

## Reading David B. Allison's *Reading the New Nietzsche*

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I am a friend and, much more than that, I am without qualification an admirer of David Allison. I admire him for the same reasons, I believe, that most people who know him even slightly, but especially those who know him very well, also have cause to admire him. David has style, fire, and grace. He has this in his person, and he has this in his writing.

Elegantly written, carefully comprehensive, David's *Reading the New Nietzsche* tells us the compound story Nietzsche regarded as the characteristic heart of "every great philosophy," which Nietzsche named "the personal confession of its author." All philosophy reduces, Nietzsche writes, to "a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir" (*BGE*, I, sec. 6, p. 13). An easy corollary (and one Nietzsche himself suggests) entails that what draws us to one philosophical voice and not another is likewise revelatory of the reader: Tell me what philosophy you like to read, and I will tell you who you are. When we bring a book to a café, or to any public place, we count on this consciously—or subconsciously.

Is this true? Is philosophy only about the person who reads or composes it? Is it all so much self-confession, so many elective affinities? On the face it, Nietzsche's claim in *Ecce Homo* seems dismally circular: "Ultimately, no one can extract from things, books included, more than he already knows. What one has no access to through experience one has no ear for" (*EH*, p. 70). "Books included," he emphasizes, in case we were dozing off. It is not insignificant that Nietzsche then goes on to denounce precisely popular readings of his work as readings in the image of the reader: "Whoever believed he had understood something of me had dressed up something out of me after his own image" (*EH*, pp. 70–1).<sup>1</sup>

It was none other than Josef Widmann, who had authored one of the few manifestly appreciative reviews of Nietzsche's work, whose reading inspired Nietzsche's opposition to the reader's self-projection. David tells us that this was one of the reviews Nietzsche liked. What about the rest of us? Do we simply dress up or invent our own Nietzsche after our own images?

Part of the problem here is the question of Nietzsche's style. On this question, philosophical readings of Nietzsche break down into new, Continental-style readings and rather old-line "analytic-style" approaches. Whether one be a Nietzsche or an Adorno, whatever one writes will fall for analytic readings into one of two categories: it is either "clear" enough for the word-police or else it is simply "not philosophy" (analytic philosophers apparently read philosophy the way one reads a Brillo box). That this judgment will *not* be made of David's book is, I think, a great exception. I am less

sanguine in my confidence that professional scholars of Nietzsche's philosophy will take the chance of responding to it. For to do so, they would have to read it, and there is the danger they may take it to be no more than an introduction to Nietzsche's works (as it also is), assign it as so much supplementary reading for their students and, given their advanced competence in Nietzsche, fail to bother to read it for themselves. Their loss, one can say.

Nevertheless, the matter of "style" was Nietzsche's way of excluding certain readers. Not only did he write for all and none, as the subtitle of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* informs us, but he also wrote for insiders, which is to say that he wrote to exclude outsiders, and seemed—and *this* will be David's greatest insight—in many ways to be writing for himself. Conscientiously, quite deliberately: Nietzsche addresses or writes for himself. Thus can one come to oneself; thus can one become, literally, what one is. In his crucial epigraph written to intercalate his foreword to *Ecce Homo* and his first brashly titled claim for his own wisdom, Nietzsche wrote some of his most beautiful words of benediction to the times of his life: "On this perfect day, when everything has become ripe and not only the grapes are growing brown, a ray of sunlight has fallen on to my life: I looked behind me, I looked before me, never have I seen so many and such good things together." For Nietzsche, his life had borne fruit, so many books, "so many and such good things," and he lists them, fruits of just one year, "its last quarter even!": the "first book of the *Revaluation of all Values*, the *Songs of Zarathustra*, the *Twilight of the Idols*, my attempt to philosophize with a hammer." Thus, Nietzsche asks, "*How should I not be grateful to my whole life?*" In the spirit of this same gratitude he writes, "— And so I tell myself my life" (*EH*, p. 37).<sup>2</sup>

Playing fluidity, infinity, and open possibility against the determination of god and destiny, becoming contra being, Nietzsche invites us to affirm life (eternal return, will to power, *amor fati*). Nietzsche emphasizes that we are, as he noted at the start of his preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, "unknown to ourselves." In spite of this incurable indigence (and it is so utterly incurable that Nietzsche reflects that reflecting upon that unknowability changes nothing about it: *Wissen um das alles, hebt's nicht auf* ...), we are nonetheless to become, as David helpfully reminds us, as Jesus was (which is also to say, to "become like little children"). We are to become affirmative spirits, saying yes to life on the model not merely of Odysseus (as he took his leave of Nausicaa, *not* in love but *still*—and how hard is this?—blessing her), but to use the beautiful image with which David concludes his chapter on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we are to love life, as Zarathustra takes his own leave, "smiling, strong as bronze, accompanied by his laughing lion" (Allison, 179).

Like Zarathustra, we are invited to be as Jesus was, a Yea-sayer. The "joyful naivete like that of the child" reveals, as David reminds us "one of the signal virtues Nietzsche most admired in the person of Christ" (Allison, 168).

