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Nietzsche: A Response to Kant's Sundering of the World

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Introduction

Chapter 1. Introductory remarks on Kant's problematic, the attempt by many philosophers to heal that split, and its continued relevance in today's world.

Friedrich Nietzsche is one of the most revolutionary and influential philosophers of post-Romantic Germany. He called into question ancient habits of mind and ingrained moral prejudices prevalent in European cultures since the rise of Christendom. The intellectual and popular communities, in Germany and Europe at large, primarily disregarded Nietzsche's work until after his death. However, contemporary continental thinkers have been greatly influenced by Nietzsche and his provocative rhetoric. Nietzsche's work is particularly remarkable in light of his upbringing and childhood experiences. The scion of a long line of Lutheran ministers, Nietzsche mounted a critique of traditional piety and religious institutions that was unprecedented in its force and insight.

Nietzsche came from an intellectual family and was inspired by the considerable efforts of earlier German thinkers. In general, the development and articulation of any philosopher's ideas are dependent on the environment in which he or she exists. For this reason, and to gain a better understanding of Nietzsche's personality, this study will place great emphasis on the biographical information pertaining to both Nietzsche and other German thinkers who influenced him. It is impossible to fully understand the position and concerns of philosophers like Nietzsche and Kant without first delving into their childhood and education. In the case of Nietzsche, a whole tradition of German intellectualism affected his view of the world and the ideas that he adopted and later reshaped into an penetrating examination of the foundations of Western European culture.

The philosophers that had the most impact on Nietzsche's life were Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Kant was the principal philosopher of the Idealist movement, a school of thought that underlined the mind's ability to make its own laws, both moral and epistemological. He emphasized the need to account for the possibility of human freedom and moral obligation in a world governed by the laws of Newtonian science. Faced with these seemingly "absolute" laws of nature, Kant struggled to understand and allow for human freedom, the freedom that most people take for granted, even in today's increasingly technological world.

In order to make room for both freedom and science in a single philosophical system, Kant split the world into two parts: the noumenal and the phenomenal. Kant defined the noumenal realm as the reality that underlies sensible appearances. Human freedom, Kant believed, was part of this ultimate reality. The phenomenal realm is the world of appearances, where neither freedom nor moral duty exists. Nietzsche spent most of his life trying to address the dilemma posed by Kant's split world. He was preceded in his efforts by Schopenhauer and Goethe, both of whom believed that art served to mediate between the two realms. Nietzsche, for his part, argued that free will, in the Kantian sense, is not possible. Like Schopenhauer and Goethe, Nietzsche relied on art as the means to compensate for the loss of objective purpose and meaning in the aftermath of the Kantian revolution.

In the early part of his life, Nietzsche was strongly influenced by the work of Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer was a pessimist and a follower of the idealist school of Kant. Unlike many of the other Idealists of the time, Schopenhauer maintained the Kantian notion of the split between appearance and reality. Schopenhauer's

acceptance of Kant's dual world is reflected in his belief that finite, or individual, wills are part of the realm of appearance. At the level of the noumenal, individual wills do not exist, but are instead part of an infinite, or noumenal, Will that pervades the entire universe. By definition, a free, finite will is impossible. Therefore, the feeling of separateness that affects individuals is illusory, as everyone is part of a collective consciousness. This divine or absolute will is not a benign guardian or protector, but rather it is an irrational force that is totally indifferent to individual purposes of any kind, or the importance of human survival. Schopenhauer embraces art as a means for escaping the frustrating morass of an existence that is dominated by the capricious, collective Will.

Goethe, Germany's greatest poet, was one of the earliest German thinkers to deal with and try to reunite the sundered realms of Kant. In contrast to Schopenhauer, Goethe's approach to the split between the real and the illusory is to claim that mankind inhabits, of necessity, the realm of the finite. Complications arise as people are inevitably drawn to the infinite even though they are unable to achieve that goal because of natural human limitations. Goethe addresses the split world crisis by arguing that the answer to the problem is an aesthetic reconciliation. While Schopenhauer considers art a temporary salve for the hopelessness of human life, Goethe thinks that the aesthetic can be the source of salvation for the world. Artists stand at the critical juncture between completed Creation and human striving, and it is at this threshold that Goethe calls them to serve mankind. The artists are able to suggest the eventual union of the realms of appearance and reality by capturing the beauty of the world within his art. Most

importantly, the artist uses his craft to manifest the harmony that should exist between humanity and the cosmos.

The split world of finite givens and infinite striving, as articulated by both Kant and Schopenhauer, is still relevant to contemporary philosophy. Science, morality, and the human freedom presupposed by the latter are just as significant in today's world as they were 200 years ago when Kant first defined the crisis. Many of today's great debates, such as cloning and automation, center on whether science is stripping away the very freedom that is the root of morality. Clearly, the foundational tenets of science and morality are still in conflict and the question of whether there can be free will to make ethical decisions in a world dominated by ever-increasing scientific and technological superiority is still alive and well.

Kant's problematic, which was a source of frustration for Nietzsche throughout his life, was also the impetus for his career. For many years after Kant's revolutionary Critiques were published, European philosophy was in a state of chaos because of this seemingly unsolvable dilemma. So, as Schopenhauer and Goethe had done before him, Nietzsche set to work to bring the two separate worlds into harmonious union by using the aesthetic. Despite Nietzsche's considerable effort to solve this crisis, he was unable to provide a satisfactory solution. The prevalence of the same predicament in modern times is convincing evidence of this point; nevertheless, the conception of art that was forged during the course of this crisis retains its force today. In order to grasp the religious and institutional underpinnings of both German idealism and Nietzsche's response to it, an examination of the Reformation sparked by Luther is necessary. What follows is a brief exposition of the life and major intellectual achievements of Martin

Luther. The influence of Nietzsche's Lutheran upbringing on his philosophical works will be examined, before returning to a consideration of the genesis of Kant's split world theory.

Part I

Chapter 1. Martin Luther's view on human freedom and his influence on Nietzsche.

Martin Luther (1483 - 1546) was born in the Saxon town of Eisleben in Thuringian, Germany. His parents, Hans and Margerethe Luther, were poor peasants with no real education. After Martin was born, his father moved the family to Mansfeld, where Hans Luther worked in the copper mines. Martin's childhood was not a carefree time in his life, but was marked by discipline and the harsh realities of life. Unlike his parents, Martin received a good education in German schools. First, he enrolled at a Latin school in his native Mansfeld before moving onto a new school at Magdeburg. When he was fifteen, Luther went to school at Eisenach. In the spring of 1501, Luther matriculated at the University of Erfurt as a student of the arts. At the time, Erfurt was one of the oldest and best universities in Germany, a testament to Luther's exceptional skills and intelligence. ¹In 1502, Luther graduated with a bachelor's degree and in the following year he earned his masters.

Since Nietzsche grew up a Lutheran, much of the theology and imagery of the religion, as articulated by Luther, later appeared in Nietzsche's own work. In the latter's writing, there were ample signs of the ideas that Nietzsche had garnered during his

¹John M. Todd, Martin Luther: A Biographical Study (Westminster, Great Britain: The Newman Press, 1964), p. 3.

formative years under devout parents and in strict Lutheran schools. Of course, the Christian imagery that Nietzsche employed was altered and distorted almost beyond recognition, but its presence in his books is undeniable.

Like most Europeans living in the late fifteenth century, Luther was born a Catholic and inherited the Catholic Church's long tradition and modern corruption. The Church's malaise at that time was centered on the commercialization of its services and the aristocracy's use of religion as a tool to maintain their hold on absolute authority over their domains. Aside from the physical problems that plagued the Church, Luther's primary motivation for his split with Catholicism had to do with Church canonical policy. Luther disagreed with Church doctrine when it came to the all-important issue of human freedom.

According to Catholic doctrine, every person possesses free will to make moral decisions. In stark contrast to this view of the world, Luther claims that people do not have free will in the field of morality because humanity has fallen from grace. Everything that happens is ostensibly the will of a divine power that has foreseen and preordained those actions. Nietzsche's term for this idea is *amor fati*. Basically, *amor fati* means that the events of life are divinely willed and, as R.J. Hollingdale writes, "with the consequent affirmation of life as such as *divine*, as a product of the divine will, and the implication that to hate life is blasphemous."² Basically, humans walk along a path that is already laid before them without variation. No one is capable of wandering from that path, in the sense of trying to make his or her own moral decisions, because the divine has already willed every decision and its outcome. In many ways, this conception

²R.J. Hollingdale, "Introduction," Thus Spoke Zarathustra (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 28.

of the word without any free will is somewhat similar to Schopenhauer's universal and omnipotent Will that supplants the free choice of individuals.

In this world ordered by an unmovable divinity, Luther claims that humans must devote their lives to hard work and toil, as well as to prayer. Although a life of ceaseless work and prayer seems senseless and unsatisfying, it is spent in pursuit of divine grace that is already preordained for certain individuals. The belief that the difficult life is admirable, the only way to achieve anything positive in one's lifetime, is clearly reflected in Nietzsche's writing. Nietzsche also believes that people must live on the edge of disaster in order to appreciate life and strive to better themselves.

Additionally, Nietzsche latches onto a concept of Luther's that fits perfectly into his conception of true power's higher manifestation, namely, that of divine forgiveness. Luther believes that if God so wills it, he can exonerate a person of his wicked deeds. Nietzsche secularizes this insight of Luther's by claiming that great power manifests itself as mercy. In Luther and doctrine, co-opted by Nietzsche for his own philosophy, this forgiveness or divine mercy places the human believer beyond good, evil, and the law. While Luther sees divine forgiveness as important in its own right, Nietzsche abstracts the essential point that institutional values of good and evil are not absolute.

Ultimately, the Luther and doctrine and ideal that had permeated his life since childhood clearly influenced Nietzsche and the course of his work. Nietzsche's use of Luther and doctrine, such as the calling to live dangerously, the love of fate, and the ability to escape the rigid boundaries of good and evil, would be shocking to traditional Lutherans. Most likely, Nietzsche simply drew on ideas that were lurking in his subconscious, in the sense that he did not set out to alter Christian imagery for his own

purposes. However, Nietzsche surely felt some desire to shock traditional Lutherans, and Christians generally, to force them to question their beliefs.

Chapter 2. Kant's articulation of the split world theory and the role of aesthetic judgment.

Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804) was born in the East Prussian city of Königsberg, Germany, and resided there for his entire life. Kant was raised in a financially humble and devout family. His father, a local saddler, was an extremely religious man and brought this son up to be of similar temperament. In contrast to philosophers like Nietzsche, Kant retained his pious nature until the time of his death, although he did rebel against the other religious services that he was forced to observe in school.³ It is possible that Kant's religion may have been constituted primarily by his belief in the unqualified nature of human freedom and humanity's noble task of moral legislation. As one author notes, "The salient trait in Kant's character was probably his moral earnestness and his devotion to the idea of duty, a devotion which found theoretical expression in his ethical writings."⁴ Kant is a Christian thinker whose moral sensibilities overshadow his religious sensibilities, but he never condemns Christianity as a religious institution or as a pious way to live one's life.

