

# Nietzsche: F(r)iend?

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## INTELLECTUAL MARTIAL ARTS

I first encountered Nietzsche as a freshman sitting at the University of Oregon's Erb Memorial Union Skylight Refectory—there was a bit of graffiti on the back of a seat with the phrase, “God is dead’—Nietzsche”, followed below by a counter-phrase, “Nietzsche is dead’—God.” I remember being a bit shocked at the audacity of the claim(s), and also a bit humored. Since then, after having read through much of Nietzsche, I find that this kind of reversal seems somewhat in line with the sort of intellectual martial arts performed by this rather strange figure. (A concern with reversal can be seen, for instance, with his revaluation of all values, and with the characterization made of him by other critics as being a reverse Platonist).

Indeed, Nietzsche often practices reversal as a strategy, or intellectual move in his writings; and it is his repeated exploitation of such techniques that helps distinguish Nietzsche from previous philosophers who so often seem to build static systems. For Nietzsche, these practices are used in an engagement with the specific issues found in his aimless intellectual roaming— a solitary and nihilistic combat which leaves a trail of ruins with little or no systematic organization. Such is not to claim that we could make a comprehensive list of his moves— it is important here simply to note that for Nietzsche “philosophizing” is an activity, and often a seemingly violent one pushed forward through an aphoristic bursting which repeatedly reverses, overturns, transforms, and transfigures.

One can see the influence of previous thinkers on Nietzsche's writings, however, and particularly the German philosophers (Spinoza seems to be a favorite, too). The influence of Hegel and Schopenhauer, for example, are clearly evident in the strategic use of dialectical oppositions found in his first important work, *The Birth of Tragedy*— a few of the discussed oppositions are as follows:

Apollo	—	Dionysus
Plastic Arts	—	Music
Dreams	—	Intoxication
Homer	—	Aeschylus
Illusion / Naiveté	—	Truth / Terror / Pain
The Individual	—	The Whole
Antigone	—	Cassandra
The Epic	—	The Lyrical
History / The Future	—	The Now
Word	—	Tone
Hero-Vision	—	Mass-Spectator
Phenomena	—	The Will
The Soul	—	The Body
Socrates	—	Nietzsche

With this list, one may be able to discern a repetition and expansion of Schopenhauer's opposition between the Will and Representation (respectively, the Dionysian and the Apollonian for Nietzsche) which in *The Birth of Tragedy* are ultimately sublimated with a Hegelian *Aufgehoben* into tragedy; Nietzsche recognizes such in his own appraisal of the work in his *Ecce Homo*:

“it smells offensively Hegelian, and the cadaverous perfume of Schopenhauer sticks only to a few formulas.... the antithesis of the Dionysian and the

Apollonian... in tragedy this antithesis is sublimated into a unity.”

*(Basic Writings of Nietzsche, 727 (Ecce Homo))*

Dialectical opposition remains an important strategy throughout Nietzsche’s works (the very titles of his books often suggest opposition, as with *The Birth of Tragedy* or *The Joyful Wisdom*); and keeping this in mind can be helpful in understanding a possible impetus for writing the likes of *The Anti-Christ*, or for Nietzsche calling himself an immoralist (rather than, say, an a-moralist).

One can conceivably see a parallel with Marx here, in that contrary to a Hegelian passive observation of history’s progressive unfolding out of time into being, Nietzsche seems to be attempting to create new oppositions to force stagnation and decadence into a revitalized progression into the future. However, contrary to a Marxist focus on economic domination and theory inspired practice, Nietzsche concerns himself with moral domination— and he also evidences that he believes his perspective to be more descriptive of reality than prescriptive of how it ought to be (this attempt to describe and affirm “reality” will be discussed more in depth later in this essay).

