyre thus proclaims, while he was correct to see in Nietzsche ‘the ultimate antagonist of the Aristotelian tradition’, “it now turns out to be the case that in the end the Nietzschean stance is only one more facet of that very moral culture of which Nietzsche took himself to be an implacable critic…representing individualism's final attempt to escape from its own consequences”—and thus, “the Nietzschean stance turns out not to be a mode of escape from or an alternative to the conceptual scheme of liberal individualist modernity. But rather one
more representative moment in its internal unfolding.” I certainly do not agree with MacIntyre’s assessment of Nietzsche, but I will return to this and stake Nietzsche’s claim in full later.

Now that we have expounded some major philosophical and normative underpinnings of the MacIntyrean scheme, it is time to speak of his social and political thought. In the MacIntyrean Neo-Thomist viewpoint, political community is a common project with the telos of achieving a common good. It is always defined in terms of that project and is thus instrumental in nature and secondary to the ‘common good’ (whatever that may be, but which of course for MacIntyre is ideally determined Thomistically). And importantly, MacIntyre conceives of both this ‘common good’ as well as the respective community to which it is ascribed as existing outside the domains of the modern nation-state and its institutions. Of course, a conception of society that divides the classic notion of ‘political holism’ into civil and governmental, private and public, and personal and common is a distinctively liberal and Modern development, and although MacIntyre acknowledges this, he nevertheless embraces it. Already, one can suspect that MacIntyrean politics would be far more Modern than his Neo-Thomist moral theory would suggest. Not only does he exclude government from membership in the community, he sees “no value in community as such”, viewing community and culture never as an ‘end in-itself’ but as means to the achievement of the ultimate end—Good life. It is on this ground that MacIntyre forcefully rejects the “communitarian” label—and he is right, for philosophically at least he is no communitarian.

At the same time, MacIntyre posits that the “notion of the political community as a common project” understood not functionally, but holistically and concerned with “a whole of life” is “alien to the modern liberal individualist world.” He points to “a crucial difference between the way

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104 AV, p. 259
105 AV, p. xiv
106 AV, p. 156
in which the relationship between moral character and political community is envisaged from the standpoint of liberal individualist modernity and the way in which that relationship was envisaged from the standpoint of the type of ancient and medieval tradition of the virtues.”  

MacIntyre specifically problematizes the Modern view of “society as nothing more than an arena in which individuals seek to secure what is useful or agreeable to them,” which often dismisses “any conception of society as a community united in a shared vision of the good for man (as prior to and independent of any summing of individual interests) and a consequent shared practice of the virtues.”  

Given this Modern divide between community and its roots in a common vision of the good (courtesy of liberalism), MacIntyre views it as a natural consequence that modern society be perceived “as simply an arena in which individuals each pursue their own self-chosen conception of the good life, and political institutions exist to provide that degree of order which makes such self-determined activity possible.”  

MacIntyre thus distinguishes between the modern notion of ‘public interest’ and his idea of the ‘common good’ arguing the former is simply a collection of aggregate individual goods of the ‘unencumbered’ liberal selves which cannot amount to genuine goods, while the latter signifies a version of the ultimate human good which we all share. It follows, so MacIntyre thinks, that “the shared public goods of the modern nation-state are not the common goods of a genuine nationwide community and, when the nation-state masquerades as the guardian of such a common good, the outcome is bound to be either ludicrous or disastrous or both”.  

Accordingly, MacIntyre seeks

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107 AV, p.195
108 AV, p. 236 (My Emphasis): Here again MacIntyre presents the idea of a human good as prior to the practice of the virtues which I find problematic.
109 AV, p. 195
110 *Dependent Rational Animals*, p. 132. MacIntyre also forcefully rejects (Volkish) nationalism (the nation in the “nation-state” understood as folk) not because he dislikes nations as such but because (understanding Volks as ‘communities of kinship’) he does not think possible that such a community can emerge which can encompass whole body of citizens in our times: “The counterpart to the nation-state thus misconceived as itself a community is a misconception of its citizens as constituting a Volk—a type of collectivity whose bonds are simultaneously to extend
to maintain his notion of a shared human good as a common project but to deny the state any part in this project. That is, contrary to Aristotle (and many communitarians) for whom the *community*, *government*, and *common good* are all in such a nexus as to constitute an interdependent whole—where the *communal*, the *political*, and the *normative* form an indivisible unity—MacIntyre believes that the modern state should not be a part of the ‘normative adjudication’ or the quest for *alethic* solidarity and should indeed remain *neutral* in such discussions (in this he openly sides with the liberals).\(^{111}\) to ensure ‘rational inquiry’ and not sheer *power* determines the winner of the moral discourse and hence the *authoritative* vision of the common good (via deliberation).\(^{112}\) Here once more, the issue of *authority/justification* which is the central concern of *After Virtue*’s normative project is raised. For MacIntyre, the liberal-Modern rupture in the idea of community (dissociating it from the *Good* which is henceforth *privatized*) means that (modern) political thought is concerned solely with questions of political authority; questions of normative authority lie outside its mandate. And certainly, MacIntyre believes that true *genuine* authority can only emanate from a conception of the ‘common good’ (good for the community as a *whole*) and not private interests viewed in aggregate as general interest in a utilitarian fashion, and hence ‘genuine authority’ rests with the *normative* not the *political*. What is more, genuine normative authority could be rationally adjudicated among the traditions through *discourse*. This in part explains a

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\(^{111}\) MacIntyre, “Partial Response to my Critics”, p. 302

\(^{112}\) It is important to note that for Aristotle ‘good government’ was precisely the kind which was able to institutionalize, be the conduit for, and indeed *monopolize* (as to give the decided ‘truth’ an official status). Government was a *whole* which contained within it this process of ‘normative adjudication’ which MacIntyre seems to champion—this was the very *telos* of government in Aristotle’s view. Aristotle’s contribution was to introduce and emphasize within this process the notion of *deliberation* via rational discourse of the *Spoudaioi* (a class of mature persons of practical reasonableness inhabiting the polis which were its true citizens). This was a holistic process but not totalistic for although the process was monopolizing aimed at reaching a unity (not unlike MacIntyre’s own overall formulation on the basis of which his entire critique of liberalism rests), it was also to both *deliberative* and genuinely *free*, reliant on the *Spoudaioi* and their differing original perspectives.
major tenet of MacIntyre’s political philosophy—his deep aversion to and rejection of the modern state.

Perhaps, the most important aspect of MacIntyre’s political philosophy (at least in its negative form) lies in his utter antipathy for the modern managerial and bureaucratic state, which he finds corrupted by power and money—distributing provisions and external goods akin to a “giant utility company”. He also despises its procedural, formal, and hierarchical nature. Here, one sees the ghost of Marx who envisaged the state ‘withering away’. To MacIntyre, the modern state is a form of government that is utterly incapable of engaging or allowing for a rational inquiry into politics. Not only for it is thoroughly corrupt and an instrument in the hands of corporations that have no interest in practical reasoning, but also and even more fundamentally because the modern state as a hierarchical, vertical and colossal institution cannot lend itself to the kind leveled, horizontal (rational) discourse that must take place between different normative traditions where all sides to the inquiry possess equal standing (at least until the time that they are ‘rationally overcome’). It is clear that MacIntyre ‘internalizes’ the so-called Modern and materialist idea of the state (state as provisional and instrumental distributor of external goods and services) as the ‘state’ per se. This is quite a Modern move on the part of MacIntyre which means dismissing the long tradition in the West going back to the Greeks that characterizes statecraft as soulcraft and, even before Socrates, stresses the deep nexus and identity of the political with the normative, a unity whose embodiment is the community. Thus, at the same time as MacIntyre criticizes the dissociative conception of community advanced by liberalism, he seems to take for granted the by-product of this dissociation in the modern state in particular and modern sociology in general, or otherwise appears oblivious to the connection.

113 Dependent Rational Animals, p. 132
In fact, MacIntyre observes that “the differences between political community conceived in Aristotelian terms and any modern nation-state is just too great”, by which MacIntyre seems to conclude that an Aristotelian polity is just not attainable or practicable given the institutions of the Modern state; he thus declares that “any credible modern version of an Aristotelian ruler would have to exercise her or his function, whatever that might be, other than as an official of a [modern] state.” 114 Of course, MacIntyre presupposes the bourgeois character of all modern states understanding them as commonwealths established via of some version of social contract theory (itself an inherently Modern development). In this fashion, MacIntyre completely dissociates the Aristotelian ‘political’ from the Modern ‘political’, construing the former as the realm of the normative and intellectual, at least until such time that the modern state has been transformed (consequent to the rise of a new intellectual culture) to accommodate a radically republican government. Aristotelian inspired politics, it turns out, is, in the modern setting, not really political at all, not directed at governing, which leaves a contemporary Neo-Thomist in a very confounding territory as to the practical and political implications of his doctrine and his own public and citizenly duties which is ironically quite un-Aristotelian.

MacIntyre offers a two-step solution to this conundrum. The first step, as outlined in chapter X of the Three Rival Versions, is to turn what he thinks to be Aristotelian principles of politics toward academia and the modern university system. This first step is preparatory, meant to foster the kind of ‘common mind’ and ‘normative unity’ MacIntyre argues for in AV and which he sees foundational to his ideal vision of politics as spelled out in Dependent Rational Animals—a localized, radical, direct, popular, participatory, deliberative democratic republic not unlike the ideal of many neo-Marxist democrats such as Habermas. What distinguishes MacIntyrean praxis

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from them however is his insistence on the need for a united vision of the common good (an alethic solidarity) à la Rousseauan ‘general will’ presupposed in and undergirding the practice of the agonistic democratic republic (in which conflicts in the will of a people are resolved by means of a consensus that forms in their mind—a middle ground [synthesis] between the deliberative/communicative and the agonistic strains in post-Marxist democratic theory). This shared vision of the good, so far as MacIntyre imagines it, of course turns out to be not so different from Thomistic natural law substantiated by the Thomistic constellation of values and standards of justice (i.e. the victorious tradition). At the same time however, MacIntyre argues for a public space which accommodates identity and class politics (viz. multi-culturalism). So, in the ideal republic of MacIntyre, perpetual (and unavoidable) social conflict and political contestation (agon) deriving from inescapable differences in identity are harmonized by means of the rational and deliberative inquiry that strives to establish the normative community (providing for a common normative identity). Thus, while the development of a unified standard of rationality and justice (alethic unity), which he labels the ‘common mind’, is necessary for accommodating radical social differences and political agon, MacIntyre thinks that the adoption of the neo-Thomist model could effectively foster that ‘common mind’, preventing anarchy and social fragmentation.

Seen from the MacIntyrean standpoint, the Modern state is ill-suited for any such Truth-quest. Nor is it advisable that it bear any (genuine) values given to an embodied vision of life or the ‘common good’, for in doing so it “always imperils those values”. Not only is the modern
state a plaything of the corrupting influences of external goods (i.e., money and politics) that detract from internal genuine goods (i.e. truth), but in MacIntyre’s (and arguably Aristotle’s) conception, Truth emerges from the interplay among an array of heterogeneous diverse original stances of rationality seeking unity \textit{a posteriori}, while the Modern state is a standardizing homogenizing machinery demanding \textit{a priori} uniformity.\footnote{In addition to his views on the Modern state, MacIntyre also has deep reservations regarding the status of modern nuclear family as having any ability to soften the blow one is bound to experience from the Modern state. The main reason is influence of cash and consumption on the modern family which make it quite ineffective in exercising its “parental authority to make children grow up so as to be virtuous adults” (\textit{AV}, p. 195). This dual failure at the top and bottom of Modern society underscores a need for a new vision one specifically reliant on the intermediary communal institutions and associations for fostering of the common good. He writes “the family flourishes only if its social environment also flourishes” (\textit{Dependent Rational Animals}, p. 134).} The true practice of politics (as espoused by the Aristotelian tradition), according to MacIntyre, “reflects a \textit{common mind} arrived at through widespread shared deliberation governed by norms of rational enquiry”, which is simply impossible in the state of affairs that is dominated by the Modern nation-state.\footnote{\textit{Dependent Rational Animals}, p. 131 (my emphasis—cf. Rousseauan ‘general will’)} Not believing this ideal possible in our current political life, MacIntyre identifies the university system as his main target for reform in the hope of realizing such normative solidarity away from the political sphere. Accordingly, MacIntyre takes his normative project exclusively outside the purview of the state (at least until his ideal form of radically republican government inspired by Rousseau and Marx characterized by direct, deliberative, local democratic participation can come to fruition). MacIntyre thus Intellectualizes the Aristotelian \textit{politikon} and becomes distinctively anti-political so far as political realism and concrete politics are concerned (i.e., realpolitik). Thus, in practice, the Aristotelian possibilities of politics are abandoned (until further notice). Aristotle’s \textit{zoon politikon} is understood as being realizable only in academic settings, that is in the intellectual world, which is to say that he is not a normative-political animal but just a normative-philosophical deliberator and in fact no animal at all but an academic and an intellectual.
In our modern condition, only universities and not modern states are those truly republican institutions where republicanism could be embodied in an egalitarian, democratic, local, and direct exercise of practical rationality which creates an environment of ‘shared deliberation’ directed toward aethic solidarity in the common quest for the shared human goods within the wider academic community as an intercollegiate exercise. MacIntyre’s commitment to egalitarianism and his adoption of this “Truth-through-agon” approach also means that he democratizes the Aristotelian notion of the *Spoudaios*, generalizing it to include all ‘educated plain persons’ (though it is ultimately ambiguous whether education is simply preferred or a requirement for participation, and indeed some commentators have referenced this to suggest an inherent elitism in MacIntyre’s thought). This requires that different traditions of thought and rational inquiry be housed in different universities so aethic discourse and rational engagement can proceed from originally different intellectual positions and recognition of the reality of different traditions (of inquiry)—in other words, the *uni*-versitas should perhaps become a ‘*multi*-versitas’.

Far from being elitist in his view of politics in my view, MacIntyre looks to disown the distinctively unmodern and aristocratic aspects of Aristotelian doctrine. While in the general contours of his socio-political thought, in his emphasis on deliberation and his insistence on a unifying truth project, MacIntyre embraces some general Aristotelian principles, in many areas of actual praxis and his sociological doctrine, he breaks with Aristotle and even the larger Thomistic-Aristotelian tradition. In fact, MacIntyre exhibits rather non-Aristotelian and even anti-Aristotelian tendencies, challenging key elements of the traditional Aristotelian view of government and society, which he refers to as *limitations*. These limitations in both normative theory and political

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119 One could speculate that the preference for education is specifically geared toward the quest for a common standard of rationality in the context of universities, while potentially MacIntyre’s politics—once the ‘common mind’ and standards of truth are established—is open to the participation and inclusion of all person whether educated or not. What’s clear is that MacIntyre’s politics qua politics in his ideal republic is not in any sense Millian or elitist at all.
theory, MacIntyre attempts to overcome by turning to Aquinas and Marx respectively. This underwrites his embrace of Thomas Aquinas over and above Aristotle as the true master of the Aristotelian tradition and in particular his adoption of a Thomistic idea of normative order and the necessity of adhering to some version of ‘moral hierarchy’. In a rather celebratory tone, MacIntyre writes, “the Aristotelian account of justice and of practical rationality emerges from the conflicts of the ancient polis, but is then developed by Aquinas in a way which escapes the limitations of the polis.” Moreover, MacIntyre’s social and political theory is very much egalitarian, in part because of his recourse to Marx. MacIntyre argues that his vision of social justice (which he ties to the virtue of ‘just generosity’) is “characterized both by effective appeals to desert and by effective appeals to need,” which are key features of the ideal Marxian arrangement of society.

MacIntyre is very clear what such a Marxist vision would amount to:

> Between independent practical reasoners the norms will have to satisfy Marx's formula for justice in a socialist society, according to which what each receives is proportionate to what each contributes. Between those capable of giving and those who are most dependent and in most need of receiving—children, the old, the disabled—the norms will have to satisfy a revised version of Marx's formula for justice in a communist society, ‘From each according to her or his ability, to each, so far as is possible, according to her or his needs’.

MacIntyre’s acceptance of Marx’s social (even moral) theory (which he presents as ‘virtues of acknowledged dependence’) in turn affects his Thomistic-Aristotelian normative theory in significant ways. Espousing such Marxian egalitarianism, MacIntyre observes that “the truths of Thomistic-Aristotelianism…have to be detached from…Aristotle’s false assertions” about women and labor and the inegalitarian sociology inherent in Thomistic-Aristotelianism. In this way,

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120 *WJWR*, p. 10
121 *Dependent Rational Animals*, p. 130
122 *Dependent Rational Animals*, p. 129-130
123 “A Partial Response to my Critics”, p. 301
MacIntyre conceives of the means to achieving moral hierarchy and unified standards of rationality as a bottom-up process.

On the normative theory of neo-Thomism and its political implications for engendering a ‘common mind’ (in the immediate phase of his social program), MacIntyre asserts, “What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.” In this way, as Ronald Beiner notices, MacIntyre joins ‘two kinds of particularisms’—a parochial vision of university education and a localist vision of political community—together as means of realizing his philosophical universals (i.e. truth and the human good viz. the common mind), which Beiner describes as particularist ‘detours’ on the path to his (MacIntyre’s) universalist ‘ultimate destination’. This is consistent with MacIntyre’s philosophical anthropology and his belief in some permanent quality of human nature from which he deduces ‘natural law’. But while the Encyclopedic tradition adopts a unitary and homogenous approach to inquiry which results in an anomic (or rather polynomic/polyonomous) normative situation—moral chaos. MacIntyre postulates a heterogenous, non-hierarchical program of inquiry (in plural traditions housed in different academic institutions) as means to the eventual (a posteriori) discovery of the alethic unity (reestablishing normative monism). Therefore, although MacIntyre rejects the institutions of liberal bourgeois politics and the modern state, his political vision is in many regards institutionalistic and gradualistic, where the actual form of the ultimate political order (i.e., a pluralist democratic republic) he desires will be predicated and founded on the outcomes of the process of the intellectual engagement across universities (which for MacIntyre

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124 AV, p. 263
MacIntyre’s image of perfect society is not unlike that of a monastery: the Good life is the ultimate telos for which all communities exist, toward which they should strive, and the first principle around which they should be organized, but the uncertain nature of this Good for us humans invites incessant debate and inquiry throughout history directed toward knowledge of Truth. By emphasizing the pursuit and the quest for the Good as perhaps even more important than the content of that ultimate Truth-to-be-discovered itself, MacIntyre suggests that in practice his ideal society is one in which there exist a multitude of monastic orders based in various universities (each representing and continuing one tradition of inquiry) so that the university could actually be transformed into a multiversity in a collective quest for a potentially unitary truth.

Undoubtedly, there is a profound sense of optimism and idealism to the MacIntyrean account—a strong conviction that only if we were to provide the right kind of environment, (educated) ‘plain persons’ in their everyday life (and in the context of being engaged in universities) would challenge the tenets of liberalism and cause its transformation, ushering in the kind of life that’s embodied by “the shared achievement” of common goods (the most integral of
which is the ultimate human Good) driven forward in this venture under the guidance of Thomistic Aristotelian tradition of inquiry and creating the kinds of (virtues-oriented) communities (mindful of Marxist social and political theory) that make it easier to do so. Through Marxist thought, MacIntyre hopes to usher in a democratic and populist transition in modern order (which apparently is not democratic and popular enough) itself propagated by a democratic reading of the Thomistic-Aristotelian socio-political project. MacIntyre argues not only that our moral impasse is actually an intellectual impasse, but that the main reason for this impasse is that we have been blinded (by the Encyclopedic stance) to assume and proceed from an original consensus in our assumptions and fundamentals of inquiry where none exists, which makes actual substantive consensus elusive. MacIntyre believes that recognition of our profound differences in point of view (as well as institutionalizing them in various ‘parochial’ universities) will help us to arrive eventually at a rational consensus, a position of convergence of traditions and ‘traditional’ unity (where one intellectual tradition is crowned as winner of the intellectual competition not unlike intermural sports). This will create, in turn, the proper environment for celebration of concrete differences in identity (gender, race, and class), and the full practice of a ‘multi-cultural’ democracy in the public sphere. MacIntyre is confident that this rational victor would prove to be none other than the Thomistic Tradition of thought. Of course, MacIntyre, as he repeatedly reminds us, is far from a neutral observer and very mindful of his ‘incommensurable differences’ in outlook from members of other traditions; and so, it is not clear at all if adopting his approach to academic institutions in both organization and appreciation of ‘original differences’ would be any more fruitful in reaching a consensus than today’s model, nor is it at all obvious that his avowed school will come out on top at the end of the ‘contest’. Therefore, it is doubtful if the intellectual agonism (of the first stage) can foster the kind of agonistic politics he advocates (in the second stage).
Expressing his political and social thought in the *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre supplements his exclusively moral (and hence intellectualistic) hierarchy of values (as presented in *AV*) by adding one more central virtue and good which he finds crucial for political practice. He thus speaks of two virtues required for the achievement of that common good which he calls the “social relationship of giving and receiving” and which he claims are ultimately “governed by and partially defined by norms of the natural law”; two virtues necessary to determine and to participate in determining in an unending inquiry what those norms are (i.e. within a community’s own “open narrative”): one is the virtue of ‘independent practical reasoning’ (the central virtue of *AV* necessary to any rational inquiry) and the other that of ‘acknowledged dependence’.

As MacIntyre posits in *Dependent Rational Animals*, our natural vulnerabilities and our need to realize our natural powers dictate that our community be constituted with our vulnerability and interdependence in mind, and hence a community’s common good (and necessary virtues) cannot be decided on rational deliberation alone without acknowledging our mutual dependencies and notions of reciprocity.

It is evident here that MacIntyre believes that societal protection of the weak and the vulnerable are not just Marxian imperatives but rather precepts of natural law, which he nonetheless casts as in man’s general interest given “that disability and dependence on others are something that all of us experience at certain times in our lives and this to unpredictable degrees, and that consequently our interest in how the needs of the disabled are adequately voiced and met is…the interest of the whole political society, an interest that is integral to their conception of their common good.” Therefore, MacIntyre argues that these ‘virtues of acknowledged dependence’

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126 *Dependent Rational Animals*, p. 156
127 *Dependent Rational Animals*, p. 130. Note: It is interesting first that MacIntyre does not see this as a utilitarian argument given the talk of interests, which stands in contrast to J.S. Mill who defended a similar proposition of collective common good by means of a utilitarian, sensorial and scientistic interpretation of Aristotle. MacIntyre’s
underwrite the politics of welfare in practice. That our shortcoming is one of moral/natural law and authority is a sentiment echoed throughout much of MacIntyre’s writings, and it does well to negate the idea that MacIntyre is fundamentally opposed to the ethics of rules (i.e. deontology) as such but rather looks to complement ethics of that sort with an ethic of the virtues as to enrich our notion of moral obligation:

Any reconciliation of biblical theology and Aristotelianism would have to sustain a defense of the thesis that only a life constituted in key part by obedience to law could be such as to exhibit fully those virtues without which human beings cannot achieve their telos.  

We should note that while in Dependent Rational Animals, MacIntyre speaks of our natural vulnerabilities and appears to want to organize a kind of ideal society with a rational sense of the common good in which to curtail them, in AV, he unequivocally rejected such utopian hopes, mocking the Enlightenment thinkers and the Utilitarians and Marxists that followed them for writing “as though fragility and vulnerability could be overcome in some progressive future”.  

It seems after all that MacIntyre would do just that.

Accordingly, MacIntyre outlines a three-level conception of the virtues (AV) or a three-pronged model for ascription of goods (Dependent Rational Animals), with the third category encompassing the unqualified general notion of the virtues concerned with the unconditional and exigent understanding of those goods not inherent to practices and roles in which persons qua

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own position is based on some supposed permanence of human nature—a ideational and theistic interpretation of Aristotle (i.e. Aquinas) which lends itself to Natural Law. In MacIntyre’s defense, I think he believes there would be or should be complete consensus (cf. Rousseau) on this ‘interest’ (since we can all imagine being in a similar situation) making it an absolute communal interest and thus formative in the conception of the common good. The logic of the argument in that case resembles in my mind to a striking degree the Kantian notion of man as an end-in-itself. Remember that Kant extrapolated and abstracted from an individual because he believed all rational agents inherently similar (qua agents) and of the same permanent nature (having practical reason). MacIntyre does essentially the same move except he declares it not a categorical imperative but a common good imperative and deems it not as common good of individuals but as the common good of an association/civil society. But at this stage, we are simply equivocating.

128 AV, p. 278 (my emboldening)
129 AV, p. 103
agents engage but as goods in themselves for human beings as such. MacIntyre’s original position on these third-level goods (as elaborated in AV) seems to be that they are aimed at in theory and in rational inquiry (the universalistic quest for truth being a condition of any inquiry) but in practice they stand always just within reach and yet just elusive at the crucial moment; nonetheless, they signify a promise that eventually “out of these more specific acts of reasoning about the goods,” we could “generate some more general notion of the ‘human good’ per se.” Well, that historical eventuality turned out to be much closer than one would expect, being partially presented to us in Dependent Rational Animals, where a version of the unqualified good was proffered under the idea of the natural law. In fact, as his intellectual trajectory moves from Aristotle to Aquinas, MacIntyre appears to acquire an increasingly favorable view of natural law. And scholars such as Murphy and Pinkard have detected just such a trend in MacIntyre’s writings with Pinkard observing that “MacIntyre clearly subscribes to some version of natural law”; he adds that MacIntyre’s notion of natural law “turns on how much weight is to be put on the notion of our rational, social natures as realizations of our more directly biological nature.”

In truth, MacIntyre does seem to recognize community as the ultimate source of ‘common good’, the substance of which he attempts to ascertain through a general consensus which he identifies as ‘common mind’ (cf. Rousseau’s general will), but instead of embracing the (communitarian) implications of such observations, he turns to human nature and from there abstracts and extrapolates to (universal) natural law! In so doing and in the logic of his argument, MacIntyre moves dangerously close to the arguments of natural rights theorists he otherwise so forcefully condemns. And yet, it seems to me that the only difference between MacIntyre’s position as developed in Dependent Rational Animals and a more straightforward natural rights

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130 Pinkard, p. 183
131 Pinkard, p. 199
stance rests on his more socially-encumbered, non-individualistic, romantic, and warm-hearted notion of a self that is fully aware of her dependence on others/community-at-large and her perennial lack of self-sufficiency. MacIntyre might judge this a substantial difference, but I think overall that his more recent direction has the danger of making his entire project appear much less convincing and his task of persuading us that much harder.

For now, however, “there is no reason to think that there is anything on the horizon other than what MacIntyre has described as the clash of incommensurable viewpoints and the necessity to adopt standards of justification that take that clash into consideration”. It is ironic therefore that such endurance of conflict (agon) ad infinitum is to many scholars also a measure/indication of Modernism, signifying the very spirit of Modernity since Hegel—such that we might very well be left at the end of MacIntyre’s project with the prospect of a never-ending Modernity (cf. Pippin’s ‘unending modernity’).

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132 Pinkard, p. 196
133 See Pinkard, p. 196-198. Also, consult Robert Pippin’s Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfaction of the European High Culture, Blackwell Publishers [1991] (1999), p. 160-180—where he coins the phrase “unending modernity”. Pippin (p. 176) points to a “narration of modernity in which the crucial events unfold in the middle rather than at the end”. One could argue that MacIntyre’s project has been to intellectualize this very conception n terms of his ‘traditions of inquiry’.
What Is the Problem with the MacIntyrean Position?

The MacIntyrean account presented above is a single and rather well-focused project which some have called the “After Virtue Project”. Much of the scholarly reaction to this project continues to unfold along two familiar axes. Some scholars problematize his critique of Modern liberalism and his account of the Enlightenment looking to defend the Modern liberal order—arguing against the suitability or value of the “virtue ethics” MacIntyre advocates and defending the “liberal individualist” position MacIntyre rejects. Robert Wokler, Stephen Mulhall, and Andrew Mason have provided such critiques in support of liberalism or in refuting MacIntyre’s understanding of the Enlightenment. But others, who agree with his overall evaluation of the Modern condition, critique his proffered account of Aristotle and Aquinas. In this group one can place Janet Coleman’s review for instance. By arguing so blatantly along inter-traditional or intra-traditional lines, the latter group actually endorse MacIntyre’s more significant contention: the idea that ethical inquiry generally proceeds under different normative premises (cf. “traditions”) corresponding to different spheres of justice with distinctive notions of rationality akin to various “echo chambers” contending against one another, thus demonstrating the “incommensurability” of those value positions. My critique is different and perhaps more meta in two ways. My initial effort is to consider the MacIntyrean model as a whole and not be a partisan voice for any of the three normative categories or moral

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135 See Wokler’s “Projecting the Enlightenment”; Mulhall’s “Liberalism, Morality and Rationality: MacIntyre, Rawls and Cavell”; and Mason’s “MacIntyre on Liberalism and its Critics: Tradition, Incommensurability, and Disagreement”—all in *After MacIntyre* (1994). Also, see Terry Pinkard’s article “MacIntyre’s Critique of Modernity” in *Alasdair MacIntyre* (2003) who in fact highlights the Modernism of MacIntyre which he celebrates, seeming relieved by the existence of Modern commitments in MacIntyre’s thought
136 For Coleman’s critique of MacIntyre’s Neo-Aristotelianism, see Janet Coleman, “MacIntyre and Aquinas”, *After MacIntyre* (1994) p. 65-90
philosophies MacIntyre delineates. In other words, at least at the beginning stage of my argument, my aim is to take a big-picture holistic view of the MacIntyrean scheme (keeping in mind both his moral and his political philosophy) rather than being a participant in the (normative/rational) “game” MacIntyre so creatively envisions. At the same time, what is often lacking from these critical assessments of MacIntyre’s project in the literature is a thorough analysis of MacIntyre’s account of Nietzsche, whom MacIntyre shuns as the ‘prophet of nihilism’ in his embrace of Aristotle and Aquinas. I aim to remedy this gap. My account seeks to rehabilitate Nietzsche (the historical philosopher), distinguishing between him and the Postmodern Tradition MacIntyre attributes to him as “Genealogy”. In fact, the later parts (or ‘acts’) of this study will establish Nietzsche as a founder of a new ‘tradition’ radically different from “Genealogy” who was anything but a ‘nihilistic provocateur’.

Despite its novel and refreshing approach to the Modern aporia, MacIntyrean theory suffers from four specific shortcomings. As such, I will conduct my critique along these four different but interdependent axes. First, there appears a disjunction between MacIntyre’s radical anti-Modern philosophical doctrine (theoria) and his rather tame and even Modernist political program (praxis). Given that MacIntyre’s politics still strikes a stubbornly Modern chord, it is in many ways contrary to the otherwise anti-Modern, post-Modern, and transformational claims of his work—his overall philosophy thus appears inconsistent. Second, MacIntyre’s proposed Thomistic alternative to the Modern aporia is a teleological, metaphysical, and even theistic one, which is not easily reconcilable and immediately in tension with those who subscribe to a non-perennialist, processual, and non-metaphysical view of the world. Accordingly, by the token of MacIntyre’s own arguments regarding “incommensurability” and “untranslatability” of normative positions, it stands to reason that
MacIntyre’s preferred Thomistic/traditional normative category would remain perpetually unconvincing and out of reach to many predisposed to secular and laic stances. Thirdly, the model it proposes, insightful as it is, remains incomplete—not just in its presentation of Nietzsche but also in its proposed system of normative categories—and thus needs to be expanded further for a more comprehensive account. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, while MacIntyre is rightly worried about the grave question of nihilism in the Modern world, he frames it in terms of “ethical nihilism” rather than “existential nihilism”; that is, his account is troubled by 1) a potential confusion in deciding the questions of right or wrong and 2) a lack of normative unity and moral hierarchy in Modernity—i.e. a value-discrepant society—(a concern that, as mentioned, in a different way also animated Leo Strauss’ worries about relativism and historicism), rather than seeing the problematic in terms of a higher order discontent with the narrative and the worldview of Modernity itself as exhausted and futile—a question of meaning.

What should become clear in this critique is that as audacious as MacIntyre’s critique of Modernity sounds, it is ultimately neither consistently nor fundamentally radical. MacIntyre aims not to overcome Modernity but to rehabilitate it along Neo-Thomist lines hoping to unleash its full potential as well as its democratic and egalitarian thrust. And in his view, to preserve the inherent good in Modernity requires one to shed or rather break the corrosive ‘steel-hard’ liberal shell (Gehäuse) in which Modernity was originally cocooned and is now held captive and about to suffocate (cf. Weber’s stahlhartes Gehäuse)—a case of ultimate metamorphosis. From the perspective of a true critic of Modernity like Nietzsche, however,
this project (even if successful) is ultimately procrustean and would just amount to a snake shedding its skin.\textsuperscript{137}

Why Inconsistent?

Although the MacIntyrean view of the political is far less developed and less nuanced than MacIntyre’s outlook on the normative and the philosophical, there exists a substantial gap between MacIntyre’s normative and philosophical program and his political doctrine, which problematizes the typical (liberal) portrayal of MacIntyre as a genuinely and comprehensively anti-Modern thinker (who in this view romanticizes the Middle Ages). Nor is he a ‘subversive’ post-Modern looking to abolish the Modern project altogether. While MacIntyre’s philosophical account expresses an intricate critique of Modernity and what he thinks is the Modern crisis of values (i.e., normative anarchy)—thus calling for a moral overhaul in the Modernist normative architecture according to the Thomistic blueprint aimed at recreating a hierarchy of values in the West (i.e., normative monism), MacIntyre’s politics (and the concrete aspects of his thought in general) prove to be tired extensions of Modernist socio-political schemes—and arguably fanatically Modern in the neo-Marxist and anarchist mold (i.e., hyper-modernistic).\textsuperscript{138} As MacIntyre himself admits at times, he wants to “restore” the Thomistic/Christian moral scheme within the Modern normative

\textsuperscript{137} Weber incidentally used the ‘steel-hard casing’ characterization because he believed Modernity had solidified to the extent that it was no longer changeable or amorphous, no longer fluid or moldable. What more, it had crystallized around the liberal capitalistic order.

\textsuperscript{138} From the neo-Marxist or post-Marxist point of view, the source of Modern political discontent lies in the threat capitalist rationalization (encompassing the modern bureaucratic state and the consumerist culture) poses to democratization and equality in advanced Modern societies. (cf. New Left and the Frankfurt School). On the historical trajectory of Marxist thought in general and its essential Modernism see Göran Therborn, \textit{From Marxism to Post-Marxism?} (Verso, 2010). Therborn argues (p. 67) that Marxism is solely critical of Modernity’s political economy while it specifically endorses Modernity against both anti-modernism and post-modernism seeking to engender “another, fully developed Modernity” by resolving the contradictions inherent in Modernity owing to its troubled political economy—i.e. capitalism. This is in many ways also the strategy of MacIntyre, but although MacIntyre remains uneasy with Modern capitalism and the modern bureaucratic state, his main target for attack is the Modern moral (dis)order.
architecture, while preserving the key tenets of Modern sociology and politics (barring the ‘bourgeois’ Modern nation-state of course). From the perspective of true critics of Modernity who aim at Modernity’s *sublation* (Ger. *Aufhebung*), such as Nietzsche, however, this highlights a glaring contradiction—revealing MacIntyre to be a *reformer* and a *rehabilitator* rather than a *renegade iconoclast*.\(^{139}\) It is not a full-on critique, for its aim is ultimately *maintenance* and *restoration* of the paradigm rather than its complete overcoming.

Indeed, MacIntyre’s politics is far less heterodox and in search for a paradigm shift than his normative project would suggest. There is scarcely any non-Modern or extra-Modern creativity or imagination in MacIntyre’s political thought. In fact, if one characterizes Modernity, as Nietzsche and before him Tocqueville did, as the ‘age of equality’ or ‘the democratic age’, then not only is MacIntyre not a critic of Modernity but he is as *Modernist* as they come. MacIntyre does not want to change the political status quo in Modernity—i.e., the *democratic* order; rather, he seems to argue that modern politics whether conservative or liberal is not sufficiently democratic and republican nor truly *participatory* given the constraining reality of the modern nation-state. He thus harbors the same egalitarian and democratic presumptions (if not the procedures, structures, and the principles of organization) that the liberals do, whose (specifically) normative paradigms he is challenging. Accordingly, MacIntyre’s politics is not really *paradigm-shifting*, nor revolutionary, but reform-minded at best (and this only structurally and not substantively). In the political *orthodoxy* of Modernity, MacIntyre is a proud card-holding member. Whatever the debate over the precise nature and content of MacIntyre’s democratic

\(^{139}\) MacIntyre himself agrees with this characterization: he concedes “We are all of us inescapably inhabitants of advanced modernity, bearing its social and cultural marks. So my understanding of the tradition of the virtues [neo-Thomism] and of the consequences for modernity of its rejection of that tradition and of the possibility of restoring it is indeed a peculiarly modern understanding.” This becomes even more pronounced in my view once one turns to the analysis of MacIntyre’s political thought.
political theory (whether deliberative, communicative, or agonistic), it is obvious that it sits squarely and unwaveringly in the realm of modern democratic theory. It is thus modernist par excellence—its cornerstone being equality and (universal) ‘popular participation’.

That there is a certain incongruities between MacIntyre’s philosophical radicalism about (normative) Modernity and his political acquiescence to Modernity, is a disjunction that has been recognized in the scholarly literature on his work. And this disconnect casts further doubt on the realism and possibility of the MacIntyrean critique, revealing its intrinsic idealism and naïveté. Horton and Mendus, for instance, point out that MacIntyre’s overall project suggests that “both theoretical and social changes of a fundamental nature would be necessary, and one of the deepest difficulties with the argument of *After Virtue* is that the very extent of its critique of the modern world seems to cast doubt on the possibility of any realistic revival, under the conditions of modernity, of the Aristotelianism which MacIntyre advocates”.140 This is a significant problem. While MacIntyre’s whole political program is contingent on a radical transformation of our intellectual/educational institutions (a project which seemingly bridges the divide between his normative/theoria and his political/praxis), it is not at all clear how MacIntyre’s prescribed reorganization of academia could take place absent any political will in the first place. Even if we accept MacIntyre’s arguments regarding (the alethic/axiological basis of) the Modern malaise and the necessity of such fundamental reforms (of our university system), (rational) cogency and correctness need not result in tangible action or policies. Indeed, absent a more formative, hands-on, and realpolitik conception of politics (as originally constitutive and efficient rather than what is literally an afterthought), MacIntyre’s proposals for the institutional embodiment of traditions (of inquiry) under a reconceived university structure, his “references to ‘the construction of local

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140 Horton and Mendus, “Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue* and After”, p.3
forms of community’ and the need ‘for another doubtless very different St Benedict’ look “little more than whistling in the dark to keep the spirits up when set against his coruscating critique of modernity”.\(^{141}\)

In this respect, MacIntyre’s formulation of his critique of Modernity proves highly utopian, and his vision for actualizing it completely devoid of any realistic or workable means. That is, irrespective of MacIntyre’s penchant for intellectualism and his emphasis on rationality, what is sorely lacking from the MacIntyrean account is a theory or at least a recognition of the role of power in socio-political change, perhaps a *Wille zur Macht* seen through the prism of intellect, but a *Wille zur Macht* nonetheless. This seems to reflect a deep apprehension about politics and power, which leads MacIntyre to adopt an attitude of ‘escapism’ from the political that he could be said to share with some of his Leftist comrades.\(^{142}\) One might argue that MacIntyre’s imagined system of discursive rational inquiry within academia is a kind of an intellectualist version of the Nietzschean *Wille zur Macht*—*Wille zur Macht* for the academics (democratized to encompass all ‘educated plain persons’). But even if we take for granted that the university system in the West will somehow (perhaps out of an internal regard for embodied rationality) reorganize itself as a multiversity (independent of any external directives or social policy) and that the conflicting ‘incommensurable’ traditions will somehow engage intellectually in such a way—overcoming their untranslatability and “suffering rational defeat at the hands of another”—as to crown the dominant paradigm, it is not ultimately clear what difference this would make politically (i.e.,

\(^{141}\) Ibid.

\(^{142}\) Indeed, student of Leftist politics Carl Boggs calls this “seemingly inherent flight from politics” on the part of the Modern Left “a persistent difficulty” with the leftist alternatives to liberal politics. Carl Boggs, *Social Movements and Political Power: Emerging Forms of Radicalism in the West*, Temple University Press, 1989. p. 12-13
whether the rational dominance of the neo-Thomist tradition would in reality translate into the sort of political practice MacIntyre champions).\(^{143}\)

MacIntyre seems to take for granted the possibility of an ascendancy of the “traditional/Thomistic” mode of thought (a development that parallels the reconsolidation of the Normative structure), within whose (harmonizing) confines agonistic democratic politics and rational political deliberation would be made possible. I am not so sure if this makes any practical sense. There is no guarantee that the victorious tradition of thought (even if such a rational victory could eventually be achieved and the neo-Thomist tradition did indeed emerge as the victor) would generate enough intellectual capital to reconsolidate and reunify the anomic alethic/axiological order, let alone the political capital needed to transcend the Modern nation-state and to realize the agonistic, multi-culturalist, democratic republics MacIntyre fancies. As noted, all of this is premised on the restructuring of the university system which, again discussed, is itself a problematic proposition. But, even if we accept MacIntyre’s general scheme \((\text{theoria})\), it is not clear how this could have any real implications for Modern \(\text{praxis}\)—that is regardless of how critical MacIntyre’s stance against Modernity really is (and I believe it is not truly extra-Modern or anti-Modern at all, but an intra-Modern perspective aimed at rehabilitation of the Modern paradigm from within) he provides no plausible idea of the means necessary to actualize its propositioned reforms! MacIntyre claims, “The history of morality and moral philosophy is the history of successive challenges to some preexisting moral order, a history in which the question of which party defeated the other in rational argument is always to be distinguished from the question of which party retained or gained social and political hegemony.” And it is on this point precisely that Nietzsche along with the whole school of political realism would disagree, as the

\(^{143}\) \textit{AV}, p. xiv
question of which tradition can achieve normative supremacy is never separate from the predominant political and social order.\textsuperscript{144} It is quite difficult to believe that the modern liberal order MacIntyre despises so much for its dogmatism and abstract absolutism (as embodied in its “encyclopedic” mode of thought) could all of a sudden achieve the emblematic Aristotelian liberal spirit and open itself to the kind of free dialogue and inter-traditional criticism that MacIntyre desires simply by being exposed to the sort of critique he provides in \textit{After Virtue}. In fact, the gap between MacIntyre’s normative philosophy and his political thought, between his doctrines of \textit{theoria} and \textit{praxis}, is so large that he appears at best highly idealistic—imagining a kind of philosophical kumbaya where adherents of liberal and genealogical traditions will have a moment of reckoning and realize the incoherence of their own traditions embracing MacIntyre’s neo-Thomism—and at worst simply shortsighted and unmindful.

This invites further questions about whether MacIntyre’s political viewpoint is entirely consistent even with his own philosophical project. Putting aside the charges of idealism and naïveté one might direct at MacIntyre for his unquestioned faith in the rational deliberative capacities of every human being, it would also appear that his version of politics only works for an ethically-healthy society, composed of what he calls “moral agents”, who are of ‘common mind’ having already achieved ‘normative community’ (aware of their own distinctive constellation of values and having a shared standard of rationality); so it is \textit{not} meant for an ethically-disordered and passive society of subjects with confused notions of \textit{selfhood}, and especially not for a Modern society of unencumbered individuals who in their “subjectivism” do as they please (on which incidentally his normative critique of Modernity itself stands). In such a debilitating context as ours, which MacIntyre himself aptly portrays, the positive view of politics

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{AV}, p. 269
he presents simply cannot be expected to be salutary let alone transformative. In theory, MacIntyre’s idea of politics as an evolving consensus that accommodates the perpetuity of conflict (consensus through-agon) does match his call for tradition-constituted, paradigm-restoring, rather evolutionary ethics (truth-through-agon), but in practice in an environment where the normative is so thoroughly estranged from the political (i.e., in Modernity) neither can generate the other and thus both fail to sustain themselves.

This gulf between MacIntyrean politics and his normative account is also related to a (secondary) question about whether his thought is really and consistently Aristotelian. In purging from his account of Aristotelian tradition what he casts as (sociological) limitations and what he calls Aristotle’s metaphysical biology, MacIntyre essentially transforms Aristotle into a Modern democrat. He adopts an egalitarian understanding of Aristotle at the expense of the more familiar aristocratic reading, one which denies the hierarchical ordering which lies at the heart of Aristotle’s teleological order. In this spirit, MacIntyre selectively chooses from the Thomistic-Aristotelian tradition what he believes he needs to reorder the (disordered) Modern normative archetype (i.e., the notion of alethic unity and normative monism), while he discards most of the Aristotelian sociology and political thought—the aristocratic order of authority—which he considers unmodern limitations. He also abandons as ‘metaphysical biology’ the whole cultural cosmology of the Greeks reflected in the writings of Aristotle and Aquinas and teleology at large which is predicated on the inegalitarian idea of ergon, rank, and hierarchy. In so doing, MacIntyre effectively disowns the very preconditions and prerequisites of the normative solidarity he champions.

What’s more, as stated, MacIntyre’s entire practical scheme rests on an extra-political foundation dependent on the proper institutionalization of traditions of inquiry and Neo-

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145 The hierarchical order of the cosmos appears as ‘natural hierarchy’ in Aristotle and ‘divine hierarchy’ in Aquinas.
Thomism’s final rational victory over other contesting traditions. The political escapism this reflects is also a quite un-Aristotelian and non-Greek understanding of politics, in that it denies that everything is public and part of public life as a result of the strong identity and oneness of the normative with the political. Thus, in MacIntyre, the idea of man as a zoon politikon is turned on its head, becoming effectively meaningless. Given that MacIntyre severs the normative-political nexus and the primacy he attributes the normative, it is no wonder that politics is almost a postscript in the MacIntyrean account. While his moral philosophy is insightful and powerful, his political philosophy is much less nuanced, less discussed, much more timid, and embracing of the Modernist status quo. While MacIntyre advocates for something akin to a localized, republican, and direct version of the contemporary multi-culturalist democracy, he qualifies it by presupposing the preemptive, original agreement of the citizens on the normative foundations (‘a common mind’) as they participate in the political process in the plurality of their ‘rigid’ (physical) identities. Indeed, MacIntyre’s ideal of politics is one of “deliberative participation” of the ‘plain persons’ within local (republican) communities where the foundational normative agreement is meant to both accommodate the fixed sociological identities of persons as well as to make them more flexible and compromising ideologically. While in the Aristotelian tradition (cf. Aristotle’s republic), the political and the normative are coupled, coterminous, and correlative, in MacIntyre, the political is clearly secondary and subsequent to the normative.

It follows that MacIntyre’s view of Aristotle as well as his critique of Modernity proceed from within the Modern paradigm because he completely accepts and has internalized the egalitarian and democratic thrust of the Modernist project. It might seem counterintuitive for a highly philosophical and intellectualist project such as MacIntyre’s to profess populism and anti-

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146 Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Justification of Coercion and Constraint”, 2015 Keynote Address at Notre Dame Center of Ethics and Culture
elitism, but that is precisely so. In fact, MacIntyre is adamant that his project cuts against the grain of “the scripted conversations of the ruling elites of advanced modernity”.\textsuperscript{147} Virtue, for MacIntyre, is constructed, practiced, and sustained in everyday life by everyday plain persons and so it is inherently practical and rooted in common sense; it is not a theoretical and intellectual exercise. MacIntyre’s project signals then a profound, albeit mostly implicit and subliminal, egalitarian and populistic tenor in its normative doctrine already, an egalitarian and democratic streak which becomes markedly more powerful and pronounced in MacIntyre’s politics. Given his Thomistic philosophy, that MacIntyre champions political decentralization and normative monism is not surprising per se, but it is interesting that he forcefully defends the notion of normative supremacy and unified moral order (what Walzer calls complex tyranny) while renouncing any form of aristocratic or non-democratic politics. Indeed, MacIntyre shuns political hierarchy in all forms which prevails in both Aquinas and Aristotle but embraces their ideal of normative hierarchy.\textsuperscript{148} It follows that MacIntyre—in a rather Habermasian fashion—offers a more

\textsuperscript{147} AV, prologue to the Third Edition, p. xv

\textsuperscript{148} Here, Michael Walzer’s (1983) own version of neo-Marxian and materialistic critique of liberalism (in many regards an inverse of MacIntyre’s) could be instructive. Walzer’s concepts of dominance, monopoly, and complex equality further illuminate the MacIntyrean project and its inconsistencies. As outlined in the Spheres of Justice (cf. WJWR), Walzer’s problem with the modern liberal order rests not with the normative disorder MacIntyre delineates but precisely with the normative dominance liberalism (in its Capitalist formulation) affords money, a problem which is intensified by the monopolization of the dominant good. A simple egalitarian, Walzer argues, would accept this dominance and fight against any political and social monopoly in distribution of this good (this person is the superficial or Liberal social democrat). A follower of a more complex notion of equality (or a true social/community democrat as Walzer sees himself) however problematizes not just the public/political monopoly but also the normative unity and dominance of one good over all others as the medium good (i.e. power or money). As such, both MacIntyre and Walzer in their neo-Marxist leanings reject any monopoly on political power and demand a radical democratic distribution of power (i.e. simple equality). Yet, while for MacIntyre, the problem in the West is the value-chaos, the lack of alethic unity and the absence of any one normative standard dominating others, for Walzer it is just the opposite, for the modern problem is precisely that such a normative dominance does exist! As such, at the same time that MacIntyre schemes on how to escape the disorienting effects of moral confusion and polynomy in Modernity hoping that his aim of normative monism could be realized through a return to Thomism, Walzer would have celebrated this “confusion” as value pluralism had it actually existed—alas, for Walzer we live under a normative monism already whose most disconcerting embodiment is money.\textsuperscript{148} On Walzerian terms therefore, the MacIntyrean ideal is one of simple equality (in the political sphere) mounted on a complex tyranny (at the normative level). Alternatively, from the MacIntyrean position, Walzer appears a communitarian democrat and a normative liberal.
egalitarian democratic version of politics and citizenship than the kind of aristocratic, meritocratic, and inherently hierarchical model that Aristotle seems to have preferred.

Not only is the MacIntyran politics more Modernist than one would expect of a critic of Modernity, it has a strong (neo-)Marxist bent. There is hardly any Thomism or Aristotelianism in MacIntyre’s understanding of the political. While Aristotle and Aquinas were both particularly anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian, believing in a hierarchical order of authority and aristocratic organization of government, MacIntyre advocates a radical form of direct deliberative democracy which incorporates from modern democratic theory some central tenets of political agonism. Moreover, MacIntyre rejects the Modern state not on Aristotelian grounds but on Marxist ones. The case could be made that the Modern state is an intrinsically egalitarian entity, attempting to attend and cater to as many individuals in aggregate as possible and to improve man’s lot through vast programs of mass education, public housing projects, etc., or as social democrats put it, to ‘level the playing field’. In contrast, it seems that MacIntyre’s rejection of the Modern state is rooted in his rejection of capitalist market economy in its inherent ‘exploitive’, totalistic, dominating nature akin to the way that Marx and before him Rousseau had repudiated Locke.

That MacIntyre’s “allegiance to the [Marxist] view of the of the destructive character of the institutions of capitalism including the modern bureaucratic state has remained unaltered to the present day” raises further questions: namely, to what degree should we take seriously MacIntyre’s Aristotelian assertion that norms and politics are two faces of the Janus (where politics amounts precisely to ‘critical deliberation’ on normative question—i.e., practical reason) when his own dramatic shift in normative outlook—his radically restorative and monistic quest for ethics (Neo-Thomism)—seems to have had almost no effect on his specifically Modern drastically democratic
and egalitarian (neo-)Marxist politics. Should it not be, one may wonder, that his normative theory (and the Thomistic tradition for that matter) should have a distinctive view of the political that is its own and at the very least not specifically appropriated from neo-Marxism or anarchism. MacIntyre might say (and has said) that one tradition can and must borrow from another when it finds a particularly good idea but nonetheless such a wholesale adoption of an entire conception of politics seems either to disprove MacIntyre’s claim as to the coherence and comprehensiveness of Thomistic-Aristotelian tradition or point to MacIntyre’s personal failure (as a Thomist) to distinguish and articulate the Thomistic political project. For reasons noted, my own position on this is closer to the latter account although perhaps there is a degree of truth to both accounts.

As Pinkard points out, “MacIntyre’s critique of modernity is thus a critique from within modernity itself, even though it is often clothed as a rejection of the modern world, a call for a lost medieval and Thomist past.” Nowhere does this become more evident than in MacIntyre’s political and social theory and in his pronouncements for the modern university. And MacIntyre does not shy away from such a proposition: “We are all of us inescapably inhabitants of advanced modernity, bearing its social and cultural marks. So my understanding of the tradition of the virtues and of the consequences for modernity of its rejection of that tradition and of the possibility of restoring it is indeed a peculiarly modern understanding”. MacIntyre, and not Nietzsche, it turns out is one more manifestation of the Modernist mode of life—it is just that MacIntyre is not entirely comfortable with the form that life takes in liberalism and under the structures of the modern nation-state.

149 Mark Murphy, After MacIntyre, p. 3
150 Pinkard, “MacIntyre’s Critique of Modernity”, p. 197
151 AV, prologue to the Third Edition, p. xi-xii
What MacIntyre really seeks therefore is to combine a hierarchical view of moral life (i.e. a hierarchy of values) with an exceptionally democratic and egalitarian view of political and social life. And although MacIntyre does a clever and even remarkable job of weaving them together into a single project, this is not an easy marriage, for historically it has been the non-discriminating, egalitarian liberal individualist view of moral life (what he despises) that has created the Modern social and political order that (with the notable exception of his Marxist critique of the Modern state) MacIntyre seems to fundamentally admire. He seeks to preserve the egalitarian spirit of Modernity *in action*, to take advantage of the supposed benefits of democratic politics and modern institutions, but to establish the dominance of an order of values inspired by Thomistic Christianity *in thought*. Therefore, the two conflicting strands of his youthful thought (Marxism and Christianity) seem to come together in his mature thought. One wonders whether this would be a sustainable and ultimately successful union.

The MacIntyorean Turn to Teleology and Theism as a Problem

Although the crux of MacIntyre’s work in *AV* is the restoration of the Virtue tradition in order to rehabilitate Modernity, there he makes every effort to focus exclusively on the concept of the Good, and to shun any notion of naturalistic teleology and metaphysics, or what he calls “Aristotle’s metaphysical biology,” from that tradition. In short, he seeks to emphasize the Good as *good*-in-itself and as a social aim irrespective of biology. Ironically, living a life of *virtue* emerges as an end-in-itself, as the *telos*—without requiring any relation to any other *causes* or higher *ends* or *teloi*. For MacIntyre, the Good is the ultimate good, rather than an instrumental good for some other purpose, such as the advancement of culture or community. In fact, MacIntyre
insists that he is not a communitarian on precisely those grounds, for he prioritizes the Good over the community, instrumentalizing the latter, whereas the communitarians supposedly do exactly the opposite. In so doing, he is originally content to appropriate only the teleological scheme of Aristotle (in a social rather than natural sense) while happily discarding Aristotelian (biological) metaphysics.

In time, however, MacIntyre became convinced that it would be futile to speak of the Good and attempt to recover it without at the same time recovering a notion of metaphysics (with which it is traditionally fused) and ultimately ‘natural law’. He realized that for the project (good-qua-good) to be tenable (i.e., to move from the particular [man] to the universal [Good]), it was necessary to link the Good as the ultimate purpose with some abstract/universal idea of mankind’s nature via a ‘generalizable principle’. After all, “it is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do”.

With this realization, MacIntyre evolved from a pure Aristotelian-type into a Thomist and arguably a proponent of natural law.

Aquinas, MacIntyre came to believe, is perhaps “a better Aristotelian than Aristotle…able to extend and deepen both Aristotle's metaphysical and his moral enquiries”. As Horton and Mendus point out, in the process of his intellectual evolution, MacIntyre became increasingly Thomistic in his interpretation of Aristotle and what he calls tradition, seeing in Aquinas a kind of satisfactory reconciliation of two alternate conceptions of rationality championed by Aristotle and St. Augustine, which to MacIntyre signifies not only the possibility of resolution of the discord among various traditions by means of practical reason, but also “the possibility of moral progress”

\[AV, \text{prologue to the Third Edition, p. xi}\]
\[AV, \text{Prologue to the Third Edition, p. x}\]
itself which emerges out of the belief in teleology. And, this moral progress cannot be dissociated from its grounding in some form of natural law. Hence, it was inevitable that the idea of ‘progress’ toward a universal Good become a fundamental concept in the MacIntyrean teleology. And once MacIntyre embraced universality (albeit in theory), it was only a matter of time before he also needed a concept of *metaphysics* and even an idea of natural law to go with it, both of which he appropriated from Thomas Aquinas.

In his reconsideration of *AV*, MacIntyre writes that he “learned from Aquinas that [his] attempt to provide an account of the human good purely in social [non-metaphysical] terms, in terms of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of human lives, was bound to be inadequate until [he] had provided it with a metaphysical grounding.” In other words, he realized he needed a theistic account to give his notion of the Good as good-in-itself a universality (which incidentally is a problem also encountered by Plato).

Through his combining of teleology and Thomistic metaphysics, MacIntyre was able to overcome one major limitation to his *Goodness/virtue-for-its-own-sake* model, but in process he became a more theistic and metaphysical thinker both philosophically and personally as his conversion to Catholicism indicates, which meant shedding the secular/atheistic skin of his middle period. But, what is an agnostic critic of Modernity who doesn’t believe in grand designs, natural law, and final universal ends, and adheres to a strictly naturalistic/thisworldly metaphysics to do? It is in answering this question specifically that the Nietzschean account appears especially helpful. Still, one could argue that in prioritizing the virtues and the Good over the community and social practices, MacIntyre had simply gotten the order wrong. As observed by many anthropological

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154 Horton and Mendus, p.4  
155 *AV*, prologue to the Third Edition, p. xi
philosophers,\textsuperscript{156} it is much more likely that the norms and the virtues develop for the sake of sustaining the community, in order to support its meaning structure and aid in the development of culture (and are thus an instrumental good) rather than the other way around.

There is a further critique to be made of MacIntyre’s interpretation of Aristotelian teleology. MacIntyre like many other Aristotelians individualizes and humanizes Aristotle’s notion of teleology without accounting for or incorporating the holistic, communal, interdependent, and organicist aspect of the Aristotelian teleological scheme within which the person’s telos/purpose is to be understood solely as function where the whole is concerned—a subset within the larger set. As MacIntyre himself concedes, “It is only when man is thought of as an individual prior to and apart from all roles that 'man' ceases to be a functional concept” (and this is precisely the error MacIntyre himself commits).\textsuperscript{157} This second-order (systemic/holistic) aspect of teleology (with respect to which the first-order is to be perceived functionally) is not personal at all but communal and even cultural, not humanistic per se but ideational and instrumental, oriented to the realization of the ultimate (Aristotelian) ideal—\textit{Eudaimonia}.

But absent this two-level analysis of Aristotelian teleology, there exists for MacIntyre in Aristotle a naturalistic teleology which he calls 'metaphysical biology', which he then feels compelled to reinterpret and rehabilitate as 'sociological teleology'—that is to sever the ordered 'role' of man from birth and nature and to connect it to community and nurture so as to supply it

\textsuperscript{156} On whose arguments MacIntyre himself draws in his \textit{Dependent Rational Animals} (1999), although MacIntyre adopts a rather Schelerian position, where knowledge (of the Good) remains dependent on culture and sociality as the vehicle for its realization, but its nature is nonetheless independent and final in substance (cf. \textit{Vitalism}). For more on the instrumental nature of norms for communal life, see Arnold Gehlen’s \textit{Man: His Nature and Place in the World} ([1950], 1988) and \textit{Moral and Hyper-moral} (1969), as well as Karl Mannheim’s formulation of “sociology of knowledge” (i.e. socio-cultural basis of reality/knowledge) in \textit{Ideology and Utopia} (1936). Nietzsche’s radical position is better reflected here (Cf. \textit{Organicism}).

\textsuperscript{157} AV, p.59
with (an illusion of) choice (having a personal narrative thus becoming important).\textsuperscript{158} As we will see later, Nietzsche's “anthro-culturalism”, in effect, culturalizes (natural) teleology in a way which I believe is closer to the spirit of the Hellenic idea of teleology (of which the most acclaimed spokesman is Aristotle), recovering what MacIntyre dubs the ‘functional concept of man’. Culture after all is the space where man (real) and good (ideal), means and ends, natural (nature) and social (nurture), essence and existence combine and achieve unity in a (perspectival) ‘reality’ that goes beyond binary Cartesian distinctions.\textsuperscript{159} Nietzsche's alternative, in this view, is a cultural teleology without the essentialistic framework typically and traditionally associated with teleology.

It follows that in the MacIntyrean project (akin to his intellectual mentor Aquinas’), it is the “linking of a biblical historical perspective with an Aristotelian one in the treatment of the virtues…the unique achievement of the Middle Ages” that is to be celebrated and revisited to find a practical remedy to the conundrums of Modern morality.\textsuperscript{160} Thus, far from being radical as it first appears, the MacIntyrean premise proves to be one of reversion. It is not an altogether novel or a forward-looking project, traversing into unchartered waters. It is a hearkening for a new St. Benedict to be the new moral guardian of Modern morality, which exhibits a deep nostalgia for the West’s pre-Enlightenment Weltanschauung—its normative monism (it is this return to the moral status quo ante on the part of MacIntyre that many liberals mistakenly generalize as the overall spirit of MacIntyrean philosophy, finding him reactionary and backward-looking).

\textsuperscript{158} MacIntyre himself grounds his turn away from biology and in line with a more social understanding of the telos to pre-Aristotelian Homeric Greece with its emphasis on social, moral, and cosmic order (rather than biology) and man’s place within this order. Curiously, MacIntyre in ch.5 of \textit{AV} acknowledges the functional nature of man in a larger world order (the telos of which supersedes the individual and the aim of which is not Goodness) but for obvious reasons this is not a tack MacIntyre is prepared to take. See \textit{AV}, p.58

\textsuperscript{159} Or to borrow a passage from MacIntyre that almost perfectly reflects what I am describing (\textit{AV}, p.149): “that the world is as a matter of contingent fact so ordered that if you are able to bring about a happening or state or activity of the first kind, an event or state or activity of the second kind will ensue. The means and the end can each be adequately characterized without reference to the other; and a number of quite different means may be employed to achieve one and the same end.”

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{AV}, p. 180
As MacIntyre himself contends, “ever since belief in Aristotelian teleology was discredited moral philosophers have attempted to provide some alternative rational secular account of the nature [i.e., a new metaphysics] and status of morality, but that all these attempts, various and variously impressive as they have been, have in fact failed, a failure perceived most clearly by Nietzsche.”¹⁶¹ In other words, MacIntyre sees clearly what Nietzsche had seen previously: the Modern efforts at a new non-theistic, non-metaphysical, secular and “naturalist” ontology had born no fruit. What separates the two thinkers is their reaction to this failure. While Nietzsche takes it upon himself to continue on this task and devise a new secular (this-worldly) metaphysics that is tenable—and in fact making this enterprise into the foundation of his positive project, MacIntyre’s response has been to abandon this modern imperative altogether and instead restore the old “Aristotelian” teleology (which he mistakenly humanizes/individualizes) and metaphysics (which via Thomism he renders theistic)—in many ways ending up with a new ‘natural law’.

Why Incomplete?

There are two ways in which the MacIntyrean meta-normative approach misses the mark. More generally, I find the three-pronged model (Encyclopedia, Genealogy, Tradition) MacIntyre proposes not entirely persuasive and in need of expansion. Going back to what I just discussed in the previous section (II.B), in his partiality toward a teleological and theistic viewpoint, MacIntyre’s categorization of normative orientations is rightly preoccupied with the question of the scope (of the norms) but less inclined to consider their position on the question of permanence and fluidity (i.e. their relationship to time and space). it is thus far from a comprehensive model.

¹⁶¹ AV, p. 256
Specifically, the model errs in its understanding of the Nietzschean “genealogical” category it outlines. Following the likes of Deleuze and Foucault, MacIntyre’s reading of the Nietzschean project is decidedly negative, overlooking what I believe to be the overwhelmingly positive affirmative agenda of Nietzsche, for which the so-called “repudiations” or “subversions” are only a preamble and indeed futile if not complemented with a positive program and for the sake of a new affirmation. It is thus a partial reading at best.

The MacIntyrean Model—Expanded

MacIntyre’s understanding of traditions of inquiry which he presents as Three Rival Versions of Normative Inquiry (1990) is essentially a one-dimensional model developed around the scope of truth-claims and the domain for their practical application (universal=Encyclopedia, community=Aristotelian, and individual=Genealogy). It does not account for how the normative categories would conceive of the nature of the norms—i.e. the temporality or timelessness of truth-claims as well as the permanence or mutability in the constellation of values themselves. And while it accounts for the (practical) scope of the norms, the boundaries of their operation, and to whom are they meant to apply (whether they are universal, cultural, or subjective), it is less concerned with their origin (i.e. whence they derive their authority). In Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity (2016), MacIntyre basically presents a different one-dimensional model on an entirely different plane conceived around the notion of the “fact-value” (is-ought) distinction which distinguishes two fundamental classes of normative categories on the basis of their views on permanence of norms and ‘alethic/moral realism’. He thus differentiates between Hume and Humean-inspired normative traditions which espouse changeability and fluidity of normative
claims (comprising all schools of Modern morality in which he also includes Nietzsche, the expressivists, and the nihilistic tradition at large) and those traditions which emphasize the permanence and timelessness of norms as natural where he situates his preferred Thomistic-Aristotelian tradition. Thus, where the original battle for the future of morality in West (given the expiration of liberal morality) was conceived to be between Aristotle and Nietzsche in AV, in Ethics (2016) the fundamental rivalry happens to be between Aristotle and Hume (who MacIntyre believes the first Modern moral philosopher) with Nietzsche and modern expressivists just the newest expression of this centuries-old conflict between Moderns and Aristotelians—between the proponents of is and ought.

As it stands therefore, MacIntyre appears to equivocate on just how we should conceive and demarcate the fundamental distinctions in moral categories. A more comprehensive model of normative categories, I suggest, should combine both these seemingly diverging axes to attain a more unified model responsive to both differences in scope and those of nature and permanence. The proposed model is therefore two-dimensional which I hold to be much more illuminating. MacIntyre’s model (1990) understandably blankets all the “universalist” schools of modern philosophy under one category (Encyclopedia) which fits with his overarching critique of Modernity as universalistic and totalistic, whereas they represent, I posit, different categories of normative thought altogether once we account for the question of temporality as well as origin. In so doing, we are left with not three, but six normative categories which are better understood as rather instinctual normative orientations separating different normative traditions and persons in general—a more exhaustive model (see Table 1 below).

The notion of fluidity I highlight because as Gehlen already observes in 1969 through his notion of pluralistische Ethik and what he calls the Weltoffenheit der Sozialregulationen (the
world-openness of social regulations), there may be various independent sources of ethical behavior.”

This derives from what Nietzsche also stressed as the indeterminate nature of man as a ‘not yet determined animal’ (das noch nicht festgestellte Tier), extending this indeterminate quality from the human animal to human culture whose end is still being shaped in time. Of course, both MacIntyre’s theism and his belief in the timeless and definitiveness of human nature (inherent to his Neo-Thomist normative orientation) would reject this suggestion but adopting such a position will allow for a more complete system of normative inquiry, encompassing the full spectrum of normative stances or close to it.

Of course, it is important to note that the categories under the cultural scope—hence MacIntyre (category 2) and Nietzsche (category 5) both—subscribe to a philosophical anthropology or an epistemology of the human which emphasizes the sociability, contextuality, and communal constitution of a person. In fact, this unique philosophical anthropology and understanding of the human is what underlies the incommensurability between these two normative categories and the other four partially accounting for the similarity (in scope) of the two traditions. What separates MacIntyre from Nietzsche, which MacIntyre himself implies in Ethics, is their different positions regarding the nature of norms and the question of perenniality (i.e., moral realism). As Horton and Mendus observe of MacIntyre (and this is equally applicable to Nietzsche), “this relationship between the epistemological and the normative is one of the most interesting and problematic aspects of MacIntyre’s work” because critics either reject the normative outright by not accepting the contextualist philosophical anthropology underlying it, or do not see the relationship MacIntyre underlines between the sociability of humans and his normative program as either intuitive or plausible.

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163 Horton and Mendus, “Alasdair MacIntyre: After Virtue and After”, p.9
Here, one has to distinguish (and MacIntyre himself does so only poorly) between two different kinds of tradition within which MacIntyrean philosophy functions: one being the socio-cultural tradition (i.e. the larger cultural context which MacIntyre calls ‘order’ in his latest writings) which often assumes a ‘dominant mode’ as the form of cultural life; the other, the various traditions of normative inquiry or schools of rational thought that operate beneath it inquiring into the ‘established beliefs’ of the cultural paradigm. As MacIntyre states, “where some particular social tradition [i.e. liberal individualist Modernity] involves incompatible commitments those incompatible commitments may be expressed in the form of a set of continuing and unresolvable conflicts and debates” as “rival incommensurable points of view” between the various schools of normative inquiry or traditions of rationality but internal to that overarching cultural tradition (i.e. the West). It is in this light that one should view the “political and moral culture of those advanced societies whose dominant mode [MacIntyre calls] liberalism” and criticizes as Modernity. The standards for this critical inquiry however are provided by what MacIntyre believes to be the three (rational) traditions of thought or normative categories in Western civilization.

Accordingly, the MacIntyrean normative system and analysis of the Modern paradigm, as MacIntyre himself recognizes, presents a rather incomplete picture and its categorization is not exhaustive. For instance, the Encyclopedic tradition of thought (which is premised on universality above all else and hence includes utilitarian, Kantian, as well as contractarian moral theories) does not adequately differentiate “between those who advance claims grounded on appeals to rational

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164 He speaks of ‘the social and cultural order’ specially in his newest book, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, Cambridge University Press (2016). There, he also uses Morality with a capital M to describe the liberal form of life in Modern Western societies (Cf. Encyclopedic)
165 Alasdair MacIntyre, “A Partial Response to my Critics”, p. 291, 292
166 Ibid., p. 292
rights and those who dispute those claims in the name of utility”—two separate lines of inquiry (in liberal Modern societies) which markedly lack a common standard with which to settle normative differences.167 My model, on the other hand, effectively distinguishes between them, for while the contractarians such as Locke (situated in the 1st category) combine a universalist normative orientation with belief in moral realism (i.e. natural rights) and Kantians (belonging in the 3rd category) aspire to such universalism only via their belief in permanence of moral law grounded in permanent qualities of human reason originating from individual agents (i.e. categorical imperative as moral law), the so-called utilitarians (which one can trace to Hume but is also manifest in J.S. Mill) underscore the changing (albeit progressive) nature of norms as tied to mutable quality of human desires, only arriving at normative universalism via their scientism, humanism, and progressive views of history. Incidentally, when Nietzsche sarcastically rejects David Strauss as part of the first essay of his Untimely Mediations, it is this fourth normative orientation and its scientism and pretense to a universal and progressive history of mankind and man’s supposed “permanent interests” that he is in fact rejecting. It is clear then that the MacIntyrean model should be extended for the sake of consistency and coherence. Grouping all so-called liberal traditions of thought together due to their perceived “shared rejection of all accounts of human beings as by their natures participants in the forms of community aimed at a single, if a complex good,” (a ‘shared rejection’ which of course proves to be dismissive ‘most notably’ of the Aristotelian/Thomistic account) seems to me to be a particularly reductionist and simplified analysis in need of further elaboration.168

What is more, in addition to Kantian formal universal reason and utilitarian universal progress, we can now account for an alternative third path for European thinkers to traverse in

167 Ibid., p. 290
168 Ibid., p. 292
their reaction to the rise of autonomous reason and human egoism in the wake of the ‘death of God’—that of altruism and universal love of man. As MacIntyre tells it,

It was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that morality came generally to be understood as offering a solution to the problems posed by human egoism and that the content of morality came to be largely equated with altruism. For it was in that same period that men came to be thought of as in some dangerous measure egoistic by nature; and it is only once we think of mankind as by nature dangerously egoistic that altruism becomes at once socially necessary.  

Among this group of thinkers one can place both Rousseau and Schopenhauer who professed pity and universal compassion respectively as the genuine basis of Morality generalizing from individual affect as they did to a ‘universal affective principle’.

Following my system, it becomes more understandable why MacIntyre so persistently holds liberalism to be an incoherent mode of culture and a failure as a form of life. Liberalism should be discredited because it cannot be a consistent cultural paradigm. It is precisely because it vacillates and equivocates between the four normative categories proffered by universal (agent-independent) and individual (agent-dependent) points of views and cannot successfully adjudicate between the rival claims of the formatively different traditions of thought that operate within these four normative orientations, that liberalism is so problematic a model for an ordered life. What one ends up with here is a state of normative confusion and chaos, where it is ultimately unclear which one of the modes of thought/rationality liberalism favors or finds ultimately authoritative. As MacIntyre reiterates, “liberalism has become the kind of [dominant] social and cultural tradition” in and through “which incoherence…is at home”, meaning that in Modernity “the pervasive and dominant morality cannot function…as a coherent morality”, while the various schools of normative inquiry in the West (contractarian, Kantian, utilitarian, and otherwise) which “constitute liberalism do not of course necessarily suffer from the same kind of incoherence” within

169 AV, p. 228-229
themselves.\textsuperscript{170} It should by now also be partly evident what I will elaborate in more detail later that the absolutely relativist position MacIntyre attributes to Nietzsche and calls nihilistic, or otherwise emotivist/expressionist normative tradition should really be located in the sixth category among those traditions which reject moral permanence (i.e., moral realism/metaphysical idealism) but for whom both the origins and the scope of the normative lies exclusively within the individual (i.e. moral solipsism). Nietzsche, on the other hand, is the founder of a distinctive normative tradition inspired by the Renaissance I call \textit{anthro-culturalism}, whose affirmative philosophy and imagined paradigm belong squarely in the fifth normative orientation. This anti-universalist outlook is grounded on a processual philosophy which champions epistemological/alethic \textit{perspectivism} and favors cultural pragmatism (meta-)ethically: it stresses normative fluidity, celebrating \textit{difference} and \textit{cultural relationism}, while insisting on the need to overcome both the established “unitarian-rational” (i.e. liberal) and its consequent solipsistic (i.e. nihilistic) normative paradigms in the West in hopes of fostering a \textit{new} paradigm altogether—one that decidedly abolishes and \textit{sublates} Modernity (cf. Nietzsche’s ‘revaluation’).

\textsuperscript{170} “A Partial Response to my Critics”, p. 293 (First emphasis my own)
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<th>Rival Normative Types</th>
<th>Scope and Origin of Norms</th>
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<td><strong>Perenniality</strong> (rooted in metaphysical idealism/Non-humanism) where truth-claims are deemed true <em>a priori</em> (often as value rational per precepts of substantive rationality and practical reason). An eternalistic view of human nature. Things are absolute so be <em>true</em> to yourself or your moral obligations under all circumstances—based on a Foundationalist epistemology</td>
<td>Historical antecedent is <strong>Aristotle</strong> and his conception of teleological natural law derived in a value-rational fashion from communally-bounded praxis via the spoudaios and their practical reason (Hegel later historicizes this as the historical dialectic of the Universal and the Particular, and the embodied/bounded &amp; historically contingent notion of Freedom). Some believe this to be a kind of ethical naturalism, but it is rather (morally) teleological than natural. Praxis contains both the emotion (pathos) &amp; reason (logos) in our socially-driven habits—which both point to and are driven by our telos. Reformulated and made <em>theistic</em> under Thomism and scholastic Catholic thought in Medieval times and reintroduced as neo-Aristotelianism by Anscombe and MacIntyre in 20th century.</td>
<td>A truly Modern post-enlightenment position encapsulating the voluntarist primacy of the Will in a post-religious secular context of the Enlightenment and individualizing it. Home to Ideal Observer Theory best exemplar of which is Kant and Kantianism (before him Adam Smith) where the will (inherently free) is understood rationalistically and universalized from the individual agent to comprise the “Categorical imperative” so that one’s will becomes equivalent to the moral law through the medium of (universal) practical reason. As such, Kant is able to arrive at the universalist Lockean position and deontological ethics from the starting point of the individual (*s mind): Fusion of nominalism (will) and realism (reason) in the absence of God. Same applies to Rawls. Rousseau also extrapolates from the (subjective) Will “affectively” and pre-personally via the notion of “pity” (“compassion” for Schopenhauer)—as <em>inherent</em> feeling—to arrive at the notion of “general will” without emphasizing reason but intuitively although still as <em>a priori</em>. Best suitable to a Republic. <strong>Normative absolutism via rationalism and (rational) intuitionism.</strong> Man as an infallible and free being becomes an image of God (apotheotic view of man) ethical naturalism in practice.</td>
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<td><strong>Universal</strong> (agent independent)</td>
<td><strong>Culture</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Historical examples include Platonism</strong> (Theory of Forms= pre-deontological and teleological with emphasis on Moral responsibility) and Augustinian views of Natural law in ancient and medieval times. Roman and Medieval Stoic tradition <em>interiorizes</em> and de-teleologizes the Good as a matter of will rather than character or mind, which finally gives rise to the nominalist <em>contractarian</em> natural right theories of Morality in early Modernity (c.f. Locke). Difference lying with respect to the Metaphysical realism (Divine wisdom) of the former and the nominalism/ voluntarism of the latter (divine command theory). Deontological ethics (i.e. moral law)—Freedom is a “given”. Order of primacy from the universal to the individual agent. Best lends itself to a monarchic, an oligarchic or a theocratic regime. <strong>Normative Absolutism.</strong></td>
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### Fluidity (rooted in metaphysical materialism/naturalism/humanism)

where truth-claims are understood *a posteriori* as a function of experience per precepts of instrumental rationality. A historicist view of human nature. Things are in flux so always account for changing circumstances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utilitarianism</th>
<th>Antecedent in <em>Machiavelli</em> but best articulated by <em>Nietzsche</em>.</th>
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<td>and scientistic understanding of ethics (agent-independent, human dependent). Paradigmatic example of ethical naturalism. Classical antecedent in Epicureanism. Morality as topic for scientific inquiry in accordance to the principle of utility. Seeks the “permanent interest of man as a progressive being” and a science of morality in aggregate term (but its methodology is analytic and hence it begins with the individual and his sentiments as representative for all mankind as did Hume). <strong>Normative Progressivism</strong> Understanding the Universal as the human species (humanity) i.e. human(itarian) consequentialism. Greatest happiness of the greatest number implies a holistic and aggregate view that nevertheless sees the whole in terms of the sum of its parts per the operating principle of Majoritarianism and the primacy of the common wealth. Early forbearer is Hobbes who offers a utilitarian and functionalist defense of government and morality as to man’s primary interest achieved via institutionalized and positive law. More authoritative examples include Bentham, James Mill, as well as Marx’s quantitative/materialist utilitarianism and J.S Mill’s qualitative or eudemonistic utilitarianism and elitist deliberative democracy. Best suited to the doctrine of progressive liberalism and a technocratic/skilled, controlled/mediated/republican/progressive democracy or radical/democratic republicanism.</td>
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| Normative Relativism/subjectivism moral nihilism. Ethical skepticism and cynicism. Historical antecedent is Sophism where consequentialism is understood individualistically and through the purview and primacy of the individual’s will, “preferences”, and personal well-being. Umbrella for individual consequentialism, ethical egoism, existentialism, emotivism, expressivism, or sentimentalism (advocating for one’s personal moral feeling/attitude=moral sense theory). Best represented in post-modern thought of the likes of *Sartre, Deleuze, Rorty* and *Foucault*. Suited to anarchism and stateless politics (Proudhon) and radical and direct democracy (both Marxist and MacIntyrean politics belong here). Could potentially lead to tyranny. |

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*MacIntyre’s Nietzsche vs. Nietzsche’s Nietzsche*
In developing his so-called “genealogic” tradition of thought, MacIntyre fundamentally misreads the Nietzschean project. Here, my interest is not to exegete the Nietzschean project as such (an endeavor that takes up the rest of this project) but to delineate the principal reasons for MacIntyre’s misreading of Nietzsche. In so doing, I will not just contrast their opposing intellectual directions but also call attention to what unites these two thinkers.

My position in regards to MacIntyre’s treatment of Nietzsche should be evident by now—that the picture MacIntyre presents of Nietzsche is at best incomplete, and that he (MacIntyre), following the French tradition (Deleuze and Foucault), wrongly emphasizes Nietzsche’s “denials” or the negative element in his philosophy (what he calls Nietzsche’s “subversive” philosophy) at the expense of the radical and positive alternatives Nietzsche proposes to transform the Modern status quo in toto—i.e. his affirmations. MacIntyre acknowledges in Three Rival Versions that he has indeed appropriated his view of Nietzsche from figures in French post-structuralism, specifically Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, and he humbly asks “was I right to take Foucault as a faithful interpreter of Nietzsche?”. The answer is in my mind a resounding No—for the tradition that he attributes to Nietzsche and which he despises (i.e. genealogic) looks to be far more Foucauldian than Nietzschean. In retrospect, then, MacIntyre’s forceful renunciation appears better directed at continental Postmodernism and existentialism (whose moral nihilism/solipsism parallels the analytic formulation in expressivist-emotivist normative theory) instead of at Nietzsche. The consequence of this misappropriation is that MacIntyre misunderstands the crucial affirmative and substantive element in Nietzsche’s thought—his alterative normative and political schemes. Indeed, he denies that Nietzsche even has any such alternative. This is an important point,

171 Three Rival Versions, p. 3 (it seems that MacIntyre’s understanding of not just Nietzsche but even Foucault himself actually comes from his reading of Deleuze).
172 When MacIntyre speaks of emotivism and expressivism, he has in mind specifically analytic philosophers A.J. Ayer (1936), C.L. Stevenson (1937), R.M. Hare (1952).
because we must recognize there to be positive proposals in Nietzsche to our Modern discontents before we can speak of a positive substantive divergence between MacIntyre and Nietzsche.

Certainly, MacIntyre and Nietzsche exhibit some remarkable similarities, particularly in what most troubles them—i.e. their era—and their rather instinctive approaches to overcoming this problematic. The similarity on this count is particularly evident between MacIntyre and the earlier Nietzsche, best exemplified in his *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*—a series of four essays Nietzsche wrote between 1873 and 1876 where he articulated his strong discontent with his age, often translated as *Untimely Meditations* though perhaps a better translation is “Reflections Outside of One’s Time”. They both hearken back to ancient times—Greek specifically—to achieve the necessary ‘distance’ both to criticize Modernity and to find inspiration for a cure. Furthermore, they both express their disillusionment with Modernity in terms of frustrations with its moral and normative (or even ideational) order. And finally, for both MacIntyre and the early Nietzsche the means to remedying this malaise involves an overhauling of the West’s education system and its academic institutions—a substantial reimagining and reorganization of its universities and curriculum.

Of course, that Nietzsche looks to archaic Greece and MacIntyre to the classic period is quite significant and arguably the source of their very different trajectories on all these issues, including their politics. Via Aristotle, MacIntyre, as we have seen, gets rerouted to Aquinas and Thomistic philosophy. The mature Nietzsche meanwhile derives more and more leavening from Heraclitus and pre-Socratic Greek philosophy, which raises him above the Modern paradigm and catapults him forward in his own ideas culminating in him coming into his own as the first thinker

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173 To this early period also belongs “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” published posthumously [1873] (1976) as well as his 1869 lecture *Über die Zukunft unserer Bildungs-Anstalten* (On the future of our educational institutions)
to wholeheartedly venture beyond Modernity. As it has been suggested and in contradistinction with the overwhelming majority of European thinkers, Nietzsche reveres the ancient praxis (of Homeric Greece) over the ancient theoria (post-Socratic reason hallmark of Classical Greece), which he loathes.\textsuperscript{174} MacIntyre, meanwhile, gravitates to the latter. Ergo, at the end of their journey, the two thinkers could not be more different.

Yet, when this early Nietzsche considered how the education system should be constituted, its general tropes (albeit not its aristocratic and personalistic form) sound astoundingly similar to MacIntyre’s own ideal for the university. In this period, Nietzsche aimed at “a general renewal of modern culture carried out by that society of collaborating (and competing) men of genius” which were to be created through the proper academic institutions\textsuperscript{175}. Nietzsche writes: “I dream of a fellowship of men who are uncompromising, unindulgent, and want to be called 'Destroyers.' They apply the standard of their criticism to everything and sacrifice themselves to Truth.”\textsuperscript{176} They are “those unmodern men [of genius], who, by surpassing the classics, become destroyers of the intolerable culture of the present, and creators of the future.”\textsuperscript{177} In many ways, these ‘men of genius’ and ‘Destroyers’ (cf. Übermenschen) are entrusted with the very task of fostering critique and instigating change that MacIntyre assigns to his ‘traditions of inquiry’, and so one could indeed consider this the humanization and personalization of the MacIntyrean ‘traditions’.

Given this, it is no wonder that MacIntyre has so much trouble understanding and coming to terms with Nietzsche. In \textit{After Virtue}, MacIntyre suggests two essential, and antagonistic

\textsuperscript{174} See Werner Dannhauser’s Introduction to “History in the Service and Disservice of Life”, \textit{Unmodern Observations}, ed. W. Arrowsmith, Yale University Press (1990). P. 76. Dannhauser also points out correctly that Nietzschean philosophy views return to a former age as fundamentally impossible framing his critique in a particularly forward-looking and post-modern fashion. This is in line with Nietzsche’s overall emphasis on the movement and fluidity of time and his metaphysics of process.

\textsuperscript{175} William Arrowsmith, Introduction to ‘We Classists’, 1990. p. 318.


\textsuperscript{177} William Arrowsmith, Introduction to ‘We Classists’, 1990. p. 319
normative paradigms and conceptual schemes—the liberal-individualist (Modernity) and the Aristotelian (Tradition), where the Nietzschean position supposedly represents but one manifestation (and indeed consequence) of Modernity’s liberal-individualist normative order. In the following decade and by the time *Three Rival Versions* is published, MacIntyre increasingly refines and reconstitutes this position so that the Nietzschean position turns out to be a hostile reaction and *alternative* to liberal-individualist Modernity’s universal absolutism (he calls Encyclopedic)—albeit an entirely false and misguided alternative as far as MacIntyre is concerned. In his latest work, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, meanwhile, MacIntyre seemingly reverts back to the *After Virtue* position. So, it is appropriate to treat *AV* as the source of the main line of criticism MacIntyre directs at Nietzsche.

In the closing pages of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre makes his strongest denunciatory claim about the Nietzschean normative position. Nietzschean Übermenschen to MacIntyre “represents individualism’s final attempt to escape from its own consequences. And the Nietzschean stance turns out not to be a mode of escape from or an alternative to the conceptual scheme of liberal individualist modernity, but rather one more representative moment in its internal unfolding.”