From 1732 until 1740, Kant attended a Lutheran grades school, Collegium Friedericianum, in Königsberg. In 1740, he enrolled in the University of Königsberg. At the university, he was introduced to the rationalist philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Christian Wolff, as well as Newtonian physics. In 1746, Kant published his

³Frederick Copleston, S.J., A History of Philosophy Volume VI: Wolff to Kant (New York, NY: The Newman Press, 1960), p. 180 - 181.

first work: *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces*, a scientific paper that was influenced by the thought of Leibniz. After graduating from university, Kant became a private tutor. Then in 1755, he returned to the University of Königsberg as a private lecturer for the next fifteen years.

As a teacher, Kant's lessons focused on science and its connections and applications to mathematics and philosophy, especially in the field of metaphysics. During his tenure as a teacher, the prevailing intellectual framework in the universities was based on the work of Leibniz, so Kant's thinking during this time was clearly influenced by the earlier German philosopher. However, Kant also respected the writings of the eminent Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the groundbreaking ideas of Sir Isaac Newton, ideas that were just being introduced to the University of Königsberg.

This explosion of intellectual accomplishment was both a blessing and a curse for Kant, as he struggled to reconcile the rationalism of Leibniz with the empiricism of Newton. Although Kant eventually broke with the traditional German philosophy of Wolff and Leibniz, he never abandoned Newtonian physics. This was not only a transitional period for Kant, but also for European thought, as science and mathematics began to erode the once-unassailable foundation of Christian dogma in Europe.⁵ Science was breaking down the authority of religion, and Kant found himself caught in the midst of this titanic struggle. As a devout Lutheran, Kant, "...saw his mission in philosophy to be the defense of science, morality, and the rationality of religion."⁶

⁴Ibid, p. 184.

⁵Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 26.

⁶Ibid, p. 26.

Kant believed that although it was good for science to gain legitimacy outside of the sphere of religion, it would be disastrous if the consequence of that development was general contempt for religious faith. At the same time, Kant possessed some knowledge of Newtonian science and he never questioned the validity of the scientific conception of the world. Kant's difficulties in formulating his own philosophical system arose on the basis of his dual belief in the value of science and the inviolability of the moral law. For how could Kant, "...reconcile with the scientific conception of the world as a law-governed system, in which each event has its determinate and determining cause, the world of moral experience which implies freedom?"⁷ Therefore, Kant's purpose was to redefine what it meant to be a rational human being in order to answer science's objection to religion and other non-scientific beliefs.⁸

In 1781, Kant set off on this mission by publishing the first of his three Critiques: *The Critique of Pure Reason*. In his first major work, Kant tried to provide a philosophical basis for science, while simultaneously denying knowledge of ultimate reality in order to make room for faith. In this way, he hoped to solve the problem of freedom: allowing for ethics without denying scientific law. Kant's thesis is that the mind does not have knowledge of things in-itself. Therefore, the mind imposes its own categories of order on the external world in order to understand it.⁹ Even though Kant denied the possibility of knowledge of things in their own right, he did not deny their existence.

Kant is in accord with the British empiricists, such as David Hume, who claim that the physical senses are an indispensable component in human knowledge. At the

⁷Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 186.

⁸Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self*, p. 26.

sametime, *apriori* processes in the mind turn this kind of sensory input into conceptual knowledge. All propositions are either analytic or synthetic. Of the class of propositions called synthetic, there can be either *apriori* or *aposteriori* statements. *Apriori* knowledge is defined as that which is prior to experience, the formal element in one's theoretical knowledge of objects. Conversely, the term *aposteriori* describes the material element in one's theoretical knowledge of objects.¹⁰ The subject thus contributes to experience, and knowledge does not arise solely from the object. According to Kant, all rational human beings use *apriori* "categories" in shaping experience, which are sometimes likened to Plato's Forms. Necessity and universality are the hallmark of a priori.¹¹

Thus, Kant connects the empiricists' understanding of knowledge with the rationalists' understanding of knowledge. A person does not have knowledge of the true "objects" of his senses that Kant terms "noumena". These are transcendental objects that are not attainable by direct human perception. A person's mind shapes the information that his senses direct to him about the transcendent or objective matter around him into recognizable forms: the phenomena of our minds.

Kant's morality, as elaborated in his famous *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, is based upon the value of the "goodwill." As Frederick Copleston writes, "... the Kantian concept of a good will is the concept of a will which is always good in itself, by virtue of its intrinsic value, and not simply in relation to the production of some end, for example, happiness."¹² Kant's system of morality defines the goodwill as one that is

⁹Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 28.

¹⁰Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 308.

¹¹Ibid, p. 309.

¹²Ibid, p. 315.

motivated primarily by duty. The only actions that possess moral worth are those that are performed for the sake of duty.¹³ In the *Groundwork*, Kant defines duty as complete allegiance to the moral law within. The creation of this moral law is in turn dependent on the concept that acts as the cornerstone for Kant's moral system: the categorical imperative.

Kant defines the categorical imperative as the rule to act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a Universal Law of Nature.¹⁴ Of the three classes of imperatives, hypothetical, assertoric, categorical, the categorical is the only imperative that is purely *a priori* in that it demands conformity to law in general. A person must perform good actions for the sake of moral duty alone. However, people are not explicitly aware of the *a priori* principles of morality, and it is the duty of the moral philosopher to discover the origins of the *a priori* elements in moral knowledge. Living a moral life will eventually make a person happy, presumably in an afterlife, when divine reward is received in return for a lifetime of struggle, a reward that Kant sees as a necessary presupposition for the pursuing of the good life.

To allow for this moral freedom in a world ruled by the rational dictates of Newtonian science, Kant splits the world into the noumenal and the phenomenal. The noumenal is the world of ultimate reality. Kant claims that the noumenal realm is the world as it is in itself and is only accessible through the activities of the will and not

¹³ According to some critical commentators, Kant argues that the baser a person's inclinations, the higher the moral value of his actions when he overcomes his evil tendencies and acts according to duty. This interpretation is not correct because it would imply that there is an irreconcilable conflict in a person between desire and morality. Kant is really claiming that when a person performs his duty contrary to his natural inclinations, the fact that he acts for the sake of duty and not out of inclination is simply clearer than if he had possessed a natural attraction to the moral deed.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

through knowledge.¹⁵ The phenomenal is the world of appearances, where freedom and moral duty do not exist. The phenomenal realm itself is only apparent and is characterized by mechanical necessity and blind causality. Unfortunately, regular humans are caught at the crossroads between the two realms.

After creating this split world hypothesis in the first and second critiques, Kant attempts to resolve the conflict in the third critique, the *Critique of Judgement*, which was published in 1790. In his third major work, Kant applies his critical method to aesthetic and teleological judgments. The chief purpose of this work was to find a bridge between the sensible and the intelligible worlds. Kant's bridge is based on the concepts of beauty and purposiveness. These concepts, which are uniquely Kantian, suggest at least the possibility of a ultimate union of the two realms of the noumenal and the phenomenal.

In his aesthetic theory, Kant argues that judgments that ascribe beauty to something, although based on emotion and not reason, do have a claim to universal validity and are not merely statements of taste or opinion. When a person makes a judgment about whether or not something is beautiful, imagination, perception, and understanding are in harmony. In Kant's view, the experience of beauty is marked by a "free play" between the components of the mental structure. When a person makes any judgment, the imagination takes in raw sensory data from the world and organizes it so that the understanding can apply a concept to the object. Additionally, the imagination brings temporality to the unchanging categories that are understood *a priori*. In an aesthetic judgment, the understanding has no determined category to apply to the object, but it nevertheless finds the "substance" of the imagination to be in harmony with its

¹⁵ Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy*, p. 77.

overall pursuit of order and regularity. It is the experience of this harmony between the imagination and understanding that is expressed in an aesthetic judgment.

Aesthetic judgments must be arrived at disinterestedly. According to Kant, when making an aesthetic judgment, "...we must not be in the least biased in favor of the thing's existence but must be wholly indifferent about it."¹⁶ A person must remove himself from any biases and inclinations that he already possesses and examine each object impartially in order to make a valid judgment of its beauty.

Kant goes on to claim that aesthetic judgments are subjectively universal as well as disinterested. Because of the shared mental faculties that account for the feeling of aesthetic pleasure, aesthetic judgments are themselves universal. As Kant writes, "...judgments about the beautiful are put forward as having general validity."¹⁷ Since a person decides what is beautiful disinterestedly and without inclination or private conditions for liking it, that person feels free to like or dislike any object and he believes that everyone will necessarily agree with his decision. However, an aesthetic judgment does not rest on a determinative concept and so does not have logical universal validity. Kant writes, "...the universal voice [of general agreement] is only an idea."¹⁸

Finally, aesthetic judgments exhibit "purposiveness without a purpose." Kant defines this concept as applying to something that seems to have a purpose without a person being able to name it. A purpose is the end of an action that brings about an object's existence. The purpose of a bridge is to carry people and vehicles from one point to another, previously inaccessible, point. Both natural objects and works of art

¹⁶Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), p. 46.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 57.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 60.

seem indicative of some design or goal, but the precise nature of the purpose cannot be expressed. Kant would claim that these objects manifest purposiveness with a purpose.

When Kant discusses the role of disinterested pleasure in making aesthetic judgments, he distinguishes between aesthetic pleasure, sensible pleasure, and moral feeling. Moral feeling must be interested because individuals have a duty to will what is good. This moral feeling is a sign of rational freedom within the individual. Sensible pleasure is interested, based on the senses, and bestial. It is determined by an individual's concrete make-up, and it is not an expression of freedom. In contrast, aesthetic pleasure is disinterested and human, a synthesis of the bestial and the rational. Kant writes that, "...only the liking involved in taste for the beautiful is disinterested and free."¹⁹ Anything that is aesthetically pleasing is decided upon disinterestedly and with no regard to duty. Kant describes this as spontaneity bound neither by moral nor natural laws, and it is important in the functioning of the cognitive powers, whose harmony contains the basis of this pleasure.

Aesthetic experience forms a transition between inclination and moral duty. Aesthetic judgment bridges the gap between the categorical imperative and natural inclination. The disinterested pleasure of aesthetic experience contains elements of both sensuality and a higher disinterested calling. This is possible because judgment presupposes *a priori* conditions whereby it is possible to achieve the final purpose of human nature. Happiness and morality are shown to be compatible, as aesthetic judgment rests on a pleasure that is, in some sense, selfless and universal. As Kant writes, "This judgment makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of

¹⁹Ibid, p.52.

nature[reality]tothatoftheconceptoffreedom.”²⁰Inthiswayjudgmentisthe middle ground,orbridge,betweenappetite,withitsgroundinginthephenomenal,andduty, whichisbasedinthenoumenal.

Aftercreatingthesplitworldtheoryinordertoallowformoralfreedomina worldgovernedbythelawsofNewtonianphysics,Kant claimedtobeabletouseartto solvetheproblemthathearticulated.Theaestheticformsabridgebetweenmoralduty, whichisintherealmofthenoumenalandfree,andinclination,whichispartofthe phenomenalanddetermined.Aestheticjudgment restsonapleasurethatisselflessand universal;happinessandmoralityareseentobepotentiallycompatiblebecauseofour capacityforacollective,spontaneousagreementwithasensual,ratherthansolely rational,basis.The disinterestedpleasure ofaestheticexperiencecontains elements ofa sensuallifeandahighercalling;theactofjudgmentpresupposes *apriori* theconditions necessarytoachievetheendofhumannature.Avirtuouslifeiscapableofuniting pleasureandduty,ratherthanmerelysettingthematodds.

Chapter3. Schopenhauer’sbeliefinKant’sidealism,hisalterationofthesplitworld theoryintohisownversion,andhishopeforarttoactastemporarysolution.