Nietzsche wears his influence from other philosophers in a new way; rather than subsuming or destroying their explanatory systems with a new one, he draws upon them for a repertoire of critical strategies. And in this way, he conducts a genealogical performance— more than simply tracing the roots of ideas, he enacts philosophical moves. Indeed, much of what could be said about Nietzsche’s philosophy could also be said about Hegel’s or Schopenhauer’s— discerning what is original in Nietzsche can be difficult. With another reversal, though, Nietzsche does not concede an indebtedness, but writes of feeding on:

“those who were unknowingly my workers.”  
 (*The Will to Power*, 5)

This is not to say that he is uncritical of previous philosophers. With regard to Hegel, for instance, Nietzsche would deny that any type of absolute description could be made concerning the progress of a history centered on notions such as the *zeitgeist*:

“the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of ‘aim,’ the concept of ‘unity,’ or the concept of ‘truth.’ Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking: the character of existence is not ‘true,’ is *false*”  
 (*The Will to Power*, 13)

It is important to note the word “interpretation” here, as when any absolute criterion for truth is lost, there can be nothing left but various competing perspectives, or projected interpretations.

Ironically, Nietzsche’s rejection of absolute truth seems to have been inspired somewhat by Kant and science, as evidenced in his “On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense.” Nietzsche takes very seriously Kant’s claims in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that human reason has no access to the in-itself, or what might be absolute truth; as Nietzsche claims any idea

“is anthropomorphic through and through, and does not contain one single point which is ‘true-in-itself,’ real and universally valid, apart from man”  
 (“On Truth and Lie...”)

Moreover, he claims:

“Everything which makes man stand out in bold relief against the animal depends on this faculty of volatilizing the concrete metaphors into a schema, and therefore resolving a perception into an idea.”

(“On Truth and Lie...”)

Such claims follow his description of metaphor making:

“A nerve-stimulus, first transformed into a percept! First metaphor! The percept again copied into a sound! Second metaphor! And each time he [the creator of language] leaps completely out of one sphere right into the midst of an entirely different one.... Every idea originates through equating the unequal.”

(“On Truth and Lie...”)

These claims, concerning the metamorphosis of metaphorizing, use a “schema” terminology that is clearly Kantian; and the crux of Nietzsche’s metaphorical transfiguration resorts to neuro-biology, leading to his bold claims:

“What therefore is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions; worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses; coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal”

(“On Truth and Lie...”)

In a radical scientific Kantianism, truth is lost the moment perception is hypostatized— ideas never directly correspond to

the intricate detail of the world which metaphor making and schematizing severs them from, but are always caught up within reified human customs and connections; and in this way, Nietzsche puts Kant's Understanding on as dubitable grounds as Kant put the faculty of Reason. The ironic aspect of this hyper-critical (hypocritical?) claim that all truth has the same status as lies, is that it is based on the hyper-extension of the discourses— scientific and Kantian— most concerned with and “grounded in” truth (i.e., how can Nietzsche make this scientifically valid, and true claim?).

It is with this destruction of any claim to absolute truth (and any real unity, final aim, etc.) that one may begin to wonder about the integrity of Nietzsche's writing. Indeed, a bold confidence resonates through his writings, suggesting that all should blindly follow him, as if he were directly asking, “how could you trust yourself more than you trust me?” Nietzsche explores some of life's most important aspects, often in new ways which appear to be experimental wanderings on untrodden ground— we must ask, in the face of a claimed lost truth, what would make Nietzsche a trustworthy guide? Such a hesitance is not at all abated when Nietzsche claims on the one hand:

“the truth speaks out of me.— But my truth is terrible; for so far one has called lies truth”  
*(Basic Writings of Nietzsche, 782 (Ecce Homo))*

But remarks on the other:

“Have I thereby harmed virtue?— As little as the anarchists harm princes: only since they have been shot at do they sit securely on their thrones again— For thus has it ever been and always will be: one cannot serve a

cause better than by persecuting it and hunting it down— This— is what I have done.”

(*The Will to Power*, 179-180; modified also in *The Portable Nietzsche* 71-72 (*The Wanderer and his Shadow*), see also *The Will to Power*, #361)

As suggested by the title *Twilight of the Idols*, much of Nietzsche’s writing is iconoclastic— he targets any sort of given ideal, or ideology; it is this anti-ideological activity of Nietzsche which makes him impossible to pin down, as he will not rest at any given point or ideal. Yet, if he believes that resistance strengthens the opposition, what then are we to believe— that Nietzsche is attempting to strengthen ideals?

