WALKING NIETZSCHE'S TIGHTROPE,
A THESIS FOR NO ONE

by

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ABSTRACT

The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche is thought provoking and enigmatic. This work is an exploration of three of the bulwarks of Nietzsche's philosophy and an attempt to trace their political implications. Analyses of Nietzsche's concepts of the will to power, eternal return, and the Übermensch are presented in an effort to build a coherent vision of Nietzsche's work. The will to power has been interpreted in many ways, and in this text I make the case that it is a drive for self-cultivation and finding one's own direction in life. Eternal return is presented as a mythic idea which Nietzsche thought would spur people to live each moment as if they wished it would recur eternally, rather than judging their actions by future promises or past glories. The Übermensch is the Nietzschean individual who believes in eternal return and engages in self-cultivation through the will to power. There are interesting political implications which follow from this philosophical framework, which I discuss in the final chapter. Based on the analysis of the three concepts mentioned above, I argue that Nietzsche thought societal problems were never cured or even lessened by politics or any political theory.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe many thanks to Tim Luke and Stephen White, for driving me to do what it takes to do good work, and for saving me from attempting "My Theory of the World." I thank Guy Hammond for stepping over the boundary of disciplines and giving me a perspective on Nietzsche that I could not get in political science. To Charles Walcott I owe a great deal for persuading me to apply to (and getting me into) VPI. Were it not for Chuck, my return to undergraduate study in 1988 after a hiatus probably would not have led me here, thanks Chuck. To Doug Bor, Philosopher and Guru, for all the time you've given me: (th)ankhs man. To Nick (P)Smith, I owe thanks for inspiration and some of the best advice a friend could give. Many thanks go to Terry, Kim, and Maxine, who persevere in the face of graduate student mindlessness.

I benefitted greatly from the "Übermensch Society" discussions with Stephen White, Scott Nelson, and Tim Duvall. Scott has given me many ideas (and stolen a few) and immeasurably helped me to stay afloat. I can't thank Tim enough, for help on this or anything else. My thoughts and life would be of less value were it not for Tim. You are well hated my friend, C-. To my parents, well, I hope the time it took to make me makes up for the past 24 years. I'm still not sure how you lived through them.
I owe more to my wife Shelley than to anyone else. I can't believe the hell she has put up with here at VPI. I can't imagine completing this program without her support, criticism, and love. Through it all she has reminded me of what is most important to me; along with Buddy, Jane, Bill, Ted, and Earl.
**Key to Abbreviations of Nietzsche's Works**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>BGE</td>
<td><em>Beyond Good and Evil</em>, 1886</td>
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<td>BT</td>
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<td>EH</td>
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<td>HAH</td>
<td><em>Human, All Too-Human</em>, 1878</td>
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<td>TI</td>
<td><em>Twilight of the Idols</em>, 1889</td>
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<td>TSZ</td>
<td><em>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</em>, 1883-5</td>
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Major divisions (Books, Essays...) of works are listed by Roman numerals. Sections are listed by number. For example, Section 12, Essay 2 of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, will be cited as: *(GM, II, 12).*
PREFACE

As undesirable as it may seem, it remains necessary to inform the reader of the limitations of this work. First, I have not read Nietzsche's work in the original German--because I cannot. Hence, I have not had access to the volumes of untranslated texts and notes; nor have I been able to speculate on the nuances of the German language which translators may have missed. Second, unlike the commentators I have cited repeatedly in this work (who regularly thank each other for help in their interpretations of Nietzsche), I have had only myself and a few friends to ruminate with over the construction of 'my Nietzsche.' If my work seems sophomoric, well, that is because it is.

I have taken care in my interpretation of the work of Nietzsche and his commentators. I owe that care to them and to the reader. I have also attempted at all times to make this work readable and enjoyable for those inside and outside academia. I think I also owe this to Nietzsche, his commentators, and those few who might read this text.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE: MOUNTING THE TIGHTROPE

1.1 Introduction ................................................. 1
1.2 Why This Thesis? ........................................... 3
1.3 Why Nietzsche? ............................................. 5
1.4 Conceptual Overview ....................................... 7
1.4.a Eternal Return ........................................... 7
1.4.b The Will to Power ....................................... 10
1.4.c The Übermensch ......................................... 15
1.5 A Glimpse at the Political Implications ............... 17

## CHAPTER TWO: HERAKLEITOS, ETERNAL RETURN, AND THE DEATH OF GOD

2.1 The Circle of Cycles ....................................... 20
2.2 The Glorification of the Moment ......................... 27
2.3 Weaving a Web With Nietzsche’s Thoughts ............. 30
2.3.a “Behold This Gateway, Dwarf!” ......................... 30
2.3.b The Death of God ........................................ 34
2.3.c The Love of Fate ......................................... 36
2.3.d Eternal Return, The Will to Power, and the Übermensch ................................................. 38
CHAPTER THREE: 'GIVING STYLE TO ONE'S CHARACTER'............40

3.1 Stormtroopers and Swastikas: Nietzsche and World Mastery..........................41
3.1.b The Individual and the 'Great War'.................46
3.2 Nietzsche & the Greek 'Aesthetics of Existence'....53
3.3 The Will to Power and Aesthetic Praxis..............64
3.3.a Untruth as a Condition of Life......................64
3.3.b Good For All, Evil For All, Do Not Exist.........67
3.3.c The Will to Power = Aesthetic Praxis...............69
3.4 Conclusion.........................................79

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ÜBERMENSCH: HOW ONE BECOMES
WHAT ONE IS.............................................82

4.1 Eternal Return, The Will to Power, and the
Übermensch............................................82
4.2 The Three Metamorphoses of the Spirit..............86
4.3 Nietzsche's Conception of Self.......................89
4.4 Übermensch Autonomy: "Holding a Space".............94

CHAPTER FIVE: FROM PHILOSOPHY TO POLITICS: WALKING
NIETZSCHE'S TIGHTROPE..................................104

5.1 The Promise of the Will to Power....................106
5.2 The Power of Eternal Return........................117
5.3 The Übermensch: Life on Nietzsche's Tightrope......124

BIBLIOGRAPHY.............................................138
CHAPTER ONE
MOUNTING THE TIGHTROPE

Nietzsche lived with his intellectual problems as with realities, he experienced a similar emotional commitment to them as other men experience to their wife and children...In a man who thinks like this, the dichotomy between thinking and feeling, intellect and passion, has really disappeared. He feels his thoughts. He can fall in love with an idea. An idea can make him ill.

--R. J. Hollingdale

1.1 Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was more a philosopher and critic of society than he was a political theorist. His works do not include political treatises in the tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Machiavelli, Locke, and Rousseau. The emerging political theories of Nietzsche's time—Marxism, socialism, anarchism, and democratic theory are among the targets of Nietzsche's most vitriolic attacks (see, e.g. GM: I, 4 & 5; TS2: I, 11; II, 6). The affinity of his manifestly political ideas with his friend Jacob Burckhardt's,1 tenuously places them among those of 'Aristocratic Conservatives' such as Alexis de Tocqueville and Henry Adams. But to say that this was a concern of Nietzsche's at all would be a severe overstatement. His sparse political commentary shared

1 Nietzsche's elder colleague at the University of Basel, 1869-79; Hayman: 108-9.
Burckhardt's view that "Mediocrity is the real diabolical force in the world. Civilization is in danger from the ascendancy of the masses" (in Curtis, 1962: 180). In general, Nietzsche's philosophy was a critique of what he saw as a deplorable rise of mediocrity in the "plebeian bias of the modern mind" (GM: I, 4). He lambasted socialists for their "weakness," their "complaining," and their "shifting of blame onto others for their conditions of existence" (TI: 34). He attacked the ideology of "that gruesome farce", the French Revolution, which still pervaded Europe as "a force enlisting everything shallow and mediocre" (BGE: 38; TI: 48). He launched a scathing critique of the German peoples, asserting that their culture had been "democratized to the most dubious mediocrity" since the beginning of the Reich in 1871 (Hayman: 322). Instead of joining in the growing German self-satisfaction and jingoism, Nietzsche became its severest critic.²

The Germans--they were once called a people of thinkers: do they really think at all at present? Nowadays the Germans are bored by intellect, all earnestness for really intellectual things--"Germany, Germany above all." I fear this was the death-blow to German philosophy...How much tiresome heaviness, lameness, dampness, dressing-gown dilatoriness--how much beer there is in the German intellect (TI: "Things Germans Lack," 2).

His philosophy was oriented more toward social critique than

² This critique of Bismarck's Germany is evident, at length, in each of the four essays in the Untimely Meditations, of 1872.
it was toward formulation of political theory. However, there are interesting implications for politics and political philosophy to be drawn out of Nietzsche's work.

In the next section, I present the premise on which this work is founded. In section 1.3, I briefly sketch why I have chosen to focus on the philosophy of Nietzsche. Section 1.4 serves as an introduction to the theoretical arguments of chapters two through four. The final section allows, albeit dimly, a glimpse at the heart of the matter—the implications of Nietzsche's philosophy for politics, political theory, and individual action.

1.2 Why This Thesis?

This thesis is a product of my thoughts on late modern society. I am disappointed at what I perceive to be a lack of desire in many contemporary individuals to think for themselves about the direction which guides their existence. Many look to some form of religion to supply direction; the roads to heaven and hell being lined with plenty of "thou shalts" and "thou shalt nots" issued by the only "true"

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\text{Nietzsche proclaimed that in every philosophy we can recognize the confessions of the philosopher (BGE: 6). Stephen White (1986) has commented that "However much [Michel] Foucault wished for his analysis to be that of a detached observer, one cannot help hearing the voice of a subject deeply injured by the social processes under observation" (424-5). These two insights penetrate this project as well.}\]
knower. Others allow their government to determine right and wrong, good and evil, believing patriotically that justice can be served in law courts, and that military and economic matters are for the "experts" to decide. We are creatures whose identities are products of our relationships with other individuals and societal institutions (e.g. churches, schools, families, the state). These identity-forming relationships are infused with tension. The tension exists because part of our identity is what we hold in common with others, and another part of our identity is what differentiates us from others. The more we differentiate ourselves from others, the more we become 'individuals.' And the more we liken ourselves to others the more we 'identify' with them. This is a tension which runs throughout this thesis. From other people and societal institutions we are bombarded with answers to most of our questions in life. From many directions we are told how to act, who to be, and how to think. Too many people accept such answers without critical reflection upon them. That uncritical acceptance of other people's answers seems to me somehow less than fully actualized human existence. We are the only specie on earth (that we know of) with the capacity to understand and construct self-identity. And, like Aristotle, I believe that active and critical reflection on our own lives and identities makes us that much more uniquely human. I think this sentiment echoes Foucault's desire to
jolt us out of our self-assured assessment of the [modern cognitive and institutional] structures as necessarily superior and uniquely privileged...to show that structures we take to be thoroughly enabling are always simultaneously constraining (White, 1986:421).

I am quite attracted to thinkers who attempt to "jolt" us out of conventional thought patterns, and call for individuals to think for themselves.

1.3 Why Nietzsche?

In this thesis I am constructing an interpretation of a portion of Nietzsche's philosophy which addresses the critique I have related in the previous section. I see Nietzsche as a thinker who tried very hard to "jolt" people out of the conventional thinking of his day. His works seem to me to be the work of a man screaming at the top of his lungs through his pen: "Think for yourself! Do not accept anything unless it makes sense to you. Just because so and so says so is not good enough! Even me!" I am aware that many other interpretations of Nietzsche's work can and have been made. In fact, Detwiler's partial list of interpretations of Nietzsche's political philosophy is absurdly varied:

It has been variously argued that Nietzsche was antipolitical and considered the state 'the devil of his ethics,' that he was a proto-Nazi and would have joined the Nazi party had he lived long enough, that he was 'part Nazi and part anti-Nazi,' that he was a socialist, a social Darwinist, an opponent of social Darwinism, a German nationalist, an opponent of all nationalism, that his thinking
was compatible with liberal constitutionalism, that he was "a most thorough-going critic of liberalism," and so forth (1990: 1).

This veritable cornucopia of interpretations represents a deep and heavily invested conversation of Nietzsche scholars, which I am entering with this thesis. Through referring to the existent Nietzsche literature I intend to review the conceptual landscape on which I shall erect my interpretation. In each chapter I will critically review the relevant work and lay out "my Nietzsche" as it fits or does not fit what others have said. Focusing on Thus Spoke Zarathustra and Beyond Good and Evil, I construct "my Nietzsche" as the unity of the Nietzschean concepts of the Übermensch, 4 eternal return, and the will to power in a single "aesthetic praxis." 5 Praxis is an ancient Greek word, used by many non-Greeks, but most importantly for my purposes by Karl Marx. In Plato's writings, praxis simply refers to practices, doings, the various things people do in life. Aristotle adds a more specific meaning to praxis when he uses it. In his works, praxis also refers to craft-specific practices. For example,

4 "Overman," "Superior Man," whatever the translation, this is Nietzsche's hero, his "designation of a type of supreme achievement" to which (some) humans should aspire (EH: "Why I Write Such Good Books,").

5 This discussion of praxis and the others that follow are products of my discussions with Tim Duvall, Tim Luke, and Nick Smith. Any insights I owe to group collaboration, errors are my own.
the knowledge and skills of carpentry have their own praxis: the actual building of houses. Marx however, added a twist to the meaning of praxis, one not necessarily recognized by the Greeks. Rather than theory and practice (praxis) being separate, as they were for Aristotle, Marx defined praxis as the merging of theory and practice. Pre-formulated theory would not guide practice, nor would theory follow practice to explain or rationalize it. Practicing would be theorizing and theorizing would be practicing, simultaneously. These are difficult concepts, and in the next section I lay out introductory sketches of them before exploring them in depth in the ensuing chapters.

1.4 Conceptual Overview

1.4.a Eternal Return

Nietzsche's doctrine of the 'eternal return of the same' which he called "the fundamental conception" of Thus Spoke Zarathustra (EH: "TSZ," 1), is, like much of his thought, nebulous at best. For Nietzsche, the eternal return signified the "highest formula of affirmation" of this world (EH: "TSZ," 1). Zarathustra pleads with his disciples to "remain true to the earth" and forsake the teachings of an
other-worldly paradise (TSZ: "Zarathustra’s Prologue," 3).6 Why? Why is the affirmation of this world so essential to life? Because for Nietzsche, the world had no intrinsic purpose or goal (Stambaugh, 1972: 34). He saw no fulfillment of a theological ‘judgement day’ in a linear procession of time (Lampert, 1986: 257-8). There is no light at the end of the tunnel. As such, no plan or agenda exists which orders the march of history through time. The world understood through the framework of eternal return is as Walter Kaufmann noted, "the epitome of ‘a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing’" (1968: 282).

Some have suggested that affirmation in the eternal return occurs as a process of selection. This view argues that life runs its course and then repeats itself, and in each cycle the Übermensch can choose what will and will not recur (Bernstein, 1987: 57); or that the process of recurrence itself as a cosmological force has a selective power which

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6 Zarathustra is thought to have lived in the seventh century B.C. He was the founder of a Persian religion which was based on the conflict of two gods: Ahuru Mazda—the god of light and good, and Angra Mainzu—the god of darkness and evil. Nietzsche chose Zarathustra to be his messenger because of his "importance" in history. "Zarathustra was the first to see in the struggle between good and evil the actual wheel in the working of things: the translation of morality into metaphysics, as force, cause, end-in-itself, is his work. Zarathustra created this most fateful of errors, morality: consequently he must also be the first to recognize it... The self-overcoming of the moralist into his opposite—into me—that is what the name Zarathustra means in my mouth" (EH, "Why I am a Destiny," 3).
only allows desirable things to recur (Deleuze, 1983: 68-71). These interpretations simply do not square with the texts. Zarathustra emphatically and repeatedly proclaims the return of all things, even those things he reviles (TSZ: III, 13.2).

The affirmation of the world which is the eternal return is not a selection of those things "worthy of recurring" in the eyes of the Übermensch, it is the "supreme exaltation of the moment" in which all things recur (Kaufmann, 1968: 277). Nietzsche's emphasis on the moment is very clear in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. We always stand under the gateway which links the past and future, it is "This Moment" (TSZ: III, 2.2). Yet time does pass, and this moment (present) becomes that moment (past), and that moment (future) becomes this moment (present), through the passage of time. The Übermensch defines his existence according to the affirmation of the eternal return of everything in this moment, and strives to achieve perfection in each moment as it comes. Life is lived fully in the present moment, it is never to be postponed or temporarily abandoned for dwelling on the past. "Either one

7 I am using the male gender denomination throughout this thesis when referring to the Übermensch. Nietzsche's sexism is already celebrated, so there is no need to elaborate on it in this work. For Nietzsche, the mensch in Übermensch undoubtedly refers to males only. I find this particularly odious and distasteful. However, in keeping with Nietzsche's intent, and in an effort to constantly remind us that he was in fact sexist, I am using 'he' as the singular pronoun. Nietzsche's philosophy has aspects of degeneracy as well as powerful insight.
(the Übermensch) lives in the present or one does not live at all" (Stambaugh, 1972: 26). Since the Übermensch strives for the full actualization of himself in "this moment," and "this moment" existed in the past and will exist again in the future, he is striving for perfection and affirming the world in every moment of his life. He does not hope for a paradise of the future, or lament a lost paradise of the past. This concept must be explored in depth to complete an understanding of it, and it is to this that I turn in chapter two.

1.4.b The Will to Power

In chapter three I will examine Nietzsche's idea of the "will to power" and develop it more fully as aesthetic praxis. The often unclear nature of Nietzsche's work and the first edition of The Will to Power led many to assert that the idea was a totalitarian scheme only to be followed by aspirants to dictatorship. In this vein authors have suggested it is a

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6 Nietzsche worked on The Will to Power from November 1887 to February 1888. He finished an "unsatisfactory draft" including 372 paragraphs, which does not correspond to The Will to Power as it was published after his death. In fact, Kaufmann states that in 1888, Nietzsche abandoned the whole project of The Will to Power, and decided to write a new, four part "magnum opus" entitled: The Revaluation of All Values, which had been the subtitle of earlier drafts of The Will to Power (1968: 7). His outline for the new work is as follows: (I) "The Antichrist: Attempt at a Critique of Christianity," (II) "The Free Spirit: Critique of Philosophy as a Nihilistic Movement," (III) "The Immoralist: Critique of the Most Fatal Kind of Ignorance," (IV) "Dionysus: Philosophy of Eternal Recurrence" (Ibid.: 113-114). The only part of this work he finished was "The Antichrist,"
formula of "catastrophic conquest and...domination," and the philosophy of Hitler’s political career (Stern, 1978: 79-87). Indeed, the Nazis did seek to label Nietzsche a proto-Nazi, as can be seen in the works of Alfred Baümler and Heinrich Härtle. Such an interpretation is the worldly application of the will to power as Alexander Nehamas interprets it, "manifested in the ability to make one’s view of the world and one’s own values the very world and values in which and by which others live" (1985: 32). This interpretation rests on the premise that Nietzsche believed that the discoverer of will to power saw it as the discovery of "the way of all beings," (emphasis added) from which comes the responsibility to "command and legislate how the world ought to be" (Lampert, _The Will to Power_, 1895). What has for almost a century now been propounded and/or mistaken for Nietzsche’s crowning work, _The Will to Power_, is nothing more than notes from his notebooks which his sister Elizabeth compiled.

His sister Elizabeth had gained control of his archives in 1893, after his mental breakdown in Turin (1889). She intended to write a book which would redeem the reputation of her late husband, Bernhard Förster. Förster had attempted to settle a proto-Nazi colony in Paraguay in the late 1880’s, and upon its failure in 1889, committed suicide. Elizabeth’s affiliation with Förster and his ideas certainly impacted the agenda and content of _The Will to Power_ as it was first published in 1901 (Hayman: 314, 343). As such, I am refusing to use any texts from this work. I do not think it right to accord unedited and unfinished notes the same weight as finished work. Ideas change, and with them the form and structure of arguments change. Anyone who writes at length knows that their notes are almost always far from their finished product. I think we do much to obfuscate Nietzsche’s ideas if we construct arguments about them referring to evidence we find in _The Will to Power_. For an excellent discussion of this problem, see Magnus, in Solomon and Higgins, 1988.
1986: 247). It is not hard then to see how this could be a philosophy for Hitler. However, this view does not address Nietzsche’s contentions that, (1) there is not one way the world ought to be, for it has no inherent purpose, and (2) "the way (of all beings) does not exist" (TSZ: III, 11.2). My construction of the will to power follows a path different from those discussed above.