Indeed, the Nietzschean project is to MacIntyre nothing more than a heightened egoism or hyper-individualism. Such an estimation would perhaps ring true if we were to democratize the conception of Übermenschen, as MacIntyre, following in the tracks of Deleuze so willingly does. Yet, Nietzsche’s neo-archaism is thoroughly and genuinely *aristocratic* in the ancient Greek sense of the term. Nevertheless, MacIntyre’s final edict seems to be that while Nietzsche appears as “the ultimate antagonist of the Aristotelian tradition”, *we* Neo-Aristotelians know that “in the end the Nietzschean stance is only one more facet of that very moral culture of which Nietzsche took

\[178\] AV, p.259
himself to be an implacable critic”, from which MacIntyre concludes that in reality “the crucial moral opposition is between liberal individualism in some version or other and the Aristotelian tradition in some version or other”. ¹⁷⁹

MacIntyre’s Nietzsche thus turns out as the paradigm example of a moral nihilist, and a *Modernist!* He is, so MacIntyre thinks, the ancestor to ‘emotivism’ in MacIntyre’s earlier writings and precursor to ‘expressivism’ in his later ones. Nietzsche’s fate is sealed by MacIntyre from the beginning. He has a narrative of nihilism (not entirely incorrect in itself) to which he seeks an author and culprit. It is my contention that while many so-called post-Nietzscheans and Postmoderns such as Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and even the existentialist Sartre are just as MacIntyre describes, and these schools of thought as a ‘tradition’ can fit into MacIntyre’s paradigm of radically individualist nihilism (the 6th category I outlined in the previous section), Nietzsche himself is not at all part of this tradition. What these Postmoderns (and MacIntyre by default) do is to focus on and develop exclusively Nietzsche’s critical and negative projects—the aspect of his thought that was to prepare the ground for the rise of ‘a new breed of philosophers’—to the complete neglect of his affirmative project, his *revaluation of all values.* In his quest for this *revaluation,* Nietzsche hearkens back not to the classical Greece but to the Greece of the archaic period, with its aristocratic Homeric values and its exaltation of the *hero* who achieves *kúdos* (glory) through transformative spirited acts (*thumos*) and in being exceptional and above everyone else in performing those acts, thus demonstrating his virtue of *timê* (*honor*)—an internal quality one is born with and must yet prove in relation to the community and its needs. In the highly timocratic and aristocratic Homeric community, lack of (or not exhibiting) this virtue of *timê*

¹⁷⁹ AV, p.259
brought one not kudos but aidôs (shame).\textsuperscript{180} Given this archaic supra-moral and relational normative paradigm, good and evil, morality and sin (i.e., absolute morality) could not exist—one could only be better or worse than others.

This illuminates further what I pointed out earlier, the very uneasy relationship MacIntyre has with Nietzsche, so much so that MacIntyre struggles throughout his writings to situate him appropriately within his normative system. It is not ultimately clear where Nietzsche stands vis-à-vis the Modern paradigm MacIntyre critiques. As we saw, Nietzsche is presented both as the “ultimate antagonist of the Aristotelian tradition” as well as “only one more facet” of the Modern moral culture for which he appears to be “an implacable critic”\textsuperscript{181}. Question abound of course. Is Nietzsche an “implacable critic” or an unbeknownst promoter of Modernity? Does Nietzsche embody a negative reaction to (and in fact a rejection of) Modernity or just another rendition of the Modern pathologies? In my mind, MacIntyre struggles with Nietzsche because he profoundly mistakes him for a figure whom the historic Nietzsche himself would have despised, and had he understood the Nietzschean project on Nietzsche’s own terms, it would have been clear that Nietzsche provides indeed the ultimate alternative to MacIntyre’s Aristotle, and, more than that, a viable affirmative program of action. It might be also that as a philosophical theist, MacIntyre simply does not have the right intuition about the thoroughly atheistic philosophy of Nietzsche, a confusion that only intensifies as MacIntyre turns in an increasingly Thomistic direction.

There is of course more that divides MacIntyre and Nietzsche: particularly their practical solutions to the shortcomings of Modernity both in their different normative theories and conceptions of ethics and in how to realize them politically. I suggested earlier that MacIntyre’s

\textsuperscript{180} aidôs was also deemed a virtue for the rest of the non-heroic population understood as ‘public decency’ and ‘modesty’

\textsuperscript{181} AV, p. 259
original classicism and consequent Thomism (hence idealism) and Nietzsche’s intuitive archaism (hence pragmatism) partly explain their diverging paths. This is especially manifest in the area of political philosophy, where they take antithetical positions on the political, the nature/function of power, and the role of exceptional persons in engendering historical change. These differences correspond to MacIntyre’s Traditional-Thomistic normative paradigm (discussed here) and Nietzsche’s Anthro-culturalism (which I will pursue further in the second Act of this study).

As shown previously, the biggest problem plaguing the MacIntyrean project is the disconnect that exists between his normative aspirations and his strategy for achieving them: his ambitious restorative program is not really compatible with the rather flaccid and quixotic means he provides for its actualization, which is a consequence of his stubborn refusal to acknowledge the pivotal role of politics in socio-political change (something MacIntyre attempts to cloth in intellectualist garb). MacIntyre’s politics seems entirely inadequate, given the daunting demands of his normative project and the taxing requirements for its fruition. Indeed, at times MacIntyre appears to proceed as if his recommended normative paradigm (i.e. Neo-Thomism) has already won over the West as the ‘common’ authoritative standard, so he focuses on building his ideal of radically-democratic politics on that foundation rather than the other way around. Putting aside all the other imaginings of MacIntyre, one gets the impression that he sincerely believes the implementation of his university restructuring proposal to be a probable development—so it is only a matter of when rather than if. In the previous section, I called this an inconsistency, but from the Nietzschean perspective, with its emphasis on the reality of power (hard and soft) in the normative struggles of a community and where politics is understood as the arena for normative adjudication, MacIntyre’s project appears to be mere fantasy if not an overt contradiction. Indeed, it is akin to what Nietzsche said of the grand aspirations of British empiricists and utilitarians, namely David
Hume and J.S. Mill—i.e., that they lack “spiritual vision of real depth—in short, philosophy”. That is not far off from how Nietzsche probably would have reacted to MacIntyre’s view—treating it as just another manifestation of “plebeian ambition”. It is in this sense, in its political realism and the prominence it affords the will (which is simultaneously intellectual and political), that the wisdom of Nietzsche’s affirmative project (i.e. anthro-cultural paradigm) comes into full focus. The Nietzschean program is positive and indeed salutary precisely because it realistically gages the monumental task that confronts any thinker courageous and audacious enough to want to overcome the Modern paradigm altogether and who is also visionary and creative enough to have something novel to put in its place—in this light, Nietzsche appears a genuinely ‘forward-looking’ critic of Modernity.

Moreover, truly accomplishing a paradigm shift—a paradigmatic revolution in culture—necessitates an equally transformative and heterodox politics, geared toward values of a meritocracy, or an aristocracy in the Homeric sense. Nietzsche is thoroughly anti-egalitarian and anti-democratic, fearful of “herd” psychology and popular opinions knowing full well that the “public” almost always reflects and harbors the conventional values of the existing culture-complex, a fundamental problem considering that Nietzsche aims to sublate and transform the exhausted Modern values which he associates with cultural decline in the West. If we are to have any chance of successfully “breaking the old tablets” and “writing new values on new tablets” transcending our debilitative Christian-rooted normative paradigm, it is clear to Nietzsche that an aristocratic, elitist, hierarchical model of politics must replace the democratic ethos, which in its very practice reinforces the old values of the old tablets (i.e. “slavish morality”). At the same time, Nietzsche, ever the Renaissance man, understood that such a foundational transformation as is

182 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, §252
183 Ibid., §213
required cannot be effected by any force other than human actors and the exceptional men he calls the Übermenschen. Cultural transformation is a historical undertaking requiring the likes of the great men of history. In fact, the cultivation and selection of these higher-type, noble persons who embody exceptionality (cf. ‘pathos of distance’) in their mind and will (making them particularly suited to become the agents of change for our Weltanschauung) along with Nietzsche’s emphasis on “order of rank” (Rangordnung) has led some scholars to call his entire project that of “Aristocratic Radicalism” (Detwiler, 1990).

In contrast to MacIntyre, Nietzsche’s critique of Modernity then rests on more solid consistent ground, where the ethics and the politics (both to be transcended from their current individualist foundations) better complement one another, while hinting at an intrinsic relationship between the practice of ethics advanced by each normative category and its conception of the political. Furthermore, as we shall see, Nietzsche’s account points to a deep nexus between distinctive normative orientations and the different physiological types that conceive and gravitate to them. But if the claims I am making here about Nietzsche are to be substantiated well, we need to consider more fully and carefully the Nietzschean account and review his writings with the following questions in mind. Does Nietzsche advance a coherent critique of Modernity? And if so, does that critique posit an affirmative vision that amounts to more than simply a discordant hodgepodge of denials and “subversions”. Does he offer an alternate normative framework and do so in a way that is consistent with the other aspects of his philosophy? And finally, does Nietzsche’s political philosophy (if he indeed has anything close to what could be deemed a political thought) align with his normative and axiological observations in particular and his overall critique of Modernity more generally, providing them a pragmatic ‘plan of action’?

184 Cf. Machiavelli’s Prince
MacIntyrean Understanding of Nihilism as Moral Chaos

MacIntyre closes his account in *AV* by proclaiming that we in the West today “are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict.” More than highlighting his appeal to an *apolitical* strategy and sanctioning a *monastic* withdrawal from worldly affairs in various ‘truth-seeking’ colonies until such time as is right for reengagement, this metaphor also suggests that MacIntyre believes we are not in need of a *new* meaning or purpose (as in Godot) but simply a reinstitution of the *old* meaning, a recovery of already-existing moral law and moral authority for the modern man (as in a new St. Benedict and a new natural law) reaffirming his belief that we in the West today do not grapple with an existential crisis but with a moral one. According to MacIntyre, the greatest danger to our way of life spawned by the Modern form of life is *moral disorder*. It stems from our (liberal) culture not *discerning* right from wrong, from us not *knowing* our moral commitments coherently in the face of so many normative standards which claim authority (i.e., a *polynomous* condition), and from *doubting* the ethical system’s rational authority over us—all resulting in normative chaos. We think of ourselves as moral but possess only “simulacra of morality”, vague images of it lacking the substance. The source of the nihilistic threat then is *epistemological*, invoked by the question of “*what* is or should be our authoritative moral standard”? But what if the perils of nihilism are stirred not by the *what* but by the *why*? Could it be that the ultimate trepidation we feel in Modernity is neither about the normative commitments themselves nor about the standards of rationality and the correct hierarchy of our values but about the *meaning* behind them? That is *why* and to what purpose do we observe these norms irrespective of *what* they dictate and *how* we abide by them and put them to practice?

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185 *AV*, p.263
186 *AV*, p.2
If so, then the sources of confusion are not “epistemological” (or at least not entirely) but “existential”. Although MacIntyre is justified to be troubled by nihilism, I believe he misconstrues the real source of the nihilistic threat. What is missing from the MacIntyrean argument which makes him blind to the existential thrust of nihilism is a proper discussion of meaning and its relation to life and existence. He does not see the Modern malaise as an existential disorder but as a moral one alone—as a crisis of normative authority.

Perhaps then, the most primary distinction between MacIntyre and Nietzsche lies in the irreconcilable differences between their cosmological and metaphysical orientations and their relationship to the question of religion. MacIntyre is a philosophical theist, a metaphysical idealist, and a moral realist, who correspondingly accepts the idea of the universal, the natural design, the telos. A convert to Catholicism, MacIntyre is a man of faith and this religious outlook accompanies his “philosophical realism”, underwriting his allegiance to both metaphysical/ontological idealism and meta-ethical realism, his emphasis on being and teleology. MacIntyre understands the innate relationship of teleology to meaning in the traditional Weltanschauung, to which Löwith so eloquently gave expression: “The significance of this version of an ultimate end, as both finis and telos, is that it provides a scheme of progressive order and meaning.”187 Faced with the existential questions posed by the normative crisis of Modernity that emerges from the unraveling of Modern view of reason and the discrediting of the Enlightenment project of moral rationalism, MacIntyre turns to religion (the age-old treasure chest of meaning) and what he describes as the “Augustinian-Thomistic” approach. He resorts to philosophy to create a space for religion—philosophy is approached as a complement to religion. As such, MacIntyre ultimately emerges as a backward-looking critic of Modernity at least from the point of view of secular man.

187 Karl Löwith, Meaning and History, p. 18 (last emphasis my own).
On all these points, Nietzsche could not be more different. A religious and moral skeptic, Nietzsche was a devout philosophical atheist who has no qualms about reaching the ultimate logical conclusions inherent in his perspectivist epistemology by completely renouncing all pretense to (substantive forms of) universality and teleology, no ifs, ands, or buts. His stance is one of ontological and meta-ethical non-realism with a cosmological view predicated on becoming and the changing, processual nature of the world. Without any supra-natural other-worldly authority to order experience, the unraveling of moral and epistemological rationalism and of philosophical/alethic realism translates into a crisis of meaning, which Nietzsche realizes as the existential crisis of Modernity. It follows that the great task here at the “great noon” is resubstantivization of life in the absence of god and theology, to recover and create meaning as to foster our will to life along with the cultural agency of the West. On this mission, Zarathustra, so thoroughly this-worldly and “true to the Earth”, asks his disciples to pursue knowledge only to “serve the meaning of the Earth”. In stark contrast to MacIntyre then, Nietzsche turns to philosophy to create meaning for life here on Earth; and in his quest for “a human meaning”, he deifies philosophy (in its new rendition of course as “philosophy of the future”) in place of religion—attesting to his claim as one of the handful forward-looking, future-oriented critics of Modernity.

In the end, in his own testament, MacIntyre’s ambition is to “preserve and justify the canonical status of the bible as distinct from, yet hegemonic over, all secular inquiry.” Nietzsche’s thought, on the other hand, is thoroughly secular and strongly anti-theological. His

188 “‘Dead are all gods: now we want the ubermensch to live.’ – Let this be our last will at the great noon!”—Nietzsche, Zarathustra, part one, “On the Bestowing Virtue”, §3
189 Ibid, §2
190 Ibid.
191 MacIntyre, Whose Justice Which Rationality. p.25
skepticism stems from a radical empiricism, and so naturally, his project is to affirm a this-worldly “new philosophy” for a secular and post-theological world. This is one irreconcilable, and to use MacIntyre’s terminology “incommensurable”, difference between the two thinkers. But if one disavows religious thought, is he then opening the door to nihilism? MacIntyre’s account seems to suggest this is the case, but for Nietzsche such a “godless” condition actually necessitates and justifies philosophy more than ever, with the aim of providing different communities of peoples with coherent this-worldly metanarratives—i.e. substantive rationalities—that could give their lives meaning and orientation but in a secular fashion. While they are not to be pursued as ends-in-themselves, knowledge and truth then are not so much rejected by Nietzsche as some claim but actually vindicated by him on utilitarian/pragmatic grounds as means (Mittel) to “earthly” human salvation. MacIntyre, in an Augustinian and Thomistic fashion, takes God and the Good to be inseparable subjects of inquiry, theoretically-grounded in an almost pantheistic idea of universal unity and practically-grounded in principles of ‘natural law’ (both historically immanent in and through the holism of diverse cultural practices and intellectual traditions), which raises the question: if we are not fully committed to one (or its philosophical equivalence as Truth), could we possibly achieve the other? Alternatively, Nietzsche’s project hinges on the separability and even opposition of divine Truth and the noble good. It is founded on the promise that we could have an internally coherent idea of good and bad (necessary to human flourishing) not only in spite of the fact that “God is dead”, but because of it: that we can now once again understand and affirm the archaic idea of noble goods (immanent as better or worse) given the opportunity that is available to us to finally repudiate and negate evil (as a notion) along with its life-denying consequences.
Here is where a return to Nietzschean thought could be particularly salutary. Nietzsche, for whom the fundamental problematic for the West is not that our norms are no longer authoritative for us or that our culture is fragmented and confused between all the various standards of truth available to us, but that the (sustaining) narratives and myths behind them are debunked, thus undermining the normative practices from within.\footnote{While our norms continue to enjoy external authority over individual members of the society, they have lost their internal authority that is tied to their relationship to a coherent value system and belief system.} In short, the link of the extant norms to our value system and belief system—our \textit{weltanschauung}—has been severed, and our belief system itself is fast expiring thanks partly to the very “will to Truth” and the critical spirit introduced by Socrates (reaching its logical conclusion in the Enlightenment). Our myths have been demystified, losing the power they once obtained from our belief in their truth, and in turn we have been left disenchanted, disillusioned with our state, staring into an abyss. To Nietzsche, the Modern malaise should be investigated by thinking through its principal symptom—which is \textit{existential} disorder. And the virus that causes the existential disorder is \textit{meaninglessness}. If the absence of meaning is the cause of our debilitating condition, the remedy then must lie in recreating meaning—in ‘resubstantivization’ of life, the \textit{revaluation of all values}. In fact, as Paul Ricoeur suggests in a volume to which the young MacIntyre also contributed, “the religious significance of atheism” is in that “atheism does not exhaust itself in the negation and destruction of religion” (including its metaphysics and ontology), but that “atheism clears the ground for a new faith, a faith for a post-religious age”—this revaluation of all values in a post-metaphysical age via faith in a \textit{new} constellation of values anchored on a new ontology/meaning-scheme I believe is Nietzsche’s ‘great noon’ (as well as his most noteworthy influence on Ricoeur).\footnote{Paul Ricoeur, \textit{The Religious Significance of Atheism}, p.59}
Karl Löwith writes of the Modern predicament of the West that “we are neither ancient ancients nor ancient Christians, but Moderns”, a “compound of both traditions”—and that there is something “more or less inconsistent” in this condition, an ‘inconsistency’ that as we have seen MacIntyre also finds in liberalism and the post-Enlightenment world order. 194 Well, in order to resolve this historic discrepancy, perhaps the time has come for us moderns to choose, and it is a stark choice: whether we want to recover the essence of the Christian/Thomistic normative order with MacIntyre or to opt for the kind of neo-paganist/Homeric future championed by Nietzsche.

On this note, let us explore further the MacIntyrean and the Nietzschean critiques of Modernity in light of the question of meaning to better examine the relationship of meaning to Modernity.

194 Löwith, Meaning and History, p. 19
ACT II

THE HUMAN WILL TO MEANING
A people—or, for that matter, a human being—only has value to the extent that it is able to put the stamp of the eternal on its experiences; for in doing so it sheds, one might say, its worldliness and reveals its unconscious, inner conviction that time is relative and that the true meaning of life [must be] metaphysical. The opposite of this occurs when a people begins to understand itself historically and to demolish the metaphysical buttresses surrounding it; this is usually accompanied by a decided growth in worldliness and a break with the unconscious metaphysics of its previous existence, with all the ethical consequences this entails.\footnote{\textit{BT}, §23, p. 110}

Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, §23

The Enlightenment was a cataclysmic event for the Western civilization. Many \textit{Lumières} celebrated it as a mark of human emancipation from millennia of servitude to all types of irrationalities, religion chief among them. A host of anti-enlightenment thinkers, meanwhile, lambasted and bewailed the very inhumaness, unnaturalness, as well as faithlessness of the Age of Reason. For Nietzsche though, the Enlightenment, which he refers to as “the greatest recent event”, was not at all black and white. And by Nietzsche’s own time (the latter half of 19th century), Nietzsche speculated, this great event had only just begun “to cast its first shadow over Europe”.\footnote{\textit{GS}, §343}

To him, the Enlightenment certainly was a watershed moment, yet only a stepping-stone, a page-turning not \textit{necessarily} and by default catastrophic—disorienting but a cause for enthusiasm all the same. For the few genuine skeptics “the suspicion in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle,” Nietzsche (who clearly sees himself as among these few) remarks, “some kind of sun seems to have set; some old deep trust turned into doubt”.\footnote{Ibid.} For as Nietzsche saw it, the Enlightenment signified above all that “‘God is dead'; that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable”.\footnote{Ibid.} And this discovery was not only epistemologically consequential, but, crucially, it was soon to prove \textit{existentially} overwhelming for the West. Firstly, the cessation of

\footnote{Ibid.}
God, the divine, and metaphysics interfering in human affairs highlighted the importance of finding a new premise to explain the notion of change in the ‘human realm’ and to put it in human terms—i.e. without ‘divine providence’, how would (or could) human societies undergo transformation? Secondly and in practice, the Enlightenment also meant for Nietzsche an opportunity to investigate the axiological and ethical (i.e. value) consequences of this shift in Weltanschauung for a Zeitgeist already expiring and coming to a close, to cope with a ‘form of life’ on the verge of extinction and attempt to remedy and cure it from the grips of profound sickness.

What is wrong with life in the Modern199 Western Zeitgeist? This is the fundamental Nietzschean question. Is “valuelessness” the source of our Modern discontent like other critics of Modernity (Strauss and MacIntyre we have already mentioned) presume? How about nihilism? Pessimism? Meaninglessness? Or perhaps, scientism? optimism? Socratism? absolutism? Egypticism? Perennialism? Universalism? All these are terms Nietzsche uses copiously and negatively in his writings. It is the thesis of this section that all the aforementioned diagnoses together form only one part of the story of Western decline which Nietzsche comes to see as a degenerative physiological condition draining the European culture of its health and vitality. All these symptoms share a common underlying cause which anthropologically-speaking is a particularly human concern and which Nietzsche identifies as the formative question of all philosophy—why suffering and tragedy? Some call this the problem of theodicy. I prefer to characterize it as the problem of meaning itself—to what end and purpose and why do we exist? Perhaps, it is the mark of Nietzsche’s genius that he finds in this ‘problem of meaning’ (i.e. the theodicean problem) and our distinct failure spanning millennia to effectively address it in the

199 Throughout this dissertation, wherever Modernity is capitalized, the philosophical rather than the temporal meaning of Modernity as a distinctive epochal state of being in the West and Modernism as an intellectual, cultural as well as a sociological attitude is meant.
West, the root of all other failings of Modernity in particular and the Western culture in general, revealing them all to be symptoms of a singular problem: the systemic failure of the West to comprehensively and healthfully resolve this problematic unraveling into a degenerative disease threatening the very survival of the West and the “Last Men” who inhabit and embody it.

Nietzsche’s mature philosophy arising out of his own “self-overcoming” is nothing short of a synthesis tragoediam, a creative ‘sublation’ of all that came before him—of Romanticism and the Enlightenment, of the Socratic and the artistic, of the radical and the aristocratic. From Romanticism he appropriated a deep suspicion of scientism, objectivism, and disembodied reason as well as an appreciation for the provocative and the notion of crisis; from 18th century Enlightenment thought (namely Voltaire, to whom Nietzsche originally dedicates Human All Too Human) his entrenched anti-Christian and atheistic sentiment. Nietzsche was probably the first to recognize Romanticism and the Enlightenment as the two faces of the Modern Janus which their conceptual antinomy often masked.\textsuperscript{200} It is perhaps illuminating to point out, continuing on our discussion from Act I, that MacIntyre’s philosophy aligns in many ways with Nietzsche’s early romantic thought and conservative romantic thought more broadly.\textsuperscript{201}

When Nietzsche declares that “God is Dead” (the first time in §108 of the Gay Science), what he means is that given the “tidings” of the Enlightenment, “Looking at nature as if it were proof of the goodness and care of a god; interpreting history in honour of some divine reason, as a continual testimony of a moral world order and ultimate moral purposes; interpreting one's own experiences as pious people have long interpreted theirs, as if everything were providential, a hint,\textsuperscript{200}

\textsuperscript{200} If the Enlightenment and Romanticism were the two spiritual faces of the Modern Janus, liberalism and socialism were the political manifestation of this Modern Janus.
\textsuperscript{201} To recall our discussion from Act One, MacIntyre of course disposes of the conservative political and social theories of conservative Romanticism substituting in their place his decidedly Marxist-rooted ‘agonistic’ socio-political theory on top of his borrowings from existentialism (namely his identitarian, narrativist, and rationalist form of subjectivism) in his philosophical anthropology and his idea of meaning (i.e., semiotics).
designed and ordained for the sake of salvation of the soul—that is over now; that has [honest] conscience against it; every refined conscience considers it to be indecent, dishonest, a form of mendacity, effeminacy, weakness, cowardice.” 202 In the words of the Danish scholar and Nietzsche’s pen pal, Georg Brandes, we realize that we have an intellectual conscience behind our ‘moral’ conscience: “We can see quite well that our opinions of what is noble and good, our moral valuations, are powerful levers where action is concerned; but we must begin by refining these opinions and independently creating for ourselves new tables of values” energized out of our newly-acquired intellectual conscience.203 Our classical idea of Morality now has “conscience”, that is our intellect, against it.

And thus, Nietzsche immediately brings us face to face with the consequence of this ground-breaking Enlightenment discovery; for Nietzsche realizes that as a result of this revelation, what the good Westerns will inevitably have to confront is a new demon, and one to which Nietzsche believed Schopenhauer was first to give voice—the problematization of the meaning and worth of existence, a primordial problem which was for two thousand years hidden under the shroud of Christianity! This ‘shroud’ was now removed, at once exposing a subterranean and titanic demon underneath it. Although Nietzsche venerated Schopenhauer for his acuity and realism in bringing this demon to the conscious attention of the West, Nietzsche thought Schopenhauer was not strong enough for the Schopenhauerian demon he had unleashed, a demon more like a virus or cancer which if left unchecked and uncountered could propagate a kind of totalistic “no-will-at-all” nihilism which would surely bring Western culture to its knees. Instead of valuelessness, Nietzsche focuses our attention on the imminent dangers of willlessness threatening the West—the evisceration of cultural agency. The matter facing the West then is not

202 Nietzsche, Gay Science, “Book Five: We Fearless Ones”, § 357, p. 219
just theoretical and in the domain of values. It is existential, and, as Nietzsche sees it, a matter of life or death—the threat of impending and systemic collapse of an entire civilization which has lost its vigor, its health (and as we will see later, it is this creative ‘agency’ that Nietzsche comes to poetically call the healthy ‘will to power’).

In the years following the Enlightenment, “as we thus reject Christian interpretation and condemn its ‘meaning’ as counterfeit”, Nietzsche writes, “Schopenhauer’s question immediately comes at us in a terrifying way: Does existence have any meaning at all?” 204 Nietzsche remained convinced that Schopenhauer had in his glance the right question and one befitting true philosophy. Nietzsche also admired and was inspired by Schopenhauer’s (philosophical) pessimism (i.e., the instinct to problematize the value of existence) throughout his life. Yet, as he brooded on the matter over the years, he embraced this epistemological attitude (i.e., free-minded criticality) while completely shedding the skin under which this monstrosity had presented itself and was its original soil—its romanticism. To be sure, in overcoming the vestiges of 19th century Continental thought in his philosophy, the later wiser Nietzsche (of Zarathustra) became utterly unimpressed with Schopenhauer’s altruistic solution to this conundrum (similarly he also repudiated the Hegelian spirit underlying The Birth of Tragedy). 205 not to speak of how dangerous and pathological Nietzsche had found the negative and passive stance of Schopenhauer in the face of this fundamental and, if Nietzsche is correct, the most consequential of philosophical problems. It is the aim of this section to expound on how (mature) Nietzsche conceptualized this theodicean problematic and what solution he envisioned for it as remedy and recuperation.

The picture that emerges through a close reading of Nietzsche’s later writings (but one that nevertheless attests to a common thread in Nietzsche’s writings from BT to AC) is one of coming

204 Nietzsche, Gay Science, “Book Five: We Fearless Ones”, § 357, p. 219
205 Ecce Homo, III, “Birth of Tragedy”, §1
to terms with a profound crisis in Modernity, and the need to as well as a stratagem for subsequently sublating and overcoming Modernity toward a new healthful age predicated on what Nietzsche deems the principles of life. Contrary to how most critics of Modernity such as MacIntyre (who was our topic of discussion in the last section) conceptualize our Modern crisis, that is, in terms of a crisis of values (i.e., valuelessness or value-confusion), Nietzsche proposes that our current crisis is actually one of meaninglessness, a kind of “theoretical nihilism” ushered in by the “consciousness” brought about by the Enlightenment. As disconcerting as this diagnosis might seem, Nietzsche, ever the “physician of culture”, considers it a mere symptom of our overall degenerative disorder, whose etiology is our weakness and failing in confronting the foundational question of tragedy and suffering in existence, and the good doctor “prognosticates” a far graver fate looming for us—will-lessness (“practical nihilism”) and cultural death. This final and fatal phase of our illness, the demise of our culture (where we finally succumb to the cancer we unwittingly bred in our Spirit), corresponds with the completion of nihilismus—i.e., “total nihilism”.

To tease out the often-neglected, but in my view fundamental, theme of meaning and its relation to willing and agency in Nietzsche’s philosophy, this section begins by providing a brief survey of two different (explicit and implicit) treatments of meaning in modern philosophical discourse organized mostly around MacIntyre and Kierkegaard, whom I identify as part of the existentialist approach to meaning, in order to highlight Nietzsche’s fundamentally distinctive and sui generis take on meaning. Next, a theoretical framework for the Nietzschean treatment of meaning is proposed so as to better clarify Nietzsche’s position. In the third and fourth segments, a genealogy of meaning in the West from the rise of Christianity and the Enlightenment (third) to the Modern and contemporary (fourth) eras is given by means of exegesis of Nietzsche’s texts.
The section concludes by summarily bringing to light what Nietzsche believes to be his Dionysian cure to the crisis of meaning. Nietzsche’s concrete program (which he calls “the revaluation of all values” is more systematically dealt with in the third and final part (the Second Act) of this dissertation.

For Nietzsche, it all seems to come down to the hardships and suffering that is inherent in life and how we ought to confront it. In other words, how one can conceive of and juxtapose “meaning” vis-à-vis “existence” in such a way as not to sacrifice the all-too-important human willing and (cultural) agency. In what Nietzsche believes to be the degenerate and décadent mentality (cf. Geist) powered by weak and sickly instincts, suffering is explained (i.e., made meaningful) via the proposition of life-escaping “bliss”—as “path to blissful existence”.\(^{206}\) No matter if this ‘path’ is formulated presententially or promised in some future, such an a posteriori justification of life Nietzsche finds problematic, at times referring to it as the way of the “crucified one” and in other times denigrating it as manifestation of idealism. From the perspective of his honest realism (cf. tragic realism), Nietzsche argues instead that life should be viewed as inherently justified and meaningful a priori, collapsing the classical false dichotomies of the ‘real’ and ‘apparent’ worlds into it, thus not requiring any justification whatsoever. In what he calls the Dionysian approach to life (to which Nietzsche himself claims to subscribe), the age-old décadent formula is reversed: “existence is held to be blissful enough [in itself] to justify even monstrous suffering”, rather than vindicating and rationalizing suffering as warranted ‘ordeal’ on the path to a potential of reward and ‘blessings’.\(^{207}\) Thus, the Dionysian man says a loud Yes and takes to doing and creating (cf. poiesis) in an affirmative fashion, whereas the Christian says No and turns

\(^{206}\) *KGW* 13, 14 [89]. From Friedrich Nietzsche: *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, Cambridge Press, 2003, p. 249-250

\(^{207}\) Ibid.
away from life in abhorrence and disgust—“the God on the cross' is a curse on life, a hint [signal] to deliver oneself from it”, while etched onto Dionysus we have instead “a promise to life”: that life “will eternally be reborn and come home [to its essence, as creation] out of [the wilderness of] destruction” and chaos.208

Some Background on ‘Meaning’

Putting Nietzsche in Context

Existentialism broadly-put could be understood as a tradition of thought which emphasizes the formative nature of meaning for human existence and recognizes the role of the individual agent in shaping it. Using this definition, Nietzsche could be loosely and thematically associated with thinkers (of existentialist leanings) whose concern is meaning, but existentialism as a philosophical school takes a specifically egalitarian and democratic approach to meaning, and this could not be further from the Nietzschean approach, whose conception of meaning emphasizes first and foremost what is communal and shared and which treats “meaning-making” as an inherently aristocratic, singular, and exceptional activity (i.e., aristocratic individualism). Hence, before delving further into Nietzsche’s idea of ‘meaning’, it is useful to distinguish Nietzsche’s unique conception of ‘meaning’ from what I call the egalitarian interpretations of meaning. This egalitarian school of meaning (i.e., existentialist), which is premised on democratic individualism, can be further divided into two classes: one, subjectivist, unmediated, and presential; the other, relational (objective in the Hegelian sense), mediated, and historical. In the unmediated

208 Ibid.
subjectivist circle, embodied by Soren Kierkegaard (in philosophy) and Victor Frankl (in psychology), the discussion of meaning is explicit. Amongst the other group, epitomized by MacIntyre, the discussion of meaning is still central but rather implicit. Although the explicit interpreters, Soren Kierkegaard and Viktor Frankl chief among them, underline man’s “will to meaning” as his most definitive human quality, they individualize and subjectivize this will such that each and every individual acquires the ability to fashion his own meaning in a radical way out of himself (i.e., solipsistically). In the “implicit” faction, represented here by MacIntyre but perhaps by Hegel as well, emphasis is placed on historical continuity and (rational) tradition in relation to which the individual’s formation of a personal narrative occurs by means of his own practical reason. Nonetheless both these factions are united in the egalitarian belief that all individuals (either solipsistically, directly, and affectively or via some meditating factors, indirectly, and rationally) possess the ability to be “meaning-generators” (or at least choose their meaning out of a whole spectrum of ‘meanings’ offered by various schools of thought and “traditions” through rational ‘deliberation’ as MacIntyre would have it) for themselves and thus live a meaningful life on their own terms.

For Nietzsche (given his distinctive philosophical anthropology), however, man’s innate desire for meaning (as homo semioticus) should be juxtaposed against man’s other defining natural characteristic as a ‘communal being’ and consequently meaning can only be achieved under a collective and holistic project and within the evolution of culture (perhaps even spawning culture altogether for this end). Meaning is thus a ‘construction’ (Gebilde) of those few individuals who are actually free (and embody the free human willing), instinctivized by the many who are not. The majority are therefore not “independent” and “autonomous” as the liberals and existentialists would have it, but rather by definition dependent on the paradigm of meaning created by those
rare strokes who embody genius, precisely because of this very formative “life-furthering” and “creative” act. As such, the “well-being” of the many depends on the ‘meaning-creation’ of the very few “artistic” natures (i.e., the higher types) who satisfy the mass’ human-all-too-human desire for meaning. Homo semioticus must hence necessarily evolve into homo cultus early in human pre-history in such a way that man is simultaneously and symbiotically both a creature of meaning and a cultural being (with true free will even for the “great” existing only within the scope of the culture they inherit and are born into as a matter of fate and which they must affirm). Meaning, as the (pen)ultimate need of man second only to life itself—necessary to make human life not just possible (cf. mere life) but flourishing—requires an ultimate kind of man to create and envision. Meaning-creation is an aesthetic and noble action, a ritual for life, which does not lend itself to the democratic and egalitarian whims of the human-all-too-human but instead demands a will and imagination which is many ways superhuman along with a courage and strength to empower this imagined vision in culture. Understood from this vantage point (i.e., of the radical almost mythical artistic-hero), meaning appears as a highly discriminating and fastidious achievement won only by those especially bred for it in accordance with the aristocratic ethos of virtù and courage.

For his part and in contradistinction from the subjectivist (rather solipsistic) extremes of existentialism (which is particularly evident in the philosophical school of existentialism), MacIntyre (as discussed in Act One) champions the shared and social nature of meaning as does Nietzsche, but he still crucially leans toward the existentialist position by accepting ‘meaning-creation’ itself as an individual and ‘subject-centered’ act in which all partake, albeit with a

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significant caveat of this ‘creation’ being contextualized by and embedded in one’s (minded) relationship with substantive ‘traditions’ (an inherently social relationship). As such, MacIntyre endeavors meticulously to qualify and limit his understanding of human autonomy as operative within the conceived ‘traditions’ of rationality so as to make his notion of autonomy more moderate and ‘sensible’ and less radical and irrational in comparison to the radically existentialist and subjectivist positions assumed by Kierkegaard and (later non-religiously rendered by) Sartre, which would eliminate all criteria for judgment. Nonetheless, the core of existentialist teaching—the subject-oriented creation of meaning accessible to all as mankind’s defining attribute—is actively embraced by MacIntyre, whose notion of personal narrative as an individual construction relies on a rather inclusive, democratic view of human free will—an idea which it could be argued finds its first clear expression in Kierkegaard.

Thus, despite MacIntyre’s painstaking attempts to constrain and contextualize a subject’s choice in selecting a narrative within bounds of the ‘traditions’ of rationality (and their various claims regarding justice) available to him, in such a way that an individual narrative always entails an embedded and embodied (rational) choice that is socially conditioned and concretized, the question of meaning-making is nonetheless conceived by MacIntyre as a bottom-up, subject-determined process to which all, as humans, equally have access. And such an inclusive democratic picture of human agency and subjectivized meaning is (as we will explore in more detail later) exactly what Nietzsche decisively rejects. Such a picture, one can also argue, places the MacIntyrean account of meaning (despite MacIntyre’s many hesitations and qualifications and

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210 In the MacIntyrean sense, this means that actions could be subjected to some ‘particular’ criterion or standard according to which they can be judged rationally and objectively (if not absolutely and ‘unconditionally’ in the Kantian sense). In fact, MacIntyre’s insistence upon such holistic, substantive, and historical ‘traditions’ of rationality and justice—whose very purpose is to preclude such radical and irrational subjectivism of the likes of Sartre (who is evidently MacIntyre’s philosophical arch-nemesis and whom MacIntyre forcefully repudiates)—is precisely his defense against those critics who charge him (quite mistakenly in my view) with relativism.
his much less radical and subjectivist position in comparison to the existentialists’) much closer to the existentialist camp than to Nietzsche’s. For Nietzsche, not only can *homo semioticus* (a tragic being for whom the meaning of life itself is a problem, or a creature of meaning) *not* exist outside of cultural existence, but ‘meaning-making’ itself must be an unambiguously top-down, highly-selective, and aristocratic affair to which only a great *few* are privy. As such, Nietzsche’s thought points to the entwinement of *power/agency* and *meaning* as part of human evolution. Meaning then is culturally sustained, bred, and internalized within populations, but created and transformed aristocratically in the hands of the great (fr. *le génie du cœur*; de. *das Genie des Herzens*) who not only come to embody and personify cultural meaning, but (by chance and fatefuly) possess the *will* and the *means* to revolutionize (i.e., *revalue*) it on a grand scale. They alone possess *true* human autonomy and agency (which the existentialists so obsessively desire) to the extent that it exists in an otherwise deterministic and mechanistic nature, and in their persons alone does cultural agency remain vibrant and full of life.

In contrast to the existentialist understanding of meaning (Kierkegaard and Sartre) which holds that the individual, living authentically and autonomously, *gives* meaning to his life and determines his own values, Nietzsche believes that except for those historic *rare* strokes of genius (which in later writings he calls the Übermensch) the overwhelming majority of us *receive* meaning from our particular cultural environment in terms of *instinctivized* cultural values—i.e., as part of an order/structure of meaning. The Übermensch alone possess “the meaning of the Earth”, Nietzsche famously declares. Their existence *in itself* not only confers value on (human) life but is irrefutable *proof* of life’s inherent ‘worth’, providing a *thisworldly* and *concrete* meaning to human existence. And it is this ‘meaning-creation’ that makes the breeding and cultivation of

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211 Z, Prologue, §3
the Übermensch type of utmost (existential) importance for human communities/cultures—it is for
this task that they are championed by Nietzsche and set as the goal for mankind by Zarathustra. ²¹²

Nietzsche’s insistence on the individual, singular, and übermenschlich creation of meaning
by the few who also appear as the “agents of revaluation” for these structured “orders of meaning”
in the “eternal becoming” of culture accounts for why Nietzsche is often seen and even claimed
(wrongly in my view) as an intellectual father by existentialists and post-structuralists (not to
mention their liberal and conservative critics as well), for both are able to highlight those
“transformative” elements in Nietzsche they find agreeable (or problematic) while overlooking the
whole of Nietzsche’s personal mission and enterprise (i.e., his “task”). This is behavior Nietzsche
expected in his worst readers: “The worst readers are like plundering soldiers: they take away the
few things they can use, spoiling and upsetting the rest, and giving a bad name to the whole.” ²¹³

Having eyes only for what they seek in Nietzsche and looking to contrive some modicum of
historical authority for their already-held beliefs, it is not surprising that they find it, for Nietzsche
anticipates their positions without subscribing to any of their specifically existentialist views. In
other words, they appropriate the Nietzschean agent (for their idea of absolute and rather solipsistic
free will) without heeding Nietzsche’s specifically culturalist and aristocratic conception of
meaning (i.e., the aristocratic humanism which underpins it). By democratizing and universalizing
Nietzsche’s concept of the Übermensch then, Post-structuralists (Deleuze, Foucault) have done the
greatest disservice to Nietzsche, decentering some foundational aspects of Nietzsche’s thought as

²¹² In his commentary on Nietzsche’s philosophy, Georg Brandes, correctly captures the Nietzschean sentiment:
“When does a state of culture prevail? When the men of a community are steadily working for the production of single
great men. From this highest aim all the others follow. And what state is farthest removed from a state of culture? That
in which men energetically and with united forces resist the appearance of great men, partly by preventing the
cultivation of the soil required for the growth of genius, partly by obstinately opposing everything in the shape of
genius that appears amongst them. Such a state is more remote from culture than that of sheer barbarism.” (Brandes,
An Essay on Aristocratic Radicalism, 1889, p.12)
²¹³ Human All Too Human, II, §137. (Hollingdale and Hermann Hummel Translations harmonized)
well as overshadowing his ‘untimely’ prescient “two-level” meaning scheme which rather seamlessly combines elements from what in 20th century becomes the Structuralist and Post-structuralist divide and at the same time inventively synthesizes and sublates them into a whole. Although Nietzsche’s overall (relationist) methodology means that he carries out his analyses of the Übermensch and of culture separately, in two different parts, and each with apposite methodology to its own (holism for culture and individualism for the Übermensch), the subjective experience of the Übermensch and the objective cultural institutions are physiologically united in the dynamic being of a cultural organism which is in turn instinctivized and then overcome in the person of the Übermensch.

A separate aspect of Nietzsche’s theory of meaning which merits discussion and stands in stark contrast with both MacIntyre’s and Kierkegaard’s is his particularly non-metaphysical and naturalist (or rather humanist) stance toward meaning which sees meaning as a particularly human good. Kierkegaard’s metaphysicalism (transposed unto his subjective ontology) of course speaks for itself. To note, from the radically anti-Hegelian (or rather inverted Hegelian) position of Kierkegaard, meaning (and metaphysics and religion as well) are to remain intrinsically irrational. Subverting and internalizing the Hegelian dialectic, Kierkegaardian meaning is grounded on a dialectical conception of selfhood, fashioned not from a metaphysical abstraction external to oneself, but from one that is entirely internal to oneself (and believed via one’s faith)—it is thus produced from within, out of one’s personal faith, in a radically subjective way. Despite his rhetoric

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214 We will revisit this feature of Nietzsche’s thought in more depth in the next section where we specifically examine Nietzsche’s notion of the Übermensch and his culturalism (what I call his anthro-culturalism) in relation to his seminal idea of the “eternal recurrence”.

215 Kierkegaard’s metaphysicalism indeed contributes to his explicit concern with meaning as a divine yet “subjective” gift, where alienation from the divine authority (and telos) in the aftermath of post-Enlightenment’s ‘objectivity’ is in fact rendered the cause of our dreadful ‘meaninglessness’—our only solace thus remains in reestablishing our subjective relationship with and faith in the divine (the abstract universal) as to become a “singular universal” in a unio mystica. (Cf. also Kierkegaard’s notion of the “teleological suspension of the ethical”).

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against ‘abstractions’ (which are really meant as attacks against Hegel) and in support of ‘real existence’, Kierkegaard, by so thoroughly individualizing, subjectifying, and interiorizing the human, himself abstracts the human (qua existence). Individual existence, contained so rigidly to itself and unmediated, appears awfully solipsistic.\footnote{To my mind, it is the mediating aspect in the Hegelian dialectic (the objective spirit’s rational and rationalizing element) to which Kierkegaard most objects. Interestingly, this mediating aspect is precisely what MacIntyre hopes to recover in his notion of “traditions”, which goes to buttress MacIntyre’s claims as to the irreconcilability of his and Kierkegaardian philosophies.} The ‘will to religion’ as a feeling of faith (irrational by definition) is the defining feature of mankind for Kierkegaard, endowing human existence with meaning.\footnote{Perhaps an apt description of Kierkegaardian philosophy and one in direct contrast with Nietzsche is offered by a fellow Dane scholar and Nietzsche’s pen pal, again George Brandes: [like Nietzsche for the Germans,] “We had in Denmark a great man who with impressive force exhorted his contemporaries to become individuals. But Soren Kierkegaard’s appeal was not intended to be taken so unconditionally as it sounded. For the goal was fixed. They were to become individuals, not in order to develop into free personalities, but in order by this means to become true Christians. Their freedom was only apparent; above them was suspended a “Thou shalt believe!” and a “Thou shalt obey!” Even as individuals they had a halter round their necks, and on the farther side of the narrow passage of individualism, through which the herd was driven, the herd awaited them again one flock, one shepherd.” Brandes, An Essay on Aristocratic Radicalism (1789), p. 9-10.} Accumulation of meaning in one’s life is the result of a faith repeatedly affirmed and reaffirmed in a (dialectical) self (i.e., “positive” synthesis) which incessantly relates (via sin and guilt) itself (thesis) to its immediately preceding and succeeding selves (antitheses): in the Kierkegaardian account, meaning depends on the reflexive dialectic of selfhood.\footnote{Kierkegaard’s account of the self as “a relation which relates itself to itself”, and as “a synthesis” is particularly illuminating in this regard. (The Sickness unto Death, p. 13)}

Moreover, when MacIntyre writes that “human beings are by their essential nature metaphysical enquirers” and hence must be prone to “metaphysical abstractionism”, it is the aforementioned implicit ‘will to meaning’ that MacIntyre is so ‘metaphysically’ and in other places rather ‘teleologically’ interpreting.\footnote{Alasdair MacIntyre, “Once More on Kierkegaard”, in Kierkegaard After MacIntyre, ed. John Davenport and Anthony Rudd, (Open Court, 2001), p. 350.} And it is precisely this “metaphysical need” (a psychologized instinct), which Nietzsche comes to problematize (first in HAH), heralding its
abolition with the conclusion of the idealist metaphysical age in the wake of the Enlightenment, and looking to explore its practical sociocultural consequences:

‘The moral man stands no closer to the intelligible (metaphysical) world than does physical man—*for* there is no intelligible world...' [Réé says]. This claim, hardened and sharpened under the hammer blow of historical knowledge (*Lisez: revaluation of all values*), may perhaps at some future time serve as the axe that will chop at the root of the 'metaphysical need' of man—whether this will prove more of a blessing or a curse for humanity, who can say? But in any event as a claim with gravest of consequences, at once fruitful and frightful, and looking into the world with that *two-sided gaze* possessed by all great insights.²²⁰

The fact that the ‘will to meaning’ must inevitably encompass some “metaphysical abstraction” and at the same time be rationally accessible for MacIntyre means that it must be *historically* immanent in the various traditions. It follows that MacIntyre’s idea of *meaning* is “rationalized” in a very Hegelian sense—attained in *narrative* form through a dialectic between the individual subject and (competing) traditions. MacIntyre’s metaphysicalism leads him to conceptualize meaning as part of a rationally-driven historical dialectic reminiscent of Hegel—*meaning is produced within a dialectical conception of history*.²²¹, *a rational process culminating in a goal-driven universal teleology*.²²² MacIntyre is clever to conceptualize meaning in this fashion, for it means that not just meaning, but religion and metaphysics too, could be discussed *rationally* and *teleologically*. Meaning is thus immanent dialectically in (objective) traditions which *mediate* between the individual subject and the world-historical universal. And in doing this, MacIntyre opens himself up to the same lines of criticism which were directed at Hegel’s philosophy in the 19th century.

²²⁰ *EH*, III, “*Human All Too Human*”, §6 cf. *HAH*, §37
²²¹ *Rationally* understood in terms of the various traditions of rational inquiry and alternate forms of ‘practical reason’ immanent in competing conceptions of justice.
²²² Following his Hegelian tack, this *goal* for MacIntyre, it turns out, is *freedom*.
A starkly different picture of meaning is offered by Nietzsche. Given Nietzsche’s fundamentally “post-metaphysical” standpoint, in the Nietzschean representation of meaning, metaphysical abstractions, whether externalized via reason or internalized via faith, are to be thoroughly and utterly rejected. Meaning is wholeheartedly human—that is, it is a “human, all too human,” creation. What is more, the creation of meaning is also decidedly not a result of ‘abstractionism’ of one form or another. Meaning is tethered to human life and the concrete in a very real way in terms of culture and actual human relationships without any recourse to ‘universals’: in the Nietzschean account, meaning is created out of the reflexive dialectic of culture (more on this to follow in Act Two). Nietzsche earnestly teaches us not just that meaning is pivotal to human experience, but that meaning must not necessarily dwell in metaphysics or the universal nor need it be conceived of in an abstract and teleological fashion to be meaningful. As such, we can observe three drastically different conceptions of meaning centered on three competing “dialectics of meaning”. In MacIntyre’s case, his teleological interpretation of meaning merits more of a discussion as it exemplifies a yet another aspect of his manifest opposition to Nietzsche, for this teleology reinforces, and in many regards stems from, MacIntyre’s staunch theism in contradistinction with Nietzsche’s profound atheism.

Revisiting MacIntyre’s Teleology in Lieu of Nietzsche

In the Romanticism which dominated European intellectual circles in the first half of the 19th century, there was an unmistakable element of conservatism, indeed of religious conservatism, which involved resurrecting Dionysus and equating him with Christ.223 Emphasizing faith and

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223 The case for the early romantic adoption of Dionysus as an anti-Enlightenment divinity paralleling Christ which Nietzsche cleverly co-opts into an opposition between ‘Dionysus and the Crucified’ has been persuasively argued in
subjectivity, this strand of romantic counter-Enlightenment thought found its precursor in Johann Georg Hamann (*Sturm und Drang*) and its consummation in the existentialism of Soren Kierkegaard. Nietzsche’s profound atheism (Nietzsche believed himself “an instinctive and ruthless type” of atheist) meant that he rejected this romantic equivalency of Dionysus and Christ as outright blasphemous. Remediying this sacrilege, Nietzsche ‘restored’ Dionysus to his rightful position as the ‘divinity of (thisworldly) life’—as *anti-Christ*. Nietzsche’s “Dionysus” not only opposes the Apollonian spirit of the Enlightenment, but it also transcends the esoteric/mystic Dionysus of the Romantics, who transposed a metaphysics of *nature* on to the philosophes’ metaphysics of *ideal*. The Dionysian, as Nietzsche conceives it, is a radically ‘this-worldly’ and ‘earthly’ symbol that stands powerfully against, not just religion per se, but all pretense to the ‘theological’ and the ‘heavenly’—it is the ‘non-metaphysical’ atheistic symbol *par excellence* and thus the only one worthy of both the heavens and the earth. Hence, Nietzsche turns against Romanticism in all its aspects, facets and forms—transcending Romanticism. It is my view that MacIntyre’s overall philosophy, on the other hand, subtly reflects this distinctive (religious) variant of Romantic thought, especially informing his axiology.  

Michael A. Gillespie’s *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, (University of Chicago, 1995). See particularly Ch.7, “Dionysus and the Triumph of Nihilism”.  

224 *EH*, III, “The Untimely Ones”, §2  

225 It is quite telling that in the final weeks and months before his breakdown, Nietzsche on multiple occasions signs his name as “Dionysus” and alternatively as “the Crucified”, postulating himself not only as the latest incarnation of the Dionysus in the long chain of historical genius, including Caesar, Napoleon, and Voltaire, etc., but one ready to be crucified in Christ’s place thus replacing him at the pinnacle of the Western Civilization heralding a new post-Christian and hence post-Modern age.  

226 MacIntyre indeed rejects Kierkegaard’s ethics substituting his own Thomistic version in its place: responding to his critics in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, MacIntyre writes, “the gap between Aristotelian or Thomistic ethics of virtues and Kierkegaardian ethics is just too great”. Nonetheless, although MacIntyre’s axiological solution differs from that of Kierkegaard whose approach he regards as “not only different but irreconcilable…systematically at odds, both philosophically and theologically” from his own, MacIntyre’s fundamental concern with axiology and ethics is in my mind very much informed by Kierkegaard if not driven by it. MacIntyrean ethics is perhaps best understood as a rejoinder to that of Kierkegaard’s. For MacIntyre’s own account of where he stands on Kierkegaard, see Alasdair MacIntyre, “Once More on Kierkegaard”, in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, ed. John Davenport and Anthony Rudd, (Open Court, 2001), pp. 339-55.
Although (as we have seen in Act One) MacIntyre disposes of the conservative political and social theories of conservative Romanticism, substituting in their place his decidedly Marxist-rooted ‘agonistic’ socio-political theory, and borrows elements from existentialism (namely its democratic and radical individualism) in his anthropology (and semiotics), it would be safe to assume that had MacIntyre adopted the concept of Dionysus as part of his philosophy, he would have retained the original religious (indeed Christian) connotations Dionysus evoked in (conservative) romantic circles. Thus, MacIntyre cleverly manages to be both (philosophically and axiologically) reactionary and (socio-politically) revolutionary, philosophically anti-Modern and anthropologically Modernist (i.e., existentialist). Nietzschean thought, however, is decidedly post-Modern (i.e., transcending Modernity via its unique culturalism), whereas Nietzsche’s anthropology is radically humanist and pragmatist, a fact which underlies his radically aristocratic and neo-archaic socio-political thought. In contrast to MacIntyre’s Romanticism, Nietzschean post-Modernism hearkens back to the Renaissance. Seen in this light, MacIntyre resembles a Marxian Kierkegaard, Nietzsche a culturalist Machiavelli.

The Modern ‘self’ (as delineated in existentialist and liberal thought) is a ‘self’ with no story, only episodes. It is construed atomistically and disembedded from its social roles and functions. It is separated (or delinked) and isolated from others in the normative community, severed from bonds of community and cultural friendship, and detached from context and history. It is not surprising then that MacIntyre views the Modern self to be completely incapable of leading an ethical life, as Modern man appears un-synced with any notion of a higher purpose/cause to orient him (telos) and thus untethered to any values greater than and outside of himself. To remedy Modernity and the grave moral disorder MacIntyre believes to be at its heart, then, one needs to
rescue this disembodied “self” from the abyss into which liberal and existential solipsism has thus thrown him.

To recall Act One, what MacIntyre’s philosophy essentially bears witness to is a problem of disembodied self (i.e., autonomous) having to choose among disembodied values (i.e., abstract), creating an inescapable moral crisis the remedy to which is re-embodiment (of both self and values) in a concrete social context where virtue (as praxis) and reason (as practical reasoning) can combine and reclaim their moral authority. Here I want to make explicit what I only alluded to before: for MacIntyre this relinking of man to his norms can only be done by accepting an account of teleology. And still further to point out what MacIntyre at best only insinuates without properly stating: the recourse to teleology in the MacIntyrean system serves to make life whole once more—to make it meaningful. All this captures the paramount importance of the idea of “narrative” (as an ‘identity-shaping’ force) in MacIntyre’s account.

Thus, MacIntyre understands correctly that man is “essentially a story-telling animal”—a narrativist (cf. Nietzschean ‘myth’)—and that “the key question for men is not about their own authorship” of the norms (i.e. autonomy) as liberals believe, but only that they find these values coherent and significant: as MacIntyre states, “I can only answer the question ‘what am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”. In this regard, MacIntyre agrees with Nietzsche on the importance of significance and meaning for man’s flourishing and sense of fulfillment (Gk. Eudaimonia). And yet, MacIntyre sanctions the individual’s prerogative to choose (or rather “discover”) her own story from among a collection of stories made available to her via her rational engagement with her particular community (therefore not at all independent from or autochthonous to the horizon of tradition and community under

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227 AV, p.216
which she finds herself living). MacIntyre, it follows, subjectivizes the “story-telling” element into a ‘personal quest’ intrinsically meaningful for the individual (and necessary generally for the alethic quest), understanding it as a “personal narrative” where each finds his story by living out his own unique experience. The development of a personal narrative (i.e., identity) is therefore deemed foundational to the “unity of an individual life”.  

For these reasons, MacIntyre only partially “rejects a conception of a person as principally a chooser and a decider”, and maintains the person’s latitude in discovery of a personal identity for herself from within the array of stories available to her. Nonetheless, as MacIntyre himself acknowledges, I must “understand the enacted narrative of my own individual life as embedded in the history of my country” and cannot simply manufacture it out of thin air and from my free will. It follows that MacIntyre’s idea of a (personal) identity thus synthesizes the individual and the unique traditions of rationality to which she has access (overshadowing her culture) in terms that are specifically and (crucially) universally historical, personalizing the notion of a tradition that has a distinctive identitarian thrust while circumventing the notion of culture. This synthesis can only be achieved through an acceptance of teleology, for “it is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do.” The recourse to teleology also signifies the central role the idea of purpose or an ultimate cause has in the MacIntyrean scheme and highlights the key nexus between purpose and meaning centered on the all-encompassing, theistic idea of the Good.

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228 AV, p.203  
229 Horton and Mendus, p. 9  
231 AV, prologue to the Third Edition, p. xi
Precisely by way of fusing the abstract, the universal, and the theoretical (human *nature*) with the concrete, the particular, and the practical (*community*), the Thomistic tradition, MacIntyre argues, can provide a more consistent, workable, *meaningful* synthesis between this personal narrative and one’s value-commitments and hence a way out of what he deems a “crisis of values”. MacIntyre is correct to observe that “the unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest,” but his distinctly theistic approach to the Good (and hence his commitment to its universality) compels him to privilege “personal narrative” over that of “culture narrative” (i.e., distinctive myths) which Nietzsche champions. And to be workable, this obliges him to rely on a teleology. One wonders why the ‘unity of life’, which MacIntyre endorses, could not be achieved in terms of Nietzsche’s ‘culture complexes’?  

MacIntyre rightly understands that this narrative quest and unity are impossible outside a social context, which substantivizes the quest, but it is important to reemphasize, with Horton and Mendus, that context is *independent* to man and “not something a person chooses”. But if this is so, should we not then speak of the necessity for the said ‘context’ to have a ‘narrative’ which is itself coherent and meaningful?  

Similar to Hegel and Aristotle, MacIntyre recognizes the *sociality* (of values) as the principle on which all normative arrangements and even personal identity are *contingent*, but his idea of teleology (premised on attaining the Good as a universal good) inevitably *historicizes* it—projecting it on to the universal dialectic of history. And it is this very idea of teleology (stemming out of a preconceived theism of the Good) that proves to be MacIntyre’s Achilles heel vis-à-vis meaning understood in Nietzschean terms. Despite the different more existentialist/egalitarian and subjectivist perspectives which undergird MacIntyre’s view of meaning noted above, it is my contention that *teleology* (historical and social) for MacIntyre plays a similar function to that of

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232 Ibid. p. 219  
233 Horton and Mendus, p. 10
culture for Nietzsche in recovering a sense of greater purpose and significance for human life, which ties it to his conception of the Good, and it is concurrently a way for him to supersede culture itself. MacIntyre’s reliance on the Good as the universal desideratum further explains his vacillation between a social conception of teleology (AV) and one which increasingly resembles the natural teleology he had emphatically rejected in AV, as well as his increasing embrace of ‘natural law’ in more recent works: whether formulated in terms of “universal history” or in a universalist conception of nature, both attitudes reflect a fundamentally theistic and monistic disposition—and the telos remains one and the same. The words of Löwith are particularly revealing here. Löwith, echoing Nietzsche, derides people like Hegel and the future Hegelians to-come who attempt to derive such a meaning from the course of history or the laws of nature, writing “to the critical mind, neither a providential design nor a natural law of progressive development is discernible in the tragic human comedy of all times.”

What is more, the MacIntyrean position of an internally-found but externally-located narrative also implies that our interactions with others and our own values, practices, and aspiration would only make sense (i.e., have meaning) within the context of a super-narrative in relation to which one creates his or her own personal narrative (cf. identity). Therefore, in order for one’s personal narrative and one’s role, contribution, and end in this meta-narrative to make sense and appear worthy, the overarching narrative itself needs to cohere in an internally consistent and harmonious fashion—thus we arrive at a higher-order insight: that we do not need simply a personal narrative but a cultural narrative as well to achieve meaning. This observation is to me one of Nietzsche’s most powerful realizations.

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234 Löwith, *Meaning and History*, p. v
Accordingly, I concur with MacIntyre when he states that “any specific account of the virtues presupposes an equally specific account of the narrative structure and unity of a human life and vice versa.” 235 Yet, although the ‘narrative unity of self’ does in fact operate from the perspective of the individual, this seems to be a much more complicated process than an arbitrary and affective notion of personal-identity—‘rationalized’ would suggest. For as a ‘narrative quest’ it is always dependent on the meaningfulness of the quest—at most only one half of which is personally arbitrated by us using our practical reason. The other half, the social half if you will, is informed and indeed inculcated by the greater cultural context as well as our natural and physiological inclinations (i.e., instinct). The cultural narrative is made significant as well as transmitted to us (Nietzsche would say imprinted unto us via instinctivization) through our myths, stories, and histories. After all, as MacIntyre concedes, “the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity”. 236

All this demonstrates that the whole notion of teleology (whether social, natural, historical, or otherwise) is not only deeply connected to the particular account of meaning and significance (itself a narrative) a cultural community imagines for itself; it is a ‘metaphysical abstraction’, itself predicated on that constitutive (a priori) meaning. What are to be our collective ends qua human, as universally good for us, what is to be our purpose as human beings and why…these are the formative questions on which the MacIntyreen idea of teleology is founded and for which he seeks to find a unified formula or ‘narrative’—the notions of community and culture as well as communal ‘difference’ and ‘incommensurability’ as far as they are alluded to are only ever a foil, a means toward this higher monistic Good (privileged a priori). In this respect, it is clear that “the possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide” for they are

235 AV, p. 243
236 AV, p. 221
only both manifestations of the (attempts at) universal Good. Thus, while MacIntyre appears consumed by the ‘unity of the narrative embodied in a single life’ to make meaningful and to forcibly unite the disparate and at times contradictory actions of a person (literally collapsed into an identity), the greater unity to be sought seems to me to involve the unity or rather harmony of the personal narrative of the individual(s) with the communal narrative that is enacted in cultures (the latter being “breeds of mind”) over generations (all as different manifestations of human life).

Relinkage, which MacIntyre advocates, then is not just about connecting the delinked individual to others, but to relink her to the overall chain of narrative already extant in the culture—to replenish one’s life with attachments and to imbue those attachments with meaning as part of a larger historically alive and ever in fieri cultural narrative/memory. It is to realize that absent some overarching stories at the cultural level, one would also lack a story to tell oneself (or to ‘find’), a narrative to construct and embody, a task to passionately pursue in one’s life. It is to recognize that in the end, one’s story is a contribution to the story of culture at large, just as a character’s is to the plot in a novel. Human life, so far as being human means anything concrete and is not simply an abstraction of some a priori ideal and value, is always an embedded and instinctivized experience in culture. And this, precisely, is something that only the ‘great’ types “overcome”, thereby transforming culture, recasting it in their own image for future generations to recall, embody, and aspire to. The picture of MacIntyre that comes to light, therefore, is one of high sensitivity to the imperative of giving meaning to human life, but one that ultimately falls short given its teleological and metaphysical interpretation of meaning, not to speak of its existentialist/democratic groundings, which place it much closer to Kierkegaard (despite MacIntyre’s much professed resistance) than to Nietzsche’s culturalist understanding of meaning.

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237 AV, p. 221
In both his intellectual and personal trajectory, MacIntyre it seems to me becomes increasingly conscious of this “problem of meaning” threatening our life in the West. As this idea becomes more pronounced, we see in MacIntyre the philosopher, a move in the direction of natural teleology and the conception of the whole as a unity (i.e., *universalism*)—discarding the extrinsic *social* teleology he once espoused (1984) and putting intrinsic natural teleology in its place (1988,1990). As to his personal life, with this “question of meaning” possibly weighing on his mind, MacIntyre turned to theology and to God in general and converted to Catholicism. It could indeed be argued that his Thomistic philosophy itself was inspired by a will to provide a solution for this problematic based on the “cosmological argument” but given a practical framework, to concretize and actualize the transcendental while still retaining a place for the Transcendent itself. In MacIntyre’s own admission, Harry V. Jaffa (1952) already and successfully challenged the presumed nexus between the Pagan Aristotle and the Christian Thomas Aquinas, arguing that although the two normative traditions are not in direct opposition, there is “manifest and striking difference between Pagan and Christian ethics” in particular and secular and religious conceptions of virtue in general since one (i.e., Aristotle) has no recourse to the higher divine principle in his understanding of virtue (and hence of *Spoudaios*) that Aquinas does.\(^{238}\) Like his teacher Leo Strauss, Jaffa’s chief concern of course was the *relativism* he saw inherent in Modernity, not the *abstracted* and disembodied theoretical and autonomous reason (failing to adjudicate the “polynomic” normative state) that originally troubled MacIntyre, but Jaffa’s solution—a return to Catholic natural law—is similar to MacIntyre’s albeit under different motivations and to different ends.

\(^{238}\) Harry V. Jaffa, *Thomism and Aristotelianism*, p. 22, 34
Karl Löwith once wrote that philosophical skepticism can lead in one of two directions: it may end in “upholding the question as question”, in “mature resignation”—in Nihilism (cf. Schopenhauer), or it can end in faith (as it did particularly for Kierkegaard), a stance which responds to the questions posed by skepticism by “transcending doubt through faith” and by “faithful expectation”, celebrating the absurd and the irrational (and in fact, seeing in them the ultimate characteristics of the human).\(^{239}\) MacIntyre effectively following along this path chooses the latter option (both in adopting a theistic philosophy and in his personal life). MacIntyre also believes (in tune with Löwith) that Nietzsche chooses the former tack. My position, conversely, is that Nietzsche rejects this dichotomy as a false choice; that he chooses culture as the only proper philosophically consistent and earthly way of overcoming the doubts engendered by the radical skepticism he had inherited from Schopenhauer. This is of note particularly as MacIntyre’s (philosophical) theism stands in stark contrast to Nietzsche’s (philosophical) atheism. In fact, Nietzsche remarks, “atheism was what led me to Schopenhauer”.\(^{240}\)

The idea of meaningfulness and narrative (or myth) I have highlighted here, because, as I have argued, it is originally Nietzsche on whom this very serious aporia dawns, and he is also much more explicit about it. In fact, as I read Nietzsche, the centrality of this question of meaning for norms in particular (upon which they are founded) but generally for life itself, and the symbiotic relationship between it and the cultural meta-narrative, form the crux of not only Nietzsche’s critique of Modernity but his affirmative philosophy as well—a project dedicated to ‘re-projecting meaning into (the) history’ of Western culture and re-substantivizing the nihilistic present of the West all in a secular spirit. The hope is that by focusing on the theme of meaning in this study we can both clarify its fundamental importance in the Nietzschean scheme of ideas and also to deepen

\(^{239}\) Löwith, Meaning and history, Preface
\(^{240}\) EH, III, “The Untimely Ones”, §2
the story about Modernity already being told through the different accounts provided by these two thinkers (i.e., MacIntyre and Nietzsche). I shall now turn to explore Nietzsche’s account of the question of meaning and theodicy in more depth and to examine its consequences for and relationship with his ideas about willing and agency.

Nietzsche and Theodicy: Grounds for a Semiotic Critique of the Western Civilization

My task, preparing the way for humanity's moment of highest self-examination, a great noon when it will look back and look out [ahead], when it will escape from the domination of chance [nature] and priests [idealism] and, for the first time, pose the question 'why?', the question 'what for?' as a whole—

Genealogy of Meaning Out of Will to Power and Tragedy

To understand Nietzsche’s general philosophy and his emphasis on meaning, one must begin with Nietzsche’s naturalist and realist ontology, his presumptive picture of the world rooted in a radically skepticist epistemology. To Nietzsche, the entire cosmos is in constant becoming and transformation. What we call nature is indeed a perpetual re-casting, in consequence of the dynamism of creation and destruction to no apparent (or intrinsic) end and purpose. Accordingly, it is always in flux and in fieri and from our standpoint arbitrary and random. Nietzsche learned from Schopenhauer “how the acquisition of wealth, respectability, or erudition cannot pluck the individual out of his deep disgust at the worthlessness of his existence.” This recognition, Nietzsche concedes, is eerie enough to plunge one into the depths of resignation and despair about life, or alternatively, to desire instead to escape the confines of this pointless worldly existence by

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241 EH, III (“Daybreak”, §2)
242 Nietzsche, Unmodern Observations, “Schopenhauer as Educator”, §3, p. 178
fancying a ‘sanctuary’ beyond and swapping the frightful ‘reality’ for a more convenient ‘dream’.

“Uncanny is human existence and still without meaning . . . I want to teach humans the meaning of their being,” Zarathustra declares. Sense and significance are concepts entirely alien to nature, and mankind eternally suffers from this fundamental absence of meaning in nature made all the more real and tangible in terms of what this fragile species perceives as the senseless arbitrariness of death.

It is on such shaky, unstable, and ephemeral grounds, which is to say no grounds at all and made all the more problematic through the reality of suffering and death, that human beings, as other species, attempt to make themselves a permanent fixture of the world, by imposing themselves upon nature and other species. What is more, human intellect being our principal means in this overcoming and the source of our competitive advantage indicates that, more than any other creature, man dominates and transforms his environment in his image. We shape our own environment from the resources available to us—this is our will to power understood in most naturalist terms. Our intelligence in the face of the ‘ugly’ reality of our inevitable demise also makes our existence itself an aporia to us. And so, in light of both these reasons, Nietzsche realizes that having a sense of significance and meaning to situate and substantiate this biological will to power exponentially strengthens and empowers this will, allowing us not merely to survive (cf. Aristotle’s ‘mere life’) but to continually ascend higher and outdo ourselves—birthing human culture (as a distinctly human sublimation and channeling of the will to power). Put differently, in the quest for further enhancement (to which all species unwittingly aspire), our competition is primarily with ourselves: we compete only against ourselves, setting our own competition. The

\[243\] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, “Zarathustra’s Prologue”, §7
evolution of culture (in its striking plurality) hence reflects the different incarnations (i.e., sublimations) of our will to power.

As far as Nietzsche is concerned, then, the recognition of the power of *meaning* and the practice of ‘meaning-creation’ (combining *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poiesis*) as a formative force in the enhancement of mankind was an evolutionary and auxiliary development for the sake of life and its advancement, an ordering mechanism to bring a semblance (cf. Schein) of order and stability (via symbols and metaphors) to an otherwise chaotic and disorderly nature. What we must recognize, however, is that this ‘will to order’ itself both depends on and springs from a prior ‘will to meaning’. Meaning then is instrumental to life, as well as deeply connected with human willing and creative powers (making its achievement a fundamentally poietic exercise—cf. mythopoesis). Moreover, it is prior to and informative of our desire for order and security, a means to assert man’s control over the chaos of nature: it reflects the human will to power. In the early writings of Nietzsche’s, his symbol for the ‘will to order’ is *Apollo*; *Dionysus*, meanwhile, represents the foundational human will to meaning and myth—exemplifying together the different facets of human will to power and standing as the enduring embodiments of our creativity.

The relative order and sequence of their emergence notwithstanding, Nietzsche conceives of a symbiotic relationship between (structures of) *meaning* and *order*, a synthesis created in response to the magnitude of tragedy and suffering (cf. the Apollonian-Dionysian synthesis in his novel conception of *tragedy*). As early as *BT*, Nietzsche is quite adamant as to what he means by what I call the *order of meaning*:

Everything which distinguishes human beings from animals depends on this ability to sublimate sensuous metaphors into a schema, in other words, to dissolve an image into a concept. This is because something becomes possible in the realm of these schemata which could never be achieved in the realm of those sensuous first impressions, namely the construction of a pyramidal order based on castes and degrees, the creation of a new world of laws, privileges, subordinations, definitions
of borders, which now confronts the other, sensuously perceived world as something firmer, more general, more familiar, more human, and hence as something regulatory and imperative. Whereas every metaphor standing for a sensuous perception [i.e. culture] is individual and unique and is therefore always able to escape classification, the great edifice of concepts exhibits the rigid regularity of a Roman *columbarium*... Anyone who has been touched by that cool breath will scarcely believe that concepts too, which are as bony and eight-cornered as dice and just as capable of being shifted around, are only the left-over residue of a metaphor, and that the illusion produced by the artistic translation of a nervous stimulus into images is, if not the mother, then at least the grandmother of each and every concept.\(^{244}\)

It follows that a further implication of Nietzsche’s view is that each order of meaning (animate in a distinct and *sui generis* culture) is necessarily *man-made* and hence a form of “illusion” (*Schein*).

For Nietzsche, the *man-made* nature of meaning and its “true” artificiality has never been in doubt:

> Because we have for millennia made moral, aesthetic, religious demands on the world, looked upon it with blind desire, passion or fear, and abandoned ourselves to the bad habits of illogical thinking, this world has gradually become so marvelously variegated, frightful, meaningful, soulful, it has acquired colour—but we have been the colourists: it is the human intellect that has made appearance appear and transported its erroneous basic conceptions into things.\(^{245}\)

And here, Nietzsche’s position spells significant repercussions for the human idea of *justice*: that it too is only a *human* ‘construct’ and not rooted in nature. Indeed, the Greek *moira*, the natural fatedness and randomness of existence, seems to Nietzsche to be the only radically empirical form of ‘eternal justice’, which is really (disorderly) *injustice*, wholly neutral to both good and evil—that is, it permits *evil* and surely enough nature is permeated by what a human being would deem *evil* and *unjust* (*death* itself chief among them). As Nietzsche declares in a very early essay, “The Dionysian Worldview”:

> Recognition of the terrors and absurdities of existence, of the disturbed order and the unreasonable but planned [i.e. deterministic] nature of events, indeed of the

\(^{244}\) *BT*, p. 146-7

\(^{245}\) *Human All Too Human*, I. §16, p. 20
most enormous suffering throughout the whole of nature, [removes] the veil from the artificially hidden figures of moira….⁷⁴⁶

What Nietzsche speaks to as moira is the subterranean Titanic forces of nature obstructing man’s (epi)terranean designs on Earth seemingly in an arbitrary and senseless manner, the whole process of which could be identified as moira. Thus, Nietzsche argues, in contrast to the Abrahamic understanding of theodicy and its justification of evil through ‘original sin’ and the resulting guilt, the Indo-European theodicy and explanation for ‘bad fate’, as manifested in the myth of Prometheus, suggests an understanding of evil and injustice arising from the natural injustice of the world leading to a race between epiterranean humans and the subterranean (gods of) nature (cf. the Titans) for increased control—an antinomy, whose synthesis is achieved in the rise of the Olympian Gods in/with whom the belief in ‘cosmic harmony’ is inaugurated. It is the Greek peoples’ very audacity, irreverence, and lack of any sense of limitation that requires a lesson in moderation to be taught to them by Sophocles in Oedipus. And yet, the Nietzschean moira (as fatedness) seems to hide a double-entendre (as both nature and fortune) evidenced by Nietzsche’s reference to those “artificially hidden” agents of moira, for whom the Roman Fortuna might be a more appropriate symbol (cf. chance and fortuna) and who humanly and owing to their strong power of willing interfere in the otherwise deterministic course of nature. The “artificially hidden figures of moira” recall again those great humans of genius who embrace their fated greatness (cf. amor fati).

One must note a fundamental difference between the Nietzschean conceptions of order and justice. Of course, considering human societies as such (i.e. as ‘complex’ structures), one can speak of either ordered ‘injustice’ or ordered ‘justice’. However, according to Nietzsche, both are contrived and not strictly-speaking natural from the human standpoint. For whatever kind of

⁷⁴⁶ The essay is reproduced with The Birth of Tragedy by Cambridge University Press, 1999.
(“disturbed”) order does exist in the cosmos, from the perspective of man and given his mortality, this is always bound to look senseless, orderless, and unjust. After all, it is man’s nature to need to know the reasons behind any laws in order to accept and follow them. And this is true also of the ‘laws’ of nature. In the absence of any reason or sense accessible to us in nature, meaning supplies our contrived reasoning, an inherently speculative explanation for what is from our point of view the rather arbitrary and unjust presence of death. Meaning, then, underlies our theodicean struggle. The first task for mankind (one can call this the original anthropological/existential question), therefore, has been to establish a scheme of meaning which at its inception always precedes the notion of justice itself (bearing in mind our previous discussion as to the subsequent development of order and the regimentation of meaning). And yet, it secondarily incorporates and includes a paradigm of justice within its purposed ‘order of meaning’ as its modus operandi, and one which it presumes to best reflect its distinctive meaning scheme. For any ‘meaning-architecture’, this paradigm of justice (in time) masquerades as the raison d’etre for the entire civilization, orchestrating a whole hierarchy of norms and values whose only role is to sustain that particular interpretation of justice (and by extension life itself). This is especially misleading, however, for any order of meaning’s primary function is to provide a shared culture of (preferably human) meaning in order to sustain that collection of humans against the tragic reality of eventual death and loss. Meaning is to Nietzsche that “bright image of clouds and sky reflected in a dark sea of sadness” which is nature and the world-in-itself. It supplies that cry of in spite of it all, “in defiance of all catastrophes”, which one needs to not only go on and survive, but to strive for and ascend higher.

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247 Nietzsche, BT, §9
248 Ibid.
Nietzsche understands “injustice as inseparable from life”, and (human) “life itself as conditioned by the sense of [culturally-rooted] perspective” (with and through which man is cultivated), a plant growing tall on top of that soil which is “[life’s] injustice.” As such, Nietzsche maintains that in human life there is nothing unconditional nor absolute except that all is a matter of perspective. From the purview of nature, apropos, nothing is universal (i.e., natural law) other than causality. In spite of Nietzsche’s distinctive realist ontology, his unique philosophical anthropology hence derives from the recognition that although the “natural” or the “real” is ontologically prior to the cultural and should be our starting point for any human/anthropological genealogy, reality dictates that we can only interpret the world from our particular cultural vantage point—our cultural reality—a fortiori: ergo, culture must be epistemologically prior to nature in anthropologicis. In Nietzschean thought, we are therefore for the first time confronted with a synthesis (if not an outright sublation) of the naturalist-positivist position of analytic philosophy as well as the humanist-pragmatic position underlying the continental tradition, bridging their divide. We also observe the rejection of the customary totalistic and unitary views of reality and the possibility of multiple existing human realities within various and distinct culture-complexes. Such culturalism would seem to paint a relationist (if not outright relativist) picture of Nietzsche, the view that for Nietzsche, no authoritative standards of value could exist outside of culture. This would be both misleading and incorrect, for (as we shall see) Nietzsche has a definite basis for separating what he deems to be healthful cultures from unhealthy ones—a yardstick which (as we shall soon discover) arises out of life itself. In

249 Human All Too Human, Vol. I, Preface, §6
250 This radically realist/naturalist ontology is thus foundational to Nietzsche’s development of the humanist/culturalist epistemology (i.e., perspectivism) that some philosophers have referred to as ‘epistemological idealism’. 251 For an independent and at-length philosophical exploration of this position (i.e., cultural realism) by a philosopher, see the groundbreaking work of professor Joseph Margolis, Selves and Other Texts: The Case for Cultural Realism (Penn State, 2001); for more on Margolis’ philosophical stance, see Historied Thought, Constructed World (University of California, 1995) from the same author.
emphasizing perspectivism and culturalism, Nietzsche’s point is only that this (life-directed) yardstick should and can only be applied culturally (that is intraculturally rather than ‘universally’ and ‘inter-culturally’) if it is not to become a mere abstraction. Any judgment and “revaluation” must, in other words, be rooted in the concrete, historic, and authentic realities of the culture in question to be real and meaningful, for this is what the evolution of human life dictates.

Mindful of the ‘man-made’ quality of meaning, Nietzsche believes man’s culture-making a testament to mankind’s innately creative nature which consistently separates it from and lifts it above nature (permitting it to overcome nature’s inherent limitations). As such, in Nietzsche’s distinctive philosophical anthropology, the human being, at its best and most human form, “is an architectural genius who is far superior to the bee; the latter builds with wax which she gathers from nature, whereas the human being builds with the far more delicate material of concepts which he must first manufacture from himself”. Instead of this realization being disconcerting to us, however, Nietzsche asks us to celebrate our inventiveness vis-à-vis meaning, for this fact underscores that we (or at least a few among us) can indeed be masters of our own fate and our own reality, shaping and re-forming our meaning architecture if it is not to our spiritual (Geist) and lifeful advantage. This highlights the plasticity, malleability, and transmutability of our cultures as living organisms to which, like gods, the divinely human among us have and will continue to breathe life. The possibility for change and becoming in culture is of profound importance to Nietzsche particularly since the aftermath of the Enlightenment (i.e., the meaninglessness) has proved that we in the West have erred in our formulation of meaning for so long, choosing especially degenerative paths hostile to life. Indeed, for Nietzsche, the recognition of the privileged status of meaning and of man (albeit of a special kind of man) as the agent of its

\footnote{BT, p. 147}
creation marks the dawn of the (truly-human) age of humanism, one which in brushstrokes we formerly encountered and *lost* in the Renaissance. From the point of view of primitive human societies, to suffer from suffering is itself a sign of *weakness*; it is a *shame*, a *dishonor* not befitting a *strong* nature: one has got to deny his pain altogether or better “suffer in silence” and in *private*. In the wake of the Enlightenment, we (i.e., the Hyperboreans living outside of Modernity having *overcome* it) have finally come to cast off our *shame* once and for all.

The supervening philosophical repression of man’s (original) concrete act of cultural creation is historically essential for human enhancement (in the ‘*civilizing* age’), Nietzsche reasons, because “only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor, only by virtue of the fact that a mass of images, which originally flowed in a hot, liquid stream from the primal power of the human imagination, has become hard and rigid, only because of the invincible faith that this sun, this window, this table is a truth in itself—in short only because man forgets himself as a subject, and indeed as an artistically creative subject, does he live with some degree of peace, security, and consistency; if he could escape for just a moment from the prison walls of this faith, it would mean the end of his ‘consciousness of self’”, perhaps even spelling the end for mankind’s *hitherto-justified* existence. And with the end of this myth of “consciousness” comes the loss of his secure and comfortable ground, his cohered and ordered world—threatening his very survival. The Enlightenment endangers man’s artificial ecosystem by revealing it to be illusory and man-made. What is more, only by confronting the axiological consequences that this paradigm-shift entails could we ever hope to remedy and transcend the full-on nihilistic implications of this profound world-shattering discovery—its “meaninglessness” and “theoretical nihilism”! Only by conceiving our ontology and meaning scheme anew and embracing the new

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253 *AC*, §23
254 “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” (1873), §1. Reproduced in *Birth of Tragedy*, p. 148

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set of values apposite to them could we resolve the current crisis that plagues Modernity, a paradigm which stubbornly refuses to let go of its *expired pathological* values that are but relics from the pre-Enlightenment Christian age.

As Nietzsche observes, speaking historically, “a people—or, for that matter, a human being—only has value to the extent that it is able to put the stamp of the eternal on its experiences; for in doing so it sheds, one might say, its worldliness and reveals its unconscious, inner conviction that time is relative and [believing] that the true meaning of life is metaphysical.”²⁵⁵ Yet, Nietzsche is quick to remind us that “The opposite of this occurs when a people begins to understand itself historically and to demolish the metaphysical buttresses surrounding it,” a phenomenon that we in the West are in fact experiencing as post-Enlightenment; and he adds that “this is usually accompanied by a decided growth in worldliness and a break with the unconscious metaphysics of its previous existence, with all the ethical consequences this entails”.²⁵⁶ It is at such a juncture that we find ourselves in Modernity given Enlightenment’s powerful and indeed illuminatory rejection of the divine and of metaphysics (i.e., the Christian meaning). And it is precisely in the realm of ethics and values that we have not followed through on the Enlightenment’s originally skeptical, subversive, and probing tack. To *revalue* our expired and fatal template of values by means of a new generative meaning and a novel conception of values—this is the task that presently confronts those of us engaged in philosophy and who Nietzsche demands be “physicians of culture”. Consequently, contrary to what Nietzsche’s detractors such as Strauss call his radical relativism (and which Post-structuralists actually embrace), the fundamental question Nietzsche poses for his readers is whether any meaning-architecture and value-paradigm could be reasonably preferred to

²⁵⁵ *BT*, p. 110
²⁵⁶ Ibid.
another as more desirable: what would the criteria be for the recasting of our values in the spirit of the Hyperboreans’ revaluation project?

Toward this end, as alluded to above, Nietzsche distinguishes between healthy and generative meanings in service of life (i.e., meaning for life) and those degenerative and pathological meanings that seek to justify life in terms outside of life (i.e., meaning as such), which we will explore in more detail next. Moreover, these “life-affirming” and affirmative as well as “life-denying” and décadent meanings correspond to and reflect positive and healthy and negative and sickly kinds of ‘will to power’. In this schema, he who adheres to the “meaning-as-such” paradigm of Truth (i.e., the Platonist whom Nietzsche calls the idealist and could equally be applied to MacIntyre) errs, Nietzsche writes, by “forgetting that the original metaphors of perception were indeed metaphors, he takes them for the things themselves”, neglecting their ‘man-made’ nature and projecting the existence of things-in-themselves as true reality (cf. the Platonic eidos or Forms). The one who correctly understands meaning as an instrument for and in service of life, meanwhile, shows his respect for life by embracing the human spirit of this-worldly creation (cf. the Dionysian spirit) which he fatefully embodies.

The Nietzschean view of meaning as a (divinely human) creative enterprise is encapsulated in the following line which is fully embodied by the healthy type of man or woman who rightly grasps the Nietzschean notion of tragedy: “It is night [beneath existence]: alas, that I [mankind] must be light”. Such creators, chosen for this grand task of semiotic and mythical creation (i.e., mythopoesis) by fate, therefore, must become hardened to the fact that all things are finite and will wither; that they too will die—this is the most powerful impetus for creating (those enduring

257 “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” (1873), §1, BT, p. 148
258 Z, II, “The Night Song”
metaphors and orders). Thus, the human species’ markedly ‘minded’ (geistig) form of procreating is intimately linked with human agency:

Creating—that is the great redemption from suffering, and life’s becoming light. But in order for the creator to be, suffering is needed and much transformation... Willing liberates: that is the true teaching of will and liberty—thus Zarathustra teaches it. No more willing, and [we have] no more esteeming and no more creating! Oh, if only this great exhaustion would always keep far away from me! Even in knowing I feel only my will’s lust to beget/procreate and to become; and if there is innocence in my knowledge, then this is so because the will to beget/procreate [drives] it. This ‘will’ lured me away from God and gods, for what would there be to create, after all, if there were gods? But I am always driven back to human beings by my fervent will to create; just as the hammer is driven to the stone.²⁵⁹

Our will and creative powers are the defining characteristics of human life—the very markers of our humanity: everything else is mere means to this end. As for meaning, it too is deeply concordant with and a product of the most spectacular acts of creative willing (i.e., reflecting true human agency). From the Nietzschean point of view, meaning-making is an evolutionary tool meant to make life worthwhile to humans, not just so we can survive the tragedies of life (at the heart of which lies death itself) but so that we can soar, increase our evolutionary powers, and be ascendant as species. Historically, Nietzsche believes, we do this by means of sublimating our second-order instincts (for creation, power, and meaning, etc.) which are aroused via our mindedness (Geist) into higher and higher forms of life within cultures. As soon as our arbitrary existence became a problem for us, instinct aroused in us a will to order. The evolution in us of an urge toward meaning and significance and the accompanying spiritual powers of meaning-creation seems nature’s rather clever solution to appease our existential crisis and give us (indirectly) a semblance of order in a world in which we are surrounded with chaos and senseless suffering. And given that we are communal creatures, our ‘will to meaning’ almost immediately ‘conceived’ our

will to culture, for any (order of) meaning must be commonly shared if it is to be both empowered (over us) and empowering (for our flourishing).