Possibly, if Nietzsche’s stance were consistently evil (he says of *Twilight of the Idols*, no book has been “more evil” [*Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 770 (*Ecce Homo*)] an appraisal of his work would be easier. His comments advocating slavery, his misogyny, and his racial stereotyping are obviously abhorrent; yet, would we want to throw out his affirmation of life on earth as well? (A Buddhist might reply, “yes!”) Moreover, Nietzsche does on occasion make statements which are blatantly contradictory. This obstacle to interpretation is made even more problematic in that when reading Nietzsche one risks coming to “love” him for his clear character and profound soul; this tends often to blind one to his “darker” side— one wishes “good” intentions upon him, despite his re-envisioning and shifting of the categories of good and evil (a shifting which through subtle seductions may also re-situate the reader’s own perspective on morality). Indeed, it is all too easy to project one’s wishes onto Nietzsche, a danger he points out:

“Whoever thought he had understood something of me, had made up something out of me after his own

image— not uncommonly an antithesis to me; for example an ‘idealist.’”

*(Basic Writings of Nietzsche, 717 (Ecce Homo)).*

Here, I feel I have to be vigilant of this myself— one seems challenged by Nietzsche not to be reactive towards him, yet he is so polemical! Maybe it is easy to be duped into Nietzsche’s game— yet he stacks all the cards in his favor, as with the paradoxical order: Don’t Follow Me!:

“I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.”

*(Basic Writings of Nietzsche, 676 (Ecce Homo))*

If we are to play this game by his rules, then he has already won. And one must ponder his aim— to dominate? To invent a game where he always wins? What might have motivated him to create such a game? Does he have ulterior motives? Alas, it is difficult to even discuss Nietzsche without sounding like an admirer or an ass! His remarks elude summary dismissal; yet whether they deserve extended discussion is another matter.

Nietzsche does return again and again to various themes though, such as the Will to Power, the Over-man, the Eternal Return, and revenge; and while these themes may not constitute any system or ideal, they seem to provide focal points for a rather consistent, even if loose, schema of interpretation. Before indirectly discussing these themes that might constitute a “positive” aspect of Nietzsche’s writing, it seems important to note that despite their extremely simple (some might say, “elegant”) theoretical structure, it is Nietzsche’s use of these themes which has such tremendous rhetorical force and critical insight. Moreover, his opinions and style often imply a megalomania that demonstrate how “seriously” he takes his writings:

“...who I am. Really, one should know it, for I have not left myself ‘without testimony.’”

(*Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 673 (*Ecce Homo*))

### **THE GREAT MOTHER (Over Man?)**

The rhetorical force and beautiful art of Nietzsche’s writings might often make one forget his academic connections. His writings are, after all, often concerned with famous academic writers, and with traditionally important academic themes. One finds a telling break from what might be called Nietzsche’s “performance” in a note at the end of the first section of his *Genealogy of Morals*. It is here that he modestly proposes a small contest, with the prompt:

“What light does linguistics, and especially the study of etymology, throw on the history of the evolution of moral concepts?”

(*Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 491 (*The Genealogy of Morals*))

One can hardly ignore the fact that Nietzsche began his academic career as a Greek philologist. And, with his question’s limitation of using etymology, one can see that possibly only a few words might be applicable— it seems as if Nietzsche were trying to predetermine any answer with his question. For example, the word “morality” comes from the Latin word for “custom” or “habit”— hence Nietzsche’s concern with tracing the genealogy of moral customs. And also— and this is even more telling— the word “virtue” has its origins in the Latin word for “man.” Of course, I’m tracing English words to their Latin origins rather than treating German words and Greek origins— but I am sure that other cases would show parallels with Nietzsche’s themes.