David's insight is crucially important, and it is essential to take it further even if we cannot quite do so here. "As the apostle Paul remarked in 2 Corinthians 1:19, 'There was not in Christ yea and nay, but in him was yea'" (Allison, 168). We are to say yes to life. This is, of course, *amor fati*, and this is the secret solution to the challenging question that is the thought of the eternal return. But how are we to do this?

For Nietzsche, "our ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit" (*GM*, Preface, sec. 2, p. 16). We cannot know ourselves, and the selves we are are already determined. This is, and not accidentally, the domain that we today might recognize as the dominion of nothing other than the unconscious. In this light, Nietzsche undertakes to describe the landscape he had uncovered in his psycho-philosophical researches as "a country of my own, a soil of my own, an entire discreet, thriving, flourishing world, like a secret garden the existence of which no one suspected" (*GM*, Preface, sec. 3, p. 17). In his study *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche's efforts are far more radical than the proclamation of a new table of values as we hear in *Zarathustra*. Instead, he there "articulate[s] this *new demand*: we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values themselves must first be called in question*" (*GM*, Preface, sec. 6, p. 20). Thus, he is able to turn to what might be accounted the natural history of suppression or instinctual sublimation, that is, the garden variety discontents of civilization itself, sketched in the form of "the ultramodern unassuming moral milksop who 'no longer bites'" (*GM*, Preface, sec. 7, p. 21). The problems of morality require the psychoanalytic services of a "psychologist of the spirit," a "physician of culture."

Who was Nietzsche? It is hard to say; it is easy to say. Nietzsche was a pastor's son, in a line of pastors and clerics on two sides, lost his father at an early age, losing his younger brother too; Nietzsche was short-sighted, lousy with the ladies, inclined to the still-embarrassing to mention habit of self-abuse, that is, masturbation, which same habit was reviled in the nineteenth century for its personal dangers to the individual's health and to the health of the society, in much the same or even exactly the same way we revile heroin, crack and, increasingly, marijuana and caffeine (and cigarettes) and the other vulgar drugs of the street. David reminds us that, as in any good psychoanalytic account, Nietzsche tells us about this, his own vice, himself.<sup>3</sup> Add to that some disease such as syphilis or some other romantic disease of a bygone time (softening of the brain, as this affliction was accounted responsible for his father's early death). A dramatic collapse, with horses. Madness. Silence. Thus was Nietzsche.

Once upon a time, David wrote a two-page preface to *The New Nietzsche*, the invaluable collection he edited which then brought Continental voices to the Anglo-Saxon tradition of reading Nietzsche, a collection still important for

Nietzsche scholarship. Yet David could not begin with an allusion to the differently informed voices brought together in the collection to follow. Instead, he spoke about Nietzsche, noting that so very much seems to turn on the *ad hominem* issues that are the rule in Nietzsche's case. It is not given to us to say of Nietzsche, as Heidegger reminds us he might have wished to have it said of himself, as can be said of Aristotle: "He was born; he worked; he died." Indeed, nothing is too trivial for us: we talk about Nietzsche's socks,<sup>4</sup> his sex life, his too-small red slippers, his sister, his gloves, his diet, his sexual persuasion—was he gay? was he not gay?—his headaches, his onanism. Yet, when all is said and done, as David wrote in 1977, "Nietzsche's biography is uninspiring, to say the least."<sup>5</sup> But we continue to be inspired nevertheless, as David then noted, and almost everything written about Nietzsche dredges up bits of the biographical confessions which Nietzsche claimed to represent the heart of all philosophy.

But like this eponymous new book, the voices David gathered in that first, pathbreaking collection pointed to the complex matters of historical eventualities and circumstances for interpreting the genesis and development of a philosophical mind. Along the way, David instituted a crucial tradition of what can be called "Continental" readings of Nietzsche. If David overleaps such distinctions, his own work just as surely belongs in the purely Continental modality of everything there is that determines the same division within philosophy. For Continental philosophy is philosophy that finds it essential to think, philosophy that remembers that there is the question of style and that it is not easy to parse its rhetorical working in the text, and that the historical context is so very key that knowing that same context and tracking it down can at times explain a text away.

David's book asks about an author who writes, as Nietzsche writes, "such good books." How so? Better still to be sure really to ask the question in Nietzsche's case, because every sophomore poet fancies the same good and excellent achievement of himself, every graduate student panel that dominates conference programs is good, wise, and as clever as the committee that selected their fascinating presentations on the basis of a single, promissory proposal. Regarding Nietzsche, one simply believes his self-description of his own style, his own writerly achievements, that he is indeed, as the table of contents from his *Ecce Homo* would inform us, "so wise," "so clever," and the author of "such excellent books," a veritable "destiny."

For his part, David asks the practical question: how did Nietzsche pull it off? David's book answers this question even before you have had time to realize how crucial a question it is and how much it matters to anyone who reads Nietzsche. How does Nietzsche write as he does?