ArthurSchopenhauer(1788 -1860)wasborninthecityofDanzigin northern Germany.Schopenhauercamefromaprivilegedbackgroundandinheritedalarge fortunefromhisfatherthatenabledhimtoretireearlyinfavorofalifeofstudyand contemplation.Asaprivatescholar,Schopenhauerwasabletodevotehislifetothe studyofphilosophy.Bythetimehewasthirtyyearsoldhismajorwork, *TheWorldas WillandIdea*, waspublished.Mostmodernscholarsnowconsideritanimportantwork

²⁰Ibid,p.37.

in the field of philosophy because of its amalgamation of post-Kantian Idealism and Buddhist thought.

Schopenhauer was one of the nineteenth-century German Idealists and considered himself a member of the Kantian school of thought. Schopenhauer's philosophy was similar to the other Kantian theorists of the time, and he had a long-standing rivalry with his fellow Idealists, including Fichte, Hegel, and Schiller. For a time, Hegel and Schopenhauer actually competed for students at the University of Berlin. Schopenhauer was among the first European thinkers to incorporate Eastern, specifically Buddhist, beliefs into his own philosophy. A tenet of his philosophy that is taken directly from Buddhism is the insistence on the futility of desire.²¹ Schopenhauer believed that through creativity and the contemplation of the aesthetic, a person could lose contact with the vicissitudes of daily existence.

Schopenhauer accepted the Kantian idea of the split worlds of the noumenal and the phenomenal, but he did not think it possible to reconcile the freedom of moral choice with the principles of Newtonian physics. By using Kant's philosophical maxims as the premise for his own work, Schopenhauer came to the conclusion that life is absurd and the world itself a transcendental illusion. Some major differences between Kant and Schopenhauer emerge because of Kant's fundamental belief that both of the worlds are "real." Kant thinks that the phenomenal exists independently of the noumenal and of societal belief, while Schopenhauer thinks that knowledge of the phenomenal is impossible and that the realm of appearances itself is a sort of essential chimera.

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²¹Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy*, p. 75.

²²Ibid, p. 77.

On this point, Schopenhauer diverges from the teachings of Kant by arguing that the world of appearances is itself a necessary illusion rather than the object of our knowledge. Furthermore, Schopenhauer presents the split world in an novel fashion, likening the difference between appearance and reality to the difference between the individual and the collective. Finite, or individual wills, are part of the realm of appearances and are therefore illusory. The only path to reality and the truth is to examine one's own inner consciousness, where the Will, the manifestation of one universal will beyond a person's control, is found. ²³

People do not possess individual wills in the sense that is commonly held, but are part of an infinite, or noumenal, collective consciousness that Schopenhauer names the Will. The Will is the only thing in the universe that is truly real and it is not dependent on human perception, creation, or mastery. Schopenhauer follows the standard line of the post-Kantians by stating that individualism is an illusion because everyone is really controlled by the universal Will. Of course, Schopenhauer still has to account for the unique qualities of every person. He does this by insisting that every human is a manifestation of the idea of humanity, but refracted through an idea of one's own. ²⁴

Also, Schopenhauer claims that people have an immutable "character" that is fixed from birth and is ultimately what dictates their ethical behavior. For example, when a good person is faced with ethical questions, he always chooses the good.

This issue of character is difficult to address because it would seem to imply a moral law that presumably does not exist in a determined universe controlled by a single Will. Schopenhauer links moral evil with the fiction of an autonomous self. According

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid, p. 80.

to Robert Solomon, Schopenhauer's view is that "evil comes into the world because of our false notion of individuality, our belief that it somehow matters what happens to each of us."²⁵ If a person commits a wicked deed against a fellow man, then he is really hurting society at large because everyone is a part of the collective. The general belief in individuality is both a metaphysical and ethical disaster. Schopenhauer's conception of evil reverses the traditional basis for ethical action: Schopenhauer claims that evil comes from our belief in the existence of an individual will. Traditionally, ethics requires such a belief.

Unfortunately, the Will is not a kind to the benevolent god of Christianity. It is an irrational and purposeless force that can often be harmful to the welfare of individual human beings. Since a person has no control over reality and his life is totally dictated by an almost alien force, finite existence is characterized by ultimate frustration. Each individual person is possessed of infinite desires that cannot be fulfilled within the finite realm and the consequence is a feeling of inescapable futility. Permanent relief can only be achieved through the denial of the will to live, the eradication of individual desire, the suppression of one's instincts, and the renunciation of all that is considered worthwhile in practical life. Schopenhauer quite seriously suggests suicide as the only sensible way out of this unsolvable and unbearable predicament.

Of the Idealists, Schopenhauer was the only one to retain the Kantian concept of the split world of the noumenal and phenomenal, but with some important changes. The most notable of these differences is that Kant's realm of appearances is not as important for Schopenhauer's conception of the universe. Instead, the phenomenal is just a necessary illusion, like the ideal of equality in modern America. Everyone is supposed to

²⁵ Ibid, p. 82.

be equal and people must accept this illusion to make society run smoothly, but it simply masks the reality underneath.

Schopenhauer also offers the idea that the aesthetic acts as a panacea for the existential dissatisfaction that results from the lack of individual freedom and the dominance of the collective Will. Robert Solomon writes that, according to Schopenhauer, "Every aesthetic experience is a temporary escape from the dictates of the Will, because aesthetic experience... gives us a disinterested appreciation of the art object and sets us at some significant distance from our normal concerns."²⁶ By means of art, people lose their subjective perspective and become objective. A person is then able to acquire genuine knowledge about the Will.

Ultimately, art can only provide a brief escape from the ubiquitous power of the Will and illusions of the individual self.²⁷ Schopenhauer's pessimism was difficult for his contemporaries to understand, but by the time of Nietzsche, it was widely accepted in German intellectual circles. The philosophy of Schopenhauer attracted the young Nietzsche, but Schopenhauer's dismissal of the ultimate reality of individual consciousness was the element that later pushed him away from Kantian and Schopenhauerian Idealism.

Chapter 4. Goethe's role in the Romantic Movement and his hope for an aesthetic reconciliation of the split world of Kant.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 - 1832) was born in Frankfurt, Germany. Goethe's early education was somewhat irregular and informal. In 1765, Goethe went to

²⁶Ibid, p. 83.

²⁷Ibid, p. 84.

Leipzig, where he studied law and learned to express his reaction through the medium of writing and poetry. Goethe then went to the city of Strasbourg in 1770 in order to pass his preliminary law examinations and to study art, music, anatomy, and chemistry. While at Strasbourg, Goethe developed a strong friendship with the German writer Herder, an important relationship in Goethe's formative years.²⁸

Goethe was an unlikely convert for Herder because of their vastly different approaches to writing. Goethe had made his fame by writing lyrics in the rococo mode and plays written in alexandrines under the influence of Racine.²⁹ Despite Goethe's prior style of writing, "...Herder opened his [Goethe's] eyes to the liberating possibilities of the Shakespearean form of drama and Goethe went on to write a historical play animated by all the fire and fury of *Macbeth*."³⁰ This work, *Götz von Berlichingen*, ushered in the first important period of German Romantic literature: *Sturm und Drang*.³¹

Sturm und Drang is usually defined as a creative movement that preceded, but eventually became, Romanticism proper. An important aspect of both movements was the rejection of the contemporary status quo and an attempt to make something new. Their common goal was the rejuvenation of imaginative writing, the primacy of the subjective and aesthetic, and the importance of the freedom of self-expression.³² However, while the *Sturm und Drang* focused on the lack of liberty and social ills plaguing society, Romanticism emphasized a more inward orientation centered on the imagination and almost mystical tendencies.

²⁸Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement*, p.24.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Storman dStress

³²L.R.Furst, *The Contour of European Romanticism* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 59.

Goethe's momentous tragedy, *Gotz von Berlichingen*, was published in 1771 when Goethe returned to Frankfurt, ostensibly to practice law, but really to work on his first dramatic success. Although the plot concerns a robber baron of the sixteenth century, it represents Goethe's protest against the established order and his demand for intellectual freedom.³³ This first tale set the trend for the rest of Goethe's literary works in which the protagonist is either Goethe himself or a close representation of the writer. The success of the story catapulted Goethe from being a relatively unknown author into being one of Germany's leading intellectuals.

For his next story, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*,³⁴ Goethe moved away from the Shakespearean model that he had adopted for his last literary success. Stylistically, *Die Leiden* resembles works by another of the giants of the Romantic Movement: Jean Jacques Rousseau. The book consists of a series of letters composed by young Werther concerning his time as a small hamlet in the countryside with the beautiful Lotte and Lotte's fiancé, Albert. Frustrated by a love that can never be consummated, Werther moves to the city to pursue a government post. Upon his return to the town, Lotte unexpectedly begins to fall in love with him and this creates a complicated situation for all three of the characters. When Lotte is forced to choose between Werther and Albert, Werther commits suicide. As is the case with many of his other novels, Goethe was displeased with the autobiographical nature of the work: "Goethe said, 'Werther has much in common with me.'" ³⁵ Werther is a quintessential Romantic champion, one whom many young men of the late eighteenth century tried to emulate by killing themselves for forbidden love.

³³Ibid.

³⁴The Suffering of Young Werther

As one of the leading Romantic authors, Goethe helped to define the character that is now known as the Romantic hero. The Romantic Age is often considered the last age of the Heroic Age. One author notes, "Perhaps that was in fact one of the sources of the fascination he [the Romantic hero] evidently exercised: his essential ambiguity both reflected and appealed to a period of transition, that looked at one and the same time backwards and forwards."³⁶ The members of the avant-garde *Sturm und Drang* worshipped human greatness in all of its forms, from the image of the classical soldier to the creative genius. In his search for an aesthetic prototype for his overman, Nietzsche undoubtedly looked back to the Romantic heroes of Goethe, from Götze to Faust, for inspiration.

Inconsistencies in the Romantic ideal of heroism began to surface as the movement progressed. For the most part, the protagonists of the *Sturm und Drang* do not fit the customary model of heroism due to their moral ambiguity.³⁷ Goethe's Götze von Berlichingen, though a German knight in the tradition of Arthurian chivalry, is characterized more by his savagery and lawlessness than by his heroic deeds. The classic example is that of Faust, who is the protagonist of the story, but whose despicable attempt to seduce Gretchen leads to her loss of innocence and finally to her death. Faust is another instance in which the ideal of the Romantic hero is marked by a moral equivocation that makes another wise and likable figure into an internally conflicted and reprehensible character.

Goethe left much of this world of the Romantic *Sturm und Drang* when, in the early 1770's, he conceived the idea to create what would become his masterpiece. In

³⁵ Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement*, p.26.

³⁶ L.R. Furst, *The Contours of European Romanticism*, p.40.

1775, Duke Karl August invited Goethe to his court at Weimar to become the manager of the Court Theater. Goethe's time spent in the theater directed his talent from pure poetry to dramatic literature and even play writing. This appointment turned out to be a watershed for German literature as Goethe brought as much of the Faust story as he had written up to that point to the court, at this point known as *Goethe's Faust Urspruenglicher Gestalt*³⁸, and immersed himself in his work. However, Goethe's *Faust* was not a simple task, but a project that extended over practically Goethe's entire literary life, a period of about fifty -seven years. The full version was not completed until Goethe's eighty -first birthday.

