

Background: A. J. Hoover, "A Brief Life" in *Friedrich Nietzsche: His Life and Thought*. (Westport, CN & London: Praeger, 1994), pp. 1-27.

Friedrich Nietzsche was born on October 15, 1844, in Rocken, a small town in Prussian Saxony, the first child of Ludwig Nietzsche, a Lutheran pastor and the son of a pastor.¹ His mother, Franziska, was also the daughter of a Lutheran cleric. Little Fritz was born on the birthday of the reigning king of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, so they named him Friedrich Wilhelm. (He later dropped the "Wilhelm" from his name.) For those who put stock in coincidences, it is of interest to note that all three—the king, the father, and the son—went insane.

On July 10, 1846, Elisabeth Therese Alexandria Nietzsche was born, the "sister of Zarathustra" who was to play such a fateful role in Nietzsche's life and especially in the making of the Nietzsche myth. Elisabeth loved and adored her older brother and considered him an authority on just about everything.

Father Ludwig died in 1849, when Nietzsche was only four. In 1850 his two-year-old brother, Joseph, also died. Nietzsche had foreseen Joseph's death in a dream just a short time before, which may have been the beginning of his epistemological interest in dreams. These early deaths no doubt contributed to that trait of melancholy and seriousness that people observed in the young Nietzsche. He liked solitude and reflected on serious topics that children his age rarely consider. He early acquired the habit of self-absorption; he even wrote an autobiography at the tender age of fourteen entitled *Aus meinem Leben* (From My Life).

Losing his father deprived young Fritz of a male role model, so he turned to his grandfather, Pastor David Oehler, a hunting parson of the old school, a large, robust man who fathered eleven children and died in full harness at the age of seventy-two. Grandfather Oehler was well-rounded, for in addition to his large body he had a large library and was musically gifted. Fritz grew up loving good books and good music. The Nietzsche clan was Lutheran, patriotic, educated, and musical. Growing up in this atmosphere, a young man would be equipped with a strict morality, a tolerant Lutheran orthodoxy, a sense of honor, a regard for order, an appreciation of aristocratic values, and a love of literature and music.

After the death of Joseph, Franziska moved the family to nearby Naumburg on the Saale, which has been described as "a religious church-going and royalist civil service City."² Here Friedrich spent the next eight years, the

remainder of his childhood, as the only man in a house with five women—his mother Franziska, his sister Elisabeth, his paternal grandmother Erdmuthe, and two maiden aunts. Fritz attended a local elementary school and then went to a private preparatory school. He started Greek and Latin at the age of ten. During these years he impressed the townspeople as unusually well-mannered. Some called him "the little minister."

NIETZSCHE'S EDUCATION

In October 1858, Nietzsche entered a prestigious boarding school, the Gymnasium Pforta, located two miles from Naumburg. Schulpforta, the most famous classical school in all Germany, was founded in 1543 by Maurice, Duke of Saxony, and was housed in a former Cistercian monastery that dated back to 1140. Nietzsche's academic record up to that time was so impressive that he secured a full scholarship for six years. Pforta has a reputation in German history comparable to England's Rugby school, an elitist institution with a strong tradition of discipline and learning. At Pforta, boys were not merely filled with learning but disciplined, even drilled, for manhood. The school's alumni list numbered such luminaries as Fichte, Ranke, Klopstock, Novalis, and the Schlegel brothers. Most of its graduates went on to select universities.

Nietzsche was one of the finest students Pforta had ever enrolled, but he attained an uneven record there, almost failing to graduate because of his low scores on the mathematics exit examination. He never learned French well and nearly always read English in translation. But he was strong in religion, German literature, and classical philology. He graduated in 1864 with a thesis on the Greek poet Theognis, who may have been the primitive source of his later enthusiasm for the master-slave morality paradigm.

The 1860s was the decade of Napoleon III. Young Nietzsche was one of the many in Europe who admired the French emperor and frankly admitted that his "Caesarism"—getting things done while using democratic or populist rhetoric—seemed a workable system of politics. Nietzsche early developed a dislike for egalitarianism and democracy because they exalted the herd and held down the genius. In January 1862 he wrote, "A genius is dependent upon laws higher than and different from those governing the average person."

In 1864 Nietzsche entered Bonn University, a school that had been founded by Prussia after 1815. A Protestant island in the Roman Catholic Rheinland, it drew most of its students from Prussia and southwest Germany. He tried to fit in by joining a local fraternity but was repelled by the crass

behavior and the beer-drinking and soon resigned. He began studying theology and classical philology but in one year had dropped theology and concentrated solely on classical philology. When his favorite teacher, Friedrich Ritschl, moved to the University of Leipzig, Nietzsche went with him. He said the principal thing he liked about Ritschl was his conviction that philology studied more than just the language of a people, that it studied the total culture and civilization.

It was at Leipzig, in the fall of 1865, that Nietzsche picked up a copy of Arthur Schopenhauer's book *The World as Will and Idea* in a second-hand bookstore and read it in one sitting. Something clicked inside him; he experienced a flush of discovery and was converted to a new philosophical paradigm. It was like looking into a mirror. He became so excited by this new worldview that he took monastic vows, as it were, imposing upon himself an ascetic regime that permitted only four hours of sleep a night. He even started a little Schopenhauer study group with two old Pforta graduates, one of whom, Paul Deussen, would go on to become a leading translator and interpreter of Indian philosophy.

What was this new teaching? It could be summed up in two words: **antirationalism and pessimism**. The rational optimist, Hegel, was in his heyday in the early part of the century, and Schopenhauer attacked vigorously the Hegelian dictum that "the real is the rational." On the contrary, he maintained, the irrational will is the essence of man and reality. Descartes was wrong when he made the intellect the prime human faculty and the will the servant; reason is rather will's servant and appendage. We are deceived into thinking that our actions come from a free will guided by reason; conscious acts of choice seldom truly determine our behavior at all. **Real decisions are made by the will below the level of the rational, reflective consciousness**. Consciousness is merely the surface of the mind; it is like the crust of the earth and we know very little of what lies beneath. **This will, moreover, is the substratum of all reality. It is a nonrational force, a blind, ignorant, striving power with no ultimate purpose or design. Those who try to explain this churning cauldron of will in terms of a scientific mechanism are as deceitful as those who draw a veil of rationalism over the human psyche. The honest thinker is by necessity, therefore, a debunker; he must expose all these deceptions: rationalism, optimism, mechanism.**

Schopenhauer is one of the founding fathers of modern "depth psychology." He anticipated Freud by identifying such psychological mechanisms as rationalization, memory failure, and repression. He argued that

the sexual urge represented the ultimate focus of the will, which, despite its importance, had received little attention from most philosophers and psychologists. It was as if a veil had been thrown over sex, through which, however, the subject kept shining through.

This view of the world leads to pessimism. We may enjoy the world aesthetically, but it provides no kind of moral comfort or guidance; on the contrary, the ethical significance of reality lies in its ultimate horror. Humans can never live as if to "fit in" with the universe. True salvation requires a rejection of its pattern of ignorant, goalless striving. **Conscious life can lead only to sorrow, for life is incurably evil**. All of this sounds terribly eastern, of course, and we are not surprised to learn that Schopenhauer deeply admired the thought of India. He kept a statue of a Tibetan Buddha in his study. His ideas were close to both the Hindu Upanishads and Buddhism. He used the Sanskrit term *maya* (from which we derive the word "magic") to refer to the illusory phenomenal world. **He taught that all human life is mired in suffering and that release comes only when one breaks the attachment to earthly objects**, when the fire of desire finally goes out and one enters Nirvana, thus ceasing to exist as a separate entity. The one who comes closest to this ideal while on earth is the ascetic saint. Schopenhauer frequently quoted the Brahman formula *tat tuam asi* ("that art thou") to express his monism, his conviction of the metaphysical unity of all things underlying the realm of appearances.