The will to power in my interpretation is not about world domination. I will construe it as a force of conquering and creation; no doubt it calls for these things. But, I see it as the will to overcome all that one finds base and vulgar in oneself. The will to power is explicitly referred to for the first time in Thus Spoke Zarathustra as the "voice" of every people’s desire for overcoming, and their "tablet of the good" (I, 15). It is explained in some detail in the chapter "On Self-Overcoming," and I agree with Walter Kaufmann’s assertion that this is no accident or coincidental placement (1968: 173). In these chapters the will to power is revealed as a will to self-overcoming. It is a will to create oneself in a form which one sees as better, "higher" than one presently is (Ibid.: 267). It is also clear that one who would become "higher" than one is, must command oneself according to one’s own will to power (TSZ: II, 12). This implies that one can obey one’s own commands. Nietzsche is quick to point out that one with a weak will to power is not able to obey himself and
will therefore be commanded by another, according to "the nature of living creatures" (Ibid.). Hence, the commanding of oneself is the nature and goal of the will to power, not the domination or injury of another (Kaufmann, 1968: 167, 174). The practice of creating, commanding, and elevating oneself is embodied (in my interpretation) in the concept of aesthetic praxis. By aesthetic praxis I mean the activity of individuals who constantly seek new and more exact expressions and actualizations of themselves through the analysis, reinterpretation, and rearrangement of the norms of society which imprint codes of behavior and modes of thought on individuals.

The vicarious conversation of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas through Thomas Dumm and Stephen White (1986), concerning aesthetics and subjectivity informs the notion of aesthetic praxis as I will develop it. White outlines Foucault's understanding of the "aesthetics of existence" in the work of the early Stoics and Charles Baudelaire. The Stoics sought to escape the prevailing Greek system of life and concentrate on "the individual course of life...as a material for an aesthetic piece of art" with no grounding in intersubjective (juridical) norms (1986: 424). Baudelaire, in

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9 I am using subjectivity to denote the idea of the self—the human agent as it is psychologically and physiologically conceived.
his construct of "dandyism" also describes the creation of the individual as a work of art, again, "with no attention to the social or political realms" (Ibid.). At this point, we do well to heed Stern's warning that "No man came closer to self-created values than A. Hitler" (1978: 79). From the Habermasian perspective, White is quick to point out (and is justified in doing so), that such ideas include no bridge to intersubjectivity, community, and collective action. However, Dumm suggests that such a bridge is possible and desirable. Rather than conceiving of the self dichotomously as an intersubjective entity and an aesthetic project, Dumm proposes a relationship between the two. "There may be relations, of similitude, perhaps, ... not so closely tied to the dangers ... from the separation of the two" (1988: 223). In other words, Dumm is proposing that one can engage in the project of aesthetic cultivation and still be a member of society. One can simultaneously attempt to create oneself as a work of art and participate in an intersubjective community.

Those who would pursue aesthetic praxis with no attention to at least some societal norms would be problematic indeed. A race of such 'works of art' could not even communicate with one another and would indeed live in a state of social autism, to say nothing of agreeing upon acceptable codes of behavior and jurisprudence. It is this implication which drives the well founded concerns of the Habermasian perspective. But the
line between genius and sociopath is demonstrably thin. The line between aesthetic self-cultivation which impinges on others, and that which does not impinge on others but is still critical and creative, is not very broad. Aesthetic praxis as I have sketched it above: creative self-cultivation undertaken not at the expense of others, is what I will argue to be the will to power as taught by Nietzsche's Zarathustra. From this proposed relationship between aesthetic and juridical subjectivity, with an awareness of the inherent tension between the two, I will develop my conception of aesthetic praxis.

1.4.3 The Übermensch

Early interpretations of the Übermensch as an animalistic "blond beast" abounded. It was Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth who attempted to convince Hitler that he was in fact the Übermensch incarnate (Danto, 1965: 198). If the will to power is seen as aesthetic self-cultivation with no attention to any societal ground rules, this vision is plausible. But this seems to be a patently wrong-headed interpretation of Nietzsche. Could he really be calling for a sociopathic fiend as a refinement of humanity? According to Zarathustra, the answer is no. "All beings have created something higher than themselves. And would you be the ebb of this great flood, and return to the animals rather than overcome man" (emphasis
added), ("Zarathustra's Prologue," 3, 4)? Nor should Ὑπερμνήσχ be conceived of in the sense of a "pseudo-Darwinian" evolutionary natural selection (Stambaugh, 1972: 23). According to the eternal return, there is no higher, final state of the world or humanity. No rapturous Ὑπερμνήσχ society can be attained—everything recurs, not just the desirable.

The Ὑπερμνήσχ personifies will to power as he masters and refines himself according to his sense of aesthetic praxis (Knight, 1967: 126). He has as such reached an "immeasurably higher" level of human being, but must strive with the recurrence of each moment for greater self-actualization, or he falls back to mediocrity (Kaufmann, 1968: 267). Zarathustra contrasts the Ὑπερμνήσχ with "last" men who think that they have created the "ultimate" sublime society, but it is exposed as a society of complacency, conformity, and mediocrity ("Zarathustra's Prologue," 5).¹⁰ The aesthetic praxis of the Ὑπερμνήσχ allows him to practice life according to his theory of it, unlike "those detestable mediocrities 'the good and the just' who...have no will of their own" (Knight, 1967: 127). The Ὑπερμνήσχ does not look to judgement day or God for goals or redemption in life. Redemption from meaningless existence, and purpose in life,

¹⁰ No doubt Nietzsche here is making an allusion to socialist and democratic ideals.
are embodied in the consecration of "this moment" (Kaufmann, 1968: 278-9). Affirmation of the momentary struggle for perfection, and that against which one must struggle, creates meaning in his life, his feeling of exaltation in each moment.

The Übermensch sense of aesthetic self-construction allows the creative passions to flourish as one makes oneself a 'work of art,' while the "unphilosophic and inartistic mass" remains all too mediocre (Ibid.: 270). In practice then, creating oneself as a work of art entails eternally recurring aesthetic praxis.

1.5 A Glimpse at the Political Implications

Even though Nietzsche's works do not include systematic political analyses or propositions, many interpretations of his "politics" have been constructed in the past 25 years. With the rise of Michel Foucault and the post-structuralist movement in Europe in the late 1960's, studies of Nietzsche in general have increased.¹¹ Foucault himself claims to have been greatly influenced by Nietzsche, as do many other contemporary social and political theorists. Many of these theorists have attempted to construct or explain visions of a

¹¹ The explosion of Nietzsche and "Nietzschean" scholarship and literature in our so-called 'post-modern' society is an interesting issue. Why, after 100 years, do academics flock to the enigmatic figure of Nietzsche? While this is a question meriting exploration, I have chosen not to address it in this thesis.
"Nietzschean" politics based on his philosophical works (e.g. Connolly, 1991; Detwiler, 1990; Strong, 1975; Thiele, 1990; Warren, 1988). William Connolly (1991) concentrates on developing a Nietzschean politics based on the concept of the will to power. He states explicitly that his enterprise is a departure from strict interpretation of Nietzsche. He attempts to use Nietzsche as a foundation to build on, not a blueprint to be followed to the last detail. Connolly erects a polity which is an arena for comparison, conversation, and contestation between groups with different ideas for solutions to social problems based on their different wills to power. He calls this polity an "agonistic democracy." It is agonistic because rules for contestation and contestation itself is built into the political system (agon is ancient Greek for contest). It is a democracy because the state he constructs holds the groups in conflict on an equal level. No one group can legitimately dominate another. This vision, along with the others I sketch in this section, are discussed further in chapter five.

Mark Warren argues that a Nietzschean politics like Connolly's is a legitimate and "positive" extension of Nietzsche's philosophy (1988: 247). But, Warren spends a great deal of time arguing that Nietzsche himself did not base his political views on his philosophical views. He asserts that in the end, Nietzsche's "aristocratic and authoritarian"
political views are the products of unsophisticated political analysis (Ibid.). Bruce Detwiler (1990) argues that Nietzsche despised the political movements of his day (a statement with which I agree) and advocated the creation of an aristocracy which was constructed with the aim of creating an upper class free from economic concerns and able to engage in self-cultivation. He asserts that Nietzsche thought the only legitimation for most of society was serving the interest of an upper class, out of which Übermensch can grow.

I however, have a different interpretation of the political implications of Nietzsche's works. I do not think that any politics as clear or systematic as those I have sketched above and discuss later in depth, can be derived from the concepts of the will to power, eternal return, and the Übermensch. In chapter five I unfold my interpretation of Nietzsche's political implications, which diverges significantly from the others I discuss.

Until then, I turn to the explanation of Nietzsche's concepts which have political implications. In chapter two, I present my interpretation of the eternal return of the same. In chapter three, I struggle through the controversy over the will to power and more completely develop the notion of aesthetic praxis. In chapter four, I strive to attain a vision of the Übermensch and show its integral relationship to the will to power and the eternal return.
CHAPTER TWO
HERAKLEITOS, ETERNAL RETURN, AND THE DEATH OF GOD

To emphasize the afterlife is to deny life. To concentrate on heaven is to create hell.
--Tom Robbins,
from Skinny Legs and All

In the last chapter I suggested that interpretations of eternal return as a cyclical repetition of all time are considerably off the mark. I proposed instead that eternal return, the "highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable" is meant to be a teaching which places extreme importance on each moment of existence (EH: "TSZ," 1). In each moment one must strive for self actualization amid the recurrence of all things, good and bad. Rather than wishing that the world be different, then, we should accept and affirm the world as it manifests itself to us in each moment, while we struggle to create ourselves as "works of art." In this chapter I will examine these two interpretations with greater scrutiny, hoping to bolster the case that my view is more plausible and integral to Nietzsche's philosophy than the other.

2.1 The Circle of Cycles
In the interpretation of eternal return as repeated cycles of time, it is understood as an actual cosmological phenomenon,
not a mythic idea which should transform our lives because of its importance.¹ Time itself is understood in the following manner: everything begins at a point on the circumference of a circle, as the cycle of existence runs its course it follows the circumference until it returns to the point where it started, the cycle ends here and begins to replay itself exactly as it did the previous time. All life is played out once and repeats itself eternally, or, in Nietzsche's words,

This life, as thou livest it at present, and hast lived it, thou must live it once more, and also innumerable times; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy...in thy life must come to thee again, and all in the same series and sequence...The eternal sand-glass of existence will ever be turned once more, and thou with it, thou speck of dust (GS: 341)!

The circle image is one which Nietzsche himself seems to both affirm and deny. The chapter from The Gay Science, quoted in part above, is the first appearance of eternal return in Nietzsche's published works, and it can be taken as suggesting that time is indeed cyclical. Nietzsche's explanatory notes on eternal return contain references to the "circular process of the universe" as well. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, the image of the circle returns as Zarathustra sings of "the Ring of Recurrence," and his animals speak of the "ring of

¹ This is the view I am attempting to dispel. At the end of this section, and in the next, I will present evidence supporting my claim that Nietzsche developed eternal return as an idea, not as a cosmological theory. I am presenting the arguments with which I disagree to prevent any misreading of my interpretation.
existence" (III: 16, 13). And, in Ecce Homo, as Nietzsche reflects on his teachings, he calls eternal return the doctrine of the "unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of things" ("BT," 3).

The understanding of time as the cyclical recurrence of full courses of existence leads to many interesting conclusions. According to Ivan Soll, "Eternal return should be a matter of complete indifference" if our lives are repeated ad infinitum, for our consciousness cannot bridge cycles of existence (1973: 339). We have no power to change anything because we are locked into a recurring cycle of existence, and since our consciousness of pain or pleasure is not cumulative across cycles, what does recurrence matter (Ibid.: 340-2)? Or, according to Arnold Zuboff, eternal return is the "Nietzschean afterlife" in which people are eternally rewarded or punished according to the manner in which they live their present life (1973: 344-7). Since there can be no "next world" as in Christianity, and Zuboff thought Nietzsche "wanted to combat the feeling of the transience of this world," he assures us that this life recurs eternally (Ibid.: 350-7). The error these interpretations share is the assumption that Nietzsche thought actions in this life would have any consequences for future cyclical recurrences of our existence. This assumption is one which distorts the meaning of eternal return unrecognizably. How are we to "remain true
to the earth" which is right in front of us, if we are worried about future consequences, which are themselves only abstractions? According to Nietzsche that is not even existence, for "Existence begins in every instant; the ball There rolls around every Here. The middle is everywhere" (TSZ: III, 13.2). I take this to mean that if we live in and for every instant, then we are always "here," in the middle of our existence as it unfolds around us, rather than always searching for the elusive "there" which we suppose will be or was better than life is at present. If we live our lives constantly for the sake of the future, we never realize that future when it comes to us because we are still looking forward. If Nietzsche thought present actions should be measured by future consequences, we should ask, why would he abandon heaven and hell? If consequences were the measure of action, surely conventional theology would have served Nietzsche’s purpose as well as any new theory he might offer (Stambaugh, 1983: 161-2). Soll, Zuboff, and Ackerman interpret eternal return in ways which they feel delegitimate Nietzsche’s faith in it as a formula for affirmation, and conclude that as a cosmological theory it must be erroneous (Soll: 342; Zuboff: 357; Ackerman, 1990: 165).

There are those, however, who interpret eternal return as an affirmative process which is real. Assuming that Nietzsche did seek to prove eternal return as cosmological reality,
these interpretations bestow upon the Übermensch or the cosmos itself the power to selectively affirm or negate earthly phenomena. Gilles Deleuze writes that Nietzsche found in the cosmos the power to select which phenomena would recur and which would not, as a natural activity: "It is no longer a thought of selective existence, for eternal return is existence, and existence is selection" (1983: 71). This seems to fly patently in the face of Nietzsche's thought. First, Nietzsche does not conceive of the cosmos as any form of being which could have any power whatsoever; in fact, such a thought "disgusted" him (GS: 109). Therefore, nothing would exist which could carry out such a selection. Nietzsche unequivocally denies that the cosmos could have such a quality. Instead, he entreats us to "guard against" ascribing goals, aims, or aspirations to the cosmos (HAH-II: "W & S" 2). Such a plea only makes sense, because Nietzsche does not conceive of the cosmos as an entity, and a non-entity could not have a goal, or "aspire" to anything. "Let us be on our guard against thinking that the cosmos is a living being... Let us be on our guard against believing that the universe is a machine; it is assuredly not constructed with a view to one end... The general character of the world... is to all eternity chaos" (GS: 109).

Interpretations of eternal return as a process of selective affirmation as controlled by Übermensch instead...
than the cosmos exist also. If we believe John Bernstein, Nietzsche "sought to prove" that an Übermensch could choose what would and would not recur in each successive cycle of existence (1987: 55-7). This view is echoed in George Morgan's sentiment that recurrence would be unbearable if all bad things returned in each cycle. He thinks Übermenschen are thereby "constrained" to remove undesirable phenomena from the world (1941: 306). These views augur the eventual perfection of the world through successive cyclical extermination of that which Übermenschen would not wish to return. Such a state of perfection, according to Robin Small, is the condition which an Übermensch would will to recur eternally (1983: 105). Rather than building perfection through selection, an Übermensch would wait until the cycle when the world seemed perfect to him, and will that cycle to return eternally (Ibid.: 106-108).

The common error of these interpretations is not that they stress consequences of action, or fail to recognize the importance of worldly affirmation, at least in these respects they are on the right track. The grave error of these interpretations is that they claim a kind of progress toward perfection of the world, and such a claim is one Nietzsche never made. Zarathustra "shudders and becomes nauseated" when he contemplates eternal return, for even (and especially) those things he despises return (TSZ: III, 13.1; II, 6). All
that exists must return:

Alas, man recurs eternally! The little man recurs eternally!...Eternal recurrence for even the smallest! That was my disgust at all existence (TSZ: III, 2.2; III, 13.2)!

There will be no perfect world, no paradise of Ubermenschlichkeit will evolve:

To whatever height mankind may have developed...there is as little prospect of attaining to a higher society as there is for the ant and the earwig to enter into kinship with God and eternity...What is to come will drag behind it that which has passed (D: 49).

Finally, the error which every interpretation discussed so far shares, is the assertion that eternal return is or can be a circular repetition of full cycles of time. To be sure, eternal return implies the repetition and recurrence of all things. Nietzsche himself uses circle imagery to convey his thought. But, the notion of time itself actually being a circle is exactly what Zarathustra violently denies. His arch-enemy the Spirit of Gravity attempts to answer a question about the nature of time, saying "All truth is crooked, time itself is a circle," to which Zarathustra replies, "You spirit of gravity, do not make things too easy for yourself!" and then proceeds to explain time and eternal return in much different terms (TSZ: III, 13.2). In chapter 341 of The Gay Science, eternal return is introduced by a demon who follows
you into your darkest despair, your "loneliest loneliness"\(^2\) and asks you how you would react to the thought of your life recurring endlessly. Have you lived in such a way that this thought would be unbearable? Or have you and do you in every moment act in such a way that you would cherish this thought if it were reality? Accordingly, I do not think that time is to be understood as a circle in the manner the above authors claim. So the questions now become: to what does Nietzsche's circle imagery refer? And, what else could eternal return mean?

2.2 The Glorification of the Moment

Despite the angry split between Rome and Constantinople [circa mid-14th century], the tide of Christianity had not receded, but rather continued its slow, soupy flow...until there was scarcely a pagan left whose heart and brain had not been lapped by it, lapped so long in many cases that old beliefs had been eroded, if not washed away. In losing you [the god Pan] they were losing their body wisdom, their moon wisdom, their mountain wisdom, they were trading the live wood of the maypole for the dead carpentry of the cross. They weren't as much fun anymore, the poor homers; they were straining so desperately for admission to paradise that they had forgotten that paradise had always been their address.

---Tom Robbins,
from Jitterbug Perfume

Nietzsche's writings on eternal return repeatedly stress the

\(^2\) It seems that Nietzsche wants to create the moment in which you would be most likely to cry out, "I wish my life were different!"
value of this life, this place, and this time. He tells us that our task is to live so that we would gladly live again and again, and that this task is present with us every moment (GS: III, 109). If we undertake our task properly, we are concentrating on refining our lives now, and "here," not then and "there." We aspire to excellence in each moment of our lives. This moment is not to be sacrificed for the next or spent dwelling on the last (Stambaugh, 1987: 182). This is the thought which leads Kaufmann to call eternal return the "supreme exaltation of the moment...the most extreme repudiation of any depreciation of the moment...the antithesis, too, of any faith which looks to another world" (1968: 277).

It is Zarathustra who tells us emphatically that this moment should be our focus (TSZ: III, 2.2). While conversing with the Spirit of Gravity, Zarathustra explains eternal return in this way: We always stand under a gateway which is the link between the past and the future, that gateway is called "This Moment." The past is a lane which stretches behind us for eternity, the future a lane which unfolds ahead of us for eternity. We must not even begin to think, however, that as the world travels down the lane of time, it progresses toward perfection; we have been warned that the things of the

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3 This helps us to gain a better understanding of the passage from Thus Spoke Zarathustra, quoted on p. 23.
past will return, even those we abhor (TSZ: III, 13.2). Zarathustra then asks whether or not the gateway (This Moment) existed in the past and will exist again in the future, and us with it. The Spirit of Gravity does not have the answer; he tells Zarathustra that time is a circle. Do we have an answer that Zarathustra would affirm? Is it not a fact that the gateway looms over you as you read this sentence? And does it not loom over you as you read this sentence too? Now, when you read the first sentence, the second sentence was in the lane of the future. When you read the second sentence, the first was in the lane of the past. And, when you read this sentence, both of the other sentences are in the past. Through it all though, the gateway "This Moment" has loomed over you faithfully. When Zarathustra asks, then, "must we not all have been here [under the gateway] before?--and must we not return and run down that other lane before us...must we not return eternally" to this moment (Ibid.)? We can answer his query with a yes.