By means of his tragic realism, Nietzsche hence fathers a new conception of blessing and redemption that standspowerfully against the Christian versions: where willing is baptized as the only true liberator for man in his existential struggle with suffering (except for what has already happened and come to pass for the will still “cannot will backward” and change the past). This kind of Dionysian realism, Nietzsche posits as the only genuine and revitalizing piece of ‘theodicy’ available to humanity:

How could I bear to be human, if humans were not also (poetic) creators [lit. composer-poets] and solvers of riddles and redeemers of chance? *To redeem that which has passed [away] and to recreate all ‘it was’ into ‘thus I willed it!’—only that would I call redemption! ‘Will’—thus one calls the liberator and joy-bringer...*

Deliverance from suffering that underlies life rests only in creation and willing—i.e., in ‘affirmative’ overcoming (of both nature and history). This is what the tragic nature, the Dionysian spirit, alone understands. “Into all abysses then I carry my yes-saying that blesses” with its creativity—such a spirit proclaims. Suffering, it turns out, is for mankind a blessing in disguise, the double-edged sword which could either kill or make one stronger. And so, we shall now take a closer look at the Nietzschean idea of the “tragic artist” juxtaposed against the type of the

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260 Z, II, “On Redemption”: Nietzschean philosophical anthropology essentially operates on a fatalistic account of the past (itself the result of deterministic natural laws of evolution as well as human history) which we must embrace (cf. amor fati) and in rare cases overcome as stepping stone for a voluntaristic account of the (human) future (cf. the Übermensch and the will to power). This concomitantly parallels Nietzsche’s naturalist ontology, where natural causality (i.e., determinism) is posited as the only ‘real’ law of nature. In other words, the Übermensch who appear as forces of ‘deus ex machina’ in human history are really not external to the system but (fated) ‘anomalies’ internal to it (as ‘vir in machina’— exceptons embedded or built into the system from the start. (Also cf. Nietzsche’s ideas of ‘eternal recurrence’ and ‘eternal return’ which he articulates both in naturalist and humanist terms as part of his Dionysian formula for ‘eternal becoming’.)


262 Z, III, “Before Sunrise”
“philosopher-priest” and examine their respective kinds of will to power (i.e., healthy and degenerative) as well as the inherently conflicting architectures of meanings which follow from them and which they epitomize in Nietzschean philosophy.

“Meaning for Life” vs. “Meaning as Such”

All meanings are not made equal—this is a central teaching of Nietzschean philosophy, a fact that considering our discussion above (that meaning originates and reflects human willing) suggests not all wills and instincts are the same and worthy of tribute. Nietzsche’s proposed benchmark for distinguishing them is life itself along with principles specifically drawn from it. Keeping in mind his penchant for physiological phraseology and biological metaphors, Nietzsche argues that the particular physiology and natural constitution of a (human) type underlies those instincts and wills out of which meaning is generated. Even among those (naturally appearing) instincts, some are ‘life-promoting’ while others turn forcefully and hatefully against life.

Any will to order reflects a will to meaning whose principal motivation is to justify life. Nietzsche evaluates any such ‘justification’ of life according to whether the provided justification is internal to life itself or external to it. A will to meaning that turns life into a means for its (ideal) ends is misguided, degenerative, and unnatural—producing idealism. The right kind of justification, meanwhile, supplies solely the means for life and is internal to it—only life justifies life. This better explains Nietzsche’s often repeated statement: life does not need justification. Put differently, life is the only thing in-itself, the only end-in-itself. Ergo, any discussion of meaning as such, meaning in itself, directed toward ends and ideals outside the premises of life (advanced by the degenerate “philosopher-priests”) would hence be meaningless and even absurd in the
Nietzschean account, for it confuses the question of ends and means. It takes a means (of life) as an end-in-itself.\textsuperscript{263} Hence, Nietzsche does not object to meaning when it is in the service of life; in fact, he recognizes its necessity for life and celebrates ‘meaning-creation’ as a (aesthetic) praxis foundational to both human life and the culture in which it finds expression. Yet, he objects to all pretense to ‘meaning as such’, idolized and idealized in a vacuum, or worse still, as a substitute for the considerations and realities of life. Exposing and eliminating this pretense—a decidedly false consciousness—is what Nietzsche has in mind when he speaks of the “twilight of the idols”.

Nietzsche points out not just that humankind would need to aspire to such a semblance of order and meaning, but that it is paramount that we do so with a full recognition of suffering in nature:

Humankind must from time to time believe they know why they exist, their kind cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life! Without believing in the reason in life! And ever again, from time to time, the human race will decree: "there is something over which it is absolutely forbidden to laugh!" And the careful friend of humanity will add: "Not only laughter and joyous wisdom but also the tragic [randomness] with all of its solemn unreason belong under the means and necessities of the species’ preservation!"\textsuperscript{264}

Thus, “incipit tragoedia” and “incipit parodia” too—all begins with tragedy and meaning should as well.\textsuperscript{265} The recognition of the randomness and the chaos of the natural world and the resultant worthlessness of existence (from the human vantage point)—i.e. the theodicean predicament—originally precedes the salubrious evolution of meaning and culture. Tragedy and suffering are the keystone to the healthful formations of meaning. This fact underlies not only the Nietzschean account of meaning, but the import of meaning and semiotic/symbolic arrangements to life and

\textsuperscript{263} Remarkably, a similar line of logic is applied by Aristotle in his criticism of commercial society and the role of money, another means-end good falsely presented as an end in itself.

\textsuperscript{264} GS, § 1

\textsuperscript{265} GS, Preface to the Second Ed., §1
human willing as such. In the acknowledgment of the reality of suffering Nietzsche finds a major starting point and a telling sign of a healthy ‘will to meaning’ without which meaning could only be corrupted.

This is because Nietzsche recognizes that such a need for order and comprehension of man’s place and purpose in the universe amid the pointless flux of nature is also basal to all types of blind faiths including those of religion: “the meaning of the religious cult is to determine and constrain nature for the benefit of mankind, that is to say to impress upon it a regularity and rule of law which it does not at first possess”. Human survival demands this. And yet, in the failure to grant such recognition to natural meaninglessness and suffering, this law of the tide—“ebb and flow”—which is vital for the enhancement of life and even its preservation can (and has) at times inflict on man the greatest destruction and waning of his powers up to present times:

Even the vehemence with which our cleverest contemporaries get lost in pitiful nooks and crevices such as patriotism (I refer to what the French call chauvinisme and the Germans 'German'), or in petty aesthetic creeds such as French naturalism..., or in Petersburg-style nihilism (meaning faith in unbelief to the point of martyrdom), always indicates primarily the need for faith, a foothold, backbone, support. Standing in for a people’s “passive” and “helpless” anti-natural optimism, such faith, Nietzsche tells us, becomes absolutely necessary when the healthy will to power and all sense of activism and communal agency are sickened or are lacking. Such a faith always betrays a “dependency”: human beings feel powerless to act themselves, so they contrive an imaginary world which acts on their behalf (i.e., providence) or otherwise explains and contextualizes the ‘random’ acts of nature. But such a state is always a sign that a décadent and escapist physiology has become dominant. These décadent types are defined by physiological decay and weakness in the face of

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266 Human All Too Human, Vol. I, III. § 111, p. 65
267 GS, § 347
reality (characterizing their instinct and will) which in turn infuses a culture with decay and degeneration, forecasting its demise.

Nietzsche posits that within the human quest for significance, the décadent instinct in man comes to conceive of the cosmos as a grand scheme in which man must hold a privileged position. This construction plants the seed for our future disease of nihilism, and it is for this reason that Nietzsche dubs this instinct décadent and sickly. To undergird human value in an essentially value-free cosmos, the décadent spirit makes three fabrications, which in their eventual falsification in the Enlightenment, ironically become the main causes for nihilism and breed the overwhelming feeling of human worthlessness itself (i.e. theoretical nihilism). Seeking to combat the apparent purposelessness and aimlessness of becoming, the décadent spirit invents teleology, setting existence an overarching goal while offering humanity center stage in its advancement and achievement and calling it providential. It, furthermore, conceives the cosmos a unified structure, an organized and systematized whole, an ordered totality that operates in an orderly and predictable fashion and always in grand harmony: it invents monism. Finally, in order to quell the charges of anti-realism and anti-naturalism against it, the décadent spirit devises a true world beyond the reach of the actual and real world as an alternate ‘reality’: it invents metaphysics, as the director of providence, in whose ‘schemes’ and supplied ‘illusions’ not just humans but the notions of ‘teleology’ and ‘monism’ too find their justification and reprieve—a non plus ultra explicans, ultimatum et maximum. Man is dehumanized by this totality which he ironically conceived with a noble humanistic intention to affirm his own value and worth—human value as such—in the grand scheme of things! These three lies are foundational and genetic to idealism as spirit. In the words of Nietzsche, “You rob reality of its meaning, value, and truthfulness to the

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268 For Nietzsche’s detailed discussion, see WP, §12 (A)
extent that you *make up* an ideal world . . . The 'true world' and the 'world of appearances' [are] in plain language, the *made-up* world and reality.” 269 The perfect demonstration of humanism going astray—this marks the birth of *Meaning as such*, “in-itself” and “to-itself”, not accountable nor bound to any forces of nature or reality, and *not in service* to life: it is inversion as *fait accompli*.

Put simply, Nietzsche believes that under the supremacy of *décadent* instincts (whose pathological impulses are transposed unto the spirit of idealism), *meaning* is inexorably metastasized into a wasteful and life-threatening kind of illusion (*Scheine*)—it is *idealized*. In this way, Nietzsche can justifiably point to *meaninglessness* as a danger for all breeds of culture—and a crisis for the Western culture especially, while at the same time, identify the cause for this ‘symptom’ of Western decline in its historic obsession with *meaning an sich* going back to Socrates and Plato (the first *idealists*). Consistent with Nietzsche’s overall philosophy and circular symbolism, *meaning as such*, transcendentally supplied, emerges as an *Ouroboros* turned back on itself, eating itself up. Meaning for life being uprooted in the name of ‘meaning in itself’ is the original culprit in the story of Western degeneration and decline: its etiology—*the failure to cope correctly with suffering*; to first assert it and then *subsequently overcome* it. Given this clever diagnosis, Nietzsche’s task—his panacea for the woes of the Western culture—comes into full view: reorienting meaning toward its proper horizon (*life*), recreating a new order of meaning that is *life-ascending*, and a “revaluation of all values” in the “culture-complex” according to the needs and necessities of life (in that culture) so that they are, once more, *life-affirming*. “The meaning of [our] being,” which Nietzsche aimed to teach us, it now turns out, “is the *Übermensch*, the lightning from the dark cloud ‘human being’” who by their very *distinguished* nature say a

269 *EH*, Preface, 2
deafening *yes* to life in all its joys and horrors—thus Zarathustra has spoken.  

In the *Übermensch*, Nietzsche seeks the “meaning of the Earth” and the purpose for (human) life as well, both firmly tethered to *culture* and to *man*; Nietzsche beseeches us all to be *faithful only* to this “earthly” and “this-worldly” meaning.\(^\text{271}\)

This fact underscores why Nietzsche is so captivated by the *archaic* Greeks, the only people in the course of Western historiography to exhibit just such a ‘life-affirming’ attitude and who, Nietzsche contends, conceive their meaning scheme out of total acknowledgement of the tragic nature of life and from a position of *courage*. They are his concrete *prototype*, to be used as a *model* for the “revaluation”. According to Nietzsche, the origin of Greek tragedy showcases the strength of the ancient Hellenes, their perhaps pessimistic but nonetheless courageous recognition that *there is no justice in the cosmos*! The understanding that in nature and in the *actual* grand scheme of things, our fates are reminiscent of the *goat* who has no control over its fate (in this case to be sacrificed and offered as prize to the best tragedian), nor is it aware of the purpose of its own existence. From the perspective of the sacrificial goat, life is senseless and indeed utterly *tragic*. Ironically, to accept the arbitrariness and senselessness of life from the human perspective by composing a "goat sung"—a *tragōidia*—that is the kind of (archaic) “pessimism of strength” that could be generative of culture and indeed lifefully *create* both meaning and order, animating Apollo from the entrails of Dionysus.

Initially in human history, Nietzsche maintains, meaning is observed and envisaged through life’s prism, existing fully within the purview of life. It is *concretely* and *deeply* rooted in life and its harsh realities, and thus fully informed by *suffering*. As such, it is mythical, tragic even,

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\(^{270}\) Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue”, §7

\(^{271}\) Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue”, §3
for it mirrors life in its better and worse aspects. It must be so, if we are to fulfill our potential as a species and reach ever-expanding, newer, and more curious heights. Nowhere is this process of healthy sublimation of our creative will to meaning better highlighted than in archaic Homeric Greece, and in no type is it better represented than the ‘tragic artist’. Yet, all this (the symbiotic ‘meaning-creation’ and evolutionary ascent via culture) is interrupted and perverted, Nietzsche believes, due to the advent of a particularly toxic type of man, the ‘philosopher-priest’, whose best historical embodiment is Socrates. In Nietzsche’s assessment, with the rise of the Sophists, the Greeks encounter not the sublimation of instincts in service of a “higher life” and “becoming who we are”, but the rather cynical egoistic tyranny of the instincts, where instincts are democratized into (self-serving) anarchy. Socrates’ mission then, so Nietzsche thinks, is to resolve this (Greek) crisis of his time. In his formulations of the cure, Socrates personifies the abolition of the this-worldly Dionysian will to meaning and myth as well as the corruption of the Apollonian spirit of will to order by completely denying, rather than genuinely overcoming, the tragic nature of life and existence through philosophy—a complete perversion (Widernaturlichkeit) of philosophy par excellence. Conversely, Nietzsche argues the original raison d'être of philosophy was to assist in that ‘overcoming’ through its unique vantage point of honesty and hardness from which to engage with the inconvenient truths of existence; and so it must be reclaimed, if it is to both “guarantee” our future and itself have a future.

In its program for human/Greek preservation, Socratism’s dialectical logos-centered solution was not to channel and sublimate those (healthful) human instincts as was the case in the archaic age, but rather to tame and control them, indeed to suffocate them altogether and call it

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272 *TI*, “The Problem of Socrates”, §9
273 Nietzsche neologism, literally “anti-naturalness”. 

civilization. Socrates’ cure for the ills of his contemporary Greece was to posit rationality against instinct, to bring the instincts into compliance by means of “reason” and under the notion of conscious responsibility. This was fatally wedded to a reductionist and egalitarian idea of the “free will” of desert (i.e., of reward and punishment), where formerly the aristocratic idea of "unconscious service" and “inherited duty” reigned as the organizing principle of the Homeric Greeks. Following the Enlightenment, this proved to be a false consciousness. In responding to the radical (philosophical) libertarianism of the Sophists in the context of age-old debates about ‘free will - determinism’ aporia, Socrates aimed to qualify human ‘free will’ (so that it not lead to anarchy), and he did so by reducing the freedom of the will to that of moral responsibility, thus sacrificing the far more consequential creative autonomy and semiotic/cultural agency (of the higher types) at the altar of (individual) moral desert.

In the Nietzschean view, what we may call “the Socratic wrong-turn” could already be seen however in the dichotomy between the tragic artist’s active transgression (Aeschylus’ Prometheus) and the contemplative/philosophic saint’s unknowing and subconscious passive offense (Sophocles’ Oedipus). It is important to note that neither the Aeschylean nor the Sophoclean tragedy are meant to inspire guilt in their Greek audience. Following the path illumined by Aeschylus implies there to be one world, the question of which is whether the rules and values should be decided on divine terms or human ones. Here, the possibility of the existence of a universal human-and-divine-encompassing standard, of cosmic Justice (Dikē)—as a grand idea, making existence (and all suffering therein) meaningful and (crucially) justified—is entertained for the first time. In this rejoicing in an ideal (i.e., justice), this turn to ideality to explain life, lies the seed for abstractification of meaning—anticipating the Socratic propagation of meaning as such and his conception of the ideal. Sophocles’ tack, on the other hand, focuses on “limitation of
man” and the inherent duality not just in existence but in knowledge and value between humans and the forces of nature or the Gods. It thus portends the moralism of Socrates. It works against the biological urge to mastery and control—i.e., the will to power. ‘Knowing thy self and thy limits’, the key to the Sophoclean notion of “moderation”, is a cornerstone of Socratic ethics. Compared with Aeschylus, Sophocles is therefore more concerned with praxis than theoria. Both these tacks attain a synthesis in Socrates. Consequently, it is here that one finds the beginnings of the ascetic ideal—which paints uninhibited and autonomous human desire and willing as such (and not just creative willing) as noxious, celebrating the restraint of human powers and willing itself as a modicum of virtue and self-discipline—anticipating the Cynics and the Stoics as well as Paul.

Nietzsche is convinced that we in the West, following Socrates’ interpretation, took the wrong message from the great Greek tragedists. For Nietzsche, celebrating the unrestrained human will and its active trials, not universalism and idealism that breed a shallow optimism (i.e., Socratic Hellenism), is the central lesson of Prometheus. Our audacity in willing has the potential to make us Godlike. In this rather Apollonian quest for control and order, we must (inevitably) challenge the Gods and Nature herself as well as overcome our own ‘all-too-human’ demons, but in doing so out of reverence for our powers we will nonetheless remain firmly in the realm of (human) life operating on human grounds. At the same time, Oedipus should teach us, Nietzsche believes, not self-denial, austerity, and asceticism but the Dionysian principle that in life nothing could be absolute and perfect, a tutorial in the reality of human limitation and shortcoming as well as the random chaos and terrible force of nature as something to be welcomed and heeded given the rather narrow human perspective. Combine these two fundamental teachings of Prometheus and Oedipus together, uniting Apollo and Dionysus, and one receives tragic but joyous wisdom—tragedy is
This is how a “tragic artist” of an affirmative nature, inspired by the Dionysian model, interprets the Greek tragedies.

In the face of this ‘intrinsically’ tragic structure of the cosmos, a truly life-affirming (which is to say tragic) nature, Nietzsche insists, embraces human limitation and lack of knowledge about the purpose of life but hopes to empower himself (and mankind) through mastery and control of nature (cosmos) via channeling his creative and genuinely aesthetic powers. Thus, from the Nietzschean viewpoint, the (natural) will to power (the drive to empower oneself by means of overpowering Nature) is an essential part of mankind and indeed of all life. The impulse to overpower nature, for assuming a sense of control over the cosmos as well as over one’s existence and fate in this cosmos, evolves in mankind the will to meaning—to symbolically and semiotically order human experience. This ‘will’ being inherently communal (without which it cannot function nor be sustained), it necessitates the evolution of language and culture. It instills in humankind the will to culture to both sustain human community and make operational man’s will to meaning. The evolution of culture (complex) as man’s habitat and environment (replacing nature) helps to separate man even more from nature and reinforce the original antinomy. In Socrates, man’s desire and quest for control over nature is understood, erroneously, as a fait accompli, as either already having been realized or otherwise as one whose realization is imminent. Nevertheless, the new attitude is one of man who really does have power over nature; only, he did not know of this before. The idealist’s explanation for this newly-ordered ‘balance of power’ is (faith in) man’s eventual acquisition of knowledge which is taken to be absolute and unlimited. Knowledge is power indeed! Thus, man is presumed able to dominate the cosmos owing to his exponentially-increasing level of knowledge rather than will. If only the pursuit of knowledge never ceases, the Socratic
Theoretical man posits, given the ‘infinity of time’, the possibility for knowledge (and hence of dominating nature) is boundless and infinite.

In this way, man’s primal ‘will to power’ (over nature) is wrongly sublimated and essentialized into (his longing for) knowledge, which is soon misdirected to be used as means of control over man as such (by the philosopher-saints). Erroneously, the possibility of absolute knowledge, we baptize as “Truth” and deem within grasp. In this process, reality is lost to (the invention) of Truth, which the idealist ‘observes’ as a revelation most sublime. This ‘beloved’ absolute of his, he learns to project as a weapon against the relativity and uncertainty of Nature which he had so disdained. As Nietzsche writes in a late letter to Malvida von Meysenburg (October 20, 1888): “I treat idealism as untruthfulness that has become an instinct, a not-wanting-to-see reality at any price: every sentence of my writings contains contempt for idealism”. The idealist then is the auspice of doom and a prophet of falsehood in the name of Truth. The original intention of the theoretical man was to conquer the cosmos/nature via the power of knowledge, but the practical outcome of his sublimation and projection of the will to power (unto knowledge and absolute Truth) is the domination of man in society with the force (read Truth) of morality— as “civilization”.

The idealist’s corrupt strain of the will therefore cannot be but a will to certainty. What is entirely bypassed and discounted in these sickly transformations in the name of knowledge is grasp of the original purpose behind the development of the ‘will to meaning’, as a drive to “enhance” earthly life for human beings, and the ‘will to culture’ and myth, which sustained for and in humankind this healthful meaning, as well as, their origins in uncertainty over the human

condition. And so, it was not long that the will to power firstly and misguided sublimated unto a ‘will to knowledge’ is secondarily sublimated unto the divine (cast as the will to religion and certainty), once the very idea of truth is proposed for which ‘the gods’ are reinterpreted to serve as surrogate. It was inescapable as well that the will to religion, distorted in view of the will to truth and enslaved by the desire for certainty, soon demanded the will to (the one) God almost immediately after the quest for knowledge was deemed complete and Truth realized (i.e., established). After all, God epitomizes Truth. Ergo, every time a quest is presumed realized and the journey completed, this signals the emergence of a new distortive sublimation and projection, the last of which is God itself—the culmination of the monotheizing process in which One ‘ideal/god’ (cf. as Truth) comes to supplant and subdue the haremic multiplicity of gods (i.e., as sui generis divergent claims to truth and justice) for the sake of unity, certainty, and absolute power. The key Nietzschean idea here, in my view, is that for a healthy will to life to remain immanent and actualized in human societies, man’s reach should be presumed to remain just beyond his grasp (especially in regard to meaning) and thus never idealized, abstracted, and absolutized into a universal totality.

Yet, Nietzsche writes that most, in facing up to the reality of human limitation and the uncertain human condition, fail (a sure sign of their lack of courage and physiological infirmity) and so immerse themselves in escapism and flight—i.e. into idealism. And even the minority, who come to accept reality as is, dither when it comes to action and confrontation, surrendering their agency and taking refuge in the sanctums of their inner selves (proselytizing solipsism). The latter are also constitutionally weak and suffer from bad instincts. They are mere (weak) pessimists who lack virtù and life-affirming strength and so choose to resign their willing and agency, seeing in them the cause of their dismay and disappointment. Operating through the prism of ‘meaning as
such’ and losing their ‘touch’ with real life, both groups represent décadence and stand in striking contrast with the Dionysian tragic natures for whom the meaninglessness and the lack of inherent purpose in the cosmos evokes, instead of doom or trepidation, a possibility for ‘meaning’ as a creative act to be envisioned out of life’s prism. They alone embody the positive forms of will to power and could best understand Nietzsche’s conception of meaning. Echoing Machiavelli’s instruction to the young de Medici prince, Nietzsche speaks directly to these rare fated individuals who seem to be “the very few” that Nietzsche has in mind as his true audience in AC: “why do you as an individual exist? Ask yourself this question, and if no one can tell you, then try to justify the meaning of your existence a posteriori, as it were, by determining your own purpose, a goal, a "reason why", a high and noble "reason why".”

Given this framework of human types, Nietzsche posits that most cultures vacillate between idealistic, romantic, and Dionysian (i.e., intellectual/geistig) orientations according to the power enjoyed by what he identifies (first in BT) as Socratic, pseudo-artistic, and tragic natures. That full understanding and knowledge is indeed possible and the ensuing “delusion that [man] can thereby heal the eternal wound of existence” remains the most enduring part of Socrates’ legacy, a delusion which for Nietzsche comes to be defined as idealism. The romantic instinct, meanwhile, is “ensnared by art's seductive veil of beauty fluttering before his eyes’, which

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275 Nietzsche, “History in the Service and Disservice of Life”, Unmodern Observations, p. 135. As one can clearly observe, there are distinct existentialist undertones in these early writings of Nietzsche, which get more and more polished and become positively anti-existentialist in his mature phase. The theme of meaning however is to remain.

276 Nietzsche’s use of the notion of “artist” is employed early-on in a more general sense initially suggesting creativity or poiesis as well as passion for ‘task’. Following his break with Romanticism however, artist assumes more specifically romantic which is to say negative connotations in later Nietzsche. I have chosen the term “pseudo-artist” to reflect this technical usage in order to avoid unnecessary confusion whereas like Nietzsche I have resorted to using his coinage the “tragic artist” whenever the generative and specifically Dionysian overtones are intended.

277 Nietzsche, BT, §18
Nietzsche only later realizes is a form of daydream in order to forget the ugly chaos of nature.\textsuperscript{278} In contrast, as the self-acclaimed ‘original’ disciple of Dionysus (whom he has recovered from impious romantic hands), Nietzsche, the philosopher behind ‘eternal becoming’, typifies the tragic nature’s embrace of the Dionysian position. Like Dionysus, the divinity who symbolizes ‘eternal becoming’, the Dionysian man stands basking in delight and light from “the metaphysical solace that eternal life flows on indestructibly beneath the turmoil of appearances” in a form of tragic myth that is human culture.\textsuperscript{279} Moreover, at any one time and “depending on the proportions of the mixture” between these natures and types, the younger Nietzsche speculates that “a culture is either Alexandrian, or Hellenic, or Buddhistic”.\textsuperscript{280} It is solely in the spiritually Dionysian cultures (whose historical antecedent is ancient Hellas) that meaning is envisioned correctly in terms I have called “meaning for life”, where life alone is the basis for ‘meaning-generation’. As this early tripartite division is reorganized (in Nietzsche’s mature philosophy post-Zarathustra) around Nietzsche’s more formative idea of décadence and within a more straightforward duality of

\textsuperscript{278} Nietzsche’s split with Romanticism coincides with his identification of Schopenhauer with the worst elements of both Romanticism and what he here calls Buddhism.

\textsuperscript{279} Nietzsche, \textit{BT}, §18

\textsuperscript{280} Ibid.: Nietzsche’s later works flush out what are only provisional categories in \textit{BT}. In \textit{BT}, Alexandrian stands for the Socratic ethos which breeds theoretical man and results in idealism—it is classical Greece. Mature Nietzsche, following his break with Wagner and repudiation of his own Romanticism, seemingly broadens the category to also include Romanticism, and particularly the Romantic return to classical and Hellenistic Greece and the Romantic fetishization of art as yet another form of masked ‘cheerfulness’. While in \textit{BT}, Buddhism is espoused as a culture-type befitting the tragic nature’s pursuit of metaphysical solace (young Nietzsche places Schopenhauer here), in later Nietzschean philosophy, Buddhism is conjured chiefly to signify (metaphysical) escapism and denial in the face of suffering (which is nonetheless accepted as real)—whether through pathos (Christ) or logos (Buddha). It is thus presented as either the culmination of the theoretical man and the ultimate and final form of idealism, or as the culmination of the inward-looking artist and the logical completion of romanticism, rather than an entirely separate category. Given Schopenhauer’s use of art and aesthetics as instruments of forgetfulness, mature Nietzsche identifies him squarely with the Romantics, artistic rather than the tragic, but Schopenhauer’s pessimism and resignation in coping with suffering and his striving for metaphysical solace in the arts make him a particular kind of a Buddhist in Nietzsche’s mind—Schopenhauer emerges as the prototypical décadent. With his invention of the idea of décadence, Nietzsche is able to unite all these different categorizations under one heading but still keep them as different personas of the décadent type—as different faces of Janus and various evils of the Pandora’s jar. In Hellenic, Nietzsche originally imagines the Greece of the Hellenistic period to which most 19th century Romantics turned, but in his later writings Hellenism is almost exclusively reserved for the Homeric age of heroes of Archaic Greece to recall the age of myth and tragedy dominated by the tragic and Dionysian natures.

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(anthro-cultural) ‘ascent and decline’ with the non-Dionysian, non-tragic groupings reconceived as different facets and incarnations of décadence as such. Nietzsche comes to propose that a culture is only ascending—only truly at home—when it rests squarely in the realm of the mytho-cultural, true to the vivacious Dionysian ‘anthro-culturalist’ values of archaic Greece where the tragic natures and Dionysian instincts are dominant. Conversely, what unites the different manifestations of décadence is that they all subscribe to one formulation or another of ‘meaning as such’ where life is not treated as an ‘end in-itself’.

It is said often that man abhors pain and suffering and desires solely happiness (cf. Epicurus and the utilitarians in our day and age). Nietzsche, however, vehemently denies this: man, he posits, “does not deny suffering as such: he wills it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose of suffering.” This “will to meaning” is so powerful a motivation in man that not only does he come to invent meanings around existence (to justify the suffering of existence), he even begins to think of that meaning in causa, as a replacement for life and suffering—as all there is or ever could be, sine qua non—easily forgetting that the original impulse behind his will to meaning was life itself. From Nietzsche’s standpoint, this notion of ‘meaning as such’ (first successfully postulated by Socrates) could result in two different kinds of décadent meaning schemes reflecting two varying sorts of décadent instincts and their contrasting wills: one absurd and false which although temporarily salutary could only end in theoretical nihilism (i.e., idealism), the other characterized by acquiescence and entirely hostile to human willing causing

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281 The first reference to the term Décadence is in a notebook from the summer 1886-autumn 1887 (see Nietzsche’s Writings from the Late Notebooks, ed. Rudiger Bittner, Cambridge (2003), Notebook 5 [89]). Although Nietzsche alludes to the notion of decline throughout his life experimenting with various terms to communicate his often-idiosyncratic categorizations, that the term is not used in any major works before 1888, while TI, AC, and WP are abound with it, is testament to Nietzsche’s belief of finally having reached a breakthrough towards a final and clear-cut classification of types.

282 Genealogy of Morality, 3.28
nihilism in *pragmata* (i.e., practical nihilism). To be precise, the former is “life-hating”, the latter “will-hating”, but both have a similar consequence in *escapism* and *renunciation* of the world *as is*, a fact which encapsulates and betrays their *décadence*.

The first *ideal* version, which is a direct offspring of Socratic semiotics, is a (teleological) order of meaning that, in response to the harsh realities of life, postulates the *unreal* and indeed functions via a future promise to an imaginary utopian ‘post-world’ emphasizing man’s inner *purpose* and natural *end*. Its modus operandi is therefore a “will to *nothingness*”—willing some ideal that does not concretely and in actuality exist. It is categorically *hostile* to life and *hateful* of reality. Albeit a functioning order for a while, this ‘meaning regime’ is *absurd* and *fake* as well as *futile* and *unsatisfactory*: life-preserving for some time, but exhausting, debilitative, and unsustainable in the long run. Nietzsche notes that since Socrates for millennia,

except for the ascetic ideal: man, the *animal* man, had no meaning up to now. His existence on earth had no purpose; ‘What is man for, actually?’— was a question without an answer; there was no *will* for man and earth; behind every great human destiny sounded the even louder refrain ‘in vain!’ *This* is what the ascetic ideal meant: something was *missing*, there was an immense *lacuna* around man, – he himself could think of no justification or explanation or affirmation, he *suffered* from the problem of what he meant… suffering itself was *not* his problem, instead, the fact that there was no answer to the question he screamed, ‘Suffering for what?’… The meaninglessness of suffering, *not* the suffering, was the curse that has so far blanketed mankind, – and *the ascetic ideal offered man a meaning*! Up to now it was the only meaning, but any meaning at all is better than no meaning at all; the ascetic ideal was, in every respect, the ultimate ‘faute de mieux’ *par excellence*. Within it, suffering was interpreted; the enormous emptiness seemed filled; the door was shut on all suicidal nihilism. 283

This ‘filling of the *void*’ however was to prove temporary and at great cost, for in practice this meaning “brought new suffering with it, deeper, more internal, more poisonous suffering, suffering

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283 *Genealogy of Morality*, III, §28
that gnawed away more intensely at life: it brought all suffering within the perspective of guilt.”

All things considered, only meaning that is built and secured on life could be truly meaningful and remedial; the others are merely sedatives. Nonetheless, even this fundamentally problematic ‘meaning architecture’ provided an answer to the primordial why question (even if on theodical terms), and this meaning still meant that man could continue to live, and that man’s will was for a while longer protected and in effect (although misdirected). And this albeit modest feeble gain was for Nietzsche something to cheer, for “man was saved, he had a meaning, from [that moment] on he was no longer like a leaf in the breeze, the plaything of the absurd, of ‘non-sense’; from [then] on he could will something—no matter what, why and how he did it at first, the will itself was saved” even though the thrust of this will was decidedly toward Nothingness.

A ‘will to nothingness’ driven and informed by the ‘ascetic ideal’ wills permanence, essence, and being (or rather the pretense to being as Nietzsche puts it) and loathes all that, naturalistically-speaking, is life, for the ideal longs “to get away from appearance, transience, growth, death, wishing, longing itself”—all the basic foundations of life and nature. Indeed, the ascetic ideal, as Nietzsche conceives it, is nothing but the “hatred of the human, and even more of the animalistic, even more of the material, [the] horror of the senses, of reason itself, [the] fear of happiness and beauty…” It is, in short, inimical to life in all its aspects.

In all this, the ascetic ‘philosopher-priest’ is the shepherd to that sickly human all-too-human herd which wanting to escape death and danger looks to a guide to steer it away from death in order to survive, as good sheep seeking relief from the big bad wolf of existential suffering. And so, it is not surprising that the “will to nothingness” which the ideal fuels and incites would also

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284 Ibid.
285 Ibid.
286 Ibid.
287 Ibid.
reflect its characteristic “aversion to life”—signifying “a rebellion against the most fundamental prerequisites of life”.

All this notwithstanding, Nietzsche, at least provisionally defends this “will to nothingness” for its timely redemption of man. After all, even as a will to nothingness, this “is and remains a will” and “man still prefers to will nothingness, than not will”, so Nietzsche proclaims at the conclusion of his Genealogy. To will or not to will, this is the ultimate question that must now be imminently adjudicated in Modernity.

The other strand of ‘meaning as such’ is centered on “presential bliss”; it is a meaning that is similarly in denial of the harshness of the outside real world as is and hopes to escape from it into a state of internal bliss—into solipsism, which ironically means it is rather resigned to the happenings of the external world. Its focus however is not life or existence as such but human willing itself, which it sees as the original and eternal culprit behind senseless existential suffering preventing bliss. Not satisfied with the Socratic restraining and moral checks of the will then, this meaning scheme demands more of its followers: to abolish willing in whole is its evangelical cure and meaning. Will to “Nothing-ness” is therefore replaced here with a will to ‘not will’: its result is the total eradication of the will, with the will being turned back on itself, withdrawn from the world and refusing to act upon it. The will no longer wills abandoning its essence—it is no will after all. Nietzsche finds these types of meaning-architectures passive, cowardly, and weak, ultimately degenerative and decaying to the culture unleashing nihilism in its full force as nihilism in praxis (nihil in actione)—a nihilism that is neither epistemological (a la Kant and Schopenhauer) nor ethical (a la Sartre and problematized by MacIntyre and Strauss) but practical, a giant earth-

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288 GM, III, §28
289 Ibid.
shattering leap toward the final state of total and existential nihilism that threatens the West in Modernity.  

In the history of Western philosophy, so Nietzsche interprets it, the will to being manifests itself as and is sublimated into the ascetic ideal, which aims at the overpowering and overcoming of becoming, physiological growth, and life itself through the denial of what life really and truly is and by pretending and postulating that it could be otherwise via a savior, or perhaps in another world—an afterlife. As such, it reveals a mindset of victimhood and pathos of “unparalleled ressentiment” in its purest form: it is an urge to control and overpower nature, existence, and life itself and strip them of their ‘oppressive’ power over man, an impulse which paradoxically ends up sustaining life (along with man’s will) by means of hating life, negating life—life as means. This ‘will to being’ then is instigated out of man’s primal need for order and his desire to endure. Its unique formula for this overpowering of life (and death) however is the repressing and restraining of human willing (which is to say humanity as such). In practice, its program for bringing nature and life under submission and control extends out onto the human itself—creatively, intellectually, and culturally enslaving us. Yet, bizarrely, by turning our wills into means for its (permanent) ends, the ‘ascetic ideal’ paradigm inadvertently manages to preserve our willing up to Modern times. As Nietzsche recognizes, “the situation is therefore the precise opposite of what the worshippers of this ideal imagine,—[for] in it and through it, life struggles

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290 Epistemological nihilism reflects skepticism in regard to what could be known, where one philosophizes in effect to provide an answer to the question what is true? It is therefore deeply related to Nietzsche’s idea of ‘theoretical nihilism’ which really only becomes an issue post-Enlightenment when the Christian worldview and truth-claims are increasingly problematized. This also explains Nietzsche’s attraction to Kant and Schopenhauer. 
Ethical nihilism, on the other hand, reflects a kind of cynicism regarding whether people know (or could know in themselves) what is morally expected of them; the goal of philosophy here therefore is to find a satisfactory solution to the question what is just/right? 
Practical/pragmatic nihilism is a more fundamental kind of skepticism and cynicism regarding what (or whether anything) could be achieved through doing, where one questions whether he could really have an effect on the world, and even if he could, whether that effect would be desirable: more significantly he asks, Should I act and what for?

291 GM, III, §11
with death and against death, the ascetic ideal [it turns out] is a trick for the preservation of life”; and so, the “ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this negating one, [emerges as] the really great conserving and yes-creating forces of life.”\footnote{GM, III, §13} Ironically however, in order to justify life in the face of and over death, life (deemed dreadful and wrongful in its cyclical chaos) is viewed as requiring correction and rehabilitation: as preparatory for death, which is now understood anew as “eternal life”—i.e. for ‘meaning as such’! Hence, the ascetic ideal results in nothing other than a “will to nothingness” since being is not a real part of nature but a semblance, and death (viewed as a reservoir of eternal life and immortality) a fanciful inversion. Crucially, belief in the ascetic ideal also has fundamental normative and moral ramifications to which we will turn next. Nietzsche aims at inverting this picture as well as its normative requirements by recovering life as an end in itself and returning meaning and willing, once more, into their healthful and rightful functions as agents and instruments for life. What is more, this task could only commence by means of a new understanding of the ethical in terms of the needs and requirements of life—a reconceptualization centered on virtù. And both these theoretical and practical revaluations, Nietzsche believes, are processes to which man (and his will) is the key.

Two Ethics, Two Pathos: “Distance” and “Ressentiment”

In the last section, we looked at meaning reflected through the prism of life and according to life’s provisions, here we will attempt to perceive ethics through the same prism. Just as justice has no moral significance in nature, for Nietzsche, existence itself can have no moral significance. Existence simply is; random, contingent, and purposeless, subject to the natural laws of cause and effect. And once we admit to ourselves “that there are no purposes, [we] also know that there is no
accident; for only against a world of purposes does the word 'accident' have a meaning”. Nonetheless, as established previously, it is we humans who project significance unto this randomness (i.e., as signifiers) so that we can feel significant (i.e., signified) along with it—at times mistakenly turning it into an ideal. The same applies to morality and our normative structures. As Nietzsche himself comments on his philosophy, his is “a philosophy which dares to situate morality itself within the phenomenal world”—and not even content merely with its reification and naturalization, but aiming “to degrade it” down to the level not of phenomena (Erscheinungen) at all but to classify it amongst those of contrived ‘deceptions’ (Täuschungen)—as delusion, semblance and artifice. And because existence and life are intrinsically amoral, Nietzsche finds it inevitable that a life that is moralized be unceasingly “proved wrong” so much so that it be “crushed by the weight of contempt and the eternal 'no!', be felt to be inherently unworthy, undeserving of our desire.” Nietzsche is convinced that people in the West “have been moralizing and idealizing very differently than might be desired”. Instead, Nietzsche’s guiding principle for his (ethical) revaluation is a ‘cultural pragmatism’ that unfailingly affirms life—a realistic stance to norms (as man-made rather than a fact of nature) only heeding every type of “honest yes and no”, rooted in (human) life itself.

The history of the West up to the modern period, Nietzsche contends, is the history of the priests and philosophers wanting explanation for the suffering and chaos of a world that they

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293 GS, Book III, § 109
294 “Attempt at Self-Criticism”, Nietzsche’s Preface to the 2nd edition of BT, §5, p. 8. The suggestion here is that while all human culture supply an illusion (Schein) at any moment in time which is the distortion of reality and nature according the particular perspective of that culture, Morality (as a particular ethical program in the West) is deluded and misconceived. Morality is simply deceitful not because it is a distortion of reality (which is necessary to attune the natural/phenomenal to human perspective and inescapable given the course of our evolution) but because it presents a mistaken and false impression of reality that is in contradiction with (human) life.
295 “Attempt at Self-Criticism”, Nietzsche’s Preface to the 2nd edition of BT, §5, p. 9
296 EC, Preface, 3
297 AC, §61
instinctively despise. Whether through faith or reason, they have sought revelation of the hidden workings of the Earth and the reality of existence: their end is some form of understanding on topics that essentially elude human understanding—they seek apocalypse or ‘uncovering’ in the religious and precise sense of the term. This desire, Nietzsche argues, arises from an inherent physiological and constitutional weakness which turns psychological and spiritual (as idealism) and (upon inevitable failure at finding a comprehensive resolution) pathological (as ressentiment and hatred of the world and life itself). The history of the West alas has thus far not been separate from the history of the ideal. Nietzsche’s moral genealogy is not only designed to reveal this fact but, critically, it intends to change it moving forward via Revaluation, which he presents as the fundamental yet, until Nietzsche, forbidden fruit of the Enlightenment. Following through with his naturalistic framework, Nietzsche attributes the sickly and escapist attitude of the priests and conventional philosophers to a natural and visceral weakness and frailty vis-à-vis life and existence that for him typifies these kinds of man (which he collectively refers to as décadent types). This constitutional weakness is juxtaposed against physiological courage and strength which for Nietzsche drives and informs the healthy and ascending types of human beings to whom, especially, Nietzschean philosophy is directed. Indeed, contrary to the caricatured and radically relativist picture in line with which his “immoralist” stance is typically portrayed, Nietzsche has a powerful ethical code to himself. “What is bad?”, he speculates, “everything that comes from weakness, from jealousy [envy], from revenge.” In the human realm, this physiological and natural infirmity breeds revengefulness and spite. To put it in contemporary psychological dictum, the weak and the servile suffer from social comparison bias. The weak-souled and small-minded exhibit their cowardice via profound vindictiveness toward the (presumed-oppressive) other (i.e.,

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208 AC, §57
the stronger types). Conversely, what constitutes good for Nietzsche is ‘power’, ‘willing’, and ‘agency’ and everything the comes from strength—from a courage that houses an honest realism (regarding both meaning and values) and a noble self-affirmation that is self-directed and non-comparative (i.e., has an internal locus of power) and which does not concern himself with others (except those who the healthy man deems his genuine equals in rank/health and with whom he can cultivate spiritual friendships).

Yet, this naturalistic picture of the will to power is still too simplistic and must be understood in the humanist and pragmatic terms Nietzsche has in mind for the full implication of the Nietzschean normative framework to emerge. In line with our observation above that ‘not all meanings are made equal’, here we can say in addition that neither are all ‘wills to power’ identical and similarly salutary. As foundational a concept as ‘will to power’ and human agency is to Nietzsche and (he would argue) human life, he posits various diverging kinds of ‘wills to power’, which are not of equal standing and not all worthy of respect. The factor that decides their value (as well as the value of the ethics to which they give rise) is whether they operationalize an instinct that is affirming or negating of life (i.e., whether they are a product of a disposition that says a vociferous yes to life). Affirmation, in the Nietzschean view, is a positive, active, and life-affirming drive, inspired by an inner strength best expressed in the Dionysian symbol. The Dionysian will to power being fully affirming of life in all its aspects, thus represents a supreme level of healthfulness. This health is expressed further in the kind of pathos it generates in the strong and courageous types individually—“pathos of distance”—as well as in the aristocratic system of good and bad (or ethos) it produces socially—the noble ‘ethics of virtù’—, a normative paradigm which puts ethics in the service of life (i.e., ethics for life) and which represents the normative
outgrowth of the Dionysian and tragic type of ‘will to power’ achieving dominance in a culture-
complex.

Life-averting renunciation is, on the other hand, a drive (and will) by definition negative, reactive, and life-denying—ever-fleeing from reality in disgust driven by weakness and cowardice that is best expressed in the ideal. Its sickness is evidenced in the hateful kind of pathos it propagates—ressentiment—and the life-suffocating, ascetic normative structure it fabricates—i.e., (slavish) Morality. This totalistic concoction, a life-degenerating spiteful paradigm which uses ressentiment to commit the noxious act of misdirecting life and human willing towards the ends of its moralism (i.e., ‘ethics as such’), turning both life and human beings into slaves of morality and upending the natural order—Nietzsche names the “ascetic ideal”, against whose venomous designs the “Revaluation” must take place in hopes of a paradigm shift that reestablishes the dominance of the healthy and life-affirming dispositions and wills. What makes this dualistic imagery of aristocratic and slavish ethics (i.e., master/slave morality or ethics of distance and ressentiment) as antagonistic normative paradigms even more powerful and intuitive is that the stronger types are historically represented by the aristocratic social stratum of the archaic Greece who embody affirmation for Nietzsche, while the weaker types are embodied by not just the priestly and the classically-philosophic classes but also by the slave and Chandala strata whom they abuse and employ as pawns, taking advantage of their innate feelings of ressentiment toward their masters for their own self-serving domination and satisfaction of their negative and detrimental will to power, which is fueled by a more profound ressentiment against existence and life itself.

In this manner, Nietzsche is able to consistently argue both that the mere response to the theodicean problem in every case reveals a ‘will to power’, signifying man’s agency (and wit) to
cope with the problematic of suffering in existence; and, concurrently, expose in his notion of ‘will to power’ effectively two kinds of agencies at play—one affirmative and generative, the other negative and debilitating—vigorously championing one, while vehemently condemning the other. The negative and life-denying kinds of will to power (highlighted by priests and Socratic philosophers) are closely associated with what Nietzsche classifies as instincts driven by hatred and resentment toward the world (as well as outgroups), the so-called “ressentimental pathos” engendering the “ascetic ideal”. This sickly will is also closely linked with the Nietzschean notion of décadence, and is, over the long term, detrimental not just to life, but to the will and human agency itself. As such, this will is pathologically delusional, willing to escape reality as is into a world of ideality as it dreams it should be: it thus wills what is not, a Beyond—i.e., nothingness. Post-Enlightenment, Nietzsche declares, we come to recognize this kind of décadence for what it is or eventually entails: theoretical nihilism! To understand Nietzsche’s idea of revaluation, these contradictory wills and pathos, their origins as well as their normative implications, merit a more in-depth investigation.

The epitome of bad instinct and negative ‘will to power’, a ressentimental pathos breeding ‘will to decline’, ‘will to nothingness’, a masked ‘theoretical nihilism’, these are how Nietzsche characterizes the ‘ascetic ideal’ that underpins (Christian) morality, confessing that his own ‘instinct for life’—for affirmation—is what originally makes him mistrustful of it: “Morality itself—might it not be a 'will to negate life', a secret instinct for annihilation, a principle of decay, negative and life-denying kinds of will to power (highlighted by priests and Socratic philosophers) are closely associated with what Nietzsche classifies as instincts driven by hatred and resentment toward the world (as well as outgroups), the so-called “ressentimental pathos” engendering the “ascetic ideal”. This sickly will is also closely linked with the Nietzschean notion of décadence, and is, over the long term, detrimental not just to life, but to the will and human agency itself. As such, this will is pathologically delusional, willing to escape reality as is into a world of ideality as it dreams it should be: it thus wills what is not, a Beyond—i.e., nothingness. Post-Enlightenment, Nietzsche declares, we come to recognize this kind of décadence for what it is or eventually entails: theoretical nihilism! To understand Nietzsche’s idea of revaluation, these contradictory wills and pathos, their origins as well as their normative implications, merit a more in-depth investigation.

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belittlement, calumny, the beginning of the end? And consequently, the greatest danger of all? Thus, my instinct turned against morality…”  

The danger of all dangers, Nietzsche later tells us, is the ‘will to nothingness’ unraveling into a no will at all in response to the Enlightenment—that is when we encounter the ultimate manifestation of the sickness as ‘will-less’ mediocrity, a new Buddhism and lifeless existence to which even death and destruction is preferable, for the latter condition, at least, holds the promise and hope of a new creation, a new dawn, a new life currently denied.

While the positive kinds of will to power are, in comparison, mostly associated with the ‘pathos of distance’ and the kind of tragic instinct characteristic of the Dionysian natures, some such wills, too, could turn pathological and degenerate to become décadent and ‘world-escaping’ by means of a radically inward and subjectivist interpretation of life which views it as limited to the self, twisting and corrupting the ‘world-engaging’ spirit of life-affirmation into one of personally-bound self-affirmation. This kind of (albeit positive and “phenomenalist”) décadence, which takes a realist ‘this-worldly’ stance toward suffering but fails to effectively overcome it, typifies what Nietzsche classifies as the Buddhistic spirit (also immanent in Schopenhauer in its ‘pessimistic’ variant and Jesus in its ‘optimistic’ form). In its erroneous inversion of life, this second form of décadence similarly obsesses over a ‘blissful’ escape, seeking refuge from the reality of suffering in either a Nirvana or apotheosis or worse amnesia and death itself, all of which are conceived of solipsistically. And although not moralistic in the same vein as ressentiment, a solipsistic conception of the will, Nietzsche believes, inevitably leads to a will, which is no will at all—confined to itself, falling back unto itself, a shadow of itself, causing the elimination of actual willing and agency to be supplanted by passivity and resignation in the relation to both the world

\(^{300}\) “Attempt at Self-Criticism”, Nietzsche’s Preface to the 2nd edition of BT, §5, p. 9
and *life*. Here, ‘theoretical nihilism’ devolves into *practical nihilism*. It is this latter type of *décadence* (with its practical nihilism and *sterilizing* of cultural creativity) that Nietzsche predicts will come to dominate Modernity (and it already has) characterizing the *pitiful* existence of the “last men” (in both capitalistic and socialistic economies), who, being rather *oblivious* to it all, take *solace* in the *false* ‘security’ of their *routinized* jobs and their *meaningless* existence of material comfort (Weber would later poetically refer to them as the “steel-hard shells” of their former *human* selves which he of course blames on the unleashing of the forces of *disenchantment* and *rationalization* in Modernity).\(^{301}\) We will revisit this theme later.

In contrast to the ‘blind optimism’ and the ‘pessimism of weakness’ that drive conventional faith and philosophy, the “pessimism of strength” which Nietzsche (as a new kind of philosopher for the future) champions, it turns out, could not be but “a pessimism ‘beyond good and evil’”.\(^{302}\) Adopting such a skeptical stance that lies ‘beyond good and evil’ has far-reaching consequences for grasping the moral paradigm of mankind (in its full variance) as well as for the physician of culture who studies them historically and genealogically:

Moral value distinctions have arisen within either a dominating type that, with a feeling of well-being, was conscious of the difference between itself and those who were dominated – or alternatively, these distinctions arose among the dominated people themselves, the slaves and dependents of every rank. In the first case, when dominating people determine the concept of “good,” it is the elevated, proud states of soul that are perceived as distinctive and as determining rank order. The noble person separates himself off from creatures in which the opposite of such elevated, proud states is expressed: he despises them. It is immediately apparent that, in this first type of morality, the contrast between “good” and “bad” amounts to one between “noble” and “despicable” (the contrast between “good” and “evil” has a different lineage). People who were cowardly, apprehensive, and petty, people who thought narrowly in terms of utility – these were the ones despised…. It is different with the second type of morality, *slave*

\(^{301}\) Cf. Weber’s famous coinage, *stahlhartes Gehäuse*.

\(^{302}\) “Attempt at Self-Criticism”, Nietzsche’s Preface to the 2\(^{nd}\) edition of *BT*, §5, p. 9
morality. What if people who were violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, exhausted, and unsure of themselves were to moralize: what type of moral valuations would they have? A pessimistic suspicion of the whole condition of humanity would probably find expression, perhaps a condemnation of humanity along with its condition. The slave’s gaze resents the virtues of the powerful. It is skeptical and distrustful, it has a subtle mistrust of all the “good” that is honored there −, it wants to convince itself that even happiness is not genuine there. Conversely, qualities that serve to alleviate existence for suffering people are pulled out and flooded with light: pity, the obliging, helpful hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility, and friendliness receive full honors here −, since these are the most useful qualities and practically the only way of holding up under the pressure of existence. Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility. Here we have the point of origin for that famous opposition between ‘good’ and ‘evil’… A final fundamental distinction: the desire for freedom, the instinct for happiness, and subtleties in the feeling of freedom necessarily belong to slave morals and morality, just as an artistry and enthusiasm in respect and devotion are invariant symptoms of an aristocratic mode of thinking and valuing.303

While the ‘ethic of nobility’ is intrinsically active and creative, the ‘ethic of ressentiment’ is an inherently (or rather extrinsically!) reactive formulation. By endorsing aristocratic virtù as he does, Nietzsche reveals himself not to be against ethics an sich and in itself, but instead against a particular universalist breed of ethics that we usually identify as morality and I have called ‘ethics as such’. Nietzsche’s immoralism then must be understood from the perspective of the secular or rather laic ethicist that he is—a thinker driven to introduce a novel normative paradigm under an innovative system of value (revaluation) grounded in the reality of human life, and who espouses an earthly aristocratic ethical architecture for the future to sublate (and take hammer to) the heavenly and democratic ethical regime courtesy of the “eternal idols” of our past and present.

Nietzsche recognizes of course that all cultures as organisms require organs who tend to the equilibrium in the cultural body—their collective function (Nietzsche in WP explicitly refers to them as “forms of domination”) is the socializing and domestication of the multitude. He writes,

303 BGE, “What is Noble?”, §260
For there to be institutions, there needs to be a type of will, instinct, imperative that is anti-liberal to the point of malice: the will to tradition, to authority, to a responsibility that spans the centuries, to solidarity in the chain that links the generations, forwards and backwards ad infinitum.\(^{304}\)

To maintain solidarity (cf. homeostasis and continuity) in the culture is the purpose of these organistic institutions (to borrow from modern sociological discourse) and so they are instrumental to all cultures, for without them the mass has it in its nature to turn against the whole, the greater good, and its own interests. It will turn disorderly, mob-like, vindictive, conflictual, and ultimately tyrannical. Norms and values, law and order, and all of tradition, religion, and government are all institutions given to pacifying the people and achieving peace, without which there is only anarchy.\(^{305}\) All institutions function, Nietzsche contends, in accordance to the principle of authority. They make a future possible for culture, for human beings. The problem (historically immanent) of course is that such a desire to ordering and taming man, expressed in the will to tradition (which is a means-end good to control against man’s unsociability and in time achieve domestication in the species), could at times degenerate to become not just an ethos but rather the pathos of culture itself, whereby civilization becomes the sole cultural instinct. This (absolutist obedience) is the other entwined polar extreme to anarchy. One better live at the equator. Such a thoroughly ‘disciplined’ and tame culture is just as ill as the wild ‘anarchic’ one, for it has lost its own origins in creativity and life. (Unhealthy) cultures which project a ressentimental slavish morality, reflect just such a degeneration. Their entire system of values becomes organized around the 'herd instinct' for conformity and monotony (which is instinctivized and bred into people by the

\(^{304}\) *TI*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, §39  
\(^{305}\) Incidentally, just such anarchy is what Nietzsche believes generally the fate of Modern democratic Western culture. Modernity represents to Nietzsche the other (polar) face of the Janus of institutions: “The West in its entirety has lost the sort of instincts that give rise to institutions, that give rise to a future: it might well be that nothing rubs its 'modern spirit' the wrong way more than this. People live for today, people live very fast—people live very irresponsibly: and this is precisely what people call 'freedom'. The things that make an institution into an institution are despised, hated, rejected: Whenever the word ‘authority’ is so much as heard out loud, people think themselves in danger of a new sort of slavery.” (*TI*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, §39)
domesticating institutions of culture), rather than the 'pathos of distance' and distinctions—the pathos which animates the ethic of nobility. The ‘pathos of distance’ celebrates the ideal of differentiation, hierarchy, and particularity—it typifies healthy aristocratic societies. The sick cultures in which the servile morality predominates erroneously presume and operate as if the average—the “lambs”—are all there is in culture. Hence, they culturize the opposing pathos of control, uniformity, and obedience under the cloak of “improvement” and “civilization”.

The picture drawn above is pivotal for it illuminates a defining feature of Nietzsche’s thought—ressentiment. Nietzsche presents a two-level theory of ressentiment reflecting two forms of vindictive hatred: first, against life (this intellectual form of ressentiment resides in the priest), second against life’s chosen and fated embodiments—the great type of man (this concrete ressentiment resides in the heart of the multitude). Using the culture’s visceral apprehension of humans en masse, the “ascetic priests”—the original and perhaps most powerful historical instantiation of which is Socrates—come to manipulate, generalize, and make pathological the culture-complex’ will to subdue (reflective of the Apollonian will to order) using it as weapon in their appropriation of culture and toward their own ressentimental, inimical ends. And once in a position of cultural leadership and dominance (i.e., as masters), these priests and philosophers de-humanize everything by most of all dehumanizing cultures as such—Nietzsche’s name for this degenerative event is the (advent of) “ascetic ideal”.

A normative method for coping with death and suffering, “the ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life, which uses every means to maintain itself and struggles for its existence”, showcasing “a partial physiological inhibition and exhaustion against which the deepest instincts of life, which have remained intact, continually struggle with
new methods and inventions”. As such, the cultural pathos of discipline and authority is hijacked by the priests and transformed in their hands into an “ethos” and program of domestication (entirely derived from and driven by the pathological pathos of ressentiment) with which they seek to entice, seduce and mobilize the masses against the elites; but the priest’s own ressentiment is directed at an entirely different target—the body, the human, and life itself which they seek to supplant with the soul, the ideal, and meaning as such. As this ‘ethic of ressentiment’ is sublimated into morality (as such), it marks the original rationalization of culture. Where healthy and genuine culture grew out of man’s lifeful, creative instinct coupling the genesis of aristocratic ethic of virtù, this new rationalized and moralized culture (i.e., civilization) became a slave to inhibiting and disembodied reason. Driven by their personal pathos of ressentiment, the ascetic priests, Nietzsche is convinced, manipulate (perhaps even conceive) the ethic of ressentiment to take control of the cultural impulse to ‘discipline’ and use it to wage war against healthful culture and life itself, for they “despise” (earthly and human) life. So inverted, the cultural instinct of taming is usurped, reprogramed, and redirected to control the originally ‘masterly’ minority as well as the ‘weakly’ majority—as equals in chains. Consequently, not just the hierarchy of (human) types, but the hierarchy of values and the ordered division of organismic functions are distorted. Such a culture (as in the West), Nietzsche passionately pleads, requires a fundamental ‘revaluation’—a human (and humanistic) intervention; a surgery to be performed by a special and specialist type of man.

What Nietzsche insistently points out is that the ascetic ideal both in its meaning and its morality has not just been ‘anti-natural’, but wholeheartedly anti-human: that it has been neither the effect nor the intention of highest values of the ascetic ideal to empower mankind, to enhance

306 GM, III, §13
him and actualize the potential in him, but rather in the name of bettering and improvement, to castrate, tame, and domesticate him—to turn him into a sickly herd animal bred fully in ressentiment and brought up to despise and fear the strong, courageous, virtù-ful higher kind of man. 307 As Nietzsche notes, in the values of the ascetic ideal, “nihilistic values, values of decline, have taken control [dominate] under the aegis of the holiest names”. 308 This is not only unnatural and unhuman—corrupting and degenerating of both man and life; it is the ultimate crime against humanity! Nietzsche provocatively observes,

The fact that we have not rediscovered God, either in history or in nature or behind nature: this is not what separates us [from the traditional philosophers and priests]. Rather, we are separated by the fact that we view the thing worshipped as God as pathetic, absurd, and harmful, not as 'divine'; the fact that we do not treat it as a simple error but as a crime against life . . . We deny that God is God [and truly divine]. 309

Nietzsche can claim this, because in his view, the principle of development (of mankind or any species for that matter) is the law of (continuous/generational) selection (Gesetz der Selektion) of who (or what) is deemed good. For mankind especially, if the very idea of goodness is perverted, corrupted, and declining, selection will inevitably fail to produce higher development (i.e. a more ascendant and empowered incoming generation). And this presumption of knowledge, falsifying the good into an absolute that exists outside the objective bounds of culture, is precisely Nietzsche’s discontent with Modernity in particular and the Western philosophical tradition in general.

307 Nietzsche’s German term for this moraline-free (moralinfrei) Virtù is Tüchtigkeit which means “capability”, “prowess” and “fitness”. The root of the word (Tücht) connotes the sense of “useful, availing, and strong, therefore good and valuable” in a very primitive, consequentialist, and pragmatic way (Proto-Germanic *duhtiz). The word is also cognate with another important Nietzschean term, Zucht, meaning “breed” and “discipline”, and one which I believe Nietzsche appropriates and adopts almost as a neologism to allude to his novel physiological conception of “culture”.

308 AC, §6
309 AC, §47
Indeed, Nietzsche asserts that the priestly ‘holy lies’ receive their very sanction out of the human incapacity to know the truth on the original questions of existence and regarding what is right. He writes, “The right to lie and the shrewdness of 'revelation' belong to the priestly type, the priests of décadence as well as the pagan priests (a pagan is anyone who says yes to life, who sees 'god' as the word for the great yes to all things). The 'law', the 'will of God', the 'holy book', 'inspiration', all these are just words for the conditions under which priests come to power and maintain their power, these concepts can be found at the bottom of all priestly organizations, all structures of priestly or philosophical-priestly control. The 'holy lie'—this is common to Confucius, the law book of Manu, Mohammed, and the Christian church: and it is not absent from Plato either. 'The truth is there': wherever you hear this, it means that the priest is lying . . .”. 310

Given the contingent and conditional reality of life, idealism along with all forms of absolute conviction in universals are therefore nothing but wills to falsehood out of touch with reality, designed to escape actual reality the weak finds disconcerting. They arise, ultimately, out of man’s inability to know just what “truth” is, especially concerning the fundational questions of existence (i.e., death and suffering). And so, passing judgement on them, in the end, “comes down to the purpose the lie is supposed to serve”: whether they serve the truly ‘holy’ ends of humanitas, creativity, and life. 311

All this notwithstanding, the theological philosophers/priestly class rise up against the historically affirmative philosophers/princely classes (Vornehmen) dominating the West in their own décadent “will to power”. 312 They aim to beautify the world by explaining away and

310 AC, §55
311 AC, §56
312 Buddhism is a creation of the noble and priestly classes’ intellectualizing and idealizing the real—marking their (wrong) turn to the ideal and instincitization of décadence—perhaps, Nietzsche surmises, out of boredom, or excessive sensitivity and susceptibility to pain, or even as a consequence of too much theorizing and intellectualizing: in any case, it is a sign of the maturity of a civilization that it intellectualizes and exhausts itself to death. Crucially therefore, it lacks the destructive and negative ressentimental pathos.
eliminating suffering, which they find ugly and unseemly; and in fact, comprehending the cause for suffering is, Nietzsche believes, the chief motivation behind their seeking of knowledge. With their morality of sin and guilt, these promoters of the ascetic ideal thus position “life against life”, where the other (positive) décadents such as Buddha and Jesus and their latest iteration Schopenhauer inadvertently place the self against life. The inevitable consequence of the priestly décadent types’ domination of culture with their negative will to power is the inversion of the will (into a force for denying the strong human self) and of meaning (into a meaning in itself and for nihil) as well as the totalization of the divine into an “monotonous” ideal (as in God and Truth), fatal developments that come into their own with the coming of Jesus and Paul and the false dawn of the Christian Age. And unless we are careful, in the normatively and semiotically dislocating aftermath of the Enlightenment, we risk abolish the ‘life-negating’ Christian morality of Paul for the potentially more dangerous ‘will-denying’ solipsism legacy of Christ and Schopenhauer—this is what the new Buddhism entails.

Nietzsche is thus rightfully troubled that the moralistic machinery of the décadent types who harbor ressentiment (the priests and saints), the morality of “de-selfing” or denying the self (Entselbstungs-Moral), continues in this day and age to claim itself as, and “passes for, morality as such”. This is precarious, for unless fully confronted and rejected, it could soon trigger and empower its radical opposite—will-less solipsism. This observation makes challenging morality and showing that it does not have a monopoly on human ethics of paramount importance. In GM, Nietzsche makes three interrelated observations meant to tease out this very fact: first, that the

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313 GM, III, §13
314 EH, III ("Daybreak", §2). Cf. EH, IV, §4: “My word immoralist essentially entails two negations. First, I am negating a type of person who has been considered highest so far, the good, the benevolent, the charitable; second, I am negating a type of morality that has attained dominance and validity in the form of morality as such—decadence morality or, to put it plainly, Christian morality.” Nietzsche’s point is that what passes as morality and almost deviously presents itself as morality as such has been just one kind of ethics not ethics as such.
spirit of ressentiment, which the physiologically *décadent* and instinctually negative types (the priests) abuse and manipulate to gain mastery over the general population and secure their position of dominance as the new elites and which later “births” (institutional) Christianity, runs counter to the spirit of noble affirmation and ethic of virtù and distance that characterized the archaic aristocratic age—that the elite displacement was part of a *reactionary* phenomenon par excellence, a *subversive* “counter-movement”. This first instance of a populistic appeal to the masses in history was the much more consequential *cultural* (rather than political) form of populism and demagoguery. Second, that whatever is called “conscience” by the religions that are animated by this *ressentiment* (i.e., Christianity) is nothing more than culture-old *cruelty* and *violence* turned inward and directed against oneself: once cruelty could not be externally expressed, it was psychologized—a piece of negative/inverted sublimation (e.g. of Nietzsche’s *psychologization* of history). And lastly, that the “ascetic ideal”, to which the sickly and cowardly *décadent* types are inherently and physiologically drawn—given their impulse for escaping the tragic becoming that underlies the world and their compulsive *will to being* (which in practice is nothing more than a will to nothingness and unreality)—has been dominant and prevailing in the West, only because it has gone unrivaled and without a viable alternative for millennia.\(^{315}\) Evidently, Nietzsche makes it his *task* to provide, in the *Dionysian* concept/model, just such an alternative—one that is this-worldly, humanly, life-loving, and tragedy-embracing as part of its first principles. A Dionysian psychology (reflecting a Dionysian physiology) is one that always wishes to be *actualized*, to *become* what/who one is and turn his life into the *highest deed* (as *mythopoesis*). Its constitution is *strong* and *courageous*, never choosing *flight* but always *overcoming*.

\(^{315}\) *EH*, III, “Genealogy of Morality”
“In me,” H. L. Mencken quotes Nietzsche saying, “the Christianity of my forebears reaches its logical conclusion. In me, the stern intellectual conscience [the will to truth] that Christianity fosters and makes paramount turns against Christianity. In me, Christianity ... devours itself.” Whereas Pauline (and Lutheran) Christianity’s rigid and absolutist morality ultimately forbids honest questioning and skepticism, *Nitimur in vetitum* (striving for the forbidden) is the motto for Nietzschean philosophy—the true mark of ‘pessimism of strength’. As such, Nietzsche reveals himself to be the righteous son of Voltaire, as the true soldier of the Enlightenment, carrying on its original mission where other *Lumières* and *philosophes* shirked their responsibility, or worse, corrupted the whole program of the Enlightenment, as in Kant. For Nietzsche, (human) thriving borne only from (cultural) striving is a hundredfold preferable to the mere surviving and self-preservation which motivates the degenerative and décadent types. Nietzsche is adamant that the affirmative ethic of virtù and the affirmative spirit that says yes to life in all its joys and horrors are both united in persons of the stronger Dionysian type who embody the pathos of distance and acknowledge rightful distinctions. Ressentiment, meanwhile, fosters alienation almost as a matter of principle, for as an ethos it resides (and is activated) in the common masses, while as a (life-denying) spirit, it is actuated in and by the priestly and saintly types. This sort of rationalized, moralized, civilizing Socratic culture-complex which Nietzsche so powerfully disparages, comes into its own in Christianity—revealing its harrowing dark face and full force. Nietzsche believes Christianity is the quintessential form (in the West) of the slave morality as well as a paradigmatic example of ressentiment moralized and spiritualized; and so, to Nietzsche’s view of Christianity we must now turn. In the next section, we will endeavor to outline a genealogy of meaning in the

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316 *EH*, Preface, 3
West so far as Nietzsche imagines it, following its concrete historical development under Christianity and the Enlightenment.

The Perversion of Meaning and the Ensuing Nihilism: Christ, Christianity and the Tidings of the Enlightenment

‘Meaning of Heaven’ and ‘Meaning of Self’ Overturning the ‘Meaning of Earth’: A historical Case in Point

Understanding the origins of Christianity requires coming to terms with Judaism as a spirit (Geist) in reaction to and, conversely, in continuation of which Nietzsche believes Christianity formed. To Nietzsche, the Jews do not strictly-speaking represent a décadent and nihilistic type but instead provide a crucial starting point as the embodiment of the ressentimental instinct (discussed above) in a people who for the first time conceive of guilt and sin as a cultural (and historical) reality. In short, they signify for him the first instantiation of asceticism (i.e., the restraining of the will) in a historic people. And yet, it is Christianity that is singled out by Nietzsche as the precursor to nihilism in its two forms in the West. How does Nietzsche come to such a conclusion? For Nietzsche, Christ and Paul epitomize two different examples of décadence which ultimately result in complete nihilism: the former sublates the ressentimental spirit (in Judaism) but falls, as a result, to the depths of (Buddhistic) solipsism, resulting in practical nihilism; the latter reproduces the Jewish ressentimental spirit in a new, far more degenerative découpage form, turning it into an ideal and, thereby spawning the paradigm of the ‘ascetic ideal’, breeding a ‘will to nothingness’ and marking the advent of ‘meaning as such’ (what after the Enlightenment comes to be correctly recognized as theoretical nihilism). Nietzsche condemns
Christianity in very harsh language. Church fathers, he says, do not lack in intelligence; they lack instead a (healthful) nature: “Nature neglected them” clean and healthy instincts, perhaps even testicles, for they do not have a shred of courage to say yes to life and reality—they are not man enough for it.\textsuperscript{317} Nietzsche identifies Christianity’s ‘the beyond’ as the formula behind “the will to negate every reality; the cross as the mark of the most subterranean conspiracy that ever existed—against health, beauty, against anything well constituted, against courage, spirit, goodness of the soul, against life itself. . . .”.\textsuperscript{318}

To recall once more, Nietzsche acknowledges in \textit{TI} that all kinds of ‘will to power’ (whether negative or positive and irrespective of their roots and instincts, whether ressentimental or distance-respecting and hierarchical, metaphysical or non-metaphysical, and \textit{décadent} or healthful) are ultimately by definition aimed at the creation of an order of meaning—one type or another of “pia fraus” or ‘holy lies’, a development which becomes part of “the bequest of all philosophers and priests who have 'improved' humanity. Neither Manu nor Plato nor Confucius nor the teachers of Judaism and Christianity have ever doubted their right to lie. They never doubted that they had very different [conceptions of] rights”\textsuperscript{319} and very different claims (not to speak of their general \textit{rights} and privileges in comparison to the average man) and that perhaps none of their conceptions is true in and of itself—i.e., as absolute and universal Truth. In fact, the history of human cultures of all ages proves to Nietzsche that “‘belief’ has just been a cloak, a cover, a \textit{curtain} behind which the instincts play their game—a shrewd \textit{blindness} about the dominance of \textit{certain} instincts.”\textsuperscript{320} After all, “people have always talked about their 'faith'” and

\textsuperscript{317} \textit{AC}, §60
\textsuperscript{318} \textit{AC}, §62
\textsuperscript{319} \textit{TI}, “Improving Humanity”, §5 (Cf. \textit{AC}, §55)
\textsuperscript{320} \textit{AC}, §39
beliefs, whereas “they have always acted from instinct”. All the meanings and belief-systems of cultures reflect and represent that culture’s most hidden and entrenched instincts. The difference between these shrouds and illusions (i.e., meanings), the correct basis for evaluating them, therefore, must ultimately rest on which instincts they animate and empower, whether the meanings they create aim at the ends of life and culture or whether they become ends to themselves as ‘in-spites-of-life’, as justifications removed from life—i.e., meanings as such.

Nietzsche applies this same benchmark for evaluating and passing judgment to Christianity in particular and the (ascetic) ideal in general, a fact which not only informs Nietzsche’s overall philosophy but refutes all who accuse him of (or in the case of Post-moderns reveling in) relativism—the Nietzschean yardstick is always honesty in the face of the reality of suffering in existence and the supplying of life-centered and naturally-derived measures on the part of these semiotico-mythical paradigms for overcoming the tragic quality of nature. And further still, Nietzsche clarifies his distinctive normative stance that I referenced previously: “In the end, it comes down to the purpose the lie is supposed to serve. The fact that 'holy' [i.e., life-driven] purposes are lacking in Christianity is my objection to its means.” In other words, “it makes a difference why you are lying: whether you are lying in order to sustain or to destroy. Christians are perfectly identical with anarchists: their only goal, their only instinct is to destroy”; they are rebellion-prone, Nietzsche thinks, for they are driven only by their pathos of ressentiment. Nietzsche’s usage of the term “pious fraud” as a resultant attribute of every will to power is significant, because it presents the fundamental importance of such intrinsically creative acts for human life and survival, an end which will justify what is technically an act of deceit and

321 Ibid.
322 AC, §56
323 AC, §58
semblance (Scheine), implying and accounting for the fact that the truly creative persons often employ questionable means and methods to achieve and realize their objectives: their dreams, whether we deem them ‘cunning productions’ or ‘artistic creations’—they are strong enough for them. And yet this is far removed from a relativistic position from the Nietzschean point of view, for Nietzsche provides the criteria for distinguishing and judging these acts: affirmation and enhancement of (earthly) life.

Troublingly from Nietzsche’s standpoint, with Paul, “the emphasis of life is put on the 'beyond' rather than on life itself”, which is to say, “on nothingness,” and as such, life is stripped of its “center of gravity”. When the immortality of the (individual) soul becomes the central idea as it does with Paul, then “there is no point to life anymore,” for this “great lie” of immortality (for all) “now becomes the 'meaning' of life” itself, stripping the natural “life-furthering” ideas of “communal spirit” (Gemeinsinn), historical and cultural bond with one’s ancestors, and national “cooperation” that is mindful of “general welfare” and ‘higher goals’ of their meaning. After all, everyone (as in all beings) only shares one goal henceforth—the immortality of the soul from an equal footing. The whole of humanity is thus dehumanized and denaturalized, an abstracted shell of its former self deprived of ‘real life’ and this-worldly objective reality as well as any “growth in culture” (Wachsthum der Cultur). This essentially projected and nihilistic existence (out of a pretense to equality) is the utterly disastrous consequence of Pauline universalism and Paul’s metaphysicization of meaning—his ‘meaning of heaven’ is but the latest rendition of the meaning as such, falsely suggesting “that in the commonality/totality [Gesammtheit] of all beings,

\[324\] AC, §43
\[325\] AC, §43
the 'salvation' of each individual lays claim to an eternal significance...[thus] raising every sort of egoism to infinity, to (the point of) shamelessness".  

Perceiving in Christianity effectively a continuation of the age-old Hellenistic-Roman oscillation between epicureanism and stoicism (given his training as a classical philologist), Nietzsche distinguishes two Christianities. One is that of Jesus, the one “who died on the cross” and whom Nietzsche calls the one true and original Christian who, following on the footsteps of Epicurus, built a whole movement around “absence of pain” (aponia). The evangel, so Nietzsche christens him, not only preached but practiced “above all a not-doing” (aparaxia), a life free from all guilt, revengefulness, and ressentiment—from all instinct, emancipated from the fear of suffering and death—a blessed “forever-now” which accepts suffering as a condition of living but is able to escape it (and with it life itself) by turning inward: the ultimate state of tranquility (ataraxia) is attained in one’s inner heart by disengaging from the external world of desire and appetite (epithymetikon), with no need for a ‘world beyond’, for ‘savior’, for other-worldly ‘salvation’—this ‘meaning for self’ has no use for morality, only subjective “inner ‘lights’”. Christ represents, in Nietzsche’s analysis, “a new, a completely original attempt at a Buddhistic peace movement, at an actual happiness on earth, not just a promissory one.” The other is that of Paul, who commits “ruthless violence to the truth” of original early Christianity (Umfälschung—AC, §42) by substituting, under the cloak of faith, the lowly Chandala instincts, where previously all instincts were lacking. It is he who invented immortality, eternality, and the savior in order to disvalue the world, who used the concept of hell to master Rome and killed life

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326 AC, §43 (Norman translation altered and harmonized with Kaufmann)
327 AC, §30, §39
328 AC, §32, §39
329 AC, §42
with his ‘beyond’. Here, dominant values are necessarily slavish/ressentimental and that of Chandala (i.e., slave morality). Jesus essentially embodies for Nietzsche the synthesis of Epicureans with the Buddhists finally culminating in complete apathy, while in Paul the stoic movement is problematically Judaized and metaphysicized, which signifies the universalization (that is to say “misuse”) of Judaism in accordance with Plato’s idealist and moralistic framework (i.e., complete mental and willful control over the unruly passions), thus birthing the “ascetic ideal”.

While Pauline Christianity consummates in theoretical nihilism, the actual consequence of Jesus’ teaching is practical nihilism. On top of their nihilisms of different kinds, what unites Christ with Paul in the Nietzschean view is their décadence (which is again of different varieties): their mutual antipathy toward life and reality as it was (especially toward the actuality and the reality of it—lofty and vigorous—under Rome) and their contraptions for escaping the (external) world. As Nietzsche posits, “the instinct of hatred against every reality” (i.e., décadence) must be recognized “as the driving, the only driving element, at the root of Christianity”. Décadent instincts cannot help but produce décadent religions. Where these divergent outlooks differ is essentially in method and approach, not results. They diverged in their response to the Roman lifeform in particular and the theodicean problem in general: Jesus, in his pacifism was resigned to it; Paul, true to his ressentimental pathos, revolted against it. Ultimately though, what they share in escapist décadence and nihilism trumps and papers over their opposition. So much so, in fact, that the “instinctive hatred for actuality” could be deemed “the only driving element at the root of Christianity”. It is in the rejection and denial of worldly life for some sanctuary—whether as

\[330 AC, \S 58\]
\[331 AC, \S 32\]
\[332 AC, \S 39\]
‘blessedness’ presently achieved under the cloak of an individual state of the mind/heart (which Nietzsche deems the one holistic and “solitary reality of the evangel”—AC, §41) or under the promise of ‘salvation’ in an other-worldly Beyond—in other words their escapism, that one can see clearly how and why Nihilist und Christ do not merely rhyme for Nietzsche.\(^3\)

To be sure, Nietzsche acknowledges the Christian ingenuity and shrewdness (Klugheit) of recognizing that “it is a matter of complete indifference whether or not something is true, but it is of supreme importance that people believe in its truth”; yet, Nietzsche is adamant that intellectual honesty or actual “truth and the faith that something is true [are] two separate spheres of interests belonging to entirely different, almost antithetical worlds (Gegensatz-Welten).”\(^4\) And further still, “if faith is needed above all else, then reason, knowledge, and inquiry have to be discredited: the path to truth [thus] becomes the forbidden path”.\(^5\)

Time and again, Nietzsche identifies idealism with the (décadent) physiological types who have in their instincts an "innermost cowardice in the face of reality" and the suffering it entails, which produces in them “also a cowardice in the face of truth” and the pervasion of truth into dishonest lies, because a lie, a distorted semblance (Schein), is much easier for these weak constitutions to digest—"untruthfulness” hence becomes “instinctive for them”, reinforcing their idealism.\(^6\) The décadent instinct of weariness and weakness in the face of reality—the inclination to flee the hardships of existence rather than fight to “overcome” them—gives rise to the prototypical décadent spirit in idealism and décadent types in idealists. Christianity (especially that institutionalized by Paul) represents for Nietzsche the most complexly constructed of these

\(^3\) AC, §39 (Note: that Christ means both Christian and Christ in German adds to the Nietzschean symbology)
\(^4\) AC, §23 (Norman translation altered and harmonized with Kauffman)
\(^5\) AC, §23
\(^6\) EH, III (‘WC’, §2). Cf. III (‘BT’, §2) where Nietzsche again locates the origin of the ‘ideal’ in “cowardice and flight from reality”, and says, “The décadents need the lie”.

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illusions, a shroud fully tailored to those with the sickly and weak constitution: it is idealism at its most advanced form, “*ultimatum* and *maximum*”.

In nature, so Nietzsche thinks, the phenomenon of the living organism’s will to power and control over the flux and insecurities of nature is the source and indeed the very idea of *life*. And even as humans evolve to separate themselves from the raw realities of nature in the intermediary state of culture, this principle of “will” must still be carried over. Put differently, the ‘will to meaning’ which inspires culture is empowered and animated by the will to power. And while this was ‘naturally’ the case in archaic human societies, Nietzsche asserts that in all of humanity’s (read: Western man’s) highest values and meaning-structures since Socrates a healthy and lifeful will to power and agency (the original driver of the will to meaning) has either been corrupted or is missing altogether. This is what “perversion” or “corruption” (*Verdorbenheit*) of meaning entails. The absence of an active and strong will amounts to *decline* for it goes against nature (*Widernatürlichkeit*): in nature, passivity begets physical death; for humans, it amounts to cultural and intellectual death even without real death.\(^{337}\)

In a marked contrast with the Buddhistic Jesus shunning all moralism and the very idea of sin and guilt in his *evangelic* Christianity, in (*church*) Christianity’s adoption of the Judaic response to suffering (a Pauline concoction), all pain, hardships, and perceived injustices (in tandem with the natural causality which is the function of *random determinism of* nature) are abstracted into *sin*, with the source of all suffering projected onto it. ‘Sin’ now mediates, justifies, and informs all suffering, tentatively but self-confidently resolving the problematic of theodicy. Man’s original struggle against suffering thus becomes a “war against sin” vindicated via the “fiction” of ‘original sin’ (whereas the theodicean struggle at least preserves its character as a “war

\(^{337}\) *AC*, §6

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against suffering” in Buddhism). To juxtapose Christian theodicy with that of Buddhism’s (as the two most familiar décadent religions), in Buddhism, Nietzsche asserts, the motto ‘I suffer’ does not need to become the predicate to sin as it does in (canonized) Christianity, to be interpreted as ‘I suffer because I sinned’—the pretense to ‘justify’ suffering and make it ‘meaningful’ is absent in Buddhism. Suffering is simply fact; it does not need to be socialized, contextualized, or propositioned by a for or against after it. It is real; it does not demand idealization—Buddhism is objective about existence at least, as much as its décadence aims to escape it. As such, Buddhism is not promissory but in the moment: “Buddhism does not promise, it delivers” here and now; whereas, Pauline “Christianity promises everything and delivers nothing.” The same applies to the movement of the evangel that followed in the Buddhist path. In morality of sin and guilt introduced into Christianity by Paul (henceforth, the Judeo-Christian Morality), the natural causality and injustice in the world is canonized and normalized into a set of rules that must be blindly observed and followed—made into a framework for guilt and for sin! You must have deserved your bad luck (which is to say it is no luck at all but natural causality and determinism morally rationalized) or else the world is meaningless and without sense and justice, a fact which cannot stand. This projection of natural causality (and with it “people’s senses for causation” AC, §49) onto sin is the ultimate form of falsification which denaturalizes what are concrete and particularistic (i.e., natural) ethics and customs (natürliche Sitte) making them universal and

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338 AC, §20: Nietzsche contends that the Buddhistic approach to suffering, although decidedly décadent, is “phenomenalist” and this-worldly and hence preferable to Christianity. The Buddhistic solution—the withdrawing from the world of suffering through interiorization of the will (turning the will inward) and escaping into the internal state of bless (or at least the quest for it)—is fundamentally anti-realist and anti-actualist causing further degeneration and decay, but at least “it has left the self-deception of moral concepts behind” standing positively in this world and “beyond good and evil”. And it is on this very ground that Nietzsche privileges the glad teachings of Christ, as the original Western Buddha, over that of Paul and his orchestrated version of Christianity. Christ and Buddha are positive décadents after all, while Paul, like Socrates before him, is an emphatically negative kind.

339 AC, §23
340 AC, §42
absolute.\textsuperscript{341} As Nietzsche states, “Sin, this supreme form of human self-desecration, was invented to block science, to block culture, to block every elevation and ennoblement of humanity; the priests rule through the invention of sin”.\textsuperscript{342} This explains Nietzsche’s forceful denunciation of ‘good and evil’ (cf. Morality) and his aim to operate beyond them, for they are wholly structured on the un-Christly notion of sin. With the invention of a “moral world order” (sittlichen Weltordnung), the will and agency of man are supplanted, and “the will of God [becomes] dominant in the destiny of a people, an individual, which is to say it punishes and rewards depending on the degree of obedience”: human agency is resigned to, subsumed under, and consumed by divine agency—God (which is to say the priest, the Platos and Pauls) becomes the ultimate will and the most determinative agent.\textsuperscript{343} This development (Nietzsche would say devolution) is a world-historic catastrophe as far as Nietzsche is concerned, signifying the dominance of a ‘negative’, subversive, and life-denying will to power out of an intrinsically ressentimental pathos and “a broken will to life”.\textsuperscript{344}

As alluded to, the Christianities of both Paul and Jesus are logical extensions of Socratic-stoic (in the former) and Epicurean-Buddhist (in the latter) life-denying, redemption-seeking tendencies, which is to say they are both intrinsically décadent movements inspired by décadent physiologies. To emphasize once more, décadence in the Nietzschean perspective is a pathological condition/disposition, exhibiting a profound and instinctive hatred for ‘reality’ as is and an “oversensitivity” for “all contact” with things ‘concrete’ and ‘tangible’ (that is to say ‘life’ as is).\textsuperscript{345} As such, in Nietzschean usage, décadence is synonymous with “un-realism” understood as a

\textsuperscript{341} AC, §25-26
\textsuperscript{342} AC, §49
\textsuperscript{343} AC, §26
\textsuperscript{344} AC, §50
\textsuperscript{345} AC, §29-30
pathological physiological condition. “Throw out a single idea” (i.e., that reality, as is, is undesirable and must be evaded), Nietzsche pleads, and “put a genuine reality [as is] in its place—and the whole of Christianity crumbles into nothingness!” It follows that both strands of this décadence are overly concerned with redemption and thus conceive of schemes to redeem and somehow explain life’s theodicean discontents, whether through individual and psychological or metaphysical and messianic forms of redemption. In the case of Christ (as in Buddha before him) where despite a non-ressentimental outlook “the pathos of distance” is conspicuously absent, this pathology manifests itself as “the instinctive exclusion of all aversion, all hostility, all boundaries and distances in feelings”, and hence even the idea of ‘the redeemer’ is generalized and democratized—i.e., everyone as one’s own redeemer. So, it refuses any (taking of) stance, remaining wholly apathetic vis-à-vis values and types, let alone acknowledging (their) hierarchy.

In Paul’s ressentimental approach (where mere apathy and denying of the ‘pathos of distance’ turns to active spite and antipathy), the décadent loathing of reality gravitates instead toward the idea of sin and (universal) morality, leading to the fabrication of a new world (i.e., the Beyond), which offers man (abstractly and unqualifiedly understood) the promise of ultimate redemption (from this life)—i.e., otherworldly salvation. Here, Christ is (deceitfully and anachronistically) made into the one true redeemer, his sanctimonious privilege over the rest firmly established by his consecration as the only son of God.