How does David answer the question? He offers his reply on the first page, where David, good Cartesian that he is, thinks honest words should be masked

in plain view: "Nietzsche writes exclusively for *you*. Not at you, but for you. For you, the reader. Only you" (Allison, vii). It is a demonstration of the complex achievement of such an address to the reader that the intimacy of Nietzsche's writing includes *everyone*, yielding an all-encompassing, democratically inclusive text that is deeply personal, speaking directly to the reader and seemingly expressing the reader's own and most intimate wishes. This is David's point not only on the first page, but throughout his text: "Like a friend, he seems to share your every concern—and your aversions and suspicions as well. Like a true friend, he rarely tells you what you ought to do" (Allison, vii). This intimate character is a quality that David's book has in common with Nietzsche; but what David maps out as an extraordinarily complex interiorized directionality of Nietzsche's voice is the most important manifestation of the rhetorical or stylized perfection of Nietzsche's writing, as he writes for us, for the reader, for the future, for infinite possibility, and perhaps above all, as he writes himself. For all that we do have of Nietzsche, all that is ultimately left of anyone who has left traces on this earth is what we can touch or read or see. This remains. Like the hunters (or perhaps they were priests) of Lascaux who carried mineral and other pigments in their mouths, to leave images blown with their breath in extraordinary colors, truly painting their ideals on the walls, in the striking beauty of animal totems that continue to glow in the depths of prehistoric caves, letters incised in stone endure, like the writing written in the scholarly blood of a man who thought about much more than the day after tomorrow.

Nietzsche named himself the most profound psychologist the world has ever known, and David tells us why. Not only does David begin with the dynamism of Nietzsche's reading of *The Birth of Tragedy* precisely in terms of its original subtitle, *Out of the Spirit of Music* (and the still crucial complexities of modern existence), in terms of the conflict between Apollonian and Dionysian modalities—which David manages to review in musical terms—while also including an interpretation that gives as much weight to Nietzsche's later subtitle for the *Birth, Hellenism or Pessimism*. Not only does he take the measure of the complexities of the modern knowledge of the world and its tensions (and its complicity) with the conclusions of Platonism and Christianity in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* as a book that would teach us the laughter in which all malice is present but transformed as such, the laughter of the gay or joyful science, in the wake of its proposed "alliance with wisdom" (*GS*, sec. 1, p. 74).<sup>6</sup> Beyond this, David testifies to the profound danger of pity and the even greater danger that is the disaster of impotence and rancor: the reaction that is characteristic of the human spirit, precisely in the face of what Nietzsche names time and its "It was." As David reminds us, the "obsessive preoccupation with a past hurt or wrong can easily condemn all subsequent human relationships for the individual. Each personal encounter then becomes

a renewed vendetta, and the human world of social intercourse becomes a place of opprobrium, of enmity" (Allison, 152). Here the point will be the difference made by the singularity of a particular and potentially transformative experience:

[P]erhaps we *once* had a love, a love *so* grand, so profound, that our waking universe paled in comparison. What if fortune took away that love? We would torture our souls in anguish over that memory—we would see every other love as a dim reflection of that *one* truly ideal and once real love.... Perhaps we might, for an instant, catch a glance of a face in the crowd—by the Café Wagner, on the Place de l'Opéra, perhaps down the Avenue Wagram by the Place des Ternes: we would run and hail to it, only to be bitterly disappointed, time and again. We would want to return, to go back, to flee—to find our lover somewhere on a warm evening hillside in Umbria, on a midnight seacoast in the Yucatán, in a small village set close to the Loire, or perhaps, dead.... What unspeakable torments of misery these little shards of the past might trigger. 'It was'—and nevermore shall be (Allison, 152–3).

The solution as Nietzsche found it, as David follows his progress, is indeed a matter of his works, his *Life*, to use the title of Alexander Nehamas's alluring insight, *as Literature*.<sup>7</sup> But David's reading of this life is a life that is as much a work—in the sense that the dream work is a work—as anything else. Thereby, as David points out, by writing for disparate readers (esoteric and exoteric), writing in disparate voices, Nietzsche is able to achieve a "meta-critique of beliefs, values, positions, explanations—and it raises underlying questions of conditionality, legitimacy, verifiability, truth-functionality, agency, and efficacy" (Allison, 176). The upshot of this analysis is a cathartic working through, with the ambivalence characteristic of the same. Revulsed, Nietzsche is also suffused with enormous and transformative joy: the result is literally an *ecstasis*. But that, being beside oneself, is precisely what one needs if the task is, as it is, to get out of oneself. For Nietzsche, both literally and figuratively, this "involves the determination to *travel*, to get *beside* himself, to self-consciously seek other, *strange* abodes and customs, other entire systems of valuation, other realms of the human spirit itself" (Allison, 177). In this way, "*one uses oneself as an experiment*." In the process, one uncovers the truth of things, and this is, of course, the very perspectivism Nietzsche championed with his teaching of perspectivalism. He writes in the summer of 1882: "*Aufgabe: die Dinge sehen, wie sie sind! Mittel: Aus hundert Augen auf sie sehen können, aus vielen Personen!*" (See *GS*, sec. 249).