Zarathustra has not told us that the cosmos goes through cycles of existence which repeat themselves eternally (Altizer, 1977: 243-5). He has merely told us in a characteristically dramatic fashion, that we will always be here, and it will always be now. Even though time passes, we return eternally to "this" moment. Even though we move from place to place, wherever we are, we are in fact, at "this"
place. And it is on this moment and this place that we should focus, lest we lose our contact with the only life we will ever have. "The more we give up our minds to all that has been and will be, the paler will become that which actually is. When we live with the dead and participate in their death, what are our 'neighbors' to us" (P: 441)? Now, the lesson here is not to simply nod and congratulate Nietzsche for his dramatic illumination of a platitude. The lesson is that one should internalize this thought and seek to live by it. To be able to do this, we must explore how this teaching relates to some of Nietzsche's other concepts, namely, the will to power and the Übermensch.

2.3 Weaving a Web With Nietzsche's Thoughts

2.3.a "Behold This Gateway, Dwarf!"

The similarity between certain aspects of the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Herakleitos of Ephesus (flourished 504 B.C.), was noted by Nietzsche himself and continues to be commented on. Nietzsche himself tells us that eternal return may have originally been taught by Herakleitos (EH: "BT," 3). Interpreters of Nietzsche stress the similarity between Herakleitos's assertion that the world is constantly changing, and Nietzsche's view that existence is characterized by dynamic becoming rather than static being (Stambaugh, 1972, 1987; Schact, 1983; Thiele, 1990). However, I think the
connection goes a bit deeper.

For Herakleitos, all opposites were connected to each other by the "unifying constituent of the cosmos," which he also called "the God" (Kirk et al., 1990: 190-1). Hence, he expressed the underlying "natural balance" of the cosmos in a unity of opposites: "The God is daynight, wintersummer, warpeace, satietyhunger..." (Ibid.: fragment 204). In effect then, the cosmos qua natural balance is the underlying unity in all opposites; but only a possessor of divine knowledge can understand this unity (Ibid.: frs. 205 and 206). Nietzsche also privileged the understanding of unities underlying apparent opposites. He called observations of "opposites" where there were only "differences of degree," "inexact and superficial" (HAH-II: "W & S" 67).

For one may doubt, first, whether there are any opposites at all, and secondly whether these...opposite valuations on which the metaphysicians put their seal, are not perhaps merely foreground estimates, only provisional perspectives...It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of these good...things is precisely that they are insidiously related, tied to, and involved with these wicked, seemingly opposite things—maybe even one with them in essence (emphasis added; BGE: 2).

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4 There are other Herakleitean riddles which express the unity of opposites theme: "Sea is the most pure and the most polluted water; for fishes it is drinkable and salutary, but for men it is undrinkable and deleterious." And, "The path up and down is one and the same" (Ibid.: frs. 199 and 200).

5 Since Herakleitos purported to have such knowledge, he was either wrong, or a god.
Herakleitos also believed that no stasis existed in the universe, all things were changing, becoming, "in process" (Ibid.: frs. 214, 215). It was this "process" which maintained the natural balance of the cosmos, and he usually referred to it as a war: "War is the father of all and king of all" (Ibid.: fr. 212). He believed that the cessation of this "war" would allow one opposite (in each pair) to dominate the other, which would destroy the balance of the cosmos, consequently destroying the world (Ibid.: 195).

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, the gateway "This Moment" is presented as a unity of opposites: the past and future "come together" under it (III, 2.2). Joan Stambaugh identifies this unity of opposites, and finds a key textual link between it and the "great noon" Zarathustra speaks of as the time for the emergence of the Übermensch: "The great noon as turning point,—the two lanes" (Collected Works of Nietzsche, 12: 394). According to this, noon equals "This Moment." This connection is supported by many references in Nietzsche's work to "noon" or "the great noon" as a junction of past and future, and also as the time of the emergence of the Übermensch. The noontide is first mentioned in Human, All-Too-Human, where Nietzsche describes it as that point in the life of an "active and stormy" character, when he consciously contemplates his past and future, and understands the importance of living in the present (HAH-II: "W & S", 308).
In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Ecce Homo*, and *Twilight of the Idols*, references to "noon" explicitly declare it as: "a time of great revealing...when the yoke of God and gods is thrown off," the "moment of highest self-examination for humanity, when it emerges from the dominion of accidents and priests," and the "moment of the shortest shadows; the end of the longest error; mankind's zenith" (*TSZ*: III, 10.2; *EH*: "D" 2; *TI*: IV, 6). The moment of the shortest shadows is the moment of greatest vision, the brightest time of day when shadows obscure less of the world than they do at any other time. This moment is the moment of the death of God and gods, and the "birth" of the *Übermensch* (*TSZ*: I, 22.3; III, 5.3 & 12.3; IV, 13.2 & 20). If the *Übermensch* comes at "the great noontide" he will come at "This Moment." "This Moment" links the past and future, just as noon and midnight link a.m. and p.m. Precisely now it is neither past nor future, and precisely midnight and noon are neither a.m. nor p.m. At those times, the "opposites" of time are expressed in a unity. Of course, a.m. and p.m., noon and midnight are human constructs not "natural facts," they are names and concepts by which we order our lives temporally. A.m. and p.m. are not really opposites, we merely recognize them as such because we have constructed our notation of time to make them appear as such. Nietzsche's use of "noon" as well, should be understood only metaphorically--don't check your watch at 11:59:59 to see
if an Übermensch is arriving at your door. That time is a human construct, it does not correspond to time kept on a "cosmic clock" somewhere preparing to bong 12 bells at a "universal noon."

If we accept that Herakleitos did greatly influence Nietzsche's idea of eternal return, two connections can be made. First, as others have done, we can equate Nietzsche's emphasis on becoming (rather than being) with Herakleitos's "War", both are ideas of continuous change which attempt to describe life (see e.g. TI: III, 2; & TSZ: III, 12.8). Second, for Herakleitos only divine understanding of the cosmos could pierce opposites to find their true unity, and Nietzsche chose a unity of what humans usually recognize as "opposites"--noon (or "This Moment") as the time when the Übermensch would appear. The connection I am making, is: the Übermensch as possessor of the deepest understanding of life is one who comes to existence through understanding that he must live completely in and for a unity of "opposites"--This Moment. With this in mind, the Übermensch could not appear unless he internalized the lesson that he must live completely in and for each moment of his existence.

2.3.b The death of God

On a bright morning a madman made his way to the marketplace, and with his lantern aglow he delivered a disturbing message
to everyone: "God is dead!...And we have killed him" (GS: 125)! We drove God to his death (TSZ: II, 3). "Is it true what they say, that pity strangled him, that he saw how man hung on the cross and that he could not bear it, that love of man became his hell, and in the end his death?" Yes, according to the "last of the popes", now a pupil of Zarathustra (Ibid.: IV, 6). God pitied us so excessively that his pity for us killed him.

Who was this madman that would say such things? Behold: it was Zarathustra the godless. Zarathustra had seen that God is dead (Ibid.: prologue, 2). He came to teach eternal return and the Übermensch, now possibilities because of the death of God (Ibid.: I, 22.3; III, 16.2; IV, 13.1). When he spoke his lesson in the marketplace, everyone heard him, but no one understood. He spoke to everyone and yet he spoke to no one (Ibid.: IV, 13.1). What did Zarathustra mean by saying that God is dead, and eternal return and the Übermensch are now possible? With the death of God, all "other worlds" are gone (Ibid.: I, 3). Our only life is this life, therefore we should remain devoted to it and the earth (Altizer, 1977: 242, 243; Lampert, 1986: 258). Judgment day, heaven and hell, afterlife, all faith in redemption and paradise at the end of time and the beginning of eternity are swept away: "the old truth is approaching its end" (EH: "TI" 1). Now there is only Herakleitos's "war." Now there is only the eternal return of
the moment, which precludes any progression toward a final
goal or state of being (Stambaugh, 1972: 34; 1985: 168).
Existence can only be embodied in the eternal return, in
robust becoming in every moment. The idea of eternal places
focus on living every moment of our lives to its fullest,
rather than measuring our actions against abstract
consequences we supposedly face after death (GS: 278).

God is dead. Other-worldly eternal paradise and
damnation no longer exist (TSZ: prologue, 6). "In general,
the phrase 'God is dead' is Nietzsche's metaphorical
expression for the loss of absolute belief and truth—whether
philosophical, scientific, or religious" (Alderman, 1977: 23).
It is up to us, then, to define our earthly existence, with no
recourse to transcendental "Truth" (EH: "TSZ" 8). We "must
become gods ourselves" (GS: 125). Übermenschen, then must
view life on this earth as their only, and eternal life, in
their eternal becoming, in every moment.

2.3.c The Love of Fate
If we are to live fully in every moment, we must face the
world and affirm it as it manifests itself in every moment.
And, according to eternal return, in every moment those things
we detest will return along with those we adore. We are
presented with a predicament, in every moment of our lives.
We can affirm the world as it is here and now, "saying yes to
life even in its strangest and hardest problems" (EH: "BT" 3); or we can fatalistically submit to the world like "leaves in the wind" (Thiele, 1990: 199); or, we can project ourselves into a fantasy land which never was nor will be. For Nietzsche, the first alternative is the only acceptable choice.

I want more and more to perceive the necessary character in things as the beautiful...Amor Fati [love of fate]: let that henceforth be my love!...I wish to be at anytime hereafter only a yea-sayer (GS: 276)!

In every moment we must affirm what happens, this is the significance of Nietzsche's amor fati. For Nietzsche, fate was not divine dispensation or pre-determined destiny, it was simply the world as it comes to us in each moment (Thiele, 1990: 199). Fate, then, necessarily includes good and bad things, according to eternal return. Now the idea of eternal return becomes the greatest test of courage, the "highest formula of affirmation of all that is attainable" (EH: "TSZ" 1). For through the return of all things in every moment—even and especially those we abhor—we must affirm what happens or we run away from the only experiences of life we will ever have (Altizer, 1977: 241). If we internalize the idea of eternal return, then we know that to run from the world or to submit to it in fatalistic nihilism is to squander our only life. Instead of "condemning the world because it is not to our taste," we need to acquire a taste for the world as
it is (Morgan, 1941: 311). Nietzsche revered the Greeks for possessing such an attitude, and he deplored Christianity for he believed that it was "only the Christian resolution to find this world full of evil and sin" which made people acquire a taste for an afterlife (GS: III, 130; and BGE: 49). We should learn, then, to overcome repudiation of the phenomena of this world, and our faith in the inevitability of "heaven." Internalizing eternal return demands adopting the attitude of amor fati, it is "the philosophy that society always needs" (HAH-II: 396).

My formula for greatness in a human being is amor fati: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it--all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary--but love it (FR: "Why I am So Clever")!

2.3.d Eternal Return, The Will To Power, and the Übermensch

The preceding discussions of the glorification of the moment, and death of God, and amor fati, were intended to clarify my interpretation of eternal return and illustrate its centrality to the Übermensch. Nietzsche identified eternal return as the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have what was and what is repeated into all eternity (BGE: 56).

The "most high-spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being" he is referring to, is or course, the Übermensch. The
Übermensch is he who has internalized the lesson of eternal return; he lives as though it were reality. He experiences eternal return as his innermost characteristic (Cobb-Stevens, 1982: 189). He lives with a sharp focus on every here, and every now. He does not wish that his world were different, nor does he believe he can reach a "perfect Kingdom of God" (TSZ: IV, 18.2). He knows and affirms that he is a product of the imperfect society that recurs around him. Therefore, he understands that society's imperfections are part of his character. But, since he believes that it is "needful to attain satisfaction with oneself through 'giving style' to one's character" (GS: 290), his will to power as aesthetic praxis recurs eternally as he strives to enhance himself amid the eternal return of all that he reveres and despises. In the next chapter I discuss and develop this idea more fully.
CHAPTER THREE

THE WILL TO POWER: 'GIVING STYLE TO ONE'S CHARACTER'

My freedom is the unique foundation of values and nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that value, this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable. My freedom is anguished at being the foundation of values while itself without foundation...the possibility of overturning the scale of values appears, complementarily as my possibility.

--Jean-Paul Sartre, from Being and Nothingness

As I introduced the will to power in chapter one, I attempted to make explicit the numerous and dangerous ways it has been interpreted. The Nazis and proto-Nazis appropriated select passages from Nietzsche, which, when taken out of context made him out to be a prophet of world domination. Contemporary commentators still paint Nietzsche's philosophy in this way on occasion. I proposed that these interpretations do not, however, give us an understanding of the will to power which coalesces coherently with the rest of Nietzsche's philosophy. At that point I began to discuss 'aesthetic praxis' as a way to understand the will to power, pointing out the inherent dangers of this project as well.

In this chapter I flesh out the interpretation of the will to power as aesthetic praxis, which I sketched in chapter one. In section 3.2 I review the interpretation of the will
to power as the will to world mastery, and attempt to point out its serious shortcomings. Section 3.3 contains an exploration of the Classical Greek construction of the aesthetics of existence, its connection to Nietzsche, and its dangers. Finally, in section 3.4, I develop my interpretation of the will to power as aesthetic praxis.

3.1 Stormtroopers and Swastikas: Nietzsche and World Mastery

Interpreters of Nietzsche find the idea of the will to power exasperating and difficult to interpret. Indeed many call it dangerous because it can be and has been interpreted in terms of ruthless totalitarianism. Nevertheless, I believe that such a manifestation of 'will to power' is not what Nietzsche spent a great deal of his life writing about. A. H. J. Knight's reading of will to power stems from implicit references to Nietzsche's notions of 'master' (strong, noble) and 'slave' (weak, vulgar) moral codes in the Genealogy of Morals. He explains that according to Nietzsche, it is the strong class in any society which imposes its "social, religious, political, and ethical systems" on the weaker classes as expressions of its will to power, while the weak on the other hand have no ability or right to express their will to power, or to attempt to impose it on anyone (1967: 137). Christopher Lampert's interpretation of the will to power is similar to Knight's. He draws from Beyond Good and Evil, and
concludes that Nietzsche's will to power pertains only to philosophers, "as the one[s] who know what religions are good for, who know how to order the politics of fatherlands, who command and legislate how the world ought to be and have the future of mankind on their agenda" (1986: 247). Alexander Nehamas characterizes the will to power in the same way. He interprets Nietzsche's doctrine as "the tendency to rearrange everything with which one is confronted and to stamp one's own impress on what is to come, as the fundamental drive in life...manifested in the ability to make one's own view of the world and one's own values the very world and values in which and by which others live" (1985: 32, 233).

We could easily see this 'will to power' working in the one socio-political quasi-religious movement of the 20th century which professed to embody 'Nietzschean' ideals, and was labelled by others as doing so: Nazism. With the encouragement of Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Adolf Hitler and his 'ministers of education' tirelessly attempted to use Nietzsche's work as a philosophical foundation for the Nazi regime. Enemies of the Nazis were also quick to label Nietzsche as the author of Hitler's policies (Kuenzli, 1983: 429). The most violent Nazi appropriations of Nietzsche were carried out by Alfred Baümler and Heinrich Härtle, under the supervision of Alfred Rosenberg in the Nazi Ministry of Education (Ibid.: 430). Baümler sought to harmonize Nazi
philosophy and the will to power "in order to make Nietzsche a philosopher of the nordic race" (Ibid.: 431). Rudolf Kuenzli, however, points out the difficulty in such an enterprise, citing Nietzsche's many blatant attacks on the German character (of which I have mentioned a few in chapter one), and quoting Baümler's weak connections between Nietzsche and the Nazis (Ibid.). Baümler constructs the nexus between the two philosophies with language which is suggestive at best: "these words could have been spoken by Nietzsche...this sounds as though it came from..." (emphasis added; Baümler, 1931: 94-5; in Kuenzli, 1983: 431). Baümler explained away Nietzsche's attacks on Germany as attacks on 'non-German' elements of German society, and proclaimed, "When we greet the Nazi youth with 'Heil Hitler!' we salute with this call at the same time Friedrich Nietzsche" (1937: 294; in Kuenzli: 432). Härtle followed Baümler's lead and cranked out masterpieces of propaganda supposedly based on Nietzsche. From Nietzsche's critiques of democracy, socialism, Christianity, and the interpretation of the will to power as a glorification of war, Härtle concluded that "Nietzsche will be recognized as the most important precursor of the Nazi movement, since he provided the ideas which Hitler is putting into practice: 'the Nazi future will also be Nietzsche's future'" (1939: 168; in

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1 This is an idea to which we will return in section 3.1.b.
Kuenzli: 433). Again, Härtle explained away any of Nietzsche's critiques with which he did not agree, as minor inconsistencies stemming from 19th century biases (Ibid.). Finally, Nazi propaganda included the printing of small anthologies of Nietzsche's aphorisms (usually only 30 to 40), which stressed—with no context but Nazi ideals—the evils of Christianity and Jews, and idolized the Viking race as possessors of the will to power (Ibid.: 434). These booklets were published without reference to whom they were assembled by, or when they were printed, so as to make the German people believe Nietzsche had intended them to appear as they did (Ibid.). However, it is interesting to note that amid all of the purposeful placing in incorrect contexts and explaining away of inconsistencies, that Baümler himself admitted (of course only in explanatory notes at the end of a text), having trouble relating Nietzsche's will to power to Nazism. Kuenzli contends that "Although Baümler states that 'nothing seems more difficult than to find in Nietzsche's work a transition from the individual to the collective,' i.e., a theory of the Volk, the race, Baümler of course is able to fabricate the link" (1983: 432). Obviously, the Nazis took great pains to establish their agenda on the foundation of a widely known German philosopher. Emphasizing Nietzsche's will to power as a doctrine of domination, Nazi intellectuals rewrote Nietzsche in their likeness. And yet even they, according to Baümler,
found almost insurmountable difficulty in their task.

In the United States, Crane Brinton of Harvard did his best in the 1940's to show how 'thoroughly proto-Nazi' Nietzsche had been. Brinton's interpretation of the will to power coincides neatly with the Nazi view. He argued that the will to power is manifested as the

statesman, the priest...are all trying to prevail, to impose themselves, to arrange their surroundings—including surrounding human beings—to suit themselves...these are men who mold society, who seek to determine the conditions of life on this earth (1940: 132-3).

Brinton combined this view with Nietzsche's repetitive mention of war, to assert that "Nietzsche approved of wars in principle, and wrote flowingly in praise of war and warriors" (Ibid.: 127). However, it seems that our friend from Harvard did not take the time to thoroughly examine Nietzsche's ideas on war, nor did he really have to. In the midst of World War II, with propaganda streaming, it was easy to associate the will to power with Hitler and Nazism. Brinton even went so far as to apologize for Nazi misinterpretations of Nietzsche.

Even when Nietzsche is trying his best to be fair to the Jews, to be even tempered, he provides good ammunition for Nazi leaders, who have only to excise a few of his phrases to be consistent...The famous phrase 'will to power' suggests ruthlessness, aggression, and a policy of expansion perfectly illustrated since Hitler's accession to power (Ibid.: 216-17).

At the end of his book on Nietzsche, Brinton proclaimed, "Point for point he [Nietzsche] preached, along with what the
Nazis chose to forget, most of the cardinal articles of the professed Nazi creed" (Ibid.: 231). It is important to note here that Brinton considered Nietzsche's "last book" and "philosophical culmination" to be *The Will to Power* (Ibid.: 118). In chapter one I discussed the dangers of such an interpretation, and now that we have seen an outcome of this enterprise in the work of Brinton, Baümler, Härtle, Förster-Nietzsche, and others, I will spend the rest of this chapter building an interpretation of the will to power which I think is more along the lines Nietzsche was thinking.