It is the consequence of Christ’s rather Epicurean “fear of pain”, his Buddhistic repudiation of all active resistance and world-engaging struggle, and the internalization of this passivity and resignation in his true disciples that gives him and his followers no choice but to turn to love and pity as the only pathos with which life can be redeemed and happiness achieved by completely

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346 AC, §39 (translation slightly altered)
347 AC, §30
avoiding pain (and hence all feeling): “this could only ever end up as a religion of love”, Nietzsche declares, for love remains, after all, “the only, the final, possibility for life”.

Accordingly, the principle of ‘self-overcoming’, which is the conclusion of any healthy pathos of distance, is inevitably corrupted into a rather solipsistic form of ‘self-love’. In Jesus’s egalitarian ‘glad tidings’, the ‘kingdom of heaven’ is shared among and equally accessible to everyone and anyone—it belongs to all God’s ‘children’. This makes the Jewish notions of ‘sin’ and ‘guilt’, ‘reward’ and ‘punishment’, ‘atonement’ and ‘forgiveness’ entirely unnecessary for Jesus, for to conceive of ‘sin’ would be to establish “distance between God and man”—whereas in Jesus’ teaching, all distance shall be “abolished”.

“This is what the ‘glad tidings’ are all about” in Nietzsche’s exegesis: a pathos of ‘no distinctions’—this is their one single surviving instinct.

As such, the evangel lived, practiced, taught, and died entirely beyond good and evil (supplanting all distance, distinctions and rank); this is at the core of his teachings and the source of his world-historical significance (and “irony”) for Nietzsche. Putting it in a modern frame of reference, Jesus of Nazareth, in the way Nietzsche presents him, was not just décadent but the prototypical (spiritual) existentialist and the original radical relativist (predating Sartre by millennia). No formulas, ideologies, or even rites are necessary anymore in the aparaxic and apoietic practice epitomized by the evangel.

Paralleling Parsifal’s “pure foolishness” (reine Thorheit), Christ’s ‘wisdom’ amounts to a disregard for everything not personally felt and experienced: “everything natural, temporal, spatial, historical” including man himself is denied and abstracted to be utilized as semiotic material (i.e., as symbols and parables) for the eternality that is accessed.

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348 Ibid.
349 AC, §33
350 Ibid.
351 Ibid.
352 AC, §32
here and now—man is at last redeemed from ‘time’ and merely-apparent physical life (and death itself), not to speak of culture and the ‘cycles’ of tragedy. Jesus hence offers a “new way of life” that stands strikingly outside the boundaries of physical (“apparent”) life and “not a new faith”, albeit that this new way is premised on the incapacitation of human agency and an uprooting of the will to power that is at the heart of life itself, thereby destroying all possibility for real actual life for the sake of timeless “inner realities” (i.e., subjective feelings). There are no external paths (or meaning schemes) to God. The whole idea of ‘redemption’ is democratized: everyone is now a savior in his or her own right. God is in each of you means unity and utopia are both achieved—He is you and you are Him.

The opposite is true for Paul, whose ressentimental drive and subversive agency are not just life-denying but “world-escaping” as well. Contrary to Jesus’ “Buddhistic peace movement” which is based on solitary and solipsistic practice, Paul formulates a new religion, a new faith, out of his negative will to power, his pathos of ressentiment constructing an ideology out his contradicting ‘no-saying’ spirit. He is the antithesis to Christ, the epitome of “bad tidings”—a dysangel. Paul’s comprehensive antipathy toward all life in this world cannot be content with mere psychological internalization; he has to conceive of a pseudo-realist alternative world to the one he so passionately despises. Life must be metaphysicized, this world instrumentalized into an arena for struggle in the name of God and his true kingdom, the determiners of which are the Pauls and the priests. Enmity and hatred for this world and all life in it (including the ‘self’) on the morbid scaffolding of ‘sin’ coupled with an obsession for martyrdom and the afterlife are foundational to Paul’s ideology (even if, as Nietzsche insists, Paul’s is a
hypocritical illusion masking a revolutionary will to power designed for a new, this-time-around “priestly”, domination as a denaturalized and falsely-revalued expression of ‘the pathos of distance’ based on an inverted set of distinctions). Paul’s Christianity stands as a distortion if not a complete upending of the teachings of the evangel—not only is it an apocryphal fabrication; it is an absolute betrayal of Jesus and all he stood for. And owing to this world-historic piece of dishonesty, Nietzsche loathes Paul: Paul is doubly dishonest, toward existence/life (Nietzsche’s abode) and toward the evangel (i.e., actual history).

Signaling the original appropriation of Buddha in the Western tradition, in Jesus’ positive denial of reality, the will is turned inward. With the will contained to itself and operating in the sphere of the self alone, desire is indicted as agent provocateur et coupable behind all suffering (breeding practical nihilism toward the this-worldly end of existential happiness which could potentially be experienced here and now): Christ’s glad tidings (Die frohe Botschaft) are centered on the self—there is no pathos of ressentiment here. In fact, Nietzsche sees in the figure of Christ (and the course of his life and death) precisely a symbolism for this, as an inherent optimist who connotes “the freedom [from], superiority over every feeling of ressentiment”—including the fear of and resistance to death itself. Perfection is not aspired to; it is a state of mind (or rather heart)—a condition of being out of complete (outer) disregard and full (inner) contentment and peace. Pleasure and happiness is hence turned into ‘bliss’ and psychologized: “the kingdom of heaven is a state of the heart” or rather “an experience of the heart” occurring “everywhere and nowhere”, not positioned beyond and “above the Earth” or coming ‘after death’”. This exercise in individualized beatification stands in marked contrast with the “dysangelist” Paul’s (i.e., the Judeo-stoic Socrates) negative denial of reality which is espoused out of a profound pathos of

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357 AC, §40
358 AC, §34
ressentiment, where the ‘will’ is turned against itself/back on itself as a control mechanism (toward other-worldly nihilistic ends—i.e., theoretical nihilism) and ‘agency’ perennially imprisoned as ‘ego’. Perfection could never be attained by man in this world, if at all; it is reserved for God—his prerogative and part of his grace. Both mindsets, of course, are nihilistic from the Nietzschean perspective, because the will is turned against its nature which is actuality and prohibited from engaging in real affirmative action (i.e., denied from acting upon the world toward this-worldly lifeful ends). Nihilism thus signifies a pining after the world of naught—i.e., nihil. And as we will see, in Modernity, Nietzsche believes this sickly and degenerative quest is finally completed with both these practical and theoretical forms of nihilism reaching their summation and synthesized to unleash full-on comprehensive nihilism—the realization of nothingness in toto which Nietzsche maintains has always been the inherent and eventual goal of the ideal in the first place.

Moreover, Nietzsche argues that despite Christians feeling otherwise, Christianity at its core is not a ‘counter-movement’ to Judaism, but instead a logical, albeit “degenerate”, consequence of it. Nietzsche blames this degeneration in Christianity of the Jewish instinct for deliverance on Paul. In Paul, the millenarianism and messianism of Judaism was denationalized, wedded to the abstract universalism of Socrates. The messianic savior of the Jewish people as the chosen and holy folk—the “salvation comes from the Jews” formula—is hence universalized (thereby assuming a “completely degenerate form” from Nietzsche’s viewpoint) to become the “redeemer of humanity”: in Paul, the Jewish instinct is Platonized.\footnote{\textit{AC}, §24} In the Jews, it turns out, the pathos of distance was first inverted into its opposite—i.e., the pathos of ressentiment; the Jews were simply the first spiritual (geistig) manifestation of the instinct of ressentiment. Christianity is not the “anti-Jewish” doctrine par excellence, but the “ultimate conclusion of Judaism”,

\footnote{\textit{AC}, §24}
especially evident in its subversion of the healthy pathos of *distance*.\(^{360}\) Despite their profound differences in interpreting this subversion (of healthy ‘distance’), both the Christian movement of Jesus and the institutional Christianity of Paul are reflections of Judaism finally denying itself even its unique human particularity as too *real* and too *harsh*: in Christ, this healthy pathos is individualized and democratized (which is to say essentially sublated); in Paul, the *negative* inverted form (i.e., ressentiment) dominates once more to the supremacy of the priestly types, but this time reaching its full conclusion in *denationalization* and *universalization*. Pauline Christianity is Judaism *stripped* of its specific and concrete bonds with the Jews as a people, a final and most fateful turning away from all reality including the “*Jewish reality itself*”!\(^{361}\)

Although Nietzsche reserves much more respect for Jesus compared to Paul, he does not spare him his own charges of *décadence*. Not only Paul, but Jesus too, need be *denounced*. After all, Jesus of Nazareth’s Christianity followed the instincts of *unreality* just as well: a rebellion against the reality of priest-domination and indeed all *domination* as such, hoping in particular to *negate* the reality of the Jewish rabbinic class itself as an institution, but turning antagonistic to all hierarchy, privilege, and “higher men” in general.\(^{362}\) Jesus, so Nietzsche’s argument goes, was the “holy anarchist who called out to the lowly people, the outcasts and the 'sinners', the *Chandala* of Israel, telling them to protest against the dominant (Roman and Rabbinic) order.\(^{363}\) Jesus’ “egalitarian” and “utopian” movement (*thesis*), in Nietzsche’s estimation, was meant to supersede the Jewish ecclesiastical order (*anti-thesis*): “What the evangel *did away with* was the Judaism of the concepts of 'sin', 'forgiveness of sin', 'faith', 'redemption through faith'—the whole Jewish

\(^{360}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{361}\) *AC*, §27

\(^{362}\) *AC*, §27

\(^{363}\) *AC*, §27
church doctrine was rejected in the 'glad tidings'.”

Through Paul, it was the ‘movement’ that found itself co-opted by (elite factions of) the Jewish church, transforming both threads into a new hierarchy (i.e., ecclesiastical Christianity as a Pauline synthesis). In Paul, the “Chandala hatred of Rome”, the “against the world” attitude, became flesh and genius. It was a sign of Paul’s devilish ingenuity “to use a small, sectarian Christian movement on the periphery of Judaism to kindle a ‘world fire’.” Nietzsche states, “his [Paul’s] need was power; with Paul, the priest [type] aimed at power yet again—he could only use ideas, doctrines, symbols that would tyrannize the masses and form the herds”, as was necessary for his revolution against Rome.

People’s desire for achieving immortality and avoiding hell captured in the magical formula, the ‘beyond’—this is the foolproof (which is to say fool-worthy) Pauline concoction: by using the unholiest of means for the unholiest of lies and purposes (i.e., décadent religion), Paul was able to forge out of original Christianity his final desired outcome, which was not just to (spiritually) dominate and break Rome but to “devalue ‘the world’” and “kill life”.

It is important for Nietzsche that his readers recognize that the ressentimental ‘will to falsehood’ (i.e., asceticism) of the Jews, even if problematic and degenerating in the long run, has its roots in an original will to life (thus not technically and theoretically décadent). Their choosing of “being at any price” translated into “a radical falsification of all nature, all naturalness, all reality”. This bit is true; but this was a choice out of a profound desire for survival in the face of their harsh and unjust historical experience of suffering in life as a people. Its outcome might have been décadent; however, its intention certainly was not: the Jews hence do not constitute

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364 AC, §33
365 AC, §58
366 AC, §58
367 AC, §42 (transl. my own)
368 AC, §58
physiologically *décadent* natures in the Nietzschean estimation in the manner of *décadent* types like Socrates and Paul. Rather, they “are the opposite of décadents: they were compelled to *act* like décadents to the point of illusion” in the interest of “self-preservation”, because they were *shrewd* and ingenious enough to detect in décadent instincts and décadent movements “a power that could be used to prevail *against* 'the world'” that had so wronged them, recognizing in such outlooks a force stronger than any (noble) drive *affirmative* of life. The Jews did not abandon their will to power and agency—they sought it albeit in a negative and destructive way. The pathos of ressentiment became genius in them engendering décadent religions; however, *décadence* was only ever a *means* of survival for them. In contradistinction with other (*weak*) peoples, the Jews are “*remarkable*” in not being dominated by the décadent instincts—as a people, they *dominate* them instead (as do the “priests” as a physiological type). Yet, in the hands of the renegade Jew Paul, the Christianity of Christ is utterly transformed from what is essentially a Jewish movement in interiorization and subjectivization of the will (collapsing it back on itself)—a radically *utopian* and *egalitarian* movement lionizing the inability to resist and becoming dead-set against *domination* as such, into the most complete and totalistic form of the ‘ascetic ideal’ that was utilized (as a paradigm) to *dominate* the gentiles. Just like in the Jews as “holiness”, so too in the *saintly* and *priestly* types and *holy* classes, the will to power and agency is strong and alive, and *décadence* is merely “a *means*”; crucially, this will to power has been turned against life (in its injustices) and ‘this world’ itself—a (*negative*) force of agency *antithetical* to life directed toward a *false invented ideal* world Beyond: *a fortiori*, “this type of person has a life-interest in making mankind *sick* and inverting the concepts 'good' and 'evil', 'true' and 'false' to the point where

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369 A.C. §24
370 Ibid.
they endanger life and slander the world.” 371 With Paul, the original intention, the act, is forgotten. The illusion becomes real. The Ideal is no longer a force to make life bearable, generating a (false) hope: all its even tentative connections to ‘self-preservation’ and life (of a people) are lost—in a Socratic turn, it is now the only end-in-itself.

In effect, after Paul and his Socratic/Platonic turn, the (Christian) priests now philosophize, interested chiefly in explanation and understanding of the machinations of existence—they seek a justification for life (only, this theodicean knowledge they seek primarily through faith rather than in reason, which was the philosophers’ preferred medium). With the universalization of the core of the Judaic religion, the natural value, designs, and purposes previously causing and animating culture, religion, ethics, etc. are all inverted, and the evolutionary reasons driving them subverted in such a way that these most natural of human creations are essentially denaturalized (Entnatürlichung der Natur-Werthe), decoupled from their natural origins and conditions of development in realities of concrete human life. 372 In exercising their negative will to power to devalue and denaturalize human values and substitute their own priestly values (Priester-Werthe) in their place, the priestly class in effect turns itself into the only value—all roads pass through them. As such, the priests do not eliminate the ‘order of rank’: they distort and erroneously revalue the hierarchy, usurping the seat of the true aristocrats, seeking their own domination—they are the ultimate false elites, the original usurpers.

As part of this process of denaturalization where creations of human culture are deprived of their natural reason and value, Nietzsche postulates, a grand falsification takes place: meaning (for life) is denatured, falsified into its opposite (i.e., meaning as such); the idea of archaic religion with its various pantheons of God is denatured and falsified into a monotheistic religion of an

371 Ibid. (Norman translation slightly altered and harmonized with Kaufmann)
372 AC, §25
absolute divine; practical and virtù-based ethics are also denatured and falsified into their opposite, i.e. Morality. Put simply, reality as a whole is denatured and turned décadent, falsified into its antithesis, the ideal! Thus, the process of denaturalization initiated and fueled by the sickly and utterly cynical pathos of ressentiment and hatred as an othering force (instantiating a negative and destructive kind of will to power and agency—i.e., the will to Nothingness) culminates in the full unleashing of décadence, proving it as fundamentally degenerative, a turning point against life, and entirely anti-Nature. Indeed, Nietzsche finds the root cause of the meaninglessness of today in the pretense of higher meaning in the classical and medieval periods (whether in church or in philosophy), which reversed the pagan attitude of finding life meaningful as such and in itself (an sich) and celebrating (i.e., finding meaning in and for) this-worldly existence.

In fact, according to Nietzsche, the very concept of god itself is also originally rooted in the sublimation of man’s will to life, in the sublimation of the will to power (the operating principle of life in general) into the will to meaning (the catalyst of human life); its genesis reflecting the human desire to say an “eternal yes” (ewiges Ja) to life by “transfiguring” (Verklärung) the flux underlying the reality of becoming into the certainty which underscores the permanence of being—all in the spirit of celebration and glorification of life. Yet, the (priestly-philosophic) perversion of meaning represented the original corruption of the (healthy) will to life/meaning by a spirit contradictory to life (Widerspruch des Lebens), a fateful event which degenerated the (healthy and genuine) übermenschlich ‘wills to power’ and the generative sorts of will to meaning naturally stemming from them. This development also paralleled the deterioration of the concept of a national/cultural god(s) into a universal idealistic one, devolving from the ‘divine’ (as reflection and symbolic representation of the realities of culture and concrete differences in values) into the “pure spirit” of the ideal as the source of a unitary/totalistic reality and an absolute/monistic
Formerly, the origin of the divine lay in the real, concrete, human world; with the coming of décadence, the divine was spiritualized and turned into an ideal par excellence. God was thus appropriated by the ideal—it became one with the ideal, the ultimate “thing-in-itself”. God’s (symbolic) origins in life and on earth were forgotten as were its meaning and purpose in advancing the cause of life for cultures; it became heavenly, itself the source of all life, and a meaning unto itself—as such (an sich)! Where god once symbolized man’s great fascination and admiration for life and was tied to man’s concrete reality (a testament to man’s will to life despite the sufferings of existence with the gods as the exalted role models fit for human emulation), he was now completely severed from all reality and praxis, epitomizing “aversion/hostility to life, to nature, to the will to life!” Losing his human connection, god (as the God) becomes “the formula for every slander against 'the here and now' [Diesseits=this world], for every lie about the 'beyond'!”

God, this fantastic archetype and eternal testimony to man’s “creator spiritus” (the “creator spirit in mankind”), thus takes a nihilistic turn into the world of forms and unreality: in him, “nothingness [das Nichts] is deified, the will to nothingness sanctified!”

Consequently, the “pathetic God of Christian monotono-theism” is in Nietzsche’s mind nothing more than a “hybrid creation of decay, made from naught, concept, and contradiction, in which all the instincts of décadence, all the cowardices and wearinesses of the soul find their sanction.” He is the misbegotten creation of the ressentimental pathos, and thus needs to be indicted for its crimes and fully condemned, a task which Nietzsche takes wholly upon himself. As he notes, “The one God and the one son of God: both are products of ressentiment”—the

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373 AC, §17  
374 AC, §18  
375 AC, §18  
376 AC, §18 (Kauffman Trans. harmonized)  
377 AC, §19 (translation my own)
“monotonous-theistic” idea of ‘one God’ itself a distinct relic of the Jewish ressentiment, the messianic doctrine of ‘one Son’ signifying the perpetuation/flourishing of the ressentimental pathos in Paul and the Christian church . . . evidence that even after Christ’s manifestly non-ressentimental ways, this degenerative pathos was alive and well.\textsuperscript{378}

The rise of Jesus was to Nietzsche also evidence that the pathos of distance and affirmation (that, when healthy, fuels aristocratic, life-affirming and positive forms of will to power that manifest in Dionysian natures) could be corrupted, perverted, and degenerated by optimistic, egalitarian, and only abstractly humanist instincts into a solipsistic and radically subjectivized pathos, which in seeking only blissful self-affirmation and apotheosis wills not to will at all, refusing to act upon the world as is (but only as it is individually felt, divined, and experienced). Within such glad tidings of Buddha and Jesus, the ‘affirmation of life’ degenerates into an ‘affirmation of self’ alone and the (theoretically positive) will to power becomes a shadow of its former self and is essentially neutered and pacified to the point that for practical purposes we can say it ceases to exist. Although in a sense ‘positive’/’phenomenalist’ and not necessarily idealist, here the solipsism and the egalitarianism is so profound, unrealist, and anti-natural as to amount to wholehearted décadence and turning away from life.

Although Jesus does not exhibit the instincts of ressentiment in his teachings, Nietzsche believes that the Messiah’s message nonetheless marks a violation of the ‘pathos of distance’, corrupting and making it ill. It hence reeks of the “smell” of décadence. After all, Christ sought to abolish “any distance between God and man” for the sake of an internal contentment to be found in the present and immediate happiness of the soul—a glad tiding.\textsuperscript{379} Nietzsche provides his own explicit exegesis for the phrase:

\textsuperscript{378} AC, §40
\textsuperscript{379} AC, §33
What are the ‘glad tidings’? That the true life, the eternal life has been found—it is not just a promise, it exists, it is in each of you: as a life of love, as a love without exceptions or rejections, without distance. Everyone is a child of God—Jesus did not claim any special privileges—as a child of God, everyone is equal to everyone else . . .

And thus, contrary to Renan’s account of Jesus as ‘hero’ and ‘genius’, Nietzsche contends that Jesus’s antipathy for (world-engaging) struggle/agon and (external) resistance on top of his profoundly egalitarian stance would make Christ the prototypical antihero: “the concept of hero” is by very definition “unevangelic” (unevangelisch), an anathema to the ‘evangel’ (Evangelium). If anything, to be heroic (which in Nietzsche’s Homeric definition is closely associated with courageous action and reverence for hierarchy and ‘distinctions’ as the building blocks of genuine aristocracy), one must precisely become “anti-Christ”—and so Nietzsche does.

Jesus’ aims notwithstanding, however, the Christian Church—the creation of Paul—ensured the an overturning of these glad teachings and happy thoughts in which, as an “example of world-historical irony”, mankind “knelt down before the opposite of the origin, the meaning, and the claim [Recht] of the evangel [in the gospels], [such] that in the concept of ‘church’, humanity canonized the very thing the ‘bearer of glad tidings’ felt to be beneath him, behind him”. True Christianity was not a set of beliefs, a faith, a religion, let alone an imposition of Truth or even concerned with matters such as ‘consciousness’—it was above all a practicum. Paul’s invented fantasy of turning Jesus into a special kind of saint and Messiah, an innocent martyr for humanity’s ‘sins’ akin to barbarian “guilt sacrifice”, the story of the ‘savior who died on the cross’ transformed into myth and belief (as the only child of God even), signifies for

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380 AC, §29 (‘distance’ is my italicization)
381 AC, §29
382 AC, §36
383 AC, §39
384 AC, §41
Nietzsche a “progressively cruder misunderstanding of the original symbolism” of Jesus’ teaching of ‘subjective redemption’ in spite of it all: it is this egalitarian and utopian symbolism which ultimately dies with Christ on that cross and also becomes plebian and lowbrow—the original heresy and vulgarization of the ‘glad tidings’ corrupted with the fallacious doctrines of resurrection and “personal immortality” as ultimate promise and reward.\footnote{AC, §37, §41}

Whereas Jesus’ movement was indeed a ‘spiritual’ and geistig form of populism which sanctioned egalitarianism (given its egalitarian take on apotheosis as a subjective experience which aimed at bringing about personal spiritual transformation), Paul’s counter-movement was dependent on a ‘socio-cultural’ populism (betting on and abusing the ressentimental pathos in the disenfranchised public to achieve a new domination). As such, both predated and anticipated the political populism and democratism that becomes commonplace in Modernity. Moreover, with Paul, suffering could no longer be recognized as a priori to life (the given in Buddhistic and Christly teachings), it was now an a posteriori that needed an explanation and justification. In Paul’s Christianity, the eradication of the will, a legacy of the antecedent existentialism of Christ, was supplanted by a ‘will to nothingness’ (the ideal, a relic of Socratic philosophy, coming together with the negative ‘ascetic will’ of the Jews and the Stoics). Accordingly, owing to Paul, both the ‘will’ and ‘the suffering’ were elucidated and saved in terms of a false meaning, a fateful development that would only delay the ultimate reckoning/confrontation for the West (which in Nietzsche’s mind was bound to occur as a natural reaction to the ‘glad tidings’ if they were left to stand alone so that their décadent effects could be felt). Nevertheless, as far as Nietzsche is concerned, both these stances (existentialist and idealist) are invalid, degenerating, and unlifeful (especially given their noxious effects on willing). For, ultimately, Nietzsche found Jesus’ glad
teachings to mean that not just death but life itself was also beneath and behind him—the Evangel was thus the first historic instantiation of the fully décadent type in the West: the original preacher of Western Buddhism.\footnote{For Nietzsche’s interpretation of the symbolism of the cross as ‘wretchedness’, consult \textit{AC}, §51.} Paul’s version, meanwhile, was similarly problematic for it signified the consummation of the ‘ascetic Ideal’.

Nietzsche’s proposed genealogy of Christianity comes on the heels of such varying investigations into the life of historical Jesus as the ones provided by Schleiermacher, Renan, and David Strauss—energized by the new historical approaches of the Tubingen school of Theology—and he belongs on the same terrain.\footnote{The context for these debates was of course the rationalist and empirical approaches in the interpretation of the life and history of Jesus. Despite his attacks on Strauss’ secular philosophy and philosophy of history in the first \textit{UM}, Nietzsche seems to be quite influenced by Strauss’ (and the Tubingen School’s) historical interpretation of Jesus in his proposed gulf between the historical Jesus and the Messianic Jesus of the Christian church.} Nietzsche’s distinctive account is one of viewing Jesus’s teachings as a recipe for an apolitical way of life—a praxis, and one where the abolishing of the Rabbinic church is only the secondary and incidental aftereffect of the movement’s realization of radical subjectivity and solipsism eliminating all middlemen, including the clergy. This apolitical ‘practicum’ (of the evangel) is essentially co-opted and politicized by Paul (the dysangel) to energize his rebellion against the Roman elites, so Nietzsche’s account goes, with the calamitous effect of substituting one set of priests for another, instead of what would have been the complete destruction of the entire priestly enterprise and the ecclesiastical institution as a whole. This of course is Nietzsche’s distinctive contribution to the interpretation of Jesus’s life and project, and here it is not my aim to argue whether he is correct in his posited history of Jesus and Christianity but only to clarify what is distinctive about his argument and why this is foundational to his account of Modernity and his (life) philosophy overall.\footnote{In fact, contrary to the Nietzschean position, quite a few recent scholars have focused exclusively on what they see as Jesus’ uniquely political (even non-theologically so) project—that of securing Judean independence from Rome or at least to secure a level of autonomy for the Jewish people to be led not by the Jewish church but by the Jesus movement, itself a politicization of the Essenic cult. For such differing accounts see, Professor James Tabor’s \textit{The}}
In the Nietzschean account, Jesus serves as the archetype for as well as a warning about what happens (i.e., the consequences for life) when a décadent type comes to live and preach a life beyond good and evil. In the hands of Christ, the will to power and agency is castrated and then left for extinction. Had it not been for Paul, we in the West would have had to confront the repercussions of will-lessness that Christ bestowed upon us much earlier. With Paul’s false inventions (meant to animate his own negative priestly will to power), this confrontation was delayed by almost two thousand years. This is the source of Nietzsche’s profound hostility to Paul. Yet, all is not lost. With the Enlightenment, Nietzsche believes, the Pauline fantasy is effectively finished, the chickens having come home to roost. This time however we cannot afford to dither; we must cure ourselves from the degenerative condition of will-lessness or be left to perish as a civilization. Nietzsche’s is a realistic, albeit grim, picture; and yet, it is one highlighting a profound possibility for a do-over and reprieve. In this light, let us now examine the consequences of the Enlightenment for Christianity more closely.

The Poison Absent the Chalice: Enlightenment, Christianity, and Morality—Nietzsche Contra Kant

Nietzsche has a peculiar and distinctive view of the Enlightenment as one of unfulfilled potential, an opportunity lost vis-à-vis values. He equally problematizes the fixation on abstract and autonomous reason on the part of many Enlightenment thinkers. Yet, the true essence and power of the Enlightenment in the Nietzschean account lies not in its obsession with rationality with which most other critics of the Enlightenment such as MacIntyre are primarily concerned, but

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instead in its promise of \textit{revaluation} by virtue of its salutary anti-religious and anti-theological drive. The fact that this potential remains \textit{unrealized} in Modern times is a result of the movement going astray, derailed and distorted by other corrupt and unhealthful elements in its program, namely its blind \textit{faith} in ‘disembodied reason’ as a categorical, absolute, and binding universal. Its shortcoming and intellectual \textit{weakness} in this respect, Nietzsche believes, is best epitomized by Immanuel Kant. In preserving the moral dimension of the ascetic ideal from the onslaught of (incipient) Enlightenment \textit{honesty}, Kant personifies for Nietzsche the figure of a \textit{moralist} par excellence and one succumbing to the power of the \textit{ideal} yet again. “Germans are idealists”, proclaims Nietzsche, adding:

\begin{quote}
Just when an honest, unambiguous, perfectly scientific mentality had been achieved, through immense bravery and self-overcoming, the Germans were twice able to find ways to creep back to the old ‘ideal’, to reconcile [the \textit{Enlightenment’s secular quest for}] truth and ‘ideal’, [both of which were] basically formulas for a right to reject science, for a right to \textit{lie}. Leibniz and Kant—the two greatest impediments to Europe’s intellectual honesty! \textsuperscript{389} \\
\end{quote}

Unfortunately, from Nietzsche’s standpoint, it is in Kant’s image that the Enlightenment ultimately solidifies as an ideology, and in the process to become a chief cornerstone of the Modern paradigm.

To recount our previous discussion, Christianity, as crystalized under Paul, is to Nietzsche the most pernicious (life-denying and world-escaping) form of idealism married to a most life- and-body-despising re sentiential praxis of unconditional asceticism, working to \textit{devalue} life wholly and completely by supplying mankind with its particularly sickly breed of ethics (based on the "ascetic ideal") devised to \textit{inhibit} human will ing, an ‘ethics as such’ which contemporaries call \textit{Morality}. In this account, the hope and promise of the original Lumières such as Voltaire was that the reign of Christian belief and morality in particular and metaphysics in general would be ended

\textsuperscript{389} \textit{EH}, III (‘WC’, §3) [Large translation].
via recourse to reason. Yet, this promise or at the very least the axiological implications of the Enlightenment, if not its ontological and epistemological aims, was betrayed, Nietzsche stressed, in the hands of none other than Immanuel Kant. Therefore, despite the influence that Kant (or neo-Kantian thought) had on Nietzsche’s own intellectual development, the mature Nietzsche comes into his own as a particularly anti-Kantian figure.

Nietzsche suggests that during the early modern period, the will to Truth and certainty vestige of the Socratic element in Christianity was increasingly accentuated; and, once it was secularized and liberated in the aftermath of the Reformation, this impulse was sublimated into science invigorating the Scientific Revolution. This scientific turn toward realism and materialism would be the source of Christianity’s downfall, because it made Christianity seem unreal and fantastical: the Socratic will to truth, as an ouroboros swallowing its own tail, eating away at the very semiotic foundation of Christianity, exposing it as a nihilistic ideology (cf. “theoretical nihilism” and “will to Nothingness”)—as anti-nature. In this apocalyptic exposé lay the seeds (and the spirit) of the Enlightenment. With the dawn of the Enlightenment, it appeared that the erroneous and unhealthy ‘meaning as such’ formula that had made possible the Christian paradigm of meaning was finally rejected as false with that entire paradigm revealed to be an unnatural counterfeit of actual reality. The logical next step, according to Nietzsche, would have been to challenge also the normative paradigm of Christianity (i.e., Morality), to overcome those underpinning values that normalized and socialized the Christian cast of mind within the herd and were themselves maintained and made sensical and intelligible by the other-worldly and idealistic (which is to say nihilistic) Christian meaning scheme (which had now been rejected). Nietzsche believed this normative contestation—instigating a most thorough and extensive revaluation—provided the last and most crucial piece of the puzzle, a long-awaited panacea for the many ills.
Christianity had inflicted on the West. And yet, to his anger and dismay, Nietzsche found that the Morality that had for eons prolonged Christianity’s will to power, serving as its very poisonous kernel and masquerading as the sole system of ethics possible, was still on safe and protected ground, with ethics not at all undergoing its own sublimation and displacement or otherwise close to transposal, sublation, and revaluation (which in Nietzsche’s mind entails supersession of the now-ascertained inferior and obsolete morality of Chandala by a radically different normative system centered on a neo-aristocratic rendition of virtù to be conceived by the creative visionary Übermensch whose life-affirming “will to power” demands such revaluation out of instinctual and visceral necessity—i.e., a “revaluation of all values” according to a novel re-envisioning of the aristocratic ‘ethics for life’ formula).

Kant had fatefuly prevented this final unraveling of the Christian Gordian knot, preserving Morality. A case of circular logic and false scientism, Kantian moral theory attempts to provide a justification for ‘ancien morality’ not through religion and its now antiquated theological/metaphysical semiotics but rather via reason as a regulating and objective force of nature. Kant’s “rational” individuation and reductionism of Morality made it possible for moral values to persist more or less unchanged in the post-Enlightenment era, this time justified as absolute and categorical imperatives of reason (in individual rational agents autonomously accessing the universals) rather than as universals sanctioned by divine reason or will (cf. commandments). What is changed with Kant is the methodology for arriving at the universal moral imperatives, not their substance and orientation. The normative picture offered by Kant is still the by-now-familiar ‘morality as such’ directed against life. Thus, Kantian Transcendental Idealism successfully and cunningly sustains (Christian) Morality as a universal maxim (albeit temporarily). Kant’s “categorical imperative” scheme, it turns out, is no other than the rationalization of the
Golden Rule. Nietzsche’s judgement on Kant is harsh and unequivocal: “The [shallow] instinct that is wrong about [or lacks grasp of] everything, anti-nature as instinct, German décadence as philosophy—this is Kant!”  

Nietzsche judges all ethics which claim to possess an “in-itself” and categorically-binding character, which carry a sense of “the impersonal and universally valid”, as mere “fantasies and manifestations of decline, of the final exhaustion of life, of the Konigsberg Chinesianity”, a totalistic and absolutist form of control/domination. While Nietzsche does not deny the value a life-serving system of ethics and duty has for culture, he sharply objects to the universalization and abstraction of the concrete particular ethics embedded and grounded in a culture into an absolute conception of duty—into ‘morality as such’. He argues that peoples and nations perish when they confuse their own unique sense of duty and ethics (as one perspective on values among many others) with that of duty as such and morality in general for all of human race: “that to each [people] its own virtue” is the basic law of preservation and growth of cultures.  

Values are “personal” to cultures and concrete in (praxis of) peoples, so they are never categorical and always conditional. Naturally and empirically speaking, nothing is or ever could be (substantively) categorical where Nietzsche is concerned. In fact, this is part of the thrust of the Nietzschean critique of Modernity: that Modernity, as a synthesis of the universalizing (Kantian) strand of the Enlightenment and its antithesis in romantic subjectivism, loses touch with the precious center and focal point that is embodied in culture, the medium where values are effectively embedded, animated, and concretized in everyday practice.

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390 AC, §11
391 Ibid.
392 AC, §11: “dass Jeder sich seine Tugend, seinen kategorischen Imperativ erfinde”: that each devise its virtue for itself, its own categorical imperative.”
The price to be paid for this earth-shattering piece of miscalculation on Kant’s part, of saving the (normative) poison and jettisoning the (semiotic) grail, was an opening of the floodgates to worthlessness and meaninglessness in the West, a senseless and absurd existence for Western man unleashed by the theoretical nihilism at the heart of Christianity. The reason for this is that it was not the whole of the Christian paradigm that was repudiated, so the ‘paradigm shift’ was interrupted and remained incomplete. After all, the Christian meaning scheme had proved nihilistic/futile and its authority no longer felt binding—it was practically extinct (cf. “God is dead, and we have killed him”). And yet, its equally exhausted normative structure, the morality which both underpinned the Christian worldview and was semiotically nourished and sustained by it, was inexplicably safeguarded. Our current state therefore is not one of valuelessness or even ‘value-anarchy’ and ethical nihilism: it is not that we in Modernity do not know what is normatively expected of us, our so-called ‘moral responsibility’ (cf. human rights), but instead that following the collapse of the Christian meaning architecture or at least its semiotic and epistemological authority over us, we can no longer positively assert (let alone be sure of) the meaning and purpose behind these Christian moral values which we nevertheless continue to mindlessly and robotically, albeit secularly, uphold—a case of reductio ad absurdum. Our issue now is why we should abide this particular set of normative commitments and to what end; and our failure to address and resolve this problematic in a timely fashion could produce not just radical relativism, ethical subjectivism, and solipsism (in line with the valuelessness against which MacIntyre and Strauss warn), but an exhaustive and pervasive sense of despair and worthlessness about life as such, resulting in complete resignation, passivity, and “practical nihilism” (i.e., willlessness)—or, existential nihilism. To avoid such a miserable fate, it is thus imperative that the free-minded amongst us attend to the value conundrum without delay and, seeking once more healthful and
life-directed meaning, beget the “revaluation of all values”, a grand task coinciding and commencing with the recreation of meaning in terms horizoned by life.

According to Nietzsche, Kant’s “categorical imperative” effectively places the rational law (which turns out to be same as the moral law) over self and thus blatantly interferes with and inhibits the crucial process of self-discovery and overcoming the free-minded genius types must go through in order to claim their mantle as the Übermenschen! The categorical imperative has two fundamental problems in Nietzsche’s estimation. First, it is ‘categorical’ and wills universality, suffocating the diversity of thought and the creative plurality which the sui generis great men of history embody. Second, it is an imperative and thus absolute, denying the very possibility of becoming, transformation and evolution (for both culture and self) from inception. As an interesting aside, Nietzsche’s negative assessment of Kant generally parallels the MacIntyrean critique of the Enlightenment in general and of Kant in particular, albeit with different conclusions.

Nietzsche is adamant that so far “all philosophers were building under the seduction of morality, even [the supposedly non-metaphysical philosopher] Kant—that they were apparently aiming at certainty, at 'truth', but in reality [they sought] 'majestic moral structures'”\(^ {393}\). Therefore, Nietzsche would agree with MacIntyre that Kant attempted to put morality on secure rational ground, or in Kant’s own words, “to level and make firm the ground for these majestic moral structures”\(^ {394}\), and similar to MacIntyre, Nietzsche argues that one “would have to admit today that he [Kant] did not [ultimately] succeed in doing that [task], quite the contrary!”\(^ {395}\). Besides, following the Enlightenment, even the pretense of having found certainty and truth is no longer

\(^ {393}\) *Daybreak*, Preface, §3
\(^ {394}\) *Critique of Pure Reason*, II, p. 257
\(^ {395}\) *Daybreak*, Preface, §3
viable or defensible. *The game is up*, so to speak. For in Nietzsche’s view, the spirit of the Enlightenment itself, correctly understood, had already begun “to prove that all understanding, by its very nature, is *limited* and conditional, thereby rejecting decisively [even] the claim of science to universal validity and universal goals”, let alone morality.\(^{396}\) Ironically, Kantian agnosticism proves this much.

From Kantian philosophy then, what is salutary and must be recovered (and Nietzsche does in many regards) is its *non-metaphysical* and *naturalist* epistemology. Absolute universal knowledge in all things is a thing of the past—a Socratic *fiction* product of a naïve optimism. This would preclude also the pretense to any absolute universal knowledge in morality. Nothing could claim to be absolute or categorical any longer. For owing to the Enlightenment and indeed Kantian epistemology, Nietzsche believes, the West has not only killed God but has also rid itself of those alluring *beautiful* sirens—*aeternae veritates*, no longer possessing “the same naive confidence and conviction that its foundations are eternally valid.”\(^{397}\)

For Nietzsche, Kant amounted to a death sentence on the promise of the Enlightenment, since with Kantian doctrine, “a hidden path [a backstairs] to the old ideal lay open; the concept of a *true* world', the concept of morality as the *essence* of the world (the two most vicious errors in existence!) were once again (thanks to an exceedingly canny skepticism), if not provable, then at least no longer *refutable* . . . Reason, the *right* of reason, does not extend that far . . . Reality was made into 'mere appearance' [while] a complete lie [about a false world] called 'the world of being' was made into a reality . . . Kant's success is just a theologian’s success…”\(^{398}\) This further articulates Nietzsche’s conviction “that among almost all peoples, the philosopher [has become]  

\(^{396}\) *BT*, §18  
\(^{397}\) Ibid.  
\(^{398}\) *AC*, §10
just a further development of the priestly type,”—an occasion of the décadent types falling “for their own counterfeiting/self-deceptions.” 399 This also explains Nietzsche’s animus against the modern Germans. In the Nietzschean framework after all, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and Romanticism form the holy trinity of evil and décadence feeding into Modernity, the consummation for each of which occurs with a German who manages to save the life-hating Christian morality in a different way. Luther, of course, is the protector and savior of the Law as a matter of faith and will. Kant’s transcendental idealism rationalizes the divine law. And finally, and perhaps most crucially for us Moderns today, Wagner’s romanticism, put in philosophical terms by Schopenhauer, naturalizes and pathologizes these laws as innate conscience and sympathy—a pathos of universal love, compassion, pity, and altruism. Alas, laments Nietzsche, Christian décadence is continually, through different strategies and essentially preserved up to our age.

Not only Kant but all idealists and décadents Nietzsche likens to spiders (Spinne) who continuously spin the web of lies with which they imprison their victims—human beings—suffocating life out of them until they are either castrated in this miserable world of the ideal or are themselves transformed into lie-spinning spiders. Nietzsche thinks that by giving voice to the grim reality of the Enlightenment being spoiled and derailed and by making his readers conscious of its causes in moralism and idealism, a few might finally set their sights on altering our course and correcting it (a process already begun with Nietzsche himself). Such a transformation could only occur however as the manifestation of a new kind of “conscience” with a fresh voice which, correctly conceived, would no longer be an ally to morality: as Nietzsche’s late confidant Georg Brandes interprets the Nietzschean stance in a contemporary essay, “the difficulty” with moral

399 AC, §12
positions such as those advanced by Kant “is that we [today] have a conscience behind our conscience, an intellectual one behind the moral.” At long last, Morality finds “conscience”, that is our intellectual honesty and integrity of spirit, against itself. This is the only truly positive legacy of the Enlightenment, and this Nietzsche seeks to use in facing the crisis of Modernity.

The Modern State of Meaning: Western Nihilism and the Reign of a New Décadence

Schopenhauerian Pessimism of Weakness and Resignation vs. Dionysian Pessimism of Strength and Action

Nietzsche finds the West already in the midst of an until-recently undetected and “unconscious” theoretical nihilism, with which unknowingly it has been grappling since the times of Socrates and Plato and most consequentially from the advent of Christianity. It was the Enlightenment’s major achievement to make people in the West conscious of their ideational nihilism and will to Nothingness, so that their belief in a beyond, in metaphysics—in nihil—could at last be exposed and discarded. And yet, the greatest peril—the crisis of our time—is that this realization is so profound and so shocking that it has the potential to make all existence feel as though it is naught (nihil) and for naught and entirely empty. This, Nietzsche forewarns, is passive nihilism: a feeling of resignation, fatalism, and despair at the prospect of losing “the” justification for life (deeming it the only possible meaning), which in turn gives rise to the kind of inaction, apathy, and passivity Nietzsche calls practical nihilism. Here, human will and agency go the same way human belief has gone in the West—toward being worthless and expunged. What ultimately

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causes this willlessness is not only our current Modern state of meaninglessness (post-Enlightenment), but our ‘pessimism of weakness and resignation’ about confronting this dreadful condition, inhibiting the creation of new healthy and life-affirming meaning and value.

We, the last men of Modernity, have inherited our stained past. From the ascetic ideal, we have obtained nausea at the sight of man and his animal sensuality—reminiscent of Socrates, the ancient cynics, and Pauline ressentiment: in their image, we were bred in theoretical nihilism and glorification of morality. From the evangel and the romantic pessimists, we inherited a pity for man—the fictitious, imaginary idea that the goal of life is or else must be compassion as the only means of escaping its pains, and that other than this we must turn away from life altogether—bequeathing to us practical nihilism. The Modern crisis is to Nietzsche nothing but the confluence of these two degenerative forces, resulting in complete nihilism in toto—the greatest “danger of all dangers”, in inaction, exhaustion, passivity, inertia, total infirmity.

As it stands, we fully deserve our eerie present. In the fallout from the Enlightenment’s rejection of Paul’s metaphysics and his doctrine of (self-immortalizing) salvation, two alternatives presented themselves, given our lack of imagination and free spirit: one was a return to that Christly Buddhism whose fire was almost extinguished by Paul (the romantic path) and the other the secularization of the Christian idea of teleology and predestination and its sublimation into a historical teleology immanent in the idea of progress (the path chosen by most utilitarians and liberals). Both Nietzsche regarded as cop-outs and in continuity with our Christian past. Nietzsche posits that our Modern sense of cynicism and weak pessimism coupled with our devotion to the doctrine of egalitarianism could only ignite the fires of practical nihilism, effectively turning us all into secular Nazarenes (cf. existentialists), leaving us with no actual will at all and spelling the death of European culture. And yet, after Nietzsche, there is hope. Whereas before we could not
think creatively and freely outside the box (of our current civilization) and deviate from its narrative, with Nietzsche’s distinctive brand of skepticism and perspectivism and his genealogical exposition of our past, a new age of free-mindedness can at last be seen just over the horizon. We can see a third way and could yet come to redeem ourselves and our culture.

In light of Nietzsche’s illuminating of the West’s once vibrant, healthful, and life-ascending archaic and Dionysian past (revived from a remote and forgotten chapter of Western history at its onset in archaic and Mycenean Greece), we finally possess that alternative, a concrete period to access as an exemplar and spiritual inspiration in our revaluation. Accordingly, our only chance is to re-empower a healthy form of pessimism of strength and courage—this is what the Dionysian spirit requires. Thus, Nietzsche believes not only that the West is struggling with a profound crisis, but also that it is at a crossroads finally having to choose which path to follow out of the crisis: the archaic Dionysian road inspired by a courageous pessimism that seeks to fully affirm life or that of Modern romantic pessimism that is too weak to overcome the crisis and wishes to escape. Nietzsche conceives this choice a binary, only one part of which holds the promise of a cure. Age-old pessimism of strength, modeled on ancient practices, Nietzsche is confident, will prove to be the only worthwhile path for the future and also the only one illuminating that future.

What is more, in Nietzsche’s account, adopting a healthy skeptical and critical stance toward metaphysics and pretenses of ‘being’ turns any honest critic into a kind of nihilist—certainly an epistemological kind if not an axiological one. Yet, the question remains as to how one is to apply and make use of his newly-dawned nihilistic perspective. For Nietzsche, there actually exist two variants of nihilism, one active and salutary, the other passive and stultifying. These two approaches to nihilism stem from different attitudes toward pessimism. Although, according to Nietzsche, pessimism is a quality to be celebrated, he distinguishes between a
pessimism of strength, which attempts to overcome the inherent nihilism stemming from the reality of suffering and chaos in nature by means of sheer will power, and a pessimism of weakness which resigns itself to (teleological) nihilism and (natural) meaninglessness on an existential level—rejecting the ‘will’ altogether and withdrawing from the world and its senseless suffering in such a manner as to collapse on itself and will no longer (will to inertia). Simply put, it is no longer. It is not that it wills nothingness—a beyond, a metaphysics (a la Paul); the danger now is that the will internalizes the nothingness and itself become nihil. This is the looming danger with Schopenhauer as well as existentialists, that by logical extension, the altruistic or else solipsistic wills, both practically extinguished, come to obliterate the very idea of collective willing and cultural agency—which, from the worldly realist standpoint, is the very essence of human willing.

When Nietzsche speaks of the crisis of European nihilism, it is this kind of existential nihilism that he is envisioning, and it deeply troubles him. In a stark contrast, in the pessimism of courage and virtù that the Dionysian spirit embodies, (epistemological) pessimism is sublimated into action. The possibility of action in the world makes the Dionysian type intrinsically encouraged, preventing him from falling victim to existential pessimism, from resigning himself to the abyss of practical nihilism. The Dionysian type, as pessimistic as he is about the possibility of knowledge and as nihilistic as he is about the question of cosmic purpose and meaning, is saved from the consequences of his existence by means of a belief in the possibility of action and human agency. The opposite of décadent, he is thus a nihilist of a special kind—an active nihilist—who is reprieved and liberated from the subterranean titanic forces of existence through his acts, while in his mind he fully accepts the totality of these tyrannical forces of nature as a tragic reality of life. The tragic nature, it turns out, is an inherently active one whose defining quality is virtù and agency vis-à-vis tragedy—a disposition that is the sure sign of the Übermensch.
As Nietzsche recounts in *Ecce Homo*, *The Birth of Tragedy* is his account of the Hellenic reaction to pessimism, which is the place wherein he hopes to recover the (early) Hellenes' (cf. Myceneans) particular breed of pessimism—a Dionysian pessimism of courage promising collective cultural (in this case Hellenic) agency which Nietzsche contrasts with the Schopenhauерian pessimism of weakness—for Nietzsche, the hallmark of Romanticism and the heralding of psychological/existential nihilism. The central question there, is how to overcome ontological and existential pessimism, best embodied by Schopenhauer, which Nietzsche believes threatens Western culture in Modernity. Even if there is something salutary in epistemological pessimism (which the early Greeks exhibited), Nietzsche is adamant that the Greek psyche and the Hellenic psychology as a whole were not pessimistic and weak toward life but courageous and life-affirming—they were thoroughly *Dionysian*.\(^{401}\) In Nietzsche’s view, at least before Socrates and his introduction of “Socratic optimism”, the Hellenes were *no* ‘existential’ nihilists: it was after Socrates that the original Hellenic pessimism was supplanted by a peculiar kind of Alexandrian (Classic-Hellenistic)\(^{402}\) cheerfulness derived from Socrates’ optimism about a life and order of nature that would be harmonious and pleasurable *a priori*. This approach was flawed since life as an end-in-itself had been replaced by life as *means* to knowledge. Life (post-Socrates) was of value and worth only because it was a *vehicle* for knowledge and science—so, this was the birthplace of *theoretical* man. This development (or rather *devolution*) was a mark of decay for it *psychologized* nihilism, ushering in existential pessimism.\(^{403}\) It is first in *BT* that Nietzsche, in a

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\(^{401}\) *EH*, III, “The Birth of Tragedy”, §1

\(^{402}\) For Nietzsche, ancient Hellenic culture can be divided to two parts with the coming of Socrates: an archaic, Homeric, mythic Hellas separated with Socrates from a rational, classical, and Alexandrian Hellenism. Alexandrian Greek encompasses what modern classicists reference as the Classic and the Hellenistic periods of Greece.

\(^{403}\) Nietzsche saw Alexandrian Greece (the Classical and Hellenistic periods in aggregate) as the direct antecedent of our current Western Modernity within “a single historical continuum”—as an older Modernity: In “Our Alexandrian Culture” (*BT* §18), Nietzsche writes. “‘Alexandrian Culture’ *just is* Modernity, and it is ‘our’ Modernity”. See James I. Porter, “Nietzsche’s Radical Philology”, in *Nietzsche as a Scholar of Antiquity*, ed. Anthony K. Jensen and Helmut Heit, (Bloomsbury Studies in Philosophy, 2014), p.42. For a more comprehensive view of the influence
rather Hegelian fashion (to his own acknowledgment), conceives of the idea of *destructive creation*—epitomized and empowered by the Dionysian-Apollonian antagonism sublated into synthesis in *tragedy*—as the formative force in cultural transformation, as the primordial *modus operandi* of culture itself. While Nietzsche later sheds the specifically Hegelian formulation and presentation of his “innovations” in more mature writings, the central premise communicated in his distinctive understanding of the Dionysian and Socratic phenomena—*destructive creation* as foundational to culture and cultural metamorphosis and the idea of Socrates as an archetypical *décadent*—doggedly persists.\(^{404}\)

Nietzsche asks, “what meaning does *our* being have, if it were not that the will to truth has become conscious of itself as a problem in us” (modern physicians of culture and philosophers of the future), stirring our (epistemologically) nihilistic instinct?\(^{405}\) Suggestive of disillusionment with life or with the existing paradigm of meaning, this kind of nihilism (i.e., epistemological nihilism) to Nietzsche is a routine and “normal phenomenon” which occurs at times of great transformation where the old values acquire the potential of being supplanted or risk being abandoned entirely with nothing put in their place. As such, nihilism “can be a symptom of increasing strength or of increasing weakness”.\(^{406}\) Nihilism is volatile and “ambiguous”, Nietzsche points out, for how a culture copes with it can either lead to a state of permanent despair, dejection, and ultimately suicide or bestow future health, joy, and life. Thus, the positive connotations of the term *nihilism* for Nietzsche suggest what one would today call “healthy

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\(^{404}\) *EH*, III, “The Birth of Tragedy”, §1: Socrates and his rationality, Nietzsche declares in a celebratory tone, “recognized for the first time as an instrument of Greek [cultural] Dissolution. ‘Rationality’ against instinct” of culture. Socratism recognized as “in the most profound sense nihilistic, whereas in the Dionysian symbol the outermost limit of affirmation is reached.” (Duncan Large Translation)

\(^{405}\) *GM*, III. §27

\(^{406}\) *WP*, §585B
skepticism”, in line with an intellectual application of his otherwise socioculturally-employed notion of “pathos of distance”. Conversely, when Nietzsche uses nihilism pejoratively as he often does, it conjures up the familiar sense of the term as “hopeless” and “despondent” or otherwise “sickened with life”. The fact that Nietzsche seems to be so entirely captivated by the notion of nihilism reflects perhaps a deeply personal connection. Nietzsche confesses that he was Europe’s “first perfect Nihilist”; but, as he dispensed with Romanticism and its version of “weak pessimism”, he also went “through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself.”. As he aged and overcame himself, Nietzsche came to also outline the Schopenhauerian and Wagnerian romantic nihilism (toward existence) from whose well he once drew inspiration. That water was poison—Nietzsche had come to learn—causing grave sickness, a perfect existential form of nihilism. Moreover, from his well-drinking days, Nietzsche had wisely, luckily only kept and remembered his thirst. Accordingly, he now aspired to a countermovement (a revaluation of all values) distinctively and unequivocally “counter-ideal”, galvanized against all the evils of nihilism—in fact “a movement that in some future will [and could] take the place of this perfect nihilism.”.

In the later Nietzschean formulation, ‘pessimism of weakness’ is a substitute for that “romantic pessimism to interpret and inflate individual personal experiences into universal judgements and, indeed, into condemnations of the world” with which Nietzsche had for a time himself struggled—it is the “pessimism of weariness with life”, of renunciation. Having become conscious of its fallacy and mind-numbing effects, Nietzsche then “turned [his]

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407 WP, Preface, 3
408 EH, III, “The Genealogy of Morality”
409 WP, Preface, 4
410 Human All Too Human, Vol. II, Preface, § 5
perspective around” in order to hear the calling of his task, which he regarded as “the greatest of life’s gifts”, as what ultimately makes one’s life feel meaningful and worthwhile. Against this negative romantic pessimism of despair and resignation which Nietzsche elsewhere calls the “danger of all dangers”, Nietzsche espouses the version of pessimism he names Dionysian, “baptizing” it with a distinctive “will to tragedy” and “will to strength”, a will which has “no fear of the fearful and the questionable [or the uncertain] that characterizes all existence”.

In addition to his various pronouncements on the forms of pessimism, Nietzsche invariably treats optimism and idealism (the hallmarks of 18th century Europe) as examples of escapism, laziness, forgetfulness, cowardice, and denial of reality—of intellectual dishonesty for the sake of deceptive convenience, which foreshadow what he saw as the coming of the human type he calls the “Last Man”, the direct offspring of theoretical nihilism. He states: “there might actually be puritanical fanatics of conscience who prefer even a certain nothing to an uncertain something to lie down on—and die. But this is nihilism and symptomatic of a desperate soul in the state of deadly exhaustion, however brave the posturing of such a virtue may seem.” Yet, given our precarious situation in Modernity where the very notions of willing and agency are undermined and neutered by mainstream philosophers and members of the Modern intelligentsia, Nietzsche regards such “desperate souls” willing certain “nothing-ness” as a second order threat to the health of the West compared to the (perhaps more dangerous) acolytes of romantic passive form of

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411 Human All Too Human, Vol. II, Preface, § 5
412 Ibid, §7; Also see GS, §370 where Nietzsche describes Schopenhauer and Wagner as the standard-bearers for the romantic pessimism of weakness: “there are two types of sufferers: first, those who suffer from a superabundance of life—they want a Dionysian art as well as a tragic outlook and insight into life; then, those who suffer from an impoverishment of life and seek quiet, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and insight, or else intoxication, paroxysm, numbness, madness. All romanticism in art and in knowledge fits the dual needs of the latter type, as did (and do) Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner, to name the most famous and prominent romantics...”.
413 The “last men” are in effect the children of capitalism who distract themselves of the inconvenient and hard truths “the death of god” ushers by retreating into the fabricated world of money, work, and vanity and that greatest of Modern myths called progress. This, Nietzsche believes, is (psychological) “repression” par excellence.
414 BGE, §10 (translation slightly altered)
nihilism, in whom he found a corrosive and neurotic form of nihilism which, instigated and spurred by the ‘pessimism of weakness’, would believe ‘non-existence’ to be preferable to existence! Nietzsche vehemently rejects the philosophy of passive resignation and the impulse to withdraw from life that the likes of Schopenhauer preach, calling them décadent (more on which below). In hailing pessimism, Nietzsche praises the intellectual honesty and the free-minded, skeptical, and mistrustful attitude which he considers chief attributes of any genuine ‘physician of culture’ and vital to a positive Wille zur Macht (i.e., human agency) and meaning-creation. For the sickly and romantic kind of pessimism, however, he only has contempt, insisting that in the kind of pessimism he (Nietzsche) advocates, “we take care not to say that the world is worth less!” The strong and courageous pessimists of the Nietzschean order are not overwhelmed by the intrinsic terror and meaninglessness of the world; rather, they declare a loud and triumphant ‘yes’ to the world in all its horrors (and joys), overcoming the terrible in life in the spirit of the ‘highest affirmation’. A holistic and high-minded affirmation of life “without reservation even of suffering”, of tragedy and pain, “even of all that is strange and questionable in existence”—this is what saying “yes to life” entails for Nietzsche.

Décadence and its Different Forms

Nietzsche’s writings are full of references to décadent thinkers, décadent philosophies, and the notion of décadence itself. To unpack what Nietzsche means by décadence, we must first underscore what décadence is not. “Décadence”, a foreign word which appears in Nietzsche’s

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416 *GS*, Book Five, §346
417 *EH*, “Birth of Tragedy”, §2
German prose verbatim, does not simply mean ‘excess’ in Nietzsche’s usage, as it commonly does in English. As a trained philologist, Nietzsche is fond of using non-German words to convey concepts he feels are lacking or not well-expressed in the German language. It follows that when he uses these foreign terms, they almost always have a technical philosophical significance to him. In this case, décadence is a French term meaning decay and decline; and both physiological and cultural decline, as we have seen, are of particular interest to Nietzsche as a “physiologist” and “Physician” of culture who claims to have successfully diagnosed the West and detected the causes behind the decline in the health of the Western culture. What is more, for Nietzsche, the notion of decline is always connected to his other profound idea—that of the will. Indeed, Nietzsche believes that cultural decline and civilizational crises arise from major decays in and negations of the powers of willing (especially in those individuals whose natural and biological task is to project their wills onto acts of cultural creation, but who are alienated from their natures due to degenerative social pressures). In this sense, décadence is in one way or another always essentially nihilistic and life-escaping (whether in ‘practice’ by castrating the will or in ‘theory’ by falsifying reality). It is an impulse thoroughly negating of life: indeed, Nietzsche associates the degenerating instinct in culture (the cause for cultural decline) with those human types in whom a décadent nature is the defining characteristic. By natural and physiological décadence, Nietzsche means these persons’ (intrinsic) need for ‘lies’ in order to justify their lack of strength (cf. pessimism of weakness and craven optimism) in encountering the harsh realities of existence—to justify their “cowardice and flight from [this] reality [into the realm of] the ‘ideal’."

It is in this light that Nietzsche condemns Plato, Christianity (of both Paul and Christ), and Schopenhauer as all smelling of decay.

\[418\] Ibid.
Historically speaking, Nietzsche identifies three main variants of ‘décadence’ in his genealogies of the West. Every form, to a different degree, weakens the Will (i.e., cultural agency) in the West, so that aggregate (spiritual) décadence as well as nihilism (which is its effect) become progressively worsened and more pervasive. Each kind is also represented by a few human archetypes and associated with particular schools of philosophy. The oldest form of the sickness is that exemplified by Socratic and Platonic philosophy in their veneration of abstract Truth and insistence on metaphysical universals. In introducing and deifying the “will to nothingness”, Socrates and Plato were the original décadents in the Western tradition. Their décadence, it is important to note, with its pretense of discovering a “world of forms” transcended the concept of time (especially biological time) and even existence itself due to its highly metaphysical character. In the Nietzschean view, this type of décadence—i.e., “the will to nothingness”—also finds more modern expressions in Paul the Apostle and Martin Luther. Paul and Luther, by means of temporalizing and individualizing this will (with respect to the Beyond and savior) within Christian doctrine, transformed it into a “will to Nothing-ness”, a formula that (as suggested earlier) typifies canonized Christianity. In doing this, each managed to contemporize and thus perpetuate the sickly will inherent in classical philosophy in more modern (and perhaps more familiar to us) Christian forms. As such, they successfully ingrained their nihilistic ‘will to Nothing-ness’ within the powerful idea of a coming salvation in the figure of a part divine, part human redeemer (i.e., Christ as Son of God), and they married it neatly with the notions of sin and guilt. Here, there is an emphasis on future escape and bliss, a ‘world-falsifying’ impulse which both ignites the “ascetic ideal” and is sustained by it. In Nietzsche’s account, to reiterate once more, it is this décadent and nihilistic paradigm (cf. idealistic décadence) that gives rise to the “slave morality” as a mechanism to suppress and control the will (cf. ascetic ideal).
The second type of décadence—*the will to not will*—is passive and *aparaxic*, characterized by Jesus Christ whom Nietzsche likens to a Western Buddha. Both Buddha (intellectually through contemplation—*logos*) and Jesus (affectively through love—*pathos*) epitomize the (infirm) will to completely *surrender* one’s will in hopes of attaining a state of *presential bliss* here and now within the individual seeker himself. A will to *deny* the will and escape the world remains a will nonetheless, albeit a decidedly ailing and destructive ‘world-denying’ will (*a will to abandon*). This type of décadence is similarly temporalized and individualized—its (egalitarian) aim is *apotheosis* for all: after all, it is only God who, by definition, truly transcends the inconvenient and often tragic hustle-bustle of Nature.

The third form of décadence, which is its most Modern formulation and arguably its most noxious and deadly, is ‘will-negating’, leading in time to the disappearance of the concept of the will altogether—the *death* of willing and the *completion* of nihilism. This kind of décadence, Nietzsche believes, is characteristic of Romanticism which, in its entrenched nostalgia and purism, always looks back to a supposedly unadulterated *past*—a *Utopia* (which of course Nietzsche contends never existed nor could it considering the intrinsically ‘tragic’ nature of existence). Schopenhauerian pessimism teaches that there is no escaping life’s suffering and that all suffering is exacerbated, if not espoused, by human willing and desire, so it is best *not to will at all*, not out of a hope for bliss (as Jesus taught) but out of a full resignation to the uncertain and arbitrary power of natural Will. Finding itself utterly *powerless* vis-à-vis existence, this form of (will-negating) décadence inevitably perceives any ‘will to power’ as a threat and hence *denies* it altogether as a matter of expediency. Thus, one can observe in this paradigm a denigration of human willing combined with a reverence for the universal will of Nature (a radical form of determinism). Given the rejection of *theism* and henceforth *apotheosis* in this secular worldview, the best we can hope
for in coping with our futile doomed existence is momentary \textit{respite} from suffering through \textit{enchantment} derived from the aesthetic power of art or the comforting power of sympathy. Unlike Jesus or Buddha, with Schopenhauerian (weak) pessimism, we cannot even presume to \textit{escape} our natural captivity and subservience to the chaotic subterranean forces of nature, so we can only wish for oblivion and amnesia—indeed, "better not to have been born at all".\footnote{Theognis of Megara’s famous words: “Optima sors homini natum non esse...” is quoted by Schopenhauer. Having read Schopenhauer just before writing \textit{BT}, it is no surprise that Nietzsche begins grappling with this age-old wisdom of Silenus and its consequences from the very beginning of his philosophical journey.} Here, at last, the negation of the will finally begets the negation of life; the circle of décadence is completed in \textit{perfect nihilism}.

In Schopenhauer’s characterization of the misery and “burden of existence”, \textit{forgetfulness} rather than \textit{flight} is shown to be our only reprieve. That Schopenhauer recognizes the tragic nature of existence and the inescapability of suffering in life is the reason why Nietzsche originally found him provocative, but his succumbing under the weight of this profound discovery (rather than affirming life in spite of the suffering) is the reason why Nietzsche sneeringly declared him a \textit{pessimist} (of the worst kind) and came to detest all he stands for. This penchant for amnesia/oblivion in the face of existential doom, Nietzsche contends, will soon unravel and eviscerate the whole conception of \textit{willing} (and not just the human will) in the age of the last men of Modernity, whose only religion is obliviousness and material comfort in an otherwise meaningless albeit ‘contented’ existence. The greater catastrophe, from the Nietzschean point of view, is that these Modern people do not even have recourse to \textit{willing}, thus lacking the ability to do what is necessary to remedy their condition of meaninglessness. Their civilization—Western civilization—is thus profoundly ill and nears its impending collapse and death. These last men are...
doomed, for they are sentenced to witness helplessly and angstfully their own demise and disappearance into the abyss.

In Nietzsche’s writings, Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner emerge as the representative figures in philosophy and in the arts respectively of this latest phase of décadence, heralding complete nihilism and ultimate cultural decay. The Romantics are Nietzsche’s representative Modern décadents who have taken Europe to the brink of ruin. To Nietzsche, their romantic idea of nature as innocent and pure, is naïve at best and delusional at worst (Nietzsche’s preferred term for such views and such protagonists is “idiot”, which he witfully borrows from Dostoyevsky’s The Idiot), meaning that they replaced of the benevolent Christian Fatherly God with a benevolent Motherly Nature—a move toward pantheism which is perhaps more of a semantic matter than a semiotic transformation and hence superficial. Both ‘love’ all their children equally and require that we treat one another with the sympathy and compassion we supposedly possess instinctively as “conscience”. Altruism, as it turns out, is nothing but the naturalization of Christian morality (a distinctive form of slave morality), which according to Nietzsche not only contradicts realism and scientific naturalism (overlooking the tragic reality of nature) but has the debilitative consequence of denying the very possibility of human willing and contrivance through its reductionistic instinctivization of morality as a natural phenomenon. As Nietzsche repeatedly pleads with his readers, the consequence of the Romantic position (whether as a loving or as a vengeful irrational Nature), is not “will to nothing-ness” but a more devastating condition of “no will at all”—inducing complete nihilism. And once our will was wholly and completely abrogated, we would have lost our inherent capacity for creative meaning-making in a naturally meaningless world. Our fates are thereby sealed—perpetual meaninglessness as a direct

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420 The Will is free; you are not! This is the teaching of Schopenhauer. Man lacks an independent will which is to say he effectively does not have a will!
consequence of our willlessness and eventual annihilation. This is what “nihilism in toto” spawns: an eerie meaningless existence becoming, at long last, reālis—nulla res nata.

Despite the distinct trajectories of décadent teachings (ideal and aparaxic) in the West embodied by Paul and Christ discussed earlier, in Modernity, both these threads are adjoined and transformed as a synthesis (a synthesis ideālis): on the one hand, Schopenhauer (as the representative Modern philosopher) naturalizes Christianity turning its morality into pity with the Buddhistic denial of oneself redeemed once more through concern for others, thus fashioning a modern (Christian-inspired) Buddhism. On the other, the notion of the beyond, formative to the (Pauline) Christian eschatology and worldview, is (with the help of the modern intellectual) historicized and reified into the fictitious and very Modern eschatology of progress. Meanwhile, living under this erroneous synthesis, the Modern ‘last man’, himself the product of theoretical nihilism in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, internalizes aspects of the glad teachings of Christ (as a false epicureanism), projecting it into an external (albeit phony) life of happiness and utility (toward the fantasy of progress) informed concomitantly by the Pauline deontological morality of rules (cf. Kantian ethics), which hardly offers anything more than vanity and naiveté. Such a confounding synthesis indicates that the morality of the last man is shaped by (what Weber famously calls) ‘instrumental rationality’ as well as ‘value rationality’, with both working to hinder any genuine willing and creation on his (the last man’s) part. If our situation is understood this way, Nietzsche is vindicated, for it suggests that the debilitating life-suffocating structure of the slave morality is reconceived anew and preserved. Despite the veneer of differences (in values) among these groups, then, Nietzsche is clear that on all sides scream the sighs of resignation.

421 This ethical mishmash of utilitarianism and deontology validates the MacIntyrean position as to the polynomous value-condition in Modernity and value anarchy as such, but Nietzsche’s analysis (and this must be stressed) specifically pertains to the average man of Modernity, or the Last Men living under the auspices of the capitalist paradigm.
Valuelessness is not the main cause for concern, but instead a state of willlessness in which we cannot break free from the conjunction of all these false, anti-natural values and reorient (i.e., revalue) our values in accordance with healthful and flourishing principles of life.

It is also important to note that while Nietzsche singles out Paul and the priestly class he fathered (which also extends to Luther and Kant) as his arch-villains in AC, he identifies the optimistic Jesus and his modern incarnation in the pessimistic Schopenhauer (fostering aparaxia) as his arch-nemeses (thus calling himself the Antichrist), for the advent of the Enlightenment in both its ontological and axiological consequences signifies to Nietzsche that the Christian church as we know it will in time unravel. In its wake, the only remaining alternatives for Modern man would be either to embrace Jesus’ unhealthy ‘surrendering of the will’, where “the incapacity of resistance becomes morality” or to champion Nietzsche’s Dionysian and healthful “will to life”—the will to overcome oneself and use one’s ingenious creative will for “culture-making”. With Nietzsche having apparently surpassed his earliest decadent arch-rival, Socrates—the erroneous sage, already in Twilight and by the time of his writing of The Anti-Christ, the “Crucified One”, with his message of this-worldly presentia inner bliss achieved not out of hate and ressentiment but out of love (a teaching adopted by Schopenhauer), is thus recognized in AC as the sole worthy (and relevant) decadent opponent of Nietzsche in the post-metaphysical world made possible by the Enlightenment and as the dangerous and destructive path against which Nietzsche warns.

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422 AC, §28
423 Another reason Nietzsche found Christ a worthier opponent than Socrates, it seems to me, is that the latter was fixated on thought and thought alone—on abstractions, while the former (as Nietzsche makes a point of himself in AC) was focused on practice, seeking to establish a model for practical emulation which better conforms to Nietzsche’s own preoccupation with praxis in what is essentially a variant of pragmatist philosophy.
424 In this sense and in their emphasis on compassion, pity, and altruism as value, Schopenhauer, Tolstoy, and Wagner are all, Nietzsche believes, the Modern disciples of Jesus. Schopenhauer is arguably only more dangerous for he takes Christ’s thought to extreme pessimistic and nihilistic heights (or nadirs) for which perhaps not even Jesus himself was prepared.
While previous forms of décadent nihilism were life-escaping, preferring their illusions (external or internal) to the reality of life, this latest Schopenhauerian version, Nietzsche found, was stridently life-fearing, subverting and negating both willing and life. Nietzsche has no doubt that this dangerous cocktail of degenerate and unhealthy ideals leaves us only with the ‘Last Men’ who, owing to the developments of the 19th century, have forgotten and abandoned willing itself. As such, they come to experience something that the West had long since mastered (in Archaic Greece)—meaninglessness; the difference and the real catastrophe, however, is that these ‘Last Men’ (in marked contrast to the archaic men) remain seemingly content and “happy” in their meaningless existence, celebrating the mundane and the purposeless within their newly-consecrated “religion of comfort” and apathy, stubbornly refusing to face this most primal of demons. To illustrate just how deeply Nietzsche loathed this poor Modern creature, who is but a shadow of a man, the following passage from AC suffices:

There are days when I am haunted by a feeling blacker than the blackest melancholy—contempt of man. And so as to leave no doubt as the what I despise, whom I despise, it is the man of today, the man with whom I am fatefully contemporary. 425

This meaninglessness (coupled with the complacency of the Last Men), Nietzsche believes, will be the cause of his contemporaries’ downfall. . . in the face of which, all other Modern discontents are merely symptoms—symptomatic of the existential dread and weakness of the Last Men in encountering the deadly disease of meaning(lessness) as a direct consequence of their willlessness and (optimistic) apathy. As such, the precarious state of willing ironically represents both a troubling prognosis for Modernity and forms (in its potential corrective) a pivotal part of the rationale in the Nietzschean quest for revaluation—one would be hard-pressed to find a better theoretical illustration of Nietzschean tragedy than in Nietzsche’s account of willing (and its cycles

425 AC, §38
of decline). A visual representation of Nietzsche’s hypothesis as to the historic progression of décadence in the West mindful of his genealogy of *willing* is provided by the graph below.

Signaling a turning away from life out of (instinctual) ‘non-affirmation’, *décadence* turns out to be nothing but a fading of *power* and *will* that coincides with every waning of (healthful) *meaning* (and culture). It has always been man’s intuition that, *limited* as we are, no “honest” and “serious” assessment of our condition could ascribe any inherent meaning and direction to nature as such. In fact, what is common and indeed universal to mankind is our involvement in “meaning-creation” within our different cultures—we are *homo cultus* because we are *homo semioticus* in
the first instance. For millennia in the West (as with peoples elsewhere), we successfully projected our created “man-made” meaning unto nature, making it seem purposeful and meaningful. In the aftermath of the 17th century Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, not only are we more certain than ever that our original intuition regarding the randomness and meaninglessness of nature was correct; but crucially, it now seems even our human arrangements of meaning (in the West if not globally) are expiring. We are thus at a civilizational impasse. Human life is left without purpose and meaning to buttress our will; and because our will is not strong enough to create a new life-affirming order of meaning of the sort that would enable us to thrive, we find ourselves at the cusp of annihilation.

The Pathologies of Culture Out of Two Kinds of Nihilismus: From Meaninglessness to Willlessness

Until now, I have argued that for Nietzsche there are different kinds of will to power that both animate and are themselves reinforced and buoyed by various postulates (in the realist dictum propositions) of meaning as well as competing ethical systems, which are geared toward ends antagonistic to one another (which I have mostly identified under the rubric of for life versus as such and against life). Here, I would extend this line of reasoning to nihilism as well by asserting that there are also different forms of ‘nihilismus’ in the Nietzschean account, all of which, with the single exception of the ‘active’ nihilism that is driven by epistemological skepticism and ‘pessimism of strength’, culminate in the existential (i.e. ‘perfect’) nihilism of Modernity—which could be better defined as the epoch most marked by the coming together of the various negative and degenerative strands of nihilismus (theoretical, practical, and passive).

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426 “Meaning-machen” (Bedeutung) as a collective desire precedes and invigorates our exercise in “Cultur-machen”.
In Nietzsche’s philosophy, accepting life as an ‘end itself’ means recognizing the ‘will to power’ as the ultimate engine and means for life, an impetus itself animated by meaning. Life functions through power and willing—a force which often reveals itself via change and adaptation (as rudimentary to life and evolution). Having a meaning and purpose, a why to inspire action and energize and propel forth one’s will to power, is thus foundational to life and a fundamental goal for any philosophy that is affirming of life. The inversion of this picture by décadent craven instincts which, disgusted and dismayed by the tragic realities of life, inspire flight rather than a will to fight and to overcome, produces nihilism in its most historically familiar forms (theoretical and practical). While meaning is vital to human flourishing and cultural health, a false and life-denying meaning scheme is calamitous and detrimental for culture, leading to its decay and weakening. Nietzsche regards the health and vitality of a culture as a direct function of the quality (i.e., lifefulness and affirmativeness) of its response to the aporia of meaning. A décadent and life-denying meaning scheme is the etiology (to borrow Nietzsche’s physiological phraseology) for all forms of cultural degeneration and nihilistic pathologies, including in Modernity.

As Nietzsche tells it, the story of the Western civilization so far has been the tale of two kinds of “nihilismus”. Instigated by a peculiar idealistic version of décadence and a ressentimental pathos which loathes the world, the will to ending and nothingness which typifies the theologian priestly instinct is the archetypical example of “the nihilistic will, willing power” over both nature and man, revealing itself first in the realm of philosophy (Socrates) and later in religion (Paul). This is theoretical nihilism—out of its desire for nothingness, this force aims to turn on their head and invert the concepts of ‘good’ and ‘truth’, as they were originally conceived, into their opposites. It had to negate (or falsify) them, for they were once naturally and solidly grounded in

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427 AC, §9
life, whereas it is intrinsically hostile to life, hating existence and authentic reality, which it finds unbecoming. An escapist ‘world-falsifying’ force, this theoretical nihilism underlies the ‘ascetic ideal’ paradigm (whose most crystalized manifestation has been institutionalized Christianity). Conceiving of humanity as a negative ressentimental force in the priest’s likeness, this cynical view of mankind sees him as a ‘world-negating’ principle’, encapsulated in the formula, “man against the world”.

This Christian nihilism—often accompanied with existential cynicism and philosophical/teleological optimism—is distinct but deeply related to the other kind of nihilism present in the West at least since the time of Jesus: practical nihilism. This latter form of will-negating Christly nihilism shares with the Pauline theoretical nihilism in décadence and escapism, while it is arguably even more fully optimistic concerning the possibility of attaining salvation from worldly suffering (cf. bliss). Following the Enlightenment’s destruction of Christianity’s semiotic order in its assaults on Christian metaphysics, ‘practical nihilism’ again gains traction in Modern (particularly Romantic) philosophical circles, chief among them Schopenhauer, discarding optimism per se for a more realist (or phenomenalist) version driven entirely by existential and philosophical ‘pessimism’. However, this ‘new’ European form of Buddhism, as Nietzsche characterizes the Modern variant of practical nihilism, has a passive understanding of pessimism, because it is rather resigned toward suffering, thus completely nullifying the will per se.

The ‘Last Man’ (der letzte Mensch) of Modernity is thus a pitiful creature, afflicted by both types of contemporary nihilismus—theoretical and practical. He is the preparatory ground if

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428 GS, §346
429 The best expressions of these theoretical and practical nihilisms in modern philosophical schools are perhaps utilitarians with their idea of progress and classical liberals with their unshakable faith in the capitalistic economic structure, both of which Nietzsche would judge as meaningless fancies (cf. theoretical nihilism); while modern
not the sign for the coming of complete nihilism. He exhibits this new form of practical nihilism and at same time is aware in his heart that his existence is deprived of meaning and purpose, even as he generally retains the vestiges of the existential optimism and innocence of the Christian age in his progressive outlook—resulting only in the constant angst, neurosis, and even thoughts of suicide which have become so commonplace in Modern life. Just as his Christian ancestors, he remains altogether weak. He still retains a certain optimism (the reason for which he is not altogether sure), however, which produces in him a new kind of faith—the religion of comfortableness and contentment, “happy” with what Nietzsche calls “lazy peace”. He aims for a carefree and oblivious existence—this he calls success. His existence is tied to his profession within the rationalized machinations of the capitalistic order, yet he does not feel a higher purpose and meaning, so life is marked by anxiety, alienation, and loneliness; nor does he believe (or can even conceive of any way) that he or his kind can change the system short of a miraculous deus ex machina. This has all the markings of a new religion in toto, yet one in which (contrary to the old religion) he can foresee no redemption, can imagine no escape from it all in the end. There is no happy ending here amid all the obsession with ‘happiness’. The truth can no longer remain hidden from him: he lacks all agency and is utterly powerless against existence in all its meaninglessness—in him the spirit of perfect European nihilism is incarnate. Az Zarathustra ominously declares, “Beware! The time approaches when human beings will no longer give birth

scientism, positivism, determinism and ideas such as altruism and “religion of humanity” (cf. Comte), not to mention Schopenhauerian philosophy itself, all point to what, in Nietzsche’s estimation, is the abrogation of the will and cultural agency (cf. practical nihilism). To note, the radically subjectivist turn in existentialist, post-modern, and even phenomenologist circles toward absolute and autonomous agency of the human subject is arguably a fanciful reaction to and a mere falsification of practical nihilism edging on absurdity, but nonetheless it is profoundly influenced by nihilistic tendencies as well as by theoretical nihilism and the absence of meaning. In many ways presaged by Nietzsche, this last group represents the projected valuelessness and perfect and total form of nihilism about which many including Nietzsche have warned.
to a [dancing] star. Beware! The time of the most contemptible human is coming, the one who can no longer have contempt for himself”.

The “Last Man” and the advent of “existential nihilism” thus combine to paint a grim picture of the Modern condition as one of perfect resignation. This is what ‘European nihilism’ entails. Resignation is what both the Schopenhauerian spirit and the Last man share, albeit for the former it is resignation out of pessimism, for the latter out of blind and perhaps innocent optimism. They are both chained and unfree spirits. The one historical lesson here is that the décadent types (who embody the anti-Dionysian instincts for negating reality) will inevitably construct nihilistic values which often beget and uphold a ressentimental morality. In Modernity, the practical nihilism and the cowardly existential and philosophical pessimism of the Modern philosopher who vilifies willing (a la Schopenhauer) along with the theoretical nihilism and will to nothingness of the mundane Last Man—both of which find their origin in (the decadent’s) weakness and a lack of courage in the face of the reality of life—together unite to show our Modern era in a new light (or darkness rather): Modernity as the age of complete existential nihilism!

When seen in this light, Modernity appears as the quintessential age of meaninglessness and increasingly (in late Modernity) willlessness, leading to perfect/complete existential nihilism (cf. European nihilism)—an entirely preventable development caused by European thinkers’ problematic reaction to the illuminations (indeed glad tidings) of the Enlightenment, a stance reached out of phobia, over-fixation, and mania over the perceived fatality of valuelessness, which forestalls the revaluation that in Nietzsche’s view is necessary for the West’s cultural recuperation and health and is only natural as a result of the Enlightenment’s rejection of the Christian meaning scheme (i.e., meaninglessness). This neurotic and manic attitude only perpetuates the original

\[^{430}\] Z, “Prologue”, §5. The term “dancing” is the translator’s addition. It does not appear in the original German.
meaninglessness rather than overcoming it with new meaning, engendering the even more (pragmatically) consequential crisis of willlessness.

Ultimately then, Nietzsche contends, there is a fatal genetic disorder threatening all cultures, which left unchecked could destroy them from the inside out. As established, this degenerative disease is one that is spawned by the aporia of meaning, whose origins lie in the natural meaninglessness of life itself from the human perspective, and a failure to come to terms with it, which would inevitably cause willlessness, further exacerbating the seminal ‘crisis of meaning’. The human thirst for meaning left unfulfilled, the consequence (or symptom) is existential nihilism. Perhaps nothing provides a better illustration of this than Western history, where the progressive production of the naïve, glibly self-satisfied, and palliative-seeking ‘last men’ (only too content to numb the pain of meaninglessness as do addicts) coupled with the theoretical and practical nihilisms finally causes the eradication of cultural agency and all capacity for willing. The final consequence is cultural death and annihilation of a lifeform.

Meaning and Morality were the warp and woof of the (ascetic) ideal—sustaining the web it weaved in the Western culture for millennia since Socrates. The Renaissance, Nietzsche believed, was the last time a movement in the West attempted to disentangle and confront both these noxious aspects of the ascetic ideal, and it failed, owing in part to Martin Luther and the Reformation. Once again, in Modernity, we stand at the precipice of this web untangling. Etiologically-speaking, Modernity is not really immoral (whether as ‘value-free’ normative relativism or as ‘value-confused’ normative anarchy), as critics such as Strauss and MacIntyre believe, however; the problem is rather, that it lacks a generative meaning and sustainable will. To shift the paradigm and achieve sublation of the ascetic ideal once and for all (revaluing it) requires abolition of its morality in the same way that the Enlightenment managed to destroy its meaning.
From the Nietzschean perspective, the Enlightenment project, in its true substance and promise, remains incomplete, and especially so because its project has been overtaken by modern idealists and romantics! Due to the overwhelming influence of the “moraline”-administered idealists (this time not as priests but rather as practitioners of the old philosophy a la Kant) and the naturalistic attitude of the romantics (whether as an apotheotic and utopian ‘return to Nature’ or the atheistic and pessimistic phenomenalist acquiescence in the face of this Nature and its might), the promise of the Enlightenment was thwarted, so it unraveled into Modernity. But thankfully, Nietzsche does not stop there. He posits a flicker of hope for a way out of this abyss by proposing a strict course of treatment and even a cure as only a physician of culture could. Nietzsche’s revaluation stands as his curative prescription. And yet, as we shall soon discover, Nietzsche’s revaluation project is not one of destruction (i.e., of the moraline virus) alone, since he always planned to replace the ascetic ideal with a new paradigm based on life—captured in the culturalist application of the Dionysian.

A Way Forward: A Paradigm Shift Away from the Ascetic Ideal

This part of the dissertation—an exercise which began with a discussion of Nietzsche’s elementary claims about the essential and natural meaninglessness of life and the human need for meaning (generated out of willful creation), reviewing the different (often faulty) contraptions the Western man has so far conceived in order to make life meaningful—thus comes to an end with Nietzsche’s profound realization of sociological (i.e., human) meaninglessness and the cultural depletion of life in the West as a consequence of Modernity. This is the point of entry into an understanding of our cultural malady, which requires recognition of the willlessness and the advent of perfect existential nihilism (which arises out of both) abolishing genuine and willful ‘selfness’
(of great starring types) and cultural agency. The perfect storm of European nihilism has been unleashed by a value totalitarianism that crucially refused to abandon its (Christian) value commitments and whose tyrannical dogma precluded recreation of meaning and value on new (life-affirming) terms in the wake of the Enlightenment. Hence, one critical question confronts us squarely: does our chance at a cure depend on a choice between willlessness and existential nihilism, on the one hand, and valuelessness and axiological nihilism, on the other? If so, the choice, as it has been routinely presented by philosophers since the Enlightenment, is a false one, for no culture can survive long either valueless or will-less. Or, can we imagine the possibility that this formulation is a lie, because both will and value (and meaning too) must align and correspond for them all to function properly, that they are functions of one another in a holistic constellation, and that getting rid of our Christian-rooted values and norms (i.e., morality) need not entail of abolition of all values. Nietzsche is convinced not only that this is possible, but that it is our only path out of the crisis: if the will is once again allowed to precede value, as it does in nature, the power of man’s creative willing (as manifested in the “great”) could then be harnessed to recreate meaning and “revalue all values” in its likeness and be based on life itself, overcoming the pervasive cultural willlessness and obviating the social chaos of valuelessness.

It is in such a spirit that Nietzsche’s offers us (his few “honest” and “objective” readers born in the “day after tomorrow”)\footnote{On Nietzsche’s intended audience references abound; see, in particular, the ‘preface’ to \textit{AC}, and \textit{AC}, §20} \textit{Revaluation} as his earnest solution to the crisis at hand. Revaluation is not just a destructive endeavor limited to abolishing morality. In Nietzsche’s conception, it is a wide-ranging, multi-dimensional restorative act meant to thwart both meaninglessness and willlessness in the West by recovering actual willing and cultural agency. It involves creating a new paradigm of meaning to remedy the meaningless situation and provide a
new hierarchy of values, both of which are to be premised on life and designed to *invigorate* a ‘higher culture’ for the West. Values then are not simply disvalued, as some critics of Nietzsche suggest; they are instead reconceived—or, wholly *revalued*. Reoriented toward life, these new Dionysian values are conducive only to the principles of life and cultural health. As normative instruments for a vibrant and reimagined ‘meaning for life’ scheme, this new set of values can only be of one kind, making them fundamentally *immoral* in the Nietzschean sense: a pragmatist aristocratic ethics of virtù as the only rightful, honest, and healthful value system. *Revaluation of all values* is Nietzsche’s recommended course of treatment—this he presents as the singular medicine for neutralizing the advance of nihilism in the West.