The achievement, as David tracks it for us in the final passages of his chapter on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is nothing less than self-mastery, or what

I have been calling style, what it takes to be, better said, to become, someone who turns out well. It is out of this consummate achievement that one is able to learn, as David cites Nietzsche as having learned, how to break the bondage of the past and its bitterness: "For, every Against costs us" (Allison, 178). Thus, David concludes, "finally having gained possession of his own self-mastery through controlling his sense of perspective, having freed himself from bondage to the imperative of the 'thou shalt'—and the personal discontent caused by it—Nietzsche would reflect, 'You come to realize how you have given ear to the voice of nature, that nature which rules the whole world through joy'" (Allison, 179).

But the fundamental insight is the same that moved Nietzsche in his first book. It is the question the Greeks found themselves compelled to pose in the face of life itself. This is the completely ordinary everydayness of ordinary human life, not the transcendent world of ideal truth, divinity, or even science; in place of the will to absolute moral truth, "Nietzsche offers the spectacle of life as a whole, together with its pains and joys, instead of an illusory escape into a transcendent, divine afterworld" (Allison, 245). He offers us this world precisely because the challenge is to redeem this world on its own terms without promising a metaphysical transformation of it, neither philosophical, religious, nor scientific. The moment of affirmation is ineluctably Faustian, as David explains: "To make even the briefest happiness endure, to recall it, to say 'abide moment,' is to want *all* of it, to want it all to endure, for woe and happiness to recur eternally, for they are ensnared, entangled, and enamored with one another" (Allison, 170).

What David describes here is nothing less than a kind of moral-psychological (in Nietzsche's sense of the same) type of *epoché*: "By withholding the conventional value-positing perspective, the prevailing mode of esteem or belief that enshrouds something, by 'turning it around,' one can uncover the distorting biases that contextualize and determine the very significance, the symbolic 'truth' of things" (Allison, 177–8).

This has to work in the face of the ideal of forgetting that is a part of the aspect of the child (Zarathustra) and the noble. The lion wills, and turns a perspective around that willing; it is a child's play, however, that plays itself out as being itself, *aeon*, the world that the child ceaselessly—this is the "monster" that is the world as will to power—builds up, and breaks down again, in a game, casting draughts at the edge of the world. "The child: youth, innocence, and forgetting" (Allison, 150). We need just this kind of forgetting, just such a sweet, a kind nepenthe. We need to forget, to let things go, because the alternative, good and long memory, is the ground of something no less debilitating and poisonous (if also culturally world-building) than *ressentiment*. Thus, David cites Nietzsche's own remonstrance with himself in *The Gay Science*:

No revenge, my sweetest thought: I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! ... Now we see how everything turns out for the best. Every day and every hour, life seems to have no other wish than to prove this proposition again and again (Allison, 154; citing *GS*, sec. 276–7).

### Become the One You Are: *Amor Fati* and in Praise of Eros

In our first books, before we come to know better, we are far more honest in our acknowledgments than we later tend to become. Often, as we age, we stop expressing thanks altogether. We do this not because we are less grateful but because we wish to avoid the personalist hermeneutics almost every academic engages in, reading a book jacket or list of names acknowledged and wondering about the relationship between author and author: do these famous names saying these fulsome things know the person or the book? Who did the author sleep with? Which expressions of thanks are really admissions of debt, which others ambition to garner indebtedness, and so on? But at the beginning, we see none of that. We see only the chance to thank, in perpetuity, admitting the part of influence on our own thinking, and so we thank those who are our friends and those whom we admire.

When I told David about the book I was planning to write on *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science*, he laughed in response, "Slim volume that!" I was horrified, but I soldiered on and at the end, when I had finished the book which was, I was happy to notice, none too slim, I added a long list of acknowledgments, thanking David for the usual things, but also "for his illustrative embodiment of what it is 'to have turned out well' in Nietzsche's sense." Such ethical talk of "turning out well" recalls the same characteristic style with which I began; and anyone who knows David will have noticed this style, fire, and grace. Thus, David talks as easily and as passionately about philosophy as about politics, as he speaks casually about common friends, as about anything. This is very Greek; this is everything Aristotle says has to belong, as a full complement, to a human being. But to be what a human being should be only means that David matches the Dionysian capacity of a god with a gentle generosity of character. How can one do this? Can we share David's secret?