In contrast to his more dramatic pieces, *Faust* is really a poem and not intended for performance on the theatrical stage. Goethe's version of the Faust story is based on the playwright Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, which is itself based on the legend of a sixteenth century alchemist named Johann Faust.³⁹ Even though his story is a distillation of previous works and myths, Goethe's *Faust* transcends both its legendary source and the English play in scope and insight. Marlowe's work and the oral legend that preceded it served to illustrate the price that sinners must pay for their immorality, while Goethe's work is an epic drama of redemption.

As in his earlier writings Goethe himself plays the role of the protagonist of the European legend. Interestingly, Goethe shares the same first name, Johann, with the historical Faust. In another similarity between Goethe and his poem's namesake, "This legendary Faust, like the young Goethe, as a result of his scholastic education lost his

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Goethe's *Faust* of Original Shape

³⁹William Page Andrews, *Goethe's Key to Faust* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1968), p.33.

faith in a Controlling Deity.”⁴⁰ Goethe, and the original Faust, expected a lot out of human life and felt frustrated by the prohibitions associated with the divine, so they cast off belief in a deity in order to free themselves of constraint.

Goethe encapsulates the major theme of the poem by using the legend of a medieval alchemist as the foundation for his work. From the standpoint of traditional Christian morality, alchemists are condemned for trying to go beyond human limitations. The argument is that by experimenting with the infinite, the alchemist leaves himself vulnerable to temptation. In this context, science is considered sin and even hubris. However, Goethe and his fellow Romantic thinkers believe that humanity is the attempt to transcend the confines of a limited existence.⁴¹ As L.R. Furst writes, Faust’s “perpetual striving is a variation of the romantic’s innate yearning.”⁴² From the Romantic perspective, Faust is the archetypal literary character who develops his human spirit to its highest degree.

The Romantic ideal that Goethe upholds in *Faust* are certainly not lost on later generations of German philosophers, and Nietzsche based much of his thinking on Goethe’s life and poetic achievement. The Romantic emphasis on the joy of existence and of the self-sufficient happiness of the sovereign individual as the aim and meaning of life is ultimately derived from the work of the man whom Nietzsche later celebrates as the actualization of the overman: Goethe.⁴³ Just as Nietzsche’s overman is the exception

⁴⁰Ibid, p.34.

⁴¹L.R.Furst, *The Contour of European Romanticism*, p.4.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³R.J.Hollingdale, “Introduction,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p.29.

to the rule of society's norms, Faust is also unusual and not many people can, or should, follow his example.⁴⁴

Despite the fact that Faust achieves salvation and immortality at the end of the play, Faust is really a tragic hero. Faust's tragedy and his greatness consist in his attempt to defy the natural limitations of mankind. In Faust's case, this occurs in the course of his search for a meaning or goal for existence. Faust is an overman in the Nietzschean sense of the word, as he seeks for more than man is meant to know or experience.⁴⁵ In traditional Christianity, dissatisfaction with life is a blasphemous notion because it implies a divine lack of knowledge or control over an imperfect world. However, the idea of frustration with the human condition is the implicit premise for Faust and his story. As one interpreter of *Faust*, Alexander Gillies, writes, "Dissatisfaction comes to acquire a higher meaning. It is a spur to further effort, a dynamic force which, if it operates as it should, is of the greatest value in life."⁴⁶ This existential dissatisfaction, deeper than a temporary feeling of emptiness, leads Faust to attempt to escape from the vicissitudes of everyday human life and to reach for the infinite.

Similar to his fellow German thinkers Kant and Schopenhauer, Goethe describes two fundamental and mutually antagonistic desires. This duality of human nature is salient in the major characters in *Faust*, including Faust, Mephistopheles, and Gretchen. From the very beginning of the play, Faust is in despair because his ability to glimpse the whole is immediately interrupted by his human limitations, and he is unable to move

⁴⁴Alexander Gillies, *Goethe's Faust: An Interpretation* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell & Mott, Limited, 1957), p. 11.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁶Ibid.

beyond the finite. Faust's desperate quest for the infinite leads him to try all different methods, even suicide, to escape his predicament.

Mephistopheles succinctly states Faust's struggle when he uses the classic cricket analogy. Mephistopheles says, "...they're [humans] like those crickets with long legs who won't stop flying though they only hop, and promptly sing the same old song down in the grass again."⁴⁷ Like crickets, humans are dual creatures that alternately reach for the infinite and the finite. People want to achieve some higher consciousness, but are always pulled back down to worldly desires. In Kantian terminology, people are uncomfortably suspended at the intersection of the finite and the infinite.

Faust is the embodiment of this split nature of humanity. Before the arrival of Mephistopheles, Faust says, "Two souls, alas! Reside within my breast, and each is eager for a separation."⁴⁸ No amount of study or effort on the part of Faust can bring him any nearer to his goal of union with the infinite, and he is so discouraged that, just prior to Mephistopheles' appearance, he contemplates an end to his striving. Faust is so lost in his struggle for the unknown that he shuns even the greatest of worldly gifts that are offered to him by the devil: money, women, and power. Caught in this state of nihilism, Faust is suicidal, and Mephistopheles has to bring him back into Faust's life.

The character of Mephistopheles reflects the duality present in Faust. Although he is the spirit of negation and destruction, Mephistopheles is the driving force behind the play's action. It is Mephistopheles who saves Faust's life and rekindles his search for the infinite. Mephistopheles describes himself to Faust as, "A part of that force which,

⁴⁷ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust I & II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

always willing evil, always produces good.”⁴⁹ Mephistopheles, the negation of the creative power of love, is the only figure who can stir Faust from nihilistic contemplation to creative action. The negative can lead to the affirmation of life because it rejects the status quo, or what is generally accepted as normal in regular society, that can in fact be destructive or inhibiting. By aligning himself with the creative tendency of life, Faust is freed from the despair that results from his loss of faith. The ensuing tragedy in the relationship between Faust and Gretchen is caused by their failure to continue in harmony with the controlling creative and sustaining tendency of life.⁵⁰

Even Gretchen is characterized by the duality that permeates her life. Gretchen gives Faust a taste of the infinite within the finite and he is therefore inspired to cling to her. Herself at home in the sphere of the finite, she drowns when she attempts to follow Faust in his search for the infinite. When he first sees Gretchen, Faust says, “How all here breathes a sense of calm, of order, of contentedness! What abundance in this poverty, what blessedness within this prison.”⁵¹ Initially, Gretchen represents, in the eyes of Faust, the harmony between the finite and the infinite that he is unable to effect. By the end of the play near the ramparts and in the cathedral, a feeling of restriction replaces the feeling of freedom that Faust had previously perceived in Gretchen’s life. In contrast to the ubiquitous and unfocused nature of his aspirations, Gretchen’s small world offered Faust the opportunity to feel free and active. From Gretchen’s perspective, her limited universe is threatened and ultimately destroyed by the incursion of Faust’s ruthless striving, as encouraged by Mephistopheles.

⁴⁹Ibid, p.36.

⁵⁰William Page Andrews, Goethe’s Key to Faust, p.35.

⁵¹Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust I & II p.69.

Just as Goethe outlines an almost Kantian division of the world, he anticipates the work of Nietzsche, who likewise tries to make sense of, and then solve, the duality of human existence. Although *Faust I* ends in the despair of Gretchen's death and her rejection of the tormented Faust, the story does give a glimpse of an aesthetic reconciliation between the dual nature present in the play's major characters. Goethe suggests that playwrights and artists reveal, beneath reality's chaotic surface, an ebullient flow of desire and satisfaction, guided by man-made goals. In the Prelude, the Poet says to the Manager and Player:

The consonance between what surges from his heart and what that heart in turn takes from the world! When Nature, unconcerned, twirls her endless thread and fixes it upon the spindle, when all creation's in harmonious myriads vexed with a potpourri of sound, who then divides the strand monotonously unreeling and gives it life and rhythmic motion.⁵²

The Poet describes a contract between eternal completion and human striving with the poet or artist acting as an intermediary, as one who makes sense of this flux and gives it meaning. Similar to the arc-like trajectory that every person invariably follows in life, every moment of beauty and insight that arises will eventually dissolve or prove provisional. Therefore, the dissolution of these moments must be accepted and it is up to the artist to take in and save these moments of beauty and capture, by creative construction, their meaning in his art.

Goethe, as a poet himself, places a great responsibility on the character of the Poet and all artists in general. One commentator notes, "Like the poet himself, he [Goethe] seemed to be probing for the ultimate truth about human life."⁵³ Artists are portrayed as higher beings whose work has a universal appeal to their anonymous audiences. Since

⁵²Ibid, p.5.

⁵³Alexander Gillies, *Goethe's Faust: An Interpretation*, p.4.

the artist, and in this case the Poet, is a part of the cosmic spirit of creation, he is therefore able to use his art to manifest human possibilities and the prospect of a harmonious human relationship to the cosmos. ⁵⁴Goethe's emphasis on the importance of the artist in the struggle to reunite the world was not lost on later generations of German intellectuals. One such thinker was Nietzsche, who followed the example of Faust, and Goethe himself, by articulating his own solution to the split world crisis.

Part II

Chapter 1. Biographical information on Friedrich Nietzsche, especially concerning his Lutheran upbringing and his early love of Wagner.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was born on October 15, 1844 in the small town of Röchen in the Prussian province of Saxony. Nietzsche's mother was the eighteen-year-old daughter of a Lutheran minister. His father, Ludwig Nietzsche, was a thirty-one-year-old Lutheran minister whose father had been a Superintendent, the equivalent of a Catholic bishop, in the Lutheran church. Friedrich's penchant for writing probably came from his grandfather, who wrote two texts during the French Revolutionary period that claimed Christianity would endure forever. One biographer writes:

This difference of opinion [between Nietzsche and his grandfather on the probable life cycle of Christianity] notwithstanding, there is something about the grandfather that reminds us of the grandson: the extreme assertion of a threatened tradition is common to both... although the grandfather has little of the grandson's wit and rhetorical brilliance. ⁵⁵

⁵⁴Ibid, p. 10.

⁵⁵R.J. Hollingdale, Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 5.

Nietzsche's great love and admiration for his father made it all the more devastating when, in September of 1848, Ludwig went mad. He eventually died in 1849 and left behind his widow, two sons, and a daughter. Unfortunately, Nietzsche's younger brother, who was born shortly after Ludwig went insane in 1848, perished in January of 1850. Upon his death, Nietzsche's mother moved the entire family to Naumburg. Nietzsche spent the rest of his childhood as the only male in the house in Naumburg amid his mother, sister, grandmother, and two maiden aunts. It seems that his life at home was not nearly as pleasurable for Nietzsche after his father died.