Schopenhauer did more than any other thinker of his century to awaken the general German mind to Indian influences. His gloomy philosophy was partly redeemed by his good writing style and he therefore captivated many young thinkers who had given up God and set sail on the sea of nihilism looking for new ports. To these free spirits he opened up the East as a source of new ideas. His worldview encouraged a great deal of psychological introspection and opened the door to a strange new phenomenon for Europe—an atheistic mysticism, the contours of which will gradually become dear as we unfold Nietzsche's thinking.

Nietzsche was enamored of Schopenhauer's system for a few years. He was grateful that Schopenhauer had taken the blindfold of optimism off his eyes so that he could see more clearly. "Life is more interesting," he confessed, "even if more hateful."⁵ But gradually he rejected much of this view, especially the pessimism. He decided later that he wanted to be a yes-sayer, not a no-sayer. The key ideas he retained from Schopenhauer were (1) the primacy of the will over the intellect and (2) the nonrational or chaotic nature of the universe.

Another book that deeply influenced Nietzsche in these years was Friedrich Albert Lange's study, *History of Materialism and Critique of its Significance for the Present* (1866), which helped many thinkers of the time make the intellectual shift from Christianity and Platonism to a materialistic realism. Lange challenged Kant's distinction between the world we sense and the Ding an sich ("thing in itself"), arguing that such a distinction could no longer be usefully employed. Ultimate reality is totally unknowable, a thesis we shall encounter in Nietzsche's epistemology.

Nietzsche remained at Leipzig through 1868, pursuing his doctorate in classical philology. Ritschl was so impressed with his work that he helped the young genius publish a paper on Theognis in a scholarly journal, *Rheinisches Museum* July 1866). Another treatise, on Diogenes Laertius, won a university prize in 1867. Yet even with all these successes Nietzsche admitted that he grew disgusted with the study of philology, which turned out to be a pursuit of trivia that ignored the serious problems of life. In 1869 he seriously considered switching to chemistry.

In 1868 the University of Basel, Switzerland, was searching for a professor of classical philology. Ritschl gave Nietzsche a glowing recommendation and Basel offered him the post, even though he had not yet written his doctor's thesis or the dissertation a German Ph.D. usually produces before lecturing at a university. Ritschl told the authorities at Basel that Nietzsche was the most unusual student he had seen in his forty years of teaching. Even though his work had been in Greek literature and philosophy, he said, Nietzsche's "high gifts" would permit him to work in other fields with "great success." Ritschl ended his encomium with the confident prediction: "He will simply be able to do anything he wants to do."

So, with neither dissertation nor examination, Leipzig awarded Nietzsche the doctorate and Basel gave him the position of professor. He became a Swiss citizen and moved to Basel in January 1869.

SOJOURN IN BASEL (1869-79)

A doctor and a professor at the age of twenty-four! It seemed that Nietzsche led a charmed life. He had reached the pinnacle of his profession. People were saying that he would be a privy councilor or something higher by age thirty. Yet he came to feel that his good fortune was more a curse than a blessing. This new post locked him into a field he didn't like; he really wanted to be a philosopher. In January 1871 he asked the university to appoint him to the vacant Chair of Philosophy, but they declined, reminding him that he had not been formally trained in that area.

While at Basel, Nietzsche made two good friends on the university faculty who were to remain friends to the very end of his sanity: Franz Overbeck and Jacob Burckhardt.

Overbeck was a church historian who, paradoxically, was an agnostic in religion. He was a mild, serene skeptic who kept his doubts about Christianity from his students and the public. He was probably the best friend Nietzsche ever had; they lived in the same house in Basel for a while, and even after Nietzsche left the university they kept in touch by mail. Overbeck shared many of Nietzsche's doubts, but he was the dry, scholarly type, not at all polemical like Nietzsche. Like Erasmus, he didn't have the constitution to be a revolutionary. He and Nietzsche agreed that there was a profound difference between primitive and contemporary Christianity, but he never voiced any such heresies to his students. He realized that in Nietzsche he had a volatile personality on his hands—a potential hero or madman. He couldn't conscientiously enter into the passion of Nietzsche's "hammer philosophy," but he tried his best to understand him and comfort him in troubled times. Overbeck's wife, Ida, spent many enjoyable hours discussing philosophy with their younger friend. From her conversations with him she recalls picking up a "strong disgust" with life.

Burckhardt was a historian of art and culture, best remembered for his *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860). He had even less sympathy with Nietzsche's strange passion for forbidden ideas, but the two shared a common love of history, art, and culture, especially of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. Nietzsche attended many of Burckhardt's lectures and spoke highly of them in his correspondence. Both men could commiserate with each other over the decline of modern culture and the stupidity of current nationalism, industrialism, and the shallow doctrine of progress. It was Burckhardt and Overbeck who detected Nietzsche's oncoming mental collapse in late 1888 and early 1889.

Shortly after his arrival in Basel, Nietzsche made his first trip to visit the home of Richard Wagner, in Tribschen near Lucerne. Between 1869 and 1872 he made twenty-two visits to Wagner's home, usually staying for several days at a time. He became an informal member of the family, even enjoying his own room in the house. By the end of 1869 he was helping Cosima Wagner with the family Christmas shopping. He got so close to the family that he was entrusted with the confidential task of reading Wagner's secret autobiography.

What attracted Nietzsche to Wagner? There is much evidence to suggest that Wagner was a "father surrogate" for Nietzsche-although it is the kind of evidence difficult to confirm. Wagner and Ludwig Nietzsche had both been born in 1813; both spoke the Saxon dialect; both looked alike; and so on. Nietzsche had been rather unhappy living in a fatherless household, alone with five women. A broader version of the same thesis-easier to confirm-would say that Nietzsche found a home with the Wagners, a complete home, a second adolescence. Writing years later, he called this period "the most profound and cordial recreation" of his life: "I'd let go cheap the whole rest of my human relationships; I should not want to give away out of my life at any price the days of Tribschen-days of trust, of cheerfulness, of sublime accidents, of profound moments" (EH, II, 5).

Nietzsche was attracted by Wagner's devotion to Schopenhauer's philosophy, especially his theory of music. Schopenhauer maintained that of all the arts only music stood close to the ultimate reality of existence; music spoke a universal language of the heart. Nietzsche loved music with an adulation that transcended mere auditory pleasure; he said that he suffered from music as from an open wound. He was an astute musical critic and played the piano excellently. He and Wagner agreed that Schopenhauer was the only philosopher who really understood music. He must have listened to Wagner's music with a feeling that "revelation" was occurring straight from the heart of being. Music resembled the "Dionysian state" he was later to describe. Music gave insight, prerational insight, into ultimate reality.

It has been said that Nietzsche learned to be a philosopher by observing Wagner, who was at the height of his powers at Tribschen. He must have seemed the word of Schopenhauer made flesh. Nietzsche had before him one of the most versatile and open natures ever to appear on earth, and Wagner's tremendous artworks were a classical study in aesthetic domination; the artistic will-to-power stood incarnated before his eyes. Nietzsche was to talk of "great men" a good deal in his career, but Wagner was the only great man he ever knew personally." Wagner was the herald of a new religion of art, a modern Aeschylus who would open a new artistic era for the Germans. At Tribschen, history was being made and Nietzsche stood right in the eye of the hurricane.

Wagner had an unusual wife. Cosima, the illegitimate daughter of composer Franz Liszt, was the wife of conductor Hans von Bülow when she met Wagner. Cosima left Bülow in 1863 to become Wagner's mistress; she had already borne him two daughters and was pregnant with a third, though not

yet divorced from Bülow. She fascinated Nietzsche. She must have seemed to him the first female "free spirit" he had ever met-so different from the small-town women of Naumburg. It is often suggested that he harbored Oedipal feelings toward her; if he desired her sexually, the impermissibility of this longing probably made his love for Wagner (the "father" in the paradigm) increasingly ambivalent.