The subtitle to Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* suggests that we read it as a guidebook of a kind: *How One Becomes What One Is*. Similarly, we hear Nietzsche's aphorism noted in quotation marks in *The Gay Science*, "What does your conscience say?—'You shall become the person you are'" [*Was sagt dein Gewissen?—'Du sollst der werden, der du bist.'*] (*GS*, sec. 270, p. 219.) In this same spirit, we read a *Nachlaß* note Nietzsche writes to himself:

"Become more and more the one that you are—the teacher and fashioner of yourself" (*KSA* 9, 555).<sup>8</sup> David argues that Nietzsche writes himself as he forges his own experience of a great liberation. We hear a similarly self-creative, literally educating, reflection in the first section of the fourth part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "For I am *he*, from the heart and from the beginning, drawing, drawing towards me, drawing up to me, raising up, a drawer, trainer, and taskmaster who once bade himself, and not in vain: 'Become what you are!'" (*Z*, p. 252).<sup>9</sup>

To become the one you are, so Nietzsche tells us, will require that you turn your own will upon itself. If the will cannot will against its own nature, if willing cannot become non-willing, if the will is powerless against time and its "it was"—like the stone fact that shatters the steel force of will—the will is exactly not powerless against itself, as the durable course of *ressentiment* alone would prove. Teaching the will to will backwards, as Nietzsche proposes to do, turns it back not upon the past but precisely upon what is immediately, consummately present: it turns the whole of will, desire, or ambition back into what is *already* what it is. It is for this reason that Nietzsche promises to explain *how* one becomes what one is. This is a practical philosophy, and understood as encomium, I elsewhere argue that it is perhaps the heart of Nietzsche's ethics.

We recall Nietzsche's rhetorical preoccupation with suffering and pain, in life and in love, inextricably bound together. In the absence of transcendent ideals, in the absence of a beyond, of a divine judge, the challenge posed to us is exactly to affirm what is, "especially," as David reminds us at the conclusion of his book, "in the face of those moments that are painful, that cause suffering," precisely where (David says "even when," but I think it is worse than that, because what makes affirmation difficult in the case of "ordinary human life" is the sheer and deadening fact that) "those moments are themselves meaningless and without any purpose whatsoever" (Allison, 245).

The heart- and life-shattering longing here, the soul-killing regret, is the point of the thought experiment that stands behind the question Nietzsche poses to us when he asks us how we might respond to that demon following us like an imaginary assailant, "some day or night," to pronounce nothing but the veritable loss of any kind of meaning, "any purpose whatsoever." This parabolic image sets one into a god-emptied world, a world without end: the eternal return of the same. David rightly calls our attention to the question of disposition, self-disposition, which refers to nothing other than our state of mind—our habits of soul, our virtues (to speak with Aristotle). This focus for David "forces the question of value—and the interpretation of that value—back upon the individual, as the individual's own creative task of rendering life significant, worthy of his or her own respect and joyful exuberance" (Allison, 246).

This is the war of memory and desire against the past *and* hoped for future. This is what Nietzsche means by *ressentiment* or rancor: a war of the self with itself, with what one has become, with what one has done. For we can, and we do, fall short in being, we can fail in becoming what we are, despite the fact that we do become what we are in any case, because we can fail on the level of becoming itself as creatures of implacable resentment.

This contrast is what David hears in his account of the eternal return of the same.<sup>10</sup> The problem is not sheerly that of the old theodicies. We are not installing suffering in the place of the problem of evil (challenging God's justice and his existence). As David's example of a past love tells us with the elegance I began by emphasizing, we can be haunted by either "past joy *or* hurt" (Allison, 160). The still tragic and capital point here is that the key to both suffering and joy is not staying the moment (contra Goethe) but letting it go, giving it and oneself out. Thus we hear Nietzsche's strangest language in the face of suffering: *sacrifice*, yes, but also, dissonantly, *expression*, but above all, he speaks of *gift*.

It is the idea of sacrifice, and that means a gift that will cost us, that will cause us, in place of what we can claim or gain for own part, to risk or offer ourselves, that will bring us to lose ourselves more painfully, more literally than Zarathustra bids us to lose him. This sacrifice remains as perhaps the most troubling part of what Nietzsche's teaching of the eternal return of the same entails on the level of day to day misery, real horror, genuine and not just academic suffering. It is the meaning of his imperative to become the one you are, as what you will, in any case, do. Not a quietist, Nietzsche emphasizes the ineluctable necessity of becoming and the impossibility of eliminating pain. There is no way to a philosophy that makes it possible, in Adorno's words, to "write poetry" after Auschwitz—which does not mean that Paul Celan or René Char or Primo Levi did not write such "poetry."

One wants a way beyond the moral justification of duty, a way that would teach one to see the future and transform it, and what Nietzsche offers in place of the dutiful ideal which commands us to frame an imperative for our philosophizing such that it would be impossible to permit inhumanity on the order of the Holocaust (or dare we say, on the order of the utter oblivion and neglect of even the word for the cruelties perpetrated in the name of revenge in bombing Afghanistan and the twice-played, protracted, still-ongoing war in Iraq, because, if Nietzsche's word on revenge had not taught us this, we have had occasion to learn its truth from Israel and Ireland: there is no end to terror) is a philosophy which, in advance of all external events, all contingent brutality, would enjoin us always to act in the love of our neighbor or the hope of eternal salvation.