Now, I think the connection between virtue and manliness

may be what Nietzsche really intended to load his question with; as he has sighted Christianity with castrating the strong in favor of making truth feminine:

“it becomes female, it becomes Christian.”  
(*The Portable Nietzsche*, 485 (*Twilight of the Idols*))

His nostalgia for pre-Christian times, circa the pinnacle of Greek culture is obvious; Nietzsche longs for the times when “men where men” and manliness was goodness. It is from this perspective that he sees Christianity as a terrible turn of events: it was the destruction of Greek morality, the culture that was so obviously the obsession of the young Nietzsche. This Christian turn is further seen by Nietzsche (after Hegel, et. al.) as a type of revenge on the part of the mass of slaves; prior to Christianity, so it goes, there was a master morality exercised by the strong. The mass of slaves, weak as individuals but strong as a group, striped the strong individuals of their powerful claim to moral supremacy. It is because of this shift to calling the weak “good” that Nietzsche castigates Christianity.

In fact, Nietzsche is so critical of this Christian turn, that one might say he viewed it as something equivalent to the second fall of humankind (Christ has been called the second Adam) which instead of forfeiting paradise, loses for Nietzsche the “true” distinction between good and evil. Hence, there is a sense of a lost origin, a true morality which Nietzsche so ardently advocates a return to— a return from his era which he sees as so thoroughly decadent. This sort of logic of moral decay suggests that history evidences the sustained devolution of morality which should rightfully be reversed.

However, a point that comes to my mind is, “why not go further back than the Greeks?” Indeed, if we look towards Nietzsche’s opinion of a morality prior to the Greeks, at least prior to any Greek history that would be subject to any

genealogy or etymology, we find that there could be no logic of “moral decay.” In Nietzsche’s essay “Homer’s Contest” for example, we find he views such prior times as a

“pre-Homeric abyss of a terrifying savagery of hatred and the lust to annihilate” (*The Portable Nietzsche*, 38 (*Homer’s Contest*))

—Times which were:

“evil...cruel...vengeful...godless.”  
(*The Portable Nietzsche*, 39 (*Homer’s Contest*))

Indeed, contemporary research into pre-Homeric times has demonstrated that there were many matriarchal based societies—the likes that might be found with an *archeology* of morals. Nietzsche’s lack of scholarly insight into this area is seen in these comments:

“Christianity only takes up the fight that had already begun against the classical ideal and the noble religion. In fact, this entire transformation is an adaptation to the needs and the level of understanding of the religious masses of that time: those masses which believed in Isis, Mithras, Dionysus, the ‘Great Mother.’”  
(*The Will to Power*, 115)

What Nietzsche here fails to recognize is that interest in the likes of Isis or the Great Mother were not reactions against a Hellenic noble (master) morality— these cults have pre-Homeric origins! And hence, one might see that the so-called “noble” master morality of Greek Gods— the manliness of high-Greek culture— must have indeed been a *reaction* against the earlier Goddess religions:

“Today’s scholars habitually call all female and male deities of the ancient world ‘gods,’ as they also call humanity ‘man.’ Yet the supreme deity of the world was usually a Goddess, the creatress or Mother of the gods; and the very [English] word ‘man’ used to mean ‘woman,’ an incarnation of the same lunar Mother, in its original language.”

(Barbra G. Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, [New York: Harper and Row, 1983], p. ix)

Even more puzzling is Nietzsche’s lumping of Dionysus with Isis and the Great Mother. Could it be that Nietzsche saw the Dionysian as being feminine? (Even though the god Dionysus was male, his cult was female— and as a mythical predecessor to Christ, the Dionysian might have been viewed by Nietzsche as being as feminine as the Christian.) And, to speculate further, with Nietzsche’s association of the Dionysian with the whole, as opposed to the Apollonian with the individual, might there also be a parallel with the Buddhist being/nothingness beyond the ego? Could it be that the term “Over-man” designated some feminine state beyond the ego? (Such is not to make the ridiculous assertion that women have no egos, but to explore the possible implications of Nietzsche’s claims!). At any rate, such might account for Nietzsche’s praise of losing one’s self in Dionysian intoxication. It is more likely that Nietzsche used the term “Over-man” to designate some future man much more sophisticated and life-affirming than those of his time.