3.1.b *The Individual and The 'Great War'*

As promised earlier, I am now returning to Nietzsche's ideas on war and warriors. Was it really the two world wars he was prophetically extolling, or any actual military campaign whatsoever? I think that if we look closely at his work, the answer is a resounding no.\(^2\) The 'great war' Nietzsche speaks of is the *transvaluation of all values* (EH, "BGE:" 1). In the

\(^2\) In chapter two I mentioned Nietzsche's self-professed debt to the philosophy of Herakleitos, and the emphasis Herakleitos put on war as the origin of all things. While I explain in the rest of this section what I think Nietzsche meant by 'war,' we must keep in mind the connection between Nietzsche and Herakleitos as we consider why Nietzsche would choose 'war' to describe his project. On this note, see *GS*: "Jest, Ruse, and Revenge," 41.
preface to the *Twilight of the Idols*,³ he calls the transvaluation of values an "exceedingly responsible task...[which] justifies every means. Above all war." In chapter 7 of "Why I am so Wise" (EH), Nietzsche called himself "warlike," and explained his ideas on war as follows: (1) attack only causes which seem to have been victorious over others, (2) attack alone--never attack causes against which you may find yourself among allies, (3) never attack persons--only attack the ideas they propound, and (4) only attack causes where no personal quarrel or enmity is involved. It is true that Nietzsche did serve in the Prussian military, but he never saw combat, nor do his 'warfighting' principles look anything like plans for Hitler's blitzkreig. In fact, according to this 4-point creed, it seems quite clear that his 'war' is completely unrelated to any military campaign as we normally conceive of them. Again, in the *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche called the "radical revaluation of their [the Jews] enemies' values" the "most fundamental of all declarations of war" (I: 7). The war he seems to be speaking of is clearly not Hitler's quest for Aryan Lebensraum, nor is it any other war involving the death of persons. Ideas are what should perish, old ideas and old values which are transvalued would

³ Which he signed, the first book of the *Transvaluation of all Values*. This project was the project he considered to be his 'magnum opus,' not *The Will to Power*, which, as I said in chapter one, he abandoned.
be the casualties of Nietzsche's great war, just as he explicitly said in the texts mentioned above. And when he proclaims "it is the good war that hallows any cause" rather than a good cause hallowing any war (TSZ, I: 10), we ought not seek megadeath and Hitler as his meaning; instead, we should understand this maxim as Kaufmann has. In an explanatory note on this passage in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Kaufmann says, "We revere Plato's Republic not for its cause (which many of us believe to have been, at least in part, totalitarianism), but because few men, if any, have ever waged a more brilliant war for any cause." This understanding of Nietzsche's great war makes much more sense than ones which label him a prophet of destruction (e. g. Stern, Brinton, the Nazis). His war was the transvaluation of all values, in which he saw himself as a "warlike" combatant, engaged in a spiritual/philosophical attack on absolutist, universalizing systems of ethics and morals. And in this role he did not see himself as a leader who would establish new values for us all, or as an idol to be worshipped by followers--like Hitler or any other despot, "even God" (BGR: 67). He explicitly denied such an agenda and beseeched later readers not to place him in such a position:

There is nothing in me of a founder of a religion...I want no "believers"; I think I am too malicious to believe in myself; I never speak to masses.--I have a terrible fear that one day I will be pronounced holy (EH, "Why I am A Destiny:" 1).

Whether these are delusions of grandeur or not, Nietzsche
himself explicitly proclaimed that he wanted no part in any regime such as Hitler's. While he did choose terms which lend themselves to dangerous interpretations, it should be clear that he explained himself in ways which should not have allowed commentators to create the philosophy of Nazism under his name.

For Nietzsche, great strength--great power did not reside in the ability to dominate others, in cruelty and tyrannical mastery of people. In "The Wanderer and His Shadow," he displays a vehement hatred for such militaristic hegemony, and betrays a hope for a day when nations would rather perish than be instruments of fear and domination (HAE-II, "W & S:" 284). In fact, he saw the mark of true strength in a nation which could destroy its whole military apparatus as a gesture in the interest of a genuine peace; rather than acting like a corner bully and intimidating other nations in the "so-called armed peace" of his day (Ibid.). Kaufmann's work on this point is indispensable. In Nietzsche he found the view that only the weak "need to convince themselves and others of their might by inflicting hurt," while the truly powerful do not feel such a need; they already know they are powerful (1968: 194). He goes back to aphorism 113 of Nietzsche's Dawn, and shows how Nietzsche had constructed a conceptual ranking of powerholders. At the bottom is the barbarian, who incessantly tortures others because of a need to continually reinforce his
fleeting sense of power. At the top is the master of the self whose sense of power is strong, who commands himself as he must, in his quest to master himself (Ibid.: 194-7; and *Dawn*: 113). In Nietzsche's eyes then, the most powerful do not dominate others—their will to power is an exercise in self-mastery and self-sovereignty, *not* world domination (see also *Dawn*: 139).

In many of Nietzsche's works we can see this focus on the sovereignty and self-control of the individual rather than the domination of the world. Even Alfred Baümler saw an almost singular emphasis on the individual in Nietzsche's work. "Oh, how greatly it goes against my grain to impose my own thoughts upon others!" Nietzsche said in the *Dawn* (449). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he attacked universalist dogma in his description of the philosophers he hoped to see arise in the future. Rather than imposing an absolute system on all others even in an attempt to promote 'common good,' Nietzsche hoped that such philosophers would be "powerful enough to say, 'my judgment is my judgment: no one else is easily entitled to it'" (43). They should not declare that they have once and for all found the way for everyone. Instead, their focus would obviously be on creating their own way, which might be held up as an example, but certainly not as an absolute blueprint for societal conduct. Nietzsche was concerned much more with creating space for the originality, sovereignty, and
authenticity of the individual, not finding universal 'Truths' which he could impose as commandments etched in stone on all people (Ibid.: preface, 31, 108, 228). In the Gay Science, he entreated us to "confine ourselves, therefore [because of the non-existence of absolute truths"], to the purification of our opinions and appreciations, and to the construction of new tables of value of our own" (III: 335). And Zarathustra, as he speaks to one who supposedly 'follows' his teachings, says, "even if Zarathustra's words were a thousand times right, still you would always do wrong with my words" (III: 7).

For Nietzsche, then, it seems that the will to power would not be exercised in tyrannical leadership like that of Genghis Khan or Hitler, but in the ability of individuals to master themselves. In the Dawn he writes of that power which overcomes 'worldly power' (that of kings, emperors, priests).

I refer to that spectacle of power which a genius does not lay out upon his works, but upon himself as a work, that is, his own self-control, the purifying of his own imagination, the order and selection in his inspirations and tasks (548).

This power over self then, is the greatest power of all. Elsewhere, Nietzsche makes it still clearer that authors, philosophers, and psychologists--"lovers of the great hunt" which is human self-understanding--should be drawn to focus on the individual; on the self conquering itself (HAH-II: 152;

4 See also Dawn: 507.
and BGE: 45). Rather than attempting to stamp the entire world and everyone's experience in it with one's own vision, rather than imposing one's values and ethics on everyone as a universal and absolute system based on 'Truth,' Nietzsche was speaking explicitly of the project of self-cultivation and self-mastery. He was concerned much more with individuals being allowed the freedom to 'create themselves as works of art,' than he was with formulating some sort of Nazi doctrine. Does his writing really point to Fascism as many have claimed? Or, is the will to power he is describing that which is found in Alphonso Lingis' idea of the 'noble' man, whose power is not a power over other men, over organizations, or over history that he owes to institutional structures; ...it is rather the power by which he molds and fashions his human type, the power of his own dignity, his own distinction, his own difference, the power to make of his own life something distinguished (Lingis, 1977: 52)?

This interpretation is clearly in agreement with the view Kaufmann found evident in chapter 113 of the Dawn. It is this view that I have attempted to bring out of Nietzsche's work throughout this section. Hopefully I have at least made it clear that the will to power can be (if not should be) read as a phenomenon which is specifically concerned with self-mastery, not fascistic world domination. It is this interpretation of the will to power as self-mastery which I now develop more fully, as individual aesthetic praxis.
3.2 Nietzsche and the Greek 'Aesthetics of Existence'

'The Greeks neither inherited nor developed a belief that a divine power had revealed to mankind a code of laws for the regulation of sexual behavior; they had no religious institution possessed of the authority to enforce sexual prohibitions. Confronted by cultures older and richer and more elaborate than theirs, cultures which nonetheless differed greatly from each other, the Greeks felt free to select, adapt, develop, and--above all--innovate.' For them, reflection on sexual behavior as a moral domain was not a means of internalizing, justifying, or formalizing general interdictions imposed on everyone; rather, it was a means of developing...an aesthetics of existence, the purposeful art of a freedom perceived as a power game (Foucault, 1990: 252-3).

As Michel Foucault concludes volume 2 of The History of Sexuality, he leaves us with the thoughts I have quoted above. In volumes 2 and 3 of that work, Foucault asks "how, why, and in what forms was sexuality constituted as a moral domain?" in Greek and Roman cultures (Ibid.: 10). In his introduction to volume 2, he says,

it occurred to me that this problematization [sexuality as a moral domain] was linked to a group of practices that have been of unquestionable importance in our societies: I am referring to what might be called the "arts of existence." What I mean by that phrase are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre [work] that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria (pp. 10-11).

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5 Dover, 1978; in Foucault, 1990.
Focusing on ethical questions surrounding Greek sexuality, Foucault explores Greek writings on bodily regimen, household management, and the erotic relationships between young and old men. He concludes that it was around these three issues that the Greeks constructed the idea of the "arts of existence:" the ideas of self-conduct and "pleasure-use" according to "demanding principles" (Ibid.: 249). Now of course, Nietzsche did not center his philosophical inquiries around questions of the ethics and moral "problems" of sexuality. However, as I argue, the Greek arts of existence which Foucault outlines are very similar to the idea of aesthetic praxis which I develop in this chapter. Therefore, I will relate the main themes Foucault points out concerning the arts of existence, as an introduction to the concept of aesthetic praxis.

First, the Greek arts of existence did not stem from a meticulously codified absolutist moral and ethical system. Instead, there seems to have been a core of accepted behaviors and practices, on which one based one’s conduct. The purpose of exploring ethical conduct with regard to the use of pleasures was not the universal imposition of a canon of acceptable and unacceptable sexual acts; it was to "define an individual style of conduct...more oriented toward practices of the self, and artistic self-limitation" (Ibid.: 30, 53, 57). This exploration was necessary for one to order their drives in a 'noble' fashion, to formulate a hierarchy of
desires which would be reflected in behavior recognized by self and others as "brilliantly" beautiful (Ibid.: 89).

We are a long way from a form of austerity that would tend to govern all individuals in the same way...under a universal law...On the contrary, here everything was a matter of adjustment, circumstance, and personal position. The few great common laws--of the city, religion, nature--remained present, but it was as if they traced a very wide circle in the distance, inside of which practical thought had to define what could rightfully be done...in this form of morality, the individual did not make himself into an ethical subject by universalizing the principles that informed his action; on the contrary, he did so by means of an attitude and a quest that individualized his action, modulated it, and perhaps even gave his a special brilliance of virtue of the rational and deliberate structure his action manifested (Ibid.: 62; emphasis added).

The idea of sculpting or painting oneself into a work of art, into a shining example of the human power to define and form one's own existence was strong among the Greeks. Each citizen took it upon himself to reflect on his own practices and desires, and order them in such a fashion as to be exemplary of beauty. In this endeavor there were no checklists, no stone tablets or long scrolls of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" for individuals to obey. Beside a few general principles, it was up to each man (meaning men only) to create, limit, order his drives and conduct himself as he would.

It is interesting to note that the Greeks did not consider their art of existence to pertain only to the mind,
or spirit. It was not a practice of "soul cleansing," "spiritual purification," or rational deliberation undertaken to cultivate only the psyche. The Greek conception of self, according to Foucault, had bodily as well as purely psychological components (Ibid.: 108). Control of the body and its conduct was part of the same craft which allowed individuals to exhibit themselves as either good or poor guides of their own lives. Distinguished and revered were those who could skillfully manage the "tumultuous forces" within themselves, who controlled their "stores of energy" so as not to waste themselves; who could make themselves "works of art" for others to admire (Ibid.: 138-9). A demanding physical regimen was as integral to the art of existence as the ordering of the 'soul,' which we will examine later. In Nietzsche's writings as well, there is an attempt to bridge the gap between mind and body, flesh and spirit. "We philosophers are not at liberty to separate the soul and body, as the people separate them; and we are still less at liberty to separate soul and spirit" (GS: preface, 3). Nietzsche, like some of the early Greeks, did not conceive of the self as a merely spiritual entity temporarily imprisoned in flesh.⁶

⁶ The most notable exception to this is Plato, who did construct a strict soul/body dualism, which I discuss later in this chapter. Throughout this chapter, my usage of the phrase "the Greeks" follows Foucault's: "philosophers and doctors in classical Greek culture of the fourth century BC" (1990: vol. 2, 12), with exceptions made when necessary.
When Zarathustra speaks to the "despisers of the body" (one of his many nicknames for Christians), he tells them that their selves are unities of their thoughts and feelings. Their selves, our selves, are unities of body and mind "dwell[ing]" in our bodies (TSZ: I, 4). In discussing the will to power, Kaufmann addresses this attempt of Nietzsche's to bridge the mind/body duality. Rather than assuming that strength and reason, "brawn and brains" are two qualitatively different human faculties, Kaufmann asserts that for Nietzsche they are both merely manifestations of the will to power (1968: 202). On this reading, the dualism of mind/body is fused into the monism of the will to power. Appetites, reason, spirited emotions all still exist, but are seen as characteristic of different quantities of will to power, not different qualities of flesh or spirit. As with the Greeks, Nietzsche considered the indissoluble relationship of mind and body central to the self.\(^7\) This largely individual, uncodified art of existence, grounded in the refinement and care of self as spirit and flesh, what form did it take? What practices were included in the daily work of the Greek 'artist' of existence? According to Foucault, ethical behavior informed by the arts

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\(^7\) Of course, Nietzsche's concept of self does differ with the Greek notion of self in other ways. Indeed, his notion of self differs radically from almost any other. I discuss this difference in chapter four, when focusing on the Übermensch, Nietzsche's idea of the supreme self.
of existence was achieved only by "adopting a combative attitude toward [one's] pleasures...unfolding as a solo contest: [it] was to cross swords with oneself" (Ibid.: 66, 68). The tactics of this contest were moderation, a judicious use of one's sense of timing, and sensing what might be acceptable or unacceptable, when and where. This was aimed at the sublimation of one's drives--controlling them, at becoming "stronger than oneself," at besting oneself in 'ethical combat' (Ibid.: 250). There is a sense of this in Nietzsche's Gay Science, wherein he states: against other individuals "let us not struggle in direct conflict!--All blaming, punishing, and desire to impose comes under this category. But let us elevate ourselves all the higher! Let us ever give to our pattern more shining colors! Let us obscure the other by our light!" (321). Nietzsche extols this desire to outshine another's beauty by one's own beauty, cultivated through the "most necessary gymnastic" of self-combat (NHA-II, "W & S," 305). Kaufmann also understood this process of 'self-combat' to be evident in Nietzsche's work. Drawing from many texts, he saw will to power as that power of self to "organize the chaos" of one's drives and impulses, to create a self infused with "harmony" present through the ordering and
mastery of one’s natural "chaos" (1968: 227). This is the same ‘crossing of swords’ with oneself which Foucault found to be the central mechanism of the Greek art of existence. For the Greeks, this ‘self-combat,’ this ‘chaos ordering’ was a perpetual process. They did not view it as a means to an end which they would ever realize, they viewed it as a life-long struggle.

It was extremely important then, for a Greek to continually engage himself—to never let up in his struggle to create himself as a work of art. For "self-mastery was a way of being a man with respect to oneself, a way of commanding what needed commanding, of coercing that not capable of self-direction...of setting up a structure of virility that related oneself to oneself" (Foucault, 1990: 82-3). One must be able to command oneself. How could one command others if one could not even command oneself? How could one carry out business and engage in pleasure in a recognizably ‘noble’ way if one could not master oneself? These were the major concerns driving the Greeks to their continual self-combat. Again, there is this sentiment of perpetual self-cultivation in Nietzsche. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, he wrote that ‘life’ had confessed to Zarathustra that it was thoroughly infused

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8 Aside from and including the passages I have cited, Kaufmann found support for this interpretation in, Dawn: 30, 110, 204, 502, 503; BGR: 225, 229, 230, 260; GM: III, 8; and TI: I, 4 and IX, 22.
with self-overcoming: "I am that which must overcome itself again and again" (TSZ: II, 12). The never-ending self-contest the Greeks engaged in then, was for Nietzsche, in accord with basic conditions of human existence.

We see in the Greeks and in Nietzsche, the idea that one must be in control of one's self before one can engage in any other activity and hope to be successful. Nietzsche called the man who has overcome his passions one who possesses the "most fruitful soil," who is able to cultivate himself on grounds which in others are still "wild" and unusable (HAH-II: "W & S," 37, 53). There is the implication that unless one is in control of one's self, one is only setting oneself up for trouble in any endeavor undertaken. In both philosophies there is an identification of those who do master themselves as 'noble,' 'high,' and 'exalted;' and those who do not as 'low' and 'base.' For the Greeks, those who had 'bested themselves' in their self-combat had attained the highest victory, and were considered most powerful of all; for "the first and best victory" is the victory of "oneself over oneself" (Plato, Laws: 626d-e; in Foucault, 1990: 69). The most virtuous of the Greeks then, in the moral and ethical domain were those who had become the most adept artists of existence, those who controlled their drives and manifested "beautiful" conduct and behavior, those who had become worthy of being called works of art.
Writing of the Greek notion of the self as a mind/body unity, I said that the arts of existence were not aimed merely at purification of the soul. It is now necessary to amplify this point and show that the Greeks really did not aim at 'purification' at all. Rather than exalting the individual who did not have strong desires which called for control, like the 'pure' in the Christian sense, the Greeks revered those with exceptionally strong desires who had successfully controlled them. Therefore, they did not aim the self-combat of the arts of existence at extermination of their passions, drives, and desires. The active and ongoing struggle of self-mastery was aimed only at gaining and maintaining control of one's drives. For one's virtuosity was considered greater "in proportion as his desires are strong" (Foucault, 1990: 65). This is no struggle to attain an innocence once enjoyed in a paradise now lost, nor is it a striving for the ability to enter a confessional and have no sins to confess. Drives and desires were not considered sinful--in need of elimination. The idea of this struggle was to control, master, and be "victorious" over desires which are, will be, and should be part of one's self, always (Ibid.: 69). According to Aristotle, such a "victory" is all the more virtuous and emblematic of great power if one has intense drives and impulses which one is strong enough to master in self-combat (Nicomachean Ethics: VII, 2, 1146a; in Foucault, 1990: 69).
The artists of existence who had created themselves as the most spectacularly beautiful masterpieces were not devoid of lust, greed, and high-spirited impulses. On the contrary, they possessed such drives in great strength, but had greater power to order them according to their ethical and moral taste. They struggled with 'enemies' (drives) identified as natural and worthy of existence, not 'evil' and fit for extinction.

In other words, to form oneself as a virtuous and moderate subject in the use he makes of pleasures, the individual has to construct a relationship with the self that is of the "domination-submission," "command-obedience," "master-docility" type (and not, as will be the case in Christian spirituality, a relationship of the "elucidation-renunciation," "decipherment-purification" type) (Ibid.: 70).