We already have such a philosophic foundation in the Scriptures; this is well known, not that we hear it. We have a philosophic formulation of such a

command already before Levinas in Immanuel Kant's uncanny invention of a categorical imperative that would *avant la lettre* or apart from the Bible itself nonetheless enjoin its most stringent commandments, grounded not on faith but on reason. Thus denying reason to make room for faith, one sets aside a philosopher's rule for the sake of the gold of the living Word. Nietzsche wants something other than the imperative rule of righteousness because one cannot separate the self-gratifying succor of reason at its own service from the ideal of salvation, be it through pure, triumphant reason in practice, or, reason-denied, be it achieved through faith.

Contra such an ethical imperative (which Nietzsche claims "reeks of cruelty," anticipating Jacques Lacan's clever alliance of Kant and de Sade), Nietzsche offers the affirmation of what he believes would redeem the innocence of becoming. This is the teaching of the eternal return of the same, and it is something commentators have almost uniformly found seemingly more cruel: an affirmation of pain and violence as not only inevitable but necessary, of age and death and change, all as necessary, and as a reconstitution of the becoming that brings such change, all to be absolved in itself as innocent, all without fault. Commentators often pretend that the sheer acceptance of the doctrine of the eternal return would be enough to constitute a devotion to every evil in history. Yet the hard point of the doctrine of the eternal return is not the replay of the Holocaust to all eternity—we already have that; rather, it teaches us that in our very own lives, everything thought in reference to one's own miserable life and all that has ever been in it, great and small, recurs. The eternal return of the same teaches that you have no future beyond a return, as Nietzsche's Zarathustra famously emphasizes, "*not* to a new life or a better life or a similar life ... [but] this identical and self-same life" (*Z*, p. 237).

We do well to remember Nietzsche's self-description precisely in his moral theorizing as a psychologist.<sup>11</sup> For Nietzsche, what has to be questioned when one considers the *genealogy* of morals is the *source* of our concern with the hearts and deeds of other people, as well as our concern with what we take to be our history, our collective past. In his last chapter, David traces out the extraordinary achievement that is the creation of values as accomplished by slave morality. What is perhaps most important is to note the effects of this successful revolt in values on the victor (just as much as the vanquished modality utterly lost to us today, that of noble morality). "Since the slave—or utilitarian—scale of values is now constructed according to a non-egoistic standard, precisely according to 'herd' morality, the value of the self, the ego, is necessarily inverted and devalued" (Allison, 215). We have turned the revaluing force of the ascetic ideal against ourselves. If the slave revolt in morals began with the ingenious achievement of subverting the names or values of things, so that "instead of striking back at an aggressor, as in the

case of revenge, one merely denigrates him and pronounces that he is worthless, beneath contempt, or, rather *evil*," we now find ourselves excluded from nothing less than exultant happiness or joy: "Since they are *prescribed* by the herd morality, one's own moral actions effectively *proscribe* one's own happiness" (Allison, 211, 215). Kant notoriously contended that the inclination to act in a particular way excluded its moral worth and, on Allison's reading, Nietzsche ultimately shows us why.

The problem, for Nietzsche, begins at home: this is the past as it bears on that part of being about which only we have and can have as our concern, our affirmation, and our denial. We are in truth more easily brought down to despair less on account of the various reports of the inhumanity inflicted by human beings upon other human beings, or even as wrought against animals—in the extraordinary register of pain that characterizes almost all our dealings with animals used for pleasure, in research, for food and for clothing, or as wrought against the earth itself—than we are floored by a reflection on ourselves, as petty as possible, exactly in all our value for and to ourselves. What kills us in the depths of our being, in our "loneliest loneliness," tends not to be the all-too-recently present thought of the bombing assault, suicide or straight attacks on American military personnel in Iraq, in the process killing so many others, mere Iraqi bystanders who die like so many extras, or Dresden or London, Hiroshima or Nagasaki, not the violence of African and South American warlords against their own peoples, not the Athenian holocaust of the Island dwellers of Melos, not the fall of Nineveh. Let us be clear about this. It is our own suffering that horrifies and petrifies us. We look backward and forward "on the ground" of such remembered pain, and in Robert Burns's words, "we doubt, an' fear." But all our doubt and all our fear is for ourselves. To teach the eternal return of the same, to teach *amor fati*, is to teach us to let such doubts and terrors be, to affirm them as necessary for what is and enabling for what will be. It is not to teach us to speak of Golgotha once again, or Auschwitz once again, or, once again, to take it home, the fall of twin skyscrapers shaken down to Manhattan's famously unshakeable bedrock. But our conviction that our willing and all our hopes really are about such things—all the names of history—works to cover and so to preserve (as Nietzsche teaches us, this is the working of *ressentiment*) our more patent fear for ourselves. This is what we find difficult to affirm, just as it was: our lives just as they were, just as they are, in all our pettiness and hoped for grandness.

If good things are often little enough as we see them in our own lives, the point of *amor fati*, the teaching of Nietzsche's blessing, is that life is to be loved, let be, allowed to be as it is, and will be. The becoming of our lives is to be redeemed in its innocence as such, without the promise of redemption or salvation, that is all, for Nietzsche, so many blatant claims for compensa-

tion: "Principle of 'Christian love': it wants to be well *paid*..." (*AC*, sec. 45, p. 160).