### **NATURE (*The Will to Power*)**

In section #62 of *The Will to Power*, we find Nietzsche’s own appraisal of his “firsts”:

Fundamental innovations:

In place of “moral values,” purely naturalistic values.  
Naturalization of morality.

In place of “sociology,” a theory of the forms of  
domination.

In place of “society,” the culture complex, as my chief  
interest (as a whole or in its parts).

In place of “epistemology,” a perspective theory of  
affects (to which belongs a hierarchy of the affects; the  
affects transfigured; their superior order, their  
“spirituality”).

In place of “metaphysics” and religion, the theory of  
Eternal Recurrence (this as a means of breeding and  
selection).

Now, it would be quite ridiculous to suppose that Nietzsche advocated a master-morality simply because it was evidenced in one of his favorite periods of history; it seems more likely that he preferred the pre-Christian Hellenic world because it evidenced the morality he advocated. Where, then, might Nietzsche have gained the strength to claim that the values of good vs. evil should be replaced by the values of strong vs. weak? Indeed, as this transvaluation of values stands at the heart of much of Nietzsche’s thought, his basis for making this reevaluation would give at least some basis to evaluate his trustworthiness. As evidenced by the quote above, it would seem that he has chosen to follow nature rather than culture— nature chronologically precedes culture, and thus may be genealogically “superior” (primordial)— more so than even the Greeks.

It is with this insight that we can see how Nietzsche saw his views as inevitable and necessary. For, with humanity’s turning away from religion to science with respect to what was generally

cited as reality and truth, morality too would have to be “scientific”, or rather, exposed as fraudulent:

“Wherever one has not yet been capable of causal thinking, one has thought morally.”

(*The Will to Power*, 179)

Here “science” itself is understood to be the study of nature; the laws that nature obeys are seen as real. Much of science is concerned with what I would call the theoretical reproduction of nature, where with the likes of physics and chemistry nature is understood to be something like a machine— a machine we understand to the extent that we could reconstruct it according to the blue-prints of scientific theories. Now, when biology (and we have already seen evidence of Nietzsche’s interest in neuro-biology) is combined with history (note Nietzsche the philologist and genealogist) we can derive theories of evolution (cp. “volition”). Such theories, including references to natural selection and the survival of the fittest seem to designate areas of the science of the historical or temporal progress of biological organisms.

The “story” of evolution through time, so much more scientific than any Hegelian “description” of history, has one clear message: the “strong” survive. Indeed, despite what Nietzsche may say about Darwin or science, it seems that he could have hardly developed his theory of noble values from any other type of source: the morality of nature may be seen as strength through domination! The more one dominates, be it through brute strength, or subtle evasions, the more likely one is to survive and procreate. Couple this with a Buddhist or Schopenhauerian suggestion that all is Will, and one can find no other conclusion than that nature goes beyond the desire to survive and is one with the Will to Power.

Connections of *evolution* to Nietzsche’s concerns with 1) a

striving for the Over-man, 2) breeding through the Eternal Recurrence, and 3) a morality praising strength and hence the Will to Power seems too obvious and strong to be defeated by any of his claims to the contrary. If these connections are to be questioned at all, it could only be to see Nietzsche's schemas as being more efficiently elegant, and thus circumscribing and determining other theories of evolution. To reject theories of evolution, or even science itself, in favor of the Will to Power would not be to throw them away, but to see how the Will to Power is a further development of these theories and a superseding of them. Indeed, the Will to Power can not only describe evolutionary forces, but psychological and physiological motivations as well:

“Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength— life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results.”

*(Basic Writings of Nietzsche, 211 (Beyond Good and Evil))*

Moreover, for Nietzsche, the Will to Power may not only be found to be a better theory of life motivation, but may also be the ulterior motive behind all other theory making!