Wagner's shadow hangs over Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872), his first and last production in his professional field of philology. The book proposes to explain how Attic tragedy, the highest art form, was suddenly born and then just as suddenly died in a short time. Tragedy, like all art, comes into being by the interplay of two forces-the Apollonian and the Dionysian, the rational formative force and the prerational formless element. Art is thus a reconciliation of opposites. The Apollonian power in us (read: reason) covers the ugly reality of being with an artistic veil, which Nietzsche sometimes compared to the "veil of Isis." (Inside the tomb of Isis in Egypt is the inscription "I am that which was, and is, and shall be, and no man hath lifted my veil.")

The great historical impact of the Greeks is that they developed a style of culture whereby they were able to tolerate the harsh, ugly realities of life by seeking refuge in an imaginary realm of their own creation. Art, like fantasy, drunkenness, and dreams, is a mechanism of escape. The Greeks interposed a world of art between themselves and the world of suffering, casting a veil of beauty over the abyss. Dionysus worship began in non-Greek countries where it was performed with savage license that shocked the Greeks, but gradually the power of Apollo, which at first kept it out of the Greek pantheon, toned it down and sublimated it. Once the reason of Apollo linked up with the raw power of Dionysus, something wonderful was produced-tragedy, born of the spirit of music, the special language of Dionysus.

Nietzsche loved the Greeks, those 'barbarians of genius,' but he especially loved the pre-Socratics, those of the sixth century, before the great Age of Pericles and the Persian Wars, where most scholars bestow their encomiums. Sixth-century Greece was the land of so many things Nietzsche admired: hardness, lack of sentimentality, contempt for women, dependence on slave labor, warfare, tyrants, Dionysus worship, and music. In that world people lived under a horizon, a mythical worldview shielding their minds from the abyss. It was fitting that such a people should develop tragedy; pleasure in tragedy marks strong ages and strong characters. Only the strong can tolerate the truth about the wretchedness of life.

Into this Garden of Eden comes a snake: Socrates. Tragedy died suddenly from the rationalism of Socrates and Euripides. It was an artistic catastrophe of huge proportions. Socrates represents "theoretical man," the compulsive rationalist, the thinker who suffers from the profound illusion that Nietzsche describes as "the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being but even of correcting it." Socrates is the real father of science, "the one turning point and vortex of so-called world history" (BT, 15).

Few thinkers have ever attached so much importance to that strange god, Dionysus. Nietzsche later boasted that he, so to speak, "put Dionysus on the map." He says he was the first to describe the Dionysian principle in its psychological significance. As Max Baumeister points out, this is rhetorical exaggeration. Long before Nietzsche, the German Romantics had speculated on Dionysus and the origins of dithyrambic poetry, the uncontrolled underside of human nature, the wild, free, unrestrained life liberated from reason and authority. One can find such speculations in Winckelmann, Hamann, Herder, Novalis, Hölderlin, Heine, and Hamerling. Nietzsche's boast that he transformed Dionysus into a "philosophical pathos" is true, to an extent, but this means mainly that he made it into a "rhetorical cliché." "He accomplished this so brilliantly and propagandized it so effectively," concludes Baumeister, "that we hardly remember anything more about the long and significant prehistory of the Dionysian in the nineteenth century, or the mighty epiphany of Dionysus in early German Romanticism."¹³ In other words, as we shall find in other cases, Nietzsche provided the "media hype" for Dionysus.

But hype wasn't what most German scholars were looking for in the first book of a new professor, so *Birth of Tragedy* got a cold reception from the scholarly community. Nietzsche had attacked a sacred cow, the traditional "sweetness and light" picture of the Greeks inherited from Winckelmann and Goethe. The received opinion stressed the "noble simplicity and calm grandeur," the balance and rationality of the Greeks. Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer, had removed the Apollonian veil and disclosed the Dionysian substratum. The Greeks were cruel, violent, unruly, uncultured—until by hard work they overcame themselves and created a unique "style:" Greek beauty was a victory won after centuries of titanic competition between Apollo and Dionysus.

Nietzsche also appeared to be a crass barker for Wagner. Ten of the twenty-five sections in *Birth of Tragedy* are concerned with Wagner's new

musical dramas, which Nietzsche considered a possible revival of tragedy in Germany. Wagner seemed to be a potential new "German Dionysus" or "German Aeschylus." There is evidence that Nietzsche's original plan for the book was changed by Wagner himself to include the strong emphasis on music, so that the book's thesis would have Wagner reviving Attic art forms. The Wagnerians were naturally delighted with the book, but the professional philologists felt that Nietzsche had prostituted his craft for propaganda purposes. Subsequent scholarship has partly vindicated Nietzsche's view of the Greeks, but that didn't help him at the time. The entire episode strengthened his disgust with philology and scholars in general. Years later he commented that instead of writing a book he should have "sung" it to his colleagues!

It took Nietzsche several years to shake off the spell of Wagner. Christ must have been referring to Wagner when he said that "no man can serve two masters:" Nietzsche gradually discovered that his hero meddled in everything and tried to direct his entire life. When Cosima finally secured her divorce from Bulow, she turned Protestant and became serious about religion. It is generally believed that Cosima inspired Wagner to write *Parsifal*, the opera which used the Middle Ages as backdrop instead of his customary pre-Christian Germanic mythology and vaguely extolled the Christian ideal of redemption. Nietzsche, who had long since abandoned Christianity, was disappointed with the opera; he said that Wagner had "knelt at the cross." When he visited the opening of the first Wagner festival in Bayreuth (July 1876), he became strangely ill and had to leave early. The illness was likely psychosomatic in origin. He was disgusted at the herdlike assembly of people who flocked to hear Wagner's music. Later, when Wagner made common cause with the anti-Semites, it only confirmed Nietzsche's opinion that his hero had prostituted his rare gift, knelt at the cross, and pandered to the masses for applause. He had become a "cultural philistine," one of those individuals who would slay the German spirit in favor of the German Reich (LJ, I, 1). At the end of his career, Nietzsche testified that the one thing he could never forgive was that Wagner became reichsdeutsch—"imperial German," infected with the shallow, philistine nationalism of the Bismarckian Reich (EH, II, 5).

In a larger sense, Nietzsche's break with Wagner was the first great battle in his quest for intellectual independence. In the mid-1870s he purified himself from the malign influence of Wagner and his music by listening to lighter compositions such as *Carmen*. To escape the pessimism of

Schopenhauer and Wagner he turned to French writers: Montaigne, Pascal, Chamfort, LaRochefoucauld, Voltaire, and Rousseau. His interest in things French came about partly through the influence of a new friend who came along just at the Wagner break-a Jew, Paul Ree.

Ree and Nietzsche had a lot in common: a sickly adolescence, university study in Leipzig, a stint in the Franco-Prussian War, youthful enthusiasm for Schopenhauer, and especially an intense interest in the problems of morality, the subject nearest Nietzsche's heart. They met in Basel in the spring of 1873 when Ree was writing his dissertation on Aristotle's ethics. His first book, *Psychologische Beobachtungen* (Psychological Observations), attracted Nietzsche's attention, and they started exchanging letters and soon developed an abiding friendship. Here was a friend who possessed that mysterious ability, lacking in Overbeck and Burckhardt, to stimulate Nietzsche's philosophical thinking. In 1877 Ree published *Der Ursprung der moralischen Empfindungen* (Origin of Moral Feelings), a study Nietzsche deeply influenced. Ree conceded his great debt by dedicating a gift copy: "To the father of this essay, most gratefully from its mother."