It follows that Nietzsche’s project was always *two-pronged*. On the one end (the *destructive* and *negative* part of his philosophy), its chief aim was to expose and unravel the “ascetic ideal” as a (meta)paradigm and condemning the various systems that had long operated within the (imprint of) *reality* constructed in response to the ‘domination’ of this value (meta)paradigm: this includes its order of meaning (i.e., its *metaphysics*), its constellation of truth-claims (i.e., its optimistic *epistemology*), its regime of ethics and conception of good (i.e., its *slave morality*), and its socio-political arrangements and commitments (i.e., its *egalitarian* and *mass* politics). All this, he wanted destroyed and supplanted. But on the other end, we are also confronted with Nietzsche’s decidedly *affirmative* thought—his “Dionysian” vision for the kind of paradigm he believed should replace the waning ‘ascetic ideal’ (paradigm) in the West, which is a set of principles and criteria (a *how to* guide) grounded on *life* with which to recast our antiquated and defuncted *idealistic* values and aim for a *higher* culture. As a theoretical exposition of Nietzsche’s theory of meaning, this part of the dissertation has been an “interlude” focused, by and large, on the first, ‘negative’ part of Nietzsche’s project: his critiques, genealogies, and diagnoses of the Western culture and
Modernity, which he performs as a skilled ‘physician of culture’ and on which he hope the new breed of philosophers and cultural critics will build. A new Nietzschean interpretation of meaning—not always explicit but always present and underlying in Nietzsche’s thought—has also been introduced, in the hope of clarifying what he really aims at in his “subversive” and “destructive” philosophy (so-called by critics such as MacIntyre)

Nietzsche alludes to the monumental task confronting Western culture when he wagers to present the contemporary world as if with ‘dynamite’: “The lie of the ideal has till now been the curse on reality; on its account humanity itself has become fake and false right down to its deepest instincts—to the point of worshipping values opposite to the only ones which would guarantee it a flourishing, a future, the exalted right to a future.” To rectify this falsehood, we cannot just abandon our values and presume to live a valueless existence. If we aim to ascend higher in the course of our human evolution and flourish in our becoming as a species, we need to engage in revaluation of all our values—in the hope of achieving something which is the inverse of our contemporary values in the West. They are pagan, aristocratic in the Homeric sense, and grounded on virtù. This is what Nietzsche hopes will happen with the help of his new age philosophy.

So, Nietzsche affirms both the notion of truth and the idea of goodness, but he just completely reconceptualizes them on new basis. In Nietzsche’s view, the problem of the good hitherto has been the false belief that in the cosmos there exists a genuine possibility for justice. Given the ‘realist’ and tragic cosmology of Nietzsche’s, this is a fantasy. Moreover, the faith that in the end everything can be happily salvaged in an apocalyptic kumbaya moment—this is nothing but pathological optimism that stands contradicted by the actual reality of life in suffering. What is more, all such pretensions come at the expense of truth itself. They are dishonest fabrications

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432 EH, Preface, §2 (Duncan Large trans.)
masquerading as ‘knowledge’. Thus, the Christian idea of the good is nothing but a means to secure the compliance of the good individuals (whose most exhaustively acquiescing example are the hakuna matata-embracing “last men” of Modernity) and hide the ultimate sources of their domination: their instinctivized conformity and submission to the routine and rules and imperatives of the hegemonic status quo is testament to the corruption and domination of mankind at large by uncreative and weak natures (cf. décadent), who in their quest to protect their own (negative) will to power bring to a halt the creative revaluing dynamic of culture, the very natural process which guarantees a future for culture per se. Conceived in this way, the good exist at the expense of the future, at the expense of humanitas. The Last Man, it turns out, is actually the good man, oppressively bred into a “herd animal”, managing the feat of living and lasting the longest physically, but nearing the end of its humanity, divorced from the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual high-mindedness which for Nietzsche defines the human and is the source of its value. In his blank and vacuous blinking at the elemental human concepts of passion, creation, and artistic longing, this goat-like creature, Nietzsche is convinced, spells “the beginning of the end” for mankind.\footnote{EC, “Why Am I Destiny”, §4. Cf. Z, “Prologue”, §5}

All this should make it quite clear that Nietzsche is not a solely negative thinker, as MacIntyre wrongly assumes, or the one in whom the problem of nihilism in the West is most clearly represented, as Strauss believes. Instead, as Robert Solomon argues, “Nihilism is not the doctrine which [Nietzsche] seeks to defend...but rather the problem with which his philosophy begins.”\footnote{Robert C. Solomon, From Rationalism to Existentialism: The Existentialists and Their Nineteenth-Century Backgrounds (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 112.} Or, as Solomon and Higgins emphasize elsewhere, “To think of Nietzsche as nothing but negative, ‘the Great Destroyer’, is to misunderstand him profoundly, [for] Nietzsche himself
would insist that the essential thing is to say *yes* to philosophy, and to life.”

Nietzsche’s affirmative spirit and Dionysian nature allows him to “contradict as nobody has ever contradicted before, and yet in spite of this [remain] the opposite of a nay-saying spirit—[… ] a *bearer of glad tidings* as no one ever was before.” Despite his sharp attacks on Truth, one must remember that the Truth Nietzsche is contradicting is not truth as such, but “the lies of millennia” deceptively posing as Truth; and this he does, in fact, out of a spirit of *honesty*, from a deep sense of reverence for *truthfulness*. It is truthfulness that ‘*smells*’ the lie that is involved in the idealist’s invention of absolute universal Truth.

In truth, Nietzsche’s blistering attacks on his contemporaries (extending to us) is due to the fact that he sees Modern thinkers as hypocrites, as stillbirths and “miscarriages of duplicity”, who owing to the advances made in the Enlightenment and the ensuing theoretical nihilism must surely know that ‘God is dead’, that there is nothing but unnatural fabrication and lies in the teachings of all the churches that claim metaphysical sanction. We might *pretend* otherwise, but we cannot claim *ignorance* or *innocence* any longer. We should already have known better, post-Enlightenment, and we surely do know better after Nietzsche. Yet, although we reject the Truth (i.e., the *theology* and *miracles*) of Religion, not viewing it as objective and factual any longer, we continue to follow and abide by its *décadent* values and structure our lives on its *ressentimental* Pauline morality. This curious phenomenon has only become more ingrained with the advent of perfect existential nihilism and the passive subsistence of the “last men”, further undermining our

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436 *EH*, IV, §1
437 Ibid.
438 In fact, Nietzsche cites his will to truthfulness as one formative reason behind his selection of Zarathustra as his ultimate protagonist: “Zarathustra is more truthful than any other thinker. His teaching is the only one that considers truthfulness to be the highest virtue—that means the opposite of the *cowardice* of ‘idealists’, who take flight in the face of reality; Zarathustra has more courage in his body than all thinkers put together. To speak the truth and *shoot well with an arrow*, this is the Persian virtue” (*EH*, IV, §3). In the last sentence, Nietzsche is quoting Herodotus.
ability to *create* new naturally-grounded humanist and healthful values. So, the project still awaiting the most *courageous* amongst us, outstanding since the Enlightenment, is *revaluation*: the eradication of the Judeo-Christian values and their replacement with Dionysian values in full reverence to the “pathos of distance” and the aristocratic ethos. It is thus imperative for Nietzsche that we join him in *Hyperborea* and achieve honest intellectual *coldness*, that we overcome our passivity and lack of will for this task (i.e., revaluation) and recover the dynamism, agency and creativity which will be needed to re-conceive and remake our culture, curing it of the age-old illness of décadence and making it healthy and vibrant once more. Whoever fails to take up this project of revaluation, Nietzsche believes is not just instinctually and spiritually *décadent* and *ressentimental*, but inherently hypocritical and misbegotten as well.\(^{439}\)

This is doubly problematic, however, for it has pronounced socio-political effects. Adopting the two-level Nietzschean analysis of *value*, it follows that in any given culture-complex, the enduring dominant value-paradigm functions through two concomitant, mutually-reinforcing elements: 1) the semiotic meaning-making element resulting in an “order of meaning’, and 2) the specific norms and values that are derived from the semiotic order (i.e., *ethics*). In most cases (*nationalist* regimes being the big exception), meaning and meaning-creation fall within the sphere of *culture*, while norms and value systems are more closely linked with the *political*. Yet, with the destruction of (Christian) *meaning* following the Enlightenment,\(^{440}\) the ascetic ideal itself was redirected, and it collapsed into the political and normative spheres, and one suspects that, in the absence of meaning, whatever dregs remain of the ascetic ideal cannot but be further and more

\(^{439}\) *AC*, §38

\(^{440}\) To reiterate once more, the order of meaning perpetuated by the ascetic ideal is so *totalistic*, so *exclusionary*, and having pretended to be ‘meaning as such’ for so long that, in destroying the meaning-regime of the ‘ascetic ideal’, the Enlightenment effectively destroys not only the very possibility of ‘meaning-creation’ but, in fact, *all* meaning as such—even the notion of meaning itself.
aggressively normalized and politicized (as the only setting left open to them). As the ascetic ideal’s operating principle, the pathos of ressentiment—now the ideal’s principal residuum—is refocused from culture (and even norms) onto politics, with all its sheer power to be more exclusively felt in the political realm. That the unleashing of the ressentimental pathos upon the political domain would mean more hateful, vengeful, identity-centered, group-disenfranchising, and Populistic politics in practice, should come as no surprise! In hindsight, after all, it was perhaps inevitable that the totalism of the “ideal” (paradigm) in culture would produce totalitarianism in politics. We will return to this theme (the sociopolitical ramifications of the ascetic ideal in Modernity) more fully in the next part (Act Two) of this study.

Our experience since the Enlightenment has made one thing quite clear: that without a healthy form of meaning, humanity depreciates and life declines. It has neither a secure ground nor a worthy purpose with which to express its aesthetic creative will to power (as poiesis). Alas, this has been the legacy of the Enlightenment. “Well-being as you [Moderns] understand it”, premised on securing pleasure and repelling pain, on a calculus of utility, Nietzsche informs us, “that is no goal.” On the basis of Nietzschean tragic realism, nothing is “crazier” than the desire to abolish suffering, for in being bred in suffering, being forged by “great suffering”, Nietzsche finds the impetus for all human enhancements and heightening. This is not entirely surprising, given the physiological standpoint that underpins Nietzschean anthropology. In mankind, as Nietzsche sees it, body and mind are combined, ideality and physicality are united, such that one can say, “in human beings, creature and creator are combined: in humans there is material, fragments, abundance, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but in humans there is also creator, maker,

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441 BGE, “Our Virtues”, §225
442 Ibid.
hammer-hardness, spectator-divinity and seventh day”. A similar symbiosis informs the relationship between suffering and greatness. To Nietzsche, the utilitarians, the hedonists, the liberals—the philosophers of pleasure and pain as Nietzsche calls them—are all naïve for their pity is misdirected. Their supposed altruism concerns our physical suffering (i.e., discomfort) whereas a Nietzschean pities our lowly and abysmal state of Mind (and culture) and the horrid fate of humanity as species. Even Modern humanitarianism then, like Modernity’s other impulses turned pathologies, involves an inversion— inverted pity. As Zarathustra rather expectantly puts it, now it “is time that mankind set themselves a goal. It is time that mankind plant the seed of their highest hope. Their soil is still rich enough for this,” given that the Hyperboreans still roam amongst us. Yet, with the goatherds consistently grazing and “inerradical” as the flea, “one day this soil will be poor and tame, and no tall tree will be able to grow from it anymore.”

Echoing the idea of Modernity as the point of convergence for ancient and Christian worldviews (of which Löwith also speaks and with which we concluded Act One), Nietzsche notes:

It is in this oscillation between Christianity and antiquity, between an imitated or hypocritical Christianity of morals and an equally despondent and timid revival of antiquity [through classicism], that modern man lives, and does not live very happily; the fear of what is natural he has inherited and the renewed attraction of this naturalness, the desire for a firm footing somewhere, the impotence of his knowledge that reels back and forth between the good and the better, all this engenders a restlessness, a disorder in the modern soul which condemns it to a joyless unfruitfulness [sterility].

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443 Ibid.
444 Z, “Prologue”, §5
445 Ibid.
446 Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator”, Untimely Meditations, Cambridge University Press, p. 133. Nietzsche’s word choice here is allusive, for it evokes the reversal of his championed notions of ‘joyful proliferation’ and ‘fertility’ in Modernity as a major threat to our species.
Yet, despite observing a continuity between Hellenic antiquity, Christianity, and Modernity, Nietzsche also calls our attention to a far older and consequential form of life in archaic Greece which stands in full opposition to the ascetic ideal (and indeed all totalisms). This instantiation of an ascendant form of cultural life Nietzsche espouses as a ‘firm footing’ from which to guide and inspire his revaluation and sublation of Modernity.

Perhaps nowhere is the kind of modern man Nietzsche describes above better represented than among the Romantics, who, owing to their limited view of history and perhaps imagination too, lack a grasp of this archaic reference point (to use) as a resource/inspiration for finding a ‘firm footing’ toward a vibrant future. Because it exacerbates their cowardice and feebleness in dealing with existential suffering, this fact, Nietzsche suggests, more than any other explains the neurosis and pessimism of the Romantics (cf. Wagner and Schopenhauer). Nietzsche argues that the reason for their décadence lies precisely in that they, in their (existential/weak) pessimism and life-negating instincts, lack the strength to overcome their despondency and conceive of a way out of the existential crisis which threatens the West (i.e., total nihilism). They are thus resigned to it. And this pathology is only reinforced and aggravated by their ignorance of the Dionysian model. Indeed, they “suffer from an impoverishment of life and seek quiet, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and insight, or else intoxication, paroxysm, numbness, madness”. 447

Meaning (and height and greatness as well) is the domain of the Dionysian (rather than the romantic) pessimist, who has the courage and strength to deal with suffering and the terrible incumbent in life and is able to affirm life nonetheless, for he does not will to escape it nor can he ever forget it: to him, life simply is tragic, and this tragedy is key to life’s worth and significance, making every moment valuable. The escapist décadent, the deluded one who wishes to deny to

447 GS, §370
himself the inherent meaninglessness of life and its intrinsic pain—his domain is happiness. Such an impulse embodies the types of Epicurus, Jesus, the scientistic, quantitatively-minded utilitarian, and the ‘Last Man’, when this life-denier embodies an innocent optimism. Here, ‘happiness’ (a notion he ironically invents in order to feel ‘happy’) is the only meaning and desideratum subsuming and superseding willing per se—which is to say, real meaning and active willing (i.e., cultural agency) are wholly nullified. Further still, when this décadent type is so completely exhausted as to feel pessimistic even about the possibility of escape (i.e., happiness), he denies and forsakes even the idea of willing and agency, thus emerging as the Schopenhauerian type (cf. romantic/modern pessimism). The opposite of décadent, the affirmer of life—henceforth the Dionysian—represents a more ancient kind of pessimism, where (active philosophical) pessimism is combined with a healthy dose of ‘courage’, and hence he remains cheerful and jovial in his pessimism.

Given his lucid yet disturbing observations regarding the state of mankind and culture in Modernity, Nietzsche appropriately declares himself both “terrible” (for the now) and “benevolent” (for the future). The constituents of value and worth for human life, meaning and willing (i.e., the human responses to the tragic reality of suffering and chaos in nature) are lacking in Modernity, thus forecasting that humanitas (especially in the West) is nearing expiration and facing its demise. Yet, this bearer of bad news could also be the messenger of good and ‘glad tidings’. After all, for Nietzsche, what is ‘bad’ (defined according to principles of life) is all that destroys, ‘good’ is all that creates, and they come together as one in the ‘great noons’ of cultural upheaval, which is why Nietzsche sees in himself both the “highest evil” and the “highest good”, for he is a creative destroyer.\footnote{See: Z, II, “On Self-Overcoming”. Cf. EH, IV, §2} In him alone, Nietzsche believes, the spirit of ‘destructive
creation’ (which defines both eternal becoming and his revaluation project) has become, to use one of his favorite phrasings, “flesh and genius”: “I obey my Dionysian nature, which does not know how to separate doing no from saying yes. I am the first immoralist: which makes me the destroyer par excellence.” If nothing else, Nietzsche highlights the twining of creation and destruction, the idea that “negation and destruction are conditions of affirmation”. And with him, we can finally leave behind both the foolish heavens and the subterranean tyranny of ‘Idealenphilosophie’ and come back to the surface of the Earth, to bask in the affirmative and epitteranean midday sun of ‘Lebensphilosophie’.

We have seen so far that for Nietzsche the origin of meaning lies in the chaos, tragedy, and randomness inherent to nature. Similarly, the source of creativity is Dionysian destruction (of presumed certainties in celebration of the tragic randomness), the embracing of which gives renewed meaning to the notion of “creative destruction” underpinning Nietzschean philosophy. Human fulfillment and flourishing cannot arise without accepting and indeed welcoming the pain, suffering, and hardship that underlie the accomplishment of a great task, which imbues it with meaning and worth—worthy even of self-sacrifice. It is out of such an essentially Dionysian picture that even Apollo—the desire for mastery, control, and ordering of the cosmos—is born. Apollo, though, it turns out, must be in the service of Dionysus, inspired through his hard revelations. In such a way, Dionysus and Apollo combine to affirm life and the creative forces of existence. In fact, as early as The Birth of Tragedy, it is this unity that Nietzsche identifies as spawning tragedy itself. As he observes in TI (‘Reason’, §6), what he comes to call Dionysian is nothing other than the creative spirit “who affirms all that is questionable and terrible in existence”. Similarly, Nietzsche emerges as a Dionysian type when he assumes the mantle of the ‘tragic artist’

449 EH, IV, §2
450 EH, IV, §4
for whom “the revaluation project” is the one great creative task. As an honest and true disciple of Dionysus, Nietzsche chooses the bigger-than-self undertaking of “meaning-creation” and “culture-making” as the only meaningful quest worthy of his genius and fruitful for humanitas. Ever the hopeful Dionysian, he sets out to bring about the new dawn of Western civilization if not by himself alone then by cultivating the mind and will of his readers.

In the end, one finds in Nietzsche’s oeuvre a more profound and consequential human meaninglessness, coupled with the original meaninglessness of nature. Double-sided meaninglessness (completing the circle)—is, it seems to me, Nietzsche’s most thoughtful insight as to the ramifications of the décadence in our Modern condition. And yet, historically, décadence possesses a strange quality—perhaps even a redeeming one, for behind décadence of every kind, behind every sickly cultural decline lies the promise of a new beginning, a renewed health and ascent, if not in that particular sinking culture then in some other culture at a different corner of the world. What is more, the Übermenschen are the natural and fated ‘strokes of genius’ whose very physiology causes them to diverge from civilization in its false rules and illusions—they are party only to life, standing as paragons of culture-making in the flesh, reshaping cultures in their image: the will cannot be extinguished in them irrespective of the scheme. That is the story of human genius and explains in part our triumph as species. It is also the grounds for a new way forward. In this desperate moment of need, the Übermenschlich type has the potential to liberate us from the grips of willlessness and absolve us our sins once more. As Nietzsche notes, referencing his poor health, “I have a subtler sense of smell for the signs of ascent and decline than anyone has ever had, I am their teacher par excellence.” So, percolating deep within his philosophy is a profound ‘renaissance theory’, obsessed with signs of spiritual/cultural ascent and degeneration—“able to look out from the optic of sickness towards healthier concepts and values,
and again the other way around, to look down from the fullness and self-assurance of the rich life into the secret work of the instinct of decadence”, which he would later baptize as the myth of the eternal recurrence informing his idea of cultural rebirth. 

Nietzsche is unyielding on this point: “I created my philosophy from out of my will to health, to life...the years of my lowest vitality were the ones when I stopped being a pessimist”, for “what does not kill one makes one stronger”!

Nietzsche’s interpretation of meaning, then, is humanistic while cleverly circumventing the humanitarian, altruistic, and populistic labels it finds fundamentally problematic—paying homage to the humanitas of the ancient Roman and the Renaissance ilk, without succumbing to the whims of the “dregs of humanity”, loving the human while disgusted with the people. 

For him, everything, even reality, must be viewed through the prism of a type of man truthful and loyal only to life: all is contrived and man-made—human-all-too-human. That Nietzsche is an exalted humanist both epistemologically and sociologically is most evident in his conception of the Übermensch. It is precisely because he is so profoundly humanistic that he is an avid culturist, for it is in culture that the human—at its highest and best—becomes most immanent. And because he is concerned with the human as a form of life, he continuously emphasizes physiology. Indeed, Nietzsche wants to ensure “that culture begin in the right place—not in the "soul" . . . [but in] the body, gestures, diet, [and] physiology”—Nietzschean humanism demands as much. The rightful home for all healthful culture and meaning is the body, eros, and life.

This part of the dissertation—a theoretical intermezzo engaging with Nietzsche’s standpoint on meaning— is inspired by the conviction that people who attempt to understand
Nietzsche through his notion of Will zur Macht (i.e., will to power) without connecting it with what I call Nietzsche’s ‘will to (diversified and earthly) meaning’ are bound to err. Will zur Macht, alas, is a Janus with two faces. Will to meaning has manifested itself as will to Truth in the past two thousand years of Western history under the auspices of what Nietzsche calls the ascetic ideal. Now, Nietzsche believes it will have to be recalibrated via the re-affirmation of (healthy) will to power, a principle that can allow meaning its constant reformulation, reinterpretation, and creative transformation.

As the abode of perfect nihilism in toto and the Last Man, Modernity sits at the equator—as far away from Hyperborea as imaginable. Given this theoretical framework, we can finally venture into the realm of Nietzsche’s affirmations, to explore their practical and concrete implications for how we live and organize our societies, and to explicate Nietzsche’s pragmatist and humanist ideas underlying his theory of agency and cultural change: his “instrumentalist” account for the way in which his revaluation-prescription could be effectively realized, that is how this task must be conducted and by whom, if it is to turn into an actual reality transforming our culture. This is the topic for act two, the third part of this study.

Engaging with the problematic of meaning, Karl Löwith, in the preface to his Meaning and History, speaks of “the humble greatness of a human soul which can give meaning, if anything can give it, to what otherwise would be a burden for man.” And this, by and large, is the million-dollar question which Nietzsche strives to answer without recourse to either theology or teleology. What must the true disciple of Dionysus reared in full philosophical atheism, or one who has correctly understood and internalized what Nietzsche means by pessimism of strength and has the courage for it, do now? Nietzsche is unequivocal: he must embark on a project of revaluation and

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455 Löwith, Meaning and History, p. v: To note, for Löwith, in contrast to Nietzsche, the problem of meaning originates in the inherent relationship of meaning with theology.
reimbue human life with meaning. Stemming from our need to forge a new path out of meaninglessness and willlessness, revaluation requires both a creative vision and strength as well as a set of principles for a new philosophy and a plan of action reflecting them, if it is to be cultivated and realized. Understanding Nietzsche’s concrete and actionable formula for fulfilling his vision and effecting cultural transformation (i.e., his views on culture and his theory of socio-cultural change) along with his pragmatist program of aristocratic cultivation (cf. breeding), specifically as it regards the Übermenschen (i.e., Nietzsche’s Renaissance-inspired humanism informed by 19th century’s ‘great man theory’), is therefore of especial interest in any serious inquiry into Nietzschean thought. Reflecting Nietzsche’s affirmations, this uniquely positive facet of Nietzsche’s thought—his ‘anthro-cultural’ philosophy—we shall consider next.

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456 Nietzsche would thus share in my view Löwith’s concerns regarding radical subjectivism and existentialism which he (Löwith) rightfully sees being communicated in political form by Heidegger.
ACT III

NIETZSCHE’S ANTHRO-CULTURALISM:
THE REVALUATION OF ALL VALUES
“The Cultur-Komplex as my chief interest (as a whole or in its parts).”

Nietzsche, Nachlass (Spring-Fall 1887)

“No one before me knew the right way, the way upwards: only after me are there hopes, tasks, paths to prescribe to culture once again—I am the bearer of these glad tidings... And that is why I am also a destiny.”

Nietzsche, EH (III-‘TI’-§2)

Nietzsche’s Dionysian Philosophy and the Dawn of Anthro Culturalism

It follows from our discussion in the preceding section that the Dionysian philosophy to which Nietzsche gives voice has two central tenets. First, it is decidedly affirmative, this-worldly, and life-driven. Second, it conceives of its affirmations in light of its emphasis on becoming and change. Given its naturalist and realist metaphysics (the only form of metaphysics it tolerates), its view of reality is premised on the idea of ‘eternal becoming’ as its operating ontological principle, a principle it duly applies both in its anthropology (pertaining to the Übermensch) and its nascent sociology (i.e. its account of culture). In other words, Nietzsche’s new philosophy views change as the ultimate law of the cosmos which humans should especially heed—affirm—for the sake of life itself. And as a sui generis ‘philosophy of life’ that puts ‘human life’ front and center and affirms the tragic reality of human condition—its cycles of health and decay and its hunger for meaning in a meaningless cosmos, this Dionysian formulation emerges as a tragic yet all too humanly sort of realism. Any philosophizing must proceed by positively affirming transience, which means acknowledging suffering, death, and destruction as real and as formative as birth and
creation (at least, so far as we humans are concerned). Doing so, Nietzsche believes, need not inevitably turn one pessimistic about existence and the promise of life. In fact, it should do quite the opposite. It should rather encourage action affirming human agency within cultures (albeit true agency is not a characteristic of all humans, but a fated gift possessed by the very few). Those possessing this gift have the very human quality of virtù so rarely given it could be judged as intrinsically ‘superhuman’ (übermenschlich). For as Nietzsche remarks (GS, §382), this “ideal of a human, superhuman well-being and benevolence that will often enough appear inhuman” is nevertheless thoroughly human.\footnote{Cf. \textit{EH}, III, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”, §2} What is more, these Übermensch types can alter human destiny (or destinies given the myriad of cultures) by transforming the cultures in which they live and which they embody—by categorically “overcoming” both themselves (as particular products of culture) and crucially culture itself.

To fully accept the randomness and the meaninglessness of nature, and yet, to endeavor to ‘order’ it and make it all (appear) meaningful in the context of human cultures is the distinctive mark of a tragic instinct best realized in the Übermensch—the culture-heroes. Nietzsche’s culturalism reverberates in his central doctrine of ‘eternal recurrence’ (Wiederkehr) highlighting the ‘waxing and waning’ of cultures in history; his theory of the Übermensch embodies the other side of the coin of eternal becoming—the doctrine of ‘eternal return’ (Wiederkunft)—which emphasizes the eternal coming of the ‘culture-hero’ whose ‘performative’ and consequential task is the metamorphosis of culture—understood as ‘revaluation’—a restorative act which allows all human life to not just go forward but to ascend higher, affirming human agency in its most exalted form. A culture which hinders this process by impeding the coming of the Übermensch not only endangers its own health (heralding its own degeneration) but it sickens humanity’s health as such.
(the human will to life) spawning existential pessimism and total nihilism (practical and theoretical)—prognosticating the very death of mankind.

As far as man is concerned, the central question, Nietzsche believes, is not (or should not be) whether nature and existence as such have meaning and purpose (which in Nietzsche’s mind surely do not), but whether human experience could be made meaningful in practice. Because humans experience the drama of life in the grand theater of culture, this question (the meaning of existence and the agency of man) becomes intrinsically linked with whether we can presume to change our experience within cultures; or, put differently, whether we can change culture itself—to which Nietzsche answers with an affirmative and a hopeful yes.

Understood in both its parts as a ‘relationist’ and ‘reflexive’ unity, I call Nietzsche’s novel and imaginatively Dionysian philosophy of eternal becoming as it applies to the human realm, Nietzschean Anthro-culturalism. Nietzsche’s anthro-culturalism both springs from and depends on his unique and life-affirming “tragic realism”. And this human or agent-centered tragic realism informs both Nietzsche’s cultural realism and his (aristocratic) version of ‘great politics’ that could be viewed as a distinctive branch of realist politics which puts culture first and prior to politics—or, “Aristocratic Realpolitik”. Reflecting Nietzsche’s overall pragmatism, the Nietzschean conception of Realpolitik is uniquely tethered to culture and subservient to its ends, especially the cultivation of the strong-natured Übermensch. The first part of this section therefore expands on Nietzsche’s culturalism—his thoughts on Cultur-Komplex as a whole—organized around the notion of ‘eternal recurrence’ which it treats holistically. The second part concerns the humanistic and pragmatic aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy which includes Nietzsche’s politics—his

458 To note, in the conception of great politics (grosse-Politik) which Nietzsche champions, Realpolitik is inverted from its roots in Rankean and Bismarckian usage which Nietzsche calls “prudent indulgence toward strength” and does not think achieves full grasp of agency. For a detailed analysis of the intellectual milieu informing Nietzsche notion great politics, Drochon (2016) is particularly helpful.
thinking on *Cultur-Komplex in its parts*. It focuses on Nietzsche’s *practical* philosophy and anthropology organized around the idea of the ‘eternal return’ and his rather “psychological” conception of the *Übermensch* examined instrumentally. What should become evident by the end of Act II then, is Nietzsche’s profound methodological relationism which is *interactive* but never *intersubjective.*

Part of the general scholarly confusion and even ceaseless controversy within Nietzschean studies with respect to Nietzsche interpretation over the past century is due to the peculiar style and explosive content of Nietzschean argument. Nietzsche predates and anticipates many of the approaches that could be dubbed post-structuralist in his epistemology applying them in his provocative critique of Modernity but ironically uses them to reinforce a new order of rank and power *structure* by reconceptualizing some older binaries and still rejecting others for new ones of his creation and liking. The end of *revaluation*, and this cannot be stressed enough, is a *new structure* of meaning and values produced in a symbiosis with culture, these two (natural and evolutionary) *products* being related to one another in a humanist and even socio-physiological way via the *Übermensch*. As such, one could anachronistically refer to Nietzsche as a “new structuralist” who curiously anticipates and transcends many of the debates and the schisms defining the 20th century philosophical discourse decades earlier by applying his *pragmatist* approach. It is this “new structuralism” that I have chosen to emphasize by naming Nietzsche’s philosophy *anthro-cultural*.

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459 Methodological relationism assumes two forms. The first form, often called “symbolic interactionism”, entails the symbolic interactions of subjects in the *microsocial* level and their coinciding interpretations as a source of meaning for culture. In Nietzsche, however, the symbolic and semiotic interaction between the human agent (Übermensch) and the embodied and immanent meaning (i.e. ‘Culture’) is not *horizontal* and “micro-micro”, but rather *vertical*, reflexively dialectical, and “macro-micro”. For a discussion of “methodological relationism” in contradistinction to the more prevalent methodological holism and methodological individualism the latter two having saturated the methodology of modern social sciences, see George Ritzer and Pamela Gindoff, “Methodological Relationism: Lessons for and from Social Psychology”, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 1992, 55:2, pp.128-140.
Inspired by Heraclitus, Nietzsche comes to view culture as a *spring* whose water is ever renewed and eternally refreshed but always flowing in the same riverbed—this emphasis on *continuity* underlies his notion of eternal recurrence. And it is what the doctrine of ‘eternal becoming’ encompasses humanistically-speaking. So conceived, each culture thus does not represent simply a ‘cast of mind’; it is a (human) “breed of mind” (*die Zucht des Geistes*) both *alive* and *living* in history. Following Nietzsche’s tack, four distinctively Nietzschean disciplines could be seen to emerge out of the non-metaphysical ‘new philosophy of the future’ Nietzsche champions, whose chief preoccupation is *human meaning* and central aim *cultural health*: Nietzsche’s brand of anthropological *psychology* to ascertain and rank the individual types with the Übermensch especially in mind, *culturology* to study various cultures in their proffered orders of meanings, *ethics* to examine and mediate the relation between the two, and finally a unique, pragmatist, and instrumentalist understanding of *politics* as an extension of the former three and particularly informed by them geared toward ‘great politics’ (*grosse Politik*) as a lever for producing (high) *culture*, which some have provocatively labeled “aristocratic radicalism”.  

Although, as it will be explained later, “aristocratic agonism” is perhaps a more appropriate label for the kind of politics of culture that Nietzsche has in mind here.

Nietzsche’s understanding of culture is fundamentally *structured* around his idea of meaning. Each culture embodies and brings to life an order of meaning: it is a structure of meaning and myth *animated* in a cultural organism. In this, the main antagonism necessarily lies between forces that are *generative* and *ascending* to culture and those which cause cultural *degeneration* and *decline*. The segment immediately following (I) then attempts to engage with Nietzsche’s

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culturalism (i.e. cultural macrocosm), exposing the ontological, epistemological, and axiological views which undergird it. And yet, Nietzsche believes meanings can change, myths can evolve, and values underpinning them can be revalued—a particular culture is never static, perennial, and least of all “pure” in history. How this (historical) transformation is to be actualized and by whom (i.e. cultural microcosms) as well as the kind of politics and (philosophical) anthropology it requires is the subject of the second segment (II) of this Act.

Nietzsche’s Culturalism—‘Culture-Complex’ as a Whole

The Myth of the ‘Eternal Recurrence’ out of the Reality of Becoming

French philosopher Eric Blondel stands corrected overall in his anti-Heideggerian, non-metaphysical reading of Nietzsche when he writes, “The problem of culture in Nietzsche has been underestimated, and yet it forms the origin and centre of his thought”. In fact, Nietzsche recognizes that when it comes to that elusive concept of ‘human nature’, “the striving for culture is universal”—that the need for culture, established by the unique evolutionary history of man, is the only common perennial aspect that could be used to define and concretize the otherwise abstract human category.

One of the chief tenets of Nietzsche’s thought linking his early years with his mature period is undoubtedly his fascination with the idea of culture, which he increasingly comes to regard not just an ideational or spiritual notion, but a living physiological and evolutionary body. Culture as a living and growing (thereby changing and dynamic) organism occupies centerstage in

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462 Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, “Schopenhauer as Educator”, §6, (p. 199)
Nietzsche’s thinking, through whose medium and formative perspective alone one could interpret and understand the “human” (Ger. *Mensch*), as well as the different “human types”—including what it means to be *Übermensch* or *Unmensch* (unhuman). Indeed, in a letter (Sept. 1886) to his friend and colleague at Basel Jacob Burckhardt, Nietzsche describes his *Genealogy* as a work that deals with “the mysterious conditions behind any growth in culture”.

As early as *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche heralds the coming of “a tragic age”, where tragedy (and myth), understood as “the highest art of saying yes to life, will be reborn”, and, as established before, the idea of myth is deeply connected with the conception of culture in the Nietzschean account. While *BT* constitutes Nietzsche’s first attempt at offering a critique of *culture*—of being a ‘physician of culture’—by the time of his third and fourth of the *Untimely Mediations*, Nietzsche explicitly endeavors to provide “a higher conception of culture” (in contradistinction to the fashionable civilizational idea of culture in 19th century Germany expressed by *Bildung*), actively working “towards the restoration of the concept culture” which he believes to be almost disappearing—an endeavor that was to preoccupy him up until his last moments of sanity.

Moreover, already in *Human, All Too Human* (1878), Nietzsche speaks of the *macrocosm* and the *microcosm* of culture, making it clear that, although they are interlinked, Nietzsche will differentiate them and elaborate on them separately. Speaking *holistically* and from the *macro*

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463 *EH*, III, (BT §4)
464 *EH*, III, (UM §1)
465 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, “Signs of Higher and Lower Culture”, §276: eluding to man’s *uncultured culturality*, Nietzsche writes, “Man makes the best discoveries about culture within himself when he finds two heterogeneous powers governing there”. Here, Nietzsche juxtaposes man’s urgent will to creativity against his equally powerful “will to conformity”. Previously, Kant had referred to the same driving force inherent in human nature as his “unsocial sociability”. Nietzsche thinks this paradoxical nature of man a catalyst for the evolution of culture, where man attempts to resolve this formative contradiction by “[making] so large an edifice of culture out of himself that both powers can be accommodated [live] within it, even if at different ends of it” in a *contrived* ‘unity’ so that these opposing forces are *harmonized*. And “between them there reside mediating powers [of government and norms] with the strength and authority to settle any contention that might break out”. He continues, “For wherever grand cultural architecture has developed, its purpose has been to effect a harmony and concord between contending powers through the agency of an overwhelming assemblage of the other powers, but without the need to suppress them or clap them in irons.”
sociological) standpoint, the culture-complex for Nietzsche stands as a complex edifice which is anthropomorphized in that other complex edifice which is the person of the Übermensch, the physiological composition of whom embodies not just him (as living and breathing body) but also animates, by means of his ‘will to power’, the “grand cultural architecture” for “entire epochs”.466

A key question to contend with here then is what exactly is to be the purpose of this grand cultural architecture and culture itself in the Nietzschean account. “The sole and exclusive goal of culture is to foster the production of the true man” of genius, Nietzsche informs his readers in kind—genii who enhance life by igniting the fire of culture and serving as guardians for the health of their respective cultural organism and hence humanity at large.467 Nietzsche’s response clearly points to the circular, symbiotic, synergistic, and highly nuanced relationship between culture and the higher types of genius he calls “true men” here (and Übermensch later). In this mighty and vital task, the higher men who “replace ‘blind instinct’ with minded/purposeful willing” comprise “a mighty community welded together not by external forms and laws, but by a fundamental idea. This is the fundamental idea of culture, insofar as culture imposes only one duty on each of us: to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist, and the saint, within us and in the world, and thereby to labor for the perfection of Nature.”468 What emerges as the Übermensch in Nietzsche’s later writing beginning with Zarathustra is in many respects the coalescence of these early three types (Philosopher, Artist, and Saint): This ideal type he-man has the criticality and independence of the true philosopher, the creative spirit and vision of the artist, and finally the

466 Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human, “Signs of Higher and Lower Culture”, §276
467 Nietzsche, Unmodern Observations, “Schopenhauer as Educator”, §6, (p. 199); Cf. “The Greek State”, an early 1872 essay meant as a gift for Cosima Wagner, where Nietzsche sets the generation (Zeugung) and preparation (Vorbereitung) of genius (“in its most general sense”) and the “Olympian existence” of the few who propagate higher culture as the “actual goal of the state” and the purpose and meaning of human society as such, with the common man (in his labor) serving only as instrument (Werkzeug) and facilitator (Mittel des Genius) for the work and art (Kunstwerks) of the Übermensch. (GSt, KSA 1, p. 775-6)
468 Nietzsche, Unmodern Observations, “Schopenhauer as Educator”, §5, (p. 197)
strength of will, the foregoing of one’s ego in quest for a higher unity, and the sense of vocation (cf. ‘destiny of task’) of the saint all in one. As such, the Übermensch possesses all the personality, power of will, and love of self and yet is free from limiting and myopic individualism or rather overcomes it.\textsuperscript{469} Contrary to what is proposed by some commentators, this early 1874 rendering of Nietzsche’s position on culture never gets abandoned but is in fact only deepened and made more complicated as the philosopher and his thoughts mature and come of age.

In Nietzsche’s late works, culture continues to form the crux of Nietzsche’s philosophy as his panacea to the fundamental meaninglessness of existence having permeated into Modernity, a cure which is to be continuously attained by means of ‘culture-making’ and which endures in revaluation projects. These great men continually father the culture using their creative energies to make her repeatedly pregnant with higher ways of life. They are, at the same time, sacrificial/dutiful sons to this graceful and nurturing Mother we call culture. In this at once joyful and at once tragic eternally recurring dance, the eternal masculine couples the eternal feminine, nature is fused with nurture, and microcosm and macrocosm join in unison to achieve ultimate unity—hence, order is birthed from the midst of chaos just as Apollo and the Olympians rose in Greek mythology from the grips of and in their struggle with Titanic terror. In this process, Becoming comes to experience itself, albeit fleetingly and tentatively, as being. In the personal terms of the Übermensch too, the will to order (the apollonian task)—which psychologically speaking, is none other than self-seeking—passes through the chaos of trials, ordeals, and experiments—the Dionysian struggle—and they overcoming it in themselves: their path to value-creation is thus wrought with chaos, with uncertainty, with dangers. It comes out of their perilous quest in self-discovery—their rite of passage. This ‘hero’s journey’ (to recall Joseph Campbell’s

\textsuperscript{469} See GS, §345 for Nietzsche’s thought on the importance of a personal connection between the visionary and his visions and a rather distanced, impersonal relationship.
arc of myths\textsuperscript{470}) is defined by its ‘call to adventure’ at the end of which the heroic great man is rewarded with true Dionysian wisdom—claiming his status as the Übermensch. In this never-ending cycle, Nietzsche serves only as the great teacher and mentor so that the heroes accept their ‘fated’ calling, and it is precisely for this reason that Nietzsche never incudes himself as part of the Übermensch caste for he is only the messenger of god Dionysus—the divinity behind this very human ‘cycle of myth’.

As noted, Nietzsche believes that he has “a subtler sense of smell for the signs of ascent and decline than anyone has ever had;” that he is “their teacher par excellence”.\textsuperscript{471} ‘Becoming who he is’ for Nietzsche therefore amounts to becoming the founder of genuine renaissance theory—a chief heralder of cultural rebirth. Indeed, Nietzsche’s myth of the Eternal Recurrence as an ontological concept ties in with Nietzsche’s use of Kreislauf or the self-regenerative cycle that will constantly repeat itself in history as a processual matter, engendering and encompassing within itself the multiple rejuvenation and rebirths of culture. This is at the heart of Nietzsche’s distinctive renaissance theory within which the Renaissance is not a singular event limited to the Western experience, but merely one manifestation in the Western culture of the repetitive and circular process of (cultural) revitalization that is to recur so long as any culture (including the Western one) as a lifeform survives—a process that undergirds the evolution and sustaining of all cultures as alive complex organisms.

Nietzsche’s profound (bio-)culturalism is a testament to the rather ‘untimely’ structuralist undercurrent in his philosophy—his functionalist ‘sociology’—, while his focus on psychology and indeed the existentialist elements in his thought are directed squarely at the Übermensch,\textsuperscript{470} Campbell’s \textit{The Hero with a Thousand Faces} (1949) and his idea of hero’s journey along the 12 stages of myth was profoundly influenced by his reading of Nietzsche, which he understood as a ‘will to myth’.\textsuperscript{471} EH, “Why I Am So Wise”, §1

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whom Nietzsche conceives as both a microcosm of culture and its *agents of change*. Nietzsche’s emphasis on *meaning*—Nietzschean semiotics—connects these two aspects of culture together underscoring the rather cyclical relationship (*Kreislauf*) between the two, as well as highlighting the antagonism between culture and nature, where “the content of the tragic myth is an epic event” whose own worth and glory ties in “with its glorification of the fighting hero” who turns against the chaotic, disharmonious, and inherently meaningless reality of nature while furnishing “a perception of some higher delight” and meaning in his heroic and *human* overcoming of this naturally senseless reality. In this way, the tragic hero supplies “a metaphysical supplement to the reality of nature, and [is] set alongside [that harsh ugly reality] as a way of overcoming it.”

In the end, it turns out, only the tragic hero can in his *übermenschlichkeit* rise above and conquer “Silenus’ wisdom”. In doing so, he also provides a different kind of wisdom all together—he embodies the wisdom of Dionysus.

The path to this *übermenschlichkeit*—set as both goal and means—and consummated in the metamorphosis of culture is one illuminated by Dionysus, for which reason Nietzsche names his entire philosophy *Dionysian*. An entirely human divinity, Nietzsche’s Dionysus sits precisely at the heart of the antagonism between nature and culture noted above (which incidentally typifies the human experience) mediating between them, and so is far removed from the popular Dionysus of 19th century romantics. As Gillespie (1995) has correctly recognized, the origin of the Romantic interest in Dionysus as an *opposite* to Apollo, Classicism, and Idealism (as he is originally espoused by Cruezer, Schelling, and other early Romantics) is entirely subverted by Nietzsche as he outgrows his own Romanticism, and in mature Nietzsche’s hands, Dionysus is turned at once (*rehabilitated* Nietzsche would claim) into an *antithesis* symbol par excellence, set against not just

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472 *BT*, §24

473 *BT*, §24
idealism but romanticism as well—the two ideologies which together form the basis of what Nietzsche perceives as Modernity in the West. And without idealism and the Transcendent to underpin Christianity, Nietzsche is also able to reject the Romantic identification of Dionysus with Christ and Christianity.\textsuperscript{474} Dionysus is thus revived as the archaic humanistic divinity of anti-Modernity and of (cultural) myth espoused against both reason and nature. It is specifically on this ground that Nietzsche writes, “any weakening of myth generally expresses a waning of the capacity for the Dionysiac.”\textsuperscript{475}

Within the Nietzschean account of culture, the Apollonian spirit summons our ingenuity and creativity to build a sandcastle (‘a living myth’ consequence of ‘creative mythology’)\textsuperscript{476} and to sustain it across generations, while the Dionysian spirit supplies us with the courage and the criticality to blow it apart, akin to that Heraclitean example “of a playing child who sets down stones here, there, and the next place, and who builds up piles of sand only to knock them down again”.\textsuperscript{477} This process ad infinitum typifies (human) life itself. It is for all these reasons underlying the eternal hero’s role in the mytho-cultural cycle that Nietzsche so triumphantly declares, “There are good reasons for supposing that the gods could learn a thing or two from us humans. We humans are—more humanly…”\textsuperscript{478} Thus dawns Nietzsche’s anthro-culturalism, a synthesis tragoediam for which Apollo is shorthand for the dominant structure of myth and meaning—the “poetics of culture”\textsuperscript{479}, while Nietzsche’s conception of Dionysus increasingly

\textsuperscript{474} Michael A. Gillespie, \textit{Nihilism Before Nietzsche}, p. 242. Gillespie’s nominalist understanding of Dionysus as a supreme power and God of (universal) Will is however problematic for it simply turns Dionysus identification with Christ into an identification with Paul or Luther. This would be tantamount to an anathema for Nietzsche. In any case, a nominalist and universalized understanding of the Will would be more apropos for Schopenhauer than for Nietzsche.

\textsuperscript{475} \textit{BT}, §24

\textsuperscript{476} Here I am borrowing terminology from Campbell’s \textit{Creative Mythology} (1968), the concluding volume of his series \textit{The Masks of God}.

\textsuperscript{477} \textit{BT}, §24

\textsuperscript{478} \textit{BGE}, §295

\textsuperscript{479} My borrowing from Stephen Greenblatt
exemplifies both the process of cultural regeneration as a whole as well as the poetic wisdom (sapienza poetica)\textsuperscript{480} the Üermensch come to possess in their self-overcoming (which is really the overcoming of the preceding order of meaning for the sake of their creation of a new one). As such, Dionysus signals the actual processes of meaning-creation, of culture-making, and of culture itself; Apollo, meanwhile, alludes to the complex—the (functionalist) structures and institutions of control maintaining meaning and sustaining culture: together, they enliven the “culture complex” and affirm its dynamism.

The Absence in Modernity of Cultural Agency

Within Nietzsche’s Dionysian philosophy, the idea of ‘eternal recurrence’ (Wiederkehr) serves as the formula with which Nietzsche seeks to bring to light the cyclical and dynamic transformation of any living cultural paradigm. In this way, cultures function as resilient wholes which can in themselves overcome most bottlenecks and degenerative pressures threatening their health. The engine for this constant revitalization and rebirth of culture, in other words what turns the wheels of the all-important eternal recurrence, is ‘cultural agency’—understood in terms of Üermensch production and the realization of the will to power of these distinctive great men of history. The notion of eternal recurrence functions and depends on cultural agency, and it is this cultural agency which Nietzsche finds severely lacking in Modernity causing in part its many ills. It is this absence of cultural agency parallels what Tocqueville famously calls the “great

\textsuperscript{480} A term originally used by Giambattista Vico
exhaustion”, and this Nietzsche prophetically foresees as the dominant shortcoming of our Modern zeitgeist.

Moreover, with eternal recurrence effectively halted, it threatens the very collapse and death of the Western culture by interrupting its renewal. Cultural recuperation hinges on a constant supply of the Übermensch who in essentially operating as the white blood cells for the cultural organism are the ready-made solution in facilitating cultural recovery. In the last section (“The Interlude”), we discussed the substantive, historical, and genealogical sources of this unfortunate development as well as the nature of the sickness with which the West grapples. Here, I hope to outline the structural and systemic reasons Nietzsche finds impeding the restoration of cultural agency in the West by working to emaciate the production of these vital white blood cells—the Übermensch, and which in effect have so far blocked the Western system from healing and self-correcting thus requiring Nietzsche’s personal intervention. These structural problems are also why Nietzsche is so subversive toward and dismissive of traditional philosophy, the nascent sociological inquiry of his day, and indeed millennia of Western epistemology.

Nietzsche’s Critical Philosophy Rooted in Becoming

The first of these structural problems preventing the recovery of cultural agency in the West so far as Nietzsche is concerned is Western philosophy itself, or more exactly the Socratic brand of classical philosophy having perpetuated all the way to our time as the only viable form of philosophizing. Ironically, this is a blockage that plagues the elites and intellectuals. In other words, Nietzsche believes that our pedagogical approach to elite formation obstructs the breeding of the healthy ‘life-driven’ kind of elites—the Übermensch. And this should come as no surprise given that in Nietzsche’s account the pedagogical class stands responsible for inaugurating the
décadent perennialist worldview in the West. As discussed earlier, from the Nietzschean perspective, classical philosophy is forever haunted by the Apollonian questions of being and form hence requiring rigid and absolutist categories in its quest for the perennial and the eternal it calls “Truth”. Nietzsche finds this immensely problematic for not only does Socratic philosophy irreparably open the door to metaphysics, but this kind of philosophizing (i.e. idealism) has no time for becoming and change, cornerstones of Nietzsche’s theory of culture and indeed his understanding of reality itself. What is more, as fixated as it is on being, it is inevitable, Nietzsche believes, that such philosophizing turn dogmatic and uncritical, for criticality pivots on genuine and boundless intellectual freedom accepting the possibility for the novel and the variable. Nietzsche thus decidedly breaks with traditional philosophical practice rejecting its absolutist categories and “dogmatic slumber”. In its stead, he hopes to establish a new kind of philosophy whose first principles are becoming and mutability, which it regards as the only justifiable principles having been drawn from life itself. In contrast to metaphysical philosophers who come to dominate Western philosophy since Socrates and Plato, Nietzsche could be viewed as an archetypical culturalist philosopher not interested in universals, absolutes, metaphysics, and God, but solely culture and multiplicity viewed as inherently changing and dynamic. Entirely hostile to “philosophy of being” in all its forms, the “free spirit” (Freigeister) philosophy Nietzsche, the misopope, champions is a “philosophy of becoming” seeking genuine free-mindedness and criticality.

For a civilization such as the West—mired and emaciated by a misguided and theoretically-nihilistic idea of the Beyond (cf. Paul) on one end, and a pathological, distorted, life-denying, practically-nihilistic notion of subjective Hither (cf. Jesus) on the other, both of which profusely décadent and which Western philosophy doggedly justifies and rationalizes with its notions of
disembodied reason and autonomous will—nothing is more dangerous, Nietzsche maintains, than totalizing systems that profess monopoly on truth (as Truth) and decree ‘categorical imperatives’. Nietzsche was convinced that institutional dogma in the philosophical domain causes intellectual and axiological dogma in the culture at large. In fact, Nietzsche is among the first European thinkers to observe that such parasite of intellectual totalitarianism overtaking culture as its host is far more pernicious to the health of a cultural organism than political totalitarianism (whose sphere of influence is limited to politics and state institutions) could ever be. As such, he warns of just such spiritual parasitism overwhelming the cultural mind and undermining its intellectual sensibilities and handicapping its relationship to knowledge, referring to it as Egyptianism and revolting against its ‘will to Truth’:

We knowing ones: oh, how we nowadays learn as artists to forget well, to be good at not knowing! And as for our future, one will hardly find us again on the paths of those Egyptian youths… No, we have grown sick of this bad taste, this will to truth, to ‘truth at any price’, this youthful madness in the love of truth: we are too experienced, too serious, too jovial, too burned, too deep for that . . . We no longer believe that truth remains truth when one pulls off the veil; we have lived too much to believe this… Perhaps truth is a woman who has grounds [out of a sense of decency] for not showing her grounds? 481

With such visceral misosophic language, Nietzsche declares war on the whole tradition of Western Truthism (Wahrheitsbegriff) which passes for philosophy and indeed the very categories of knowledge the West (under the tutelage of Socrates) has enshrined for millennia. Coming out so strongly against all forms of foundationalism, he rejects traditional Western dualities as false dichotomies. In their place, Nietzsche endeavors to create new categories—a new set of dualities—privileging in his renovations not the foundations and substantive essences (cf. eidos) but the interrelations which he deems fundamental to a healthful structure of meaning capable of self-criticality.

481 Gay Science, Preface, §4
Nietzsche is adamant that the course of human life and history as well as the human relationship to nature are all premised on semblance—grand Apollonian lies working to make life appear orderly and worth living by ironically and deceptively presenting themselves as Truth all the while inverting the very notion of truth. “Truth is a woman”, Nietzsche writes in the preface to Beyond Good and Evil—a woman who does not let herself be won by the cold and clumsy dogmatists who masquerade as philosophers and desire to eternally pigeonhole and define it. In reality, Nietzsche contends, truth is best showcased by its ephemeral and flickering quality if not its absence; its ‘relatedness and contextuality’ intimating it as a product of culture to be explained and interpreted rather than a ubiquitous feature of nature to be discovered. Truth is thus a human good—even a human masterstroke. In fact, as an entirely normative demand, the principle thou shall not deceive (even oneself) often stands counter to reality and utilitarian considerations of life—its practice regularly hampering human interest.\footnote{Gay Science, V, §344} Within Nietzsche’s radical critique of the Wahrheitsbegriff (Truthism) of Philosophy, the compulsive focus on truth as a singular in-itself distorts what should rightly be the focus on reality, making it an intrinsically anti-realist exercise. And yet, Nietzsche’s own anti-metaphysical and realist stances are decidedly grounded in the age-old ‘will to truth’ coming to its own post-Enlightenment. This is a fact of which Nietzsche is not only aware but readily concedes.\footnote{Gay Science, V, §344} His task then is not one of simply renouncing truth per se but one of reinterpreting it whole—breaking its absolutist, dogmatic shell and recalibrating it according to the natural reality of becoming and the fluctuating needs of human life and culture. This is what a true free spirit (Freigeist) aspires to: freeing truth from the shackles of human prejudice placed on it by its human inventors (cf. Socrates and Plato) and no longer utilizing it as a sacrificial lamb to God.
Still, if philosophy and truth are not harmful per se but perhaps even a salutary tool man constructs for himself in understanding his place vis-à-vis reality, then the question remains: what exactly in the Western will to truth has historically seduced and misdirected Western philosophers bringing them to the brink? Nietzsche provides an answer:

‘Look…to the lap of being, the everlasting, the hidden God, the ‘thing-in-itself’ – this is where their ground must be, and nowhere else!’ – This way of judging typifies the prejudices by which metaphysicians of all ages can be recognized… From these ‘beliefs’ they try to acquire their ‘knowledge,’ to acquire something that will end up being solemnly christened as ‘the truth’.484

Classical philosophy, as conceived by Nietzsche, is the realm of metaphysics and ideals and of blind faith and submission in their sheen. In short, it is exclusively a philosophy of being. It follows also that “the fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is the belief in oppositions of values”—a world animated by false dichotomies opposite to life.485 This ‘philosophy of being’ based in an original “Socratic-Platonic error, still evident in Kant but overcome by Goethe, in Nietzsche's view, was to cast Form, like the shape of the bell above, into a metaphysical entity and then to forget that one has shaped it. This results in a static culture, unhistorical, uncreative, one separated from the dynamics of the body, of the senses, of nature.”486 Yet, Nietzsche wagers that ‘we physiologists’ who believe in a naturalistic and this-worldly principle of valuation should know better. The metaphysicians in their weakness assumed erroneously that because humans need order and hierarchy to flourish then that must mean not only our values but reality itself is ordered and hierarchical in esse and in actu. Nietzsche’s realization was that nature itself is random, chaotic, meaningless, and in fieri (not a fixed being at all but eternally becoming), which is just what makes

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484 BGE, “On the Prejudices of Philosophers”, §2
485 BGE, “On the Prejudices of Philosophers”, §2
486 White and Hellerich, p. 7
meaning, order, form, and a hierarchy of values of such paramount importance to us in making sense of the chaos in life and putting us on stable ground on which to thrive—to be human.

Martin Heidegger is among the first of Nietzsche interpreters to understand that what Nietzsche despises in classical philosophy and calls “old” philosophy is really metaphysics and the kind of philosophy rooted in it since Socrates driven by a distorted will-to-Truth (albeit Heidegger himself ultimately misreads Nietzsche’s position vis-à-vis that metaphysics given his own phenomenological turn that reaffirms the metaphysical in Being and Dasein). It is true, however, that, for Nietzsche, metaphysical philosophy is really no philosophy at all but, as it stands, a misosophy; and whenever sophia or wisdom begets any association with being, all critically-minded independent philosophers, who have become free-minded (freigewordenen Geister), must discard it as idealistic jargon, adopting a rather cautious and misosophic stance toward it. Yet their task does not end there—for they shall also create. Richard Schacht summarizes this point rather well observing, “Nietzschean free spirits are not necessarily philosophers; but Nietzschean philosophers are necessarily free spirits”.487 To philosophize authentically, the genuinely free-minded philosophes of the future (who in Nietzsche find their teacher) must appreciate and advance a new philosophy grounded not in being and the illusory meaning-as-such, but in becoming—posing meanings in service of life.

And with this insight, the allegorical “bell rings ominously and hopefully” marking the dawn of the “new temporal order”—a genuine moment of awakening from millennia of slumber.488 The dawn of our age marks the “new day” whose lessons and ‘philosophy of future’ is to come to its apex and fully unfold at noon. The Nietzschean soul does not become enlightened

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487 Richard Schacht, Human All Too Human, “Introduction”, p. xxi
via ideals as it did with Socrates and Plato. It is illuminated in and through life concretely practiced. To that enlightenment which finds (perennial) “consciousness” in denying the existence of the dark and the tragic, the Nietzschean psyche is ignorant—defiantly unconscious. The Socratic illusion (der Schein) which masks its ‘will to certainty’ as ‘will to truth’ is thus exposed as an Earth-shattering lie (Luge) and defeated by celebration of chance and indeterminacy of life—embracing uncertainty. From this prism, the modern ‘conscious’ I (Ich) thus reveals itself as the mere subjectivization of being—and it results inescapably in individualism and solipsism for it has no other ground to stand on in the real world but the ‘subject’. The “will” thus has no choice but to turn back on itself destroying the self and engendering the destructive passivistic complete nihilism (from ‘will to nothingness’ to ‘no will at all’) which characterizes Modernity.

In fact, the very notion of ego is to Nietzsche yet another example of the idealism of the ‘commonplace philosophers’, a false pretense and a higher sort of lie meant to break apart the physiological unity behind one’s existence into “psychological absurdities”. Under the holiest of names, this unholiest of deceptions fabricates the false duality of self and instinct turning this (contrived) self against its own very nature. These ‘world-historic impostors’ and ‘enemies of life’, as Nietzsche sentences them, devalue all that is ‘natural’ in man casting them as ‘unnatural’, and hence permit themselves to judge one’s every action under an entirely made-up premise—egoistic and unegoistic. The self, pitted against its very self as it is, in time comes to despise its very malign existence and learns (or is civilized rather) to deny itself and its will as sin. Thus the ‘ascetic ideal’ is birthed. Man feels his very existence is an affront to nature and life—his very being is a curse and offends. In a flash, the rehabilitated man of the idealist philosophers becomes the highest paragon of self-hatred there ever was.

489 EH, III, §5
It should come as no surprise that adopting such a décadent and anti-natural philosophical premise by the metaphysical philosophers (i.e. idealists) would leave its décadent marks on moral philosophy having insalubrious axiological implications. For Nietzsche believes the espoused *Morality* of such conventional philosophers a piece of anti-nature (*Widernatürlichkeit*). Their moral ideal *commands* them “to say no to everyone who believes in the senses, to all the rest of humanity [excluding themselves of course]: they are all [pronounced] "rabble". Be a philosopher, be a mummy, put on your gravedigger's face and show the world what monotono-theism is all about! - And above all, get rid of the *body*, this miserable *idée fixe* of the senses! full of all the errors of logic, refuted, impossible even, although [this *body*] is impudent enough to act as if it were real! . . .” 490 What conceit on the part of this engine of *physis*! Yet, Nietzsche assertively tells us that the real *lie* is the philosopher’s. That his pretense to *being*, to the universal, to the perennial, to idealization (and all in the name of civilization), which Nietzsche likens to the mummification of the *concrete*, in effect amounts to a “denaturing”, deculturing”, a “deadening”—a full-scale *de-animation*.

In his characteristically subversive spirit, Nietzsche powerfully impugns the conventional philosophers’ “lack of historical sense, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egyptianism”, writing:

They think that they are honoring something when they dehistoricize it, *sub specie aeterni*, —when they turn it into a mummy. For thousands of years, philosophers have been using only mummified concepts; nothing real makes it through their hands alive. They kill and stuff the things they worship, these lords of concept idolatry—they become mortal dangers to everything they worship. They see death, change, and age, as well as procreation and growth, as objections,—refutations even. What is, does not *become*; what becomes, *is* not . . . So, they all believe, desperately even, in being. 491

490 *Twilight of the Idols*, “’Reason’ in Philosophy”, § 1
491 *Twilight of the Idols*, “’Reason’ in Philosophy”, § 1 (bolding is my own).
In Nietzsche’s brand of affirmative philosophy centered on *becoming* and *life*, all such forms of intellectual *taxidermy*, that is all *meta*-physics (whether Egyptian, Socratic, or Judeo-Christian in origin), should be countered and burned at stake by the new breed of life-serving philosophers—the lying taxidermists are thereby condemned for their “world negations” and ‘non-this-worldly’ and hence *inauthentic* and *hypocritical* character. And the same applies to the kind of normative and ethical paradigm (i.e. Morality) founded on such “bold lunacies of metaphysics” thus speaks Nietzsche.

In the preface to *Daybreak* (1881), Nietzsche informs his readers that he is about to begin what has *hitherto* been avoided for the fear of being too “dangerous”—too controversial; to investigate the foundations of an *ancient faith* that is the cornerstone of classical Platonic philosophy, and to criticize for the first-time *Morality*—the universalist Good and Evil ethical order that emerges from this metaphysical philosophical foundation—“to regard it as a problem” and challenge its iron-clad *authority*. Nietzsche describes his “dangerous” and “subterranean” philosophical quest driven by a commitment to free-mindedness thus:

I descended into the depths, I tunneled into the foundations, I commenced an investigation and digging out of an ancient *faith*, one upon which we philosophers have for a couple of millennia been accustomed to build as if upon the firmest of all foundations – and have continued to do so even though every building hitherto erected on them has fallen down: I commenced to undermine our faith in morality.

Given the idealistic, anti-natural roots of classical philosophy, Nietzsche surmises that “on a grand scale, philosophy has been no more than an interpretation of the body [or rather] a

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492 *GS*, Preface, §2
493 *Daybreak*, Preface, § 3
494 *Daybreak*, Preface, § 2
misunderstanding of the body”, concealing specific “misunderstandings of the physical constitution of individuals, or classes, or even whole races”.

Not only does this piece of world-historic deception masquerading as “philosophy” not possess the monopoly on Truth it presumes, but it has canonized one particular interpretation of one particular body of culture (i.e. the West) when there exist many others (cf. cultural organisms)—and even there, this anti-natural view is perhaps symptomatic of persons of a particularly décadent type or class, namely the priests and metaphysicians.

For Nietzsche, “the worst, most prolonged, and most dangerous of all errors to this day was a dogmatist’s error, namely Plato’s invention of pure spirit and the Good in itself.” With the Enlightenment, despite all its turmoil and terrors, this error (belief in metaphysical absurdities) “has been overcome, and Europe breathes a sigh of relief after this nightmare, and at least can enjoy a healthier — well—sleep, we, whose task is wakefulness itself, are the heirs to all the force cultivated through the struggle against this error.” In liberating our minds from the clutches of metaphysics however, we in the West, to follow Nietzsche’s clever metaphor, have gone from a disastrous nightmare into a deep sleep which threatens to become our eternal sleep and peaceful death. But this development is also one which offers those free-spirited physicians of culture (chief among them Nietzsche) the chance to wake us from our (dogmatic) slumbers. As it turns out, the great task at hand for the philosophers of the future is great awakening which goes hand in hand with a new dawn of the Western culture promising even a “great noon” of illumination and height.

Instrumenting this great wake is the fundamental task for the physician of culture in our time, the only path to becoming human again for a creature who is just an empty theoretical shell

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495 GS, Preface, §2
496 BGE, Preface
497 Ibid.
of its former self. Only when we embrace the new reality of becoming Nietzsche preaches, could we fathom that “the formation of culture, including the will to create, must complement the chaos [of physical world] so as to produce a dynamic totality”, to fully grasp the “evolutionary dynamism” at play.. This task is one reserved for the new breed of philosophers whose arrival Nietzsche anticipates which we may call “culturalist philosophers”: they stand wholeheartedly against the metaphysical philosophers of old philosophy and, in their stance, found the new philosophy of the future. As Nietzsche puts it, he awaits only the “philosophical physician in the exceptional sense of the term–someone who has set himself the task of pursuing the problem of the total health of a people, time, race or of man”. True philosophy (the kind heralded for the future) strives only for health—for life itself. All of which makes clear that as far as Nietzsche is concerned, “what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all 'truth' but rather something else—let us say health, future, growth, power, life…”, albeit that this noble effort and intellectual energy has as of yet been distorted, misrepresented, and misdirected by the traditional philosophers.

Ultimately, then, the practice of philosophy up to now has signified only that “the trust in life is gone: life itself has become a problem.” How one solves this problem is key. Will he choose to affirm life despite its injustice and pain. Or will he give in, withdraw, and choose to deny the harsh realities of life by conceptualizing another more soothing and pleasant life, a Beyond, a spiritual Shangri-La which the Buddhists call Nirvana. Will he decide to impose his will upon the world or will he deny his will for the sake of the pure spirit—a nothingness. To live or not to live—to fight or not to fight—that is the pivotal question.

499 GS, Preface, §2
500 Ibid.
Counting himself among the “godless anti-metaphysicians”, Nietzsche’s central aim is putting philosophy and its chief capital, truth, in service of life: A historical philosophy or a philosophy with a historical sense whose goal is culture and health in place of the metaphysical philosophy of the past fixated on an unchanging and permanent horizon according to an absolute universal Truth—the lie of the pure Spirit. Indeed, the very dichotomy of ‘essence-existence’ and thing-in-itself versus appearance (Erscheinung) reveals itself a fantastic Schein (illusion) to Nietzsche. As such, a more apt subtitle for his Twilight of the Idols is perhaps The End of Our Self-Deceptions! For what Nietzsche attempts to do in TI is not only to clarify his own philosophical positions and prepare the intellectual ground for the coming of his Revaluation magnum opus, but more importantly to take a hammer to what he judges the confused and deceptive dualisms and universalisms which have so problematically defined and confined Western philosophy for millennia. Far from dismissing the necessity of truth and honesty—of aletheia, Nietzsche’s Dionysian approach demands fresh new grounds and a novel conception of truth for its future philosophy: it thus commanded a new realist epistemology, a testament of Nietzsche’s own alethic quest.

Nietzsche’s Perspectivist Epistemology

As alluded to above, Nietzsche is convinced that underpinning the old philosophers’ misguided ‘philosophy of being’ is a perennialist epistemology and an unconditional, categorical view of truth and value. Such an epistemological outlook is entirely pathological and problematic, Nietzsche believes, for it corresponds to and underwrites the ‘will to certainty’ and ‘meaning-as-such’ mindset he finds so life-denying and debilitative of cultural health. The key question then is what kind of epistemology agrees with Nietzsche’s affirmative philosophy principled on becoming
and oriented to life? That truth is *multiple, conditional*, and a matter of communal and cultural *perspective* is Nietzsche’s profound epistemological innovation. Only *perspectivism*, Nietzsche holds, is conducive to the dynamic reality of change within various cultural organisms.

Again, for all of Nietzsche’s disdain for substantive universals and absolute Truths, he does not reject the ‘will to truth’ itself as unnecessary or invaluable. Given Nietzsche’s own philosophical position and concern for intellectual *honesty*, this would not only be disingenuous to claim but untenable. To be sure, Nietzsche understands that truth does not always lend itself to human well-being; and in fact, historically-speaking truth and truthfulness have been more often than not *destructive* to human survival, cutting against (other) human *needs*. Nevertheless, Nietzsche insists, the idea and quest for truth is *also* a human need, the scaffolding on which all human meanings are structured. In his view, that old truths are falsified and exposed as deceptions (thanks to the Enlightenment) does not spell the end of the rather *unconditional* will to truth (same as our will to meaning not perishing with the collapse of metaphysics). It does suggest however that those (set and fixed) truths (cf. old tablets) be seen as *conditional* substantively-speaking. That they become understood as human creations and, as such, subject to interpretation and possibly change and adaptation, and not regarded as *absolutes* of nature—this is the Nietzschean glad tidings for epistemology. Meanings-as-such and absolute, timeless, and perennial Truths no longer hold; universal Forms are no longer. From Nietzsche’s standpoint, our “thousand-year-old” will to truth in the West has taught us that there exists no *unconditional* Truth as such but only *conditional* truths enduring as and within *cultures*.⁵⁰¹

The entire Nietzschean philosophy is living testament that the will to truth as an instinct has not yet expired. The post-metaphysical age is not on balance the post-alethic age (despite what

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⁵⁰¹ *GS*, §344
many of Nietzsche’s later commentators have supposed) if Nietzsche has anything to do with it!

Yet, Nietzsche is among the first to recognize the *liberating* potential of this epistemological shift in the West: “the world has once again become infinite to us in so far as we cannot reject the possibility *that it includes infinite interpretations*”. Nietzsche realizes that our time is perhaps a *singular* time where the consequences of applying a genuine ‘will to truth’ (and its profound consequence in uncovering of man’s *will to culture*) are in actuality salutary. We can at long last deny universal Truths and the *absolutes*, all the while affirming the possibility that the world *includes infinite interpretations*. Truth, meanwhile, is vindicated by its discovery of *culture* as a *living* physiology offering countless alternatives forms and embodiments of life. Ironically, the only universal Truth is that the *absence* of a universal truth makes it necessary that we *interpret* the human domain under the variable lens of culture in all its diverse shapes, shades, and colors—i.e. “*infinite interpretations*”. As such, we have learned (with Nietzsche) to sustain truth in and through the mosaic of *cultures*. All attempts to deny the ‘perpetually-in-flux’, ‘non-teleological’, ‘meaningless’, and ‘disordered’ nature of the world or otherwise escape its harsh, exacting disposition should be combated in the *genuine* spirit of *willing truth* and with *honest* courage.

Ultimately, under Nietzsche’s culturalist philosophy, we remain bundles of passion and instinct, but, rather than being “atoms after survival” in the Hobbesian sense, we seek *enhancement* and *strengthening* only supplied via our collective inhabiting of a cultural organism and *embodied* in the person of Ubermensch.

Indeed, Nietzsche is adamant that cultural *myth* and *belief* in that myth is in the long run more salutary for healthy *life* than any version of truth as such. Our age-old evolutionary relationship with meaning demands it: “That a great deal of belief must be present; that judgments

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502 GS, §374
may be ventured; that doubt concerning all essential values is lacking—that is the precondition of every living thing and its life. Therefore, what is needed is something that must be held to be true—not that something is true.” 503 As Michels correctly observes, “diversity, not consensus, and perspective through experience” within cultures “are prerequisites for a claim to truth”. 504 As such, the kind of perspectivist epistemology championed by the physicians of culture works to render coherent the totality of cultural experience in its multiple perspectives on reality, while placing history (of each culture) in service of continuing life (for that culture).

As White and Hellerich observe, Nietzsche’s treatment of old philosophy and its pretense to wisdom and truth “clearly express a critical misosophy—one that rails against the wisdom of the tired-of-life, the fatuous, the literal-minded and suggests an appreciation for the "unwise," the village idiots and the courtly fools who have inspired writers from William Shakespeare to Woody Allen. Yet Nietzsche's neighborhood misosophoi might well be said to express a kind of wisdom, one that is not absolute but perspectival and enlivened by the will to power…: one that enlivens the activities of the living.” 505 Nietzsche provides us with a clear definition of “perspectivism” mindful of the (human) physiological drives (Tribe) which animate it:

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena—"There are only facts"—I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself": perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing. "Everything is subjective," you say; but even this is interpretation. The "subject" is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is. Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is [poetic] invention, hypothesis. In so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is variously interpretable, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. [This is]—"Perspectivism." It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is

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503 *WP*, §507
505 Daniel R. White and Gert Hellerich, “The Liberty Bell: Nietzsche's Philosophy of Culture”, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, No. 18 (FALL 1999), pp. 1-54, p. 4
a kind of lust for domination \textit{[Herrschsucht cf. will to power]}; each one has its perspective that it would like to impose as a norm on all the other drives.\footnote{\textit{KGW} (NF 1886, 7[60]). From \textit{Friedrich Nietzsche: Writings from the Late Notebooks}, Cambridge Press, 2003, p. 139. Translation harmonized with Kauffman (\textit{WP}, §481). [Bolding is my own]} These physiological impulses and needs being best enlivened and made concrete in various human cultures, Nietzsche objects to all nonsensical philosophies (chief among them Hegelianism) that profess (and project) uniformity and universality of a so-called human culture (i.e. Humanitat) \textit{advancing} as a universal spirit (cf. Weltgeist and absoluter Geist) that is \textit{active} within a teleological view of history. "Mankind" does not advance, it does not even exist”, Nietzsche declares—and after all, from Nietzsche’s standpoint, there is no \textit{one} ‘human nature’ or drive to speak of to give rise to that behemoth called humanity.\footnote{\textit{WP} §90 (1888, 15[8])} Rather, from the culturalist prism, “the overall aspect” and trajectory of human affairs “is that of a tremendous experimental laboratory [within cultures] in which a few successes are scored, scattered throughout all ages, while there are untold failures, and all [universal] order, logic, union, and obligingness are lacking.\footnote{\textit{WP} §90} What is more, an absolute universal perspective and categorical standard from whose vantage point one could judge all human life and cultures according to a singular hierarchy of values does not exist. And \textit{metaphysics}, understood from the perspectivist viewpoint, as White and Hellerich correctly recognize, reveals itself “the product of an attempt to control this [random precarious] process from one side, to impose the superiority of one’s [own cultural] type on others, even the superiority of "community" preconceived in terms of one [culture’s] own priorities.”\footnote{White and Hellerich, p.14}

This is a sort of ideational or “metaphysical imperialism” that precedes that advent of imperialism per se. Nietzsche thereby denies \textit{progress} (and the melioristic doctrine it espouses) as eschatological fabrication, a modern remnant of our Christian and metaphysical past obsessed
with *telos* and *salvation*: "Mankind does not represent a development toward something better or stronger or higher in the sense accepted today. 'Progress' is merely a modern idea, that is, a false idea. The European of today is vastly inferior in value to the European of the Renaissance: further development is altogether *not* according to any necessity in the direction of elevation, enhancement, or strength".  

Nietzsche’s critique of our Christian prejudice does not end with his repudiation of meliorism but extends to contemporary humanism more generally. The very idea of *humanity* itself is in Nietzsche’s view a construct, a metaphysical fallacy underwriting (in this case European) parochialism. It is partly for this reason that Nietzsche observes ("with fear and contempt") that “the European politics of today…is certainly also helping to weave the fabric of *all* mankind's future,” a fact which he *laments* given the pathological foundations and décadent drives of the Western culture in Modernity which without recourse will in time deny *future* and *health* to all mankind—this alone he regards a mark of his *compassion* for man as species (without being pitiful and sentimental for man as a wretched individual soul in whose suffering he would share).  

It is important to note here that Nietzsche’s proposed cultural humanism (modeled on the Renaissance example) not only refutes ethnocentrism (which in this case manifests as Occidentalism), but denies humanitarianism and anthropocentrism as such, for Nietzsche rightly understands anthropocentrism as simply a vehicle for *an* ethno-cultural domination (in this case European) which is not warranted given our discussion above regarding the *multifarious* nature of human will to power and meaning schemes, not to speak of the way in which *Humanitat* denies human animality—supplanting the organic lifefulness of man through metaphysical *ideals*.

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510 AC §4  
511 KGW (NF 1885, 36[7])
Accordingly, Nietzsche’s epistemological legacy for the human/cultural sciences dictates that a philosophy of culture and semiotics which understands culture in an anthropological sense as an ecological medium (where existence and experience is specifically understood as an adaptive inter-generational experience)—a kind of structural functionalism—must replace the traditional Anglo-American adherence to approaches rooted in the philosophy of mind and human nature as such in order to be salutary for our very human needs and foster human \textit{heightening}. A new sociology which investigates human community—understood as a cultural organism—not as a deterministic teleologically-ordained “society” but as a “culture-complex” \textit{recurrently} seeking meaning-creation.

\textit{Nietzsche’s Radical Sociology}

Nietzsche’s novel humanist epistemology is also the source of his gripe with a nascent field of scholarship on human community coming to its own in his age called \textit{sociology}, which he sees as beholden to and byproduct of false old philosophy. Sociology, as Nietzsche sees it, derives its intellectual capital from fallacious concepts advanced by old philosophy: internalizing old and expired notions such as teleology and progress and influenced by contemporary currents of positivism and (melioristic) historicism, sociology establishes itself as a universalist science of human society as such, whose intrinsic methodology underwrites a \textit{systemic} mechanistic understanding of determinism primarily geared to achieving such pre-supposed (and if Nietzsche is correct pathological) idealistic ends. As such, it is a discipline inherently grounded in foundationalism and doctrinaire thinking. Following his perspectivist epistemology, Nietzsche insists that knowledge in the human sciences is historically and generationally verified through
continual creation, invention, and revaluation by human interpreters and not through the scientistic principle of observation (the application of which should be limited to the natural sciences).

Building on his naturalist account of reality as one principled on incessant becoming, Nietzsche is among the very first to view human reality specifically as a ‘cultural construction’, albeit a reification rooted in human biology and evolution itself, having a life of its own. Nietzsche’s position in this regard invites comparisons to Giambattista Vico’s verum factum principle and the Italian’s desire to create a unified human sciences as expressed in his 1725 magnum opus The New Science (Scienza Nuova). Curiously, Nietzsche is not often credited by sociologists for this major contribution, while Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, and Weber are touted as founders of sociology. This is unfortunate because Nietzsche’s anthro-culturalism, as I am proposing here, anticipates many of the debates that have since come to typify and define the field of sociology—he is a mature socio-cultural theorist and at least a ‘proto’ sociologist (as much as he himself would resist such a characterization privileging the notions of culture and culture-complex over society and sociology). Yet, Nietzsche’s neglect is perhaps also salutary, for Nietzsche, in his broadminded and multi-disciplinary sociocultural theory, is much more than a

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512 Nietzsche presents culture as the only true form of reification, for it has roots in life, in human evolution, and hence in nature. All other types of reification are inherently false and dehumanizing.

513 In line with his repudiations of dogmatic and reductionist idea of reason prevalent in both Christian and modern Cartesian circles, Vico (1710) famously declares “verum esse ipsum factum”, emphasizing the man-made and constructed nature of truth and even what we take to be reality.

514 What is more curious, at least a few of these figures (Simmel, Scheler, and Weber come to mind) are, to their own acknowledgement, directly influenced and in part indebted to Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s influence on Weber is well-studied. And Weber is believed to have said in a student lecture that the modern scholar’s ‘honesty’ “can be measured by the position he takes vis-a-vis Nietzsche and Marx…the intellectual world in which we live is a world which to a large extent bears the imprint of Marx and Nietzsche.” [Wolfgang Schluchter (1989, p. 316); Schluchter is quoting Eduard Baumgarten]. Similarly, Simmel, in his often-overlooked Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (1907), goes as far as locating the source of discontinuities in modern life in an original divergence between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, thus suggesting that all sociology would be either Schopenhauerian or Nietzschean! Karl Mannheim ([1936] 1955, pp. 309-11) credited Nietzsche (and Marx) as foundational to ‘sociology of knowledge’, the movement to which Mannheim himself is often deemed a progenitor. For a more in-depth analysis of the treatment of Nietzsche by sociologists, See Robert J. Antonio’s “Nietzsche’s Antisociology” in American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 101, No. 1 (1995), pp. 1-43; and Patrick Aspers’ “Nietzsche’s Sociology” in Sociological Forum, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2007), pp. 474-499.
‘sociologist’—his thought not lending itself to narrow disciplinary divisions that under the weight of positivism have come to typify (and splinter) the “social sciences”. 515

Sociology is an offshoot of philosophy and a distinctively Modern discipline internalizing many of the intellectual trends and strains of thought popular in our epochal habitat. Nietzsche thinks sociology has oscillated between three specifically Modern ideas: reductionism reflecting Modernity’s individualism, meliorism reflecting Modernity’s rather Christian view of man and history, and determinism reflecting Modernity’s scientism and fixation on (geometrical) ‘method’ and (abstract) ‘systems’. While Durkheim’s ‘structural functionalist’ analysis of society as a holistic meta-systemic unit revolving around institutions betrays his determinism, Weber’s so-called ‘interpretive sociology’ takes the reductionistic tack and focuses on the individual and his personal interpretation of the social web of meaning as the main unit of social analysis and social change. But nowhere are these pathologies of sociology Nietzsche outlines more evident than in sociology of Karl Marx. Marxian sociology in effect combines all of the above strains into an ideology managing the feat of being melioristic, reductionistic, and deterministic all at once. Social order is posited as the product of ownership of the means of production and thus historical materialism. Communism is promised as the sure result of this historically-determined process at the completion of which lies our salvation, while the redemptive quality of the communist order

515 Nietzsche’s general critique of ‘sociology’, it seems to me, pertains to what he deems the narrow focus of sociology as a discipline on, specifically, the institutions of culture (which Nietzsche calls ‘the forms/organs of domination’) and sociology’s unsurprising deterministic interpretation of them, often to the neglect of ‘culture’ per se as well as the role of human agency in cultural transformation. In recent years, Postmodern social theory in its radical subjectivism has challenged ‘sociology’ by going to the other extreme focusing (in a radically democratic way) on the issue of agency. Nietzsche would welcome, one could reason, the anti-foundationalism that is characteristic of Postmodern thought. But Postmodern social inquiry, arguably, also lacks the ‘dialectic unity’ which defines and qualifies Nietzsche’s sociocultural thinking. Nietzsche rather uncannily portends this Postmodern ‘shift’, as an elemental component (ever-present even if dormant) in the very foundation of our present-day sociology reflecting the massified and democratic tendency which underlies Modern Western culture: “Our entire sociology simply does not know any other instinct than that of the herd [the multitude], i.e., that of the sum of zeroes—where every zero has "equal rights," where it is virtuous to be zero”; and so it is that in our contemporary sociology, “the value of the units determines the significance of the sum”. (WP, §53).
is framed in reductionistic terms of the individual freedom to materially create and be productive solely out of want (concrete and particular use-value of work) and not need (abstracted and economic value of his labor-power useful for capital). The goal of historical determinism then is individual freedom where “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”—a process in which the ‘perfectibility of man’ is affirmed and human limitation (and even the constraining reality of scarcity) effectively denied (turning us into perfectly free productive beings).  

Moreover, Nietzsche's rejection of sociology aligns quite well with his critiques of rationalistic, objectivizing, and dehumanizing Modernity—an epochal paradigm which, he believes, through the preference that it affords the collective mass in its interests and "happiness" systematically (and institutionally) inhibits the breeding of the Übermensch, downplaying the role of these great men of history on the socio-cultural transformations it inevitably seeks out in institutions. And it routinely discounts the underlying mindset at work (which unsurprisingly is often distinctively Western). It is inevitable, Nietzsche argues, that sociology, having internalized the Modern world and its institutions and drawing its intellectual compass from old metaphysical philosophy, reinforce this ‘homogenizing’ and pathological condition rather than offering it a cure. It thus could be nothing more than a “theory of domination” furthering Modernity and remaining unmindful of culture both as a whole and in its different parts. In fact, it perpetuates the hegemonic force of Modernity itself. 

In Nietzsche’s social theory (he would say cultural theory), ‘social’ methods and concepts must always be viewed from a meta and historical standpoint, conceived with a relationist methodology and presented in a much more holistic and integrative fashion than often expressed

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516 Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Ch.2
in what is the fragmented, multi-school, and often disoriented field that is contemporary sociology. Moreover, in marked contrast with classical sociological thinking, for Nietzsche, the fact that sociocultural transformations are historically dynamic suggests that the phenomenon of cultural change is specifically not progressive but cyclical, not universal but cultural—which meant also that Nietzsche foresaw and rejected the essentialist and foundationalist disposition in ‘sociology’ long before the Postmodern sort of critiques became in vogue. What is more, the idea of totality too undergoes thorough revisions under Nietzsche’s “fundamental innovations” on German philosophy. In Nietzsche, totality and dialectic (Hegelian in origin) are both culturalized. As such, a picture of culture envisaged by Nietzsche emerges at once—a unique physiological whole, an organism best understood as a living ‘dyadic monad’. Such a nuanced view of culture affirming of both the systemic complex and the rare but profoundly human agent within it (the Übermensch), Nietzsche insists, must inform all of human sciences.

Last but not least, sociology, in Nietzsche’s estimation, lacks the theoretical resources to be forward-looking and create a new paradigm, driven as the field is by the mentality and values of the ancien regime. And Ironically, this blockage is even more compounded with the “postists” who in their fixation with deconstruction and cynical stance toward “power” and “metanarratives” simply refuse to even be party to any new paradigm-building projects, let alone actually offering one. The view of the entire enterprise that one encounters in Nietzsche’s account is hence quite disconcerting and grim: stationary and backward-looking clinging stubbornly to expiring values on one end; and, on the other, exclusively negative and subversive solely for ideological reasons and preparing ground for complete nihilism and the emergence of the solipsistic “last men” (a development it typically christens as revolution). Both these ‘sociological’ extremes thus put the very foundations of human community (their professed subject matter) at risk.
‘Philosophy of Life’ and Culturalism—Nietzsche’s ‘Positive’ Innovations

*Nietzschean Lebensphilosophie as Basis for Future Philosophy*

Ich machte aus meinem Willen zur Gesundheit, zum Leben, meine Philosophie.

(“I made my philosophy out of my will to health, to life.”)

Nietzsche, EH, I, §2

Nietzsche’s perspectivist account is not only negative, radical, and subversive but positive and creative. In Nietzsche’s reimagined culture-bound philosophy of life, perspectivism is affirmed via recourse to both physiological principles (cf. our natural bodily urges—*horne* and *eros*) and culture, which Nietzsche conceives as a unity—forming a holistic and humanly Realität understood as a cultural body (cf. *sôma*). Put differently, Nietzsche’s new Dionysian philosophy seeks to affirm both the eternal *becoming* of life and the autochthony of human body (growing on the cultural soil as if “plant”)—as not only real but foundational to reality. In so doing, he moves from idealistic and even anthropocentric conceptions of the world prevalent in classical philosophy, which he finds décadent and life-denying, to a view of the world (and reality) which is (from the human standpoint) entirely man-made, perspectival, and *anthropomorphic*. This philosophical radicalism is tethered however to a culturalism that respects continuity, path-dependency, and the (practical) necessity of complex structural order for human flourishing—thus resulting in a view of culture as a complex yet *dynamic* unity always in flux and evolving and wholly rejecting of cultural essentialism. It is owing to such novel formulations that Nietzsche is able to advance a so profoundly radical philosophical, epistemological, and genealogical account.
and nonetheless remain rather conservative socio-politically, suspicious and even hostile as he is toward popular revolution, political radicalism, and anarchism (cf. Russian Nihilism). Profound and fundamental transformation (of the kind the *revaluation* project entails) could only occur at the cultural level, not to be sought in the political strictly-speaking (cf. “petty politics”). Nietzsche understands that such bold and transformative ‘culture-making’ requires its own politics, and it is this sort of broadly understood “politics of culture” that he identifies as “great politics”. But this kind of “higher order” politics whose domain is “high culture” is a topic to be discussed in the next segment.