However, one can easily question Nietzsche's noble interpretation of nature. Indeed, although one can see that the “strong” have the best chance for survival, strength also comes in various modes and through collectivity. Nietzsche's preference for the lone predator over “the herd” or the vegetable is completely inexplicable— one may postulate the projection of a loner attempting to justify himself. To glorify the centralization of the Will to Power in the single individual— is such not a crude praise of the likes of Christ, one of the most individualized loci of power in history? Besides, who strives for

power— who is more filled with the Will to Power— those who have it, or those who don't? Indeed, the Will to Power could only describe the aspirations of those who have not achieved absolute domination. And it is in this way that the Will to Power is a “theory” infused with “ressentiment:” the Will to Power describes the attempted revenge of those without absolute power. Perhaps Nietzsche, denying all absolutes, would suggest that all beings are victim to a perpetual struggle of revenge for the sake of the Will to Power.

This Will to Power is possibly beyond natural selection (the subjective experience of which, may sound a little like aiming for “eternal comfort” if not being “love” connected with “chance”). “Natural selection” seems a concept aiming towards “stasis” in an ever changing environment; whereas the concept of a “Will to Power” designates a temporal *force* dynamic, where “Power” may not necessarily be absolutely static (or possibly potential), but rather, kinetic. Note that although the temporal measure of power, the “Watt” was named after James Watt in 1889, a little after the time that Nietzsche was writing most of his works, the idea of power as technical term had already been developed somewhat as that which designates the intensity or amount of energy per unit of time. Possibly the Will to Power concept could be seen as a bridge between the mechanical understanding of energy, the natural selection of evolution, and the subjective experience of that bio-mechanical evolutionary process (“Will” designating both an “objective component” often attributed to an organism (like Freudian “desires” or Kantian “purposiveness”) *and* subjective experience (as we feel desires in an emotional way). The quote above about discharging strength suggests that Nietzsche is not placing “Will” as a Freudian desire for what is lacking, but more like the Kantian “purposiveness,” “Will” could be seen as a positive orientation. One might wish that Nietzsche had rather coined the phrase, “Will to Empowerment”— and really, what is Nietzsche's broader aim as an author trying to inform the public, if not an attempt at

empowering others? Possibly Nietzsche had this concept in mind as a replacement for “God” as omnipotent will— possibly Nietzsche saw some Will to be all-Powerful as a desire to be God, where the human mind might play as intermediary between God's omnipotence and the traditionally “Satanic” desire to be God. With more than a desire for the messianic, that “human” mind might desire itself all the way to being that God, which in turn expresses that subjective desire as objective power (the hunger becomes discharge— wish becomes action; imagined freedom turns to some place between perfectly reasoned fate and wild random chance).

Much of this has taken the Will to Power purely as a description of nature. This sort of description goes beyond the reproductive aspects of concrete science; the attempts to grasp the “mechanistic” laws repeated and reverberated throughout all nature, just as the “purposiveness” of Kant’s Reason goes beyond the concrete judgments of the Understanding. Nietzsche has to admit that the “truth” of the Will to Power, or any other schematics of purposive force, such as the Desire for Reproduction, are metaphorically severed from the concrete. And such speculations must explain how any centralized force, be it termed “evolution”, “desire”, “purpose”, or “will to power” can have a relationship with concrete chains of causality. However, despite the fact that the Will to Power does not offer a mechanistically sufficient explanation of life, Nietzsche’s texts offer a thorough demonstration of its descriptive potency; the Will to Power may be a more effective description of nature than even causality.

Nietzsche might view such a focus on the descriptive aspect of the Will to Power as too Apollonian, and consequently, an adequate discussion of it would have to turn towards its more dynamic Dionysian forces; a shift from *describing* (plastic art) the phenomenal to a concern with the experience of (musical) *expression*. However, just as much science strives to purely

describe nature from a perspective devoid of individual and cultural bias, here we must consider the possibility of a pure expression of nature free from the culturally directed individual will.