David traces Nietzsche's alternative as that which would elevate suffering to tragic wisdom. Nietzsche finds the model for this wisdom in the Greek ideal of love or *eros* (and *eris*, which last is a bit different from the *agon* as such). What erotic love transforms or transfigures beyond lust is one's eroticized disposition to suffering. Where suffering is thus revalued, it is transformed, made meaningful, and thereby becomes, so Nietzsche argues, infinitely bearable: "If we possess our *why* of life we can put up with almost any *how*" (*TI*, Maxims and Arrows, sec. 12, p. 23; *KSA* 6, 60). It goes without saying that such a transformation is as rare as that same (impossible) possibility of love, erotic or otherwise.

Thus, Nietzsche writes for the ideal of the lover, and he writes in this way—as Allison catches the measure of that gently erotic attunement in his reflections on this very theme—because only the one who loves can be so attuned, as the lover catches a sensuality opening his/her senses into a sensibility veritably alive to everything in life.<sup>12</sup> The one who bodily, *physically* represents "the *over-fullness of life*" is capable of desiring the Dionysian and altogether erotic art Nietzsche consecrates as presupposing "a tragic view of life, a tragic insight."<sup>13</sup>

Nietzsche did not begin his inquiry into *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* as an explicit exploration of the erotic, festival dimension of ancient tragedy, although in his later work he claims he did nothing less than this. Nietzsche's nemesis, Ulrich von Willamowitz-Möllendorff, was painfully on target when he leveled this criticism against Nietzsche.<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche must have taken this critique to heart. He must have made a place in his heart for Willamowitz, as his enemy, taking the advice of Nietzsche's favorite Jesuit, Balthasar Gracian, who suggests that we lodge our enemy within us, as our most salutary advocate, in love. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche affirms his investigation into the tragic in the very erotic fashion Willamowitz had mocked him for glossing too delicately in his first book, pronouncing the "Dionysian phenomenon" as ultimately "explicable only as an *excess of energy*" (*TI*, What I Owe to the Ancients, sec. 4, p. 108).

Talking of such an "excess of energy" was explicit enough for a child of the nineteenth century, although in this same locus Nietzsche speaks overtly of sexuality, indeed of the "orgy." Hence it is relevant, beyond a nicely salacious biographical detail, that we advert to a phenomenological modality that goes by the wonderful German terminus, *Vergegenwärtigung*—*re-presentation, realization*—this effectively orgiastic, ineluctably bodily investigation stands behind the apocryphal report that has Nietzsche dancing naked in his upstairs room in Turin, fully aroused, playing a flute. Such an active phenomenology was where Nietzsche's choice of the seeker's life would have to take him: "If

you want to achieve peace of mind and happiness, then have faith," Nietzsche urges in an early letter to his sister. David recalls this letter for us in his book, contrasting two very different sibling sensibilities and mirroring their very different fortunes. But Nietzsche continued, now for his own part: "if you want to be a disciple of truth, then search [*so forsche*]" (Allison, 7). The Dionysian, the erotic dimension, is Nietzsche's "triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; *true* life as collective continuation of life through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality" (*TI*, What I Owe to the Ancients, sec. 4, p. 109). Nietzsche's now eroticized consciousness of the tragic insight colors both the affirmative and the reactive dispositions of abundance and need.

Where, as Nietzsche continually repeats from the end of *On the Genealogy of Morals* through *The Antichrist*, the nihilistic, played out or decadent will is an exactly grasping will *to* (acquire) power; in contrast with such a needy will, positive and flourishing power can *only* be maintained if continually spent, lost, expressed. The course of desire sacrificed is the eternal return of the same. The trick for us is ever and always to believe this secret. But this is the fulgurating abundance of life: the green burst of spring, the swirling buzz of dayflies in the summer's heat, the magnificent speed of fall, the length of winter.

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## Notes

1. There follows an impatient catalogue of such imaginary readings: taking his work as a kind of idealism, rehearsing domesticated accounts of the *Übermensch*, or inverting Zarathustra, or suspecting Nietzsche of Darwinism, or else of propagating Carlyle's "cult of the hero."

2. Hazel E. Barnes, herself a classicist, could seem to have borrowed a bit of Nietzsche's gunpowder for the good use of titling her own autobiography: *The Story I Tell Myself* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

3. See Allison, 165ff. For an extended discussion of this issue in the context of Nietzsche's life, beyond metaphorical concessions, see especially the highly nuanced notes to the text on pages 292–3.

4. This and more can be found in Hermann Josef Schmidt, *Nietzsche absconditus oder Spurenlesen bei Nietzsche, Kindheit 1854–1858, Teil 1/2*, (Aschaffenburg: Alibri, 1990); *Nietzsche absconditus oder Spurenlesen bei Nietzsche, Kindheit 1854–1858 Teil 3* (Aschaffenburg: Alibri, 1990);

*Nietzsche absconditus oder Spurenlesen bei Nietzsche, Jugend 1. Teilband 1858–1861* (Aschaffenburg: Alibri, 1993); *Nietzsche absconditus oder Spurenlesen bei Nietzsche, 2. Teilband 1862–1864* (Aschaffenburg: Alibri, 1994).