Nietzsche is among the first to realize the gulf between universal laws of nature and physics and that of human perception and norms which are inherently interpretive.\(^{517}\) In fact, the seeds of Nietzsche’s radical perspectivism is already evident in 1873 where in “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” he observes, “insects or birds perceive a quite different world from that of human beings, and that the question as to which of these two perceptions of the world is the more correct is quite meaningless, since this would require them to be measured by the criterion of the correct perception, i.e. by a non-existent criterion.”\(^{518}\) To Nietzsche then, as far as we humans are concerned, everything is *interpretation* and the goal of cultural knowledge (and performing “genealogy”) is *understanding* the old meanings, and this not as an end-in-itself but in order to produce new and better ones in comparison. Nietzsche indeed subversively critiques disembodied reason, objectivity, certainty, and scientism as pseudoscientific and anti-natural, but contrary to the Poststructuralist position and other more nuanced interpreters such as Reginster (2006) and

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\(^{517}\) Contemporaneous to Nietzsche, German hermeneutic philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey reaches a similar conclusion independently (following the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher) and hence coins the terms *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* to better articulate this chasm in the spheres of knowledge. Max Weber, coming on the heels of both Nietzsche and Dilthey, preferred the term *Kulturwissenschaft* to *Geisteswissenschaft*.

\(^{518}\) “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” (1873), §1, *BT*, p. 148
even MacIntyre, his remedy to objectivity and rationality does not entail a turn toward irrationalism and “normative subjectivism”. Nietzsche means to transcend and overcome the Socratic subject-object, body-mind polarities for holistic physiological ones amenable to a new unity (i.e. culture). And perspectivism is the building block of just such a sublation. It is ‘culturally-bounded-and-intended’ reason rooted in concrete human practices which provides the basis for perspectivism and interpretation—embodied reason that is informed and horizoned by the perspective of reality supplied by the culture-complex and one which remains always instrumental and utilitarian to the ends of that culture and its heightening. A fortiori, such a practical reason is always a means to a higher end of creation and hence instrumental to continuous human and cultural becoming (cf. Eternal Recurrence).

Because Nietzsche believes notions such as identity, social self, ego, consciousness, and the subject-object schism in general manufacture for us a socially-conditioned mask (cf. character) and a self-alienating role and hence finds them all equally problematic, commentators conclude that Nietzsche must have therefore rejected all communal roles, duties, and responsibilities as such seeing in them charade, façade, and even chicanery. This is misleading and false. For here what Nietzsche objects to is the rupturing in the natural unity of body and self—the self being divided against itself and forced to deny its authentic and natural impulses (especially as it is for some metaphysical telos and dogma). From Nietzsche’s point of view, all communal life amounts to theater and playacting in which we (king and pauper) are all habituated into characters and given social roles thereby being mere play-actors. But is this really a problem if we are bred in and for them as our reality? Since Nietzsche thinks that we are unconsciously instinctivized since birth

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519 Bernard Reginster, p. 58: Reginster believes that in Nietzsche “normative objectivism” (which is characteristic of idealism from Plato to Kant) is superseded by “normative subjectivism”.

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into the value-universe of our culture-complex (where our axiological construct becomes instinct and second-nature to us), it is the substance and goals of our values and roles that matter profoundly to Nietzsche: taken altogether, are they culture-ascending, life-enhancing roles that we occupy in harmony with our unique physiological drives? And do they leave space for all the different types of man to realize their fated impulses (cf. amor fati) and unlock their potential—to have tasks with the pursuit of which to both give their own lives meaning and to contribute to the flourishing of the cultural organism in which they are all members?

As such, the not so subtle difference in Nietzsche’s usage of “cultural” and “social” should not escape our attention. For Nietzsche regards social roles to be ‘civilizing’ ones, not only superficial but taming and disciplinary. Especially is that they are conceived in the Western example almost entirely out of (life-hating) ressentiment—they are rationalizations against both the instinct of life and our physiological drives, strangling creativity. Cultural roles and duties however are entirely instinctivized through the breeding process of the culture-complex. They are not masks we ‘consciously’ and ‘autonomously’ put on but refractions of the culture itself. And since culture in its most healthful and natural state always strives for creativity and life, its impulse Nietzsche reasons is to breed vital and creative natures. And in this vein, Nietzsche’s blistering attacks on morality become more deepened and pronounced. For in the name of free will and moral responsibility, morality not only disembodied reason separating it from praxis, but it consistently disenfranchises man, unselfing and enslaving him under a false pretense (Schein) of choice, whereas the earth-shattering, life-escaping choice is already made long ago and is categorical—instantivized as “conscience”. The externalization of the self and its socialization as ego (the inventions of Socrates and Plato), Nietzsche maintains, effectively spell the end of genuine ‘self’ as an autochthonous unity—it is unselfing par excellence. And this fateful and unfortunate original
“choice” is accompanied with the internalization of cruelty achieved with the invention of ‘free will’ and conscience and the resulting disembodiment of the body (where body is vilified and free will is sustained via disembodied reason) as well as the cooption and misappropriation of both the law of selection and the concept of goodness from their original forms in archaic aristocratic societies into their opposites. It is a paradox of Modernity that in the ‘death of God’ we have all become (or at least pretend to be) greater than the god we have supposedly left behind but are less than man, actively denying our historic powers and the reality of power relations (which we can no longer stomach) but act as if autonomous, unrestrained, and solipsistic bundles of rationality and intentionality (i.e. free rational agents)—monadic worlds to ourselves.

In the man-made and anthropomorphic world Nietzsche describes, the “drive to build metaphors” proves itself the “fundamental drive”, needed to project meaning into an otherwise meaningless human existence in the natural order of things which from our perspective is on the whole chaotic and disorderly—to bring some sense of order and regularity to human existence and enrich our innate perspectives with colorful horizons. Ironically then, the meaningless natural world with its regular laws of physics is the inspiration that generates the lifeful human ‘will to meaning’ as an evolutionary occurrence for our species. Nietzsche tells us that mankind’s ‘will to meaning’ is so profound a part of her existence and potential vitality that “it constantly manifests the desire to shape the given world of the waking human being in ways which are just as multiform, irregular, inconsequential, incoherent, charming and ever-new, as things are in the world of dream”. But structured and horizoned as they are within the culture-complex, these dream-like semiotic creations of ours are brought to order and assume complex form as different physiologies

520 “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” (1873), §2, BT, p. 150-1
521 “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” (1873), §2, BT, p. 151
are in the state of nature—as cultural body. In fact, so fundamental is the notion of meaning and metaphor (as powerful ordering mechanisms) to Nietzsche’s concept of human being and their lives that he contends that any neglect of the human “will to meaning” means disposing of human beings themselves, for “actually the waking human being is only clear about the fact that he is awake thanks to the rigid and regular web of concepts”.

Whereas in BGE and GM, Nietzsche presents various critiques of our present Modern condition, of what needs to be overcome here and now, in Zarathustra, Nietzsche poetically lays out an affirmative vision (enhanced with the ideas of the Übermensch and the ‘eternal becoming’) for how he imagines the future post-Modernity. Nietzsche notes that the “most affirmative of all spirits,” Zarathustra (as a type) is both the antithesis and the cause for a new synthesis—"a new unity” speaks through him! With Zarathustra, Nietzsche claims, humanity as it has been—as it has been defined—in the idealistic age “has been overcome,” supplanted by the novel notion of the Übermensch which is actualized as "the highest reality"—the concrete cultural (finding body and flesh). Zarathustra then is the latest physical incarnation of a Dionysus that is conceptualized: in his figure, the Eternal Recurrence of the Dionysian symbol (cycle of cultural renewal) and the Eternal Return of Dionysus the demigod (as the superhuman agent of renewal) achieve unity, and thus the thrust of Nietzsche’s Dionysian philosophy as “anthro-culturalism” comes to full view. Nietzsche’s Dionysus is a many-faced humanly god, a unity united in multiplicity—with his manifold contrasting iterations and personalities made animate in various

522 “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” (1873), §2, BT, p. 151
523 EH, III, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”, §6
524 EH, III, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”, §6
cultures, all different and even opposite and yet all unified in his symbol as *founder* and transformative *culture-hero* in whose personal image a culture is *made*.

The close relationship in Nietzsche’s mind between the *Übermenschlich* Dionysian type and *becoming* is most illuminating. The Übermensch, interestingly, is presented as the “mouthpiece”—the *voice*—of an inspired moment of (cultural/spiritual) becoming. *He (the Übermensch) hears its music!* As if directly addressing the Übermensch, Nietzsche asserts, “Here all things come caressingly to your speech and flatter you: because they want to ride on your back. Here you ride on every metaphor to every truth… all being wants to become a word here, all becoming wants to learn to speak from you”.

The inspiration arrives to the *body* (not the soul as it was previously) and in a flash, *involuntarily, fatefully*. It is the task of the Übermensch to be becoming’s personal human vessel and *act* upon it. And he can only act upon this inspiration, Nietzsche believes, if he has first *overcome* himself and can thus hear the song that culture plays especially for *him*! *In fieri* by his very constitution, the Übermensch is the type of spirited physiology which “wills itself into becoming”; he only needs be let *free* to express the inspiring music that he has *heard*. His is the “destiny of a task”. *Hearing and acting*, this is what Nietzsche means when he says that in *Zarathustra*, his “Dionysian” concept has become actualized into “the *highest deed*.” If prophets promise a book from heaven, well this is Nietzsche's version the cultural physician that he is—a *mountainly* book seeking *height*.

*Pathos of Distance and the Ethology of the Future: Aristocratic Virtù*

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525 *Z*, III, “The Coming Home”
528 *EH*, III, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”, §6
529 *EH*, III, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”, §6
Recalling his provocative critique of philosophy, Nietzsche teaches that the philosophers of old in effect presume and deduce a hierarchy of values from nature, one that does not exist in reality, and following their doctrinal error privilege the slave desiderata of sameness and equality (product of their *ressentimental* instinct) into an absolute principle—*equality* as Goodness, and thereby come to abolish the concrete hierarchies and distances that exist among people *in actu* owing to their different physiologies and uniqueness of type. They thus prioritize an ideational *hierarchy* of values of their own creation (constructing a *normative* paradigm) over the hierarchy of types that exist in archaic human communities, christening the former as Truth and going so far as to deny even the existence of the latter.

What they cannot and do not abolish however is the conception of *hierarchy* and *power* itself, for this Nietzsche insists is formative of the human experience. Man’s innate ‘will to power’ and her practical ‘need for meaning’ as a species it turns out find an evolutionary corollary in what Nietzsche famously calls the ‘pathos of distance’ (*Pathos der Distanz*).\(^{530}\) The classical philosophers are guilty of projecting their normative rendering or application of this pathos (i.e. hierarchies of Good and Evil) over all else, namely over a socio-cultural hierarchies of praxis dominant in noble human communities of the archaic age (and in Nietzsche’s view every *strong* age) which operated out of *necessity* and ‘sense-experience’. It is up to the philosopher of the future to recover or rather reclaim this distinctively-human drive (i.e. the “pathos of distance”) as an underlying and undeniable force in human existence shaping our reality. The ideational consequence of resuscitating this pathos in the philosophical domain is perspectivism, its practical result reestablishing or rather reaffirming the idea of difference and ‘order of rank’ in human existence.

\(^{530}\) *BGE*, §257. One could find traces of this theme of *Distance* already in the poetry of JW Goethe. It is safe to say that Nietzsche being aware of this connection adopts and recasts the idea for his own ends conceptualizing it as a distinctly aristocratic *pathos*. 
communities—in other words reviving distinction and nobility. This Nietzsche believes a prerequisite for recovering cultural agency and the breeding of the Übermensch. While his critique of philosophy could be said to correspond to a systemic critique of our supposedly educated and intellectual elites (as wrongful and corrupted), here he tackles the issue of corruption and pathology of the masses (the herding of the mediocre and average men into Last Men) by means of the instinctivization of décadent values and norms of idealist philosophy—namely the prevalent egalitarianism and democratic thrust of the Modern era which he rejects as the remaining poison of secularized Christianity belonging “essentially to decline”, suffocating cultural agency, and strangulating life, creativity, and ascent toward higher culture. Given Nietzsche’s claims about Christianity’s continuous paradigmatic and structural hegemony over our culture-complex in Modernity, the Last Men are thereby revealed to be the socially engineered product of its ethos in ressentiment.

Nietzsche regards ‘pathos of distance’ a socio-cultural reality showcased in millennia of human praxis, and it is this practice-rooted principle that inspires his approach to philosophy and theoretical inquiry in general. To be sure, perspectivism is the tangible result of application of Distanz to philosophy recovering the original meaning of theoria as “spectatorship” grounded in vision and our sense of sight: a theoretical position that appreciates distinction, demands having distance from one’s subject, and takes difference in vantage points, outlooks, and hence interpretations seriously. What is more, Distanz and perspective are antithetical to the morbid instinct of ressentiment. If ressentiment, as a disposition envious and spiteful of the ‘outstanding’, demands homogeneity and sameness fearing distinctions and reveling in the ‘mediocre’ forever

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531 *TI*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, §37
532 Lit. ancient Greek translation: “I behold a view”
haunted by the thought of being left behind, Distanz actively seeks out such distinctions between man and man (Werthverschiedenheit) and marvels at the sight of those gifted ‘standouts’ it regards as markers of human ingenuity and heightening. As such, this pathos of ‘standing apart’ thrives on variety and eternally champions heterogeneity as a spring for creativity.

In fact, Nietzsche writes in Twilight that “the cleavage (Kluft) between man and man, status and status (Stand), the plurality (Vielheit) of types, the will to be oneself, to stand out—what I call the pathos of distance, that is characteristic of every strong age”, which is to say every noble age inhabited by the giants of culture.\(^{533}\) To differentiate among different types of man and classify them (hierarchy), and yet to do so according to their ability, competency, and (excellence in) function vis-à-vis the whole (or virtù)—this is the aristocratic or rather axiocratic “ordering of rank” (Rangordnung) which Nietzsche finds the most suitable and natural organization of man (regarding it the honest division of labor). This Nietzsche believes the most life-driven and even naturally-just arrangement for it allows each the opportunity to actualize the potential fated in her physiology and disposition, to perform the task to which she is most naturally inclined and fitted as her task, and in process benefit or rather ‘enhance’ and ‘heighten’ the body at large (both the culture’s and her own) with the distinction and quality begot by this “destiny of task”. For Nietzsche, only such a ‘self-actualization’ holistically conceived is the true embodiment of freedom as understood by the freier Geister (those free enough to understand what real freedom entails and demands).\(^{534}\)

Note furthermore that while Nietzsche’s formulation appears radically elitist to Modern audiences, it is so only post-facto evidenced by actual accomplishments and thus not exclusionary

\(^{533}\) *TI*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, §37 (Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale Transl.)

\(^{534}\) Nietzsche’s understanding of freedom is thus more classical and Aristotelian than liberal.
a priori or a birthright. Nietzsche’s imagined aristocracy is no new caste system. His radical socio-cultural revisionism manifest in his project of revaluation is not a call to nostalgia or reactionism. It is however a call to (consciously) reaffirm hierarchy and reestablish a healthy (and honest) order of rank. In fact, even the dichotomy of equality or hierarchy, as modern liberals often frame the problem, is a wrong and misleading one from the Nietzschean standpoint. For hierarchy and power relations form the fabric of reality for human experience, wherein the “long ladder” stands as the socio-cultural outcome of some will to power’s domination (of our instincts and imagination). Rejecting our Modern impression of the dissolution of hierarchy—the purported flattening or leveling of the ‘long ladder’ (let alone the desirability of such a phenomenon)—as false and deceptive, Nietzsche teaches that in Modernity hierarchy and order of rank do not disappear at all but are simply recast, recalibrated according to that singular criterion and measure which underwrites modern capitalistic order—money and wealth. The real question therefore is not whether hierarchy but what kind? Is the will to power that is casting them positive and life-affirming (cf. health and Distanz) or negative and life-denying (cf. décadence and ressentiment)?

And here, we must turn our attention to Nietzsche’s distinctive philosophical anthropology, a topic often overlooked in Nietzsche scholarship. Nietzsche is among the first to realize not just the deeply-inherent connections between meaning regimes (cf. worldviews) and human nature, but that human nature is not just of one uniform type as the idealists reductionistically presume—rather, it encompasses an entire spectrum of types. Nietzsche vitriolically renounces the Modern universalist understanding of human nature and the form of individualism it sanctions not only because he finds it fixed, unwavering, and procrustean (showcasing the dangers of analytic systematization) but for the fact that he deems it simply wrong and dishonest—which is to say anti-natural, ahistorical, and unrealistic. In his philosophical
anthropology, Nietzsche contends that we humans possess a multiplicity of natures (instincts) giving rise and corresponding to multiple human types (physiologies) and instigating unique wills to power. This aspect of Nietzschean philosophical anthropology has critical repercussions for other aspects of Nietzschean philosophy—especially Nietzsche’s culturalism as I have described it here in its symbiosis with the Übermensch. It is also seminal in Nietzsche’s genealogy of Western culture which we covered in the last section.

Nietzsche’s idea of the Übermensch stands antipodal to the kind of systematic categorical analysis to which Modern systematizers (whose reductionism and dogmatism Nietzsche distrusts) are inclined. It bridges the gap between macro level analysis of socio-cultural life (focused on structure and the big-picture) and the micro level (which reduces the collectivity to its individual units and is focused on individual agency). The ‘analytico-deductive’ model might be useful in the natural sciences or if one is dealing with clocks, but it is entirely misleading, pathological, and out of its depth once applied to the cultural and humanistic domains that resist easy categorization and reification. Instead, cultural sciences must be inductively grounded in sense-experience, perspectivism, and realism—in the reality of necessity, human sensory experience, and concrete human practices. It is not that Nietzsche is blind to the utility of categories and abstractions. He realizes that we orient ourselves in the world using various categories and boundaries. However, his philosophical model tends toward integrative and holistic systems built inductively (from the firm and solid ground of historical human experience inhabiting culture-

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535 This approach is best evident in Durkheim and Parson in what is known as “structural functionalism”.
536 The question of how social meaning is interpreted and motivates the actions of individuals is the central concern of “interpretive sociology” best represented by Weber.
complexes) rather than being premised on such analytic reductionist blocks which he thinks breed foundationalism.

To use the language of philosophy, the phenomenon of culture in the Nietzschean analysis is an emergent property of the human phenomenon and thus generally irreducible to its lower parts, while the human itself emerges from the phenomenon of life and physiology. By extension, culture is an emergent property of physiological phenomena per se. Through the myths of the Eternal Return and the Eternal Recurrence, the two sides of the coin of eternal becoming represented by the Dionysian symbol, human agency (as the chief attribute of a special kind of man—Übermensch) is both affirmed and married to the complex structure of culture and collective reality through never-ending projects in meaning-creation, understood as endless cycles of destruction and creation evocative of Shiva’s cosmic dance. Indeed, Nietzsche’s Dionysus is to be better appreciated as the Greco-Western counterpoint to the Hindu triumvirate (Trimurti) of Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu—embodying and uniting the Indian trinity in his symbol.⁵³⁷

Recalling our discussion from the last section, Nietzsche wagers that even as architectures of meaning (worldviews culturally instinctivized) were slightly altered in the West (with varying effects on the will), they were all formulated/conceived out of the instinct of “flight from reality” (i.e. the ideal), so much so in fact as to be only different manifestations of ‘ideal’. Moreover, he

⁵³⁷ One could argue that Zarathustra is to Dionysus what Krishna (or even Rama) are to Vishnu—a latest and timely incarnation. Vishnu remember represents the synthesis of creation (Brahma) and destruction (Shiva) in Hindu cosmology, a renewing preserving god who “dreams the universe into reality” and protects it through its endless (Ananta) serpentine cycles (cf. Ananta Shesha, lit. the unending of six (many) forms, the giant serpent on whose coils it is said Vishnu rests). (Fred S. Kleiner, Gardner’s Art through the Ages: Non-Western Perspectives, Cengage Learning, 2007, p. 22). The Minoans also had such a snake goddess which intimated the sense of the cosmos as a dynamic and yet labyrinthine being (cf. Cretan Serpent and the Labyrinth), the myth of which reverberated through later Greek mythology (especially Mycenean). As a classically-trained philologist, Nietzsche was no doubt familiar with these mythical archetypes and the symbolism behind them and was possibly inspired by them for his coinage—eternal becoming. As when he says, for example, that values which many take to be eternal are but “seductive flash of gold on the belly of the snake vita” recalling the ancient image of the ‘serpent of life’. (WP, §577; 9[26])
held that all these (idealist) meanings were operationalized not just in accordance with a normative scheme (as are all semiotic orders), but always with the same fundamental normative system (i.e. Morality) which sustained them in the long-run—their combination into a cultural paradigm Nietzsche calls “the ascetic ideal”. Nietzsche’s philosophical anthropology however completes the circle back to the human by illumining that all normative systems themselves operate and are activated in accordance to a particular representation of human nature (what Nietzsche sometime calls psychology) and perhaps even imitating past (human) archetypes. For Nietzsche, this realization meant that the (ascetic) moral order of the ‘ideal’—or Morality, has also depended on one formative picture of human nature and the breeding (read: civilizing) of one fundamental (human) type throughout its history, in this case the décadent form of human psychology with a philosophical anthropology derived from décadent instinct in man duplicitously professing itself the ‘human instinct’ par excellence (i.e. the human nature as such). In the same vein that the ideal’s totalistic claims on the monism of its worldview (its truth—the only Truth, its meaning—all meaning as such, and its morality—morality as such) all proved to be utter fiction and pretense, Nietzsche thought, one must similarly invalidate the ascetic ideal’s claims on its ‘psychology of man’ being the only true psychology and justified view of human nature, let alone its more modern view of human persons (espoused by liberalism) as individual monads (delinked, decontextualized, and ahistorical). For Nietzsche, not only was this proffered psychology not the only kind one can observe in philosophical anthropology through historical analysis of mankind, but that the view of human nature extended (by the ascetic ideal) was utterly erroneous, ‘antinature’, and unhealthy for the future of mankind.

What is more, Nietzsche seeks to establish a new philosophical language and conceptual framework (as he puts it in Z, a “new lyre” with which to sing “new songs”) whose terminology is
derived from that of human physiology and whose principles are unified around organicism as well as the human body and the senses (that one observes in history). Revisiting his BT for its second publication in 1887, Nietzsche makes an observation that is particularly illuminating: “I now regret very much that I did not yet have the courage (or immodesty?) at that time to permit myself a language of my very own for such personal views and acts of daring, laboring instead to express strange and new evaluations in Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulations, things which fundamentally ran counter to both the spirit and taste of Kant and Schopenhauer.”\(^{538}\) Some fourteen years later in Beyond Good and Evil, he laments “the belief in the opposition of values” (cf. our familiar moral dichotomies) which he identifies as “the fundamental belief of the metaphysicians.”\(^{539}\) Around the same time in 1886, writing a new preface for his Human All Too Human (1878), Nietzsche declares “where I could not find what I needed, I had artificially to enforce, falsify and invent a suitable fiction for myself (–and what else have poets ever done? and to what end does art exist in the world at all?).”\(^{540}\) Having outgrown BT and its clever but basic countercultural critique, Nietzsche was now formulating a novel philosophy for the future all his own much like an inventive artist, relying ever-increasingly on poetic language and metaphors. He was not an idealist and had ventured beyond the Romanticism of his youth. He was for all intents and purposes founding a new school of thought—a sui generis mélange of culturalism, pragmatism, and philosophical anthropology in line with Nietzsche’s distinctive version of Lebensphilosophie. He needed a new language, a novel compendium of vocabulary and neologisms suited to articulating his vision and communicating his found human archetypes.

\(^{538}\) “Attempt at Self-Criticism”, Nietzsche’s Preface to the 2nd edition of BT, §6, p. 10
\(^{539}\) Beyond Good and Evil, §2
\(^{540}\) Human All Too Human, Vol. I, Preface, §1
It thus makes sense that Nietzsche’s task not end with exposing the false world of the metaphysicians whom he charges with stealing the cloaks of genuine philosophers by *philosophizing* a plethora of false dichotomies in step with their Manichean spirit: ‘culture-nature’, ‘truth-lie’, ‘good-evil’, etc. Nietzsche, in a trademark fashion, renounces the false choices that one is offered between these *man-made* polarities. He does not feel *compelled* by them. This endeavor animates his criticality, motivating his "*Götzen-Dämmerung*”, such that he refuses to engage in them and *play* the “game” (invented by such *philosophes ancien*). “Revaluation” means envisioning new rules, *inventing* a new game. *Deconstruction* is wasted without the promise of a new *construction.*

As such, Nietzsche revels in *creating* a new unity and totality of concepts inherently anti-metaphysical and thisworldly—rooted in the realities of life itself, a task in which he is partly inspired by Goethe. For Nietzsche, Goethe was the exemplary culture-hero of the 18th century Europe, not just an *artifact* of Cultur but an *artificer* of it—shaping and molding it as to have become a kind of *Übermensch* in his own right and a sort of prophet for *realism*: “What he [Goethe] wanted was *totality*; he fought against the [customary] dissociation/separation of reason, sensibility, feeling, [and] will…he disciplined himself to wholeness, he *created* himself. . . . In the middle of an age inclined to unreality, Goethe was a convinced realist.”

Nietzsche develops this further: “A spirit like this who has *become free* stands in the middle of the world with a cheerful and trusting fatalism [fatedness] in the *belief* that only the individual is reprehensible, that everything is redeemed and affirmed in the whole—*he does not negate [deny] any more*...But a belief like this is the highest of all possible beliefs: I have christened it with the name *Dionysus.*”

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541 *Twilight of the Idols*, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, § 49.
542 Ibid. More on this on the next chapter.
In fact, Nietzsche understood that “to make the rule of play, of culture into metaphysical principles is to trap the players, ‘humanity,’ in the continuous binds of love and hate, good and evil, without recourse”.\textsuperscript{543} He was convinced that this results only in deadening man’s creativity and dropping mankind into a degenerating condition—a décadence. Here, we fully encounter “the critical-creative ascent to freedom intoned by Nietzsche's bell of culture,” realizing with White and Hellerich the true nature of “Nietzsche's ‘dangerous game’: the cultural practice of his New Enlightenment.”\textsuperscript{544}

The above passages also showcase a fundamental problem gripping the “Last Man” of Modernity. Namely, that in his quest for Truth and absolute knowledge, this abysmal creature has forgotten culture and myths that sustain human life and buttress our worldviews. As the child of the ‘abstract man’ of the idealists, the mythless and thus homeless (unheimlich) Last Man is thus plunged into the abyss of abstractions without recourse or strength of will and agency to free himself of their procrustean chains and resurface onto the solid and familiar ground of home:

Place beside this type of mythical culture [of archaic Greece,] abstract man, without guidance from myth, [mired in] abstract education, abstract morality, abstract law, the abstract state...think of a culture which has no secure and sacred place of origin and which is condemned to exhaust every possibility and to seek meagre nourishment from all other cultures; that is the present, the result of Socratism's determination to destroy myth. Now mythless man stands there, surrounded by every past there has ever been, eternally hungry, scraping and digging in a search for roots, even if he has to dig for them in the most distant antiquities. The enormous historical need of dissatisfied modern culture, the accumulation of countless other cultures, the consuming desire for knowledge—what does all this point to, if not to the loss of myth, the loss of a mythical home (Heimat), a mythical, maternal womb? The reader should ask himself whether the feverish and uncanny (unheimliche) agitation of this culture is anything other than the greedy grabbing and chasing after nourishment of the hungry.\textsuperscript{545}

\textsuperscript{543} White and Hellerich, p.30
\textsuperscript{544} White and Hellerich, p.30
\textsuperscript{545} BT, §23, p. 108-9
The language of this early passage from *BT* finds curious parallels to the imagery of Peter L. Berger’s the “sacred canopy” (albeit Nietzsche characteristically develops his in an exclusively non-metaphysical direction). Although a product of Nietzsche’s youthful mind, it is already suggestive of the fact that one could view *being* as the engine and source of (spiritual) capital for *becoming*, allowing it to thrust forward and at the same time to enhance life—engendering a *holistic Realität* (i.e. culture). As Nietzsche develops this thought later in his life, “To impose upon *becoming* the character of *being*—that is the supreme will to power”.

The passage is thus quite prescient of Nietzsche’s more mature thought in pointing to the development of this frenzied and feverish *homelessness* as a marker of Modernity’s ‘great exhaustion’ which in Nietzsche late writings culminates in complete and total nihilism.

In the history of Western philosophy, so Nietzsche interprets it, the *will to being* manifests as and is sublimated into the ascetic ideal, which aims at the *overcoming* of becoming, physiological growth, and life itself through the denial of what life really and truly is and by pretending that it could be otherwise, perhaps in another world—an *afterlife*. As such, it is "unparalleled *ressentiment*" in its purest form: it is a (negative) urge to control and overpower life, nature, and existence and strip them of their power over man (or at least to deny that they have any such powers or better yet to deny *power* itself as evil). In the Christian age, this impulse paradoxically ends up sustaining life (along with man’s will) by means of *hating* life, *negating* life—life as *means*. This will to being is hence instigated out of man’s primal need for *order* and out of fear for difference and distinctions. As Nietzsche recognizes, “the situation is therefore the precise opposite of what the worshippers of this ideal imagine—[for] in it and through it, life struggles with death and *against* death, the ascetic ideal [it turns out] is a trick for the *preservation*

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546 *WP*, §567
of life”, wherein the “ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this negating one, [emerges as] the really great conserving and yes-creating forces of life.”.\textsuperscript{547} Ironically however, in order to justify life in the face of death, life (deemed tragic and wrongful in itself) is viewed as requiring correction and rehabilitation, as preparatory for death—for meaning as such! Hence, the ascetic ideal results in nothing other than a will to nothingness since being is not a real part of nature but a semblance.

As explained earlier, Nietzsche aims at inverting this picture by recovering life as an end in itself and turning meaning, once more, into an agent and instrument for life. And this, Nietzsche believes, is a process to which man (and his will) is the key. As White and Hellerich note, “Nietzsche views the "deconstructive" activity of critical reason [which man possesses] as one pole in the dynamic bipolar process of creativity: His Kultur-Machen or "cultural practice" requires the bold move from chaos into order, so as to produce dynamic forms”, a stepping stone on the path to a new ‘construction’.\textsuperscript{548}

Collectively, Nietzsche’s writings effectively create “the first language of a new range of experiences”; and because of their novelty, originality, and unfamiliarity, Nietzsche correctly predicts that “absolutely nothing will be heard, with the associated acoustic illusion that if nothing is heard, nothing is there. At the end of the day, this has been my usual experience and, if you will, the originality of my experience. Anyone who thinks that they have understood me has made me into something after their own image, —often enough they make me into my opposite, an 'idealist', for example; anyone who has not understood me at all denies that I deserve any sort of

\textsuperscript{547} GM, (III. §13)
\textsuperscript{548} White and Hellerich, p. 7
consideration.” ⁵⁴⁹ Not content with simply discarding the old songs of the idealists (let alone rehashing them), Nietzsche wanted to sing us a “new song” for which he required “a new lyre”, a new kind of language to voice his ‘profound’, ‘abysmal’, ‘tragic’ weltanschauung. But all novelties, all new acts of creation run the risk of misapprehension, misappropriation, and misinterpretation, a risk of which Nietzsche was only too aware. Nietzsche was much more than a mere rebel or subversive. Alas, this is the way that his genius is often caricatured.

Nevertheless, if I have been at all successful in teasing out Nietzsche’s distinctive language and novel epistemology, we should have seen by now that Nietzschean anthro-culturalism teaches that the human quest for meaning in a meaningless cosmos is an eternal struggle that occurs time and again in the context of cultures, a reality-determining process inviting the eternal and transformative return of the great genii of history—the Übermensch. In its natural course, this struggle is driven by life and human physiology in its full multiplicity, engendering a never-ending process that promises eternal human becoming and our heightening as a species. Alternatively, the process could become pathological—coopted and corrupted by décadent and life-denying natures as it has become in Modernity—and cause our demise as a species.

The evolution of culture represents the true (dyadic) communion of man and nature as intended by nature herself (the continuous yet dynamic future evolution of which proceeds in a dialectical fashion between the great types of man and culture). Virtù in the Nietzschean usage is the quality of strength, ability, and practicality needed to bring a task to completion. To try and to strive to realize one’s will to power despite the odds, adapting our meaning architectures in process—this is characteristically Übermenschlich, affirming of true human agency, and in agreement with Nietzsche’s general doctrine of (humanly) tragic realism which from the

⁵⁴⁹ EH, III, §I
Übermenschen’s point of view is decidedly *visionary* realism. Notwithstanding the failings of realizing authentic *Distanz* in history, the Modern idea of egalitarianism, in the way it has unfolded, cannot foster anything but a kind of *equality in servitude* dismissive of hierarchies (as ideal even if a fiction in praxis) denying human flourishing and cultural heightening as such.

Lastly, Nietzsche suggests that our modern idea of ‘consciousness’ and the politics of (individual) identity that form around it both betray a distortion of world-historic proportions—a result of Modern abandoning of real authentic and empirical particularities (i.e. culture-complex, nation, religion, etc.) and the dominance hierarchy that couples them and the attempt to individualize what remains into superficial pseudo-clans and subcultures—a reduction to the accidents of appearance. These *skin-deep* forms of associations provide for some thin veneer of meaning and belonging in a homeless and meaningless world that is Modernity. But they are utter misprojections, wholly insufficient given man’s eternal quest for meaning, and ultimately life-denying. The Modern “Last Man” has made a religion out of *subjectivity* and *comfortableness*, turning his (monadic) *solipsism, flight, and passivity* into virtues to which all (including the temperamentally übermenschlich) should conform. This, Nietzsche reminds us, surely cannot ever be conducive to growth of life and to renewal and ascendance of culture. It is ‘anti-natural’ fabrication and dogmatically anti-realist.

Plato sought out the True and the Right (philosophic) living in “fixed and immutable realities, a realm where there is no injustice done or suffered, but all is reason and order” and therefore immune to flux and chaos. 550 Given his faith in the rational order of the cosmos in harmony with our supposedly natural *telos*, Plato joined his teacher Socrates in inventing (moral) “consciousness” (the idea of man as fully *conscious* and *in control* of his actions via his faculty of

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reason), setting the *mind* as rational check against bodily appetite and chaotic, instinctual will of man. This new rather normative and moralistic understanding of (human) “awareness” supersedes the (morally) neutral category of “perception” (which is *limited* to sense-experience by definition), thus inaugurating the notion of “moral responsibility”. For Nietzsche, meanwhile, not only is suffering and injustice *not* an argument against life, its affirmation is critical to life’s heightening. We would do well to remember Nietzsche’s vitriolic stance against *Theodicy* which he finds rather “primitive” and symptomatic of lower levels of culture that religionize and moralize sheer bad luck and suffering into *Evil*: “the belief that there is a good meaning in evil [which is mere bad luck and suffering] implies a renunciation of the struggle against it”—it is passive fear of chance and uncertainty to the point of submission and slavish justification.  

What is devastating for our chances at a cure then is our cowering toward suffering at the individual level, our so-called sympathy for the (monadic) person and sentimentality for “great causes” and “holy crusades”, while forgetting the concrete interests of man as a species. Already in 1881 (*Daybreak*), objecting to the development in Modernity of such a politically and socially “correct” and *emulsifying* condition weary of any and all “offenses”, Nietzsche observes,

> Are we not, with this tremendous objective of obliterating all the sharp edges of life, well on the way to turning mankind into *sand*? Sand! Small, soft, round, unending sand! Is that your ideal, you heralds of the sympathetic affections?

Such misdirected compassion ironically blinds us to the reality of human differences—to *Distanz*, and so Nietzsche thinks it a sure sign of *weakness, décadence*, and slave morality of *ressentiment*.

It is not that Nietzsche does not have any compassion in his heart. It is that his compassion is reserved for the *few* who fully and truly “deserve” it. Zarathustra only pities the higher men as

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551 The Greeks did not have any term for “consciousness” in the way we moderns understand the term. The Socratic invention was rather communicated through complex network of metaphors and fables.

552 *KGW* (NF 1887, 10[21])

553 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §174
he informs us lamentingly in the closing of Book IV of Z: “What has been left me now as my last sin?”, Nietzsche has Zarathustra ask himself, “Pity! Pity for the higher men!’ he cried, and his face transformed to bronze. ‘Well then! That – has its time!’” Nietzsche is only concerned with the future health of the human as species and as cultures. Especially is that Nietzsche (in opposition to Darwin) regards evolution a middling phenomenon making it tremendously difficult to beget such higher men of genius. The fittest do not often survive the labyrinths of evolution; they are systematically eliminated in line with the interests of the average majority. As Harvard professor (and a critic of Nietzsche) Irving Babbitt (1924) put it in terms echoing Nietzsche’s line of thought on Modernity’s leveling and emergence of the Last Man,

“One is inclined, indeed, to ask, in certain moods, whether the net result of the movement that has been sweeping the Occident for several generations may not be a huge mass of standardized mediocrity; and whether in this country in particular we are not in danger of producing in the name of democracy one of the most trifling brands of the human species that the world has yet seen.”

As such, remedying our procrustean, spirit-flattening, and exhausting modern condition requires that we wait neither for Godot nor for St. Benedict but that we actively breed a Theseus or at the very least create the right conditions for emergence of this particular type of man. This we can no longer afford to leave up to nature and fate itself—here is Nietzsche at his most (Renaissancely) modern. Let us now examine what Nietzsche deems the healthy normative terrain conducive to such an emergence.

Virtù: The Building Block for A New Aristocratic Normative Architecture

Contrary to the customary characterizations of Nietzsche offered by moral philosophers, Nietzsche’s fundamental innovation in regards to norms and values is not to simply eradicate

554 Irving Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, p.269-270
normativity and value paradigms as such but instead to challenge that corrosive pretense on the part of generations of moral (read: metaphysical) philosophers to seek the normative in the universal and perennial ‘beyond’ rather than in particularity, becoming, changeability, and multiplicity—or in that variable ‘concrete reality’ that is eternally yet dynamically man-made and, so Nietzsche thinks, cultural. That normativity and particularity (cf. culture) go hand in hand is both a direct implication of Nietzsche’s perspectivism and what sustains its practice in the here and the now.\(^{555}\)

Nor is Nietzsche (to the chagrin of the postists) dismissive of reason as such but only problematizes the dogmatic scientistic kind of reason idolized as “rationality”. Norms are rooted in cultural praxis and shall be consistently revisited by physicians of culture, who having been bred in Lebensphilosophie must exercise their practical and interpretive (cf. perceptual and perspectival) reason (phronesis) as to ensure that such arrangements have not lost their basis in life and become ossified and dogmatic—and if so revalue them, inverting the décadent perspectives propagating them (cf. Perspektiven umzustellen).

To this end, Nietzsche looks to shatter the Manichean matrix of Morality (which he believes the relic of the ascetic ideal) and to cast the very idea of what is ‘valuable’ and ‘virtuous’ anew and on the solid ground of a “philosophy of life” at once tragic and Dionysian. Nietzsche articulates his novel vision of value by adopting the Renaissance idea of virtù—the “moraline-free” holistic quality of disposition encapsulating the aristocratic ethos that is embodied in the great persons animating heroic, creative, and generative action (cf. archaic Greek arete). Virtù is

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\(^{555}\) The observation of symbiosis between norms and culture is of course not unique to Nietzsche. One could find similar strains in Aristotle and Aquinas all the way to the modern philosophies of Hegel, Voegelin, and MacIntyre. What is unique however is Nietzsche’s perspectivist and culturalist account, which explicitly repudiates the Universal, the One, or the Word as fabrications of metaphysical fancy, distinctively horizoning his analysis to cultures (as the highest embodiments of the concrete particularity of humanity) flowing in the stream of eternal becoming with no need for an ultimate synthesis or monistic unity in perspective.
thus deeply connected to Nietzsche’s understanding of (human) ‘will to power’ encompassing, inter alia, such vital values as honesty (vis-à-vis the tragic reality of life), worldliness, courage, vision, curiosity, ingenuity, adaptability, pragmatism, magnanimity, criticality, creativity, originality, practical agency, and above all strength (cf. “aristocratic morality”). It is in actively possessing such values (attained through self-seeking and becoming one’s fated innate self) in whole that a man of virtù affirms his “distinction” and “pathos of distance”, ascertains both his health and particular type (übermenschlich), and thus begins to become who he is and is (naturally) fated to be—exceptional and great. In offering his radical axiological innovations (or restorations—Wiederherstellung), Nietzsche does not, I insist, seek to abolish value and virtue per se. Far from it. His aim, rather, is to obliterate the universalistic, totalistic, and idealistic scaffolding (and by extension the universalistic idea of rationality) on which (moral) values are problematically based and monistically interpreted since Socrates, as well as reversing those décadent perspectives that spawn them. The latter’s ascendance (i.e. Morality) after all was a perversion of healthy instincts and values—the original revaluation accomplished by that morbid and sickly type of man, Socrates.

By reframing the discussion of values in pre-Socratic, Homeric terms of “virtù and vice” and “better and worse”, Nietzsche does not so much abandon the whole conception of goodness and badness as moot, but actually produces an entirely new (physio-psychological) definition of good and bad (and well-being per se) based on what he thinks their natural evolution in archaic

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556 They are literally vital for on such values depends not just the Übermensch but cultural health and vigor. In this context, also consider the Aristotelian notion of megalopsychia.

557 Note that for Nietzsche it is the exceptional person’s physiological temperament and body that drives him or her to such genuine self-discovery: “Your Self laughs at your Ego and its proud leaps. ‘What are these leaps and flights of thought to me?’ it says to itself. ‘A detour to my purpose [goal]. I am the leading strings of the ego and the prompter of its conceptions.’” (Z, I, On Despisers of the Body). Note also that Nietzsche distinguishes between the venerable self-seeking and self-importance of the great and exceptional which almost always requires a “self-overcoming” and the cynical self-interest we would associate with the Ego after Freud.
aristocratic societies, sublating the Manichean cast of Good and Evil. Nietzsche problematizes the naïve moralized understanding of “Goodness” and “Happiness” which the Last Men both embody and (out of their optimism) idolize. To break such idols is the crux of Nietzsche’s quest (cf. *Twilight of the Idols*). The Last Men who are naively good and happy spell disaster for mankind because in their desire to be good and to have things easy, precisely oblivious to the unjust and terrible reality of existence that necessitates hardness, they suffocate creativity and strength: “The Good—they cannot create, they are always the beginning of the end—they crucify Him who writes new values on new tablets, they sacrifice the future to themselves, they crucify all the futures of mankind! The Good—they have always been the beginning of the end!” 558 Such Good and Righteous folk, sure of themselves and all-too-dogmatic as they are, “exist at the expense of truth as much as they exist at the expanse of the future” of humanity—representing the physiological type which is “the most harmful of harms” to health, the “hater” of the creator types. 559 Those who are called Good today are precisely the ones who cannot create (meaning) and culture-make, the ones content to be ‘herd animal’ (Heerdenthier Mensch) and follow the norms and values of general morality. And given Nietzsche’s strong association of goodness with creativity (which he defends on utilitarian grounds as a physio-psychological matter of practical consequence rather than a moral postulate), it follows that the people who are dubbed good today—whom Nietzsche brandishes as the Last Men—are actually not good at all from the Nietzschean standpoint and the perspective of the healthy types.

The following passage (*EH*, I, §2) is particularly illuminative of Nietzsche’s concept of virtù and wellbeing,

How do you know that someone has turned out well?\textsuperscript{560} By the fact that a well-turned-out person does our senses good: by the fact that he is cut from wood that is simultaneously hard, gentle, and fragrant. He only has a taste for what agrees with (is conducive to) him; his enjoyment, his desires stop at the boundary of what is agreeable (beneficial) to him. He works out how to repair damages, he uses mishaps to his advantage; what does not kill him makes him stronger. He instinctively gathers his totality from everything he sees, hears, experiences: he is a principle of selection, he lets many things fall by the wayside. He is always in the company of his own kind,\textsuperscript{561} whether dealing with books, people, or landscapes: he honours by choosing, by granting admission, by entrusting. He reacts slowly to all types of stimuli, with that slowness that has been bred in him by a long caution and a willful pride—he scrutinizes whatever stimulus comes near him, he would not go to meet it. He does not believe in 'bad luck' or 'guilt': he comes to terms with himself and with others, he knows how to forget—he is strong enough that everything has to turn out best for him.\textsuperscript{562}

What is truly virtuous and ‘millennium-shaping’ sometimes makes man act immorally (that is contrary to the conventional mores); not heeding conventions—this is at the heart of all creative activity. Especially is this the case for Nietzsche’s creative higher men whose destiny of task it is specifically to revalue the old values. As Nietzsche reminds his readers, “Every distinguished [choice (auserlesene)] person strives instinctively for his citadel and private refuge (Heimlichkeit) where he is delivered (erlöst) from the crowd, the multitude, the vast majority, where he is allowed to forget the rules of ‘mankind’, being the exception to them. Apart from one case, however, when such a person is driven by an even stronger instinct straight back towards such norms, being discerning (Erkennender) [as he is] of all things great and exceptional.”\textsuperscript{563} To become fully great (i.e. embodied and actualized greatness) in the Nietzschean ‘order of rank’ requires that such übermenschlich persons act immorally (and not amorally which is passive in distinction) against the slave morality that is dominant in his time (cf. Modernity) and create for posterity a new kind

\textsuperscript{560} Nietzsche uses ‘Wohlgerathenheit’ (cf. III, 1), the rough German equivalent for the ancient Greek concept of virtue as arete.

\textsuperscript{561} Cf. the ancient Greek concept of friendship, which is always selective and reserved to one’s own peers and equals.

\textsuperscript{562} EH, I, §2 (Norman Translation slightly altered and harmonized with Duncan Large). Bolding is my own.

\textsuperscript{563} BGE, II, §26 (translation is my own)
of aristocratic ethical program that reaffirms the ‘pathos of distance’ and differential values of relative distinction. For Nietzsche believes only such an aristocratic cultural environment would be conducive to the kind of meaning creation and myth-making we desperately need in the West to guarantee its future now that ‘God is dead and remains dead’. Viewed in this spirit of pronounced urgency (cf. the nihilistic crisis), it would indeed be the case that the harm done by the (lazy and passive) Good is the most harmful of harms.

To recall our discussion in Act One, Nietzsche would concur with MacIntyre that a culture needs a normative order of rank (i.e. a holistic hierarchy of values). Nevertheless, in the Nietzschean formulation, not only would the order of rank not be limited to the normative and axiological domains (extending to the socio-cultural/practical realm), Nietzsche’s would be based entirely on a counter-idealistic template—on virtù and (concrete) action, and hence substantive only at the cultural level (cf. cultural monism) without overtures to teleology (whether natural, historical, or sociological) and universality, let alone totality. Contrary to MacIntyre, Nietzsche would plausibly see the supposed polynomous normative disorder (liberal value anarchy) introduced earlier, as an example of a false anarchy, where all the available and seemingly-independent ‘value-baskets’ simply represent different manifestations of the ascetic ideal—in effect ‘unanimously’ disguising the normative and cultural dominance of idealism and the ressentimental instincts that drive it! Following Nietzsche’s logic, the Western situation, it turns out, is not “polynomous” at all but decidedly mononomous. At least since Socrates, one spiritual paradigm—idealism (which Nietzsche again calls antinature)—has reigned supreme in the West. And this paradigm has both sanctioned and sustained for millennia the décadent normative scheme Nietzsche labels the ‘ascetic ideal’ or alternatively refers to as “slave morality”.
When Nietzsche refutes Morality, he is not speaking of just any code of ethics: it is the
morality (i.e. the normative canon and program) of ‘idealism’ that he disavows. The ‘old saints’
and priestly types needed their ideals—their eternal ideals turned into idols—to escape actuality,
the harsh reality of suffering. Despite their claims, they were not free to choose and measure their
truth-claims and values according to any truly autonomous criterion—the criterion of life, of
ascending life. Amor fati and (physiological) necessity had decreed against them and so they
fatefully lacked (and could never possess) the correct yardstick, let alone becoming that measure
themselves, being slaves to their ever-fleeing cowardly nature. In their lack of strength and courage
for life in the face of suffering, these priestly-types-turned-classical-philosophers violated the old
Protagorean axiom, homo mensura, that “man is a measure of all things”—thus with them the
unhuman ‘ideal’ (which they later called divine) became the measure, negating not just the human
but life itself. Nietzsche sets out to recover just such a humanly picture of value and discernment
of norms, stating: “I am the first to have the yardstick (measure) for ‘truths’ in my hand, I am the
first to be able to decide.” The picture of norms that emerges by way of Nietzsche is thus one
with more Aristotelian undertones than perhaps is proposed by the neo-Thomistic MacIntyre
increasingly concerned with bridging the gap between the liberal idea of man and natural law:
Nietzsche’s is one, not of man coequally autonomous and ‘law unto himself’, but rather of man as
homo nomos and of norms wholly man-made (albeit by the discerning few). In fact, the ideal’s
imagined subject (the self who freely chooses mindful of course of his moral responsibility) is
himself the invention of idealism, which has no true appreciation at all for that ancient humanistic
idea of freedom (as marker of the great). It is in this light that Nietzsche believes radical

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564 EH, III (‘TI’, §2)
565 As Nietzsche has it, freedom (of will) is always bounded and checked by the realities of fate, chance, necessity,
and Fortuna (cf. amor fati), and so to speak of the will as ‘free’ or ‘unfree’ is a misnomer. The correct dichotomy as
evident in aristocratic societies is the one between active and hard wills vs. passive and soft ones (which are
relativism and (moral) nihilism will in the end necessarily follow idealism in its final days, for the (idealistic) project—having become conscious of the demands made upon it by the idea of (individuated) liberty it itself unwittingly sowed—aims to hide its deterministic, teleological, and ultimately totalistic program with the illusion of choice—culminating in the liberal project. But ultimately this is an exercise in failure. Like its congenital twin, the will to truth (leading to the Enlightenment), (individuated) liberty emerges as the natural consequence of the idealistic worldview, eating it from within, as the serpent does its own tail. The postist is the natural spawn of the idealist, fittingly and parricideally turned against it.

On these grounds, Nietzschean ethics supplants the dichotomy of good and evil whose roots lie in ‘idealism’ and hatred of life—in religion and philosophy of the ascetic ideal—and replaces them with the new metric of virtù and vice whose guiding principles come from life itself—from Lebensphilosophie. Clarifying his novel code of ethics that is premised on ‘aristocratic values’, Nietzsche notes, “I use the word ‘vice’ to fight against every type of anti-nature or, if you like pretty words, idealism.” Virtù, meanwhile, encompasses all those qualities as well as activities which protect courage and bolster the strength and hardness of the will for the purposes of life. Within Nietzsche’s aristocratic vision of ethos, ethics is not an end in itself but a means to the full affirmation of life in all its aspects, an attitude strengthened in daily practice. It is in such spirits for instance that sex, a natural and elementary part of life and a requirement of body, is valued and celebrated by Nietzsche as an ‘aesthetic’ (i.e. appealing to the senses) activity formative of virtù; and in contrast, ‘chastity’ is singled out as vice of the first order: “preaching

nevertheless still fated but require practical demonstration and actualization to ascertain). Hard wills exhibit the highest creative strength which is hard enough to impose meaning upon becoming, resulting in a cosmodicy (Kosmodicee) which renders the need for theodicy obsolete. See Peter Durno Murray’s Nietzsche and the Dionysian: A Compulsion to Ethics, Brill Rodopi, 2018, ch.1.

566 EH, III, §5
chastity is a public incitement to anti-nature. Every contempt for sex, every effort to dirty it through the concept of ‘impurity’ is a crime against life itself—it is the true sin against the holy spirit of life.”

What is more, Nietzsche’s brand of naturalism affirms hierarchies in the spirit of realism but rejects the classical idea of natural teleology and universal human ends. Accordingly, Nietzsche’s version of aristocracy is neither “predatory” nor idealist and teleological exploiting the masses as a matter of might or right but instead a cultural meritocratic (or axiocratic) one salutary as well for the common man by supplying her with an ordering architecture and a solid ground of meaning along which to exercise the freedom inherent in her physiological potentialities and strive to realize them as her own personal task. Breeding a healthy will to power (which does not seek to turn away from life in horror or disgust) within the culture-complex by means of instinctivizing and routinizing healthy and life-affirming norms and values (i.e. virtù), Nietzsche hopes, could generate the kinds of great man who represent in themselves the “self-sublimation of morality”—sublimating (Sublimierung) man’s normative and axiological nature into pragmatic, cultural, and aristocratic norms whose main purpose it is to propagate the Übermensch and in turn actualize the principles of life on Earth (i.e. within man’s cultural habitat).

These great and exceptional men are meant to bring about the revaluation of all values in such a way that ethics is once more used to enhance culture by reinstituting a variant of the aristocratic ethos within the rediscovered aristocratic hierarchy of values and types. The aristocratic types and noble action once more celebrated, they are restored their mantle as the highest communal goal with society.

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567 EH, III, §5 (quotation also appears in Nietzsche’s postscript to AC, “Law against Christianity”, which Nietzsche wrote on 30 September 1888 and with which he sought to conclude The Antichrist.

568 This theme has been developed in a different form by Jeffrey Church. See Jeffrey Church, “Nietzsche on Aristocracy and the Meaning of Life”, in Aristocratic Souls in Democratic Times, Richard Avramenko and Ethan Alexander-Davey (eds.), Lexington Books, 2018, pp. 141-156.

569 Daybreak, Preface, §4
itself being organized around it. As Nietzsche had done earlier with philosophy, turning it into an instrument for culture and life, so he does again with morality.

In all of this, one can infer from Nietzsche that while he aims to affirm hierarchy and inequality, distance and distinction, and discrimination and prejudice as real, vital, and even biological components of human existence, he does differentiate (and strongly so) between fair and reasonable prejudice (i.e. based on virtù and competency) as the foundation of his preferred (naturally-derived) organicist view of justice and the kind of arbitrary and unreasonable discrimination, rancor, and partiality driven by the ressentimental pathos and its offspring “pity”, which inevitably result in paradigms of justice that are, to use Nietzsche’s phrase, ‘against naturality’ (Widernatürlichkeit) and prone to inequity. How and according to what set of principles one structures the hierarchy (of both values and people) is the foundational life question (Lebensfrage) for human beings; and it is the key to adjudicating whether a particular order of rank is positive and life-affirming or negative and escapist. It is Nietzsche’s incisive observation that power and hierarchy are in themselves simply neutral (i.e. beyond good and evil) and that it is critical for human and cultural heightening that their reality and presence within the human domain be actively acknowledged so that they can consequently be judged on their merit. Acknowledging this facticity (like acknowledging the facticity of suffering and death) could only be liberating over the long haul and a judicious force for forming better and more healthy orders of rank.

*The Return to Culture: Aristocratic Breeding and the Re-centering of Culture*

Under Nietzsche’s distinctive version of naturalism (cf. ‘bio-physicalism’) which views nature as a dynamic animate totality of living processes and an eternal becoming operating in a homeodynamic manner, Culture (cf. Cultur-Komplex, Zucht, Geist, Erziehung) is regarded a
formative step in the evolution of mankind—an “ascent” ("coming up," Hinaufkommen) from pure cru ‘nature’ (where men were merely tribal beasts) to culture as an elevated enhancement of the powers of man. Nonetheless, culture, to be healthy and generative, must remain a superorganismic medium inspired by and grounded in nature not succumbing to the temptations of ‘ideals’ and ‘imagined utopias’ masked as “being”—the proudly unreal and unnatural to be sought in an otherworldly netherworld to which Nietzsche prefers even wild and ‘uncultured’ yet equally ‘untamed’ and ‘commanding’ barbarians (cf. Nietzsche’s rhetorical appeal to ‘blond beasts’). Nietzsche’s distinctive understanding of (healthy) culture as myth-based, laicistic, open, and dynamic sets him apart also from the proponents of class-rigid, religious, essentialistic, and static culturalism espoused by conservative thinkers such as T.S. Elliot. For Nietzsche, the reality of becoming and flux within ‘living processes’ must be re-centered and re-emphasized not just vis-à-vis nature (especially organic and biological nature) but as elementary for culture as such understanding the latter as mechanism and complex for life.

In BGE, Nietzsche provides a kind of genealogy of culture (cf. Cultur-Komplex) underscoring its inherent relationship with breeding as well as the qualification and selective cultivation of a set of virtues as a mark of their unique kind of species (Art). In its original aristocratic phase, Nietzsche writes, a species, as one distinct breed of human life,

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570 The nuanced and intimate relationship between Nietzsche’s usage of Zucht (‘discipline’ or ‘breed’) and of Cultur and Geist is one I have emphasized before. The Zucht usage is especially noteworthy for it seems to combine rather effectively the sense of Kultur together with that of Erziehung or ‘rearing’ (one of the two common senses of ‘education’ in German usually focused on development of ‘skill’, which has a contrasting pair or “shadow” in Bildung or ‘character-formation’). Raymond Geuss notes that Cultur in the German Enlightenment usage (especially Kant’s and Herder’s) intimates “the general state or level of cultivation of human faculties”, a process that is directed at the ‘self’ and need not be ‘social’—in a distinct contrast with Zivilisierung/Zivilisation (‘civilizing’/’civilization’). The emphasis on the social, political, and communal in addition to the personal and übermenschlich dimensions of Cultur as well as their profound interdependence, seem to me, to be among Nietzsche’s most important contributions. See Geuss’ essay, “Cultur, Bildung, Geist”, in his Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 29-50.

571 For an exposition of T.S. Elliot’s views on ‘culture’ see his Notes Towards a Definition of Culture (1948) (1972).

572 BGE, “What is Noble?”, §262
needs itself to be a species, to be something that, by virtue of its very hardness, uniformity, and simplicity of form, can succeed and make itself persevere in constant struggle with its neighbors or with the oppressed who are or threaten to become rebellious. A tremendous range of experiences teaches it which qualities are primarily responsible for the fact that, despite all gods and men, it still exists, it keeps prevailing. It calls these qualities virtues, and these are the only virtues it fosters. It does so with harshness; in fact, it desires harshness. …It considers intolerance itself to be a virtue, under its rubric of ‘justice’. 573

And yet, Nietzsche was no conservative. He observed that given their historical arc, old aristocratic societies having become increasingly conformist and uniform would soon devolve into articles of civilization suffocating that generative culture itself on the soil of which they (as variant species of man) themselves initially grew and from whose teats they drank their first drops of milk and nourishment. He recognized no doubt that such aristocratic societies, preoccupied with the “horrible risk of being eradicated,” would grant “none of the advantages, excesses, and protections that are favorable to variation”, out of justified fear that they not succeed in their primal need for preserving their kind. But for Nietzsche, it was important that the new-age form of aristocracy he stipulated be mindful precisely of the importance of difference and creativity to culture and life.

This was no erratic turn in Nietzsche’s thought. Years before, in BT, he had already conceived of the antagonism of culture and civilization as two oppositional mechanisms (ein antagonismus)—one for creation and life (hence healthful), the other a necessary means of culture originally that becomes corrupted and reduced to merely a tool for “domestication” 574. Untethered from its life-affirming cultural ends, civilization devolves into a mortally dangerous monstrosity, catering to the routinization of dogma and the systematic taming and elimination of the strong, the

573 BGE, “What is Noble?”, §262
574 The radical ‘antagonism’ between culture and civilization as an antipodal contrast is distinctive to Nietzsche but the contrast itself predates Nietzsche to at least the 18th century as is evident in different ways in the writings of Kant, Herder, and others. For a fuller discussion of their divergence in the German usage, see Norbert Elias, The Civilizing Process, “Sociogenesis of the Antithesis Between Kultur and Zivilisation in German Usage” (specifically pp. 1-11), Blackwell, 1978 [1939]. For a concise account of their philosophical usage and its history, see Raymond Geuss’ essay, “Cultur, Bildung, Geist”, in his Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 29-50.
ultimate result of which could only be (cultural) petrification, destruction, and death for man as species. Conceptually, Cultur represents therefore the “will to life”, while civilization conjures the essence of what Nietzsche identifies as the will to negate life—that décadent instinct running counter to the philosophy of becoming. Civilization thrives on rigidity and fixity for which it needs being and absolutes (those “monstrous and terrifying masks”), while the true modus operandi of culture is change itself—‘becoming as such’. As he declares already in 1871, “all those things which we now [under our Modern categories] call culture, education, civilization must someday appear before the judge Dionysus whom no man can deceive.” It is illustrative that Nietzsche “disliked ‘culture’, insofar as it implies the transcendence and sublimation of ‘nature’ in service of ‘moral’ ideals” and yet embraced culture as a dynamic whole, a processual body or living organism in the manner that I with Nietzsche understand the term.. As Solms-Laubach (2007) correctly observes, “Nietzsche believes that true cultural advance only arises from the antagonistic struggle between the different forms of will inherent in ‘culture and ‘civilization’…as the two fundamental forces in human beings and also in the rest of the world: Dionysus, creative but also destructive and Apollo, structuring but also contemplative”.

What is more, Nietzsche imagined culture as something concrete, organic, whole, and physiological rather than abstract, ideational, fragmented, and immaterial (which our conventional usage of the term often implies). In the Nietzschean dictum, culture adheres only to that most

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575 In preface to BGE, Nietzsche alludes to this will to permanence and being as a pathological inclination which nevertheless galvanizes the many lofty aspirations and projects of mankind: “It seems that all great things, in order to inscribe eternal demands in the heart of humanity, must first wander the earth under monstrous and terrifying masks…”

576 BT, § 19


578 Franz zu Solms-Laubach, Nietzsche and Early German and Austrian Sociology, p. 133
fundamental principle of life—the will to power, heightening, and growth (cf. BGE, §13).

Expanding on what he calls the “fundamental will of the Geist”, Nietzsche writes:

The commanding element (whatever it is) that is generally called “spirit” wants to dominate itself and its surroundings, and to feel its domination: it wills simplicity out of multiplicity, it is a binding, subduing, domineering, and truly masterful will. Its needs and abilities are the same ones that physiologists have established for everything that lives, grows, and propagates. 579

It is an interesting fact that as Nietzsche seeks out new categories to ground his (perspectivist) philosophy of the future, he finds them residing especially in his novel physiological understanding of culture as a totality. It is for this reason that Nietzsche rejects the old nature-nurture dichotomy and even begins to concoct one of his characteristic neologism when referring to his conception of culture (cf. Zucht) as symbiotically and reflexively connected to, and a strain of, breeding—Zuchtung. Cultures in the Nietzschean conception are thus living organisms forming and inhabiting single bodies, each with a Mind (Geist) of its own—each a sui generis breed (Zucht), “a creative, productive, mutable force” (cf. die Zucht des Geistes). 580 Such a conclusion, Nietzsche finds, a natural consequence of “translating humanity back into nature”, a pronouncement which for Nietzsche means “to gain control of the many vain and fanciful interpretations and incidental meanings that have been scribbled and drawn over that eternal basic text of homo natura so far,” recognizing in them the distinctive handwriting of the different breeds of culture that incessantly draw them. 581 It follows that this Dionysian picture of the plurality of cultures (and Dionysus’ divine affirmation of them) cannot help but also breed a plurality of truths and so it is here that Nietzschean epistemology of perspectivism is indeed truly realized and vindicated. Ultimately, it is made apparent that the plethora of (opposing) truths is not the media nor the handiwork of

individual subjects (cf. radical relativism) but those of Culture-colonies/culture complexes which paradoxically happen to reflect and make immanent the creative vision of those higher types of man who in their lifeful visionary strength conceived them (as species) in the first place.

To note, within Nietzsche’s mythopoeic account, normativity and a sense of ethos are routinized as part and parcel of any (cultural) mythos (understood as the underlying organizing narrative and the semiotic ordering paradigm for a particular breed/species) whether life-serving or life-escaping, embodied in the particular types of man the dominant paradigm of meaning (cf. mythos) has need for and hence aims to breed to perpetuate itself and further its hold on the culture. The aristocratic normative program built around virtù is however foundationally different from the classical model of virtue ethics (ethos) which presumes that these particular bundles of values could be taught in such a way as to be ‘character-forming’. Character is here replaced by disposition and instinct that must nevertheless be developed in the framework of a person becoming who he or she is. Richard Schacht thus stands vindicated in arguing that "the exhortation for 'become yourself' is to be understood not as a call to return to nature or to intensify subjectivity, but rather as an appeal to ascend to culture, and to contribute what one can to its enrichment."582 The best the dominant values could hope for is that they be instinctivized within the cultural body at large and in its members. It is for this reason that Nietzsche emphasizes breeding (Zuchtung), which takes place rather unconsciously from the perspective of its target, over that of education (Bildung). The very concept of Breeding itself reflects once more Nietzsche’s belief in the synthesis between nature and nurture, body and mind, culture and value, inter alia.

In this context, a crucial aspect of Nietzsche’s distinctive normative program (what one can call Nietzsche philosophy of education) is expressed in his novel Ethic of Breeding and

Cultivation he refers to as Zuchtung in distinction with classical education and civilizing (Bildung). Bildung is the business of folly ‘civilizers’ and ‘improvers of mankind’, Nietzsche proclaims, not that of breeders concerned with the health of culture (as a breed) and its future. The latter group, Nietzsche insists, must concentrate their efforts on natural cultivation and breeding (Zuchtung) of the exemplary types of man informed by the ancient aristocratic templates. As Nietzsche repeatedly reminds us, instilling a new ethic of breeding and cultivation is something he takes “seriously” within his Dionysian approach, for the remedy to the “European problem” (and its total nihilism), as Nietzsche understands it, entails “the breeding of a new caste to rule Europe,” if not politically then certainly culturally.\(^{583}\)

With respect to Nietzsche’s discussion of European nihilism and Western cultural degeneration, such a paradigmatic shift in the Western approach to education is particularly pertinent and urgent if the West is to have a future as a cultural body, for Nietzsche remains adamant that within the global cultural game, “the spiritual/intellectual leveling of one people is compensated for in the deepening of another.”\(^{584}\) Confronted with that distinctively-modern type of ‘herd animal’ (Heerdenthier) that is the mediocre ‘last man’, the West’s only path forward, upward rather, is instrumenting a new culture of breeding to cultivate the necessary type of exceptional and lionesque humans (cf. Übermenschlich) with whom lies the ‘arrow’ to finally release the “magnificent spiritual tension” of our Western bow and “shoot” towards that sole life-worthy goal at present furthest away from us: a new dawn of culture, a new birth, a rejuvenation, a restoration of innocence, the ‘high noon’ that is characteristic of the child state of culture (cf. Z’s “The Three Metamorphoses”).\(^{585}\) Nietzsche’s understanding of Culture, being neither ‘nature’ nor

\(^{583}\) BGE, “Peoples and Fatherlands”, §251  
\(^{584}\) BGE, “Peoples and Fatherlands”, §241  
\(^{585}\) BGE, Preface.
‘humanity’ as such, paradoxically embodies both at the same time. As for the Übermensch, this type is “the persona emergent from the interplay of nature's dynamism with culture's enlightened sensibility” (the true fruit of the Enlightenment so far remaining forbidden to us); as the microcosm of culture, this type too “is paradoxically both nature and humanity, embodied in a creative flash of insight”, a holistic individual both instinctivized into culture and inoculated from it by his distinguishing physiology.586

To Nietzsche, Morality consists of contingent and essentially man-made “norms” dominating (as customs and conventions) and in time becoming commanding as ‘Law’. By the same token, dogmatic metaphysical philosophy known as classical philosophy (cf. Socratic philosophy) involves contingent ideas dominating and becoming commanding as a priori Truths to be doubted no more. For they become dominant and commanding over us to the extent as to “achieve the surety of instinct” and appear as though second-nature, Nietzsche calls them "will to power" for they were once nothing more than expedient and contingent wills and views of a person or a group of people (representative of a type) in a particular past which being advantageous for some time have survived long enough to have become powerful over us contemporaneously. We now follow them routinely and mechanically. As such, morality is the product of a particular ethos (in our case a characteristically décadent one), which having originated in the pathos of a particular physiological type, has become the general and public pathos—logos being distant from it!587 As products of wills from a past that could have been otherwise however, mores are vulnerable to transformation once their history is revealed and deconstructed; it necessarily follows from this that they can be changed once more by new wills dominating the old ones—by

587 In this way, Nietzschean genealogy of morality points to an especial “reflexivity” between pathos and ethos in the formation and routinization of morality.
strong creative wills of “great types” breaking the old tablets and replacing them with new ones of their own creation. Revaluation of all values is thus ingrained into the conception of the will to power as well as the metaphysics of all change. This process of constant transformation and transfiguration that inevitably does and must happen in the life-cycle of a culture-complex Nietzsche calls the Eternal Recurrence (of this very process).

For Nietzsche, life’s will to power, domineering, and enhancement is regarded the only law of nature best captured in the process of evolution itself. There are multiple wills to power, some lifeful, some pathological. And these different, opposing wills to power are almost always contesting to dominate the Geist of a culture—seeking to become instinctivized. As Nietzsche once observed mindful of this very fact, “Every people has its own tartufferies, and calls them its virtues.” Applied to the human domain in its ideational and normative activity, this implies that “overpowering and dominating consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which former ‘meaning’ (Sinn) and ‘purpose’ [attributed to existence] must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated”. But this is not for naught and must be accompanied with a new creation—a replacement and revaluation. Will to power then also demands the kind of ‘assertiveness’ and action which animate creation and that stands opposite to resignation and passivity. It reflects what sociologists call ‘agency’, albeit Nietzsche’s is a special kind of cultural agency with a destructive-creative character in that it destroys a previous ordering paradigm (of meaning and norms) for a new one of new meanings and values. The person (as the culture-incarnate) who accomplishes this performative task—the Übermensch—is one who unleashes true

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588 Nietzsche of course rejects Darwin’s doctrine of ‘survival of the fittest’, as he believes that this will to power tends to express itself by selecting the group (as the average) over that of the fittest exceptional individual who stands outside and opposite to the population at large. Evolution’s guiding principle, Nietzsche contends, is ‘the survival of the mean’ prioritizing the median group within a population wherever possible.

589 BGE, “Peoples and Fatherlands”, §249

590 On Genealogy of Morality, Second Essay, §12
human potential—the exceptional one overcoming *natura naturata* to become *natura naturans* and who in process preserves cultural dynamism.\(^{591}\)

Nietzsche understands that humans need norms and values for evolutionary purposes and in order to flourish—yet these values should not come as morality classically understood but must be values that are grounded in *life* and do not contradict its principal teachings: that a ‘will to life’ sanctions only one kind of will to power that guarantees its creativity and hence a future for it, and consequently that a healthy will to power must engender an ethic of nobility, an ethic of the *Virtus* that celebrates courage, honesty, and vigorous *action* rather than the ‘virtues’ as such which aim to domesticate and tame with no regard to order of rank. As Steven Michels rightly puts it, “If nihilism is a sort of inaction, then Nietzsche’s philosophy points away from nihilism, not to it. The will to power is nothing if not a doctrine of action.”\(^{592}\)

In all this, although a focus on persons of a special type (a kind of loose *humanism*) and their *breeding* constitute a key aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy of life, (the higher) man and his generative will to power together serve something bigger and greater than themselves—they contribute to life as such through reinvigorating culture—“as though man were not an end but just a path, an episode, a bridge, a great promise”.\(^{593}\) We can hence detect in Nietzsche’s Lebensphilosophie a ‘weak’ or perhaps ‘qualified’ humanism as well as an emphasis on pragmatism. That Nietzsche does not seem to count himself among the *select* Übermenschlich seems at first strange. Yet, it is clear in hindsight that it is the mantle of the “great teacher” and trainer that Nietzsche reserves for himself—he is the ‘breeder in-chief’ of the Übermensch par

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\(^{591}\) *natura naturans* (creative nature of genius formative of culture) is to be contrasted with *natura naturata* (man-made or created nature product of culture).


\(^{593}\) *GM*, II, §16
excellence. Not only is Nietzsche their harbinger, the Übermensch seem to sacrifice at the altar of god Dionysus, and Nietzsche believes himself Dionysus’ prophet, if not his latest reincarnation on Earth. Not to speak of the fact that he has already envisioned quite poetically and metaphorically one such trainer figure in Zarathustra of Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Zarathustra, after all, is offered as Nietzsche’s best mythical and rhetorical exemplar of a kind of exceptional mentor who teaches his children “in the vital activity of Kultur-Machen (‘culture Making’) in which the [healthful kind of] will to power will come to animate the art of culture in the human-ecological lifeworld”.

In 1886, in a new preface to HAH in the aftermath of completing Z, Nietzsche writes of the great hope he feels for the Übermenschlich and of his role in bringing about or expediting their emergence,

That free spirits of this kind could one day exist, that our Europe will have such active and audacious fellows among its sons of tomorrow and the next day, physically present and palpable and not, as in my case, merely phantoms and hermit's phantasmagoria: I should wish to be the last to doubt it. I see them already coming, slowly, slowly; and perhaps I shall do something to speed their coming if I describe in advance under what vicissitudes, upon what paths, I see them coming?

And it is on this final point that we can at long last turn to examining the central role of the Übermensch type, as the reflexive microcosm of culture, in Nietzsche’s Dionysian philosophy generally and the “revaluation project” especially and consider their seminal cultural as well as political task—what Nietzsche considers their destiny.

Nietzsche’s Anthropological Account of the Political—Culture-Complex in its Parts

595 Human All Too Human, Vol. I, Preface, §2
Nietzsche’s Realist Vision for New Politics: Culture as End, Politics Only as a Means

“Even the fact that Dionysus is a philosopher and that, consequently, even gods philosophize, seems to me like something new and not without its dangers [entirely innocuous], something that might arouse mistrust precisely among philosophers…”

Nietzsche, BGE, “What is Noble”, §295

Part of the aim of this study and one which bears a particular relevance to political theory is to suggest that the historical attitude Nietzsche characterizes as ‘Idealism’ and traces back to Socrates and Plato (as well as the ressentimental drive animating it) give rise to a normative, deontological model of political theorizing which, although dominant in the history of the discipline, stands wholeheartedly antipodal to the perspectivist and realist yet visionary model of political theory rooted in the reality of human perception/experience and driven by a philosophy of life that affirms both the tragic and the creative in life. In fact, the entire corpus of Nietzsche’s writings deeply problematizes the Anglo-American ‘ethics first’ approach to politics and its inclination to treat political theory as an extension of applied ethics. In parallel, Nietzsche stands wholly outside the liberal understanding of political legitimacy grounded in ‘consent’ and (deliberative) ‘consensus’, rejecting ideality and utopian thinking in the exercise of politics along with any conception of the political that is conjoined with the ideal and/or the moral. Paul E. Kirkland sums up rather nicely the powerful imprint Nietzsche’s life-bound tragic realism leaves on his political vision,

Nietzsche's presentation of realism does not seek to eliminate overweening ambitions or resolve fundamental conflicts, but it does attempt to divorce political life from eschatological hopes. He thus rejects modern optimism and its hopes for infinite progress, perpetual peace, or a resting point of human history. This perspective can be understood as postmodern in that Nietzsche rejects what he sees to be the inheritance of otherworldliness in modernity and its idealism. Yet, Nietzsche's antimodernism looks to life as it is to combat the eschatological
universalism of modern thought rather than seeking to transform humanity in accordance with willful products at odds with life.\textsuperscript{596}

Indeed, there is an inherent connection between Nietzsche’s epistemological realism (discussed prior) and his political one. In his political thinking as in his philosophy, Nietzsche belongs firmly in the realist camp—seeing politics in instrumentalist and consequential terms, a craft as well as a sphere of activity, rooted in indispensable conflict and contestation (of values and interests but also of \textit{pathos} and their corresponding worldviews and meaning schemes), in which the übermenschlich must nevertheless be skillful if they are to effectively project their distinctive will to power upon the cultural psyche. This all implies that for Nietzsche, the political is an autonomous and distinctive category, even as it is subservient to and embodied in culture—Raymond Geuss (2008) thereby has the right idea to include Nietzsche as one of his three “patrons” of ‘realist’ political thinking (which he does along with Weber and Lenin).\textsuperscript{597}

In a similar vein, what I call ‘anthro-culturalism’ belongs in the same orbit as what Diego von Vacano (2007) has called “aesthetic” political theory in his seminal study on Machiavelli and Nietzsche.\textsuperscript{598} In my reading, Nietzsche’s (weighted) anthropological model differs from Machiavelli’s expressly Political model in that in the Nietzschean account \textit{culture} is the essentially \textit{extra-political} (if not pre-political) power whose flourishing constitutes the principal goal for any healthful political practice. For Nietzsche, politics should always \textit{pursue} the ends of culture and not be presumed as an end-in-itself. Whereas for Machiavelli ‘culture-making’ is subsumed into the political if not intrinsically political, Nietzsche turns this classically Machiavellian framework on its head. Within Nietzsche’s \textit{instrumentalist} conception of the political, politics operates as a

\textsuperscript{596} Paul E. Kirkland, “Nietzsche’s Tragic Realism”, p. 57
subset of and platform for culture; as such, it is not independent from the mythopoetic process of culture-making that it is designed to stimulate. As Keith Ansell-Pearson rightly observes, for Nietzsche, “an adequate conception of politics is one which sees it as a means to an end; the production of culture and human greatness.” 599

Despite its insistence on separation and autonomy of politics from morality, Nietzsche’s instrumentalist and consequentialist account also suggests, that in its broader understanding of the political as a bridge to the cultural, Nietzsche’s tragic realism diverges from the ‘narrow’ self-contained conception of politics one usually encounters in contemporary political realism. Within Nietzsche’s novel understanding of politics as a ‘grand venture’, culture, holistically understood, encompasses also the activity of politics but precedes it in order of rank. Nietzsche clearly implies this complex relationship between life, culture, and politics, iterating that when out of “that excess of life on Earth” (cf. the successful advent of the Übermenschen as highest exemplars of human life and their regenerative efforts) cultures are revitalized and renewed, that “the Dionysian state, too, must arise once again”—coupling this willful turn toward the renewal of (higher) culture. 600

As Thomas W. Heilke observes, “Nietzsche in effect attempted to construct a new post-Enlightenment philosophical anthropology around the symbol of "life," which served him as both an analytical tool and a topical bellwether for his political education.” 601 In line with Nietzsche’s instrumental view of politics (and anthropology generally) as well as his deep-rooted consequentialism, the doctrine of ‘tragic’ or ‘visionary realism’ drawn from Nietzsche dictates that

600 EH, III (‘BT’, §4)
See Danish scholar and renowned literary critic Georg Brandes of whom Nietzsche wrote appreciatively as among the few to truly understand his philosophy is worthy of mention. See Brandes’ An Essay on Aristocratic Radicalism (1889) which is essentially a response to Nietzsche.
the exercise of politics should be always mindful of some post-political vision tied to the enhancement of culture conceived as the most concrete form of affirmation of life.

Certainly, the role and place of politics in Nietzsche’s philosophy has been one that has fundamentally eluded scholars. In fact, Ansell-Pearson notes that “inquiry into the political dimension of Nietzsche’s thought still remains the most contentious and controversial aspect of Nietzsche-studies.” Even overlooking the earlier appropriation of Nietzsche by the right as a fascistic or otherwise conservative political thinker, since the Second World War, those of us working in the Anglo-Saxon sphere have been presented, essentially, with three narratives in relation to the politics of Friedrich Nietzsche. The first is that of the antipolitical Nietzsche popularized by the wildly influential reading offered by Walter Kaufmann in the 1950s whose rather ‘existentialistic’ interpretation shunned and decentered Nietzsche’s politics, deciding instead to focus on Nietzsche the “philosopher, psychologist, and anti-Christ” and putting the question of morality (and by extension Christianity) and Nietzsche’s distinctive emancipatory and solitary ‘individualism’ front and center. Indeed, Kaufmann is adamant that “the theme of the antipolitical individual who seeks self-perfection far from the modern world” and could care less about the social demands of community and politics is the “leitmotif of Nietzsche’s life and thought”.

In his aim to tidy up Nietzsche’s legacy, Kaufmann chose to emphasize what Conway (1997) has dubbed the “radical voluntarism” in Nietzsche, perhaps first expressed in Heidegger’s critique of Nietzschean metaphysics (and its supposed radical subjectivism), as the central and all-encompassing idea in Nietzschean philosophy.

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602 Ansell-Pearson, p. 2.
The resulting *apolitical* if not antipolitical reading has continued to hold sway up to our time where it is taken up by the likes of Brian Leiter (2002) for example, who opined that Nietzsche, whom he labels the ‘*esoteric moralist*’, “has no political philosophy, in the conventional sense of a theory of the state and its legitimacy.”  Although Leiter has correctly emphasized the central role ‘culture’ and the question of ‘values’ play in Nietzschean philosophy and especially within the *revaluation* project, he has, nonetheless, equated ‘culture’ with the (solitary) ‘self-cultivation’ of the Übermensch and hence downplayed the significance of Nietzsche’s distinctive naturalist and culturalist account for his politics, noting that while Nietzsche “occasionally expresses views on political matters…read in context, they do not add up to a theoretical account of any of the questions of political philosophy”. Similar claims are made by Bernd Magnus (1978), Leslie Paul Thiele (1990), Bernard Williams (1993), Alexander Nehamas (1985), and Eric Blondel (1991) whose Nietzsche ventures far beyond any concrete political, social, and normative projects or responsibilities indeed going so far as to actively shun them.

A different strategy also commonly employed is one of derision and dismissal by those who identify a sort of politics in Nietzsche but nevertheless deem it wholly “inferior”, “second-rate”, and “naïve”—so mired with pitfalls, dangers, and illiberality that it is best brushed aside and proactively dismissed. Richard Rorty (who self-identifies as a *neo-Nietzschean* liberal and a social democrat) claims for example that Nietzsche, “know[ing] next to nothing about politics”, was

604 Peter Bergmann, *Nietzsche: The Last Anti-Political German* (Indiana University Press, 1997).
605 Ibid.
609 Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (University of California Press, 1993). See for instance pp. 10-11, where he argues that “a coherent set of opinions about the ways which power should be exercised in modern societies, with what limitations and to what ends” is altogether absent in Nietzsche.
“under the illusion” that he had important things to say in regards to politics, but that the disconnect (so Rorty thinks) between his ideal free-minded and creative individual (cf. private) and his critique of liberalism (cf. public) makes Nietzsche incoherent: he concludes that Nietzsche would have been more true to his own philosophical teachings had he also embraced the liberal politics (Rorty’s ideal is J.S. Mill) that in Rorty’s view buttress it, or to have simply stuck to the philosophical and left the political alone.612 Daniel Conway (1997) best captures this general sentiment in his critique of it: so “prematurely dismissive of the democratic reforms and liberal ideals” of Modernity is Nietzsche that “he has nothing constructive to say to us about political life in late modernity”.613 Yet, even forgiving their spuriousness, such arguments are a disservice to democratic theory itself for they overlook the “antidotal way” in which Nietzsche antiegalitarian and illiberal thinking in general and his powerful critique of democracy and democratism in particular enriches democratic theory.614 In any case, Kaufmann’s (1950) noble effort must be lauded for rehabilitating the image of Nietzsche in the post-war context (especially so in the

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612 Richard Rorty, “Thugs and Theorists: A Reply to Bernstein,” Political Theory, 15 (1987): p. 579, fn 27. For a more systematic account of Rorty’s philosophy and his reading of Nietzsche, see his Truth, Politics, and ‘Post-Modernism’ (lectures delivered as part of the Spinoza Lectures Series at the University of Amsterdam, Van Gorcum, 1997), which expands Rorty’s arguments from Contingency, Irony and Solidarity (1989): Rorty believes that the political (i.e. egalitarian) project of the Enlightenment, which he wholly endorses, is independent and separable from the foundationalist philosophical program of the Enlightenment which he finds defective and with Nietzsche rejects. Nietzsche, as I have interpreted him here, both predicts and strongly rejects such a split, emphasizing instead the unity between any metaphysics (i.e. the dominant semiotic paradigm) and the socio-political values that emerge from it thus his call for the Revaluation of all values. See Bruce Detwiler’s rebuttal to the Rorty position in “Nietzschean Self-Creation and the Critique of Liberal Institutions”, International Studies in Philosophy, XXVII:3 (1995). Also see Gerald Mara and Suzanne Dovi, “Mill, Nietzsche, and the Identity of Postmodern Liberalism”, The Journal of Politics, 57:1 (1995), where they cast doubt on Rorty’s “post-modern liberalism” and his “creative association” of Nietzsche and Mill. Calling Rorty’s creative solution “more provocative than resolutive,” they write: “For Mill and Nietzsche, who intersect on a remarkable range of issues, raise, separately and together, serious questions about the separability of private from public, creativity from culture. Even more significantly, Mill’s and Nietzsche’s concerns unite to reveal some of the most promising and problematic aspects of that form of liberalism that has come to be called postmodern.”

613 Daniel W. Conway, Nietzsche and the Political, (Routledge, 1997), p.2. Conway himself argues that Nietzsche does indeed ascribe to a distinct political model which is both relevant and a compelling alternative to those on the offer by liberal, postmodern, and communitarian theorists. Nietzsche’s model, Conway believes, is one rooted in the “conservative republicanism” of early 19th century Europe and developed in line with his ambition “to return to the very ground of politics itself”.

anglophone world) and introducing a new generation of thinkers to Nietzsche. However, this decidedly non-political, if expedient, reading simply ignores and buries the many political ‘skeletons’ supposedly found in Nietzsche’s proverbial closet instead of trying to confront or make sense of them on the basis of Nietzsche’s overall philosophy. As Ansell-Pearson argues, despite its redemptive qualities, this reading has produced “a dehistoricised and depoliticised interpretation which put a closure on a key aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy: his political thinking.”  

He goes on to conclude that Nietzsche’s “concern for ‘grand politics' is neither accidental nor peripheral to his overall philosophical project, but arises in a very deep sense from its most fundamental concerns.” As Robert Pippin rightly comments, Nietzsche proposes a “grand politics for the future” that is in fact “consistent with his case against modernity.”

The second influential line of interpretation, which could be labeled the ‘postist’ reading, walks the philosophical path of Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze yet aiming to found a political theory. It acknowledges Nietzsche’s politics but makes an explicit effort to rehabilitate and transvalue that politics by selectively appropriating what it considers useful ‘progressive’ kernels for its own radical political project (such as difference, plurality, becoming, and conflict) and discarding the rest. Among this group vying to straight-jacket Nietzsche into a mouthpiece for “theory of agonistic democracy” and radical and revolutionary political movements, we find Tracy B. Strong [1975 (2000)], William Connolly (1991), Lawrence Hatab (1995), and to a different extent Mark Warren (1988) to name only a few. By discounting Nietzsche’s contempt

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615 Ansell-Pearson, p.2  
616 Ibid. pp. 148-149  
619 Warren is different for he is attuned to the significance of “culture” in Nietzsche’s philosophy (as well as Nietzsche’s “critical approach to culture”) more than others in this group, although Warren’s own understanding of culture is much more one-sidedly structural (as complex or medium) rather than biological (as dynamic lifeform) [see
for egalitarianism and/or his “disdain for democracy” (a fact which Connelly easily concedes), the
postist project’s “politicized left-Nietzscheanism” supposedly “uneartths building stones in the
democratic edifice all too easily buried.” The attested goal then is “not to offer the true account
of the true Nietzsche hiding behind a series of masks, but to construct a post-Nietzscheanism one
is willing to endorse and enact.” In this, Nietzsche himself is actively decentered and declared
“protean” or pitted against himself—a Nietzsche “contra Nietzsche” as Hatab puts it—which
makes the question of why turn to Nietzsche at all a truly mind-boggling one. And in my view,
such exercises are at best simply “cavalier” and at worst amount to crime against exegesis itself.
As Fredrick Appel rightly notes, “If all of this bending and twisting turns the end-product—call it
‘Nietzsche’—into a mirror image of one’s own convictions, it is hard to imagine the point of such
an endeavor. A Nietzsche thus sanitized or domesticated can teach nothing that could not be
learned directly from dozens of contemporary writers.” Suffice it to say, I wholly reject that
Foucauldian commandment that declares any attempt “to get Nietzsche right” a futile exercise.