Ree probably in turn helped inspire Nietzsche's book, *Human, All Too Human*, which appeared in 1878. It was subtitled "A Book for Free Spirits" and was dedicated to that patron saint of free spirits, Voltaire, "in commemoration of his death, May 30, 1878." Nietzsche had begun the work during his 1876 visit to Bayreuth; his repulsion there stirred in him a debunking mood and he declared war on all ideals, which are merely "higher swindles" (EH, III, 3). Reading this book, one is struck with the feeling that Nietzsche has emerged into a new phase of his development. He seems to have sobered up a bit, and he flirts with the Enlightenment; he sounds rationalistic; he praises Socrates, reason, and science; he criticizes metaphysics, art, music, religion, and myth. The form is aphoristic, probably derived from some of his favorite French writers.

Concerning "Reason in the Schools;" for example, he notes that schools have an obligation to teach "rigorous thinking, cautious judgment, and consistent inference" (H, 265). The greatest progress men have made lies in their learning "how to draw correct inferences." Man has acquired this power only lately "False inferences are the rule in earlier times; and the mythology of all peoples, their magic and their superstition, their religious cults, their laws, are inexhaustible mines of proof for this proposition" (E, 271).

Human, All Too Human declared war on transcendence. It targeted all so-called ideals and reduced them to so many "idols," false deities. High things

became low things. God no longer exists, and man is just a fortunate mammal that lost its hair and grew a big brain. There is no divine realm, no spiritual dimension, to explain the origins of all our cherished values. Love, kindness, reason, continence—these are all human, all too human, sprung from the earth by the process of evolution. Life came from nonlife, love evolved from selfishness, logic developed from the illogical. Small wonder that timid thinkers have a great fear of probing into the origins of things (H, I,1).

Nietzsche had to leave his teaching position at the University of Basel in May 1879. He had stopped teaching back in 1876, hoping that his health would improve and he could return. But his health only got worse. After a particularly bad spell at Easter 1879, he concluded that he was not strong enough to continue at his post. The university gave him a modest pension for the rest of his life.

THE FREE SPIRIT (1879-88)

For the next decade Nietzsche was free, released from the routine of a regular job, able to pursue his mission without distraction. He was now separated from Wagner, separated from the university, separated from the scholarly world. All these separations were necessary for him to become truly autonomous and explore the new seas opened up by the demise of theism. At last he could say that he was doing what he himself had chosen to do:

"That way is my will; I trust In my mind and in my grip. Without plan, into the vast Open sea I head my ship."

He was an eagle, but an "anxious" eagle. He was not really a hero at heart, but he was a hero in his writings. Many people who met him in this final decade of sanity remarked on the contradiction between his mild personal manner and his abrasive writings. From 1879 to 1888 he could be found at various times in Nice, Venice, Turin, or Genoa, but his favorite lodging site was Sils-Maria in the Upper Engadine, Switzerland. It seemed "the promised land" with its blend of clear air, solitude, and grand scenery.

Exploration continued. *Daybreak* came out in 1881. (The German *Morgenrote* may also be translated "dawn" or "sunrise.") Bearing the subtitle "Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality," it launched a frontal attack on Christianity, especially on its doctrines about sin. The church's ignorant position on sex had made the Devil far more interesting to people than angels or saints; and interest in the love story was now the one thing that all social classes had in common.

"The sexual sensations have this in common with the sensations of sympathy and worship, that one person, by doing what pleases him, gives

pleasure to another person-such benevolent arrangements are not to be found so very often in nature! And to calumniate such an arrangement and to ruin it through associating it with a bad conscience!" (D, 76)

St. Paul and Luther are placed under psychoanalysis. Paul didn't really see Christ on the road to Damascus; instead he got the idea (hence the bright light!) of atonement by the substitutionary death of Christ. His motive was hatred of the Law, the stern Jewish ethical code he could not keep. The beautiful Christian gospel of love can be traced back to this all-too-human wickedness of Saul of Tarsus. Likewise, Luther's frustration in trying to achieve monastic perfection erupted into a bitter hatred for popes, priests, saints, and Church (D, 68).

He wrote *The Gay Science* in 1882. *Die froehliche Wissenschaft* can also be rendered "The Joyful Wisdom," but "Gay Science" is a better translation because the German *Wissenschaft* nearly always means "science" and not "wisdom." Furthermore, Nietzsche informs us that he was using the Provençal concept of *gaya sciènza*, which unites the free spirit, the singer, and the knight (EH, 111, 5). Imagine Voltaire with a guitar and a sword! With this title Nietzsche signaled his preference for the "south"-the Mediterranean, Provence, Italy, light-hearted gaiety in both life and thought-over the "north"-Germany, the land of fog, cold, heavy, stodgy, dismal, Wagnerian. He is suggesting a light-hearted defiance of tradition, yet a defiance that could coexist with genuine happiness. Nihilism need not make you gloomy like Schopenhauer. This book contains some classics: the famous aphorism on the death of God, the first mention of some key doctrines like will-to-power, the overman, and eternal recurrence. And-Zarathustra makes his first appearance.

It is customary to divide Nietzsche's intellectual development into three stages: the aesthetic, the scientific, and the last, mature stage. The aesthetic phase involved Wagner and *The Birth of Tragedy* and shows the deep influence of Schopenhauer. Then Nietzsche broke with Schopenhauer and Wagner and started reading French authors and saying nice things about Socrates, reason, and science. This second phase is called variously the scientific, the Socratic, or the positivistic phase. It produced *Human, Daybreak, and Gay Science*. These divisions, while useful and roughly accurate, do not fully explicate his intellectual periphrasings, for it is clear that certain themes persisted throughout Nietzsche's philosophical career.

The thing to remember is that Nietzsche was probing and exploring and testing different perspectives. He grows like a snake and must shed his skin from time to time. Grimm is probably correct in saying that during the

middle period Nietzsche was drawn to science because science attempts to free us from worn-out assumptions and presuppositions. But he valued science mostly in a negative sense, as a purgative. The scientist is usually more aware of the theoretical, provisional status of his statements. On balance, Nietzsche remained a critic of scientific humanism, especially what we would today call "scientism:"

One of the most traumatic episodes of Nietzsche's life occurred during the writing and publication of *Gay Science*, just before the writing of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*-the affair involving Lou Salome. Nietzsche had met Lou in Rome in May 1882 through two close friends, Paul Ree and Malwida von Meysenburg. Lou was a most unusual girl. The daughter of a Russian general, she was twenty-one years old, highly intelligent, and very ambitious, the kind of female intellect, as Peter Gast noted, who comes along five or six times a century. Most women in Nietzsche's life were Victorian prudes compared to her; she was "precocious, quick, and brash; eager to meet famous people . . . and proud of being free of old-fashioned inhibitions." Nietzsche must have considered her a walking incarnation of the free spirit, the gay science.

Nietzsche's relation with Lou remains obscured by the gossip circulated among the principals involved. He became so infatuated with her that she was able to lead him by the nose for several months. His attraction was both intellectual and sexual. He was thirty-eight and she was twenty-one. He considered her the ideal student, one with whom he could discuss his "most abysmal thoughts" such as eternal recurrence. Lou put out the word (now rendered dubious) that both Nietzsche and Ree had proposed to her and that Nietzsche was so shy he asked Ree to make his proposal for him. Franziska and Elisabeth disliked Lou increasingly, the more they learned about her. Elisabeth was jealous of Lou because she was intellectually superior, and feared she would take her brother away Lou claimed that Nietzsche had suggested a triple marriage, a trinity, a "wild marriage" which set all the tongues around Naumburg to wagging. Elisabeth warned her brother that he might lose his university pension if all this were revealed. Nietzsche planned for the three to go to Paris in the winter of 1882 and return to school, but this project fell through. Having in a sense given up his mother and sister for Lou, he found that she apparently did not seem to appreciate the sacrifice he had made. The whole affair burned itself out by November of 1882 and left Nietzsche with hostile feelings toward everyone: Franziska, Elisabeth, Lou, and Paul Ree. He indulged in a great deal of introspection that contributed to his thoughts on resentment and revenge.