In 1858, Nietzsche finally left his mother's house in Naumburg and entered the boarding school of Pforta on a full scholarship. He spent six good years at the school and excelled in the humanities. The first signs of Nietzsche's irreverent genius can be found in his schoolwork in Pforta when he wrote an essay about his favorite poet, the then little-known Friedrich Hölderlin. Nietzsche's teacher condemned the essay because Hölderlin was not "German enough." By 1920, Hölderlin was widely recognized as Germany's greatest poet after Goethe.⁵⁶

After graduating from secondary school, Nietzsche proceeded to the University of Bonn in 1864. Since he was a minister's son, Nietzsche had always been a pious follower of the Lutheran faith and therefore started his career at Bonn by studying theology and classical philology. However, Nietzsche soon lost his faith because of the secularized, political ambitions of most of the leaders of German Christendom, including Kaiser Bismarck himself. In 1865 he gave up theology and followed his favorite teacher to Leipzig to pursue philology more seriously. At Leipzig, Nietzsche exchanged religion

⁵⁶Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 22-23.

for philosophy. As one biographer notes, “The pathway from the family parsonage was the path of skepticism. Schopenhauerian metaphysics and Wagnerian music were detours, *ersatz* religion.”⁵⁷

Nietzsche’s infatuation with Schopenhauer would not last long, and Nietzsche soon rebelled against the teachings of his predecessor. Nietzsche’s break with the teachings of Schopenhauer was based on his disagreement with the split world doctrine and the idea of a universal Will. Nietzsche’s meteoric rise through the ranks of academia began when Leipzig conferred his doctorate in 1868 without a final examination. This allowed Nietzsche to accept a full professorship at the University of Basel when he was only twenty-four years of age.

Nietzsche taught at Basel for ten years, from 1869 – 1879. Unfortunately, his tenure was interrupted by his service in the Franco – Prussian War of 1870. His service in the German military at this time would have long-term consequences for Nietzsche’s life and possibly his sanity. While serving as an orderly in the Prussian army, Nietzsche contracted dysentery and diphtheria. These maladies forced Nietzsche to leave the service and return to Basel, and ultimately tormented Nietzsche for the rest of his life. Many experts now believe that the effects of these diseases are what drove Nietzsche to insanity at the end of his life.

Luckily, Nietzsche’s afflictions did not keep him from working, and in 1872 he published *The Birth of Tragedy*. As could be expected from such an original book, it was not well received in the intellectual community of Basel. Many of the professors criticized it because of the book’s defiance of scholarly conventions. There was a distinct lack of references, footnotes, and Greek quotations that a university expected from

⁵⁷R.J. Hollingdale, “Introduction,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 12.

any academic work and especially from a young and unknown philologist like Nietzsche. The only professor at Basel who was sympathetic to Nietzsche and his first book was Jacob Burckhardt. Nietzsche's elder colleague influenced his view on many issues, and eventually Nietzsche came to share Burckhardt's hatred of Wagner, nationalism, and asceticism.

Although Nietzsche held Richard Wagner in such high esteem that he considered the earlier thinker as somewhat of a father figure, he later condemned the heavily Germanic work of Wagner. In his *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes, "What did I never forgive Wagner?... that he became *reichsdeutsch*."⁵⁸ Nietzsche's disillusionment with Wagner triggered a new found scorn for the German nationalism that, in many contemporary German thinkers and politicians, masqueraded behind the façade of religion. Nietzsche became sickened by Wagner's outward show of devotion to Christianity, a devotion that masked his worldly ambitions.

Goethe's influence on Nietzsche was less fraught with ambiguity and longer lasting. Nietzsche's infatuation with Goethe's poetry began when he was a young student in the Lutheran seminary. Nietzsche's emphasis on individualism and the joy of everyday existence can be traced back to the work of Goethe, particularly to the inestimable *Faust*. In addition to the Germanic artists, the Biblical stories and imagery that he was exposed to during his Christian upbringing and education also affected Nietzsche. Being from a family of devoutly Lutheran Germans, the main religious ideas that permeate his work are those garnered from Lutheranism.⁵⁹ Even his critique of bad conscience, of morality, and of guilt reflects central concerns of Luther's theology.

⁵⁸Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p.38.

⁵⁹Ibid, p.28.

Chapter 2. Nietzsche's critique of morality and Christianity.

Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) is one of his most widely read works. It introduces the reader to the concepts of the slave and master morality, the idea of perspectivism as opposed to the "God's eye" conception of Christianity, and *ressentiment*. The *Genealogy* is in large part a scathing critique of the institutionalized Christianity that had ruled Europe nearly unchallenged for centuries. Although he had clearly taken issue with Christian doctrine throughout his authorship, the critique of the slave morality and its perpetuation through religion is best articulated in this work.

Despite the fact that morality should arguably be based on whatever will be the most useful to society, Nietzsche observes that existing moral codes do not have their origin in utility, but rather in tradition. Nietzsche then looks closer at morality to explore the very origin of the concept "good" as it evolved in early societies. He accurately points out that the ruling individuals, governments, or social institutions determine moral perception. After describing the evaluation of what society views as moral, Nietzsche points to a fundamental division between those moralities that affirm life and existence and those that deny them: the antagonism between the slave and master moralities. Of course, the idea of the slave morality is more universal than the name indicates and is not restricted to any social class or ethnic group.

At the same time as Nietzsche was writing, other thinkers were also trying to deconstruct the system of morality in use at the time. These philosophers claimed that these so-called moral actions whose basic motive was utility had been forgotten. People continued to perform moral actions that no longer have any use because respected people

in the community laud the actions as good. However, this is not the stance that Nietzsche takes in this debate. Instead, he spends the early part of the *Genealogy* criticizing the claim that morality originates from considerations of utility. Rather, it is originally an expression of the all-important will to power that Nietzsche discusses at length in *Zarathustra*.

Nietzsche claims that there are two types of morality: slave and master. Obviously, Nietzsche believes that the master morality is superior to the slave morality. The identifying feature of the noble morality is its basis in self-affirmation. Noble morality does not glorify useful actions but rather risky ones, a claim that immediately makes Nietzsche different from other contemporary atheist thinkers who argued that there should be a return to utilitarian values in morality. Examples of this principle of affirmation are found in the attitudes of little children, who act like kings of their own universe and think only of their own glory and advancement. Children consider others, the external, as afterthoughts that are secondary to themselves.

Aristocratic individuals are the creators of the master morality. The noble type of man is the determiner of values. Nietzsche writes, "All truly noble morality grows out of triumphant self-affirmation."⁶⁰ Those of the master morality can survive independently of society's beliefs and do not need to criticize the actions of other people in order to encourage altruistic behavior. Rather, they prefer powerful enemies to weak allies, because enemies can spur them to fresh accomplishments and do not seek to tear down the masters, but to become powerful masters themselves.

By contrast, people of the slave morality view the noble drive towards creativity and independence as "evil." From the point of view of the noble spirit, his or her actions

are by definition good. Since all of their decisions affirm life, and affirming life is the definition of good, all of an noble's actions are good. Then nobles know that they must create their own systems of value. By contrast, the slaves are governed by rules imposed on them by others, are constantly dominated by the people of the master morality, and become calculating and reactive.

The masters are the strong individuals who create their own morality. Nietzsche connects the master morality to his belief in perspectivism by claiming that strength is the ability to see through many perspectives.⁶¹ Traditional Christianity espoused the idea of the all-seeing "God's eye," which views all existence through one absolute frame of reference. Nietzsche writes:

It is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect on its road to final "objectivity" to see things for once through the wrong end of the telescope; and "objectivity" is not meant here to stand for "disinterested contemplation" (which is rank absurdity) but for an ability to have one's pros and cons within one's command and to use them or not, as one chooses... Let us beware of the tentacles of such contradictory notions as "pure reason," "absolute knowledge" ..⁶²
.. All these concepts presuppose an eye such as no living being can imagine.

In this instance, Nietzsche shows his disdain for Kant and his bridge between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds through the medium of aesthetic judgment. Rather, he argues that humans cannot claim absolutes, and the very notion of a thing-in-itself is an inhibiting fiction. It is the noble who originally creates the distinction between good and bad in early society. Practitioners of the slave morality attack the nobles' ability to define and perform good actions because these actions do not benefit the slaves. According to Nietzsche, "The exact opposite is true of the noble-minded, who spontaneously creates

⁶⁰Friedrich Nietzsche *The Genealogy of Morals* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1956), p. 170.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 255.

⁶² Ibid.

thenotion *good*.”⁶³ Virtues are defined as whatever the noble people feel is appropriate to their self-created system of ethics.

In contrast, the slave morality is a system of morality that is reactionary and centered on condemning the strength of others and affirming one's own weakness as an afterthought. The people of the slave morality are suspicious of the virtues of the powerful. They do not trust the strong and are skeptical of “good.” People of the slave morality criticize anything that is strong and powerful in other people because they are jealous of those positive traits and feel threatened by their virtues.

An example of a reactionary force in society is religion, which tends to be a conservative force rather than a creative one, like art. Nietzsche criticizes Christianity for its leveling effect: its promotion of a mediocre “democracy” in which people are represented as equal and in which no one is to possess greater skills. This mentality encourages the slaves to attack the nobles, to bring them all down to the same level. Nietzsche writes that religion's influence on society is very clear, “We can see nothing today that wants to grow greater, we suspect that things will continue to go down, to become thinner, more good-natured... more mediocre.”⁶⁴

People of the slave morality tear down and destroy what is strong; they praise qualities like industriousness and humility so that the strong people cannot assert their superiority. The people of the slave morality see as bad what the noble people see as good, and vice-versa. Additionally, the slaves harbor deep feelings of resentment. *Ressentiment* is the belief that anyone who disagrees with oneself is immoral, while one believes oneself good. At the root of the problem with the slave morality, and the

⁶³Ibid, p. 173.

⁶⁴Ibid, p. 177.

resentment that characterizes its adherents, is its focus on others. There is no reason for people to patrol the behavior of others, as many of Christianity's proponents do. Instead, people should concern themselves with their own well-being and displays some of the selfishness that is so derided in Western culture. Nietzsche offers the example of the bird of prey that is labeled devil by the lambs because the bird by its very nature eats the lambs.⁶⁵

In the perfect situation, everyone would be a bird of prey and there would be no lambs, but that is not the case in society. Nietzsche offers as an example the conflict that the people of the slave morality believe exists with the noble to illustrate his point. Too often, there is no "doer" among the herd of slaves because its members need to blame each other for their own failures. In fact, freedom is often lost because people simply work within the system and accept the moral choices that are presented to them rather than creating their own original ideas.

In Nietzsche's system of morality there is a distinct difference between the terms "bad" and "evil." The noble creates the categories "good" and "bad." The noble and his existence is, by definition, good. What is other, base, malformed, resentful, or weak, the noble designates, as an afterthought, "bad." "Evil" is a category that was invented solely by the slave in order to weaken the noble. Nietzsche says that the resentful people view a evil precisely the good man of the master morality, only re-colored, reinterpreted, and seen differently. Nietzsche's arguments concerning the slave versus the master morality should be taken as universal principles applicable to people in every social group and ethnicity, although he tends to scapegoat Jews as the most insidious representatives of the slave morality. The practitioners of the slave morality make moral judgments so that

⁶⁵Ibid, p. 178.

they can take advantage of other people while the people of the master morality have the moral fortitude to live for themselves and determine their own values independently of society. Overall, Nietzsche's system of morality makes sense if applied universally, but he often digresses into long diatribes denouncing Jews as the root of all evil.

Chapter 3. Nietzsche's critique of philosophers' fictions.

In the view of many commentators, Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) is one of his most significant works because of its rejection of central tenets of the western philosophical tradition: the primacy of reason, the existence of an immaterial soul, and the principle of sufficient reason. *Beyond Good* was also the first book in which Nietzsche's nihilistic tendencies are somewhat muted, although his distinctive brand of rhetoric and fiery speech is as fine as in any of his works. Nietzsche here examines and undermines the classical idea of cause and effect, he continues his crusade against the traditional Christian morality, and he questions the conception of a separately existing, immaterial soul. Arguably, it is the critique of the soul that is the key to understanding the book and central to the journey beyond nihilism.