This exact sentiment is present in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, but is most clearly evident in the Twilight of the Idols. Criticizing Christianity in the chapter "Morality as the Enemy of Nature," Nietzsche says, "To annihilate the passions and desires, simply on account of their 'stupidity'...seems to us today merely an aggravated form of stupidity...the method of the Church is hostile to life (TI: V, 1). For those individuals who are strong, such annihilation of drives is unnecessary, and undesirable even. Such drives are desirable in that they are part of being human, and healthy, if controlled properly ('fashioned artistically'), not exterminated. On the other hand, "castration and extirpation
are instinctively chosen for waging war against a passion, by those who are too weak of will, too degenerate, to impose some sort of moderation on it" (Ibid.: V, 2). Nietzsche did not believe in the virtue or strength of those without strong desires, or those who sought to eliminate them. His Zarathustra "laughed at the weaklings" who esteemed themselves to be good and righteous because they had no powerful drives which needed to be controlled (TSZ: II, 13). Just like the Greeks, Nietzsche saw no strength or nobility manifested where one had no drives needing strength to overcome them. In an attack on the hypocrisy of chastity as taught in "pious" (i.e. Christian) doctrines, Zarathustra asks, "Do I counsel you to slay your senses? No." No, he counseled the "innocence" of the senses (Ibid.: I, 13). This is not innocence as in purity, but innocence as in no association of human drives with any guilt or sin whatsoever. This is an innocence enjoyed from accepting one’s all-too-human drives, as part of human existence, not recognizing them as ‘Satanic temptations’ to be purged at the first opportunity. This is an innocence to revel in as one struggles to master strong drives, and still allow them to exist.
3.3 The Will to Power and Aesthetic Praxis

3.3.a Untruth as a Condition of Life

Nietzsche could see the will to power active everywhere in the world because he believed that outside of our interpretations of the world there were no 'natural laws,' or 'timeless truths' to be discovered by human beings.° No undeniable 'rational foundations' existed upon which the ideal human society should be constructed (BGE: 186). The so-called facts of scientific 'discovery' should be recognized instead as "delusions and errors" which are the best human approximations to any idea of infallible truths (GS: 107). Nor did he believe that religions possessed 'divine understanding' of universal laws. Because he taught that God had died, Nietzsche could proclaim that there were no universal laws, "good and evil that are not transitory, do not exist" (TSZ: II, 12). Nietzsche did not subscribe to Plato's assertion that 'Forms' of each thing (e.g., Good, Evil, Justice, Piety) existed independent of human construction of them. For him these were simply human constructs. They were created by humans, not by God or gods. All commandments and law tablets are not supernaturally given, they are fictions. They are not

° This is not to say that he did not believe in particular truths. There is nothing to indicate that he did not believe in the truth of death from a bullet to the head or falling 10,000 feet without a parachute. The truths he questioned and attacked were the so-called timeless truths and laws of the universe.

64
fictions in the sense that there is a truth which they do not capture. Instead, they are fictions in that they are strictly made-up, constructed out of nothing but human intellection and imagination. He believed that we humans make up our own values, Truths, and 'natural laws' as we go along.

Men gave themselves all their good and evil. Verily, they did not take it, they did not find it, nor did it come to them as a voice from heaven. Only man placed values in things...he alone created a meaning for things...Therefore he calls himself 'man' which means: the esteeemer (TSZ: I, 15).

At bottom then, for Nietzsche, human existence involves esteeming and creating, valuing and weighing, these are the actions of the will to power. To be human is to create meaning for your own life, to define your own good and evil, to become "your own judge and avenger of your law," which is to find "the way to yourself" (Ibid.: I, 17). Even your own good and evil—if you have them—are fictions. Your 'own law'—if you have it—is a fictitious product of your will to power; but at least it is your own, at least you define it yourself—if you do—and therein lies its value.

Walter Kaufmann asks a question pertinent to this point: If our interpretation of the world is a product of our will to power—a fiction, then is not Nietzsche's idea of the will to power a product of his own will to power—hence a fiction (1968: 204)? Does not Nietzsche's idea refute itself? Yes, Nietzsche's idea is a fiction, like any other human creation.
But that is not to say that it necessarily refutes itself. It merely suggests that all interpretations of life and the world are constructed, not discovered, even this one. There is no basis for any system of explanation or ordering of the world (like politics for example) except that we choose to believe in it. This is also the point of Sartre's quote, with which I have begun this chapter. Of course this means that no privileging of any view on any grounds other than we like it, can legitimately occur. The will to power itself is thus stripped of any truth value and presented for us to adopt or disregard like any other social fiction. Untruth is a condition of life in Nietzsche's system too. No doubt Nietzsche would have us believe that the will to power is the best understanding of human existence, with which we should agree upon serious contemplation. This may or may not be the case, and we may or may not agree with Nietzsche. If it was the case that Nietzsche wanted to impose the idea of untruth as a condition of life as universally true, then he would refute himself. It cannot be true that there is absolutely no truth in the world. Once I impose such an idea on others I necessarily refute it. If one interprets the will to power as creating and esteeming with the aim of making one's own world and values everyone else's world and values, then one is caught in the same trap.
3.3.4 Good For All, Evil For All, Do Not Exist

Upon his belief that untruth is a condition of life, Nietzsche built the argument that absolute and universal Good and Evil do not exist. Every individual sees things differently. Therefore, the belief that "what is good for me is also good absolutely" is only an "erroneous article of faith" (GS: III, 110). Nietzsche thought teachers of universal moral codes sought to impose the products of their will to power on everyone else, thereby attempting to deprive others of the freedom to esteem for themselves—to be human (D: 194). According to Nietzsche, this practice was harmful, because it was an attempt to "make the nut [core] of existence hollow" (TSZ: I, 15), to "undermine the thinking faculty" (D: 107) in individuals, to strip people of their ability to command themselves, which is the most uniquely human virtue. Nietzsche criticized such universal moral codes (e.g., Christianity) for making civilization "contemptible," for "weakening all bodies and souls and of crushing all unprejudiced, independent, and self-reliant men, the real pillars of a strong civilization" (D: 163; Golomb, 1986: 293). He believed that purveyors of such codes made people desire to become 'followers,' 'believers,' members of the "herd," and made them feel the need to be commanded rather than desire to command themselves (GS: III, 116; BGE: 199). In Nietzsche's eyes, commanding oneself, discovering and mastering oneself
comes from the flourishing of one's individual will to power, from accepting codes of conduct only when one has investigated them for oneself.

It was only reluctantly that I ever inquired about the way that always offended my taste. I preferred to question and try out the ways themselves...that, however, is my taste—not good, not bad, but my taste..."this is my way, where is yours"—thus I answered those who asked me "the way." For the way—does not exist (TS2: III, 11.2).

The way for all does not exist, according to Nietzsche. We need then, to find our own way, to be happy, to be human, to be a work of art. In this his thought mirrors the Greek thought of the arts of existence. In both philosophies a stress on individual creativity, originality, and authenticity of character is the foundation for strength, nobility, and beauty. Like the Greeks, he wanted no code with all of the answers. Like the Greeks, he wanted individuals to become artists of existence, to 'find their own way.' Unlike the Greeks however, Nietzsche was not writing about sexual practices only. Indeed, he desired the absence of meticulous codes for all ethical and moral questions, not merely those surrounding sexual conduct. He praised the individual who could do without such pre-ordained codes and construct their own: "He however, has discovered himself who says, 'This is
my good and evil'; with that he has reduced to silence [those\textsuperscript{10}] who say, 'Good for all, Evil for all'" (Ibid.).

3.3.c The Will to Power = Aesthetic Praxis

Through the will to power we create and esteem for ourselves, we overcome ourselves (i.e., best ourselves in self-combat) and prevent "the nut" of our existence from becoming hollow. We define ourselves and our existence according to our own interpretations of them. These activities of the will to power constitute aesthetic praxis. Construed as such, the will to power is Nietzsche's expanded version of the Greek arts of existence. Of course Nietzsche (my Nietzsche) did not merely mimic the Greeks. As I said before, his emphasis was not on the ethical and moral concerns surrounding the use of pleasures, as was the Greek emphasis. Instead, the will to power seems to be about cultivating oneself into a work of art, into a symbol of human (even superhuman) strength and beauty.

One thing is needful--To "give style" to one's character--that is a grand and rare art! He who surveys all that his nature presents in its strength and weakness, and then fashions it into an ingenious plan, until everything appears artistic, and even the weaknesses enchant the eye--exercises that admirable art (\textit{GS}: IV, 290).

\textsuperscript{10} Teachers of universal moral systems, e.g., "the spirit of gravity."
This artistry of existence, this idea of aesthetic praxis Nietzsche presents to us in the *Gay Science* is the precursor of the will to power as unveiled in the words of Zarathustra. In the chapter "On Self-Overcoming," Zarathustra explains the will to power. It is described as the drive to "value," to "esteem," to "create," to "command," as the drive of "self-overcoming" (*TSZ*: II, 12). Through the will to power self-cultivation leads to greatness, but *only* for those who can master themselves. Those who do not best themselves in self-combat can never attain the beauty and grandeur of those who are strong enough to overcome themselves. Those with strong wills to power impose form on themselves through esteeming themselves and the world around them, through controlling and commanding themselves, through fashioning their existence as "judge, avenger, and victim of [their] own law" (Ibid.). The struggle of aesthetic praxis is a struggle for those strong enough to guide themselves without a code of "Thou Shalt" and "Thou Shalt Not" imposed by others upon their every deed, and this struggle is never-ending (Kaufmann, 1968: 250). Zarathustra explains that the will to power means forever esteeming and crossing swords with oneself (*TSZ*: II, 12). No matter how much we admire our selves as works of art, our sense of aesthetic praxis drives us to overcome our selves and attempt to recreate our selves in a more refined manner (Ibid.). Every valuation and estimation is a struggle to
fashion the self into a more beautiful work of art, which leads to another struggle to do the same, again and again, over and over (Kaufmann, 1968: 248). Out of the will to power as the perpetual drive to craft oneself through aesthetic praxis, one imposes a commanding form on oneself, "out of [this] esteeming itself speaks the will to power" TSZ: II, 12).

The commanding form one masters oneself with is an ordering of drives and character which does not extinguish drives, but structures them and allows them to flourish under control. In crafting our selves, we should not look upon them as entities which have walked down a "wrong road on which one must finally walk back to the point where it begins" so we can turn them on to the right road (GM: II, 16; & III, 11). The cultivation of the artistic self through the will to power is not about "self-mortification, self-flagellation, [and] self-sacrifice," which Nietzsche considered to be a formula of "life against life" (Ibid.: III, 13). No desires or drives are to be excised or eliminated, they should be given stylistic refinement and integrated into the whole work we call our 'self' (GS: IV, 290). Extermination, or 'purification,' of the drives that we call parts of our self would make us weak. We would be left with nothing to overcome, with no material upon which to exercise our sculptor's hammer. That kind of life is the life of "bad
conscience," which Nietzsche attacks throughout the Genealogy of Morals as the most detrimental kind of human existence. Lust, greed, anger, passion, strength, all drives are to survive, but they are to obey the highest drive: reason (Kaufmann, 1968: 230). Nietzsche did not consider reasoning (deliberation, rational intellection, thinking) to be associated with a spiritual entity, a "mind" which was merely imprisoned in our bodies (GS: I, 11; BGE: 36). Reason was tied to our body as much as any other drive. Reason was merely the drive which related the self's drives to one another (Ibid.). Reason was the drive to "organize the chaos of the impulses into a harmony—and thus give man power" (Kaufmann, 1968: 230). Through reason we can command ourselves into the form of a work of art. Through reason our will to power as the drive of aesthetic praxis can master the other, 'lower' drives of the self.

At this point an exploration of the similarities and differences between Nietzsche's will to power and the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle becomes illuminating. In the Republic, Plato's depiction of the human soul champions reason as the highest element. Plato divides the soul into three parts (listed here in descending order of rank): the

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11 The discussion of the soul in the Republic appears in books four through ten of that work, but is introduced and most clearly explained in book four, 439c-445e.
rational, the high-spirited, and the appetite. If the rational part of the soul is in charge, it orders the 'lower' parts of the soul in a way which allows each to function according to its 'natural place' in the order. As long as the rational part of the soul is ordering the other parts and they do not hinder each other or the rational part of the soul, the soul according to Plato realizes justice. This justice is best thought of as a sort of 'psychic harmony.' A well-ordered and just soul is one in which one's reasoning is not tainted by one's appetites (e.g., greed, lust) or high-spiritedness (e.g., bravery, pursuit of honor). Each part of a just soul maintains its place, its activities do not interfere with the activities of the other parts. Possession of a just soul is, for Plato, a sign of distinction. Indeed, only those with just souls would rule in the ideal state, and they would do so as absolute monarchs.

While Nietzsche admired and praised the individuals who could cultivate their selves and order their drives aesthetically according the drive of reason, he did not construct an ideal state modelled on the ideal soul, nor did he advocate a political system as intricate and detailed as Plato's. Another very important difference between Plato and Nietzsche is their views on the afterlife. Plato considered the soul to be immortal and subject to repeated incarnation. It was for him an entity which could exist without a body, a
self which possesses its identity even when not incarnate (Republic: 614b-621d). As I have previously argued and will argue in the next chapter, Nietzsche's conception of self and soul is much different from this. It is exactly the notion of a soul which can exist independently of a body that allows religions (of main concern for Nietzsche, Christianity) to posit an afterlife. In chapter two I discussed Nietzsche's views on the harm of belief in the existence of an afterlife, and the importance of believing that our life on earth is our only life. Plato's contention that the well-ordered soul partakes of justice is also different from Nietzsche's view of the self. For Nietzsche, a 'work of art' created through aesthetic praxis is simply a work of art. Dignity and distinction go with the achievement of artistic self-mastery, but for Nietzsche there is no accompanying notion of justice or piety in the soul, as there is for Plato. And finally, though both Nietzsche and Plato divide the subject (for Plato the soul, for Nietzsche the self), nothing in Nietzsche's work even remotely resembles Plato's highly systematized tri-partite soul. Nietzsche writes of the existence of many drives which constitute the self, but does not label or bracket them according to any organizational scheme.
Similarities worth investigating also appear between Nietzsche's will to power as aesthetic praxis and Aristotle's explanation of the highest human good: eudaimonia. In the Nicomachean Ethics (NE), Aristotle asserts that eudaimonia is the "chief good" of humanity, it is the function of man, and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence...human good turns out to be the activity of the soul in conformity of excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete (NE: I, 7).

Eudaimonia then, is activity of the soul in accordance with complete human excellence and complete human virtue (NE: I, 7; and Eudemian Ethics (EE): II, 1). Aristotle said that human excellence is in accordance with a rational principle, and reinforces this point by saying that the highest human excellence is intellectual pursuit, i.e., contemplation or reasoning (NE: X, 7). For Aristotle as well as for Plato, and for Nietzsche, the rational part of the soul/self seems to be

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12 For Plato such a division of the soul was necessary for his assertion that justice in the state and the individual were analogous. Nietzsche on the other hand, had no such project.

13 This discussion reflects but a fragment of many hours spent with Tim Duvall and Nick Smith, without whose help I could not even begin to make this argument. If it is inadequate, the fault lies only with me.
the highest part. Aristotle insists that human excellence and human good, even the human purpose is rational activity of the soul. He asserts that human virtue, because it is human, depends on rational activity, in which no other animals can engage (EE: II, 1; and On the Soul passim; and Parts of Animals: I, 1 and 2; II, 5). If we engage in rational activity of the soul according to the highest excellence, partaking then of the highest human good, we act well and live well according to Aristotle (EE: I, 3; and II, 1). And living well according to Aristotle,

consists in the having of a certain character by oneself and one’s actions...eudaimonia is there for those who cultivate a certain character in themselves and their actions (EE: I, 3).

Like to Aristotle, whose highest human good consists in cultivating a certain character in one’s self and actions through rational activity of the soul according to the highest excellence, Nietzsche thought that the creation of the self as a work of art through the will to power was the highest human achievement. So for Aristotle and for Nietzsche, the project of the self (as eudaimonia, as aesthetic praxis) relied on the activity of the human intellect. Nietzsche said that man gave things values and created meaning for them, and that  

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Aristotle believed that all things had an end, or purpose for which they existed. In ancient Greek the word for this ‘end’ is telos. Nietzsche did not agree with Aristotle on this point. My purpose here is not to argue that he did, but that both philosophers championed the rational part of the soul/self.
"therefore he calls himself 'man' which means: the esteemer" (TSZ: I, 15). Over two thousand years earlier, Aristotle said, "intellect more than anything else is man" (NE: X, 7). Both Aristotle and Nietzsche viewed the intellect as uniquely human, as central to the highest human achievement, be that the life of eudaimonia or the creation of the self as a work of art. Aristotle and Nietzsche also shared the view that one can both govern and be governed by oneself. Aristotle believed that human beings were composed of "a thing that governs and a thing that is governed," and that within the laws of the city, each individual "should live by reference to its own governing principle" (EE: VIII, 3). This should at once remind us of Foucault's account of the Greek arts of existence with regard to the use of pleasures, wherein the artist of existence is free to sculpt his self within the "wide circle in the distance" of values and laws which guide the community. This should also remind us of Nietzsche's assertion that the individual with a strong will to power can command and obey himself, whereas a weaker person cannot control themself, and must obey others. Of course, for Nietzsche though, the Greek city laws and tribal customs would be too much constraint on one's will to power.

At this point Nietzsche and Aristotle diverge. Nietzsche's idea of a wide circle in the distance is very
different from that of Aristotle and other Greeks.\textsuperscript{15} And, like Plato, Aristotle seemed to think that the best political body was organized on the same principle as the best soul. Plato’s justice in the state was defined by its similarity to his conception of justice in the soul. For Aristotle, the most excellent state is such because its function is the same as the most excellent activity of the soul, fostering human activity according to a rational principle (\textit{Politics}; VII, 2). Again, Nietzsche had no such vision. His philosophy includes no such ideal state constructed according to its similarity with an ideal, just, virtuous, or excellent self. Finally, Aristotle wrote that the life of \textit{eudaimonia} granted humans favor in the eyes of the gods, making us more dear to them (\textit{NE}; X, 8). Though he explained that such divine favor was not the goal of the life of \textit{eudaimonia}, it was seen as an agreeable effect. Without a doubt, Nietzsche did not envision divine favor as a benefit of the creation of the self as a work of art. According to him, there were no divinities to grant such favor.

\textsuperscript{15} I will briefly address this as I conclude this chapter, but this is mostly a problem of Nietzsche’s political implications, which I will not discuss until chapter five.
3.4 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have argued that Nietzsche's focus was individual cultivation, not world domination. In this chapter in particular, I have attempted to relate the centrality of "finding one's 'own way'" to the idea of the will to power. As I conclude my discussion of the will to power, I want to emphasize that centrality of the search for one's 'own way' to further illustrate, (1) Nietzsche's focus on the individual, and (2) the similarity between the will to power and the Greek arts of existence.

To go your own way entails defining your own existence, creating your own vision of your self and your world: esteeming. Going your own way is Nietzsche's metaphor for actively defining your own existence rather than passively accepting how others (e.g., the Church, the state, your family and friends) define you and the world. Going your own way is Nietzsche's description of living your life as completely as you can through active aesthetic praxis. This aesthetic praxis is not the holding up of some theoretical image of the ideal human, to which you should aspire and order your practices accordingly, that process is instantiation. Nor is it about plundering the world in fits of frenzied rapacity and then explaining away your harm to others by constructing a theory of natural selection or anything else which rationalizes your violence, that is a reification. Such
reification of Nietzsche's philosophy is exactly what Hitler and the Nazis carried out. Aesthetic praxis is the theoretical/practical struggle to order your life as you see fit according to your own ideas of how to make your life more beautiful—not ideal. Your theory of how you should live your life, and your actual practice of it should be the same. And as you theorize/practice your life, aesthetic praxis entails fine-tuning changes in your theory/practice which are based on your previous theories/practices.

Going your own way means not being a 'follower' or a 'believer,' for such people esteem (if at all) according to the values of those whom they follow, not their own (TSZ: I, 22.3; HAH-II: 390; D: 206). Without esteeming for yourself through the will to power the "nut of your existence would become hollow," for "all of life is a dispute over taste and tasting. Taste—that is at the same time weight and scales and weigher; and woe unto all the living that would live without disputes over weight and scales and weighers" (TSZ: II, 13). Woe unto all the living who would not esteem for themselves, who would rather accept the way others give them, rather than find their own. "Go your own ways!" Nietzsche beseeched us, and desire rather to "be a fool on one's own than a sage according to others" (Ibid.: III, 12.21; IV, 4). What is most important, what it is to live fully according to Nietzsche, is to cultivate your self as a work of art through
your own will to power. It is to constantly seek newer and more exact expressions and actualizations of yourself through analysis, reinterpretation, and rearrangement of the norms of society which imprint codes of behavior and modes of thought on you. This means valuing and esteeming your world according to your own criteria, commanding and defining yourself according to your own ideal of beauty: "I am Zarathustra the godless: I still cook every chance in my pot. And only when it has been cooked through there do I welcome it as my food" (Ibid.: III, 5.3).
CHAPTER FOUR

THE ÜBERMENSCH: HOW ONE BECOMES WHAT ONE IS

I am Zarathustra the godless, where shall I find my equal?