This may have been the first time in his life that Nietzsche seriously contemplated suicide. He says he took an enormous dose of opium, but many biographers think he wrote this just to frighten and shame his relatives. At any rate, immediately after this affair he began to write *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, his greatest work. Psychological processes are difficult to prove, especially posthumously, but one thesis here seems highly probable: Nietzsche wrote *Zarathustra* as therapy. He had wished to create a female disciple; instead he created a son, the Persian prophet of his new religion. If he had still been a Christian, he might have said, "God works in mysterious ways!" It may be one of the finest examples of sublimation in psychological history. His repressed passions became creative alchemy, turning muck into gold. Later, in *Ecce Homo*, he spoke kindly of both Ree and Lou (EH, 111, 3). He conquered his resentment and employed it in his own personal moral development.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is a classic, the book that put Nietzsche into world literature. He insisted that it came to him by inspiration; he was merely a mouthpiece. "One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form-I never had any choice" (EH, III, 6). Its central concerns are the will-to-power, the Overman, and eternal return, but it contains symbolic whispers of nearly all Nietzsche's grand ideas. We shall need to cite it many times in the pages to come.

In May 1885, Elisabeth married Bernhard Foerster, a leading exponent of German antisemitism. Foerster drew inspiration from Wagner's son-in-law, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the author of *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), the racist bible for the next generation. Nietzsche and Franziska both strongly opposed this radical man and the marriage. A year after the wedding, Bernhard and Elisabeth left for Paraguay to found a colonial haven for fellow Aryan racists called *Nueva Germania* ("New Germany"). Nietzsche never saw his sister again as a sane man, though they exchanged a few letters. He wrote Malwida in May 1884, "I have broken radically with my sister; for heaven's sake, don't think of mediation or reconciliation. There is no reconciliation between a vengeful anti-Semitic goose and me."

After *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche decided to write some books in a more traditional prose style. His *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887) come closest to public expectations of a philosophical treatise, though they still have long aphorisms. He informed Burckhardt that the content of these works was the same as that of *Zarathustra*.

Beyond Good and Evil is one of the most iconoclastic volumes in philosophical history. Nietzsche begins by questioning the value of truth itself. He wonders aloud if untruth isn't necessary for life and sanity; he attacks Descartes's cogito; he shatters the unity of the self, denies free will and responsibility, attacks pity, democracy, and socialism, and defends aristocracy. He suggests that the will to truth may actually be a concealed death wish and that consciousness, therefore, may be pathological.

Genealogy of Morals is the most systematic book Nietzsche ever wrote, consisting of three orderly essays with logical subdivisions. It concentrates on the evolution of good and evil as moral concepts. Nietzsche attacks English Utilitarianism and takes great care to develop the distinction between master and slave morality. He dissects the saint, the ascetic, guilt, revenge, and punishment. This work contains his greatest contribution to psychology—the analysis of resentment. This volume caught the attention of Danish critic Georg Brandes, who began lecturing on Nietzsche at the University of Copenhagen in April 1888. Nietzsche was delighted at this first ray of recognition.

Ironically, this budding recognition came shortly before Nietzsche's creative life ended in his tragic insanity. His last year of sanity will be treated later; at this point attention must be directed to certain crucial themes in his life and career that are necessary for interpreting his philosophy.

NIETZSCHE'S ILLNESS

"Body am I entirely, and nothing else," said Zarathustra, "and soul is only a word for something about the body" (Z, I, 4). It would be wrong to call Nietzsche a gross materialist, but few thinkers in history have felt so strongly the connection between body and mind. We simply would not have the Nietzsche we now study if it had not been for his sickly body. Nearly every book he wrote was a victory over his flawed physical constitution.

Nietzsche's health was poor for most of his life. Even at Pforta the school medical records mentioned that he was nearsighted and often plagued by migraine headaches. In March 1868 he sustained an injury to his chest from a saddle pommel while jumping his horse. He was hurt seriously but continued riding as if nothing had happened. He suffered for months from this injury. A year later his health continued to deteriorate because of exhaustion and fatigue as a result of serving as a medical orderly in the Franco-Prussian War.

But there was more than just a debilitated physical constitution. Though it cannot be proved for sure, it is generally agreed that Nietzsche suffered from syphilis, to be more exact, tertiary syphilis, of unknown

provenience. This disease finally led to a general paralysis that caused his collapse in 1889. We do not know where he got it. Some say he picked it up in a brothel during his Leipzig days. Some say he unwittingly infected himself during the Franco-Prussian War while helping wounded soldiers. Some say he deliberately infected himself to carry on a mind-body experiment. In those days people considered syphilis to be incurable, and thus a patient would not be told that he had contacted it. His life would be punctuated by increasingly severe attacks of some "mysterious" malady that often ended in madness and premature death.

This syphilis thesis is far from certain. The insanity that comes from syphilis rarely lasts eleven years, as it did with Nietzsche (1889-1900). Furthermore, Nietzsche's sex life was cool to nonexistent, which does not fit very well with the thesis. At any rate, if he had syphilis, the condition was most likely dormant during his creative period and certainly does not invalidate his philosophy. Nietzsche went mad, true, but one should not call him "the mad philosopher." That phrase is really an oxymoron, for genuine insanity would prevent a person from making any coherent argument.

Still, if we are to understand Nietzsche, we must take seriously the probability that his thinking was affected by this unusual condition of his nervous system, whatever it was. "If Carlyle had a rat gnawing at his stomach," says Eric Bentley, "Nietzsche had one gnawing at his very brain." This is exaggerated, but it makes the point. In a way we will never fully understand, Nietzsche's genius unfolded intertwined with this disease. It accounts for much of the passion in his style, the shrillness in some writings. Another philosopher with a healthy constitution could do his thinking and forget the body or put it on "automatic pilot." Picasso said that when he went to work he left the body outside the studio door. Nietzsche didn't have that option. His body was always jabbing his mind with an electric prod, screaming, "Here I am! Don't you dare forget me!"

Part of the blame here rests on Nietzsche himself. His doctors told him that he could preserve his poor eyesight only if he reduced his reading and writing, but he ignored this advice. After hours of reading or writing, his sore eyes would cause a migraine headache which would deprive him of sleep. He might take pills or potions to stop the pain or to induce sleep, but then his stomach would revolt at this chemical invasion, and so on a vicious cycle. He slowly became an invalid and a hypochondriac. His letters speak a great deal of pain, suffering, and insomnia. He talks a lot about his diet, what he can eat and what he must avoid. No wine, no beer, no coffee, no alcohol, only tea. He

becomes an amateur nutritionalist, carefully analyzing the precise effects of certain foods on his sensitive stomach. His nutritional theorizing sometimes leads to patent nonsense, as, for example, when he asserts that a diet of rice leads to the use of opium and narcotics, while a diet of potatoes leads to the use of liquor (GS,145). He considers his body a finely tuned physical instrument, acutely sensitive to temperature, altitude, air pressure, and humidity. At times he becomes almost a climatic-nutritional determinist.

From 1876 to 1888 Nietzsche settled into a dreary cycle of "sickness and recovery." Sometimes he would be bedridden for days. Whenever possible he would take long walks to keep up his strength, walks of six to eight hours. He carried a notebook to write down the ideas that occurred to him. He claimed that most of his good ideas came while walking; the sedentary life was deleterious because all prejudices, he asserted, come from the intestines (EH, II,1). His writings became his escape, his life. He warred for good health, but, as Lavrin says, war requires tactics, so Nietzsche learned to use philosophy for military purposes. His system became an artifice for self-preservation. In aphorism 553 of Daybreak he asked, "Where does my philosophy, with all its deviations, really want to go?" He answered:

"Does it do more than translate as it were into reason a strong and constant drive, a drive for gentle sunlight, bright and buoyant air, southerly vegetation, the breath of the sea, fleeting meals of flesh, fruit and eggs, hot water to drink, daylong silent wanderings, little talking, infrequent and cautious reading, dwelling alone, dear, simple and almost soldierly habits. In short, for all those things which taste best and are most endurable precisely to me. A philosophy which is at bottom the instinct for a personal diet?"