Lastly, and more recently, a new generation of scholars have sought to re-center the
political in Nietzsche’s thought, to reclaim the authentic Nietzsche, and to account (each in their
own way) for Nietzsche’s radically hierarchical and anti-democratic vision of politics. They have
done so by privileging Nietzsche’s own intentions irrespective of their personal convictions or
misgivings, as any genuine interpreter must endeavor to do. Within this decidedly political
interpretation of Nietzsche’s philosophy, we can name Bruce Detwiler (1990), Fredrick Appel

for instance the chapter “Culture and Power; Culture and Ideology” (1988)]. Nevertheless, Warren’s radical
democratic reading of Nietzsche’s politics justifies his placement in the ‘postist’ circle.
620 Connolly, Identity/Difference, p.190
621 Ibid., p.197
622 Lawrence Hatab, A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy, p.28
623 Connolly, p.185
624 Fredrick Appel, Nietzsche Contra Democracy, Cornell University Press, 1999, p.3
Bernard Yack for this observation).
(1999), Don Dombowsky (2004), Manuel Knoll (2014), Hugo Drochon (2016), and to a lesser extent Diego von Vacano (2007). Such thinkers have emphasized the aristocratic and hierarchical vision behind Nietzsche’s own politics even where they have held (à la Detwiler) profound reservations regarding the merits (both moral or practical) of such a project. They have also attempted to highlight the *realpolitik* basis of Nietzsche’s political thought, pointing to Machiavelli’s formative influence and Nietzsche’s alleged admiration for Julius Caesar and Napoleon (à la Dombowsky) or calling attention to the distinctive historical context of the Bismarckian era and the geopolitics of the ‘great game’ (à la Drochon). This turn toward an authentic and realist reading of Nietzsche’s politics mindful of Nietzsche’s own historical context and influences is commendable and, in my view, quite timely given the sobering crisis of democracy and the ascent of populism and plebian politics in our time. Nevertheless, and despite its many merits, the ‘realpolitik’ reading ultimately still falls short of providing a holistic account of Nietzsche’s thought as I have attempted here. It is so, because it focuses rather wholeheartedly on privileging the politics in Nietzsche without specifically accounting for the formative role ‘culture’ and the activity of ‘culture-making’ play in Nietzschean philosophy, which for Nietzsche necessitate and undergird his championed ‘great politics’ (*grosse Politik*). Put differently, the third exegetical camp privileges Nietzschean political realism to what I believe is Nietzsche’s own cultural realism operating at its center (which nonetheless adheres to a doctrine of political realism as its offshoot and implication). What is often missing then is a discussion of the ideational and philosophical context (coupling the historical one) behind Nietzsche’s political realism and his notion of ‘great politics’. Combining the two nodes (culture and politics) forms the crux of Nietzsche’s self-described ‘Dionysian model’. As such, my work does not so much contradict this third line of interpretation as it seeks to expand its premises.
The case for the primacy and centrality of culture (both as aesthetic activity and as whole systems or bodies of Weltanschauung) in Nietzsche’s overall philosophy has been made throughout this dissertation and elsewhere persuasively by Huddleston (2019). Here, my aim is to show the essential bearing Nietzsche’s radical culturalism has on his politics and to stress the pivotal, reciprocal, and mutually reinforcing relationship between Nietzsche’s idea of culture (as body) and his ‘new politics’ (as action). Still, the interpretation of Nietzsche’s political program as “aristocratic radicalism” promoted by Detwiler has been quite influential. This reading is not incorrect per se but rather misleading in my view. For although “aristocratic radicalism”—a clever coinage of Danish critic Georg Brandes which Nietzsche enthusiastically sanctioned—is an apt characterization of the general spirit and overall philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, I contend (as we shall see) that his actual political thought is better understood as an ‘agonistic aristocracy’. Coupling the radical nature of Nietzschean understanding of culture, Nietzsche’s politics could be said to be radical only in the true and technical sense of the term—a genealogical activity of returning to the historical and cultural roots (radix) to inspire and energize future transformation and regeneration. Especially is that this activity could only be effectively carried out by the Übermenschlich (a group which Nietzsche also labels a “party of life”) that the aristocratic heart of Nietzschean politics comes into focus. Accordingly, with Ansell-Pearson, I emphasize that, contrary to our modern conventional and political understanding of a ‘radical’ as a professional or grassroots activist and revolutionary roaming the streets, “the revolution that Nietzsche sought was not a political revolution, but a cultural and educational one”—albeit one with obvious political

626 The sort of (cultural) radicalism Nietzsche has in mind is decidedly not the exclusively political one associated with the anarchist and Radical movement(s) that engulfed Europe throughout much of the 18th and 19th centuries and which (espousing utilitarian and, later, socialist doctrines) propagated democratism (dismissed since antiquity) as once again a viable, and indeed most desirable, political form—to the demotion of older aristocracy/monarchy (i.e. the ancien régime) and in fact going so far as to dismiss the organized administrative state itself.
implications. As his quotation of Emerson clearly indicates, Nietzsche was no specifically political revolutionary but instead one in ‘the most general sense’ of the term: “the things which are dear to men at this hour are so on account of the ideas which have emerged on their mental horizon, and which cause the present order of things as a tree bears its apples. A new degree of culture would instantly revolutionize the entire system of human pursuits.” Nietzsche’s desired revolution then has culture as its primary locus and intended target; it is a cultural transformation and re-founding that could generate the wholesale paradigm shift (in the “entire system” of Western weltanschauung, values, and practices) that in Nietzsche’s view has become increasingly necessary for future ‘duration’—a revaluation of all values. In fact, as we will come to see, the very idea of a popular movement and political revolution is an anathema to Nietzsche’s ‘anti-plebian’ and ‘aristocratic’ commitments.

With respect to such supremely cultural ends and ambitious goals then, one crucial question is to ascertain what exactly are the ordering principles for the “Dionysian state” that Nietzsche promotes and within which the ‘new great politics’ shall take place? And, further, what is the general framework (and procedure) of a politics of cultural metamorphosis understood as “great politics”? I believe Nietzsche’s answer to the first question relates to his understanding of hierarchy, authority—of social and political organization per se—and his belief in the need for recovery of an organic ‘order of rank’ that is centered on his distinctive philosophical anthropology and (neo-archaic) conception of distributive justice (and their naturalist and realist bases)—this corresponding to his notion of ‘complex’. While, his response to the second question would highlight his classically-inspired idea of agon and the belief that genuinely spiritual, aesthetic, and

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627 Ansell-Pearson, p.7
628 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles”, in Essays: First Series, (1892) [1841], p.289. Cf. Nietzsche, UM, III (Schopenhauer as Educator), §8. (Italics are Nietzsche’s).
creative acts—as ‘culture-making’ certainly is—necessarily invite conflict and contestation, whereby politics (as an activity or process) must serve as a conduit or platform for such irreconcilable conflicts to unfold (institutionally), whilst affirming the profound individuality and independence of the Übermenschen. Thus, my designated term for the Nietzschean political schema—‘agonistic aristocracy’. To fully unpack the grounds and implications of such a sui generis political order however, we must begin by considering the reasons behind Nietzsche’s profound discontent with the current (i.e. Modern) regime. Therefore, in what follows, we will expound Nietzsche’s critique of the politics of Modernity by tracing its affinities with the sort of acultural, quotidian, and self-serving politics he deems “petty” and consequently attempt to disentangle what the German finds an especially noxious and vulgar strain of petty politics we will refer to as Modern or mass politics (it having totally dominated the politics of Modernity). We will then turn to a discussion of the ‘Dionysian state’ and of political organization (cf. ‘complex’) in Nietzsche, conceptualizing it as an ‘inverted Platonism’. Lastly, a more in-depth and holistic explication of ‘the political’ under the aegis of ‘aristocratic agonism’ is offered, emphasizing the dynamic processes of cultural change and ‘convalescence’ as Nietzsche imagines them as well as the distinctive function of the Übermenschen as ‘agents of cultural revitalization’.

This section engages the kinds of questions noted above by highlighting the macro-sociological structure (cf. Komplex) as well as the micro-sociological or the more concrete and pragmatic aspects of Nietzschean philosophy relating directly to the Übermenschen. Both aspects, I believe, are necessary for (a successful) cultural metamorphosis, and together inform Nietzsche’s approach toward metaphysics of action and agency embedded in his visionary realism. It is here that Nietzsche’s distinctive brand of (instrumental) humanism comes to its own and is most evident. We can also see that Nietzsche’s provocative psycho-physiological and existential
theories are very clearly attuned to the needs of this sort of humanism and the distinctive (i.e. hierarchical) theory of action (and agency) it posits: put differently, an übermenschlich Dionysian humanism accommodating the needs of cultural health forms the crux of Nietzsche’s unique renaissance theory (one which he also interprets cosmologically under such terms as ‘eternal recurrence’ and ‘eternal return’).

To put it simply, the chief problematic qualifying the socio-political dimension of Nietzsche’s philosophy and one whose consummation is reached in the politics of Modernity is that of décadent types (driven by ressentiment) inhibiting and opposing the Dionysian types (driven by ‘Distanz’) especially as it concerns the latter’s great task of restoring a healthful order of rank (reflective of breeding and premised on aristocratic virtù) and (re-)creating life-affirming meaning. In contradistinction to many contemporaries whose writings shaped the then-nascent discipline of sociology (e.g. Marx), Nietzsche emphasizes the human element (and human agency) in the story of socio-cultural transformation instead of attempting to explain cultural change solely in terms of deterministic and systemic causes. Socio-political structures or ‘complexes’ do still matter in Nietzsche’s formulation but only as mechanisms, means (Mittel), or scaffold to positively generate and further enable the great and higher types and actively will them. A well-constituted (which is to life-according) complex that heeds nature is a pre-requisite for a healthy culture— not the be-all and end-all of human experience. Moreover, in contrast to the conventional liberal understanding of human agency, Nietzsche ascribes true agency only to the very rare and qualified group of humans whom he conceives as a distinctive physiological type fatefully endowed with a ‘tragic and creative’ poetic nature which they would be able, by means of successful breeding and discipline (cf. Züchtung), to cultivate into a Dionysian instinct toward change and difference.

629 I am using the term with an emphasis on its ancient Greek sense from “poïēō” (ποιέω): ‘I make/do’— i.e. “making”, “creating”, “composing”, “acting”, “doing”, and “inventing.”
Thus, these truly and thoroughly human and yet superhuman, ascendant, and heroic types Nietzsche baptizes with the most honorific of titles—Übermensch.

What is more, despite Nietzsche’s claims that the Übermensch and their breeding are to be set as goals for the culture-complex (i.e. at any given or presentational moment in the life of the cultural lifeform), considering the larger span of a culture’s dynamic history, the human exemplars themselves appear as means to the overall life of the particular culture they inhabit—as instruments (Mittel) in the greater game of cultural renewal and flourishing. They have the ‘nose’ (the instinctual nous) to preform creative, transformative, and regenerative acts (of revaluation) which promise to make (or break) culture. But, as the genuine prism and whole instantiation of (human) life, culture (i.e. its health, ascent, and flourishing) remains the clear ‘objective’ in the eternal Dionysian struggle (cf. “eternal recurrence”). The Übermensch, meanwhile, are espoused by Nietzsche as the eternal agents of change in the ‘architectures of meaning’ and ‘orders of value’ within cultures (cf. “eternal return”). As Nietzsche provocatively puts it, a culture or “a people is a detour of nature to get to six or seven great men—Yes, and then to get around them”; to this pensive and Dionysian aphorism we shall add, completing the circle back to culture and indeed life itself! 630

Nietzsche’s Critique of the Political in Modernity

On Petty Politics and the Civilizing Apparatus: Assimilation and the Instinct to Obedience

In my view, the basis for the aforementioned charge of ‘apoliticality’ routinely directed against Nietzsche by scholars who deem him uninterested and even hostile to politics lies in the fact that Nietzsche does indeed reject a particular understanding of politics he consequently labels

630 BGE, IV, §126
“petty”. And in fact, his familiar line of attack against old philosophy (where philosophy is viewed as distorted for no longer serving the ends and health of culture) is carried over onto his political critique. In Nietzsche’s assessment, the ‘conventional’ old politics of early Modernity (i.e. the ancien politics of the absolutist Westphalian nation-state dominant in pre-Enlightenment Europe) had proved itself petty, ordinary, and trivial because it was fundamentally a distortion, forgetting its natural raison d’etre and function. Politics as such obscures the natural goal and telos of politics—cultural health—treating the accumulation of state power as an end-in-itself and acquiring as a result an exhausting character, akin to the way in which metaphysical philosophers of ‘old philosophy’ had exhausted the Good, the True, and the Beautiful by treating them as ends in themselves.\(^6\) In a marked contrast, genuine and healthy politics that is true to its roots and evolutionary purpose, must understand its role as a ‘grand facilitator’ and bridge between the great types of man and their noble and never-ending task of (re-)generation and elevation of culture onto continually higher and greater planes. Genuine politics then, is always mindful of the great work that remains to be achieved and rises to its high demands—it is, in short, a “great politics” conceived in a new form (transposing and transvaluing Bismarckian great politics).

Correspondingly, Nietzsche’s notion of petty politics could be defined as any and all politics that does not set culture and its flourishing as its goal. Old philosophy and petty politics

\(^6\) The Nietzschean image of politics as petty or otherwise ‘anti-natural’ is one that could be stretched back, through the Middle Ages, all the way to Plato and classical Greece and its original overturning of the natural aristocratic terrestrial and heroic order characteristic of Archaic Greece. Applying the Nietzschean rubric to the fiefdoms of the Middle Ages for instance, we can claim that in that period ‘politics’ is even more ‘petty’ and perhaps even ‘unnatural’ given the Nietzschean standard, for it falls prey to the ascetic ideal and its ‘anti-natural’ ends more explicitly, with (temporal) states believing themselves the vassal of the Church and its God and thus prioritizing ‘faith as such’. Despite Nietzsche’s praise for the Middle Age’s duration (which he implicitly credits to the radically hierarchical organizational model of medieval society and its ‘stable’ architecture of meaning), given Nietzsche’s vitriolic stance on Christianity and the ascetic ideal that we have previously expounded, it should be clear what Nietzsche thinks of theocratic (Christian) politics: ‘politics for God’ (or any ideal for that matter cf. Plato) would arguably be even worse and more dangerous than ‘politics as such’ for it comes to replace the goal of ‘life’ with what is a parasitic and exhaustive ideal, thus becoming intrinsically hostile to culture and in fact all that is plural, varied, and differential.
thus both err in their fundamentally acultural orientation (prioritizing ‘knowledge as such’ in one case and ‘power as such’ in the other). They ignore the instrumental function of their vocational activities—their role as the natural levers of culture. And this error, Nietzsche makes clear, continues to Modernity where it is only exacerbated perhaps becoming even more pathological with increased specialization whereby all activities come to be perceived as solitary and delinked from the whole chain of human activity and their cause (or at least assessed only in relation to questions of efficiency and the needs of an economic totality). And speaking of specialization, petty politics encompasses also those political regimes in which the established order of rank is not effectively wedded to the differential psychophysiology and natural constitution of members, and where the organizational structure and division of labor do not privilege the great and higher types and could therefore be seen as out of harmony with nature and violating what Nietzsche claims is ‘natural justice’ (i.e. organic specialization).  

What is more, ‘petty’ forms of the state fail in their natural function because they systematically overlook the original purpose behind the state’s creation and correspondingly confuse the natural order of rank. As Nietzsche suggests in an especially political early essay The Greek State, given his distinctive ‘metaphysics of tragedy’ and the will to meaning it generates, the origin of culture and, subsequently, the necessity for political organization and the state stem from man’s evolutionary and existential need for “redemption through semblance (Schein)” and ‘myth’. And myths must be shared and meanings held in common, if they are to have actual and existential power. Community and organization are their precondition—they are imposed by necessity herself. Accordingly, the necessity of a ‘grand organization’ that both unites and separates people belongs to the “essence of culture”—a solid stable ground raised to a pyramidal

632 By organic, I mean to emphasize both the sense of ‘(following) natural and physiological’ as well as ‘the interdependence of different component parts within a whole’ (ala Durkheim).
structure that can withstand the inevitable chaos of (presential) creativity and innovation toward the (future) benefit of culture and provide it with material support and nourishment. Yet, as medievalist and pre-Enlightenment politics demonstrate, hierarchy in and of itself is not sufficient. Nietzsche observes that for millennia, “All questions of politics, of social ordering, of upbringing have been thoroughly falsified because the most harmful people were considered great,” a fact that is especially true of the priests who come to rule on the back of their harmful lies that conceal and distort what life itself has made necessary (i.e. terrestrial and affirmative culture) via “all the concepts [of] ‘God’, ‘soul’, ‘virtue’, ‘sin’, ‘hereafter’, ‘truth’, ‘eternal life’...”. Here, the natural and real hierarchy of values and people, reflecting the meaning of the Earth, are idealized and turned to their opposite by “the bad instincts of sick natures” that mortally despise life, thus deeming those “fundamental concerns of life itself” small and petty matters (‘kleinen’ Dinge) and turning those of us condemned to live under the shadow of their ideals ambivalent to the thisworldly affairs of a ‘healthful culture’ and a ‘great politics’. Nietzsche aspires to upend this original overturning and falsification (of life) by ascribing to both the great and the petty (cf. kleiner Leute) their natural and thisworldly worth and restoring to the “fundamental concerns of life” their supreme and rightful rank in the order of things. In the final months of his sanity, he remains hopeful still that simply educating his readers to the nature of this falsification and its harmful effects will inspire “an unprecedented overturning and rebuilding” to be carried out in his wake by the select disciples of Dionysus who have deciphered the true teachings of Zarathustra without surrendering to him their independence of will.

633 EH, II, §10 (Duncan Large trans.)
634 Ibid.
635 Ibid.
Nietzsche’s evaluation of ‘ petty politics’ raises additional questions. Namely, how could a petty form of politics be sustained historically if it so violates the natural essence of politics as Nietzsche claims? That is, if we were to accept Nietzsche’s understanding of petty politics as a corrupted form of healthy politics, the very conception of decay and degradation would compel us to seek an etiology for this degenerative condition. And to explain how this ‘corruption’ is both possible and perpetuated, we must turn to the ‘civilizing process’ endemic and elemental to all politics and perform, so to speak, a genealogy of politics with a view to the kinds of dispositions (cf. philosophical anthropology) that allow it to function effectively.

To recall an earlier discussion, Nietzsche’s writings abound with novel dichotomies that replace the older ones he had found misleading and insufficient. He references a multitude of psychologies and kinds (Art) of man in his corpus that could be understood as ‘archetypes’. And what is more, they could ultimately all be narrowed down and traced to two essential physiological drives and ‘types’ (Typus)—the ressentimental man driven by ‘pathos of ressentiment’ typified by weakness (of will) in the face of existential suffering and seeking to escape the tragic and negate life, contrasted with the distinguishing/discriminating man who animated by ‘pathos of distance’ and typified by strength (of will) in relation to suffering aims to honor life and affirm it. Eternally struggling (cf. Kampf) with one another, these two pathoses create for Nietzsche contrasting pairs or ‘shadows’ in the different spheres of human life from religion and theology to philosophy and art (e.g. saint and priest, poet and actor, commander and soldier, philosopher and scholar, hero and martyr, rebel/trickster and enforcer, etc.). In each case, the life-affirming form of the activity is associated mostly with ‘creation of new forms’ and with change as corollary to one’s self-cultivation—thus having an internal locus and a striking quality of individuality and independence from ‘shared experience’ (with the other), while the life-denying counterpart is dependent on the
collective activity of others thus acquiring an external locus and a pronounced sense of assimilation or normalization which makes it increasingly susceptible to preserving the old forms and maintaining the status quo. Interestingly, it is in this light that the Übermensch (the ‘shadow’/opposite for which would be the rest of humanity or ‘Mensch’) appears ‘whole’ and referenced as the more wholesome (ganzer) and higher (höher) type—as a ‘unity’ who combines all the creative ‘founder’ archetypes in his person, he comes to personify within Nietzsche’s mature philosophy the man who is in the most general sense (i.e. with respect to all the spiritual spheres of human activity) complete and whole as well as a cut above the rest, reinforcing and vindicating his higher status.

Following this tack onto politics, one encounters yet another novel dichotomy—that of the ‘herd’ man as contrasted with the ‘marshal’ or ‘law-giver’. Whereas the former are characterized with the ‘instinct to obey’, the latter are bred with the ‘instinct to lead’, or more generally, bred to disobey all that is beneath their station and (natural) rank. To Nietzsche, human society consists essentially of countless many followers and a rare group of commanders who are meant to lead and shape the mass at their disposal (as grandmaster ‘architects’ do stones and marbles) to build something generally (including spiritually) “great” and “enduring”. In later Nietzsche, the Übermenschen also come to appropriate the intrinsic qualities of the ‘commanding’ type. As such, in this latest iteration of Nietzsche’s new dichotomies, the ‘instinct to obey’ of the mass herd types finds its opposite in the Übermenschen’s ‘instinct to command’, and it follows that the Übermenschen would naturally only allow themselves to be ruled by their equal—a true peer in rank.

Nietzsche contends that the goal of social organization is to habituate people (cf. the many) to obedience. Whilst, as an inherent feature of politics, ‘civilizing’ signifies an apparatus that
(through the physical apparatus of *the state* and axiological power of *tradition* and *habitation*) assembles and assimilates the ‘many’ into a unity enabling them to work (or ‘labor’) as one within a complex of higher and lower ranks—a process that makes for a holistic and healthful socio-cultural organization, with economic activity (sphere of the lower types) and (great) politics (as the mythopoeic activity of the *few*), thereby making the realization of higher and cultural ends possible in the first place. Further deepening the juxtaposition (cf. *ein antagonismus*) between *culture* and *civilization*, Nietzsche suggests that the commanding instincts of strong marshalling types and the obeying instincts of the herd correspond to two essentially contrasting moral codes (i.e. bodily and intellectual disciplinary programs) which have the production of *opposite* types of man as aims—the morality of breeding (*Züchtung-Moral*) fit for *masters* (cf. Rome and “master morality”); and the morality of taming (*Zähmung-Moral*) fit for *slaves* (cf. Judea and “slave morality”).

The latter ethic is designed to tame and limit the passions, the former seeking to capitalize on them through their spiritualization (*Vergeistigung*). Thus, where ‘Züchtung’ reflects a *naturalist* picture of morality, ‘Zähmung’ practices *denaturalization* (*Entnatürlichung*), turning against life and physiology. And yet, both ethics are necessary and complementary toward the correct functioning of a healthy culture-complex.

Nevertheless, as Nietzsche points out, trouble arises when, inevitably, “the herd instinct of obedience” and the undesirable consequence of its *excess*—conformity, taming (*Zähmung*), and civilization—come to be inherited over many generations “at the expense of the art of commanding” [*des Kunst des Befehlens*], sacrificing independence, free-mindedness, and creativity—the spiritual desiderata of culture—at the altar of social order and in the interest of greater *solidarity* understood as ‘uniformity’, ‘normalcy’, and ‘sameness’—effectively turning all,

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636 KGW, NF 1888: 16[73]
and not just the multitude, into (spiritual and ‘most subtle’) slaves. Nietzsche interprets this rather fated development as the deadening, stasis, and degeneration of culture and identifies it as the main (socio-political) culprit restricting and retarding human development as a species (cf. the demise of cultural agency). 

Perhaps nowhere is this exaggeration of the civilizational, homogenizing, and flattening element characteristic of petty political orders better captured that in the transformation and enlargement of the Modern state following the death of God in the aftermath of the Enlightenment (and particularly since the advent of industrialization in the 19th century). From his early characteristically-romantic period, Nietzsche already challenges the doctrine “preached from every rooftop” which proclaims—

that the state is the highest purpose of mankind, and that man has no higher duty than service to the state. In this I see a relapse, not into paganism, but into stupidity. It may be that a man who views service to the state as his highest duty [such as the warrior and soldierly types] actually knows no higher duty. Still, this is precisely why there are higher men and higher duties, and one of these duties (which to me at least seems higher than service to the state) calls for the destruction of stupidity in every form, which means this stupidity too. I am therefore concerned here with those [types of] men whose teleology extends farther than the welfare of the state, that is, with philosophers [cf. their role as the new ‘physicians of culture’], and with them only as regards a world fairly independent of the welfare of the state—namely, the world of culture. Of the many links in the mesh composing the human community, some are gold, others gilt [brass].

Nietzsche’s skeptical attitude toward the Modern state as a totalistic force that overwhelms and deprives culture is a theme that continues to his final years. In Twilight, lamenting the cultural deficiencies of his contemporary German society under the Second Reich, Nietzsche emphasizes how politics in its Modern, petty, and Bismarckian sense shows an ambivalence and even hostility toward culture and hence must be repudiated:

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637 BGE, §199. Cf. BGE, §242
638 Ibid. cf. §30, §62, §203
639 UM, III (“Schopenhauer as Educator”), §4
“If you invest all your energy in economics, world commerce, parliamentarianism, military engagements, power and power politics,—if you take the quantum of intelligence, seriousness, will, and self-overcoming that you embody and expend it all in this one direction, then there won't be any left for the other direction. Culture and the state—let us be honest with ourselves here—these are adversaries: 'Cultur-Staat' is just a modern idea. The one lives off the other, the one flourishes at the expense of the other. All the great ages of culture have been ages of political decline: anything great in the cultural sense is apolitical, even anti-political. . . . Just as Germany is emerging as a great power, France's significance is changing to that of a cultural power. . . In the history of European culture, the rise of the [second] 'Reich' means one thing above all else: a shift in emphasis. In what matters most (and that remains culture), the Germans have dropped out of the picture [no longer come into consideration].”

The state thus stands to Nietzsche as a rather Janus-faced institution: vital to the establishment of societal architecture and the culture-complex and yet always threatening to become too dominating, totalistic, static, reactionary, and domesticating a force (cf. civilization, progress, and other ‘Modern ideas’) stifling the growth of genius and (higher) culture (cf. Wille zur Macht) and thereby endangering the production of meaning for which it was originally conceived. Intriguingly, the dichotomy between Culture and Civilization corresponds thematically to Nietzsche’s most enduring analogical pairing—that of Apollo and Dionysus. From our discussion it seems that not just in the cosmological and philosophical sense, but in the realm of human society too, the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses of life are necessary, creative, and even positive drives, each needing the other for actualization. Nevertheless, they posit different things: the former tending to the objective, structural, and systemic (in short, ‘the state’, civilization, and all form-giving), the latter giving itself over to the personalistic, differential, spiritual-mythical, and genius (in short, the Übermensch, culture, and all innovation).

640 Twilight of the Idols, “What the Germans Lack”, §4
641 This could explain Nietzsche’s attraction in his ‘middle period’ to Hippolyte Taine and his ‘sociological positivism’. Especially is that Nietzsche’s thoughts on structures and complexes became much more developed and pronounced in his mature philosophy that we can detect Taine’s formative and consequential influence. Despite Taine’s influence on Nietzsche’s ‘sociology’ however, I do not believe that Taine had a similar level of influence on Nietzsche’s political philosophy as Don Dombowsky (2004), who reads in Nietzsche a conservative liberal strain he traces to Taine among others, assumes.
What is more, in the development of the ‘taming morality’, Nietzsche finds the seeds for the eventual massification of politics, a process that finds its consummation in Modernity. For it is the instinct to obedience that, soaring to levels larger than life, breeds total and unqualified domestication and assimilation—a new slavery which marks the existence of the ‘last men’. In fact, we can see that the desire for homogeneity and its accompanying ‘taming morality’ produce two parallel harmful developments—statism and mediocritization—which, as we shall see next, lead directly to Modern egalitarianism and democratism as well as totalitarian politics. In the Politics of ‘civilization’ and ‘comprehensive leveling’ that ensue from this unfortunate (and yet fated and irretactable) development, politics itself is reduced to the great normalizing institution directed toward the protection of the old tablets (written with that lasting ressentimental ink) and the dogmas ‘of the time’ (Zeitgemässe). This sort of politics is hence conservative par excellence and in the most spiritual and general sense, so resisting it is of change in the values and fundamentals in fact as to even proclaim the ‘death of history’ and call it ‘progress’. The natural function of state is consequently inverted (originally by ancient idealists and perpetuated by the moderns) to stand against and outside ‘culture as such’. Rather than operating as a vehicle for culture to prevent dissolution in the hands of the masses and nihilistic degeneration, its energies go to waste lost in the long night of Western civilization; the result is the general dismissing of culture along with the necessary tasks of value creation and ‘revaluation’—the arduous yet grand task that is required for breaking of the old tablets (at dawn) and their replacement with new ones (at Noon, Mittag). Clearly, the Modern state as conceptualized by Nietzsche is a machinery well-oiled for totalitarianism. After all, it has the primeval assembling and totalizing force of ‘the instinct to obedience’ as well as the ressentimental power of the ascetic ideal already behind it, routinized within its very structure. All that remained absent in Nietzsche’s own time was the
state’s full-on mobilization of its countless servants to unleash its terrible terror, a development that proved only decades away. Jose Ortega y Gasset sums up this position years later: “The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated.” Indeed, the Übermensch is celebrated by Nietzsche for the very fact that he is by his very constitution antipodal and contrarian to the mass man of the Modern society: Übermenschlichkeit—the concept embodies the very antinomy of massification.

For Nietzsche, the political is a means and shall never become an end-in-itself, nor does it (or could it) provide substantive reprieve from the problems and suffering of existence within the tragic struggle. It is in such a spirit that Nietzsche declares, “Any philosophy founded on the belief that the problem of existence [could be] changed or solved by a political event is a parody of philosophy and a sham… How could a political innovation suffice to make men contented dwellers on this earth at last?” While some would read this as Nietzsche’s repudiation of politics suggestive of an “anarchistic attitude” however, this hints quite effectively in my view at the kind of political thought Nietzsche has in mind—as a subdomain and consequence of culture, a mere instrument in the greater expanse of cultural innovation and practice that must nevertheless be wielded with great skill and responsibility. Leiter, I stress, is emphatically mistaken in commenting that “the larger world, including its forms of political and economic organization, is simply not [Nietzsche’s] concern”. Nietzsche is deeply concerned and troubled by Modernity in all its aspects, including the political and the economic. Yet contrary to Leiter’s understanding of the relationship between culture and politics, Nietzsche believes this “larger world” to be a mere

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643 UM, III (“Schopenhauer as Educator”), §4
644 Leiter, Nietzsche on Morality, p.296
645 Leiter, p.297
reflection and representation as well as a direct consequence of developments in the cultural realm and its generated semiotic and moral paradigms. The activity of transforming culture and remedying it (and its pathologies) must therefore arise and largely transpire in the cultural and spiritual (geistig) realm—in Nietzsche’s mind, rise up from that scaffolding and soil of life—not the other way around: perhaps even conjuring an age of “spirit wars” and ideological strife requiring ‘great politics’ to resolve.

Accordingly, middle-period Nietzsche’s contention that "political and economic affairs are not worthy of being the enforced concern of society's most gifted spirits” (Daybreak §179) begins to make sense only when we together with the later (and earlier) Nietzsche consider culture and meaning-creation as this type’s central preoccupation and concede that their full attention and devotion to the more peripheral and administrative affairs (especially as conceived in its current petty form) would constitute a “waste” of their distinctive talents and spirit. It follows that the higher men would take a leadership role with politics and economics only reluctantly engaging with such matters (i.e. of the material rather than the spiritual domains) only secondarily and by the necessity impressed upon them by the great realities and responsibilities of actualizing their cultural task. Governmental and economic affairs are but a subset of culture and a tangential concern to ‘great politics’ that could in most cases be delegated—not of principal worth and certainly not exhaustive. Nevertheless, politics (broadly-conceived as a question of order and rank and of dynamic activity) remain of pivotal instrumental value in the Übermenschlich project of revaluation and cultural renewal which a higher man of virtù would judiciously recognize—thus unleashing the age of ‘grand politics’ in which such persons would finally have the “permission to speak” the demands of their higher spirits/wills for semiotic, axiological, and cultural matters.646

646 HAH, §438
Nietzsche’s critique of petty, ordinary, and routinized politics and its *exhaustive* and *totalistic* claim on life and culture is intimately connected to his critique of the phenomenon of ‘massification’ and ‘vulgarization’ of politics in Modernity. Although all forms of petty politics possess an acultural and anti-natural quality and are rebuked for not prioritizing (higher) culture and for inhibiting the generation of higher übermenschlich types through wasting the resources of the culture-complex on peripheral and trivial matters and failing to muster them toward this noble end, Nietzsche singles out one particular strain of petty politics as particularly and actively hostile to the ends of culture. For our purposes, we will differentiate this especially noxious variant of petty politics, which Nietzsche insists typifies all Modern forms of politics, as *plebian* or *mass* politics. Nietzsche is particularly disparaging of “mass politics” for he believes that the ‘progressive’ framework, egalitarian values, and democratic goals of this politics (which he regards a relic of Christianity’s poisonous doctrine of *equality of souls*), especially its democratic spite and rabble-rousing against a spiritual (geistig) order of rank corresponding to nature, actively degenerates and radically sterilizes culture by thoroughly crippling and emaciating the agents of cultural revival (the Übermenschen). Moreover, the rise of democratism in Modernity (especially within doctrine of popular sovereignty) represents to Nietzsche a clear sublimation of the “lowest plebian instincts” and the ressentimental drives that often undergird them. Thus, we must be always on guard not to mistake Nietzsche’s anti-democratism as an advocation of authoritarianism, conservatism, or reactionism, for not only would such regimes still qualify as ‘petty’ forms of politics Nietzsche aims to transcend, but such rhetorical formulations reflect, precisely, those older polarities of the ideal with which Nietzsche hopes to dispense once and for all. If petty politics were condemned by Nietzsche simply for being *neutral* or *ambivalent* to culture and only
indirectly hindering its conditions of growth, then plebian politics is deemed anti-cultural to its very core—making it an especially harmful and dangerous form of petty politics.

Mass plebian politics is characterized by two essential attributes that undergird its peculiar structure—viz. egalitarianism and democratism understood in the most general sense. The Modern state, Nietzsche contends, is enthralled by the ideal of equality and obsessed with the (common) public (especially for purposes of legitimation). The first point, that Modern politics is inextricably linked with egalitarianism as a highest creed and equality as an overarching value—this should not be entirely surprising; Modernity, after all, is the ‘age of equality’ in Nietzsche’s estimation. In fact, one sure way to identify mass politics is in its emphasis on ‘equality of rights’. What formatively differentiates the various political systems on the spectrum of mass politics is the differential scopes (or extensions) as well as definitions of equality employed: in other words, equality ‘among whom’ and of ‘what’. What group or ‘massified’ category is it for which we claim ‘equal rights’: is it every individual human living as such (cosmopolitanism), every citizen (liberal democracy), the majority (illiberal democracy), the proletariat class (Marxism), or the nation (fascism)—or alternatively, the few ‘distancing’ and outstanding humans as Nietzsche would have it. And, of what nature are these ‘rights’ (political, economic, social, etc.), what does a successful equal distribution actually look like and to what end (is the goal equal outcome or fair process or effecting cultural heightening), and how or according to what criteria is the distribution determined (proportionally/relatively, numerically/identically, or morally). As for its second quality, the Modern state in its general democratism declares this ‘righted’ group the people, mobilizes them and speaks for them—seeking legitimacy from it. It claims to rule on their behalf as a vested power—popular sovereignty. As for man, reduced to the ‘last man’, this diminutive, dehumanized, and domesticated creature is actually content to serve under the shackles of the state and regard it
as his highest purpose, so long as this new slavery guarantees him merely a safe, happy, and comfortable existence.

Nietzsche’s scorn for egalitarianism and democratism is one of the most distinctive and enduring traits of his writing. The reasoning Nietzsche offers for this permanent objection is as complex and wide-ranging as the language that expresses them is colorful and impassioned. Among others, several general considerations best underpin Nietzsche’s forthright rejection of mass politics and of its driving principle—egalitarianism: namely, egalitarianism’s (and hence the mass politics’) origins in Christianity and the ascetic ideal, its corresponding with the Modern doctrines of utilitarianism and progressivism that are secular renderings and reformulations of the ideal into theoretical and normative principles, and the detrimental role these ‘Modern ideas’ (specifically ‘progressivism’ and ‘egalitarianism’) play in supplying an ideological and theoretical canopy for the civilizing and homogenizing proclivities of the state further emboldening its totalistic and imperious Impulse. This is a vicious and self-perpetuating cycle: egalitarianism is the principle that breeds mass politics; this, in turn, strengthens the overweening conception of the Modern state, which, for its purposes, reinforces the egalitarian ideal, and so on.

I will deal with each of these specific aspects of the Nietzschean argument in turn below, but before proceeding we must not lose sight of Nietzsche’s general philosophical position against equality and the whole system of modern ideas (which include ‘utility’ and ‘progress’), for this conjoins with Nietzsche’s genealogical project. Most importantly, Nietzsche thinks the modern moralistic understanding of equality (and a conception of ‘progress’ that is directed toward it) to be the latest manifestation of that ressentimental drive that incessantly seeks to destroy the natural ‘order of ranks’ and diminish difference—it is thus an anti-natural principle par excellence. Irrespective of the particular formulation of equality used, Nietzsche sees the very emphasis on
equality as an absolute ideal a problem. He problematizes the very ascendancy of ‘equality’ into a substantive value around which modern socio-political structures takes shape. ‘Equality’, in Nietzsche’s naturalist and classical understanding, is merely a procedural and always a relational concept; it is a proportional, abstract, and minor principle meant to aid us in making sense of the natural hierarchies of life—never substantive and certainly not a be all and end all with which to measure and calibrate ‘progress’. Mass politics’ enduring egalitarianism is living proof to Nietzsche that the ressentimental pathos underlying the ascetic ideal and Christianity is not only alive but dominant, outlasting the ‘death of God’ and the fall from grace of Christianity post-Enlightenment. In fact, its resilience casts it as ‘the enemy number one’ for Nietzsche—the highest idol still left standing to be smashed by the philosophers of the future who want to affirm life and rescue it (and the Titanic men who exemplify it) from the abysmal Tartarus of ressentiment.

Nietzsche traces the roots of Modern politics and its anti-cultural and anti-natural orientation that discounts all (psycho-physiological) differences and distinctions (in rank) back to Christianity’s life-negating, nihilistic, and ressentimental impulses (Christianity itself amounting to a theological summation of the ascetic ideal and its hatred for life and earthly ends). In fact, as Abbey and Appel rightly observe, “The pervasive influence of Christianity on political thought and action helps to explain why Nietzsche finds so much to condemn in the moribund politics of modernity”. The following passage from Antichrist is particularly illuminating:

Let us not underestimate the disaster that has slithered its way from Christianity even into politics! Nobody is courageous enough for special privileges [Sonderrechten] these days, for the rights of the masters [Herrschafts-Rechten], for feeling a sense of reverence [Ehrfurchts-Gefühl] before oneself and one’s equals—

for a pathos of distance... Our politics is sick [krank] from this lack of courage! —

The aristocratic mindset [Gesinnung] has been most subversively [unterirdischsten] undermined by the lie of the equality of souls; and when the belief in the 'privileges of the majority' creates (and it will create) revolutions, do not doubt for a minute that it is Christianity, that it is Christian value-judgments

647 Ruth Abbey and Fredrick Appel, “Nietzsche and the Will to Politics”, p. 98
these revolutions are translating into blood and crimes! Christianity is an uprising of all ground-crawlers against that which possesses height: the evangels of the 'lowly' (types) [Niedrigen] makes things lower... \textsuperscript{648}

The roots of this fated disaster contaminating the political with the idea of ‘human dignity’ exists already in the life-denying Christian idea of ‘immortality of souls’ (‘unsterbliche Seele’), and in its destructive suggestion that everyone, as an immortal soul, is equal to everybody else and of the same rank (gleichen Rang). \textsuperscript{649} As such, the value of great persons and great acts are diminished at once, and all the small and middling types—all the “failures, the rebellious-minded, the badly developed, all the rejects and dejects of humanity” may at last imagine “that the laws of nature are constantly broken for their sake”. \textsuperscript{650} Thus, the “great lie” of individual immortality subverts “all naturalness of instinct” to the such a degree that “everything beneficial and life-enhancing in the instincts, everything that guarantees the future, now arouses mistrust”. \textsuperscript{651} Similarly, to understand political equality and its subversive power too, we are told to look to the noxious and ressentimental idea of the “equality of souls before God”: Nietzsche writes, “this falseness, this pretext for the rancour of everything low-minded, this explosive concept which finally became a revolution, a modern idea, and the principle of the decline of the whole social order—is Christian dynamite.” \textsuperscript{652} The dynamite force of this concept has been most deeply anti-cultural, by means of its misappropriating and mobilizing the masses against the higher and noble spirits who are the engines of cultural generation:

The poisonous doctrine ‘equal rights for everyone’—Christianity disseminated this the most thoroughly; from the most secret crevices of bad instincts, Christianity has waged a war to the death [Todkrieg] on every feeling of reverence and Distance between man and man, which is to say the presupposition of every heightening, of

\textsuperscript{648} AC, §43 (translation is my own).
\textsuperscript{649} Cf. AC, §43
\textsuperscript{650} AC, §43
\textsuperscript{651} AC, §43
\textsuperscript{652} AC, §62
every growth of culture,—it has forged out of the *ressentiment* of the masses its *main weapon* against us, against everything on earth that is noble, joyful, magnanimous, against our happiness on earth… 653

It is toward this ‘explosive concept’ that Nietzsche dares to throw a dynamite of his own. For he sets as his great task the recovery of ‘order of rank’ on natural, meritocratic, and aristocratic grounds (cf. proportional equality and ‘pathos of distance’), and following the classical argument against absolute equality, he is adamant that, on the basis of both nature and reason, “Injustice is never a matter of unequal rights, it is a matter of claiming *equal* rights…” 654 Moreover, Nietzsche suggests that even the purported “‘humanitarian' blessings of Christianity” have been directed at nothing other than “to breed a self-contradiction out of *humanitas*,” instinctivizing in mankind the “art of self-violation” and masochism—the groundwork for total diminution of man. 655 With its doctrinal toxins, Christianity has made the most vile and “vicious attempt to assassinate noble humanity”. 656 Political radicals, socialists, and other condemners of hierarchy (Nietzsche is particularly inimical to Rousseau in this regard) only walk the path first laid by Christianity and its “great instinct of revenge”. 657 As Nietzsche reminds us, “The anarchist and the Christian are descended from the same lineage.” 658 As such, regenerating the Western culture from the abysses of existential nihilism requires reestablishing the sense of authority, reverence, and awe of the common man before the outstanding and higher types and breeding once more the noble and high-minded exemplars of mankind. And this herculean project needs those healthy instincts and life-affirming wills power to reaffirm, socially and politically, what is already their natural dominance over mankind (i.e. in the most general sense viz. culturally, spiritually, and

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653 *AC*, §43 (translation slightly altered)
654 *AC*, §57
655 *AC*, §62
656 *AC*, §43
657 *AC*, §62
658 *AC*, §57
socio-politically as well). It would thus follow naturally that “a precondition for any attempt by a ‘new ruling caste for Europe’ to institute a ‘thousand year empire’ as envisioned by Zarathustra (Z IV HO) [would be] the overthrow of this antipolitical Christian and post-Christian mindset and the recapturing of the sort of political will that gripped the Romans.” 659

Moreover, if the pre-Enlightenment political orders (cf. ancien regime) were directed toward the ascetic ideal, the Christian church, and/or the sovereign state thereby having an essentially traditionalist character, Nietzsche thinks Modern politics are increasingly driven by the doctrine of utilitarianism—the latest and secularized product of the ideal and its ressentimental instincts. Under the doctrine of utilitarianism and in the idea of ‘progress’, a secularized rendition of the evangelic idea of happiness is made earthly and believed as attainable terrestrially. Nietzsche faults what he calls ‘utilitarian vulgarism’ for its prioritizing of the utility and happiness of the many (herd) over the health and heightening of the ‘body-culture’ as a whole, which presupposes the prioritizing of the distinctive few and facilitating their self-cultivation. Representing the scientist’s morality, utilitarianism essentially reduces human reality in all its complexity down to one principle—utility. ‘Happiness’ becomes ground for a thisworldly ‘salvation’ supplanting ‘immortality’ and in time God itself. The at-long-last-instrumentalized and de-substantivized reason is once again perverted away from the goal of culture. Utilitarianism’s scientistic formulations and rationalistic and positivistic calculations are but without any bearing to the tragic character of actual human life and man’s historicity, providing no substitute for man’s hunger for meaning and myth. As MacIntyre astutely observes, “the standard of utility or pleasure is set by man qua animal, man prior to and without any particular culture. But man without culture is a

659 Ruth Abbey and Fredrick Appel, p. 99
myth. Our biological nature certainly places constraints on all cultural possibility; but man who has nothing but a biological nature is a creature of whom we know nothing.”

Nietzsche also faults utilitarianism for its adoption, albeit in secular form, of the teleology and progressivism/meliorism of Christianity (life-invalidating propositions whose origins lie in Platonism and the ascetic ideal). To the extent that utilitarianism would leave any room for history, it is within that linear and deterministic conception of history which promises, as its end, a tranquil and happy state of existence for all. It thus cannot wait to abolish history and declare its end, believing eventual happiness to be but inevitable and declaring the ‘bettering of mankind’ as necessitated by the deterministic force of history itself—here, determinism comes to replace the ‘hand of God’ and the ‘destiny of fate’ but its effects in passivizing man away from heroic action is similar, its ‘optimism’ misplaced. For all intents and purposes, the idea of ‘progress’ marks the new superstition of the ‘last man’.

Most dangerously, utilitarian vulgarism opens the door wide open to democratism which was slammed shut for two thousand years. This is a foremost danger, for Nietzsche shares with Plato the view that democratism is only two steps removed from tyranny. No doubt, Nietzsche’s intended paradigmatic and spiritual revolution and its radically aristocratic quality was never one fit for the herd. Its high-minded heroism conceals itself from anything that smells even remotely of the ‘rabble’ and its ressentiment, and Nietzsche himself intends to hide it—after all, revaluation must not be permitted to degenerate into a popular revolution for ‘popular’ suggests a leveling of the ‘orders of rank’ by definition. However, with the aporia of meaning in the aftermath of the Enlightenment and the existential crisis of the West remaining unresolved and the revaluation still lacking, Nietzsche already foresees and forewarns the coming of ideological tyrants and

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660 AV, p. 161
totalitarian regimes—the Hitlers and Lenins and Maos and Mussolinis motivated by the very same pathos of ressentiment in its Modern form themselves—triumphantly riding the waves of democratism, by promising a shroud of meaning and assuring the ‘last men’ of ever-greener ‘pastures of happiness’, and demanding, in turn, obedience and revolution from their herd:

If … the doctrines of sovereign becoming, of the fluidity of all concepts, types and species, of the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal—doctrines which I consider true but deadly—are thrust upon the people [Volk] for another generation with the rage for instruction that has by now become normal, no one should be surprised if the people perishes of petty egoism, ossification and greed, falls apart and ceases to be a people; in its place systems of individualist egoism [Einzelegoismen], brotherhoods for the rapacious exploitation of the non-brothers, and similar creations of utilitarian vulgarity may perhaps appear in the arena of the future. To prepare the way for these creations all one has to do is to go on writing history from the standpoint of the masses [Massen] and seeking to derive the laws which govern it from the needs of these masses, that is to say from the laws which move the lowest mud—and clay—strata of society.\(^{661}\)

Yet, for Nietzsche such regimes and ideologues are neither the main disease nor its cause, but merely another symptom of the domination of our Zeitgeist by the pathos of ressentiment, now expressing itself politically as mass politics and democratism. In place of the old religion and (Judeo-Christian) moralism of the past, we moderns must now contend with the political and politicized religion of democracy—a reinvented dogma, a renewed moralism, Christianity in secular form. Indeed, Nietzsche adopts the old Platonic formula as to the inherent relationship between democratism and rise of tyranny seeing both as triggered by the advent of mass, Volkish, and plebian instincts that an absolutist or numerical conception of equality inevitably engenders:

Whether we mark the distinctiveness of today's Europeans in what we call 'civilization' or 'humanization' or 'progress', or whether we call it simply, without praise or blame, using a political formulation [Formel]—Europe's democratic movement: behind all the moral and political foregrounds that such terms describe, a tremendous physiological process is taking place and continually gaining momentum whereby Europeans are becoming increasingly alike [Anähnlichkeit]. . . . [Such that,] the democratization of Europe will culminate in engendering [Erzeugung] a type that has been groomed for slavery [Sklaverei] in the subtlest sense. . . . [T]hat is to say, the democratization of Europe is at the same time an

\(^{661}\) UM, II ("History for Life"), §9. (bolding is my own).
involuntary staging [Veranstaltung] for the breeding of tyrants [Züchtung von Tyrannen]—taking that word in every sense, including the most spiritual [geistigsten]. 662

The example just cited illustrates precisely why Nietzsche thinks the breeding of the high-minded, noble, and übermenschlich types, reaffirming their authority, and creating an environment most conducive to their self-affirmation and self-cultivation to be a matter of utmost urgency and the chief imperative for the Western culture-complex if it is to have a future. The Modern democratic conditions make ripe for the coming of ‘masters’ and ‘overlords’—better they be out of the most right, healthy, and intellectual types with heightening of culture and life their goal.

Nietzsche’s hostile stance toward utilitarianism, and the democracy and vulgarism that it propagates, bleeds into his critique of the Modern state. To him, in its totalistic and homogenizing framework, the Modern state provides the best instantiation (and indeed the consummation) of the full force of vulgar utilitarianism in Modernity with calamitous implications for European culture. Nietzsche deepens his basic (or metaphysical) critique of the Modern state (which applies to all ‘petty’ states) examined earlier with additional condemnation reserved especially for the ‘plebian’ variant: this is because not only does the plebian state possess an acultural and totalistic character, but worse its legitimacy rests on the “lie” of popular sovereignty. This is exceedingly problematic. For one thing, the rise of the utilitarian Modern state that appeals to the people, the great mass, the many and its (aggregate) ‘interests’, to justify its own superficial will and superfluous existence in a markedly vulgar and base fashion couples the “death of peoples” (Tode der Völker) and cultures—as Zarathustra is quick to remind us:

Somewhere still there are peoples and herds, but not where we live, my brothers: here there are states. State? What is that? Well then, lend me your ears now, for I shall say my words about the death of peoples. State is the name of the coldest of all cold monsters. It even lies coldly, and this lie crawls out of its mouth: “I, the

662 BGE, §242 (translation is my own)
state, am the people.” This is a lie! The ones who created the peoples were the creators, they hung a faith and a love over them, and thus they served life. The ones who set traps for the many and call them “state” are annihilators, they hang a sword and a hundred cravings over them . . . . Just look at how it lures them, the far-too-many (Viel-zu-Vielen)! How it gulps and chews and ruminates them! “On earth there is nothing greater than I: the ordaining finger of God am I”—thus roars the monster. And not only the long-eared and the shortsighted sink to their knees! Oh, even to you, you great souls, it whispers its dark lies! Unfortunately, it detects the rich hearts who gladly squander themselves! Yes, it also detects you, you vanquishers of the old God! You grew weary in battle and now your weariness still serves the new idol! . . . . It wants to use you as bait for the far-too-many! Indeed, a hellish piece of work was thus invented, a death-horse clattering in the regalia of divine honors! Indeed, a dying for the many was invented here, one that touts itself as living; truly, a hearty service to all preachers of death! State I call it, where all are drinkers of poison, the good and the bad; state, where all lose themselves, the good and the bad; state, where the slow suicide of everyone is called—“life.”

Zarathustra deems the development of the mechanistic Modern state as most unfortunate. And not only because the state deceives the ‘people’ with Christianesque lies of happiness, progress, and ‘public interest’ to rule them to the ground, and underground, but rather because this comprehensive and uniform leveling and mediocrization of all men into oblivion also eliminates those outstanding rare stroke of creativity and genius life spawns that shall create and guarantee a future and replenish and renew a culture. This is to be expected. After all, as Nietzsche suggests, the “cold monstrosity” we typically call state today is nothing but a “hellish piece of trickery” (Höllenkunststück) invented out of the suffocating force of ‘civilization’ that subsists on the ‘multitude’ and incessantly feeds on them—not given (as was originally intended) to the uplifting power of culture that depends on the few.

From a Nietzschean perspective, the schizophrenic character of the Modern state becomes further evident and problematic once one properly situates its development in the circumstance of

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663 Nietzsche’s general symbolism of “death” in this passage is deepened in Nietzsche’s characteristic style through a biblical reference to Death’s horse in the New Testament’s Book of Revelation: death, symbolized by its horse’s color of pale morbid green, is the last of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse signaling the end of times and the coming of the Last Judgment.

increased leveling and the general (and not just political) sentiment in Modernity that moans against all hierarchies and orders of rank. On the one hand, given the death of God and devaluation of highest values in the West, the state soars to fill the void turning into a totalistic behemoth and becoming a ‘new idol’, a god-like omniscient omnipotent observer (and indeed ‘executive’) demanding compliance to its laws and certain conformity (just as utilitarianism as doctrine does for Christianity). And yet, as Nietzsche is quick to discern, the nihilistic spirit in Modernity remains generally skeptical of all established values and sacred authorities, an attitude of general distrust and disregard (of all hierarchies) which would extend also to the new all-powerful state (cf. anarchists and socialists predicting the withering away of state).

This is a condition Nietzsche believes unsustainable in the long run, which is why Zarathustra prognosticates that the anti-natural Modern state will eventually cease—signaling a momentous shift: for Nietzsche posits that the increasing assimilation and mediocritization that breeds the ‘last man’ could provide as well a historic opportunity for the fundamental paradigm shift he had been anticipating since the Enlightenment to finally be realized. As Abbey and Appel accurately point out, “while forces like industrialization, democratization, the growth of mass politics and nihilism contribute to the leveling of European society, Nietzsche discerns in them a double movement. They weaken the majority, whose power should be diminished, while creating circumstances propitious for the mobilization and ascent of a minority of strong individuals.”

It is Nietzsche’s intuition that this prospect could be capitalized on by the spiritual (geistig) masters and not just abused by ideological tyrants and statist despots. Nevertheless, the non-deterministic nature of Nietzsche’s thought means that such an outcome is by no means guaranteed. Which

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665 Abbey and Appel, “Nietzsche and the Will to Politics”, p. 105. (Cf. BGE, §242)
666 Abbey and Appel note that despite Nietzsche’s claim regarding “the presence of structural conditions conducive to the rise to power of a new elite, he grapples with a version of the structure-agency debate, for there is no guarantee that such an elite exists nor, if it does, that it will take advantage of these enabling conditions.” (p.111)
is perhaps one reason Zarathustra shoulders the great responsibility of supplying his ‘children’ and ‘friends’ with the appropriate great and tragic education—to spur the übermenschlich types to self-affirm and embrace who they really are or could become (cf. amor fati), to encourage them toward heroic action or at very least to speed their rise, and, most importantly, to ensure that this fateful moment could perhaps actually become “a rainbow and bridge to the Übermenschen” as Zarathustra augurs and a herald too for the profound transformation and revaluation that is yet to come.

Nietzsche criticizes the Modern state that in his view become increasingly plebian and mass, yet that does not mean that he thereby rejects all politics wholesale or even all forms of state or tends to anarchism. His general critique is that the Modern state, in response to pressures of egalitarianism and democratism, has ballooned far outside its natural purview and function becoming a self-contained and self-referential totality and especially superseding culture itself (for which it is to be but an instrument). In his view, a return to the aristocratic state would be salutary in part because such a state is inherently restrained and wise to its great prerogatives and responsibilities and how they emanate from culture. Culture, not the people, is the source of the state’s ultimate legitimacy and the justification for all politics as well. In the aesthetic and realist vision of the political Nietzsche envisions, ‘cultural sovereignty’ replaces popular sovereignty as the basis of authority and political power. Modern democratic vision of the political produces only the most toxic form of ‘petty politics’—progressivist and mass—this Nietzsche vehemently denounces and seeks to supplant with the “grand politics” of the Übermenschen (whose right it is

667 HAH, “Preface”, §2. Cf. Abbey and Appel (p. 211) who make a similar claim apropos of the Nietzschean project serving to facilitate and expedite the transition to the higher and aristocratic types, noting that Nietzsche’s writings collectively “represent a form of political action and education, an attempt to galvanize this new elite into self-recognition and action.”
alone to create values as only they can) premised on the recovery of the now forgotten aristocratic element in politics.

That Nietzsche is anti-egalitarian, anti-democratic, and (from the contemporary point of view) anti-liberal must therefore be granted. However, such a reading need not claim Nietzsche a conservative or worse a proto-fascistic thinker. For, it is precisely such modern dichotomies (progressive and conservative; autocratic and democratic; liberal and totalitarian; etc.) that Nietzsche wants to disrupt. Nietzsche is among the first to argue that our traditional binary in the West regarding regime types (i.e. the familiar ‘authoritarian’-‘democratic’ polarity) is inherently false, for all modern politics is essentially mass politics. And investigating Modern politics through the prism Nietzsche supplies—with view to its plebian nature—suggests that democracy, communism, and fascism are merely different tunes sung from the same jukebox—all appealing to the masses and hoping to their mobilization by rousing their ressentiment. Furthermore, from the Nietzschean perspective, the conventional division of politics into authoritarian and democratic is deeply problematic, for it is grounded on equally faulty and black and white conceptions of good and evil rooted in the Manichean criteria of Christianity. Instead, the salutary division in political matters or ‘politicis’, Nietzsche suggests, is one that distinguishes plebian and mass-centered conceptions of politics from a genuinely-aristocratic one.

Nietzsche stipulates that mass politics is a direct consequence of the political domination of the ethic of ressentiment. Given that, as the sphere for normativization and axiological application, politics is deeply connected to norms and values, the significance of the fact that the ‘pathos of ressentiment’ has been the dominant culture-forming and value-shaping force (culturbildenden Kraft) in the West for over two millennia cannot be overlooked. While ressentiment was originally a source of cultural and axiological tyranny, in Modernity it has
increasingly assumed the mantle of political tyranny: age-old tyranny thus perpetuates in Modernity—only the (personal) tyranny of the One has been supplanted with the (systemic and rationalized) tyranny of the many, and with it the tyranny of the ideal replaced with the institutionalized and routinized tyranny of the state. Nietzsche argues provocatively that Modern politics possesses in one way or another a collectivistic, crowd-based, and populistic characteristic especially is that such disparate regimes mentioned all claim to be representing the people overall, or, at least, the majority of them—that the ultimate source for state legitimacy and political authority is sought in the mass! Modern politics, hence, is intrinsically demagogic and quantitative. For Nietzsche, this is one profoundly significant and undesirable shift. Accordingly, Nietzsche is able to condemn consistently all contemporary political orders as mere continuations of old ressentimental spirit of politics pronouncing them ‘petty’ by nature. Using such innovative classifications, he condemns conservative traditionalism or ancien politics for being firmly wedded to the ideal, as well as reproves all mass politics coming in the former’s wake for its ‘ism-ic’ and ideological character and progressivist framework—thus repudiating not just liberalism and democratism but also socialism, nationalism, ethnic chauvinism, fascism, radicalism and anarchism. Looking at the Modern state as a two-faced Janus with honesty and realism would leave Nietzsche’s genuine readers only with two (political) alternatives both of which Nietzsche finds equally undesirable—a no-choice between a (liberal-)democratic kind of progressivism on the one side and a radical and totalitarian kind on the other with both inevitably abusing the masses as pawns and a ruse just as the ‘priests’ had done all those decades ago pre-Enlightenment.

Moreover, Nietzsche believes that the contemporary emphasis on democracy and equality not only strengthens his point as to the naïveté and idealism of Modern peoples and the utopian optimism of the last man, but that it paints a false and misleading picture, a far cry from the actual
reality of political organization. Indeed, Nietzsche contends (and decades before the Italian social scientist Vilfredo Pareto) that all politics and governance itself is essentially elitist, and that politics is inherently determined by the incessant cycle of elite displacement. In this never-ending process, the best one can hope for is that the reigning elites be the right kind, and not the wrong ones, for the enhancement of culture (i.e. genuine, not false, aristocrats). Unfortunately, in the case of the West, the predominance of ressentiment has also meant that that the dominating groups of elites for two thousand years (the whole succession of them) have been the wrong ones: in other words, we in the West are not even truly democratic—Nietzsche’s whole conception of government precludes it—but living under the supremacy of waves of false elites (antinatural and hostile to life) who dominate under the aegis of democracy. While this reads familiarly at first as a radical critique of democracy from the Left, Nietzsche’s realism means that he would never prescribe the kind of radical and agonistic democracy which the likes of MacIntyre and Connolly would enthusiastically propose as remedy. His solution is that we breed and cultivate the healthful and uncorrupted aristocracy and restore the correct hierarchy of values and order of rank among (human) types—the complete repudiation and sublation of the pathos of ressentiment from the Western culture to be superseded by the pathos of distance. As such, he aims to inaugurate a new affirmative aristocratic (thus great) politics that remains true to the true spirit, values, and promise of (virtù-centered) aristocracy inspired by the archaic pagan model in Homeric Greece. With his

668 Modernity might claim to champion equality but what it promises (and what any paradigm can only promise, for existence and life itself is intrinsically hierarchical and unequal) is formal equality. This means that even Modernity will have a hierarchy irrespective of its deceptive pretenses; only this new hierarchy is organized around a new elite which are wrongfully selected based on “baseless” and “décadent” standards—the language of which is all-too-familiar: haves or have nots and powerful and exploited. The hierarchy persists through an unhealthy and disoriented “order of rank”. Nietzsche teaches that all cultures possess “power structures” from inception. While power does not sanction its own abolishing, these structures do not have equal validity. And so too under Modernity, power has been structured and distributed differentially, and exercised in a rather “anti-natural” (Widernaturlichkeit) manner—totalistically, reductionistically, homogeneously, and of course hegemonically.
call for revaluation of all values, Nietzsche effectively declares war on the newly-emergent totalistic behemoth (the Modern state) conjured by the ressentimental pathos as its last line of defense. It is thus that he calls for the new and grand conception of politics suitable to the upcoming war of different spirits and mentalities (Geisterkrieg) that he presages—life-affirming spirits which are united in their goal of breaking the hold of the ressentimental drive over the West and which promise to finally unravel the Gordian knot that is the ressentiment’s spiritual (idealist) and political (progressive) tyranny.

In this regard, Nietzsche’s stance against radical nationalism (both in its progressivist orientation and claims to essential superiority on ethnic or racial terms) is particularly telling. Nietzsche denounces the Christian grounding of contemporary nationalistic movement, its self-aggrandizement as ‘the chosen people’, its historical teleology, and its adherence to ‘progress’ (cf. for example the ideas of Giuseppe Mazzini). Recall again that, for Nietzsche, progressivism is Christianity secularized, historicized, and ultimately popularized: the ascetic ideal reinventing itself one final time. Nietzsche also decries the plague of “névrose nationale”, a “most anti-cultural sickness”, engulfing Europe for the failure to recognize the unity of the general Western experience of nihilism and its shared genealogical and cultural roots. Similarly, he attacks the pursuit of provincial and petty nationalist and statist politics in place of the great politics of revaluation that remedying and overcoming the crisis requires. The latter, Nietzsche declares, “a task big enough to reunite peoples” of the West. Modern Nationalism is an especially a vulgar and anti-cultural force for it prevents the required cultural unity of continental Europe:

Thanks to the pathological manner in which nationalist nonsense has alienated and continues to alienate the peoples of Europe from each other; thanks as well to the short-

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669 EH, “The Case of Wagner”, §2
670 Ibid.
sighted and swift handed politicians who have risen to the top with the help of this nonsense, and have no idea of the extent to which the politics of dissolution that they practice can only be *entr’acte* politics, – thanks to all this and to some things that are strictly unmentionable today, the most unambiguous signs declaring that *Europe wants to be one* are either overlooked or willfully and mendaciously reinterpreted.\(^{671}\)

As such, Nietzsche finds democratic populism and the doctrine of self-determination that flows from it ultimately dangerous to the accomplishment of this most pivotal of tasks—the re-substantivization of the Western lifeform. The Nietzschean objection to nationalism’s populist nature is intimately linked to nationalism’s affinity for statism, compounding the inherently *anti-cultural* power of nationalism. Recall from earlier that Nietzsche believes culture must always take precedence over state and politics and *never* become an instrument of the state or subsumed by it—and yet this exactly is the organizing principle of nationalist thought as it is often expressed, underpinning its claims to self-determination and demands for statehood. While the nationalist theory of state represents “anti-culture”, nationalist populism often betrays also an anti-natural quality, for underneath the democratic appeal and populistic sentiments nationalism inspires percolates arguably an *internalized* (ethic of) “ressentiment” galvanized against the *other*. Though often disguised and hidden, it is this endorsement of ressentiment that renders nationalism inherently anti-aristocratic and anti-übermenschlich. Nationalism, therefore, could be judged both an anticultural and anti-natural a movement, because it impedes and inhibits the coming of the life-affirming and differential *génie(s)* who transform cultures and allow for its dynamic growth and

\(^{671}\) *BGE*, “Peoples and Fatherlands”, §256
rejuvenation. Nationalism’s essentialistic rhetoric and appeals to tradition and common customs of the ‘people’, meanwhile, cast it as a reactionary force par excellence.672

Apropos of Nietzsche’s non-reactionary and non-conservative view of politics, one final observation regarding Nietzsche’s relationship with liberalism would perhaps be further clarifying. From our contemporary point of view, Nietzsche appears devoutly antiliberal. That is, no doubt, he fully rejects political liberalism that first crystalized in 19th century and continues to our time. But this moniker is rather misleading. As I have made the case, Nietzsche is positively hostile against equality/democratism and ardent in his defense of (natural) hierarchies, and yet he appears equally critical and unreceptive toward traditionalist politics (cf. ancien regime) and what could be dubbed generally as conservatism. How could this be? I would suggest that Nietzsche’s provocative critiques of established liberalism (the dominant currents of which in Nietzsche’s time were the classic Whig liberalism of John Locke and social-democratic liberalism of J.S. Mill) were advanced from his ‘untimely’ position or antecedental pedigree within the liberal movement. Despite his hostility to the political radicalism and anarchism of liberals in late 18th and early 19th century Europe (cf. the French Revolution and the Jacobins) which partly explains his opposition to socialists, Nietzsche never sides with the forces of European reaction and conservatism that wanted to restore the ancien régime of the absolutist tutelary state and reestablish the authority of

672 Reading the development of National Socialism in the decades following Nietzsche as a blatant and overt expression of ressentiment could perhaps communicate the force and premonitional warning of the Nietzschean argument against radicalism in general and radical nationalism in particular more effectively. The Nazi anti-Semitism betrays clearly the Nazi state’s explicit internalization of the ethos of ressentiment—projecting and laying blame for the problems of existence at the feet of an external source (in this case the Jews). In an age both sickened and defined by meaningfullessness and existential-practical nihilism, Nietzsche’s thought goes to in many ways predict the appeal of regimes such as Nazism and Communism which claim to supply meaning albeit in a simple, packaged, and reductionist sense of us versus them (whether that be race or class). The critical thing to realize however is that both anarchic radicalism (energized by the democratic ethos) and totalitarianism (galvanized via the pathos of control and domestication—“rule of Being” to use Heidegger’s formulation) operate by manipulating and redirecting the age-old ethic of ressentiment. What is more, such political formulations are symptomatic rather than etiological of the underlying disease of existential and total nihilism which is spreading like cancer in the Western culture. That degenerative cause, Nietzsche unequivocally holds, is meaninglessness.
the Church. This is because Nietzsche’s aristocratic sensibilities (and politics generally) take a back seat to his atheistic and anti-metaphysical philosophy and his feelings against religion. And historically speaking, the (liberal) Lumières (such as Voltaire) formed the frontlines of the fight against religion in particular and theistic thought in general. In fact, Nietzsche himself found his antecedents in an early strand of liberal thought we can name tragic or aesthetic liberalism whose first iteration was in the Weimar classicism championed by Goethe, Herder, and Schiller. Inspired by the ancient Greeks (rather than religion or Protestantism), this critically-minded freier Geist liberalism emphasized this-worldly life and action highlighting the historic relationship between heroic action of the truly individual few, on the one hand, and active, creative freedom that is epoch-transforming on the other. This rather poetic form of liberalism undermined established hereditary orders and customs of the ancien (feudal) weltanschauung by emphasizing the ‘distinguishing’ qualities of greatness (e.g. virtù, criticality, skepticism, genius, etc.) and its profound linkages to paradigmatic (cultural and historical) changes such ‘untimely’ men instigate, while affirming, in parallel, the plurality of states and cultures. As such, technically-speaking, the classicist Weimar liberalism (with its 19th century offshoot in Carlyle’s “great man theory”673) was the truly (neo-) classical variant, not the natural rights Whiggish and Lockean liberalism that we have since come to identify as “classical liberalism”. From the Nietzschean perspective and with the revaluation project in mind, in its celebration of difference, Distanz, pluralism of life, and heroic individuality, this aesthetic realist form of liberalism was qualitatively different from and

673 Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle’s masterpiece, On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History was published in Britain in 1841. With the intellectual climate that Carlyle’s account helped generate, Carlyle’s formative influence was felt not just on the continent as evident in Nietzsche’s own conception of the great and the übermenschlich but reached across the Atlantic as in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s similarly-styled volume of essays on “Representative Men” (1850). Although mature Nietzsche rejected the moralistic framework and romantic tenor of Carlyle’s analysis (cf. BGE), he was deeply familiar with the writings of both these literary men. Nevertheless, since Nietzsche’s engagement with and reception of Emerson was much more positive, it is probable that he adopted the idea for the “great types” from the American. Also see Eric Bentley, A Century of Hero-worship: A Study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche, Beacon Press (1957) [1944].
wholly preferable to the classic Lockean version, which with its origins in Whiggery and old perennialist-universalist philosophy not to mention its linear progressivist (and presentist) view of history amounted to no more than yet another instantiation of the ascetic ideal and its ressentimental will to power. All this couples the fact, that as I have argued, the ancien system (in its later stages) was one focused on accumulation of state power, and on this basis alone, the ancien regime would no doubt also qualify as ‘petty’.

Complicating this picture even more, Nietzsche must be read along with numerous other contemporaries who tried to respond to the democratic and nationalistic pressures unleashed by 19th century utilitarianism (and to a lesser extent Romanticism). While Nietzsche remains wholly opposed to the universalist and perennialist metaphysics of (Lockean-Kantian) liberalism and its fundamental commitments to (natural) rights theory, the oneness of human nature and of humanity, the idea of social contract, and its normative consensualist conception of political legitimacy as well as its general (rationalistic-)moralistic framework, there is an element of similarity and commensurability, if not convergence, between Nietzsche and the second-coming of (classical) liberalism in the wake of utilitarianism’s rise—exemplified by J.S. Mill—regarding the threat of socio-cultural tyranny and ideological totalism and celebration of freedom and diversity of thought as well as the role of elites in safeguarding that criticality and plurality.674 Whereas Mill attempts at a synthesis and reconciliation of classical liberalism with 19th century utilitarianism around the notion of (historical) progress and human perfectibility culminating in the idea of liberal or enlightened democracy however, Nietzsche, true to character, opts for the polemical route. For in Nietzsche’s mind, utilitarianism cannot be divorced from its plebian, democratic, and egalitarian designs and commitments. Nietzsche astutely surmised that the elitist yet progressive and

674 For a more in-depth analysis of the areas of convergence between Nietzsche and Mill, see Mara and Dovi’s “Mill, Nietzsche, and the Identity of Postmodern Liberalism”.

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melioristic liberalism for which Mill was a flagbearer would be unsustainable over time and thus soon collapse into a social democratism (with which modern liberalism has become synonymous) that would champion mediocrity, conformity, and the ‘last men’ with an almost religious zeal—for this is a project that has behind it the entire force of the ascetic ideal (what is left of it anyway). Thus, Nietzsche was among the first to point out the uneasy, contentious, and even unnatural relationship between liberalism and democracy that was to define 20th century sociopolitical order seeing in it a profound threat to true free spirits and their critical and intellectual liberty—liberty and equality do not make easy bedfellows.

Nietzsche’s (aristocratic and neo-archaic) understanding of liberty further complements and reinforces the previously examined contrast Nietzsche makes between “civilization” (as the standardizing and mediocritizing force) and “culture” (as the creative and generative one). Decrying the liberal schools of thought that masquerade as free thinking in the Modernist West, he writes, “Nothing is more alien and unrelated to me than this whole European and American species of ‘libres penseurs’. I am even more profoundly at odds with these incorrigible blockheads and buffoons, with their ‘modern ideas’, than I am with any of their opponents.” For from Nietzsche’s point of view, like all idealists preceding them in history, these supposedly liberal thinkers, “too, want to ‘improve’ humanity in their way, in their image.” Nietzsche, as the “first immoralist” ventured to reclaim and reinvent freier Geister (‘free spiritedness’) and what it means to be truly free and free-minded from the universalist chains of idealism—breaking free from the clasp of the ‘ascetic ideal’ and (absoluter universal) morality. It is this background that would require Nietzsche to take a position against the politicization of culture to the ends of the ‘ascetic ideal’—civilization.

675 EH, III, “The Untimely Ones”, §2 (Large Transl.)
676 Ibid.
Accordingly, Nietzsche rejects the liberal democratic state seeing in it the perfect political manifestation of “civilization”. Civilization that, so Nietzsche thinks, rationalizes and homogenizes—via its corrupt institutions—the ascetic ideal and morality, killing creativity, difference, and divergence forcing them (and all otherness) into an absolute convergence: as such, it is the ultimate form of domination and submission. Not only is ‘civilization’ absolutist, totalistic, and universalist, projecting the values of the ascetic ideal into its constructed totality, its anti-authoritarian and egalitarian instinct desecrates all authority and reverence for order of rank effectively prohibiting the emergence of the Übermensch and the revaluation project that the West desperately needs. Thus conceived—as an instrument of coercion for the idealist, the negative image of civilization as an impulse fundamentally counter to life, ‘anti-nature’ (Widernatürlichkeit) and prohibitive to the Übermensch (anti-übermenschlich) is only reinforced.

In this spirit, Nietzsche characterizes “modern democracy (together with its hybrid forms like the [Second] 'Reich') as the state's form of decline.” After all, culture-complexes depend for their function on (healthy) institutions, and for such institutions to exist, Nietzsche believes, “There needs to be a type of will, instinct, imperative that is [politically] anti-liberal to the point of malice: the will to tradition, to authority, to a responsibility that spans the centuries, to solidarity in the chain that links the generations, forwards and backwards ad infinitum.” Yet, the modern ‘people’, having internalized the (non-tragic variant of) liberal ideology in its full ressentimental spirit, reject all this—fearing “that they are in danger of a new sort of slavery when the word 'authority' is so much as spoken out loud.” As such, the very “things that make an institution into an institution are despised, hated, rejected”: in fact, Nietzsche warns that “the value-instincts

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678 Ibid.
679 Ibid.
of our politicians, our political parties, [have become] so décadent that they instinctively prefer things that disintegrate, that accelerate the end.” 680 Alas, with the demise of good healthy institutions and the denigration of their authority over modern man, we are not made free. Rather, we are newly and forcefully (perhaps irrevocably) enslaved.

While the state is an original institution and inherent instrument of culture—a vital organ for the cultural organism, “decaying forms of state” prove culture’s ultimate “antagonists”—a cancer threatening the organism’s very being. 681 And as provocative as this might sound to a modern reader, both democratic and totalitarian regimes Nietzsche classifies as decaying forms of government. Plato was right, In Nietzsche’s estimation, to foresee draconian tyranny as the resultant child of democracy. Only, due to the force of Modern rationalization, the latest manifestation of the (absolutistic) will to obedience is a regimented, uniformist, totalitarian formulation of ‘state’—absolutism in Modernity is no longer abstract and spiritual as it was under Christianity; it has become concretized with balls and chains most psychological. The totalitarian state thereby emerges as the ultimate Modernist incarnation in most comprehensive form of an older more ancient despotism that began with the rule of the ideal; only, its decay too has matured with time and become positively rotten.

Accordingly, politics as exercised in 19th century Europe Nietzsche saw as degrading, perverting, and corrupting to culture and the honorable activity of culture-making—a curse against ‘great’ politics. For Nietzsche, the 19th century would best be remembered as “the century of the masses” and of the domination of plebian instincts prone to ressentiment—“This is the age of the masses,” he writes, “they lie prostrate in front of anything massive. And the same in politicis too. They call a statesman ‘great’ if he builds them a new tower of Babel or some sort of monstrosity

680 Ibid.
681 TI, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man”, §39
of empire and power – who cares if we are more cautious and circumspect and keep holding on to our old belief that it takes a great thought to make a cause or action great." As it was with (existential) nihilism in the realm of philosophy and axiology, Nietzsche believes we must confront the phenomenon of the massification of politics (which he understands as the political manifestation of this general nihilism and the last remaining harbor for ressentimental pathos) with courage and without compromise. It is no surprise then that Nietzsche would view democracy and egalitarianism with unreserved contempt seeing them as the summation of most ignoble, base, and ‘second-rate’ instincts in man and dismissing offhand “the plebianism of modern ideas” as product of “mediocre minds”.

It is also not incidental that the small number of people Nietzsche associates with safeguarding France’s position as “the most spiritual and sophisticated culture in Europe” of his day happen to be those who “shut their ears to the raging stupidity and the noisy jabbering of the democratic bourgeoisie.”

Nietzsche’s call for a new politics fit for the future and effected by the great few entails an exhaustive refutation of the thoroughly dated and foundationally expired yet still extant and dominant values of our time. In Nietzsche’s mind, the revaluation program must necessarily indict the petty and anti-natural politics of the past and present (together with its totalistic and acultural conception of the state) as beholden, either explicitly or implicitly, to the previous order of meaning erected by the Christian cast of mind (Gesinnung) and further perverted and abused by modern utilitarians. The continued dominance of petty politics (especially in its mass and plebian

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682 *BGE, “Peoples and Fatherlands”, §241*
683 *BGE, “Peoples and Fatherlands”, §253*—Nietzsche provocatively suggests that although one associates ‘radicalism’ and the “sinking of the European spirit” with the French (cf. the French Revolution), it is England and its mediocre minds that deserve blame for thinking the base and plebian ‘modern ideas’ corrupting Europe, calling out such “respectable but mediocre Englishmen” as J.S. Mill, Darwin, and Herbert Spencer by name!
684 *BGE, “Peoples and Fatherlands”, §254: Nietzsche considers France “the seat” of noble European tastes (cf. “European noblesse”) and thus associates the worthy disposition of being ‘closed’ and ‘distant’ to the modern ideas with the few Frenchmen such as Bizet and Hippolyte Taine whom he admires.*

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form) stands as a testament to the endurance of the ressentimental pathos and its corrupting power over the Western Spirit. Its décadent values continue to endure; only its original meaning has been depleted.

Nietzsche’s indictment is hence directed against two broadly-defined camps. First, it stands in opposition to the conservative traditionalists whose political “reaction” aims to restore the power of Christianity over life and whose picture of political utopia is deeply bound to religion (and in turn the civilizing conception of the state). Second, but no less important, it is directed against the plethora of Modern progressive political movements and ideologies (all the contemporary -isms) that profess commitment to overturning the previous order, and yet, in their celebration of equality and the plebian as ideals, betray their sickly Christian and ressentimental spirit—embodying the socio-political remnant of the toxic “lie of equality of souls” (spiritual equality) and its political derivative, the “poison doctrine of ‘equal rights for all’”. Where the focus of the former (Christianity and its spiritual equality) is to pacify the mass, the latter (political equality) seek to mobilize the great quantity (incorporating them into the state structure or marshalling them to revolution). As such, they are both beholden to the mass tout court and tend to perpetuate if not enshrine its mediocre existence—resulting in a most subtle and psychological form of slavery and a most corrosive and fundamental passivity. At the same time, there is powerful recognition in Nietzsche of the unconscious and dangerous psychological forces driving mass political movements.

Ultimately, Nietzsche believes the revaluation of the values of the ideal and the overturning of ressentiment—the great task of overcoming at last what amounts to “the hypocrisy of millennia”—to be a unifying project for (continental) Europe providing Europeans with a

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685 AC, §57
686 EH, IV, §1
common cause that cuts across all former (politically-driven) cleavages which would, after Nietzsche and his exposing of the existential and nihilistic crisis, appear petty, parochial, and provincial in comparison. This pan-European *groß* politics was not a celebration of the “politics of empire” and world domination by an unchecked power-hungry and unqualified elite as Ronald Beiner has often suggested, but rather meant as a ‘politics of cultural self-defense’ both from internal dissolution in the face of the increasing pressures of nihilism, meaninglessness, and willlessness, and in the context of the civilizational rise of external centers of gravity for culture (it is namely Russia that Nietzsche has in mind). This is Nietzsche’s cultural reinterpretation and transvaluation of the Bismarckian Realpolitik (which in its political form he deems petty) into the actually-great politics of culture. Indeed, recognizing the diametrical opposition of his contemporary ‘*Kultur-Staat*’ (under Bismarck) to the requirements for real cultural power (*Culturmacht*) is Nietzsche’s legacy.

Given the above diagnoses of the Modern political moment and its debilitating effects, Nietzsche thinks that the “unstoppable”\(^\text{687}\) democratization of the West must fully unfold and culminate in complete mediocrization of the Western man and his culture-complex (cf. the last man and Modernity) before it can be overcome and a new aristocracy, that is future-deserving and future-guaranteeing for the West, can rise to take its place. The old democratic state must die and wither away so that the new Dionysian state that reaffirms the natural order of rank derived from life itself can emerge. In his quest for restoring an organic conception of ‘rank-order’ and establishing a new aristocracy whose vanguard and “new nobility” would be the spiritually-minded and truly *individual* übermenschlich, Nietzsche effectively appropriates the Platonic political vision and the classical idea of distributive justice premised on the fundamental inequality of men,

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\(^{687}\) *WS*, §275

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which he ironically weaponizes it against the Platonic philosophical and moral program and toward the *earthly* projects of *revaluation* and ‘higher culture’—thus famously turning Platonism on its head (cf. “inverted Platonism”). It is only in light of this new *dawn*, marking a new age characterized by a new model of (socio-political) organization and ‘state’, that the great politics of culture invoked by the Dionysian, realist, and tragic vision of the political could fully unfold and come into its own as an “agonistic aristocracy”.
“‘Dead are all Gods; now we want the Übermensch to live’—Let this be our last will at the great noon!”

Z (I, “On the Bestowing Virtue”)

And because [life] needs height, it needs steps and contradiction between steps and climbers! Life wants to climb and to overcome itself by climbing.

Z (II, “On the Tarantulas”)

As a medium for effecting the ennobling activity of ‘culture-making’, Nietzschean great politics operates as an interlocking system composed of two aspects or modes. The first emphasizes the organizational force of politics, the proper prerogative of state, and is generally concerned with questions of order, hierarchy, and authority—the affirmation and recovery of a healthful order of rank ruled by an (spiritual/geistig) aristocracy thus stands as a chief signifier for Nietzschean great politics. The second modality focuses on the processive, dynamic, and active nature of great politics as a sphere of great and noble action in the face of ever-present conflict and competition—an emphasis on the formative force of “agon” therefore is the other distinguishing quality of great politics. In the following section, I will elaborate on the ‘organizational’ modality and ‘aristocratic’ sense of great politics before discussing its agonistic aspect and the idea of
‘aristocratic agonism’ as a whole in the final section. Before proceeding, some general remarks and qualifications with respect to Nietzsche’s general political epistemology and points of departure could be helpful.

First, Nietzsche’s emphasis on the natural evolution of the political (and the state), as concomitant with human culture and as a means for its enhancement according to the rules of ‘natural justice’, corresponds with his rejection of contractarianism; Nietzsche thus dismisses the idea of the social contract advanced by the likes of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau and which forms the basis of modern political thinking as *idealist* fantasy. For Nietzsche, man is essentially a communal, semiotic, and most importantly a cultural animal—a being having become conscious of its own existence and tragic condition, who has only secondarily and by necessity developed into a political animal, owing to its semiotic and existential needs necessitating communal organization and shared myths. The origin of government then is neither rational nor the result of a conscious invention but the natural and necessary product of the very processes that birth tragedy (for man) and instigate human evolution of culture—it’s genesis lying with (human) life itself. Similarly, from Nietzsche’s perspective, the operating principle behind political regimes has not been to adjudicate normative and axiological differences, as Aristotle would claim, but instead to foster, enforce, and ultimately crystallize an overarching order of meaning to existentially sustain human populations under the general condition of tragedy and suffering. Accordingly, the entire history of politics (within various cultural-complexes) amount for Nietzsche to a series of successive attempts to forge a (unified) *Weltanschauung* out of the varied wills to power of a handful of different but commanding types of man who seek to shape and dominate a culture in their image. The only way to adjudicate between these varying wills to power is to apply to them
(genealogically) the yardstick of life itself and the principles of natural justice (i.e. merit) drawn from it and to observe the correlation of the dominant wills to power with the cycles of ascent or flourishing and descent or decline of the cultural organism. At the most fundamental level, this Nietzschean picture suggests that our entire political psychology and paradigms of politics are shaped by particular pathos (Nietzsche especially names ‘Ressentiment’ and ‘Distance’) along with the corresponding will to power reigning supreme over other contesting wills to dominate the cultural milieu—thus providing the necessary semblance of meaning needed to impress upon becoming the character of being. This parallels what Nietzsche says of those he considers “genuine philosophers” (understood in the most general sense as a personal unity of Geist with action), who he claims “are commanders and law-givers; they say ‘thus it shall be!’ It is they who determine the Wherefore and Whither of Mankind....They reach for the future with creative hand.... their "knowing" is creating, their creating is law-giving, their will to truth is—will to power.” This archetype maps quite well with the distinctive form of realism (cf. ‘visionary realism’) Nietzsche endorses, whereby politics is conceived both an autonomous sphere of action inherently separate and distinct from consideration of morality and the Good, and too an extension and subset of culture toward whose ends (meaning-creation) it is to be moved and activated.

In fact, Nietzsche’s realist and tragic vision of politics is an extension of his metaphysics of tragedy—his Dionysian framework celebrating impermanence and difference. It is rooted in his affirmation of life both in its natural meaninglessness and its fleeting quality which denies in turn substantive universality and totality and affirms only a wholly cultural pluralism (true to the Herderian spirit) and the universality of the homeodynamic and rather cyclical process of cultural

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688 BGE, §211
becoming. The affirmation of transience, temporality, and cyclicality of life and its multiplicity of forms has fundamental consequences for Nietzsche’s political thought for it makes him suspect of all utopian and idealist political projects that seek a permanent, objective, absolute, or universal(ly-substantive) order. The case in point for this pathology, Nietzsche believes, is the Modern second-coming of ideal and its apotheosis of egalitarianism and democratism in the wake of the ‘death of God’, which the ressentimental pathos proselytizes as a kind of end-all be-all (political) salvation attainable here on the Earth. For Nietzsche, the reality of cultural ascent and descent (cf. eternal recurrence) would also suggest that there exists no ultimately best regime in the way that Plato and the contemporary adherents of old philosophy imagine. Even the most healthful forms of orders must confront the inevitability of decay. As such, Nietzsche countenances Machiavelli’s observation that “the great goal of statecraft should be duration, which outweighs everything else” and that the actual “form of government signifies very little” both in this regard and vis-à-vis success and achievement in ennoblement of man. 689 Hence, political orders must (and could) only be judged according to apposite necessity and requirements of their times.