--Friedrich Nietzsche,
from Thus Spoke Zarathustra

I have labored at length in the two previous chapters to explain my interpretations of Nietzsche's ideas of eternal return and the will to power. I have sketched briefly in these chapters the relationship of these ideas to the figure of the Übergmensch. It is my goal in this chapter to explicate eternal return and the will to power as the central characteristics/embodiments of Nietzsche's Übergmensch. I also discuss Nietzsche's conception of self, his "three metamorphoses of the spirit," and the idea of the 'autonomous' or 'authentic' self, as they apply to the Übergmensch.

4.1 Eternal Return, The Will to Power, and the Übergmensch

We now return to Zarathustra's explanation of eternal return to his arch-enemy, the spirit of gravity (TSZ: III, 2.2). The explanation ends with a vision which Zarathustra perceives as a riddle. In this vision Zarathustra hears a dog howling and follows the sound until he happens upon a man in peril. The man lay on the ground fighting with a huge black snake which had crawled down his throat and bitten fast. Zarathustra pulls on the snake in an effort to help, but only in vain. He
then cries out, "Bite, Bite its head off, Bite!" The man (a shepherd) bites off the snake's head and spits it out. He jumps up "changed, radiant, laughing!" Zarathustra then asks, "Who is the shepherd into whose throat the snake crawled thus? What did I see in a parable? Who is the man into whose throat all that is heaviest and blackest will crawl thus?" He later answers his own query. Further along in the book he explains that it was he himself whom he had seen in his vision (Ibid.: III, 13.2). The thought of eternal return had overtaken him as he explained it to the spirit of gravity and he was not quite ready to affirm it as a condition of life--it had become the black snake which crawled into his throat and was suffocating him. But he overcame his fear at the thought of eternal return. He overcame his revulsion at the recurrence of even the smallest man, and in so doing he overcame a weaker part of himself. He jumped up laughing and radiant after he beheaded the snake with his teeth, this action signified his newly found affirmation of eternal return. He had become strong enough to live with it. This acceptance and affirmation of eternal return is an essential condition for an Übermensch. With the death of God all hopes for a 'perfect' future, a heaven, a utopia are gone. As each moment comes it should be lived to its fullest, for there is no future time which justifies desecrating the present moment. Nor is there a golden age in the past about which we should spend our time.
reminiscing. An Übermensch should embrace the world as he engages it in every moment and wish that nothing is different than it is, this is amor fati. It is only through such affirmation of eternal return that an Übermensch understands the importance of living for every moment (Ibid.; and Ackerman, 1990: 138). Affirmation of eternal return then, is a central characteristic of an Übermensch who exalts each moment and lives each moment as though he wished it would recur eternally.

The will to power as I explained it in the last chapter is also a central characteristic of the Übermensch. In fact, Nietzsche argued that it was the central characteristic of all humans. Almost every mention of the will to power in Nietzsche’s works is an assertion that it is central to life. But, as I also explained in the last chapter, Nietzsche thought that impositions of universalist ethical and moral codes squelched the will to power of many. The promulgation of Good for all and Evil for all made the nut of existence hollow for the multitude who obey and accept such an absolute code; their will to power is crushed. The will to power of an Übermensch must be allowed (or find a way) to flourish creatively and artistically so that he can value and esteem for himself rather than passively accept such cultural and societal codes. The Übermensch is one who is continually struggling with his more base manifestations of character and
the moral dictates of society, trying to overcome the "herd element, the torpor and sloth everydayness" in his self (Ibid.: 33; and Pfeffer, 1972: 245). He should seek to overcome himself in every moment through his will to power (RH: "TSZ" 6). Alexander Nehamas characterizes the will to power of the Übermensch as a "continual process of integrating one's character traits, habits, and patterns of action with one another...to give style to one's character" (1985: 185). The Übermensch as such embodies the struggle to better oneself through self-sculpting and self-overcoming (Magnus, 1978: 32-34).

The essential characteristic of Nietzsche's overman, and indeed the center of his whole philosophy is creativity...Virtue is not obedience to external commands, or self-denial, or suppression of individuality. It is self-actualization through the release and unfolding of our creative powers. Virtue is excellence in the Platonic and Aristotelian sense...It is power to order our life, giving it form and authenticity, and making it into a work of art (Pfeffer, 1972: 246).

This form giving which is self-overcoming may be characterized as the transformation of the life of the Übermensch into art-form (Magnus, 1978: 34).

This is the struggle to create oneself as a work of art through eternally recurring aesthetic praxis, and it is what identifies an Übermensch as an Übermensch.

85
4.2 The Three Metamorphoses of the Spirit

Nietzsche gave us another way to understand the struggle which an Übermensch continually undergoes in the quest for self-actualization: "Of three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you; how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child" (TSZ: I, 1). As the camel-spirit, one 'bears the load' of the values of one's culture. The camel-spirit learns and obeys the 'heavy' ethical and moral prescriptions imposed on the individual by societal institutions (e.g., church, state), internalizing and abiding by them. It seeks only to learn as many of the laws of society as it can, so it can follow them all to the letter and congratulate itself on the strength it has shown in doing so (Ibid.). The camel is the quintessential rule follower who does not question the rules or the authority of those who make them. An Übermensch must become the camel-spirit and undertake the task of learning the rules of society and abiding by them so as to understand their immense power to direct individuals. Then, like a Saharan camel loaded for a voyage, the camel-spirit goes into the desert. The camel-spirit goes into the desert with the burden of society's norms weighing heavily on it, and the undergoes the second metamorphosis of the spirit. The camel-spirit becomes the lion-spirit. The lion-spirit throws off the burdens the camel-spirit had borne. No longer desiring to follow all of
society's rules, the lion-spirit wants to "conquer its own freedom" (Ibid.). The camel-spirit had internalized and abided by as many of the societal, political, and religious orders of "Thou Shalt and Thou Shalt Not" that it could handle. Now however, the metamorphosed lion-spirit says "No! No more Thou Shalt. From now on it will be I will" (Ibid.)! No longer will the spirit, now become a lion, blindly follow the valuations and determinations of universalist ethics and morality. Now it will investigate for itself and decide for itself whether or not it will follow the prescriptions of society. Now it will act because it wants to act, not because a societal Thou Shalt impels it to act. This is the metamorphosis in which an Übermensch feels the implications of the death of God, when he recognizes untruth as a condition of life, when he rails against impositions of standards for Good for all and Evil for all, when he decides that he wants to create his own scale of values, when he no longer passively accepts that the nut of this existence is hollow.

The lion-spirit cannot go so far as to create its own new values, its only purpose is to use its power to throw off the load of the old values and make the necessary space for the new values to be created (Ibid.; and Magnus, 1978: 36). The final metamorphosis takes place when the lion-spirit becomes the child-spirit. The child spirit is capable of creating its own values. It has the power to value and esteem for itself,
it is a "new beginning" (TSZ: I, 1). The child-spirit is no longer constrained to think within the boundaries that culture and society attempt to place on it. It is no longer bound by the "moral and metaphysical fetters which bind our vision" (Magnus, 1978: 37). It now defines its own life-world and values its existence in its own terms. The child-spirit creates its own values on the basis of what it learned as a camel and a lion. Through the three metamorphoses the spirit investigates, interrogates, and eviscerates the values that were once imposed on it. The new values of the child-spirit are signs of its overcoming of the old values promulgated by society. This is the point at which an Übermensch creates his own values, esteems for himself, attempts to give style to his character--to become a work of art, when he becomes judge and avenger of his own law. These are the tasks of the child-spirit, they are the actions of the will to power as aesthetic praxis.

But an Übermensch is not ever, as Crane Brinton and others have suggested, a finished product of a pseudo-Darwinian evolution, and I have already said this. An Übermensch is never a finished work of art, only a work which is constantly under construction. Without this continual construction one becomes less a work of art and more a "herd animal" as the uninvestigated influences and impositions of societal norms weigh more and more heavily on one's character.
An Übermensch continually goes through the three metamorphoses of the spirit because he knows that he can never completely transcend the base and vulgar manifestations of himself, it is a never-ending process. Eternal return means the recurrence of even the smallest man, and it also means the recurrence of the worst in each of us. As Nietzsche's child-spirit is a "self-propelled wheel," so is an Übermensch one who continually rolls through the cycle of the three metamorphoses in the struggle of eternally recurring aesthetic praxis. And though an Übermensch knows he can never attain a state of perfection, he would rather struggle to make himself a work of art than become uncritical and passive. In the end, then, it is the struggle to embody a life of aesthetic praxis and affirmation of eternal return which identifies an Übermensch, not status as being somehow totally separated or differentiated from society and on a higher plain (Connolly, 1991: 186-9). An Übermensch is a person struggling eternally to overcome what he abhors in his self and society.

4.3 Nietzsche's Conception of Self

Nietzsche's notion of the self is unorthodox and confusing. It is also a necessary site for exploration if one wishes to discuss the Übermensch. In the last chapter I spoke of the will to power as, among other things, self-overcoming, aesthetic self-cultivation, and 'crossing swords with
oneself.' And in this chapter, I have spoken of the \textit{Übermensch} as the embodiment of this will to power. The will to power as the struggle of the self (or part of it) with itself (or another part of it) was how I most commonly described the attempt to create oneself as a work of art. But what kind of self is it which can engage in such a struggle? In other words, what kind of self is the \textit{Übermensch} for Nietzsche?

The problem begins in book III of \textit{The Gay Science}, when Nietzsche declares that those who can "make their own laws and create their own selves" should seek to "become who they are" (335). From the previous discussions in this thesis, we should recognize the maker of one's own laws and the self-creator spoken of in the above passage as the \textit{Übermensch}, for the actions described above are those of a strong will to power. So, then, the goal of aesthetic praxis as I have explained it, is becoming who you are. But what does that mean? I already am who I am, am I not? Again in \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra} (IV, 1), "become who you are" is a directive from Nietzsche. And, the subtitle of \textit{Ecce Homo} is none other than, "How One Becomes What One Is." Not only does this seem like philosophical psycho-babble, it also seems to contradict one of Nietzsche's whipping horses in \textit{On the Genealogy of Morals}. In section 13 of the first essay of the \textit{Genealogy}, Nietzsche attacks the very notion of the self as subject and declares it
false: "There is no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming: 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed--the deed is everything." Okay, but if there is no such substratum, no such thing as a self, how can an Übermensch become who he is? How can I become who I am if there is no I which is? I(?) now turn to Alexander Nehamas's explanation of this labyrinth to attempt to make sense of Nietzsche's conception of self.

I spoke of the self in the last chapter as a conglery of drives, upon which one's will to power aesthetically fashions a work of art. Nehamas identifies Nietzsche's self in a similar fashion, as a group of "thoughts, actions, and desires" organized in a single body (1985: 181). In this conception, different thoughts and actions propel the body (as group of drives) in different directions, the vie for control of the body. The pattern of their relationship with one another determines personal character, almost as the mixture of humours was thought to determine character according to late-medieval/early renaissance medical practices. The dominant traits of our character (the products of the relationship of our drives) become 'characteristic' of who we are; they determine the character of our self. Our self-identity then, is the product of the most powerful and coherent characteristic we exhibit, according to the
relationship of our drives.¹ The will to power is one of these drives, it is the drive to impose order on the other drives yet allow them to flourish. In an Übermensch the will to power is the most powerful drive, it provides a degree of order and unity for the self which no other drive can provide; it allows the Übermensch to struggle to appear as a work of art (Ibid.: 182-3).² When the will to power is the ruling drive, order is imposed on the other drives and perpetual aesthetic praxis maintains the ordering of the drives in as 'artistic' a manner as possible. Nehamas goes on (as I have) to suggest, however, that this relationship is never static. The self is not always a coherent whole which is identical to what it was and will be. Indeed, the creation of the self is not a progression to a final goal--an evolution, but a continuing struggle to impose an 'artistic' order on the relationship of the drives of the self (Nehamas, 1985: 189). The self as subject, then, is not previously defined.³ It is not a substratum which orders more superficial layers of ego

¹ See *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 6 for Nietzsche's word for word explanation of this.

² The will to power of an Übermensch is the strongest will to power according to Nietzsche. It belongs at the top of the scale of wills to power (*Dawn*: 113). That was explained in chapter three. It is the wills to power of those Nietzsche considered weaker than an Übermensch which are imposed on others.

³ Refer back to chapter three and the discussion of the differences between Nietzsche and Plato's conceptions of self and soul.
or consciousness. Instead, it is the personal character
(self-identity) formed by the relationship of one's drives to
one another. It is the sum of the actions and directions one
has taken because one's "conflicting thoughts, desires, and
actions" have propelled them there (Ibid.: 182, 188, 190).

The phrase "Become who you are" can now be explained in
a more understandable way. In chapter two I stressed the
importance of the thought of eternal return as it affects how
we live every moment: we should seek to live every moment to
its fullest so that we live life to its fullest, and not wish
that we had done anything different. If we do this, we can
have the attitude of _amor fati_:

> My formula for greatness in a human being is _amor
fati_: that one wants nothing to be different, not
forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not
merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal
it...but love it (EH: "Why I am So Clever")!

This is the attitude of an Übermensch, whose central
characteristics are the will to power and affirmation of
eternal return. For me to become who I am, in more
understandable terms now, means for me to accept myself and my
life, to not wish I was someone or somewhere else, and to not
wish I had done anything different, to have the attitude of
_amor fati_ toward myself and my life. Nehamas expresses this
most eloquently:

> What one is, then, is just what one becomes. In
counseling himself to become who he is, Zarathustra
is able to want to become what he in fact does
become and not to want anything about it, about himself, to be different. To become what one is we can see, is not to reach a specific new state and stop becoming—it is not to reach a state at all. It is to identify oneself with all of one’s actions, to see that everything one does (what one becomes) is what one is (1985: 191).

An Übermensch is one who becomes who he is, according to this conception of self.

4.4 Übermensch Autonomy: "Holding a Space"

Creeping into focus over this chapter and the last, is the issue of the authenticity and autonomy of the self. In becoming who he is, an Übermensch has ‘gone his own way,’ has given substance to the nut of his existence, and has attempted to form his life into an original and authentic work of art. In doing this, he has attempted to define his own good and evil, to establish a certain degree of autonomy from the constraints and codes of society. I am concluding this chapter with discussion of the authenticity and autonomy of the Übermensch because it serves two purposes. First, it allows us to look at the boundaries of the project of aesthetic praxis. How autonomous can/should an Übermensch really be? How ‘authentic’ can anyone really be? These are the questions I sketched in chapter one in the discussion between Stephen White and Thomas Dumm. And, second, the issue of autonomy and authenticity leads us directly into the implications of Nietzsche’s philosophy for the construction of
political theory. The will to power of an Übermensch as I have described it in this chapter and the last, is a mechanism which allows him to attempt to hold a space in which society's "Thou Shalts" have no power. Figuratively, this can be understood as an attempt to construct a space in which one lives and over which one is the exclusive sovereign. In such a space one lives by one's own rules, one is not a follower or a believer in anything or anyone else. The idea is, that the absolutist moral and ethical codes which are imposed through societal institutions will not penetrate this space and will have no power over the Übermensch. This is not to say, however, that an Übermensch is rendered immune to bombardment from societal agents seeking to tell him how to live and what to believe. Encounters with such agents do not end, they merely occur in an arena where the Übermensch can engage them and critically investigate them, for the most part. He can then decide whether or not to accept such societal dictates, on the basis of his agreement or disagreement with them--on his terms (Knight, 1967: 127). In the Dawn, Nietzsche writes explicitly of the dangers of the lack of such a space. Without this space, we are bound to "inevitable stupefaction," to "an intellect which is lulled to sleep," to become "corrupted" and to "have our nervous system destroyed as thoroughly and completely as if through regular debauchery" (19, 149, 297, 500). In On the Genealogy of
Morals, Nietzsche explicitly praises the individual who can live in and rule over such a space:

the ripest fruit is the sovereign individual, like only to himself, liberated again from the morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for "autonomous" and "moral" are mutually exclusive), in short, the man who has his own independent, protracted will... (II, 2).  

This is exactly the space in which an Übermensch would live and over which he would preside. In this space authentic self-cultivation takes the place of conformity to uninvestigated cultural values. Critical contemplation rather than mostly passive acceptance of societal value systems is the standard operating procedure of the Übermensch in this space (Magnus, 1978: 33-4).

I wish to clarify and qualify the discussion of autonomy at this point. As I have said repeatedly in this chapter, an Übermensch is never a finished product. At no time is his autonomy complete or his sovereignty over himself completely exclusive. An Übermensch is not ever totally dissociated from society. He is not a hermit or a recluse whose autonomy stems from lack of contact with society. In fact, the will to power is meaningless if the Übermensch is not a member of society. What values would there be to overcome? What absolutist scales of Good and Evil could an Übermensch overcome before he creates his own if there is no society to supply them? How

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4 See also Thus Spoke Zarathustra: III, 3.
could an Übermensch attempt to create himself as a work of art through eternally recurring aesthetic praxis if society was not constantly barraging him with its dictates and ethical and moral codes? The autonomy of an Übermensch is constantly compromised, it must be. No one could ever become completely autonomous without becoming an outcast. And yet, if one does not at least try to create a significant space over which they are (mostly) sovereign, one falls into acceptance of the answers society supplies rather than searching for one’s own. This is exactly the phenomenon that Nietzsche was attacking. The attempt to create a space of autonomy for the self is the attempt to prevent the nut of one’s existence from becoming hollow. In the conversation between Thomas Dumm and Stephen White that I wrote of in chapter one, this tension between establishing sovereignty over oneself through aesthetic self-cultivation, and remaining a member of society who is not considered insane or ethically repugnant was a central issue. White expressed the concern that aesthetic cultivation might preclude (or necessarily precludes) individuals from acting collectively in society, and embodying a genuine care and respect for others. This concern is wholly legitimate when one considers that the project of the Übermensch is to come up with his own answers to life’s problems and questions, rather than accept the answers society has to give. An Übermensch would not clamor and beg to become part of any collectivity in
which his will to power might be constrained, which necessarily includes almost all collectivities. Dumm proposed, however, that this tension between collectivity, community, and the aesthetic self-project is one which can be bridged. The argument is that it is wrong-headed to attempt self-cultivation with the goal of elevating oneself above and apart from society. If, hypothetically, one could cultivate oneself to a degree of 'purity' or 'perfection' where one had completely overcome the influences and connections with society, what would one then cultivate? The project would be over. But the only way to attain this state is to become a recluse with no social contact, or lose psychological contact with society; i.e. go insane. But aesthetic self-cultivation cannot occur outside of society, by definition it depends on human community for its very possibility. Without communal life, aesthetic self-cultivation is impossible. Dumm's point, then, was that the project of aesthetic self-cultivation is founded on one's membership in society, and cannot be undertaken if one is a recluse or a sociopath. What I have attempted to argue in this chapter is that this is a necessary and defining characteristic of the Übermensch. He is characterized by eternally recurring aesthetic praxis, which has no meaning whatsoever unless he is a member of society. Nor is he a member of society who sees the rest of society as a necessary irritant. He is not simply resigned to his
membership in society, like a painter is resigned to the need for paints if he wishes to paint. The relationship between the Übermensch and society, because of amor fati, is one of love. Nietzsche said the Übermensch should not just tolerate the "necessary character: in things, not "merely bear what is necessary" (GS: 276; EH: "Why I Am So Clever" 7). Instead, he should "love" what is necessary and "perceive it as beautiful" (Ibid.). Since the connection to society is necessary for an Übermensch, indeed society itself is necessary, it follows that he must love and perceive as beautiful his connection to society and society itself. He must affirm his love for society (even in its basest parts) not merely resign himself to contact with it. And to say one loves something implies care and respect for the object of one's love. This makes sense also in light of Nietzsche's talk of the camel-spirit. The camel-spirit seeks out connections with society. It searches zealously for understanding of, and compliance with societal conventions. It does not do this hesitantly, as if it was merely a necessary chore, like eating. It goes into society eagerly and energetically, with a strong desire to establish contacts. Even though the lion and child-spirits later disavow these connections, they do not destroy the ability of the camel to make them. In doing so they would destroy themselves, for they do not exist without the camel-spirit. All three of the spirits, i.e., the Übermensch, do
not merely bear the camel’s connections to society and society itself. No, he must love society, according to *amor fati*. Because an Übermensch must necessarily be a member of society, he will not merely bear it, he will love it.