Nietzsche begins his work by questioning the value of selflessness, the "virtue" that was central to Christian morality as practiced in his day. To object to morality because it relies on immoral means would be to make another moral judgment within the same system. Thus, he would be perpetuating the very moral valuation that his campaign is directed against. ⁶⁶Nietzsche's goal is to explain the emergence of morality in a

⁶⁶Alexander Nehamas, "The Self," *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 201.

naturalistic way. In addition to tracing morality's natural origins, Nietzsche shows that morality is, like everything else in the world, a product of the will to power.

However, Nietzsche's objection to morality centers on its fundamental denial of life. The self is denied in the rejection of the spontaneous creation of new ideas about how best to live in favor of one immutable moral code. The most crucial flaw that Nietzsche finds in the interpretation of events that produce moral values is the fact that moral valuation is dependent on absolutes. Nietzsche does not think that everyone should live according to a definitive moral code, because this would have a leveling effect as the noble are forced to abide by the same rules as the slaves. Although Nietzsche thinks that different cultures can have different values, he is not a moral relativist. The important point is that in every moral code the difference between good and evil is objective and absolute. Nehamas writes that, "Morality, according to Nietzsche, 'takes good and evil for realities that contradict one another (not as complementary value concepts, which would be the truth... it there with denies life which has in all its instincts both Yes and No.'" ⁶⁷ A person misses out on what life has to offer if he or she simply avoids anything that society labels "evil."

Nietzsche's exact conception of how good and evil are related is vague and never fully articulated. Instead, he argues that the notion of morality, which includes both good and evil, is misguided. Even though Nietzsche never explicitly defines the relationship between good and evil, Nehamas thinks that:

He [Nietzsche] can still claim that with either alternative [a morality or morality] the idea of a purely good agent is a fiction. He thinks that the appearance of perfect goodness is created by stunting all of one's features and abilities so that

⁶⁷Ibid, p. 209.

one no longer represents, even potentially, a danger to others and to the community.⁶⁸

Similar to his argument in *Genealogy*, Nietzsche believes a person can only be seen as good if he renounces all of his talents, acts on the same level as everyone else in his community, and follows the Christian ideal of selflessness that really benefits everyone but himself.

Nietzsche then addresses the question of how to maintain striving in a world that is devoid of absolutes. Nietzsche hates ease because contentment makes everyone like cattle, i.e. without distinctions. Therefore, Nietzsche says that the aesthetic can provide people with a goal and inspiration to live on the edge of disaster. One example of this disdain for a life without striving is the stoics. He says that they are unnatural because they do not live a tense, active life, but are passive and let things come to them and be ruled by whatever events happen to occur in their lives. Nietzsche exhorts, "O you noble Stoics... imagine being like nature, wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure... imagine indifference itself as a power - how *could* you live according to this indifference?"⁶⁹

The reason that people, like the Stoics, cling to a religious interpretation of life is the fear of an incurable pessimism. Instead of being the ultimate sacrifice of one's life to the divine, piety is recast as the final offspring of the fear of truth.⁷⁰ Of course, the purpose of religion is not the same for people in every stratum of society. For the strong, who Nietzsche believes are perfectly suited to rule, religion is used to overcome the resistance of their subjects to be ruled and acts as a more subtle form of sovereignty. For

⁶⁸Ibid, p. 219.

⁶⁹Friedrich Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 15.

⁷⁰Ibid, p. 71.

the subjects, religion offers contentment in a situation that should call for outrage. Most importantly, the institution of the church provides an ennobling of obedience to their betters.

Nietzsche's claim that religion has worked to weaken Europeans by turning all natural valuations upside-down. He thinks that organized religion, and Christianity in particular, "break the strong, sickly" ergo, casts suspicion on the joy in beauty, bend everything haughty, manly, conquering, domineering, all the instincts characteristic of the highest... into unsureness, agony of conscience."⁷¹ The creation of the idea of conscience is one of the primary means by which the strong are denigrated. Nietzsche resents the tendency of religion to level the field of human achievement, instead of allowing "the unfathomable hierarchy of difference" in humanity.

Lastly, Nietzsche argues that compulsion is an essential part of Christianity. There are many rules and restrictions that religion places on its followers that they must obey or face the ultimate consequence: denial of a place in an "afterlife." Nietzsche even considers Christianity a type of slavery. By keeping people in bondage to its dictates, religion steals their freedom and makes them pliable and easy to command and to control for the benefit of the church.

Concerning atomism, both material and physical, Nietzsche argues that the soul should not be seen as infinite. This is a distinct break from traditional Christian doctrine, which claims that the soul is immortal and is a connection to the divine. Although he says that the soul is not infinite, Nietzsche does not believe that the soul should be eliminated as a concept, but it should be rethought, especially in terms of its place as a scientific entity. Nietzsche writes, "One must, however, go still further, and also declare

war, relentless war unto death, against the 'atomistic need' which still leads a dangerous afterlife... just like the more celebrated 'metaphysical need.'⁷²

Nietzsche then connects his conception of the soul to the idea of freedom.

When a man who wills commands something within himself, that man is compelled to obey his own command. Since society artificially imposes the "I" on individuals to distinguish from another, the act of willing an action for oneself has been confused with the action itself. Meanwhile, the action is erroneously considered necessary after the fact of willing. Nietzsche calls "freedom of the will" the joy that a person experiences when a person who commands is at the same time the person who executes his own orders. Nietzsche writes:

In all willing it is absolutely a question of commanding and obeying, on the basis, as already said, of a social structure composed of many 'souls.' Hence a philosopher should claim the right to include willing as such within the sphere of morals - morals being understood as the doctrine of the relations of supremacy under which the phenomenon of 'life' comes to be.⁷³

After this old version of the soul and its connection to morality has been discarded, Nietzsche thinks that the field is open for new refinements and hypotheses. Thinkers are then "condemned to invention" and direct their aesthetic tendencies towards the creation of a new way of seeing the soul.⁷⁴ It is this creative process that will in fact supplant traditional notions of morality in favor of an aesthetic alternative of life-affirmation.

Chapter 4. The role of art in existence, as displayed in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*.

⁷¹Ibid, p. 75.

⁷²Ibid, p. 20.

⁷³Ibid, p. 27.

⁷⁴Ibid, p. 21.

Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) was the first of his major works in the creative period of 1872 - 1901. It contains Nietzsche's first attempt at defining and conveying the importance that he places on the aesthetic. Of course, Nietzsche's conception of art, both as a discipline and as a tool to achieve the long-sought-after aesthetic reconciliation of Kant's split worlds, changes from one book to the next. Therefore, art is presented in a very different manner and with a very different meaning in *Birth* than it is in *Zarathustra*. Nietzsche's discussion of the aesthetic in the former text takes place within a larger examination of Greek tragedy.

For Nietzsche, Greek tragedy is the expression of a culture that had achieved a delicate balance between the two drives that he terms the Dionysian and Apollonian. Nietzsche writes, "Thus we have come to interpret Greek tragedy as a Dionysiac chorus which again and again discharges itself in Apollonian images."⁷⁵ According to Nietzsche, Greek tragedy is based on the tension between these two conflicting forces, with the creative coming from the Dionysiac and the Apollonian turning those impulses into a standardized, rational form. The Apollonian is used to describe form, the objective, the rational, and the anything that is marked by individuality. The Dionysian is used to describe the collective, the instinctual, and the emotional. Dionysian would characterize an experience in which a person's individuality is lost or encompassed by the whole in roughly the same way that Schopenhauer thinks individual wills are really part of a collective. Since Nietzsche idolized the work of Schopenhauer in his youth, it is not surprising that many of Schopenhauer's important ideas are reflected in the books of his disciple.

⁷⁵Friedrich Nietzsche *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York, NY: Anchor Books: A Division of Random House, Inc., 1956), p. 56.

As a philosopher, one would expect Nietzsche to support rationality as the path to the good life. However, Nietzsche does not want the Apollonian to be the dominant drive in society. He argues that the Apollonian is choking contemporary culture and must take a secondary place to the Dionysian. In order to promote a return to the values of the Dionysian, Nietzsche critiques the complacency of contemporary European culture. Nietzsche claims that, over the course of European history, the creative energy and tendency inspired by the Dionysian had declined in the face of the Apollonian. This trend can easily be seen in the rationalist Enlightenment period in the growing reliance on technologies and in the decline of fine arts and writing. Therefore, Nietzsche desires a cultural rebirth in Europe by releasing the pent-up Dionysian, or creative, energy in an explosive eruption of the aesthetic.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche's tone tends toward the nostalgic, in marked contrast to his later nihilistic books. Nietzsche almost seems like a late comer to the tradition of German Romanticism because of his devaluation of current culture. Instead, he looks back to the time of the Homeric hero and desires a return to the tragedy of the Golden Age of ancient Greece. Although he retains art as a critical fixture of all of his works, Nietzsche's conception of its significance shifts in subsequent writings.

Nietzsche's view of art in *Birth of Tragedy* is largely pessimistic. Art doesn't anesthetize the individual, as Schopenhauer claims in his *World as Will and Idea*, but it does serve to make life tolerable by depicting suffering as beautiful. Nietzsche argues that:

Dionysian art, too, wishes to convince us of the eternal delight of existence, but it insists that we look for this delight not in the phenomenon but behind them. It makes us realize that everything that is generated must be prepared to face its painful dissolution. It forces us to gaze into the horror of individual existence...

ametaphysical solace momentarily lifts us above the whirl of shifting phenomena.⁷⁶

As stated, this conception of the aesthetic is close to the views espoused by Schopenhauer: art is a temporary salve or escape from the burdens and drudgery of daily existence that weighs so heavily on people throughout their lives. Art can still allow a person to affirm life, which for Nietzsche is the all-important component of his moral system, but in *The Birth of Tragedy* it does so through the presentation of beauty, rather than through the creative act itself. The aesthetic can transform suffering into something beautiful, but it is not yet an active, creative principle for Nietzsche.

Chapter 5. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the centerpiece of Nietzsche's philosophical beliefs.

In the Nietzsche canon, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is considered by many critics as the pinnacle of his philosophical career. *Zarathustra* marks Nietzsche's first attempt to provide an aesthetic resolution of the intellectual crisis presented in Kant's split-world dichotomy.⁷⁷ In his earlier works, such as *Human, All-Too-Human* (1878) and *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche attempted to discredit humanity's moral valuations by exposing the fact that those qualities have their origin in base instincts rather than in reason. As R.J. Hollingdale points out, Nietzsche tries to, "undermine morality by exposing its non-moral basis and rationality by exposing its irrational basis.... In brief, the controlling tendency of his thought is nihilist."⁷⁸ In *Zarathustra*, however, Nietzsche rises from his devaluation of traditional morality to a positive solution for the problems plaguing mankind, a solution that can only be achieved through the aesthetic.

⁷⁶Ibid, p.102.

⁷⁷R.J. Hollingdale, "Introduction," *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p.11.

In declaring that God is dead and espousing an amoral life, Nietzsche wishes to offer his reader an alternative to society's restrictive norms and to pave the way for the emergence of the overman. The overman refuses to base his reliance on values imposed by others, recognizing that even a person's "immoral" actions may contribute to the creation of a whole self. By considering people as characters in a work of art, the importance of the development of the "personality" comes to the fore. In Judeo-Christian society, the personality is commonly held to be absolute and fundamentally static from birth until death. By emphasizing the multiple interpretations of people, events and ideas, Nietzsche subtly distances himself from the primary of a single, absolute perspective and the deity who represents this view.