It is important to weigh carefully the effect of Nietzsche's illness on his thinking; but it is equally important that his illness not be used to refute his arguments. That would be a clear case of "poisoning the wells." There is no necessary, logical connection between his oncoming madness and his worldview. In fact, the books written in 1888, his last year of sanity, are some of the clearest works he ever composed. Some of the great thinkers and artists have gone mad—Holderlin, Poe, Leopardi, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Van Gogh. This fact does not invalidate any truth they sought to establish. Since Nietzsche attacked Christianity, Christians sometimes ignore his arguments by pointing to his insanity. But, as N. Figgis says, if Nietzsche had fought on the Christian side, the atheists would be using his insanity against Christianity. This means that the insanity thesis cancels itself out. Karl Jaspers clarifies the point well:

“Generally speaking, the value of a creation may be regarded and judged only in terms of its spiritual substance; the underlying causal factor; are irrelevant to the value of the product. A speech will not be regarded as either worse or better when it becomes known that the speaker customarily drinks a bottle of wine beforehand in order to free himself from inhibitions. The intrinsically incomprehensible causality of the natural process, in which all of us are involved, tells us nothing concerning the intelligibility, the meaning, and the value of the spiritual events to which it gives rise; it can only reveal-if our knowledge extends that far--an incomprehensibility on a totally different level.”

Kaufmann well warns us that some biographers of philosophers leave the false impression that there is a tight causal relationship between life and thought. This, of course, is true only some of the time. A philosophical problem, once launched, carries its own impetus in the mind, regardless of what was going on in the body at the time of the launching. The resolution of a philosophical problem stands on its own evidence and arguments-not on some physiological event. If Nietzsche's arguments are valid, then it is irrelevant that he might have fashioned them in the midst of a seven-day syphilitic headache.

NIETZSCHE'S SOLITUDE

One can be an invalid and not be a hermit, but Nietzsche was both. He was an invalid reduce. Dostoevsky had a loving wife to help him over the humps in his struggle with the abyss, but Nietzsche remained a bachelor all his life. Franziska wondered why her two children, so smart in so many ways, could neither find mates. Both were worthy prospects, but both were difficult to live with. Nietzsche proposed marriage at least once, perhaps twice, but he probably realized that a woman would have to be less than sane herself to live with him, a sickly philosopher who spent most of his time talking about the abyss and eternal return! He sometimes justified his bachelorhood by reference to Socrates--a married philosopher belongs to comedy. He knew he would make a poor husband, if for no other reason than that he might have to modify his behavior in deference to another will. That would have compromised his independence, and he was very proud of his freedom of thought. In October 1874, he wrote to Malwida von Meysenbug:

“There is nothing I want more than to gain insight into that whole extremely complicated system of antagonisms of which the "modern world" consists. Fortunately, I'm lacking in all political and social ambition, so that I have nothing to fear from that quarter-no distractions, no need for

compromise or concern. In short, I can say what I think, and I intend to find out to what degree our friends, who are so proud of their freedom of thought, can actually tolerate free thoughts?”

Nietzsche became a wanderer, never rooting himself. He never had a wife, child, hometown, nation, church, God, political party, profession, or regular job. He did have some dose friends, but his contacts with them were usually by mail. He was a wandering cosmopolitan, the kind of poor soul excoriated by the romantic nationalists. He interpreted his solitude as a necessary sacrifice for truth. "Association with people imposes no mean test on my patience" (EH, I, 8). Ordinary people are too hedonistic to love the truth:

“If you want to pick my roses, You must stoop and stick your noses Between thorns and rocky views, And not be afraid of bruises.” (GS, 9)

Hollingdale suggests that Nietzsche needed to be alone for a number of reasons, but especially because the manner of thinking and style of writing revealed in his books are essentially a species of talking to oneself. Nietzsche admitted as much to Frau Meysenbug: "I've never found anyone I can talk to the way I talk to myself.-Forgive me for such a confession, my revered friend." He considered his thoughts so special that they should be fenced in, "so that pigs and dreamers will not break into my gardens. "

But solitude has its price and Nietzsche paid it. He confided to Erwin Rohde that there was a connection between his illness and his solitude: "Has anyone had the faintest notion of the real cause of my long illness I've lived for forty-three years, and I'm still as alone as I was in my childhood." Rohde was one of Nietzsche's most intimate friends; at Leipzig they had shared a youthful enthusiasm for Greek culture and Wagner. Rohde got married, settled down, had a family, and went on to become a famous classical philologist. Nietzsche must have felt at times that his colleague had "sold out" to the establishment. Yet in 1884 when Rohde sent a picture of his newborn child, Nietzsche wrote him a letter with a sad confession:

“I don't know how it happened, but as I read your last letter, and especially when I saw the picture of your child, it was as if you were clasping my hand and gazing at me in a melancholy way . . . as if to say: "How is it possible that we now have so little in common and live as if in different worlds, when once . . . !" And so it is, friend, with all the people I love: everything is over . . . ; people still see me, they speak so as not to stay silent But their eyes tell me the truth: and they say to me (I hear it well enough!): "Friend Nietzsche, now you are completely alone!" That is really what it has

come to Oh friend, what a senseless, withdrawn life I live! So alone, alone! So without children."

The picture of Nietzsche as a hero of steel who stands alone in a meaningless universe will not bear close scrutiny. You might get this picture from some of his books, but his letters tell a different story, a story of one who really needed and wanted friends. "If ever there was a man endowed with a capacity for warm, all-embracing love;" says Lavrin, "that man was Nietzsche." He once told Gast that he was "in the right" when he opposed Wagner, but then he added, "It seems ridiculous to want to be in the right at the cost of love." "Even now," he admitted, "my whole philosophy wavers after an hour's friendly conversation with a total stranger." In March 1885 he wrote Elisabeth, "I have never had a friend or co-worker who appreciated my concerns, my worries, my aspirations. It is a shame that there is no God so that at least someone could understand." During his last year of sanity, he complained to Overbeck of a "perpetual lack of a really refreshing and healing human love" and his "absurd isolation: "We can nevertheless be grateful for Nietzsche's terrible loneliness. His solitude made possible the quality of his special intellectual experience. He refused to jump on most of the generational bandwagons; he did not ding to many of the leading illusions of the Victorian age. His children, his books, are still with us, and will be read as long as philosophy is studied.

Still, we must note that his solitude weakens one of his strongest notions—the value of multiple perspectives. Nietzsche always praised the person who could see out of many eyes or judge from many different viewpoints. Yet he was deprived of many crucial experiences that would have enriched his own perspective: he never knew what it meant to be a husband, a lover, a guardian, a father, a grandfather, an active citizen, an ever-present friend.

NIETZSCHE'S LOVE OF ADVENTURE AND STRUGGLE

Nietzsche well knew the wanderer's solitude, and if he hadn't been a philosopher he might well have become a famous explorer, like Columbus. He had a strong case of intellectual wanderlust. He seemed to relish the prospect of sailing into the unknown, even sailing over the edge—if the edge is indeed really there, then it is a part of reality that must be acknowledged! His love of variety made him prefer polytheism to monotheism (GS, 143). He might have said with Goethe: "With all the manifold facets of my being, one way of thinking is not sufficient for me; as a poet and artist I am a polytheist, but a pantheist as a student of Nature, and either belief I hold with equal

determination. And if I need a divinity for my personal being, my moral existence—well, this need too is promptly cared for."