An Übermensch would care for others for another reason: the nature of the project of the self. Nietzsche never made the argument I am about to make. However, I believe it is one plausible way to cash out this aspect of his thought. Over the last two chapters I have stressed the focus of the self-project on individuality. Nietzsche continually proclaims the greatness of individuals who are able to create their own laws, their own good and evil. It seems to me that this implies a recognition of the value of the self-projects of others, as well as one’s own self-project. For individuals who found the exercise of their will to power as central to life as Nietzsche did, the thought of having their will to power repressed would be a most loathsome thought. Accordingly, it seems that those exercising their will to power would not want to repress others doing the same, because they would understand the gravity of the harm they would be inflicting. If I constantly harp on the value of being able to esteem for myself and create my own scale of values to which I hold only myself, it does not seem consistent that I would repress (or attempt to repress) others in their quest to do so. Central to the will to power is the idea that one is
not a follower or a believer in someone else. What does follow consistently from this is the recognition that as this is central to one's own self-project, so is it central to other's self-projects; and other self-projects cannot flourish if one represses them. This is similar logic to that of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. The drafters of that document knew how important freedom of expression and religion were to them, so they worked very hard to protect those same freedoms for others. In other words, the care and protection of one's own self-project becomes inextricably tied to care for others and their self-projects. But, how far does this care go? And what exactly does this care entail?

Nietzsche himself tried to live examples of answers to part of the questions just asked. Throughout the ten years before he lost his mind, he tried repeatedly to form a 'community of friends' with the people to whom he was closest. His goal was a society of mutual respect and cultivation of aesthetic praxis (Hayman, 1980: 273). He wanted to live with others who were trying to find their own good and evil—who were exercising their wills to power. His Zarathustra also spoke of the need for companions, not followers or believers.

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5 This is, of course, a manifestly political example. Later I will argue that Übermenschen seek to stay away from politics. What is important in the example above is the logic, not the specific agents or institutions.
These companions would, like Zarathustra, knew the value of having a strong will to power. They would encourage the wills to power of their companions, not squelch them or be indifferent to them. So Übermensch care for others means, in part, fostering and encouraging the self-projects of his circle of friends. This could mean questioning their values, helping them to question the values and authority of institutions, or getting them to see the stifling and homogenizing tendencies of many agents in society. He would do all he could to foster the wills to power of his close friends. These are the people to whom he is closest and with whom he spends the most time, so he would likely care for them and help them with their self-projects more than anyone else. As contact and closeness to others drops off, so does the level of care for others. An Übermensch is less likely to help those he knows but does not consider a friend, and even less likely to help those he does not know. He knows he cannot protect the self-projects of everyone (if they existed), so he works hardest to protect those of his friends, and does little to protect those he does not know. Just as we do little to care for people unknown to us, and much to care for family and friends, an Übermensch would protect his friends self-projects before he would protect those of strangers. Though he would care little for the self-projects of unknown people, he would not have a hand in repressing
them. This at least minimal regard comes from a union of care for others as a corollary of care for self, and from *amor fati*. This care because of *amor fati* is a reflection of the Übermensch love of society. There is no one an Übermensch should not care for at least at some minimal level, because he would then be violating *amor fati* and jeopardizing his own self-project.

What place in society does an Übermensch occupy then? What, if any, are his ethical, social, and political responsibilities based on his embodiment of the will to power and the affirmation of eternal return? In other words, what are the implications for individuals, politics, and political theories based on Nietzsche’s philosophical framework of eternal return, the will to power, and the Übermensch? These are the questions I attempt to answer in the next, and last chapter of this thesis.
CHAPTER FIVE

FROM PHILOSOPHY TO POLITICS: WALKING NIETZSCHE’S TIGHTROPE

Go away from me [Zarathustra] and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! ...You had not yet sought yourselves when you found me. Thus do all believers; therefore all belief is of so little account. Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.

Friedrich Nietzsche,
--from Thus Spoke Zarathustra

The illusion of the seventh veil was the illusion that you could get somebody else to do it for you. To think for you. To hang on your cross. The priest, the rabbi, the imam, the swami, the philosophical novelist were traffic cops, at best. They might direct you through a busy intersection, but they wouldn’t follow you home and park your car...so everybody has to take control of their own life, define their own death, and construct their own salvation. And when you finished, you didn’t call the Messiah. He’d call you.

Tom Robbins,
--from Skinny Legs and All

In this, my concluding chapter, I am attempting to explain what I think the implications of Nietzsche’s philosophy are for politics, political theory and the individual. As I said in chapter one, this enterprise is one which is almost purely speculative. Nietzsche’s philosophy is littered with political implications and suggestions, but nowhere does he offer a systematic and detailed vision of a desired politics (Detwiler, 1990: 1; Warren, 1988: 207). He suggests no ideal state, no social contract, not even any coherent theory of
changes which might improve existing political systems (Strong, 1975: 188-189).

Based on their readings of Nietzsche’s philosophical framework, William Connolly (1991) and Mark Warren (1988) describe what they think a ‘Nietzschean’ politics could look like based on parts of his philosophical treatises. But, Warren asserts that the existing political messages in Nietzsche’s writings are not a well thought out extension of his philosophy. Instead, he argues that Nietzsche’s overtly political suggestions are the product of "largely unexamined personal assumptions about the nature of modern politics" (1988: 246). Bruce Detwiler and Tracy Strong make no such distinction between Nietzsche’s politics and a ‘Nietzschean’ politics constructed as an extension of his philosophy. They attempt to explicate his politics from a nexus of his sparse political work and derivations of his philosophy. I on the other hand, do not have a systematic vision of Nietzsche’s politics to expound. I find important implications for political theory and political systems in his works, but no concrete ‘politics.’ Connolly and Warren are in much the same position as I am, but choose to draw systematic political visions out of Nietzsche’s work anyway. Connolly’s "Nietzschean agonistic democracy" is very detailed and intriguing. However, I argue later that for various reasons, one loses too much Nietzsche and gains too much Connolly and
Warren in their visions for them to be called Nietzschean. Conversely, Detwiler and Strong have no trouble finding explicitly political systems in Nietzsche, which, interestingly enough, vary substantially from those of Connolly and Warren. I also argue that Strong and Detwiler omit analysis of so much of Nietzsche’s work as to render their ‘Nietzschean’ politics less Nietzschean and more their own. I make these arguments on the basis of my interpretations of Nietzsche’s work which I constructed in the last four chapters.

5.1 The Promise of the Will to Power

William Connolly’s vision of a ‘Nietzschean’ politics is founded on his affirmation of Nietzsche’s idea that untruth is a condition of life. His goal is to “build recognition of the unavoidability of fundamental presumptions [about value standards, ethical codes and identity] and the unlikelihood of secure knowledge of their truth into an ideal of political discourse itself” (1991: 14). In other words, he wants us to admit that untruth is a condition of life and deal with that admission politically. We need to recognize that no values, codes of ethics, or identities\(^1\) can be measured against

\(^1\) In identities Connolly includes value orientations, belief systems, and ways of life, many things which identify an individual or group, not just how they look.
transcendent scales of good and evil or truth. These ideas are socially constructed, if any are privileged it is because we humans privilege them, not because they are divinely sanctioned. There are no identities (cultural, political, individual) which have divine favor. No group or individual is legitimated in repressing others simply because they are "others," meaning different. Rather than assigning difference or 'otherness' a negative stigma (as he thinks we do now for the most part), it is assigned identification merely as different, or other.

He then erects a hypothetical polity which is an agonistic arena for the sharing, comparison, and conversation between identities where all recognize untruth as a condition of life. Each group respects the others and does not seek to dominate, eradicate, or label them 'evil' or 'wrong' simply because they are different (Ibid.: 212-213). The polity exists so that groups can air out their differences, cultivate interaction, and discuss propositions for better relationships and solutions to social problems. It is organized as a "level playing field" on which each group is respected and respects the others. The state apparatus in a "democratic hegemony" is

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2 Connolly states expressly that he is expanding on Nietzsche's philosophy in a way Nietzsche himself did not. So it is not enough to merely state that he has done this if one wishes to critique this move of his. One must argue why this move is unwarranted if one in fact believes it is. I do this in various places in this chapter.
constructed to ensure that one group or coalition does not dominate others (Ibid.). Each group is allowed the freedom to pursue its aims and realizes that their space for actualization of their agenda is contingent upon the space they allow other groups for their agendas (Ibid.: 33). Respect for others engenders their mutual respect in return. Mutual respect and recognition of the right to have the freedom to pursue different agendas maximizes the freedom of all of the groups. This is not to say that conflict will not arise from the constraints groups put on each other as a consequence of existing in the same polity. But such conflicts are incorporated into the structure of the polity in an effort to enhance the freedom of the whole.

The idea of freedom is thus most fundamentally a political one in which each site of freedom [identity group] enables and confines, compliments and opposes, each of the others. A political theory of freedom now becomes one in which each claim is drawn into engagement with the others, in which priorities are contested in a setting where many participants understand in advance that the world is not predisposed to establish perfect alignment among these interdependent and contending elements (Ibid.: 35).

Space is constructed in the organization of the political system for everyone to exercise their will to power with as much autonomy as possible, recognizing the constraints and responsibilities communal existence puts on them (Ibid.: 120). Respect for others and their projects becomes a corollary of respect for one’s own project as one recognizes the
interdependence and need for cooperation between the groups in
the polity for their freedom (Ibid.: 35, 121). Conflicts
between wills to power arise not as struggles to dominate, but
as agonistic contests which are structurally mediated. Conflicts become conversations between groups regarding
values, courses of social action, and similarities and
differences between groups. The rules of the system call for
engagement in struggle by the constituent groups, but the
state apparatus acts as a referee, not allowing any one group
to repress the others. Serious interacting, questioning, and
arguing between groups can occur only in the agonistic
political arena where it is mediated and watched. Struggle is
built into the political system, then, but without domination
and subordination. Differences of identity and value
orientation are respected and venerated because one realizes
that without others, one’s own identity would be non-existent.
Respect and care for others and their projects is fostered as
people realize that the growth of their own identities is
contingent on the growth of the identities of others in the
polity (Ibid.: 199). Without others to show one what one is,
or could be if one had taken different courses of action, one
would have no conception of self-identity. Respect for others
becomes an ethical care for others and their difference from
self (Ibid.: 166). Individuals and groups realize that their
actions help form the identities of others, and vice-versa.
The promise of this agonistic democracy is that it facilitates the widespread exercise of individual wills to power (Ibid.: 192). The political arena becomes the space for philosophical/political conversations concerning existential meaning, belief systems, values, and identities. It becomes a forum for political contestation without domination and oppression (Ibid.: 211).

One compelling attraction of [agonistic] democracy is that it enables anyone to engage fundamental riddles of existence through participation in a public politics that periodically disturbs and denaturalizes elements governing the cultural unconscious (Ibid.).

Connolly's notion of cultural unconscious is much like Foucault's, to which I alluded in my first chapter. Foucault wants to "jolt" us out of conventional patterns of thinking, out of blind trust in social institutions for guidance in our lives. Like Foucault, Connolly wants awareness of our uncritically accepted (unconsciously held) views to emerge and be addressed. Connolly's 'Nietzschean' polity is an arena for bringing prejudices, biases, and uninvestigated assumptions (his idea of the cultural unconscious) to the forefront of political life. He argues that such an enabling space can not exist outside of the control of existing political structures (Ibid.: 188-189). He does not see adequate room anywhere in existing society for individual exercises of aesthetic praxis, for the tentacles of social and political institutions
infiltrate and compromise any such potential spaces too greatly, as do cultural demands for conformity (Ibid.). According to Connolly, such a space must be created through a political organization like an agonistic democracy, then, or not exist at all.

Mark Warren's `Nietzschean' politics (as he believes flow from Nietzsche's philosophy) share the structure of Connolly's. He asserts that a positive 'Nietzschean' political vision, based on Nietzsche's philosophy, would champion egalitarianism, individuation, communal intersubjectivity, and pluralism (1988: 247). Warren sees these ideas as plausible extensions of Nietzsche's work. The goals of Warren's 'Nietzschean' polity would be the fostering of individual agency, and the exercise of individual wills to power which allow people to shape and guide their own lives. Space would be created for each person to pursue their own agenda. Such space would again be constructed on a "level playing field" infused with a "vibrant equality based on an equal respect and care for persons and their conditions" (Ibid.). A pluralism of identity would be fostered because the more difference the community would embody, the more diverse individual creativity and identity could be as they played off of each other. While not as thoroughly laid out as Connolly's 'Nietzschean' politics, Warren's version shares its structures, goals, and values. The most important similarity
between the two politics is the cultivation of space for individual wills to power to flourish, and construction of a political space wherein contests between wills to power are construed as the forum for the very constitution of identity; as conversation and discourse rather than violence and subversion.

However, I think that Connolly and Warren run into large problems constructing their 'Nietzschean' political systems. First, while their agenda is the creation of a polity where individuals would be given as much space as possible to engage their wills to power, the creation of that system itself looks like a gargantuan imposition of their own will to power on all of society. The basic rules of their 'Nietzschean' polities (which attempt to foster plurality and the exercise of aesthetic praxis) are at base the creation of a polity based on the imposition of their will to power on society. Such a political system is just the kind of contingent and contestable imposition of one person's solution on all of society that their own systems attempt to prohibit.

Tracy Strong's version of Nietzsche's politics is one which encounters the objection I have just made to the visions of Connolly and Warren, but it goes farther than Connolly and Warren would accept. Strong interprets the anti-political polemics in Nietzsche's work not as a bias against all politics, but against the political systems of Nietzsche's day.
(1975: 189). He asserts that Nietzsche's hatred for politics stemmed from the fact that philosophers did not run the political systems of the world (Ibid.: 202). Once politics could become philosophy-driven, says Strong, Nietzsche would be happy (Ibid.: 212). Strong sees Nietzsche as saying that the politics of his day were merely the imposition of the will to power of those individuals who escaped the hegemony of previous rulers. The new rulers were strong enough to break out of the "uncritical mass" and become hegemons themselves (Ibid.: 200-201). They came to power and then imposed their will to power on society, using the state only as a tool to aggrandize themselves, rather than creating a philosophy-driven polity (Ibid.: 204). They remained in power by using nationalism and religion to create the state as the new idol for people to worship, crushing the wills to power of all citizens (Ibid.). This account of Nietzsche's critique of the politics of his day leads to a different 'Nietzschean' alternative. Strong saw Nietzsche's transvaluation of all values through the will to power as a manifestly political event. Only philosophers would carry out the (only) transvaluation of all values. They would then impose the new set of values on everyone through force, and create a new culture, society, and political system (Ibid.: 187). This new

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3 This view is shared by Bruce Detwiler, 1990: 38, 61, 173.
politics would not be aristocratic as some Nietzsche scholars suggest (Detwiler is one discussed later), but democratic (Ibid.: 194, 207). He interprets Nietzsche to be arguing, like Connolly and Warren, for an agonistic democracy for all of society (Ibid.). The major difference between Strong, and Connolly and Warren, is that his account of Nietzsche's politics expressly declares that philosophers will institute the new political system after they complete the transvaluation of all values. It is the will to power of those philosophers which is imposed on society in the form of agonistic democracy. Connolly does not suggest this mechanism for constructing agonistic democracy, and Warren does not suggest any at all. In any case, Strong's explicit expression of the imposition of the philosopher's will to power on all of society to create the new 'Nietzschean' politics illustrates the susceptibility of all three visions to the objection I raised earlier. In order to realize their versions of Nietzsche's politics, they all commit the one action (imposing their 'Nietzschean' will to power on all of society) that their new political systems expressly prohibit.

A society truly infused with the freedom and responsibility of the will to power would not even need the political apparatus Connolly, Warren, and Strong prescribe. If all people believed that their exercise of aesthetic praxis depended on their respect and care for others in their
exercise of aesthetic praxis, and they believed it to be as central to life as Nietzsche did, what laws would really be necessary? A citizenry charged with the freedom of the will to power would be a citizenry in which every individual valued their freedom to engage in aesthetic praxis so highly that any action of theirs which suppressed the will to power of another would be abhorrent. As such a citizen, you would never attempt to constrain another's will to power because the thought of your own will to power being limited would be the most repulsive thought you could think. Care for the project which is one's self would become care for the project which is the other's self. At no time would anyone seek to impose their judgments on anyone else, nor would anyone seek to limit the ability of others to make their own judgments by which they guide their lives. To the highest degree possible, one's construction of a space in which to engage in aesthetic praxis would be undertaken with care so as not to constrain others in their construction of such a space and exercise of their will to power. The main and only ethical imperative of such a polity would be a care for others which is a corollary of care for the self. As I argued in chapters three and four, you would care for the projects of others as works of art just as you cared for your own. Because of your belief in the importance of the will to power, your recognition (figuratively) of the camel-spirit in yourself, and your
espousal of *amor fati*, you would believe that like yourself, others deserve the freedom to engage in aesthetic praxis. You would respect others because you respect yourself. If I cared for the welfare of others and their right to guide their own lives as much as I cared for my own welfare and my own right to do so, I would never injure another person or oppress them physically or psychologically. I would not do such a thing if I knew that by doing it I would unravel the fabric of society which allows me to exercise my will to power freely. I would never inflict such constraint and pain on another person if I knew that I was really only opening up myself for such repression and pain. Once citizens of such a society lost their care and respect for others, the society would crumble and be like ours.\(^4\) Expansive legal and moral codes would be erected in attempts to dissuade citizens from harming each other. Our polity is filled with legal, religious, and cultural restrictions on our wills to power, and a polity such as ours would be abhorrent to individuals living in a society founded on the freedom and responsibility of the will to power. Why have laws which order you to at least feign care and respect for others when you have such care and respect for others as a genuine corollary of care for yourself? Why could

\[\text{\underline{\footnotesize 4 I am, of course, speaking from the perspective of a U. S. citizen in 1992 A.D. I am not suggesting all political systems are the same. "Ours" does not mean all humans.}}\]
society not be an 'ethical anarchism' if people truly respect each other and care about each other enough to believe that care for others is equal to caring for themselves? Why are such political impositions necessary? "All great periods of culture have been periods of political decline; that which is great from the standpoint of culture, was always unpolitical—even anti-political" (TI: VIII, 4). I think that a society such as this, which goes farther than Strong, Connolly, and Warren take Nietzsche, is the promise of a society derived from the will to power, a society with no state apparatus: "AS LITTLE STATE AS POSSIBLE!: All political and economic matters are not of such great value that they ought to be dealt with by the most talented minds: it would be better to let the machinery of the state work itself to pieces again!" (P: 179).

But the will to power is not Nietzsche's only philosophical idea with political implications. With the utopia based on the will to power fresh in our minds, I wish now to elucidate the implications of eternal return. The picture I am painting darkens with this.

5.2 The Power of Eternal Return
The doctrine of eternal return casts a gloom over the ideas and society founded on the will to power. In fact, as I will now argue, affirmation of eternal return entails obliteration of any hope at all for a society founded solely on the freedom
and responsibility of the will to power.