The overman recognizes the fluidity of an individual's personality and is capable of constantly overcoming those obstacles to the will to power that constrict his existence. After learning to control animal instincts and the physical power that they represent, the overman affirms his life in art. The overman expresses power through his/her own abundant interpretations of existence. In his doctrine of the eternal recurrence, Nietzsche suggests that existence is an endless cycle, permitting no external justification, by affirming existence for its own sake, the overman finds happiness.

Nietzsche began his mission to liberate the individual by means of aesthetic creation from the very beginning of his revolutionary book. The character of Zarathustra is a hermit who lives by himself on a mountaintop. After seeing a great star, he decides to end his ten-year period of self-imposed isolation and go among the people to spread his message. In one of his most telling declamations, Zarathustra says, "*All gods are dead: now we want the Superman to live*" – let this be our last will oneday at the great

⁷⁸Ibid, p. 13.

noontide!”⁷⁹ Although Nietzsche declared that God is dead in his *Gay Science*, Zarathustra is the first character that Nietzsche uses to offer a solution to the crisis of life in a meaningless, chaotic world.

Nietzsche is a radical perspectivist: he views subjects and ideas as having no existence apart from the way that people view and define them. Hence, traditional universal values of right and wrong are discredited in Nietzsche's conception of the world, as they are not based on an absolute standard. A person's self is defined by the desire to create beyond itself and come up with a new set of values.⁸⁰ Ultimately, this act of creation is not intended for merely private consumption. Zarathustra does go into seclusion on his mountaintop home for long stretches of time, but in the end, he is always drawn back to civilization in order to mingle and interact with people. Ideally, people actively involve themselves with the external and create in a greater context than just for themselves. However, most people are not strong enough to accomplish this goal, so they join institutions that attempt to create these values for them. An example of such an institution is an organized religion that takes the power of creation away from the individual. In that case, a person is part of the herd and loses individuality and personal perspective.

Nietzsche's perspectivism dictates that there are no universal rules of conduct. Zarathustra says, “They... have discovered themselves who say, ‘This is *my* good and evil’; with that they have reduced to silence the mole and the dwarf who say, ‘Good for all,

⁷⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, “Part I: Of The Bestowing Virtue,” *Zarathustra* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 104.

⁸⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, “Part I: Of the Despisers of the Body,” *Zarathustra* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 63.

evil for all.”⁸¹ The importance of an individual’s actions and experiences changes from context to context. All of a person’s actions contribute to his nature. Although some events have more significance than others, the nature that those actions constitute is not static. Nietzsche’s acknowledgement of the inevitability of plural perspectives is the key to the significance of art for his thought.

According to Nietzsche, there are two types of art: authentic and inauthentic. Inauthentic art is the expression of the herd and leads people to such artifices as politics and science. In contrast, authentic art is that which people know that they have created. It brings individuals to the truth that the surface of things is neither god-willed nor necessary. Since most people interact with the world around them as if it were “meant” to happen or believe it is, they fail to realize that all of society’s institutions are man-made. Similarly, science and politics are artificially created disciplines whose laws are mutable and not based on some higher order. Nietzsche thinks that people should think critically about their society in order to recognize and change the aspects that they do not find satisfying or just.

The aesthetic plays an important role in Nietzsche’s healing of the split world. While philosophers like Schopenhauer see art as a tool to alleviate some of the pressures of daily existence, Nietzsche thinks that the aesthetic addresses Kant’s problematic in a more active way. In Nietzsche’s conception of the world, art leads the individual beyond established moral values and beyond those philosophical fictions whose purpose was to deny change and posit absolute purposes. The aesthetic leads away from “selfless”

⁸¹Friedrich Nietzsche, “Part III: Of The Spirit of Gravity,” *Zarathustra* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 212.

devotion to the standards of society, to a state where a person can create his own rules and be an individual unencumbered by dogma.

Not only does Nietzsche think of life as a work of art, but he also interprets the individual through the lens of the aesthetic. One of the prerequisites of this aesthetic view of the self is that individuals have to live intensely and on the edge of danger. Nietzsche harkens back to the idea of the Romantic hero, such as Faust, who lives in internal conflict between opposing tendencies. A person does not have to be in direct conflict or struggle for his entire life, but struggle must occur in everyone's life or complacency will result. Zarathustra says to a dying tightrope walker: "You have made danger your calling, there is nothing in that to despise. Now you perish through your calling."⁸² The greater the potential pain and disaster in a person's life, the more he is forced to think and move beyond societal norms. Indeed, the danger courted by Nietzsche's overman may have been precisely this rejection of a predetermined "good" and "evil."

In Nietzsche's philosophy, this aesthetic model of the world is the path to an enlightened state. Nietzsche does not think that it is necessary, or preferable, for all of a person's actions to serve as a single overall purpose, certainly not an objectively posited one. Conflict is a constant fact of human existence, and any attempt at final resolution is ultimately life-denying. Even an action that traditional Christian morality considers base may very well contribute to the freedom, pleasure, and creativity of the self.

A villain in a novel who performs heinous actions may nevertheless be a valuable character for the work. A person should not be overly concerned about his or her apparent misdeeds, in Nietzsche's view, because evil does not depend solely on

person's actions, but on whether that person's actions are an expression of his or her whole self. This is in opposition to the forces that attempt to hinder a person from fully expressing himself, such as law and society's norms. Zarathustra declares, "Yes, as a sacred Yes is needed, my brothers, for the sport of creation: the spirit now wills *its own will*, the spirits undered from the world now wins *its own world*." ⁸³

From the work of psychologists at about the time of Nietzsche's writing, Nietzsche understood that the two primitive drives in humans are the desire for power and the emotion of fear. Nietzsche thinks that religion and its absolute notion of virtues is the source of fear in people. Eventually, he decided that the emotion of fear is really the feeling of the absence of power and concluded that the will to power is the ultimate drive. Zarathustra says, "Lust for power: before its glance man crawls and bends and toils... And then it also happened – and truly, it happened for the first time! – that this teaching glorified *selfishness*, the sound, healthy selfishness." ⁸⁴

Throughout *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche describes the crisis created by the decline of belief in god. The solution that Nietzsche offers through the character of Zarathustra is the idea of the *übermensch* or overman. Nietzsche introduces the overman as the ultimate artist who has the knowledge and capacity to create his own aesthetic works. In stark contrast to the Christian view that the self is largely dependent on a person's neighbors and acquaintances, Nietzsche's new breed of individuals create their own selves outside of the herd.

⁸²Friedrich Nietzsche, "Prologue: Part 6," *Zarathustra* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 48.

⁸³Friedrich Nietzsche, "Part I: Of the Three Metamorphoses," *Zarathustra* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 55.

⁸⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, "Part III: Of the Three Evil Things," *Zarathustra* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 208.

The overman is commonly defined as a person who has overcome himself. The commentator Nehamas describes the overman as having mastered and suppressed his will to power. Nehamas and Hollingdale tend to focus on the overman's ability to dominate bestial instinct. Hollingdale writes:

A morality –“hang over every people”... primitive aggression has been directed back upon itself, sublimated into *self-control*. When the same thing happens in an individual, when he imposes commands upon himself, and obeys them, so that he too as it were changes from a rabble into a nation, the result is ‘the Superman’, the man who is master of *himself*.⁸⁵

When an individual imposes commands upon himself and obeys these directives, the result is the overman, who is master of himself. Nietzsche writes that the only escape from the nihilistic prison that ensnares people is the sublimation of the will to power in an individual. The followers of the slave morality, those infected by *ressentiment*, also undergo this process of sublimation. In this case, the aggression that is bottled up in individuals in their quest for power is directed back upon itself and in a self-destructive way. The difference between a masochistic self-overcoming and a self-affirming one rests ultimately on the conception of the will to power. For this reason, some critics regard the will to power as a far more differentiated force than that depicted by Nehamas. While the adherents of the slave morality begin to hate both themselves and anything different than themselves, the overman applauds difference and originality. Even while conforming to some of society's rules, the overman is still in conflict within himself and does not ever become a pawn of the dominant social institutions, such as religion. The overman can harness the conflicting forces within himself in a creative manner: he suppresses his animal instinct for a higher aim. The slave does so at the bidding of others, and his struggle results in conformity rather than creativity.

Only the *übermensch* has the capacity to succeed in this challenge of mastering himself. The overman is essentially aware of the fluidity of the personality.⁸⁶ It is this fluidity that accounts for the constant overcoming of the self, as opposed to a one-time overcoming or rejection of the self. The overman is the exemplar of Nietzsche's doctrine of the pessimism of strength: a life of courage, a constant struggle towards a goal that is difficult to attain. An important part of this concept is that every moment of life must be enjoyed to the fullest extent and life is thereby affirmed.

Of course, the overman must endure many dangers. First, the self of the overman is not delineated or distinguished from the outside world, so that the person and the world might be separated. There is no barrier between the self and the world because the overman must have the capacity for experiencing the great feelings of the world. Artists have always tried to embrace the pain of the world and have collapsed beneath it, and the overman is also in danger of this fate.⁸⁷ Another danger that the overman faces is the challenge of command. The overman is the strongest human and since commanding is more difficult than obeying, he is forced to bear the burden of command. In the role of commanding, there is always great risk to the overman. Since the overman feels obligated for all of those whom he commands, if he makes a mistake and jeopardizes the welfare of the regular people that he leads, then the overman will feel responsible and it is possible that this burden can crush him.⁸⁸

Despite these dangers, the overman's reward for overcoming himself is joy and happiness. This reward of joy is the meaning of life for Nietzsche. The more the

⁸⁵R.J. Hollingdale, "Introduction," *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 26-27.

⁸⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, "Prologue: Part 3," *Zarathustra*, p. 158.

⁸⁷Alexander Nehamas, "The Self," *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, p. 160.

⁸⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, "Part II: of Self-Overcoming," *Ibid*, p. 137.

overman transmutes the energy of his sublimated will to power into self-overcoming, the more his happiness increases. When the overman attains this joy, he affirms sand loves life in spite of all of the pain of existence. The overman feels this way because he understands that joy and pain are inextricably linked and both fit into the whole of his life.

To express this feeling of total affirmation of life, Nietzsche introduces his controversial idea of the “eternal return” or “eternal recurrence.” This concept is pivotal in Nietzsche’s vision of the overman and is in fact the fundamental conception of *Zarathustra*. It is commonly interpreted to mean that everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen has already occurred and will continue to occur indefinitely. After falling unconscious for seven days, Zarathustra awakes to find that the animals near his home are talking to him. They say:

Everything goes, everything returns; the wheel of existence rolls forever. Everything dies, everything blossoms anew; the year of existence runs on forever. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of existence builds itself forever. Everything departs, everything meets again; the ring of existence is true to itself forever. Existence begins in every instant; the ball there rolls around every Here. The middle is everywhere. The path of eternity is crooked.⁸⁹

In contrast to the Christian belief, there will not be a final state that will redeem everyone who has gone before.⁹⁰

Every event in the world is inextricably linked with every other event. The history of each person is at stake in every moment.⁹¹ According to this reasoning, nothing that happens to an individual is the result of an accident and there is no such

⁸⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, “Part III: The Convalescent,” *Zarathustra* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 234.

thing as coincidence. Zarathustra says, “The time has passed when accidents could befall me; and what *could* still come to me that was not already my own? It is returning, at last it is coming home to me – my own Self and those parts that have long been abroad and scattered among all things and accidents.”⁹²

Nietzsche is fully aware that the idea of the eternal recurrence is difficult to accept and might cause different reactions among people. The most likely is complete, utter despair at the thought that the universe is an endless cycle. Of course, Nietzsche wants everyone to have these two of the two possible reactions: exhilaration or gladness. However, it seems that only the overman could be so well disposed toward his life to desire to relive it forever. The overman is happy remaining the same forever and this is the ultimate expression of the self’s will to power. This eternal recurrence is Nietzsche’s aesthetic resolution of the Kantian split world crisis because it allows for freedom in a world that is governed by an immutable set of physical laws.