Creativity and adventure arise naturally out of Nietzsche's conception of the universe as chaos (GS, 109). You are challenged by chaos, not by cosmos, because cosmos needs no order. Chaos needs order, the ordering power of the artist, the creator. Nietzsche loved fluidity because chance is good and creative; you can exploit fluidity for your creativity. Every great man needs an opponent, and what opponent could be greater than cosmic disorder?

Nietzsche knew the history of philosophy rather well, and he could mention many thinkers who stopped short of the goal demanded by the principles they espoused. Courage seemed to him in short supply among history's thinkers; most seemed afraid to go over the edge. "History is full of the traces of men who have eluded their task" (WP, 510). Occam didn't really go all the way with his famous razor; Descartes refused to carry his systematic doubt far enough; Hume stopped philosophizing and played backgammon when it became impractical; Kant clung to his categories because of a moral prejudice; Strauss and Renan wouldn't press the implications of their Jesus history for fear of the still-powerful church. Few thinkers in history have had the pluck to shout, "The emperor has no clothes!"

Like many of his contemporaries, Nietzsche realized that he was living in a "moral interregnum," caught between two great philosophical paradigms. If you give up God, reason, and morality, you find yourself in complete darkness, do you not? Yet Nietzsche said, "Let's move forward anyway!" But how can you move in the dark? And besides, which way is forward? Nietzsche admitted the problem but insisted that life itself must become an experiment for the knower. Here, where he seems the most inconsistent (why not just kill yourself?) he also seems the most courageous. Like Abraham, he went out, not knowing where he was going. Like Leonardo da Vinci, a man he much admired, he didn't recoil at living in an unfinished house. Nihilism would have to be experienced before it could be conquered. In a note from 1888 he reminisced:

"Philosophy, as I have hitherto understood and lived it, is a voluntary quest for even the most detested and notorious sides of existence. From the long experience I gained from such a wandering through ice and wilderness, I learned to view differently all that had hitherto philosophized: the hidden history of philosophy, the psychology of its great names, came to light for me. "How much truth can a spirit endure, how much truth can a spirit dare?—this

became for me the real standard of value ... It is part of this state to perceive not merely the necessity of those sides of existence hitherto denied, but their desirability."

He wrote Brandes that he fancied the metaphor of the alchemist to describe his work, because he is "the one who changes something negligible or contemptible into something of value, even gold. He alone enriches, the others merely exchange. My task is quite singular this time: I've asked myself what mankind has always hated, feared, and despised the most-and precisely out of this I've made my 'gold.'"

There was a certain reckless streak of the explorer in Nietzsche, a trait he deliberately cultivated, we might say, in the interest of truth. He theorized recklessly at times; at the end of one aphorism suggesting some shocking possibilities, he exclaimed, "Excuse these extravagant reflections on all that may have been possible on earth" (13,113). He counseled men to live dangerously: "Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius!" (GS, 283). He reminds you of some romantics who worshipped the forces of nature and longed to become one with them. An incident in April 1866 illustrates this well. Nietzsche climbed to the top of a hill near Naumburg to watch an approaching storm; at the top he saw a man slaughtering two kids just before a terrific thunderstorm. He described the scene to Carl von Gersdorff:

"Yesterday a magnificent thunderstorm built up in the sky I hurried up a nearby hill The storm broke with tremendous force, gusting and hailing. I felt an incomparable upsurge, and realized that we actually understand nature only when we must fly to her to escape our cares and afflictions. What was man and his restless striving to me then! What was that endless, "Thou shalt," "Thou shalt not!" How different the lightning, the wind, the hail-sovereign powers, without ethics! How happy, how strong they are, pure will, unclouded by intellect!"

He also exhibited a strange, merry attitude toward natural disasters. During an earthquake that rattled Nice in 1887 he joked about the prospect of perishing: "How delightful when these old houses rattle over you like coffee-grinders! when the inkwell takes on a life of its own! when the streets fill up with terrified half-clothed figures, their nerves completely wrecked!" When the island of Krakatoa exploded in August 1883, he insisted that his friend read the news story aloud, shouting, "Two thousand human beings annihilated at a stroke! It's magnificent. This is how humanity should come to its end, how one day it may end." He insisted that he hoped the tidal wave set off by the eruption would reach Nice and wash him away.

Naturally, this adventuresome, reckless streak repelled some of Nietzsche's friends, like the phlegmatic Burckhardt, who upon reading *Daybreak* compared Nietzsche to a man scrambling up the steep granite fare of a high mountain, gradually compelling the gathering of admirers in the valley below. Many since his day have compared him to the mythological Icarus, son of Daedalus, who flew too close to the sun with his waxen wings. Closely related to this daredevil trait was Nietzsche's love of struggle.

Like Churchill, he relished a good fight. Like the horse in Job 29:25, "At the blast of the trumpet he snorts 'Aha!'" St. Paul said we should live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18), but Nietzsche ordered, "Live at war with your peers and yourselves!" (GS, 283) "I am warlike by nature. Attacking is one of my instincts" (EH, 1, 7). Strife is the perpetual food of the soul—a truth the Greeks learned in their history. The agon ("contest," the root of our word "agony") is the key to Greek greatness. **Every natural gift must develop itself by competition.** Heraditus, the dark sage of Ephesus, declared that "War is the father of all things." Those who, like the Christians, preach "peace of soul" as the ideal, only contribute to man's degeneration. Individuals and cultures that grow strong overcome some evil; therefore evil is a necessary foil for superior men. Strong people pursue danger because they grow stronger by overcoming it. "First principle: one must need to be strong—otherwise one will never become strong" (T, IX, 38). Nietzsche loved Napoleon for many reasons but especially because the Corsican had ushered in the "classical age" of war, which meant that "in Europe the man has again become master over the businessman and the philistine" (GS, 362).

But we must have a code for our warfare to guide the good knights of the pen and philosophy. Nietzsche spelled out his warrior code in four guidelines:

1. Attack only causes that are already victorious.
2. Attack only causes against which you could find no allies, so that you stand alone.
3. Attack movements, not persons, using the person only as a strong magnifying glass for the movement.
4. Attack things only when every personal quarrel is excluded, thus attacking out of good will. (EH, I, 7)

This is a high-sounding code, but the warrior didn't always live up to it. I do not think we could say that Nietzsche retained *respect* for (say) Christianity or the Germans, whom he flayed gloriously in several books. His attacks here were "a combination of resentment and self-glorification, hatred and benediction."

NIETZSCHE'S SENSE OF MISSION

Few thinkers in history have possessed Nietzsche's deep conviction that he had a destiny, a mission, to perform in life. He had always admired the great men of history and now, as his own thought matured, he became convinced that he was going to be one of the greatest, the equal of Socrates and Christ, a philosopher who would break history in two. "I am no man," he exulted, "I am dynamite." "One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous." He was going to bring about a "revaluation of all values," a "supreme self-examination on the part of humanity." Fate had made him the first decent human being: "I know myself to stand in opposition to the mendaciousness of millennia." He will start the great Ragnarok, and "there will be wars the like of which have never yet been seen on earth. It is only beginning with me that the earth knows *great politics*" (EH, IV, 1).

Nietzsche never hid his light under a bushel, confessing freely to his best friends his burning feeling of mission. He wrote to Malwida von Meyenburg, "I wish to force mankind to decisions which will determine its entire future-and it may yet happen that one day whole millennia will make their most solemn vows in my name." To Overbeck he insisted, "If I do not go so far that for thousands of years people will make their highest vows in my name, then I have achieved nothing, according to my own judgment." He admitted to Rohde that he needed a goal in life important beyond words, or else "I should not have been able to hold myself aloft in the light above the black floods. This is really my only excuse for the kind of literature I have been producing ever since 1875; it is my recipe, my self-concocted medium against disgust with life.