Affirmation of eternal return means denial of any hope for significant changes in the patterns of human society. Nietzsche believed that there would always be people who desired the power of ruling over others. He also believed that there always were and always would be many people who did not desire to rule themselves and would rather be ruled by someone else. The eternal return of those who have and would impose their will to power on others, and those who did not care to exercise their own will to power and never would, sentenced humanity in Nietzsche's eyes to continue in the same fashion as it always had. For Nietzsche believed that there would always be those who felt the need to oppress others because of their comparatively weak will to power.⁵ Here Strong's, Connolly's, and Warren's 'Nietzschean' politics run into further trouble. They prescribe major changes in the structure of society and political practices. Their visions, while being positive and hopeful, augur changes one cannot really call Nietzschean. Eternal return offers no solution for the dominance and oppression of the many by the few. It is a condition of human existence (GM: II, 12). Bruce Detwiler's account of Nietzsche's politics is based on this idea. Dominance of the many by the few is the one aspect of

⁵ As compared to the master of the self (the Übermensch) on the scale of strength of will to power in Dawn: 113.
the political system Nietzsche hoped for, according to Detwiler (1990: 176, 189). Like Strong, Detwiler asserts that Nietzsche's preferred politics would arise after philosophers carried out the transvaluation of all values and through force imposed their will to power on society. But unlike Strong, Detwiler's new 'Nietzschean' politics is a harsh aristocracy (Ibid.: 176-191). He explains that a Nietzschean polity would be an aristocratic factory for the production of an upper crust of Übermensch (Ibid.: 191). The majority of people would be severely oppressed in the lower classes, and gain meaning and identity only as the machinery for emancipating the upper class from economic need (Ibid.: 186-190). The Übermensch would be free to engage in agonistic society with each other, but that agonistic society would not cross class lines. The Übermensch would impose their wills to power on society, ensuring the eternal return of the domination of the many by the few.6 But no society like the ones envisioned in this chapter would evolve. Society is simply not evolving or progressing toward perfection or secular salvation according to Nietzsche's eternal return. "It is easy, ridiculously easy, to set up a model for the choice of an expert political body... But, no power on earth is strong enough to realize such

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6 Detwiler's vision satisfies the conditions of eternal return, but is not consistent with the views of the will to power and the Übermensch I have constructed. I will discuss these problems in the section on the implications of the Übermensch. 119
an ideal" (HAH-II: 318).

Embracing the idea of eternal return, however, does not mean that one simply resigns oneself to the idea that life is hopeless. The attitude of *amor fati* and the exaltation of the moment are affirmative in nature. Even though one believes that human society is not progressing (what is progress in this respect?) and can never become like the utopia envisioned in the last section, one still squeezes each moment of this life for all of the experience it can offer because one believes that this life is the only life. No afterlife exists. One attempts to cultivate oneself as a work of art and create one's own meaning for an otherwise meaningless life. The idea of eternal return does not demand fatalistic submission to pre-determined destiny. Fatalism would lead to ethical quietude and the attitude of "Why should I do anything for myself or anyone else? Nothing matters. People live, people die, people starve, people suffer, so what?" But affirmation of eternal return entails embracing every moment and living fully, not fatalism. Nietzsche saw people creating themselves as works of art throughout history and they of course would always exist as well, like everything else they participate in eternal return. Embracing every moment and the world as it manifests itself in every moment and exercising aesthetic praxis, still implies a respect and care for others which is a condition of care for the self--even if society as
a whole does not have such care and respect, as it did in the utopia explored earlier. Now even though all of society may not be engaged in aesthetic praxis and therefore not share universally a care for self and other, one who engages in aesthetic praxis in our imperfect world of eternal return still has that care for self and other, as I have argued in the last three chapters; it is built into aesthetic praxis. And even though such an individual believes that no great evolution toward a perfect society will be the consequence of their actions, their care for others would surely manifest itself in struggle to benefit those they know, care for, and identify with in local causes. Affirming eternal return means (maybe coldly) accepting that one’s power to help others is limited. It means affirming that while one engages in aesthetic praxis, people are starving, suffering and dying, and that for the most part there is nothing one can do to change that. But this is not acceptance of these things where one can do something to help. This does not mean, however, that one should strive to create political solutions to such problems. Helping those one can help does not (in this sense) mean creating a group ideology, group slogans, or a group consciousness; it does not mean becoming a leader and/or messiah in the struggle against existing political power. When one has an ideology and a solution for others to follow, others become followers if they subscribe to the plan, and I
have already discussed Nietzsche's views of followers. What helping others does mean, then, is helping them figure out how to help themselves. Helping others means banding together with them when their problems are the same as one's own, and becoming a partner, not a leader or follower. Affirmation of eternal return, then, does not lead to rugged individualism and ignorance of the troubles of others. Where one can make a difference locally through seizing the moment and helping people, one should do so, or they are not living fully.

Affirmation of eternal return entails a bittersweet struggle: the desire to improve oneself and help those one can help, but with the belief that one is making no great difference for human society. Local struggles to emancipate, empower, and help people are worthwhile because they do help people. But human society will recur eternally as a stratified manifestation of the many dominating the few, of political systems where people impose their will to power on others and many accept such impositions willingly.

Eternal return means that there will always be political struggles of domination and emancipation, many political struggles will be both things simultaneously. Even though ideas of progress and emancipation, liberty and freedom are the foundation of many political theories, their implementation into practical political systems entails "forcing people to be free" (to borrow a phrase from
Rousseau). Progress, freedom, and emancipation are different things for different people, and a political system which forces them to subscribe to singular notions of these is a formula for oppression. If society were constructed only on the foundation of the freedom and responsibility of the will to power, and everyone thought that the will to power was as important as Nietzsche did, then everyone would want to be included in such a society. But that is a fantasy. Society is filled with polities which are impositions and surrenders of wills to power, they always have been and they always will be. And according to Nietzsche there always have been and always will be those who do not wish to be dominated by other's impositions of their wills to power. So, society has been, is, and will be full of those who desire political control over others, those who want to be controlled, and those who wish to have nothing to do with such political struggles because they neither wish to impose their will to power on others nor surrender it to others. How can any political theory no matter how emancipatory, liberatory, or free it purports to be, then, be without domination and the suppression of many wills to power if it assumes that it has the answer for society universally? It really cannot allow the free function of individual wills to power. Eternal return suggests that political struggles have existed and will continue to exist as people fight to impose their wills to
power on each other and control people politically. Eternal return and the will to power suggest that one who can affirm such a world and still live every moment to its fullest would help others in local struggles to improve their conditions. But, they would do so without the faith that society is evolving toward perfection based on these local struggles or any impositions of political solutions.

5.3 The Übermensch: Life on Nietzsche’s Tightrope

The Übermensch was depicted in the last chapter as the individual who embodies both the will to power and affirmation of eternal return. This presents a problem for considering the political implications of the Übermensch. As the embodiment of the will to power, the politics of the Übermensch would seem to be the desire and actions taken to create the society based on the freedom and responsibility of the will to power which I discussed earlier. But then again, this would mean that an Übermensch would be imposing his political solution on society, imposing his will to power on other people. This is where Detwiler’s vision of a ‘Nietzschean’ politics fails, because this is exactly what he has the Übermenschen doing. They form the upper crust of society, and they rule it by imposing their will to power on all of society. But this ‘Nietzschean’ politics cannot exist, for the will to power of the Übermensch is the strongest will
to power according to Nietzsche, and as such it is not one which would be imposed on others.\footnote{Again, according to the scale of strengths of wills to power in \textit{Dawn}; 113, Nietzsche puts the brutal tyrant at the bottom, and the master of self at the top.} So an \textit{Übermensch} would not attempt to impose his solution on society. Already then, there is a tension in the politics of the \textit{Übermensch}. When we also consider what it means to affirm the idea of eternal return, this tension becomes stronger. For affirmation of eternal return only reinforces the problematic tension in the politics of the will to power, through the belief that society can never realize the utopia founded on aesthetic praxis. Eternal return does not make room for such a drastic change in the structure of society. Eternal return does not augur a humanity notably different from itself at the present (or the past): stratified, afraid of each other, and continually struggling to get ahead of each other. The implication for politics and individual action based on the \textit{Übermensch}, then, is life on a tightrope, where one balances oneself between the promise of aesthetic praxis and the problems of eternal return.

While the \textit{Übermensch} affirms his status as a social being, he eschews political activism. The quest of an \textit{Übermensch} is not aimed at ruling the world or any political system, it is a quest aimed at ruling oneself. It is not a
quest aimed at gaining followers or subjects, nor is it aimed at becoming a follower or subject (HAH-II: 367, 368; TSZ: I, 22). An Übermensch stays away from political action because he sees it invariably located in arenas where a minority of wills to power control a majority of wills to power, and he wants to be in neither camp. "That which Herakleitos avoided, however, is still the same as that which we [philosophers] shun today: the noise of democratic chatter, their politics, their latest news of the "Empire" [Reich]" (GM: III, 8). Banding together with friends or fellow citizens to address issues of concern can and usually does become political quickly. Groups tend to evolve into leaders, managers, and followers. For example, the National Organization for Women, a group striving for advancement of women's causes, has a hierarchical structure, an ideology which its members must buy into, and lobbyists who work with many state governments and the federal government in the U. S. Or, take the National Rifle Association (NRA). The NRA has a board of directors, lobbyists, media consultants and campaigns, and a loyal mass of followers. These organizations only serve to foster the control of many by a few. Rank and file members are fantastic cheerleaders at conferences and meetings, but they rarely if ever influence the direction their leaders take. Only those with clout and power at the top of the heap have control over policy and direction. The drivers of pickup trucks and sedans
with NRA and NOW bumper stickers follow in step with the directives of their leaders— in whom they trust and believe. These groups, even with the best of intent, have become infused with politics. The wills to power of the few in control are imposed on the membership of the organization, who must subscribe to the top-down ideology even if they do not have a hand in making it. They could, of course, leave the group, but then they would have no group to aid them with their cause. Our society has no groups which band together without power hierarchies and political aspirations. As such, contemporary interest groups are no place for an Übermensch. He doesn’t want to impose his will to power on others, nor does he want his imposed upon. And while an Übermensch must recognize and affirm that political systems and theories will recur eternally as people seek to impose their solutions on others, he sees such solutions only as “roadblock[s] of stentorian baboons...addressing problems [that] have to be solved over and over and over again” (Robbins, 1990: 459-60) because the solutions are not really solutions at all. Political theories and systems then, are merely part of the vicious circle of the eternal recurrence of the impositions and surrenderings of wills to power.

State I call it where all drink poison, the good and the wicked; state, where all lose themselves, the good and the wicked; state, where the slow suicide of all is called ‘life.’...Watch them clamber, these Swift monkeys! They clamber over
one another and thus drag one another into the mud and the depth. They all want to get to the throne; that is their madness—as if happiness sat on the throne. Often mud sits upon the throne—and often also the throne on mud. Mad they all appear to me, clambering monkeys and overardent. Foul smells their idol [the state], the cold monster: foul they smell to me altogether, these idolaters (TSÜ: I, 11).

An Übermensch continually strives to cultivate himself through aesthetic praxis while he shuns the political realm. But, as I said earlier, this does not mean that he would ignore local struggles with which he identifies. This implies a tricky balance. The idea that one should live fully means not sitting idly while one could be helping someone struggling with the same things one is, or who is seeking redress of grievances one has as well, but not through political solutions. This is also part of the implications of the will to power. Helping people overcome their problems does not mean telling them what to do, or forcing one's own answers to their questions on them. If there are people who have complaints and problems similar to one's own, then helping them overcome these problems is not the imposition of one's will to power on them. This vision of helping others assumes that one's questions are others' as well, and the answers reached together reflect consensus; this is not about leaders attracting followers with slogans and ideologies. Such help is a manifestation of care for others and their lives, and their freedom to exercise their will to power. Such
collective action undertaken by a community of companions, not leaders and followers, is where an Übermensch finds collectivity, if he does at all. These communities of companions would be the fighters in the "local struggles" I spoke of earlier. To remain apolitical, they would have to remain small. Large groups of Übermenschen would invariably involve some who shared concerns with the others, and some who would not. Hence, continued membership in such a group even while it pursued goals some of its members disliked, would be problematic. For example, those Übermenschen disinterested in fellow Irwin International's bid to secure lower prices for milk in the area supermarkets, who remain part of the group, become followers, tag-alongs, fighters for causes in which they do not really believe. Small groups of only a few Übermenschen are much less likely to evolve with hierarchical machines than are large groups. Secondly, these small groups would disavow redress of grievances through status quo political channels. They are not seeking to change the world, the country, or the whole state in which they live. They seek only to change their own space. Political pseudo-solutions cannot be engineered without large numbers of supporters who make a cause look worthwhile to politicians. But supporters are not companions, they are followers. A group of Übermenschen pursuing a common goal would not be hierarchical, nor would it lobby governments to help it with its problems.
A group of Übermensch engaged in a local struggle might be a group of neighborhood friends banding together to keep each other safe at night in a dangerous area rather than complaining to the police that they need more patrols. Or, it could be any group of friends who remedy their problems without turning to government or an interest group like the NRA or NOW. It would be a collection of companions who help each other because their causes unite them, not because the group they want to join has a catchy slogan or popular ideology. Even Zarathustra repeatedly spoke of the need for companions, "companions I need, living ones—not dead companions and corpses whom I carry with myself wherever I want to. Living companions I need, who follow me because they want to follow themselves—wherever I want" (TSZ: prologue, 9). He seeks out people who share his ideas about life, much the way we normally seek out friends, and attempts to band together with them in a community (or at least a circle of close friends) where they can engage in aesthetic praxis together, and encourage and care for each other as they do so. An Übermensch would also speak to many other people about his ideas and his life of aesthetic praxis and affirmation of eternal return. This would not be a preaching or an attempt to convert people so that they believed every word of the Übermensch. It would be discussion, conversation, a sort of fishing for people who share the same ideas or with whom his
ideas resonate after considerable consideration. Some people might share such ideas and then become part of the circle of friends engaged in aesthetic praxis, others would not, and still others formerly in the circle would leave it because they no longer shared the ideas of the group. In this sense, the ideas of the Übermensch are for everyone and no one. They are for everyone to hear because the Übermensch searches for those who share his views and ideas about life and the exercise of the will to power. They are for no one to "follow" because a follower is not exercising their own will to power, they merely mimic the one they follow. "The followers of a great man often put their own eyes out, so that they may be better able to sing his praise" (HAA-II: 390). Of course an Übermensch would never dream of this "aesthetic community" of which he is a part, becoming any more than a group of people on the margin of society whose ideas about life and style of life are different from the vast majority. In fact, I think this is the desired place, for "there can actually be something said in favor of the exceptions provided that they never want to become the rule" (GS: II, 76). Such a community would exist within the boundaries of whatever political system which enclosed the individual members. Only isolation would escape this boundary, and isolation renders aesthetic praxis meaningless. While the members would always be straining for as much autonomy from the political system as possible, they
would realize that because of eternal return, they cannot really change it or make it go away. Of course, some political systems would be more enabling for Übermensch than others. A totalitarian state like Orwell’s Oceana (in 1984) where thoughts are policed and controlled has no space for Übermensch; while a liberal-constitutional state, like the United States, has such space. But, for Nietzsche, a state by any name is still a state, and because of eternal return there is no escape from state political systems. The desire of Übermensch to have a space in which to exercise their wills to power must be limited by their realization that like it or not, such a space will always be compromised by the hegemony of the reigning political system (whatever it may be) and the cultural institutions of societies, as they recur eternally.\(^8\)

The Übermensch once again is placed on a tightrope. His optimism from the promise of the will to power and amor fati battle with his belief that a political solution through the imposition of his will to power (or any other will to power) on society, is harmful. On the one hand, he can see a world where people would be free to cultivate themselves as works of art, in which they would truly care for each other just as they care for themselves. But on the other hand, he can see

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\(^8\) It was Connolly’s recognition of this problem which led him to assert that the space for aesthetic praxis must be created politically or it would not exist at all. He did not see the middle ground I am attempting to create.
the eternal recurrence of people who want to dominate and control others politically, and people who would rather be controlled politically than follow their own will to power.

The Übermensch believes that political systems and political theories do not and can not have satisfactory solutions for the problems of society. There are too many different problems for a political system or theory to address without ignoring many of them, or subjugating one group in order to help another. Any political system will entail the imposition of the leader’s (or the ruling group’s) will to power on the citizenry, who must largely (if not wholly) surrender their wills to power. Politics is therefore a lose-lose game (GS: I, 31). A will to power can never be strong if one must surrender it, nor according to Nietzsche, is the strong will to power one that is.

If a solution did exist for society’s ills, it would be personal and philosophical. It would be the rise of aesthetic praxis, with its freedom and responsibility, and its promise for a creative society in which people cared for each other as strongly as they cared for themselves. It would be the embodiment by every individual of the ethos of the creation of the self as a work of art through their will to power. It would be the espousal by each individual of the quest to "enlarge the soul, liberate the spirit, and light up the brain" (Robbins, 1990: 460). This is the (necessarily
hypothetical) solution for humanity's ills as I think Nietzsche and his Übermensch would see it. And it implies the irrelevance or superfluousness of political theories and political systems: "Only where the state ends, there begins the human being who is not superfluous...the Übermensch" (TSZ: I, 11). But according to Nietzsche's belief in eternal return, I do not think that he believed such a solution would ever materialize. State politics will continue forever. New political systems which are hybrids and offshoots of older systems will continue to spring up, and old systems will remain. People will always have conflicting ideas about what is really wrong with the world and how to solve it, and the battles within and between political systems will reflect the struggle for the ability of one group to impose their will to power on others. Explicit construction of a political theory to cure society's ills by Nietzsche, or a 'Nietzschean' interpreter, then, becomes yet another proposition for the imposition of one will to power on many--in this case Nietzsche's, or an interpretation of it. The enterprises that Connolly, Warren, Detwiler, Strong, and all others engage in when they elaborate on "Nietzsche's politics," even though some are trying to create a desirable political system, are still attempts to impose as a solution a 'Nietzschean' will to power through political systems.
The inability of political theories and systems to have satisfactory solutions for society's problems, when coupled with the impossibility of the rise of a social philosophical solution, suggests that for Nietzsche there was no solution to society's ills, in theory or practice, or even praxis. In the end, the only solution even possible is a personal philosophical one, and even that is not fulfilling or comforting: live your life on a tightrope. Cultivate yourself as a work of art, respect the right of others to do so, care for them and their freedom to do so, do not crusade and attempt to convert people to your way; and, do not be an individualist with a heroic martyr complex, do not sit idle when struggles arise with which you identify--help people, but do not think you are really going to change the world and be a messiah. Walk a tightrope on which you balance your eternally recurring cultivation of your self, your care and respect for other wills to power; with your acceptance of the eternal recurrence of political wrangling and political domination which can lead to fatalism. Walk a tightrope on which you balance your desire for autonomy and authenticity with your recognition of the necessity of acting responsibly socially.

When William Connolly said that an attractive element of agonistic democracy was that it "enables anyone to engage fundamental riddles of existence through participation in a
public politics that periodically disturbs and denaturalizes elements governing the cultural unconscious" I think he had keyed into the promise of the will to power, but ultimately took his political vision past anything that can really be called 'Nietzschean.' As I have argued, when one ties together the implications of the will to power, eternal return, and the Übermensch, a vision like Connolly's does not seem plausible. The reverence for engaging the fundamental riddles of existence and denaturalizing the cultural unconscious is the reverence for the possibilities of the will to power. But because of the limitations of imposing one's own will to power on others, the idea of eternal return, and the tightrope I argue one must walk on to be an Übermensch, engaging the fundamental riddles of existence and denaturalizing the cultural unconscious necessarily becomes only a personal quest.

Do not attempt to construct a grand political theory which will create a utopian society. Nor should you wrangle for power in an existing political system in order to bring about a utopia which is your own. Either alternative, pursued even with the best intentions, means that your politics will in the end only be your failure to affirm eternal return and your attempt to impose your will to power on society. These finally, I think, are the political and individual implications of Nietzsche's philosophical concepts of eternal
return, the will to power, and the Übermensch.
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