This freedom rests in the return’s naturalization of man back into nature. As Nehamas writes, “The eternal recurrence would then indeed constitute “the highest formula of affirmation.”⁹³ The recurrence conquers the rule of nonsense and necessity that has inspired humanity to create the divine in the first place.⁹⁴ Necessity is conquered through the human act of will that says to the whole past, “Thus I will it.”⁹⁵ From the

⁹⁰Nietzsche has often been attributed his own unique cosmology based on passages such as this one, but this is not entirely accurate. Nietzsche does not believe that the same individual events will be eternally repeated. He is actually referring to the idea that each individual life has its own purpose.

⁹¹Alexander Nehamas, “The Self,” *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, p. 149.

⁹²Friedrich Nietzsche, “Part III: The Wanderer,” *Zarathustra* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 173.

⁹³Alexander Nehamas, “The Self,” *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, p. 162.

⁹⁴Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 257.

⁹⁵Ibid.

examination of *Genealogy*, it can be understood that the affirmation of life is also the key to morality and to the overman.

In his groundbreaking *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche declares that God is dead in an effort to liberate the self from its traditional association with the divine. According to Nietzsche, the world is a work of art that is created by the overman. These are the individuals who have the courage to constantly transform their natural will to power without the guidance of absolute values. Basically, the overman denies himself the illusion of final fulfillment of his desires and channels that energy instead into different ventures. By following this method, the overman achieves happiness in proportion to the overcoming. Since the overman is happy and has accomplished his goal of overcoming himself, he desires and wills for life to repeat itself eternally. A person's whole self is revealed in every action, in the interplay between creation and necessity.

Conclusion

Chapter 1. Summary of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity.

One important motif that can easily be traced through Nietzsche's works during his entire career is his critique of Christianity. It has been stressed that Nietzsche was born a Christian and was raised in a devoutly Lutheran household in which his male ancestor has served as high-ranking members of the church for generations.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche argues that religion is a tool that allows people, usually the weak, to dominate the rest of society. This is accomplished by making workers feel contentment with their difficult jobs and low status in society

because in a future after life the weak will be rewarded for their sacrifices. Most importantly, religion offers an ennobling of obedience to the common man so that he can justify his subservient position as actually superior. Going to church and hearing that their lives of thankless toil and poverty is the best life pacifies the masses and convinces them that their situation is not only bearable, but preferable.

Nietzsche labels religion a reactionary force in society, and claims that it has worked to weaken Europeans by reversing all original and natural valuations. He thinks that organized Christianity stunts the growth of the very instincts that make people strong: their creativity, intellectual independence, and conquering spirit. In its place is the "bad conscience," a concept that was invented by religion to allow it to freely criticize the noble. The creation of the idea of conscience is one of the primary reasons why the strong are denigrated. Nietzsche resents the tendency of religion to level through the appeal to conscience. According to Nietzsche, Christianity promotes a mediocre "democracy" in which people are represented as equal and in which no one is to possess greater skills. This mentality encourages the slaves to resent and weaken the nobles, in order to bring them all down to the status of slave.

Religion also espouses a system in which absolute existence and are the prevailing opinion. Nietzsche equates the master morality with the concept of perspectivism by claiming that strength is the ability to see through many perspectives. Christianity's belief in the all-seeing "God's eye," which views all existence through one absolute frame of reference, is the antithesis of Nietzsche's argument. If it is claimed that there can be only one way to look at something or to perform an action, then there is no room

for the creative, life-affirming process that Nietzsche sees as an essential component of life.

Christianity's negative influence as an institution continues by spreading the false belief that there is an afterlife that acts as a reward for being faithful to its dogma. The idea of an afterlife is dangerous because it has the potential to eliminate all striving, which Nietzsche sees as the key to the best life. If a person thinks that there is an afterlife, and all he has to do to get there is to remain one among the herd of mediocrity and not develop his talents, then his growth will be stunted and he will have no incentive to push himself to greater accomplishments.

Some critics have argued that Nietzsche does not really deconstruct Christianity, but in fact he reworks its primary messages for a more contemporary audience. However, it does not appear to be the case that Nietzsche agrees with the crucial messages of Christianity. More likely, he employs traditional Christian images for two reasons. The first is that he was raised as a Lutheran and would therefore think in terms of the biblical parables. Second, he probably wants to use Christianity's own images to destroy that tradition, and he knows that people will be more responsive to a message that displays aspects of a tradition that they are used to. This confirms Nietzsche's own perspectivism, by showing that Christianity's message is not immutable, tied for all eternity to its Biblical proclamation, since a philosopher is able to transform its central claims, using its own images and stories against it.

Chapter 3. Summaries of the earlier sections and final thoughts.

In Part I, the reader was introduced to the arguments of the thinkers whom most influenced Nietzsche. Kant's problematic is of defining importance for Nietzsche's authorship, as it formed the basis for the Idealist and Romantic Movements, both of which constituted a response and reaction to Kant. Simply stated, Kant believed that it is impossible to have a single world in which both moral freedom and modern science and technology can exist. This is due to the fact that science proclaims that all natural events follow unchanging laws. In contrast, morality, although strictly governed in Kant's conception of duty by the moral law and categorical imperative, presupposes human freedom.

Therefore, Kant split the world into two realms: the noumenal, or underlying reality, and the phenomenal, or the world of appearance. The noumenal world is the world of morality and duty, which Kant sees as the most important because Kant believed in the importance of human freedom and the moral law. Kant claims he believes, but cannot know that the two worlds are joined, and he illustrated the way in which the aesthetic might serve as a bridge between the noumenal and the phenomenal. Judgments of the aesthetic form the middle ground, or bridge, between appetite, which is grounded in the phenomenal, and duty, which is based in the noumenal.

Schopenhauer, in the tradition of German Idealism, maintains the Kantian split world theory, but alters its form. In his conception, the phenomenal world and the finite or individual will that comprise it are only an illusion that humanity perpetuates. Instead, there is only one universal Will, and this represents the noumenal, the truth underlying the world of appearances. Schopenhauer, although derided by Nietzsche later

in his career, claimed that the aesthetic itself could reconcile individuals to their illusory status.

Goethe's attempt to solve the Kantian problematic is present in the activity of the Romantic hero. Goethe maintained that humans reside in the finite, but are forever drawn to the infinite despite the fact that it is beyond their grasp. Like Schopenhauer, Goethe offered an aesthetic reconciliation as the path to healing the split between the two worlds. Unlike Schopenhauer's tendency to view art as a temporary salve for the pain caused by these separated worlds, Goethe believed that the aesthetic can actually solve the problem. This is accomplished by artists, who capture beauty in their works and thereby provide a passing vision of the unity of the finite and infinite. Nietzsche later used the figure of the artist/hero, with Faust and Goethe himself as the prime examples, as the paradigms for his overman.

In Part II, after some background and biographical information about Nietzsche was provided, some of his major works were examined in detail. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche attacks and tries to break down the moral system created and perpetuated by Christianity. Nietzsche describes a system of slave and master morality, where the slaves are the Christian majority who are afflicted by *ressentiment*, desire for mediocrity, and hatred of anything that is powerful and independent of society's fabricated rules. In contrast, Nietzsche proposes that the noble people are characterized by their self-affirmation of life and the determination of their own values.

Beyond Good and Evil was discussed in terms of its criticism of philosophers' favorite fictions. Nietzsche does away with the concept of cause and effect and revises the Kantian notion of "free will" to try to unite the two realms that were sundered by

Kant's theory. Nietzsche argues that the notion of morality, which includes both good and evil, is misguided. A person misses out on life if he or she simply avoids everything that society labels "evil." Ultimately, Nietzsche critiques Christianity's system of absolutes, its belief in an afterlife, and its faulty system of "morality." All of these principles work to reduce striving and have a leveling effect on society whose product is mediocrity.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche discusses Greek tragedy as the product of the tension between the rational Apollonian and the instinctual Dionysian drives. Because of this belief that art had lost prestige in European society over the centuries, Nietzsche desires a return to the creative tendencies of the Dionysian and a rebirth of the aesthetic.

The Birth of Tragedy was Nietzsche's first publication, and his conception of art changes in his later works. But, in this book, Nietzsche sees the aesthetic in much the same way as Schopenhauer, as a salve that offers temporary relief from a life of pain and disappointment. The aesthetic can transform the suffering of everyday life into something beautiful, enabling one to affirm life, but it is not yet an active, creative principle.

Finally, Nietzsche's pivotal work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, was examined as the ultimate manifesto of his career. In it, Nietzsche tries to view people from an aesthetic perspective. The overman, the exemplar of Nietzsche's master morality, masters himself by redirecting his will to power to constructive, self-creative ends. The overman illustrates Nietzsche's doctrine of the pessimism of strength: a life of courage, a constant struggle towards a goal that is difficult to attain. The affirmation of eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's aesthetic resolution of the Kantian problematic because it allows for freedom

in a world that is governed by an immutable set of physical laws. An important part of this concept is that every moment of life must be enjoyed to the fullest extent, on the edge of disaster, and life is thereby affirmed. The eternal recurrence would then indeed constitute the highest form of affirmation. Ultimately, the overman's ability to will the recurrence conquers the rule of nonsense and chance that has inspired humanity to create the divine in the first place.

Some would argue that Nietzsche's attempt to unite two sundered worlds of reality and illusion is outdated. Phenomenology has largely replaced the "layered" view of the world as real, thinly masked by a façade of appearance. The popular opinion among continental philosophers is that whatever people can see and perceive is reality, and that no "truth" or Form exists beneath. This view reflects the trend towards a revised understanding of reason and the dominance of science and technology, ostensibly infallible, in the everyday lives of almost all human beings.

This shifting in priorities away from the Kantian conception can also be expressed through the terms of the German philosopher Heidegger. He claims that the temporal is the real; in other words, whatever is happening in the "here and now" is reality and nothing else can possibly exist. This is in sharp contrast to the notion of the noumenal, which Kant used to house all things eternal in a place outside of time and space. To Heidegger, the assumption that there is a separate world existing that contains the moral, and ultimately the divine, is utterly absurd. It is this conception of the world that is now most common in continental philosophy.

Still, even if the noumenal, as a distinct realm of human freedom and the moral, does not exist, the fundamental Kantian problematic that spawned the split world theory

in the first place is still relevant. Science and morality are still at odds, regardless of where that conflict takes place. Even in our modern world, the question of whether or not there can be moral freedom in a world controlled by the rational dictates of science is alive and well. For this reason, humans continue to desire something more than the scientific world view allows, namely, freedom and a meaning for human existence. As long as they do so, Nietzsche's glorification of art will remain appealing and his critique of religion controversial.

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