What is more, in the absence of universal and absolute meaning and perennial and totalistic order to anchor us, conflict, competition, and contestation (cf. agon) over meaning-schemes and suitable substantive and axiological orders become positively unavoidable—this being perhaps the only time-tested certainty. As such, Nietzsche would admit that no semiotic and political arrangement (even his own mythopoeic and aristocratic schema) could last forever and must confront the eventual reality of decay and corruption under décadent instincts—the best defense of any such schemes then is that they be deemed salutary given the distinctive historical

689 HAH, §224.
circumstance and the nature of the ‘timely’ crisis at hand (for there will always be a crisis) warranting their application. As such, so far as Nietzsche is concerned, what best justifies his call for ‘aristocratic agonism’ is debilitative nihilistic crisis (cf. meaningfulness and willlessness) and the urgent need for a cultural renaissance and reanimation to escape this nadir but fateful moment in the (life)cycle of the cultural organism (in our particular case, the West).

Along the same lines, Nietzsche emphasizes the instrumental and historical character of the political as a means of culture—rejecting the idealist, moralist, substantivist, and objectivist idea of the political advanced by the forces of ascetic ideal in Modernity which demand universal acquiescence to its values and/or threatens empire and world-domination. Instead, reflecting Nietzsche’s general perspectivism, the Nietzschean understanding of politics is deeply mindful of time, place, context, and the inherent plurality of cultural and political forms as well as the structural limits placed on political practice both internal (to the political order) and external (constraints imposed by the particularities of the culture-complex in question as well as the realities of international affairs and the nuances of global competition). Despite its qualifier of ‘greatness’ then, Nietzschean gross Politik, heeding necessity and reality, could only aim for what, from the ideological standpoint, must appear limited and temporal goals—reflecting and servicing the cultural aspirations and the übermenschlich wills to power in that particular instant in the life of the cultural organism. From the prism of his “philosophy of life”, Nietzsche envisions life as never-ending flux and transience—forever in change and becoming. It follows that no orders, arrangements, or achievements (whether in metaphysics or values) could ever be final, exhaustive, or permanent—and for Nietzsche, these same principles ripple down to the political sphere. Kirkland provides a nice summary: “A fully tragic vision includes the aspirations of the grandest
political examples, the conflict that cannot be resolved, and the inevitable decay of even the healthiest orders. Nietzsche's political realism involves his rejection of bourgeois culture and its attendant liberal institutions as well as Romantic culture and the nationalism it spawns in favor of a politics that serves a tragic culture." 690

Given Nietzsche’s stance as a foremost psychological and anthropological philosopher, the Nietzschean notion of hierarchy too is primarily anthropological rather than sociological. Nietzsche’s is not a hierarchy of social classes divided among themselves—of haves and have-nots, of the patrician and peers of the realm set against the plebeians—but one of distinctive types of man who nonetheless form a unified whole. What Ortega y Gasset observes of his own understanding of hierarchy rings true for Nietzsche as well: “The division of society into masses and select minorities is, then, not a division into social classes, but into classes [i.e. types] of men, and cannot coincide with the hierarchic separation of ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ classes”. 691 In fact, that we assume these two intrinsically and qualitatively different orders of rank to be one and the same is itself, as y Gasset suggest, a reflection of the Modern crisis which the massification of culture creates: massification—“a characteristic of our times”, could well be defined as “the predominance, even in groups traditionally selective, of the mass and the vulgar,” permeating into higher classes and intellectual and spiritual elites. 692 Conversely, it would not be “rare to find today amongst working men, who before might be taken as the best example of what we are calling ‘mass’, nobly disciplined [bred] minds.” 693 This is the very confusion of the order of ranks, to

690 Kirkland, “Nietzsche’s Tragic Realism”, p. 62
691 Ortega y Gasset, p.15
692 Ibid., p.16 (emphasis is my own)
693 Ibid.
which Nietzsche points and claims: the order of rank is lacking. The “mass man” of Ortega y Gasset is the last man of Nietzsche; and it is Nietzsche’s forceful recommendation that unless we fix this ‘unnatural’ (Widernatürlichkeit) disorder and hence restore the health of our culture, this “last man” could well be the last we hear of humanity.

Ultimately, Nietzsche believes that the ascent or strengthening of a culture or race of people is the outcome of a dialectic between converging and diverging forces in that complex, between the community that walks the path of previously established authority (cf. tradition) and the self that in a contrarian fashion contests and breaks with that established order—“Two things, rather, must come together: firstly the augmentation of the stabilizing force through the union of minds in belief and communal feeling [i.e. cohesion]; then the possibility of the attainment of higher goals through the occurrence of degenerate [i.e. divergent] natures and, as a consequence of them, partial weakenings and injurings of the stabilizing force.” Nietzsche’s provocative point here and elsewhere is that perpetuity of the status quo (cf. civilization) begets stasis and ossification, yet a firm, stable ground is nevertheless needed to withstand the kind of revision, creativity, and innovation in outlook and praxis that invigorate dynamism and agency in the cultural organism and empower the ennobling of that culture—a homeodynamic process.

Nietzsche’s Anthropology of Types: An Inverted Platonism in Action

Nietzsche conceives of the culture-complex in whole as an inverted Platonism, as a socio-political structure reaffirming of his presumed physiological ‘order of rank’. At its core, Nietzsche’s Anthro-cultural political theory thus embraces a neo-aristocratic view of politics in

694 HAH, §224
the Hellenic sense (cf. meritocracy) grounded on the intrinsic difference rather than sameness of people. The more explicitly-philosophical aspects of Nietzsche’s thought (his naturalist ontology, tragic realism, perspectivism, and distinctive philosophical anthropology) discussed throughout this dissertation are hence foundational to Nietzsche’s politics, and particularly so in the organization of the Nietzschean polity. Not only does Nietzsche extend his tragic and realist metaphysics onto his political philosophy culminating in a distinctive form of political realism geared toward heroic action, but his instrumentalist account of the political itself as well as the structural functionalism inherent in his social theory (cf. Komplex) both depend fundamentally and formatively on his radically functionalist, physiological, and differential philosophical anthropology, whereby psycho-physiological typologies come to underwrite Nietzsche’s understanding of “rank order” (Rangordnung). Within Nietzsche’s radical account of difference, man is comprised of different physiological types who as a result of being constituted for different tasks acquire different worths. Worths, that is, which must be reflected in the hierarchical rankings within the (social) complex. In fact, a corresponding distribution of rank to one’s (natural) general worth to culture is the standard Nietzsche provides for judging the health (cf. ‘natural justice’) or corruption of the social hierarchy. Given that in Nietzsche’s conception, human society naturally develops a broad base (many) and a narrow top (few) with respect to the most general and spiritual concerns of life, Nietzsche, like Plato before him, posits aristocracy as the most natural and desirable form of political organization.

Moreover, in line with the ancient Greeks, Nietzsche also appears a political naturalist for whom politics simply is a given fact of life and one with a distinctive function. As such, the foundational political question becomes how to organize and structure a political order so that it
corresponds to the natural rank-order and better serves as a scaffolding and platform to actualize our desired ends (i.e. culture and meaning-creation) within the tragic circumstance of life. Accordingly, Nietzsche points to a subtle but crucial difference between the state, an institution whose end and meaning is forging a hierarchical political community given to the generation and breeding of exceptional higher men (thus bridging ‘physiology’ and the Übermensch), and (great) ‘politics’ as the ennobling activity and agonistic game in which these outstanding individuals ‘play’ part in order to create value and meaning for the said political community (politics then bridges the Übermensch and their fateful task of cultural production). Therefore, under Nietzsche’s tragic realism, the political condition constitutes the essential and formative part of the Übermenschen life, if not that of the common man (whose ‘lower’ constitution and physiology Nietzsche thinks do not permit them to participate in the great over-arching political activity of intellectual contestation with they lacking the required agency).

Coupling his instrumentalist view of the political, Nietzsche develops his anthropological and physiological account on the basis of a similar belief in the profound functionalism and instrumentalism of the ‘types’ in the cultural architecture, a fact which further reinforces his instrumentalist view of the political. The typological character of this anthropology is thus central to Nietzsche’s political thinking and indeed foundational to his political model both in terms of its organization and its practice. Nietzsche’s political realism therefore is inextricably entangled with his psychological and physiological realism. Accordingly, the domination of the mediocre types by the great and their sacrifice toward the enhancement of these higher types is a reality Nietzsche regards as part of ‘the primordial order of things’ (Urgesetz der Dinge) and as the meaning of justice itself. Additionally, under the force of his tragic realism, Nietzsche’s vision of “a hierarchy
of inner states” (cf. types) materially “corresponds to the hierarchy of problems” that define human existence.\(^{695}\) Thus, the primary aim and ‘first principle’ (Erster Satz) of ‘great politics’ requires turning the question of “physiology into the Domina or mistress [Herrin] over all other questions.”\(^{696}\) As Knoll has correctly observed, “at the basis of Nietzsche’s conception of justice is his fundamental anthropological view that men are not only fundamentally unequal but are of extremely unequal value”.\(^{697}\) Knoll notes that similar to Aristotle and Plato, Nietzsche too subscribes to a ‘proportional’ conception of distributive justice which abides by two formal principles: 1) ‘to everyone in proportion to his worth or rank’ and 2) ‘equal shares for equals, unequal shares for unequals’.\(^{698}\) For Nietzsche, it is this understanding of justice that the (Modern) egalitarian view of justice subverts, revealing it as the product of the ressentimental drive and its resultant décadent instincts. So “that mankind be redeemed from revenge” and ressentimental instincts, against the misguided “preachers of equality” and their tarantula “web” of antinatural lies, Zarathustra declares—“justice speaks to me [that] ‘humans are not equal’, and that they shouldn’t become so either!”\(^{699}\) As Nietzsche makes abundantly clear, the Übermensch’s “feeling of separation from the masses and their duties and virtues” is ultimately crucial for it is bound to this higher type’s “pleasure in and practice of the great justice” [der grossen Gerechtigkeit] that stems from nature herself and reflects their sovereign “art of command” and general “breadth of will”.\(^{700}\)

\(^{695}\) \textit{BGE}, §213. Note that for Nietzsche the \textit{spiritual} problems of ‘meaning’, with which the extra-ordinary souls grapple, outrank the \textit{material} and \textit{physical} problems and limitations of ordinary or ‘mere’ life.

\(^{696}\) \textit{KGW}, (NF 1888, 25[1])

\(^{697}\) Knoll, “The ‘Übermensch’ as a Social and Political Task, p. 254

\(^{698}\) Ibid. (cf. Aristotle, \textit{The Nicomachean Ethics}, 1131 a 22-29; Plato, \textit{Politeia}, 433 a; Nietzsche, \textit{TI}, Skirmishes §48 and \textit{AC}, §57)

\(^{699}\) \textit{Z}, II, “On the Tarantulas”

\(^{700}\) \textit{BGE}, §213
Given the differential ends of the higher and lower types in the dynamic and ever-renewed cultural project and the need to honor and affirm this supreme difference as a matter of functional and practical necessity, Nietzsche posits that all (healthy) ‘social organization’ (and orders per se) would be definitively compelled to sanction domination and hierarchy in one form or another as well as institute a firm and designated division of labor: thus Nietzsche considers a wholly and unqualifiedly free society to be a ‘wooden iron’— an oxymoronic impossibility. Challenging the anti-realism of the Modern psyche, Nietzsche notes: people everywhere are lost in rapturous enthusiasms, even in scientific disguise, about a future state of society where “the exploitative character” will fall away: – to my ears, that sounds as if someone is promising to invent a life [form] that dispenses with all organic functions. “Exploitation” does not belong to a corrupted or imperfect, primitive society: it belongs to the essence of being alive as a fundamental organic function; it is a result of genuine will to power, which is [simply] the will of life. – Although this is an innovation at the level of theory, – at the level of reality, it is the primal fact of all history.

Nevertheless, as separate and distant as the Übermenschen are from the mediocre, Nietzsche stresses their mutual interdependence and ultimate unity within the holistic framework the culture-complex provides. He thus presents his idea of culture “as a new and improved physis, unified, without the gulf between interior and exterior, without dissimulation and convention…culture as a harmony of life, thought, appearance, and will.”

Accordingly, Nietzsche’s conception of the ‘just’ social order undergirding his great politics is modeled on his image of a healthful culture-complex as a holistic entity which fully affirms life along with the orders of rank that spring from it. It follows that the healthy culture-complex in the Nietzschean conception would essentially function as a two-tier hierarchical

701 Cf. (GS, §357)
702 BGE, §259
703 Unmodern Observations, II (History for Life), §10
ecosystem (replacing the three-estate Platonic model) consisting of the exceptional type of man (inhabiting the culture) and average type (inhabiting the complex). As the overwhelming majority, the common ‘specializing’ types (i.e. the average man) populating the complex serve as producers of wealth and material comforts which the Übermenschen consume to sustain themselves. In turn, the Übermenschen devote themselves to their individually-conceived task of meaning-creation and culture-making. They do this out of an internal drive and for their own self-fulfillment and not out of a concern for the many; in fact, Nietzsche stipulates that the aristocratic types should never think of themselves as ‘function’ so as to not constrain their radical freedom. Nonetheless, in their culture-making and mythopoesis, they unwittingly construct the architecture of meaning and myth to which the common man (via enculturation) is instinctivized and thus unconsciously uses to counteract the natural and tragic condition of existential dread and nihilism. Thus, as the higher man is a consumer of sustenance and material provisions, the common man is a consumer of meaning and spiritual provisions. And yet, Nietzsche proposes that the Übermenschen are more valuable than the commons: for one, they are far fewer in number and so each personally must be of more individual worth; and two, the übermenschlich possess an intrinsic worth for the value of their practices of ‘meaning-creation’ is ‘internal’ to culture rather than ‘external’ to it (cf. the commons who are of only instrumental value, means for making the Übermenschen’s life possible). Furthermore, the Übermenschen (and their creative undertakings) are also of far greater consequence to ‘life’, for in their life, they redeem and affirm life itself and provide a meaning to

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704 BGE, §258. Note that in different places, Nietzsche seems to suggest that the average types too must not think of themselves as mere functionaries, as true as that might appear to a cultural critic, for this might curtail their ‘special’ talents and rouse their natural ressentiment. Nietzsche’s reasoning differs slightly as the mediocre according to Nietzsche lack (spiritual) freedom and cultural agency in the first place. Nietzsche thus does not discount the flourishing of the lower types, only submitting that in their case it is qualitatively different and much more limited in scope.
their existence embodies life’s overcoming of life per se. Nevertheless, in practice, there is a powerful, if unconscious, reciprocity at play here, for although the Übermensch is vital to the common man’s spiritual health, the Übermenschen’s physical health and wellbeing depend entirely on collective contribution from average men. No doubt, this highly dynamic and relational picture (to be seen as a sort of structural dialectic whereby practices—in the sense of both ‘labor’ and ‘creative works’—and meanings are ceaselessly reconstituted) strengthens the general Nietzschean position that politics and culture are deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

It is important to stress therefore that Nietzsche does not ‘resent’ those he calls the ‘average’ and ‘mediocre’ type of people; rather, he employs the term philosophically and in a technical sense. What he despises is the denaturalization (by the kinds of man he variably calls décadent—“Unmensch” and “Untermensch”) that does not respect the (organic) order of rank and hierarchy of types, the pretense to egalitarianism and democratism which confuses ‘natural order’ and in the case of democratism irrationally privileges the common type over the exceptional. His comments regarding the Indian Law of Manu are especially illuminating:

Caste-order, order of rank, is just a formula for the supreme law of life itself, splitting off into three types [in its case] is necessary for the preservation of society, to make the higher and highest types possible—unequal rights are the condition for any rights at all. A right is a privilege. Everyone finds his privilege in his own type of being. Let us not underestimate the privileges of the mediocre. Life becomes increasingly difficult the higher up you go, —it gets colder, there are more responsibilities. A high culture is a pyramid: it needs a broad base; its first presupposition is a strongly and healthily consolidated mediocrity. Crafts, trade, farming, science, most of art—in a word, employment [i.e. all professional activity] can only really function on the basis of a mediocrity of ability and desire.705

And perhaps preemptively responding to future misinterpretation of his notions of superiority and Übermensch and the charge that he would desire a society of only higher types who could vie for

705 AC, §57
distasteful mistreatment or worse the elimination of the mediocre, Nietzsche clarifies his position on the value and necessity of the common people and the general population and the duties of the genuinely noble and magnanimous towards them:

To be a public utility, a wheel, a function—you need to be destined for this by nature: it is not society but rather the type of happiness [i.e. satisfaction in the ordinary] which the vast majority of people cannot rise above, that make them intelligent machines. For the mediocre, mediocrity is a happiness; mastery of one thing, specialization is a natural instinct. It would be completely unworthy of a more profound spirit to have any objection to mediocrity as such. Mediocrity is needed before there can be exceptions: it is the condition for a high culture. When an exceptional person treats a mediocre one more delicately [gently] than he treats himself and his equals, this is not just courtesy of the heart—it is his duty . . .

Likewise, the state has an obligation to ensure that the organizational mechanism runs smoothly. As such, the Nietzschean state seems to possess a prominent role not only in detecting and cultivating the übermenschlich but also as the chief organizer and facilitator responsible for the efficient operation of the economy and the physical/material well-being of the average citizen who are the cogs in the machine in such a manner that each receives appropriately what he or she deserves—hence, Nietzsche’s invocation of the ‘noblesse oblige’ appears not limited to the individual aristocrat but extends as well to the state as the institutional apparatus aiding with the advancement of the cultural program of the Übermenschlich. And yet, we must not lose sight of the fact that the purview for politics (given to grand and titanic tasks of cultural creation) extends far beyond the ‘welfare of the state’ and/or the ‘wellbeing of the mediocre’.

Nietzsche believes that culture is intimately wedded to a primal need for structure and social ordering understood in hierarchical terms (hence the culture-complex); the activity of ‘culture-making’ too, as the chief objective for a great polity that is devoted to cultural generation,
depends on the existence of a healthy and life-embodying order—i.e. the aristocracy. The constitutive elements of Nietzsche’s great organization are the men of distinguished psycho-physiology Nietzsche regards as higher and generalist types (Übermensch) and the specializing types who are merely average and mediocre (Mensch)—cohabiting within an order of rank that affirms Dionysian ‘pathos of distance’. As an inverted Platonic pyramid, the social structure of the great culture-complex would be oriented to culture rather than fostering the values of the ideal—morality, Truth, and religion—or alternatively prostrating itself at the throne of power per se.\textsuperscript{707} The great state would be tasked with creating the conditions conducive to the breeding and cultivation of the Übermenschen as the cultural vanguards; while, in its role as an instrument for ‘uniting a people and well separating them’, it establishes order, promotes stability, and institutes the long ladder of rank between man and man. Following this tack, Nietzsche suggests a helpful and delicate distinction between mechanism of state as an organizational power and an instrument of selection, and great politics as a processive and ennobling activity. The state is a necessary link to the positing of an order of rank and so is inherently connected with the very notion of hierarchy which Nietzsche views as elemental to any form of cultural enhancement and indeed the ‘organic function’ of life itself. This reinforces the idea that the general purpose of the state in the Nietzschean view is creation and fostering of genius in the most general sense. As such, ‘aristocracy’ would present itself as the sole healthy form of political organization according to nature and on the basis of a genuine philosophy of life. If great politics could be conceived as a

\textsuperscript{707} For a different rendition of this argument (Nietzsche as a converse political Platonist) but one which draws heavily from \textit{BT}, see Phillip H. Roth’s “Political and Psychological Prerequisites for Legislation in the Early Nietzsche”, also in \textit{Nietzsche as Political Philosopher} (pp. 211-238). Knoll, in his reading, makes a similar case for seeing Plato as an inspiration for Nietzsche’s elitist politics even as he (Nietzsche) denounces the Platonic metaphysics that grounds it in favor of his own Dionysian model.
bridging ground connecting the distinctive great and higher types with the activity of culture-making as such, then the great state (understood as the organizational structure of this politics) is the pathway that facilitates the higher men becoming who they are meant to be (i.e. the Übermenschen), preparing them for the arduous and supreme political struggle ahead in the specifically Übermenschlich arena of spiritual contestations and clash of values.

Nietzsche’s affirmation of hierarchy as a natural and realist phenomenon undergirding human society is thus foundational to any subsequent discussion of meaning and culture and the sort of exceptional and ennobling activities that foster them. While Nietzsche rejects the notion of ‘suffrage universal’ and ‘equal and absolute rights’ as ‘Modern ideas’, he wants specifically-tailored differentiated rights and privileges—i.e. ‘to each, his due’—within the holistic framework supplied by the inherent unity of the culture-complex. All types of high culture are hence embodied and made immanent in the genuinely noble caste. As the personification of the High Culture for Nietzsche, the aristocracy thus stands as the one genuine form of political organization, a model which not only affirms typological hierarchies but places the generation of these higher man as the purpose of the state. Within the complex, the ‘exceptions’ appear as the only end-in-themselves and all other human types and stations function as means to their flourishing. As such, the aristocracy’s “fundamental belief must always be that society cannot exist for the sake of society, but only as the substructure and framework for raising an exceptional type of being up to its higher duty and to a higher state of being.” From the Nietzschean perspective, that the development of higher types of man is itself a sociological development is a rather empirical and historical fact:

Every enhancement [Erhöhung] so far in the type “man” has been the work of an aristocratic society – and that is how it will be, again and again, since this sort of society believes in a long ladder of rank order [Leiter der Rangordnung] and value

708 BGE, “What is Noble?”, §258
distinctions between men [and man], and in some sense needs slavery. Without the pathos of distance as it grows out of the ingrained differences between stations [Stände], out of the way the ruling caste maintains an overview and keeps looking down on subservient types and tools, and out of this caste’s equally continuous exercise in obeying and commanding, in keeping away and below—without this pathos, that other, more mysterious pathos could not have grown at all, that demand for new expansions of distance [Distanz-Erweiterung] within the soul itself, the development of states that are increasingly high, rare, distant, wide-ranging and comprehensive, and in short, the enhancement of the type “man,” the constant “self-overcoming of man” (to use a moral formula in a supra-moral sense).  

Nonetheless, all this radical and hierarchical differentiation and structural functionalism must not blur the holism and cohesion that undergirds the cultural organism as a particular unity striving for heightening. According to Nietzsche, “The essential feature of a good, healthy aristocracy is that it does not feel that it is a function (whether of the kingdom or of the community) but instead feels itself to be the meaning and highest justification (of the kingdom or community); and, consequently, that it accepts in good conscience the sacrifice of countless people who have to be pushed down and shrunk into incomplete human beings, into slaves, into tools [means], all for the sake of the aristocracy.”  

For only under a mutually-reinforcing and organically-dependent arrangement can a culture develop and actively engage its own becoming. Indeed, Nietzsche thinks that the institution of the great vertical organization of society and the establishment of a healthful state given to this very purpose could promote conditions under which “mutually refraining from injury, violence, and exploitation, placing your will on par with the other’s…can become good manners [Sitte] between individuals” making them feel as though they “have genuinely similar quantities of force and measures of value, and belong together within a single body”.  

As such, Nietzsche compares aristocracy to “the sun-seeking, Javanese climbing plant” which wraps “its

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709 BGE, “What is Noble?”, §257 (translation slightly altered)
710 BGE, “What is Noble?”, §258
711 BGE, “What is Noble?”, §259
arms around [the] oak tree [of the culture complex] so often and for such a long time that finally, high above the oak, although still supported by it, the plant will be able to unfold its highest crown of foliage and show its happiness in the full, clear light.”  

It is only when the desire for solidarity, oneness, and eventually sameness (i.e. absolutism and egalitarianism) is deemed the “fundamental principle of society” (cf. civilization) that the organizational requirements of complex become a grave danger to culture and its future—ultimately turning against nature itself and revealing its true face as “the will to negate life, the principle of disintegration, and decay.”

On the basis of the above discussion, it would be helpful perhaps to think of Nietzsche’s understanding of the political as a grand architectural greenhouse in which culture grows and with Abbey and Appel characterize Nietzsche’s as an “architectonic conception of politics”: in this light, a culture-complex appears as a “structure of domination and lordship [Herrschafts Gebilde] that lives”, for which the Übermensch serve as the grand architects or master builders (der Baumeister). As such, the Übermenschlich designates the generally aesthetic and building type of man—encompassing the master legislators and founders that originally inaugurate and enliven a culture-complex (both organizationally and axiologically), as well as the succeeding generations of creative and architectural types that come in the wake of the original founders in posterity to freshen and renovate the culture-complex and protect its vitality. As with any construction, in the great cultural edifice too, the durability, robustness, and health of the building’s foundation and framing structures (i.e. the structures of command and value) would be a vital aspect of the building process. Indeed, one could locate the roots of the Übermenschen’s general greatness in their

712 BGE, “What is Noble?”, §258
713 BGE, “What is Noble?”, §259
elementary genius in organization and assembly (especially in hierarchical forms). Nietzsche finds that the ‘type’ of spirit he associates with the higher men possesses an instinct for ‘creating and imposing form’ (Formen-schaffen, Formen-aufdrücken),\textsuperscript{715} exhibits a ‘genius’ for the kind of grandiose ‘organization’ (of society) that is statecraft, and embodies “the basic faith that man has value and meaning only insofar as he is a stone in a great edifice”.\textsuperscript{716} Best likened to master builders or military commanders who must operate with ‘order of rank’ front and center in their mind, the founder lawgivers are master organizers who imagine and create the grand cultural architecture for the future habitation of their people, ordering and organizing them according to a healthful and just (i.e. meritocratic) standard of rank. Visionary as they are though, these commanding architects are also distant and ultimately do not get to live in their artistic creations. In a testament to their tragic existence, they conceive of grand structures whose construction/completion necessarily outlives and outlasts them, taking centuries and millennia to reach completion, if ever—often destroying many things in their paths or what has come before them. Nevertheless, what they found eternalizes them, standing as an enduring monument to their greatness and genius. Great politics seeks a grand and enduring organization of society conducive to the thriving of life and culture; however, Nietzsche reckons that the paradigm of meaning, value principles, and substantive ends to the fulfillment of which this towering organization is galvanized could be established only through a grand contestation that consolidates many opposing wills (to power) into a single will—this agon being the most veritable, complete, and great a political phenomenon if there ever was one.

‘Liberum Veto’ and the Politics of Übermensch ‘Culture-Heroes’—Agon Inter Pares

\textsuperscript{715} GM, II, §18  
\textsuperscript{716} GS, §356
Ultimately, Nietzsche’s insistence on symbiosis between culture and civilization (cf. the societal complex) signals the need for a balance and equilibrium between culture and the state, and between the Übermenschlich as personal embodiments of that culture and the political as such as the arena for transformative action—albeit that the definitive goal for this equilibrium and synergy is ascendance and growth of the culture in question. Thus, together with his affirmation of aristocracies and orders of rank, Nietzsche also celebrates the ancient Greek ideal of agon or strife/contest, its inherent relationship with (spiritual and political) power, and its formative role in the often-competitive processes that culminate in the establishing of paradigms of meaning and value for human societies. Max Weber captures this Nietzschean sentiment toward the agonistic and contested nature of the political when he notes that “all politics is essentially struggle [Kampf]” and that those fit for political leadership are those selected in that struggle. Nevertheless, within Nietzsche’s Dionysian framework, the will to (and struggle for) power is not a zero-sum game in which the solitary hero triumphs, especially is that true given that the gains (in terms of founding or renewing spiritual and political orders) are never permanent in relation to the dynamic and cyclical overarching process that is (cultural and human) becoming. As Knoll rightly challenges the conventional solitary and individualistic reading of Nietzsche’s Übermensch, the Übermenschlich for Nietzsche is not one individual but instead constitutes a select stratum or breed of higher men (as Übermenschen): it is a qualifier reserved for a special type of (higher) humans with the right array of (performative) capabilities and the potential to become heroic via their

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actions (actions which possess, not simply a social and political dimension, but powerful and formative repercussions for both the political community and the culture at large). 718

And so, with this picture in mind, the individualistic and democratic interpretation of the Übermensch (as a self that could be democratized to all selves) as well as the solitary and even solipsistic account of their self-overcoming and self-realization such as offered by Kaufmann, Nehamas, and Thiele appear deeply problematic and misleading for Nietzsche’s overall direction and aims. For one, if the Übermensch are to in fact be recognized as the great types, they must also affirm as their lot those great (cultural) responsibilities that will inevitably have profound social and political consequences. In line with Knoll, Abbey and Appel have also correctly noticed the presence of this communal aspect to the Übermensch likening it to the ‘noblesse oblige’ doctrine of the ancients. As Nietzsche suggests, not wanting to shirk the heavy burden of the great responsibilities that revaluation and ‘cultural architecture’ demands and being strong enough to shoulder its weight and “not collapse under it” is a sure mark of the great. 719 With great privilege and power comes great responsibility, indeed.

To note, under what I have called Nietzsche’s tragic realism, the need for politics couples the absence of meaning in the natural world, and it is the human imperative to affirm life in the face of this primordial nihilistic condition that causes ubiquitous and incessant conflict over value, and especially so among the higher types—this being a never-ending state of grand conflict to be played out within the various theaters of culture and managed via great politics among the higher types (i.e. the Übermensch) that are born just for this ‘great game’ thus making politics per se and

718 Manuel Knoll, “The ‘Übermensch’ as a Social and Political Task: A Study in the Continuity of Nietzsche’s Political Thought”, *Nietzsche as Political Philosopher*, p. 239-266.
719 *WP*, §975
as processive activity an inescapable and enduring feature of human (or superhuman) life. Accordingly, Nietzsche’s political thought promotes a vision not of democratic contestation (cf. agonistic democracy) or of a solipsistic struggle internal to self as some have suggested but of a decidedly aristocratic one—it lends itself to the institutionalization of an agonistic (neo)aristocracy, creating space for competition over higher values and meanings that are advanced by the great creative genii of heroic, strong, and healthful will to power.

The recognition of agon as a communal activity of the great (‘a great game’) and a privilege of high society further underscores the fact that Nietzsche’s affirmation of (neo-)aristocracy and hierarchy does not exclude all liberty. Indeed, as alluded to earlier, an aristocratic, tragic, antiquarian, realist, and aesthetic conception of liberty (and what it means to be critical and free-minded vis-à-vis one’s Zeitgeist) permeates Nietzsche’s works and is essential to the form of aristocracy Nietzsche advocates as well as to its correct functioning. Such a liberty thrives on difference, plurality, and divergency and values creativity, innovation and willfulness as ennobling virtues necessary for great and noble acts. The aristocratic liberty Nietzsche promotes is further based in genuine (aristocratic) friendship and reverence for fellow peers of the same rank historically immanent in nobility—a fundamental equality in rank and esteem among peers (stemming from their overall higher capacity for cultural works) which sanctions and facilitates the kind of spiritual (geistig) conflict and agon that is bound to occur and natural to the (self-actualizing) disposition and competitive temperament of the Übermenschlich and their divergent wills standing apart inter pares. As Abbey points out, the higher idea of friendship Nietzsche propagates recognizes the common status of the great as “equal among firsts”—suggesting “a relationship among superior types who see one another as equals, who take joy in one another,
who respect distance among themselves and provide support and intimacy without quashing individuality.”  

Ironically, for the genuinely Übermenschlich, the affirmation of distance and difference only nurtures and nourishes their common bond. As Nietzsche states,

> The period of the tyrants of the spirit [Tyrannen des Geistes] is past. In the spheres of higher culture there will always have to be a sovereign authority, to be sure – but this sovereign authority will hereafter lie in the hands of the oligarchs of the spirit [Oligarchen des Geistes]. Their spatial and political division notwithstanding, they constitute a close-knit society whose members know and recognize one another.  

It follows that “the spiritual superiority which formerly divided and created hostility [in older aristocracies] now tends to unite” toward a higher form of friendship and give itself wholly to the needs of the higher culture thus pointing to the importance of ‘cultural authority’ to couple the (primordial) political one.  

As such, these neo-aristocrats constitute a wellspring for cultural health as well as a reservoir for cultural sovereignty, at the same time as they amount to the “cyclops of culture”— for these ‘authorities of culture’ represent the “savage forces beat[ing] a path” and encompass those “frightful energies” inherent to culture becoming immanent in “the cyclopean architects and road-makers of humanity”.  

All this notwithstanding, it is quite curious that, as Abbey notes, only “few of Nietzsche’s readers recognize friendship’s importance for superior types”; or that “even those who discuss his interest in agonal striving accord friendship little or no role in this believing instead that Nietzsche internalizes the agonistic struggle, so that various parts of the self battle with each other”—perhaps matching their solitary readings of the Übermensch.  

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721 HAH, §261  
722 Ibid.  
723 HAH, §246  
724 Abbey, p. 81
Similarly, the concrete political order derived from the ‘aristocratic agonism’ principle is not an authoritarian autocracy centered around an individual (cf. Caesarism and Bonapartism), nor is it a ‘mixed regime’ composite of both aristocratic and commoner elements in the mold of an Aristotelian polity (cf. the Roman Republic) dividing the culture-complex and pitting different estates (and parties) against each other; rather, it is a qualified, limited, and unitary aristocratic polity—a ‘republic of genius’ (rooted in the fellowship and competition of peers) fit for the poets (the generalist affirmers of life) who, as physicians of culture and mythopoeic architects, come to replace the old Socratic philosophers (specializing in life-denying ‘knowledge as such’) at the top of the proverbial Platonic pyramid. In this light, I would suggest that the great historical inspiration for Nietzsche’s conception of a healthful (European) polity is perhaps that of the aristocratic Kingdom of Poland and its Golden Liberty (also known as the Commonwealth of Nobles) in the 16th and 17th centuries Europe. A fact which might finally make sense of mature Nietzsche’s perplexing and at times obsessive self-association with Poland and his (since-debunked) claims to be descended from the Polish nobility! Nietzsche even alleges at times to feel Polish and possess Polish instincts, as in this passage from the original draft of Ecce Homo where he also takes the opportunity to once more reject the so-called great politics of Bismarckian Germany while drawing a sharp contrast with that of Polish aristocracy:

By virtue of my descent, I am granted an eye beyond all merely local, merely nationally conditioned perspectives; it is not difficult for me to be a “good European.” On the other hand, I am perhaps more German than present-day Germans, mere citizens of the German Reich, could possibly be—I, the last anti-political German. And yet my ancestors were Polish noblemen: I have many racial instincts in my body from that source—who knows? In the end perhaps even the *liberum veto*.725

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725 *EH*, I.3 (original draft), Kaufman trans., *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. 415
By “liberum veto”, Nietzsche is acknowledging here the peculiar right of unrestricted and free veto the Golden Liberty extended to all members of the Polish nobility (whether high or low in the peerage) allowing them to individually nullify majority decisions in the noble’s parliament (Sejm). While some might be inclined to point to any association with the Polish(-Lithuanian) Commonwealth and even the idea of the ‘republic of genius’ as betraying Nietzsche’s democratic inclinations, considering even the 19th century understanding of democracy, let alone its ancient forms, this would be a gross misreading. After all, as it has been already established, although Nietzsche values the contribution of the *demos* in the economic and material domains—as specialists in various *ergons*—and deems them vital to the survival of the culture-complex, he is actively hostile toward not just the political but indeed even the (meta) cultural participation of the *mediocre* mass (barring them from all the spiritual or *human* areas which require a general and holistic understanding and an interpretive-critical stance). Additionally, Nietzsche is quite fond of the idea of ‘liberum veto’ or the privilege of any noble to contradict the rulings of the ‘majority’ thinking that it upholds the noble’s individuality and independence of will—even if this freedom comes at the cost of political weakening and dissolution (as it did eventually overwhelm the Polish state). In a note from 1883, Nietzsche writes,

> “The Poles were for me the most gifted and chivalrous among the Slavonic peoples, and the endowment of the Slavs seemed to me superior to that of the Germans…I thought with pleasure on the right of a Polish nobleman by his simple veto to overturn the resolution of an assembly. The political unruliness and weakness of the Poles were for me rather proofs of the capacity than the reverse.”

As is clear here, for Nietzsche, ‘aristocratic liberty’ categorically trumps democratism and still among the higher and noble classes (even justifying sacrifices in effectiveness and political

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726 Quoted in “Friedrich Nietzsche: His Life and Works”, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 1897, p.480.
execution). What is more, recall that in the Nietzschean account, willfulness, divergence, or ‘unruliness’ constitute critical aspects of the aesthetic and Dionysian psychology of the cultural architects—as much the agents of destruction as they are of new creation. Therefore, any political system given to the end of cultural generation must strive to affirm the disorderly and disruptive nature of the creative spirits as it also endeavors to safeguard the life-affirming order of rank and aristocratic organization which are the preconditions to providing such ‘free rein’ to the higher Übermenschlich types in the first place. As such, effecting an agonistic aristocracy entails striking the perfect harmony between 

\begin{equation*} \text{necessity and will}. \end{equation*}

Accordingly, Nietzsche’s ‘great politics’ exhibits a radical commitment to aristocratic values and freedoms as he reimagines them to fit his agonistic model—begetting a permanent state of ‘ordered chaos’ in the human realm to match the ‘eternal becoming’ of nature.

For Nietzsche, “the exchange of rights and honors” is the “essence of all interaction”, associating, or interface (Verkehre) and “part of the natural state of things”. Culture and the agonistic process of cultural creation is the common ground that relates the Übermenschen to one another fostering a kind of inter-subjectivity between the cultural elite. The noble soul who embraces himself—affirming his true nature and drives and is strong enough for his own fated will to power (cf. Amor Fati)—thus exhibits a certain “finesse and self-limitation in dealing with equals” of rank as a part of his very egoism (or ‘self-importance’) but proudly and gladly dominates the subordinates, those naturally subservient/submissive and axiologically-dependent, as his 'right' (for he knows that it is he and his type alone which creates value)—this inherent meritocracy built around the adage ‘the better shall rule’ is the basis of all natural, which is to say, aristocratic justice.
and rudimentary to the actualization of (aristocratic) freedom.\textsuperscript{727} As such, the genuinely noble soul bred in ‘distance’ and ‘self-affirmation’,

admits to itself, under certain circumstances (that at first give it pause), that there are others with rights equal to its own. As soon as it is clear about this question of rank, it will move among these equals and “equally righted” with an assured modesty and a gentle reverence equal to how it treats itself.\textsuperscript{728}

In this light, Nietzsche’s continuous emphasis on the principle of ‘self-importance’ (\textit{Egoismus}) of the Übermenschen achieves its full double-edged meaning. \textit{Toward those below them}, i.e. the mediocre—it requires that the Übermenschen accept that the average and lower types live for \textit{their} sake, that the latter’s happiness and flourishing is tied to \textit{their} (Übermenschen’s) flourishing and success in task. Yet, \textit{toward those of the same rank}—it compels the Übermensch to seek out the company of his equals and afford them equal reverence and friendship he would afford himself. It is for this very reason that aristocracy is for Nietzsche inherently earthly and thisworldly for the noble soul “does not generally like looking ‘upwards’, – but rather \textit{ahead}, horizontally and slowly, or downwards: – it knows that it is high up.”\textsuperscript{729}

We can thus observe at the heart of Nietzsche’s theory of politics (or \textit{great politics}) a theory of \textit{man} (or \textit{great man}) understood as the ÜBermenschen who actualize their inherent potential in tandem to one another to become memorialized culture-heroes. Given the profound moment of crisis in Modernity with old tablets and values broken and new ones only partially written, Zarathustra’s injunction for the creative Übermenschen is “to press [their] hand upon the millennia as upon wax…to write upon the will of millennia as upon bronze—harder than bronze, nobler than

\textsuperscript{727} \textit{BGE}, “What is Noble?”, §265
\textsuperscript{728} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{729} Ibid.
bronze” that the will of such men is and thus become the architects of the future. Nietzsche is able to subscribe to his Übermensch theory coherently by means of joining his structurally functionalist (macro-)sociology with an ‘individualist’ microsociology and typological philosophical anthropology, in which the Übermenschen function as the most important element (organ) in the cultural organism—to be bred and protected given the vital and transformative task (function) these rare breeds of genius preform for the health and generative continuation of the cultural whole. Nietzsche, in contrasts to many classical and even modern sociologists who focus rather exclusively on systemic change—takes special note of the human agent and the role of agency in cultural transformation although he limits this agency to a select few. In exercising their radical freedom, the Übermensch, unwittingly, bridge man and culture reflexively and in themselves through their mythopoetic acts. Apropos of culture, these men of most profound, supreme, and wide-ranging genius are given to “begetting” and “giving birth”—"the two most highly valued functions of human kind".

In this sense, although human evolution dictates that culture and meaning are reified (and this is no criticism from the Nietzschean perspective but simply the reality of human evolution), change in culture and meaning will be decisively non-deterministic, non-reified, and embodied, always involving human agents and personal authorship. As cultural agents and architects, the Übermensch transcend the obsolete idealistic dichotomies of subject (as a consciousness) acting upon the world as object. The very structure of culture as an ecological medium precludes it. Rather, the relationship between the culture at-large and the cultural agent (Übermensch) is best characterized by what some sociologists call “a relation of ontological complicity or mutual

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731 BGE, §206
possession”. Or rather than ‘possession’, the Übermensch and the culture live one another embodying a relationship of ‘reflexive inhabiting’. Putting it in Nietzschean dictum, the cyclical and in fieri nature of cultural transformation requires the two physiologies (that of the cultural organism and the personal Übermensch) acting upon one another, breeding each other ad infinitum. As such, the Übermensch and the culture embody a relationship of ‘mutual and reflexive inhabiting’ in an unending dialectic loop: the story of cultural metamorphosis reflects a particular sui generis form of dialectic—a reflexive dialectic coupling the formerly-established structural one. In their own lives, these great types personify their (embodied) cultural myth, and yet creatively change it within themselves and in agonistic association with their kind in an audacious act of self-overcoming. This process represents the ultimate act in human creativity and life-giving, for the Übermensch in his “revaluation” breathes new life to the cultural organism as one mode of life; simultaneously, he ‘gives’ new meaning to the lives of the (‘human all too human’) persons who inhabit that culture as an ecological medium allowing them to go on perpetuating the cultural whole in yet another interrelated cycle. In themselves, the Übermensch actualize Nietzsche’s celebration of difference and his idea of ‘pathos of distance’. Their existence—and the promise for life they represent—would alone vindicate, in Nietzsche’s mind, his ‘consecration’ of hierarchy and his rather obsessive stress on ‘order of rank’ within a distinctively functionalist structure, without which the Übermenschen could not be realized. What unifies this picture, in my mind, is Nietzsche’s multifaceted view on agency—which really enshrines agency as both the

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733 Interpreting Nietzsche using some principles of reflexive sociology, the Übermensch would, as an ideal type, exhibit the highest—or absolute (1)—degree of cultural reflexivity, while the ‘mediocre’ herd (the Unmensch) score quite low on the cultural reflexivity scale, nearing zero.
ultimate *desideratum* and the organizing principle of his anthro-culturalism. Nietzsche’s culturalism strives for cultural agency, the lack of which signifies cultural exhaustion. Nietzsche’s anthropology (microsociology) seeks out *individual* agency which increasingly adopts many of the characteristics of Renaissance *Virtù*: this *individualized embodied* agency is itself deemed *instrumental* to completing one’s performative task and realizing cultural metamorphosis. Thus, we see that agency and action both in its human and in its reified form is formative to Nietzschean philosophy. This is perhaps the most crucial remnant of idealist thought in Nietzschean thought, which Nietzsche inventively *culturalizes* and *inverts*, unleashing it against idealism itself.

The Übermensch type thus embodies the motif of the “exuberant hero” who embraces the whole of life in both its destructive and creative force—this is an ever-present feature of Nietzsche’s thought. What does change in the course of Nietzsche’s philosophical growth is that this heroic type is no longer identified with Wagner’s *Siegfried*—the hero of the universal Schopenhauerian *Will*; he now assumes identity with Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*—the hero of *culture*. So rare are these giants, Nietzsche thinks, that they must often turn to history to find others equal in their rank and to history books to seek their company. It is thus in history that we could first detect a ‘republic of genius’:

> “The time will come when we will wisely avoid all interpretations of the world-process, or even human history; when historians generally will no longer consider the masses, but rather those individuals who form a kind of bridge over the wild torrent of Becoming. These individuals by no means continue a process, but, thanks to history which makes concerted effort possible, they live as timeless contemporaries in that republic of genius…across the desolate guls of time, giant calls to giant and, undisturbed by the noisy, clamoring dwarfs creeping around below them, the high discourse of spirits proceeds. It is the task of history to mediate between them and, by so doing, to provide fresh opportunities and to concert our forces in the creation of greatness. No, the goal of humanity cannot lie at the end of history, but only in the highest human exemplars.”

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734 *Unmodern Observations*, II (History for Life), §9.
But this was when nature and chance was in charge whereas after Zarathustra man will be at the wheel and can will the generation of Übermenschen by creating the right environment and soil for their growth. If so, perhaps one can imagine a possible future under which an Übermenschen, although still rare, would not have to sieve through history to find his peers. As such, there is an underlying but powerful suggestion in mature Nietzsche that the ‘republic of genius’ he mentions in younger years need no longer be historical… that with human willing it can now be made concrete and realized as an actual socio-political order. And as I have suggested, he finds a working model for this ideal in the polity known as the Golden Liberty of Poland. That Nietzsche is especially receptive to the ‘liberum veto’ principle is a testament to the protection he thinks such a principle would provide for the skeptical and contrarian quality he so values. It is hence reasonable that Nietzsche would think ‘liberum veto’ could also safeguard the contrarian freedom and willfulness of the Übermenschen.

Despite the unsystematic nature of Nietzsche’s writings, my intention has been to demonstrate that there is a strong continuity and unity to Nietzsche’s political thinking, to show that his political program adheres to certain tenets that could be said to be both binding and formative, and to stress that these ordering principles are neither internally contradictory nor assembled haphazardly but rather work inductively together to form a consistent and coherent political vision. Accordingly, Nietzsche’s conception of the political develops along the two vectors of aristocracy and agon which betray his own origins as an aristocratic, tragic, or aesthetic liberal. Aristocratism and agon, although they might appear contradictory forces at first, become mutually reinforcing and enhancing in the Nietzschean template. Indeed, Nietzsche’s vision for a

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735 Even if Nietzsche’s characteristic writing style and/or untimely madness prevented him from effectively presenting that vision.
healthy political organization is that of a reimagined and novel spiritual (geistig) aristocracy that safeguards and affirms the aristocratic idea of liberty and the higher forms of friendship associated with it, as well as the spirit of competition and contestation (agon) among the few and their varied wills to power. The Nietzschean state must therefore be attuned to the needs of an “agonistic aristocracy”. That this is deemed a possible and functional arrangement for Nietzsche is rooted in his understanding of the distinctive physiology that animates the pathos of distance and which all übermenschlich share as a condition of their higher existence in the first place. The Übermensch’s shared life-affirming physiology and common drive to difference and order of rank cuts across their unique wills to power fostering a spirit of solidarity, respect, and genuine friendship among this type and uniting them around the common ends of cultural ascent and Earthly revaluation of all values:

How could the individual keep himself aloft and, against every current, swim along his own course through life if he did not see here and there others of his own kind living under the same conditions and take them by the hand, in struggle against both the ochlocratic [mob-rule] character of the half-spirited and the half-educated and the attempts that occasionally occur to erect a tyranny with the aid of the masses? The oligarchs have need of one another, they have joy in one another, they understand the signs of one another—but each of them is nonetheless free, he fights and conquers in his own place, and would rather perish than submit.\(^736\)

Being the exceptions, the übermenschchen share a common hatred for all ressentimental and life-denying forms of will to power and for all décadent instincts to leveling and (unconditional) equality. They see themselves as radical aristocrats and critically-minded visionaries dispositionally-driven to become agents of cultural transformation in the grand and unceasing Dionysian game, thus they can accommodate and affirm individual differences and invite competition with respect to the substantive forms and means of actualizing their earthly vision for

\(^736\) HAH §261
the sake of the criticality and radical self-actualization that the agonistic process engenders. Creativity and dynamism thrive on spiritual conflict and the grand *agon* of the great and higher types and for this Nietzsche’s great politics provides a most distinguished of platforms. The emphasis on *agon* in Nietzschean political thinking both reinforces and enhances the openness, radicalism, and self-constitutive nature of culture and culture-making as a dynamic force, but this agonism is not in itself a substantive political or normative position but rather a procedural means or setting to make the attaining of substantive value position possible. 737 As (rationally-grounded) consensus, even elite consensus, is ultimately impossible, agreement will have to be forged, whereby one ‘will to power’ will inevitably come out on top and declared *victorious* in the great competition over wills and visions. Accordingly, the genuinely übermenschlich invite the millennial prospect of a ‘sprit war’, a spiritual/intellectual fight that is Earth-shattering and future-determining. As members of the “party of life” organized and united against the ‘party of ressentiment’ and the Christian Reich, the Übermenschen represent a “thousand bridges and paths” pressing upward toward the future. It is in this spirit that Zarathustra proclaims the Übermenschen the “divinely struggling ones” struggling both against the ‘old order’ and amongst themselves as equals, stating: “In this manner sure and beautiful let us also be enemies, my friends! Divinely let us struggle *against* each other!” 738

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737 A testament to this fact is of course that agonism is routinely appropriated by democratic theory and applied to *democratic* rather than aristocratic politics.

ACT IV

NIETZSCHE OR MACINTYRE?
WHITHER FROM HERE?
At this juncture, having performed an exhaustive exegesis of the Nietzschean account and reviewed as well both his critique of Modernity and his corrective to it, we can at long last return to some of the questions originally posed by this study—namely, what does the Nietzschean model I have identified as “anthro-culturalism” and associated with Nietzsche’s distinctive ‘tragic realism’ and characteristic ‘perspectivism’ as part of his overall ‘life philosophy’ (Lebensphilosophie) add to the MacIntyrean critique of Modernity generally-speaking, and in what ways would it complicate MacIntyre’s normative scheme specifically?

Earlier in Act I, I claimed that MacIntyre’s rejection of Nietzsche under the label of ‘Genealogy’ was categorically mistaken, and that, if this were true, it would problematize the general (three-pronged) normative classification offered by MacIntyre, making the model appear inadequate if not distorted. In *After Virtue*, having already dismissed the ‘Encyclopedic’ version of normative inquiry, MacIntyre argues that in order to resolve the crisis of moral authority (i.e., the polynomous state) in liberal Modernity, we are left to choose between two alternatives—"Nietzsche or Aristotle?”, he asks—and concludes that we must opt for neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, because Nietzschean “Genealogy” is solely “negative”, “subversive”, and entirely without a positive vision of value.

Thereby, in response to MacIntyre and to substantiate my claim, I raised the following questions toward which I oriented my exegesis of Nietzsche: I asked 1) whether Nietzsche provides a coherent critique of Modernity and on what grounds? 2) whether or not this critique posits an affirmative project that goes beyond a random mishmash of ‘denials’ and ‘subversions’? 3) whether or not this critique advances an equally positive normative framework that is
(internally) ‘consistent’ with the general aims of the project? And, 4) whether or not Nietzsche’s political philosophy (if it even exists) is compatible with his normative and ethical theory (praxis) and his general ‘philosophy of life’ (theoria), as well as an appropriate means for actualizing his affirmative vision. As shown in the last two parts of this study, the answer to all these questions is a resounding yes! Thus, we can now confidently assert that MacIntyre was incorrect to accept wholesale the general postist interpretation of Nietzsche as a negative thinker and to base his view of the Genealogical “tradition” on this faulty interpretation (cf. Foucauldian). MacIntyre’s profound misreading of the Nietzschean project—casting Nietzsche as a knowing or unknowing provocateur of nihilism, a champion of radical solipsism, and as the final stage in the unfolding of liberal individualism—has a further consequence in problematizing MacIntyre’s normative scheme and showing it to be misleading and deficient. Accordingly, the most immediate consequence of my interpretation then is to challenge Nietzsche’s position as the standard-bearer for MacIntyre’s Genealogical normative category and more generally to reject the caricatured conventional picture of Nietzsche as a prophet of doom and nihilism, or the champion for radical subjectivism and solipsistic egoism. In other words, if the normative position represented by Genealogy effectively corresponds to the normative stances of the likes of Foucault, Deleuze, and many other postists, then where in the scheme could we situate the historical Nietzsche? Of course, my view is that Nietzsche deserves his own category—“anthro-culturalism” (cf. the fifth mode of thought)—coming to terms with which would expand the MacIntyrean framework to six, rather than the three, groupings.

Moreover, I raised a more general question about whether MacIntyre was right in the first place to cast the Modern problematic in especially moral and normative terms—i.e., as a crisis of
values or moral confusion. I proposed that MacIntyre’s exclusively axiological and normative critique of Modernity is not comprehensive and deep enough, for it underestimates or rather generally overlooks the central place/role of meaning in the architecture of values. I have now defended the view that Nietzsche approaches the problematic of Modernity (i.e., nihilism) from a different philosophical ground, treating it as a crisis of meaning and agency and not simply as one of values. He upends the MacIntyrean picture, which views the value of virtues as internal to their practice —i.e., valuable both in the pursuit of the Good (as the ultimate ideal) and in making the life of individual persons meaningful (through their practice). In his holistic, perspectivist, and neo-culturalist account, Nietzsche reverses the familiar and classical (idealist) framework which identifies values as the source of meaning; for Nietzsche, it is culture and (its various) meaning-schemes which give rise to and justify values, whereby values emerge as means for sustaining a Weltanschauung and its dominant paradigm of meaning.

From Nietzsche’s (holistic) point of view, ‘values’ are only valuable externally and instrumentally. It is in this light that the ‘death of God’ arises as the foundational problem for the West and Modernity in the aftermath of the Enlightenment: because even if people continue to rigidly uphold the (noxious) Christian values (cf. slave morality) for a while (as many do so today), Nietzsche’s profound observation is that those values have nevertheless lost their grounding and been devalued—they have become essentially meaningless as a result of the Christian semiotic paradigm (cf. the ‘ascetic ideal’) having been supplanted. Hence, from the Nietzschean standpoint, the cause of our Modern ailment is not epistemological nor is it primarily axiological (for these are only ever symptomatic of the sickness) but cultural and ontological, resulting in (cultural) passivity and loss in vitality and (genuine) life in the West (especially is that the case for us ‘last
men’)! It should be rather obvious by now that I find this third-order analysis of the Modern *aporia* (focusing on the ‘why’ *behind* the values) Nietzsche provides to be, on the whole, more penetrating and generally more nuanced and provocative than MacIntyre’s second-order analysis (emphasizing the *how to* and/or *what* of values). I also think this new Nietzschean picture both complicates and enhances the MacIntyrean classification (as well as critiques of Modernity in general) in interesting ways.

Most importantly, one direct implication of Nietzsche’s account and his philosophical anthropology is that we can begin to reimagine the normative model MacIntyre supplies: to conceive of it not as rival versions of (moral) *inquiry* that promise eventual *rational* adjudication and agreement within an ‘alethic quest’, but in terms of *pre-rational* (and even *pre-affective*) normative/metaphysical *orientations* that correspond to various dispositional and instinctual differences embodied in (*types of*) man. In Nietzsche’s account, different ‘psycho-physiologies’ lead to *perspectival* variations that in turn produce different ‘dispositional-spiritual’ orientations. In offering up his own *differential* normative model, MacIntyre is certainly on to something worthwhile, if not for anything other than affirming the possibility of typological differences. But his *typology* is fundamentally ‘idealistic’ (using the term in the Nietzschean sense), aiming still for ultimate substantive unity in the ideal (i.e., the Good), and thus generally (viz. sociologically and historically) *teleological*. Furthermore, his aim is to *rationally* adjudicate the moral disagreements that, for him, define Modernity. Conversely, Nietzsche’s fundamental (life-centered) perspectivism and his emphasis on ‘psycho-physiology’ mean that any metaphysical/normative model derived from his account must think of typological differences in *personal* and *physiological* terms, privileging human *drives* (*Triebe*) and differential ‘wills to power’. A
The Nietzschean model would thus preclude the possibility of rational adjudication and consensus, finding it unrealistic and ‘anti-natural’: power (understood spiritually and instinctually), rather than ‘reason’, is the grand arbiter within the Nietzschean classification. Likewise, MacIntyre sees questions of justice in exclusively rational terms—thus, despite their varied embodiments under different ‘standards of rationality’, the incommensurability of ‘traditions’ is deemed only a temporary fact, which could ultimately be appropriately adjudicated by means of a recourse to reason and through rational moral inquiries. Hence, the underlying suggestion is that if only we could find a common ‘language’, we can (at least in theory) transcend the ‘incommensurability’ and ‘untranslatability’ of ‘traditions. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, genuine conceptions of justice too are ‘pre-rational’ and rooted in the inherent biology of life—thus he speaks of ‘natural justice’ compatible with organic ‘orders of rank’—with reason perhaps only instrumentally important to help us communicate this empirical/naturalist picture (of constitutional difference and differential conceptions of reality).

Therefore, our acceptance of the Nietzschean account would radically alter the MacIntyrean framework. For not only would its understanding of (human) reality make the very notion of an alethic quest and ultimate substantive unity appear non-sensical and anti-realist, but it fundamentally ‘decenter’ the scholar whose (customary) task (especially so in the MacIntyrean model) it is to persuade rationally and defend positions through appeals to reason, discourse, and argument. No wonder, Nietzsche requires new philosophers and dispenses with old philosophy. From the Nietzschean perspective, (spiritual) disagreements and conflicts are not just a particular feature of Modern life but of life in general, necessitating agon as an ever-present fact of human life and a characteristic of all spiritual undertakings for man within which ‘agreement’ is forged—
signaling a rather processive unity. In this agonistic process (best concretized within the dynamics of ‘culture’), thinking persons (as opposed to everyday common people who are simply instinctivized and habituated in the dominant paradigm of meaning and value that defines their culture-complex at a given time) will fundamentally gravitate to those conceptions of reality which they find express their inner dispositions and ‘pathoses’ most accurately and faithfully. Thus it is that we can say, for example, that the theistic, unitary, and ordered account (of the world) MacIntyre provides (i.e., as being) would be fundamentally disagreeable to those persons constitutionally predisposed to viewing the world as a tragic, atheistic, and manifold flux (i.e., as becoming), and vice versa. Nietzsche himself would characterize this fundamental divide by means of the symbolism offered by the Apollonian (will to unity, order, and being) and Dionysian (will to difference, creation, and becoming).

In my understanding of the Nietzschean model, I (from a position of a neutral spectator) have chosen to emphasize what Nietzsche sees as the various kinds of man and paradigms continuously evident in the history of mankind and accordingly expanded the MacIntyrean model into a ‘six-class’ categorization, where the anthro-cultural (metaphysical/tragic/spiritual) orientation or ‘mode of life’ is but one approach to make sense of life among five others. This would seemingly open the door to charges of intellectual relativism to couple that of a more general cultural relativism. While I think Nietzsche, in his radical perspectivism, would take full ownership of such charges, I believe his account is more complicated, raising interesting questions. Especially, if Nietzsche does not defend the anthro-cultural position on ‘rational’ and ‘substantive’ grounds as True per se (as MacIntyre does for his Traditional account), then how could we, the good children of Zarathustra, defend it?
Within his own account, I think Nietzsche manages to thwart the charge of intellectual relativism (if not the cultural one) and does so from two different directions. First, as alluded to before and indicated again by the example above, we should note that, as part of his ‘philosophy of life’, Nietzsche (akin to MacIntyre who ultimately comes to view all normative inquiries through the binary prism of two “traditions”—‘liberal individualism’ vs. ‘neo-Thomism’) also comes to develop a dualistic typological classification, informed by what he thinks are two fundamental approaches (or wills) toward the tragic circumstance of life. In characteristic bio-physical language, he calls them “strong”, “healthy” and generative wills (i.e., the ‘will to life’, affirming of man’s tragic existence—cf. Dionysian) and “weak”, “unhealthy” and décadent ones (i.e., the will to deny life, looking to escape man’s tragic condition—cf. Apollonian). Moreover, Nietzschean genealogy (of the West) points to a positive correlation between the presence and/or ascendency of strong and courageous wills (associated with ‘great men’/Übermenschen or Dionysian types) and the historic periods of higher and healthy culture (cf. archaic Greece and the Renaissance). What is more, for our own analysis, the Dionysian types, despite being quite rare in number, are the ones who (as argued earlier) are naturally inclined to the anthro-cultural orientation and the sort of aristocratic ethics of distance and virtù it promotes. Thus, Nietzsche could make an empirical and pragmatic claim regarding the desirability of the (rare) strong types and, in line with his life-affirmations, champion the anthro-cultural conception of the world (particularly as it relates to Übermenschen’s ‘breeding’).

Secondly (and this is a general point about Nietzschean epistemology), the different, non-idealist understanding of reality (as is) under Nietzschean Lebensphilosophie (and its acceptance of tragedy as a fact of life) entails an equally radical and realist conception of truth. So, it is
incorrect to say that Nietzsche does not value truth or that his account is a post-alethic one (it would be non-sensical for him to write as he does if he thought such a thing): it is rather the case that, for Nietzsche, ‘truth’ is not a substantive ideal to attain but instead an approach or a ‘cast of mind’ to inhabit—a “genuine” inclination to convey and reflect reality as it actually is in nature and life. Truth lies in being honest about life. Indeed, it is on this ground that Nietzsche would defend his ‘perspectivism’ in the first place. This is neither a minor nor an irrelevant observation where I am concerned, because part of the reasoning behind the manner in which I have casted this dissertation is to ever so tangentially respond to the contemporary literature on development and modernization theory, and it is by means of the sort of genuine, neo-culturalist, and life-affirming perspectivism Nietzsche champions that one can philosophically affirm culture-colonies as different ways/breeds of life, making us (at least in theory) cognizant of the fact that these diverse culture-complexes contribute something of immense value to the human picture and enrich the biodiversity of the human species. That, as vital as they are to the future of human species given the ceaseless and tragic contestations over meaning, cultures should be afforded the freedom (on realist grounds) to exist without ideological interference from alien universalist and idealist Weltanschauungs projecting/imposing their ways of life on them as the True form of life as such: put differently, the right of a culture to pursue its own ‘truth’ (cf. heightening), whatever substantive form(s) that takes, in a homeo-dynamic fashion within its own unique cycle of historical becoming and physiological growth is the ultimate embodiment of freedom.

Last but not least, we need to consider the practical/political implications of Nietzsche’s anthro-cultural account, informed by his tragic and visionary realism. Especially, why should we political theorists today be mindful of the Nietzschean ‘great politics’? First, the politics of
Nietzsche and MacIntyre juxtapose in interesting ways with the general scholarly debate over political realism and idealism. Indeed, the political manifestation of the anthro-cultural normative-metaphysical outlook, which I have labeled “agonistic aristocracy”, heeds Nietzsche’s radical, tragic, and physiological realism. On the one hand, Nietzsche casts and supports his radically aristocratic and hierarchical vision of society (as a “complex” body) on the account of the necessity of arrangements of this form for the actualization of creative cultural projects (cf. “Revaluation”). On the other hand, the trajectory of MacIntyre’s politics (especially toward Thomistic natural law) increasingly betrays his idealism, wherein the practice of politics itself becomes ingrained/embedded into the pursuit of the Human Good. In the final analysis, for Nietzsche, it is not ideas that generate action but personalities (i.e., psycho-physiological types); therefore, for him political practice should be especially mindful of differences among personalities and organize them properly (i.e., compatible with nature) to generate cultural action. For MacIntyre, in contrast, it is ideas that effect action, and so practices (and practical reason) should be communally oriented toward their attainment in most perfect form as ideals (viz. Truth, justice, and the Good). The politics of Nietzsche and MacIntyre therefore are especially attuned to and a derivative of their respective cosmological/philosophical realism and idealism.

The crux of this idealist-realist divide between MacIntyre and Nietzsche is evident in their different (extra-political) conceptions of (‘genuine’) authority (and its vacuum in Modernity), something which underscores yet again their instrumentalist understanding of the political. For MacIntyre, ‘genuine authority’ (whose loss is deeply affecting us now) rests with the normative (rather than the political) for it determines practices: as such, it could be (re-)established only rationally and through ethical inquiry (at a pre-political stage). His appeals to embodied practical
reason are hence designed to foster resolution to the normative crisis of authority that he thinks has so crippled us in liberal Modernity, leaving us on the brink of “a new Dark Age”. For Nietzsche, however, the only genuine form of authority is that of ‘cultural authority’ (reflexively) embodied in the Übermenschen—this being established personally and through the grand spiritual competition (cf. Geisterkrieg) between (the healthy) wills to power: a process which in itself necessitates ‘politics as agon’. It is this cultural authority and the sort of transformative agency that emanates from it that are sorely lacking in Modernity and which agonistic aristocracy is meant to remedy.\textsuperscript{739} Additionally, as a central part of Nietzsche’s philosophical anthropology, the deep nexus between cultural authority and psycho-physiology further reinforces the fact that for him ‘cultural authority’ (or the Übermenschlich authority in general) is not something which could be rationally adjudicated or arrived at consensually: it is physiological, primal, and fated (as potentiality) and must be positively affirmed and cultivated through “breeding” to actualize (cf. amor fati). Physis, not reason, is its source—nomos must only reflect and affirm it (i.e., ethically and socio-politically enforce the higher authority of the higher types).\textsuperscript{740} Speaking of nomos, it appears both Nietzsche and MacIntyre have an instrumentalist take as well on community. But here

\textsuperscript{739} In Nietzschean account, both the normative and the political forms of authority (although still immanent in the Übermenschen) are extensions of the (original) cultural authority they possess on the basis of their psycho-physiological and hence spiritual superiority; as such, the normative and the political are subsumed into the cultural.

\textsuperscript{740} In an ironic contrast to MacIntyre, we can see here that Nietzsche’s radically physiological account is far more amenable to what MacIntyre rejects as Aristotle’s ‘metaphysical biology’. In fact, if we believe, as I do, that our views on philosophical anthropology are positively foundational for all further inquiries into the human condition and human institutions (i.e. society, government, etc.), then MacIntyre’s outright rejection of Aristotelian anthropological philosophy and biological metaphysics raises serious questions about whether we could consider MacIntyre a genuine champion of the Aristotelian tradition. Arguably, that original rejection (of the ‘metaphysical biology’) invites MacIntyre’s distancing from and circumventing the seemingly aristocratic social/political theory of Aristotle. Nietzsche, on the other hand, decidedly abides by both, not to speak also of the clear parallels between the Nietzschean Übermensch and the Aristotelian megalopsychia (the ‘magnanimous’ ones—see Nicomachean Ethics, IV.3, 1123b1-2). Moreover, Nietzschean politics is apprehensive of any conception of ‘laws’ with which to constrain the Übermenschen’s freedom and creativity; recall the Aristotle’s suggestion in Politics that the best regime is perhaps one in which ruling does not require any ‘laws’ at all. Thus, from this vantage point, Nietzsche appears far more Aristotelian, in human (anthropological) and practical (political) terms, than MacIntyre himself is.
too, while MacIntyre prioritizes the Good (and the aesthetic quest) over the community, for Nietzsche, the (healthy) community, whose establishment—as a hierarchical, socio-political, and complex structure that affirms ‘aristocracy’—constitutes the immediate goal of the state, is just a means for attaining higher culture and securing future cultural growth.

Secondly, while many of us moderns (especially in the West) might appropriately feel that we today live under democratic regimes, both Nietzsche and MacIntyre have cast tremendous doubt on the reality of this suggestion. Each in his own way insists that Modern politics, despite its radically democratic and egalitarian thrust/posturing, remains in the paradoxical position of being both intrinsically hierarchical and socially fragmented. Indeed, Modern politics is to MacIntyre essentially “civil war carried on by other means”. The democratic pretensions or “rhetoric” of the liberal order notwithstanding, he believes liberal democracies of advanced Modern societies are simply “disguised” oligarchies which impose their will (on “the most fundamental issues”) by means of the legal-rational ‘Weberian’ state (and by determining the range of permitted alternatives).

Given Nietzsche’s own concerns about “civilization” and the homogenizing modern state, I think he would find these observations generally valid but also strongly reject the lofty egalitarian sentiment that motivates them in MacIntyre’s case. While for MacIntyre, hierarchies are a ‘sociological’ phenomenon (i.e., of man’s own doing) which persist as an especial and unfortunate characteristic of our (liberal) Modern societies—with the suggestion

741 AV, p. 253
742 Alasdair MacIntyre, “Politics, Philosophy, and the Common Good”, The MacIntyre Reader, p. 236-237. MacIntyre also decries here the general compartmentalization of life in Modernity, writing “just as philosophy has thereby been rendered unpolitical, so politics has been rendered unphilosophical”. This is, on the whole, a sentiment with which Nietzsche would also agree, for whom Lebensphilosophie and Kulturwissenschaft must go hand in hand in interpreting human existence and making it meaningful. Indeed, as I have stressed earlier, Nietzsche thinks specialization itself to be associated with mediocre and average lives (although necessary economically), while one distinctive quality of the Übermensch is their being generalists about culture and human life (cf. ‘physicians of culture’).
being that we can potentially eradicate them in the future and achieve a truly democratic/egalitarian society and politics once we emerge out of our ‘new Dark Age’, Nietzsche believes orders of rank and differentiation to be natural to all forms of organization and complex structures—and rooted in life (as a biological system) itself.

Given the organic development of politics (a “complex”/body that is a corollary to the human evolution of “culture”/Geist) in the Nietzschean view, the presence of hierarchy (in politics) mirrors that of its “biological” development in the body, making it an indispensable part of the very idea of political organization. It follows that the radically democratic (and postist) political aspirations of MacIntyre would seem from the Nietzschean standpoint to be simply unrealistic, utopian, and even quixotic. Thus, Nietzsche calls attention to the fundamental disparity that exists between the Modern attachment to the democratic ideals and the inherent nature and function of all politics (which in genuine and uncorrupted form is an aristocratic order purposed for cultural growth). He has no doubt that the incongruous, distorted, and disjointed situation, which characterizes contemporary relationship between (an idealized conception of) normativity and reality or between values longed-for and idolized (in Modernity) and the sort of praxis necessary (to life), cannot endure; hence, he calls for a rebalancing and “revaluation” of our substantive values and normative aims in order to make them compatible again with the reality and needs of life (cf. Lebensphilosophie). Especially is this important given the crisis of meaning in Modernity (i.e., existential nihilism) that has left us on the precipice of cultural demise and hungry for (earthly) myths and meaning, underscoring further the vital need for recovery of cultural agency and mythopoetic activity and thus (re)propagation of the Übermenschlich. So, whereas MacIntyre wants our politics to better reflect our egalitarian mindset in Modernity,
Nietzsche aims to fundamentally sublate and change both that mindset and the (oligarchic-ochlocratic) politics of subverted hierarchies and false elites that epitomize Modernity, deeming them both positively dangerous if we are to have any hope for cultural regeneration. His substitute for them is a genuine (neo-)aristocracy of *rightful* elites (cf. Übermenschen) underpinned by an ‘ethic of distance’ based in values such as *criticality*, *virtù*, *desert*, *honesty/realism*, and *magnanimity*: in other words, a restoration of the archaic, proportional conception of equality that for him amounts to ‘natural justice’ itself.

Ultimately and perhaps ironically, Nietzsche suggests that the intensification in Modernity of social leveling, spiritual democratism, and general uniformity and conformity culminating in the ‘last men’—whose only religion is ‘equality as such’ and only ethos *ressentiment*—could pave the way for the coming of tyrants and despots who would use the levers of the modern state to fully dominate the masses. Yet, Nietzsche also points out that the abysmal condition which spawns such catastrophic men could be the same one to propel also the Übermenschen (as spiritual/geistig masters) to reclaim their throne at the top of the human pyramid. Thus, despite his radical pessimism, Nietzsche holds out hope for the future ascendancy of the Übermenschen and thus affirms the possibility that mythopoetic activity and cultural generation could be kickstarted once more, revitalizing the West.

When all is said and done, Nietzsche’s overall philosophy is not only focused on life as such but rather is one which especially privileges *becoming* and *change* in his conception of life, something that is further rooted perhaps in his *biological* view of time. With respect to his practical (or *affirmative*) philosophy, this general emphasis entails a radical focus on the *conditions* and *requirements* for realizing social and cultural change. How could human societies (or culture-
complexes) undergo fundamental transformations and paradigm shifts in such a way as to preserve their dynamic nature in history? This is a formative and central question in Nietzschean philosophy. Nietzsche’s tragic and humanist realism seeks the sources of such changes not in ideas per se but in a special kind of life-affirming, active, and creative human agents who imagine, will, and actualize them—the Übermenschen. He thus advocates for a (healthy) ‘order of rank’ and an aristocratic organization of society not as goods in themselves, but because he sees them as inherently necessary for the generation and breeding of these outstanding individuals. Therefore, in a time when ideas such as grassroot, collective activism and bottom-up, popular revolution are held up as surest paths and beacons to achieving fundamental social changes, Nietzsche provocatively proposes that the sort of fundamental cultural and spiritual transformation which is necessary requires instead a ‘top-down’ approach predicated on a re-affirmation of hierarchy (as both fact and value) within human societies. Structural change, he suggests, needs hierarchies and orders of rank to accomplish. But really it is (dynamic) ‘cultural agency’ that he seeks to invigorate and protect. Like his contemporary J.S. Mill, Nietzsche is especially cognizant of the fact that values and orders of men could in time crystalize into ‘dead dogmas’ and orthodoxies, which are solely given to conserving the status quo in a community and resisting changes to it (no matter how décadent or degenerative an ancien order might have become). Nietzsche’s aristocratic and tragic understanding of liberty (reserved for the Übermenschlich), then, is meant as a corrective mechanism to allow the great poetic and visionary persons of a culture to break the old encrustations and replace the deadening routinized values with new tablets that are hopefully regenerative and life-enhancing.
Nietzsche’s recognition of the deep practical-poietic relationship between value-creation or “revaluation” and (great) politics—a coming together of theoria, poiesis, and praxis—makes his project as a whole much more consistent, leaving it on a more solid and philosophically defensible ground. Nevertheless, whether we conceive of the impending crisis as a clash of incommensurable viewpoints or “traditions” with MacIntyre or view it as a clash of divergent (exceptional) personalities as Nietzsche does, what seems a certain possibility is that an Earth-shattering, millennial clash is coming—a period which is perhaps even more than usual characterized by agon. Nietzsche thinks it a grand spiritual war, or a war of spirits (Geisterkrieg). But what about the standards with which to make sense of this clash/agon, what are the rules of the competition and how would the victors be determined? In his tragic and visionary realism, Nietzsche downplays the significance of reason within such historic, future-guaranteeing clashes, emphasizing the centrality of power (or will to power understood in most general and spiritual sense) to the agonistic struggle over meaning and value. Spiritual power, imagination, and creativity, in the Nietzschean account, need not and ultimately could not be justified—they simply are, as a force of life. Few happen to have them, thus permitting them to take active part in the coming wars; other do not— This, for Nietzsche, is not a moral statement but an empirical fact, albeit one with profound ethical implications.
EPILOGUE

Nietzsche famously regarded the Renaissance “a great in vain”—a missed opportunity for cultural triumph against idealism and metaphysics and the ressentimental ethos they empower.\(^{743}\) We can add to that at this juncture and say that not only when we in the West unfortunately chose Luther over Machiavelli in that originally fateful moment Nietzsche recalls, but when we interpreted Enlightenment as an accomplishment of Locke and Kant, rather than Vico and Herder (those sleeping giants of Enlightenment), when in the 19th century, in our affective turn against ‘reason’ we became enthralled by Rousseau’s romanticism rather than grasping the true force of the aesthetics of Schiller before substituting Goethe’s sensualist organicism for Hegel’s rationalistic syntheses, and when in the aftermath of industrialization and for well over a century we gave our hearts and minds to Marx instead of Nietzsche—each time was an opportunity lost for cultural renewal and a corrective to the pathologies of Modernity, and each time we fell more and more into the abyss of meaninglessness and cultural passivity which reveal themselves as nihilism and the ‘last man’ in our time, and left more and more alienated from those conditions and requirements of health which invigorate cultural heightening.

As Thomas Alexander writes on his formulation of cultural pragmatism (informed by the school of philosophical anthropology) with which I believe Nietzsche would agree for it also resonates with Nietzsche’s own nuanced notion of physiology (and pathology), we must begin to think of the aporia of meaning...

\(^{743}\) \textit{AC}, §61
In terms of human need (or *eros*) for meaning and the ways that need is met in existence...human beings have a basic need to experience existence with meaning and value; otherwise we suffer and die. ...[Hence,] our various cultures can be described as “spiritual ecologies”. Human beings inhabit nature through culture and culture is what provides the environment of meaning to sustain the Human Eros. We do not exist merely as biological – much less as neurological – beings; we exist through culture. Different cultures have found different ways to weave a spiritual ecology of meaning and value around those who live within it. But each culture can be understood as one possible answer to the questions “What is the meaning of life? How shall we live?” One aim of cultural pragmatism is to examine these ecologies of meaning and the consequences that flow from them, i.e., cultural praxeis. By examining the worlds of human meaning and how they are embodied in cultural action there would be a larger sense of the possibilities of meaning through which we could critically reflect on our own culture. Possibilities would be operative as immanently present. Cultural pragmatism would take up the critical question of how the Human Eros might best be served – what sort of world would it be in which human existence found its greatest fulfillment? How should cultures seek to enrich the possibilities for meaningful existence? Perhaps those cultures are richest that provide the best resources for people to live meaningful lives. Perhaps this concern should be a primary aim of education.744

If MacIntyre’s and before him Hegel’s philosophy can be dubbed (at the risk of sounding facetious) *Unity through Multiplicity*, Nietzsche’s is precisely the inverse: *Multiplicity through Unity*. Nietzsche’s all-encompassing *unity* is *psycho-physiological* bridging the body-spirit divide that has ignited the futile oscillation between doctrines of materialism and idealism ever since Platonic philosophy abstracted itself from archaic Greek poetry and its thick notion of tragedy. It is *cultural*, overcoming the nature-nurture false dichotomy. And perhaps most vital of all, it is both *conceptual* and *perspectivist*, which by circumventing the superficial antitheses of Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, and Truth and Lie and by refusing even to engage with them on their narrow

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744 Thomas M. Alexander, “Linguistic Pragmatism and Cultural Naturalism: Noncognitive Experience, Culture, and the Human Eros”, *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 2014, VI, 2, p. 85. It could be plausibly argued that Nietzsche independently developed his own brand of pragmatism (which as suggested in many ways and especially philosophically parallels Alexander’s recovery of pragmatist philosophy) by further developing the philosophical anthropology of Herder as well as owing perhaps to Nietzsche’s exposure to Herbert Spencer’s *The Data of Ethics* and Emerson’s essays.
planes finally succeeds in escaping the age-old contradictory and conflictual pitfalls that plague the dualistic binary conceptions of the world (as antagonisms) espoused by the likes of Socrates and Plato and which leave us within the framework of such binding polaristic schemes as to make a monistic understanding of Truth (as absolute) and an ensuing perennial universalism (i.e. metaphysics) sound plausible or even justified. After all, no one chooses evil over its opposite; and thus, evil justifies at once a universally vindicated Goodness—and even if this universal and incessant dance was all based on a lie, a fiction, or a delusion as Nietzsche claims, we were all nonetheless enthralled/enchanted/entranced by it, spellbound to partake in this sorrowful nihilistic dance ad infinitum...that is of course until Nietzsche intervened, stepping up to breed and cultivate his übèrmenschen who can only dance the joyous dance of life guided by his affirmative yes-saying philosophy of laughter!

Despite what some in the so-called post-modern and existentialist camps suppose, Nietzsche is no voluntarist and individualist. And he never was in any of his intellectual periods. Nor, as existentialist interpreters like Walter Kaufman like to imagine, is he the progenitor of existentialist philosophy. He is also not a phenomenologist in disguise or even a reaction to it as Heidegger would have it. Following Goethe, Nietzsche is concerned with the body as a sensuous totality both physiologically (overcoming the subject-object phenomenon-noumenon schism), and, in the way he views culture itself as a sort of holistic organic body. For him, the whole is always more consequential than its parts even if this whole is at the same time dependent on the generative creative parts it inevitably breeds to advance its metamorphosis. Nietzsche does not so much concern himself with the identities of his übèrmensch, what they experience (as a subject in reaction to the phenomenal world) or otherwise go through to become who they are. What matters
is only that they exist and overcome (both their milieu and their times) in their genuine individuality. Only that they be untimely and contrarian and become what they are fated to be at the end (and as far as Nietzsche is personally concerned be good Europeans!). Becoming is all there is and all pretense to being is just that—a fantastic pretense.

Accepting the reality of becoming and the tragic chaos it ushers, accepting meaninglessness as a priori, is the first and formative step towards a this-worldly, life-celebrating, joyous redemption via a will to power driven by the life-serving pathos of distance, which animates a healthy will to meaning creating a meaning for life not against it, so that life itself can enrich and enhance itself within its evolved medium of culture. Strength is needed to accept Nietzsche’s organismic Realität where destruction and creation too are wed once more as Dionysus and Apollo were once before in Greece’s heroic and archaic age. And all this strength and heroic courage in the face of Nietzsche’s princely teaching of the eternal recurrence and eternal return is salutary and instrumental, for Nietzsche demands that the great types (who are but the microcosm of the macrocosm) embrace and harness their fated generative and creative powers and accomplish their physiological acts of heroism in the grand scheme of things, rejuvenating and revitalizing their culture and spawning its renewal—almost as a successful selected-for gene does for the organism (and the species at large) in the process of natural selection. In this novel physiologically-inspired-and-driven conception of culture, the whole of reality is comprised of multiple different realities animated as sui generis organic breeds of culture (Zucht) whose health is dependent on eternal change and an ever-dynamic evolution and adaptation—from unity to multiplicity indeed. As Nietzsche declares already in Dawn (1881) presaging the inherent unity even of the macrocosm
(culture) and the microcosm (Übermenschlich) in the philosophy of what I have named anthropoculturalism,

When we try to examine the [cultural] mirror in itself we discover in the end nothing but things upon it. If we want to grasp the things we finally get hold of nothing but the mirror—This, in the most general terms, is the history of knowledge.

Only in being bonded to service, and in serving those above them in the social architecture under a healthy order of rank, in being subservient and slaves “in some sense or other” [BGE, 257], could most (the higher-minded Ubermensch exempted) become their fated selves fulfilling their potential. As Huddleston argues, for Nietzsche,

The best sort of life is one in which a person participates in a flourishing culture, even just by making a lowly contribution—whether lugging the stones to build the cathedral or sweeping Beethoven’s floor. For this is what truly ennobles a person and, according to Nietzsche, grants his or her life its highest worth and dignity. Although Nietzsche is hostile to the idea of innate human dignity and its egalitarian trappings enshrined in Christianity and Kantianism, he offers his own revisionary conception of human dignity—a respect merited by what one is able to accomplish and thus possessed in radically different degrees by different people.745

Nietzsche Lebensphilosophie envisions a life revolving around the “consecration of culture” as the surest way to affirm life in its full tragic picture. Or as Huddleston clarifies, “Human lives, Nietzsche thinks, have their highest worth and dignity when they are ‘consecrat[ed] to culture’ (UM, III:6)—when they are lived, indeed even sacrificed, in its service. 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… 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. 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.” That dynamic form of life is the cultural organism, the heightening of which depends on the few Dionysian types that embody the ‘pathos of distance’ in its fullest and most liberating form.


\[\text{\textendash} \text{\textendash}, *Being and Time*, 1962.


Knoll, Manuel and Stocker, Barry (eds.), *Nietzsche as Political Philosopher*, De Gruyter, 2014.


Ortega y Gasset, Jose, The Revolt of the Masses, Norton & Company, 1932 (1930).


Riehl, Alois, Friedrich Nietzsche, der Künstler und der Denker, 1897.


APPENDIX A: ABBREVIATIONS

MACINTYRE

MR The MacIntyre Reader. Knight, Kelvin, ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

NIETZSCHE

AOM Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche (in Menschliches Allzumenschliches II): frequently translated as Assorted Opinions and Maxims
BGE Jenseits von Gut und Böse; translated as Beyond Good and Evil
BT Die Geburt der Tragödie; translated as The Birth of Tragedy
CW Der Fall Wagner; translated as The Case of Wagner
D Morgenröthe; frequently translated as Daybreak or Dawn
DS David Strauss (Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I)
GM Zur Genealogie der Moral; frequently translated as On the Genealogy of Morals or On the Genealogy of Morality
GS Die fröhliche Wissenschaft; frequently translated as The Gay Science or The Joyful Wisdom
HAH Menschliches, Allzumenschliches; translated as Human, All Too Human
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HL</td>
<td>Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben (Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen II)</td>
<td>On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>&quot;Idyllen aus Messina&quot;</td>
<td>Idylls from Messina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWB</td>
<td>Richard Wagner in Bayreuth (Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen IV)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Schopenhauer als Erzieher (Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen III)</td>
<td>Schopenhauer as Educator</td>
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<tr>
<td>TI</td>
<td>Götzendämmerung; translated as Twilight of the Idols; references to this work also include an abbreviated section name</td>
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<tr>
<td>UM</td>
<td>Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen; frequently translated as Untimely Meditations, Unmodern Observations, or Unfashionable Observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>WS</td>
<td>Der Wanderer und sein Schatten (in Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II); translated as The Wanderer and His Shadow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Also sprach Zarathustra (part IV originally published privately); translated as Thus Spoke Zarathustra; references to this work also include an abbreviated section name.</td>
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<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Der Antichrist; frequently translated as The Antichrist or The Antichristian</td>
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<tr>
<td>DD</td>
<td>Dionysos-Dithyramben; translated as Dionysian Dithyrambs</td>
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<tr>
<td>DW</td>
<td>&quot;Die dionysische Weltanschauung&quot;; translated as &quot;The Dionysian Worldview&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>EH</td>
<td>Ecce Homo; references to this work also include an abbreviated section name</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEI</td>
<td>&quot;Über die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten&quot;; translated as “On the Future of Our Educational Institutions”</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSSt</td>
<td>&quot;Der griechische Staat&quot;</td>
<td>The Greek State</td>
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<tr>
<td>HC</td>
<td>&quot;Homer's Wettkampf&quot;; translated as “Homer’s Contest”</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCP</td>
<td>&quot;Homer und die klassische Philologie&quot;; translated as “Homer and Classical Philology”</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCW</td>
<td>Nietzsche contra Wagner</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>&quot;Die vorplatonischen Philosophen&quot;; translated as &quot;The Pre-Platonic Philosophers&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTAG</td>
<td>&quot;Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen&quot;; translated as Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGT</td>
<td>&quot;Sokrates und die griechische Tragödie&quot;; translated as &quot;Socrates and Greek Tragedy&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>TL</td>
<td>&quot;Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne&quot;; frequently translated as &quot;On Truth and Lies in an Extra-moral Sense&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPh</td>
<td>“Wir Philologen&quot;; translated as &quot;We Philologists” or &quot;We Classicists&quot;</td>
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