### **REVELATION (The Eternal Recurrence)**

There seems to be little doubt in Nietzsche's mind that he accomplished his highest poetic achievement with his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. With regard to this work, I here quote at length some comments from *Ecce Homo* concerning inspiration:

Has anyone at the end of the nineteenth century a clear idea of what poets of strong ages have called inspiration? If not, I will describe it.— If one had the slightest residue of superstition left in one's system, one could hardly reject altogether the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely a medium of overpowering forces. The concept of revelation— in the sense that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and subtlety, something becomes visible, audible, something that shakes one to the last depths and throws one down— that merely describes the facts. One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives; like lightening, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form— I never had any choice.

A rapture whose tremendous tension occasionally discharges itself in a flood of tears— now the pace quickens involuntarily, now it becomes slow; one is altogether beside oneself, with the distinct consciousness of subtle shudders and of one's skin creeping down to one's toes; a depth of happiness in which even what is most painful and gloomy does not

seem something opposite but rather conditioned, provoked, a necessary color in such a superabundance of light; an instinct for rhythmic relationships that arches over wide spaces of forms— length, the need for a rhythm with wide arches, is almost the measure of the force of inspiration, a kind of compensation for its pressure and tension.

Everything happens involuntarily in the highest degree but as in a gale of feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity.— The involuntariness of image and metaphor is strangest of all; one no longer has any notion of what is an image or a metaphor: everything offers itself as the nearest, most obvious, simplest expression. It actually seems, to allude to something Zarathustra says, as if the things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors (“Here all things come caressingly to your discourse and flatter you; for they want to ride on you back. On every metaphor you ride to every truth.... Here the words and word-shrines of all being open up before you; here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from you how to speak”)

*(Basic Writings of Nietzsche, 756-757 (Ecce Homo))*

Similarly, in *The Will to Power*:

the extreme sharpness of certain senses, so they understand quite a different sign language— and create one— the condition that seems to be a part of many nervous disorders—; extreme mobility that turns into an extreme urge to communicate; the desire to speak on the part of everything that knows how to make signs—; a need to get rid of oneself, as it were, through signs and gestures; ability to speak of oneself through a

hundred speech media— an explosive condition. One must first think of this condition as a compulsion and urge to get rid of the exuberance of inner tension through muscular activity and movements of all kinds; then as an involuntary co-ordination between this movement and the processes within (images, thoughts, desires)— as a kind of automatism of the whole muscular system impelled by strong stimuli within—; inability to prevent reaction; the system of inhibitions suspended, as it were. Every inner movement (feeling, thought, affect) is accompanied by vascular changes and consequently by changes of color, temperature, and secretion. The suggestive power of music, its “Suggestion mentale”;—  
*(The Will to Power, 438-429)*

Indeed, during a climactic episode in the third part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* entitled “On the Vision and the Riddle”, we find an exposition of the work’s:

“fundamental conception”  
*(Basic Writings of Nietzsche, 751 (Ecce Homo))*

—The Eternal Recurrence:

“Behold... this moment! From this gateway, Moment, a long eternal lane leads backward: behind us lies an eternity. Must not whatever can walk have walked this lane before? Must not whatever can happen have happened, have been done, have passed before?”  
*(The Portable Nietzsche, 270 (Thus Spoke Zarathustra)).*

What Nietzsche understood by what could be called this “revelation of the Eternal Recurrence” may also be evidenced by some remarks noted in *The Will to Power*.

“in a reprehensible world reprehending would also be reprehensible— And the consequences of a way of thinking that reprehended everything would be a way of living that affirmed everything— If becoming is a great ring, then everything is equally valuable, eternal, necessary.— In all correlations of Yes and No, of preference and rejection, love and hate, all that is expressed is a perspective, an interest of certain types of life: in itself, everything that is says Yes.”