5. Allison, "Preface" in Allison, ed., *The New Nietzsche* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), ix.

6. Note that Nietzsche suggests not only that the reader learn to laugh "at oneself as one would have to laugh in order to laugh out of the whole truth,"—thereby proposing a laughter beyond the usual treatments of Nietzsche's "comic relief" or his concept of laughter—but that with such a creator's violence, the diamond "hardness" he invokes in Zarathustra's mouth, with joyful malevolence, laughter might be transfigured: "laughter may yet have a future" (*GS*, sec. 1, p. 74).

7. See Alexander Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Nehamas's project, of reading an author's life as (self-invented) literature, is in Nehamas's case a matter of reading Nietzsche's own life as Nietzsche seems indeed to urge us to read it in *Ecce Homo*, that is, as an achieved and "perfect unity," a unity achieved, so Nehamas argues, by the expedient of writing, as Nietzsche did write, "a great number of good books that exhibit great apparent inconsistency but that can also be seen as deeply continuous with one another" (Nehamas, 416).

8. Nietzsche writes this note to himself following a scornful comment on nationalist sentiment: "Wer das fremde Blut haßt oder verachtet, ist noch kein Individuum, sondern eine Art menschliches Protoplasma." *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, eds., (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 9, 555.

9. The archaic phrasing alluding to Pindar's Greek in Nietzsche's letter to Rohde also recurs in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on no other theme than friendship in the section entitled "On the Friend," *Vom Freunde*. There Nietzsche reflects on the relation the hermit bears for himself as the relation to the self's other. For such the friend is "always the third person: the third is the cork that prevents the conversation of the two from sinking into the depths." The associative allusion to Pindar's Pythian II recurs in this locus as well—for Pindar characterizes the poem he sends to Hieron (the so-called Castor song): *This song is being sent like Phoenician merchandise across the grey sea* (Pythian 2, 68), and promises of it a buoyancy above untutored fancy, beyond slander and flattery, *just as when the rest of the*

*tackle labors/ in the depths of the sea, like a cork I shall go undipped/ over the surface of the brine* (2, 70). We note that the reflective voice, the transcendent balance of light feet, is the gift of friendship. Because such buoyancy would require the judgment of a Rhadamanthus, one is to take care *not* to show oneself before one's friend unadorned, ungroomed, or uncultivated. "Should it be an honor to the friend that you give yourself to him as you are?" It is out of respect for one's friend that one is to mask or conceal oneself: "You cannot groom yourself too beautifully for your friend: for you shall be to him an arrow and a longing for the overman." It is not without irony that all Nietzsche's efforts for the sake of his friend inevitably fell short—in *Ecce Homo* he would use another mariner's metaphor to complain that there were "no fish" for him to catch. Compounding the problem of the friend, just as at the end of his life Nietzsche could seek to become *both* father and mother to himself, it can be argued that in the end he also sought to be his own best friend: that the same vocative address that draws us so intimately into his text, is an address that turns back upon the author himself, to seek out and to find only his own ear. For a review of the context, see my discussion in Babich, "Nietzsche's Imperative as a Friend's Encomium: On Becoming the One You Are, Ethics, and Blessing" in *Nietzsche-Studien* 33 (2003).

10. See Allison's discussion of this recollective contrast in the section of *Reading the New Nietzsche* entitled "Memories."

11. Accordingly, Nietzsche's imperative is not a command that would urge us, in a Kantian extension of it, to affirm someone else's past (doing this is exactly what Nietzsche named *ressentiment*, but it is also envy—when it is not *Schadenfreude*!). See further on this, Babich, "Nietzsche's Imperative as a Friend's Encomium," cited above.

12. *Ibid.*, 152–3.

13. As an erotically charged being, the lover, precisely ecstatic, "cannot only afford the sight of the terrible and questionable" as a spectacle to be admired at an aesthetic distance, but such a "Dionysian god and man" can also face the actuality of the "terrible deed and any luxury of destruction" (*GS*, sec. 370, p. 328).

14. This point is made twice with the classicist's characteristic vulgarity and confidence (or good conscience) by Ulrich von Willamowitz-Möller in his review of Nietzsche's first book, first by inserting the challenge into the epigraph used for the review only to be thematized explicitly toward the

review's conclusion, where Willamowitz, second, challenges Nietzsche's account of the Greeks and their relation to nature (and to sexuality): "thus the phallus is no phallus: 'the unconcealed and vigorously magnificent characters of nature' (8, 61/58), neither do the Greeks, the eternal children, laugh at grotesque obscenities. No: 'the Greeks used to contemplate with reverent wonder (the sexual omnipotence of nature).'" Willamowitz-Möller, *Future Philology*, trans. Gertrude Pörtl, Babette E. Babich, and Holger Schmid, *New Nietzsche Studies*, 412 (2000) 20. See epigraph citation on page 1; see also my own editor's commentary as well as my note ii.