*(The Will to Power, 165)*

With the above quotes, we can see an attempt to describe the experience of un-willed expression; an expression that, although occurring through an individual, scientifically suspends the individual’s perspective, and lets nature force articulation. Such a suspension might be further understood as unconscious:

“All perfect acts are unconscious and no longer subject to will; consciousness is the expression of an imperfect and often morbid state in a person”

*(The Will to Power, 163)*

“To the extent that it is willed, to the extent that it is conscious, there is no perfection in action of any kind”

*(The Will to Power, 238)*

Nietzsche also comments:

“Becoming-conscious is a sign that real morality, i.e., instinctive certainty in actions, is going to the devil”

*(The Will to Power, 228)*

And:

“Intensity of consciousness stands in inverse ratio to ease and speed of cerebral transmission.... We must in

fact seek perfect life where it has become least conscious.... Genius resides in instincts; goodness likewise. One acts perfectly only when one acts instinctively”

(*The Will to Power*, 242-243).

Such a concern with involuntary and instinctive bodily action seems quite in line with the immediacy of the moment of expression, the “now.”

Despite this immediacy of revelatory expression, “something” is expressed, as with Nietzsche’s disclosure of the Eternal Recurrence: the moment of expression leaves its trace which in turn is interpreted—Nietzsche’s moment abysmally stretches out beyond any beginning or end, looping into itself in a perpetual repetition. Such a “ring” of becoming, beyond being evidenced in the cycle of seasons, can also be seen with the Buddhist’s wheel of existence, or with the Zodiac. And it is with this thought of the Eternal Recurrence that any hope of an afterlife is lost— we are already within the eternal, our actions reverberating with infinite consequences. This possibly dreadful thought forces an affirmation of life here and now— and as Nietzsche sees life as the Will to Power, one must affirm it as well, even though it is thoroughly infused with unsatisfied resentment: but at its limit, the Will to Power reprehends its reprehending and is affirmed in Eternal Recurrence. Nietzsche thus prescribes the affirmation of nature, both at large and as bodily instinct (compare William Blake and Walt Whitman): but again, is Nietzsche’s description of nature always valid?

Despite Nietzsche’s rather zealous proclamation of the eternal return, he criticizes all attempts at religious idealization. And curiously, he has traced the origin of religions to inspirations similar to those cited above:

Among intelligent, strong, and vigorous races it is

mainly the epileptic who inspires the conviction that a strange power is here at work; but every related condition of subjection, e.g., that of the inspired man, of the poet, of the great criminal, of passions such as love and revenge, also leads to the invention of extra-human powers. A condition is made concrete in a person, and when it overtakes us is thought to be effected by that person. In other words: In the psychological concept of God, a condition, in order to appear as effect, is personified as cause.

The psychological logic is this: When a man is suddenly and overwhelmingly suffused with the feeling of power— and this is what happens with all great affects— it raises him a doubt about his own person: he does not dare to think himself the cause of this astonishing feeling— and so he posits a stronger person, a divinity, to account for it.

In summa: the origin of religion lies in extreme feelings of power which, because they are strange, take men by surprise: and like a sick man who, feeling one of his limbs uncommonly heavy, comes to the conclusion another man is lying on top of him, the naïve homo religiosus divides himself into several persons. Religion is a case of “alteration de la personalite.” A sort of feeling of fear and terror at oneself— But also a feeling of extraordinary happiness and exaltation— Among the sick the feeling of health is sufficient to inspire belief in God, in the nearness of God  
(*The Will to Power*, 85-86).

Here we can see that Nietzsche’s critique of religion applies to his Zarathustra as well:

“the origin of the holy lie is *The Will to Power*.”  
(*The Will to Power*, 92)

How now can we trust Nietzsche, as he has appraised his own “truths” as lies?

It would seem, in conclusion, that Nietzsche does not want us to trust him— or anyone else for that matter. Rather, he teaches that one must take the burden of truth upon oneself— one must reveal one’s own truth, and creatively interpret nature from one’s own perspective, possibly in a counter-cultural affirmation of one’s own body. Yet, these following words of Nietzsche may be telling:

“One should not conceal and corrupt the facts of how our thoughts have come to us.”  
(*The Will to Power*, 229)

Maybe Nietzsche would claim he has been honestly dishonest, where others before have simply been dishonest.

### **PRIMARY SOURCES:**

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