The burden of this mission was heavy. Like Jeremiah and many a prophet, he was almost crushed. He lived in the horror of seeing what no one else can see, like a person who has precognition of a murder. "Who has any idea," he asked Overbeck, "of the burden that weighs upon me and of the strength it takes to endure myself! I do not know why it should fall upon me of all people-but it may be that I am the first to light upon an idea which will divide the history of mankind in two It requires some courage to fare that

thought." Elisabeth had disdained his mission with a cutting remark: "It will be a fine lot of scum that believes in you!" Nietzsche responded:

"You have not the remotest conception of what it means to be most closely related to the man and to the destiny in whom the question of millennia has been decided – I hold, quite literally, the future of mankind in the palm of my hand. ... I play with the burden which would crush any other mortal. ... For what I have to do is *terrible*, in any sense of the word. ... whichever way the decision may go, *for* me or *against* me, in any case there attaches to my name a quantity of doom that is beyond telling."

Now that God is dead, Nietzsche must launch a giant "reclamation project." He will be bringing mankind a "restoration movement." He says it is a "great restorative" to know that there is no God, no cosmic purpose to which we are responsible. He called this "the innocence of becoming" and claimed that he was a missionary for this "cleaner idea." The cosmos is cleansed of all guilt, resentment, revenge, and punishment. "There is no being that could be held responsible for the fact that anyone exists at all, that anyone is thus and thus, that anyone was born in certain circumstances, in a certain environment-it is a tremendous restorative that such a being is lacking" (WP, 765). Like Marx and Feuerbach, Nietzsche will restore to man all those beautiful traits man developed but projected onto another world.

Just as Christ came into the world through an unusual pregnancy, so Nietzsche's child, the prophet of a new era, is being prepared in him. Is there a more holy condition than pregnancy, he asks? We mothers do many things for the sake of the baby we carry-we avoid anger and sharp contentions, anything to keep "it" safe. We do everything to keep our soul still, "so that our fruitfulness shall come to a happy fulfillment!" Pregnancy is therefore ideal selfishness; self-love is simultaneously other-love. There is no talk of "willing" or "creating," for the mother has utterly no notion of what will finally be produced. Furthermore, as we all know, "the pregnant are strange! So let us be strange too, and let us not hold it against others if they too have to be so! And even if the outcome is dangerous and evil; let us not be less reverential towards that which is coming to be than worldly justice is, which does not permit a judge or an executioner to lay hands on one who is pregnant!" (D, 552). Nietzsche realized that he was considered odd by most folks, and thus the pregnancy metaphor was a striking rationalization of his eccentricity.

Nietzsche had a deep need for recognition yet faced the tragedy that befell Cassandra-he disturbed people by telling them the truth but was never believed. His books didn't sell well; some he had to publish with his own

money. He wasn't recognized as soon as he wanted and thus became bitter, so bitter that he tended more and more to say that success in communication indicated that one communicated worthless things to worthless people. He, on the contrary, communicated high things to a few worthies. He gradually began to glory in the small number of his disciples, a classic case of sour grapes.

NIETZSCHE'S STYLE

Nietzsche's books stirred up a still-lively debate over whether he was really a great philosopher or just a great writer with a mediocre intellect. This debate is fueled largely by his style of both thinking and writing. A philosopher like Nietzsche comes along once in a few centuries. He is comparable to Plato in that he had an exceptional combination of *Dichtung* and *Wahrheit*, poetry and truth, reason and rhetoric, intellectual and artistic ability. Lou Salome saw this unique amalgam: "In Nietzsche there dwelt in continual warfare, side by side of one another and in turn tyrannizing over one another, a musician of high talent, a thinker with a free orientation, a religious genius, and a born poet"³

Nietzsche's style of reasoning distresses traditional philosophers. Most thinkers refuse to write until they have made up their minds and possess a coherent, systematic viewpoint. Nietzsche was unable to operate in this manner; he wrote because his thoughts had to come out, even if contradictory. Thinking comes from life; every truth is soaked in blood. Many readers do not consider him a true philosopher because he uses parables, fables, metaphors, aphorisms, and poetry. He flits around and skips premises; he fails to define properly; he uses key terms in two or three different senses. He sounds like a lay preacher in the ears of the professionals. He appears to depend on intuition more than on careful reasoning, on insight more than logic.

These charges are partly true and partly false but eventually irrelevant. There are both logic and intuition in Nietzsche's writings. He has the ability to place problems that are apparently coldly academic in a setting of great beauty and imagination. At times it might seem that he places all his hopes for truth in metaphors, but a careful, holistic reading will show this to be wrong. It shouldn't bother us if the source of Nietzsche's truth is intuition, just as long as he allows us to verify it in a logical process. "A poetical representation of reality," says Ofelia Schulte, "if it is to be accepted in the context of the totality of life, cannot separate itself or make itself immune from logical investigation and criticism."

Nietzsche felt that the greatest breakthroughs in knowledge of the ancient world came not from dry scholars who collected small facts but from the great spirits like Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Wagner, men who could

"divine" the spirit of antiquity. The best historians read the past through their own personal experiences. History has placed Nietzsche with this august company of great thinkers who can by some special faculty see the spirit of an era or a culture. Hollingdale suggests that the gift of intuition is not apprehension without reasoning but rather very rapid reasoning, so rapid that the thinker does not necessarily know how the process works. Slower thinkers must confirm this intuition by more discursive reasoning. Einstein, for example, knew some parts of relativity by intuition. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche demonstrated his intuitive grasp of Hellenic culture, which led to his discovery of the origins of Greek tragedy. His philological colleagues rejected this thesis at the time because they could not confirm his leap in reasoning. Yet Nietzsche is best when he is leaping; he is weakest when he tries to explain or defend his ideas scientifically. "Where you can guess," he explained, "you hate to deduce" (Z, III, 2:1).

All this means that Nietzsche is much more interesting to read than, say, Aquinas, Kant, Hegel, or Spinoza. He is one of the most skillful and impressive German prose writers in recent history. But this very virtue must put us on our guard from the outset; we must read him carefully and critically. He frequently appeals to suggestion, not logic. He can start a discussion with an unsupported leap, and before the reader knows it he is carried forward on a wave of metaphor and passionate prophecy. There is a great danger of being convinced by the artistic power of the presentation rather than by the evidence-like walking through the city of Rome and being so overwhelmed by the works of Michelangelo, Raphael, and Bernini that one impulsively joins the Roman Catholic Church!

Nietzsche's philosophy has a serious problem with internal contradictions, a condition that arose out of his experimental, exploratory imperative. He is so receptive to new horizons, to the varied possibilities of reality, that he is captured first by one viewpoint and then by another. Of Nietzsche one might say what Byron wrote of Friedrich Schlegel, that "he always seems on the verge of meaning and, lo, he goes down like the sunset, or melts like the rainbow, leaving a rather rich confusion." Studying Nietzsche is like trying to mount a running horse. He paints a canvas and then washes it clean again. He probably would have liked Walt Whitman's response to this objection: "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself. (I am large. I contain multitudes.)" Or Nietzsche would say that he sees out of many eyes, from many perspectives. "I loved to look now out of this window, now out of that" (WP, 410).

Nietzsche felt that the "will to system" was a sign of intellectual dishonesty. Pedantic thinkers expect reality to be pedantic also. Convictions are prisons, and a giant philosophical system like that of Hegel is the cruelest prison of all. The systematic thinker tries to solve everything at a stroke, with a single word; he tries to resolve all questions with a single principle, which is why the image of the Gordian knot or the egg of Columbus is a favorite with systematizers. They want to be the "unriddlers of the world" and consequently they show contempt for slow, single questions and single experiments (D, 547).

Critics charge that Nietzsche never possessed the ability to finish a deep, protracted examination of any problem. This charge is largely true, though he was planning an extensive, systematic work when his mind crumbled. Even so, he defended his piecemeal approach by saying that some problems must be tackled swiftly if at all. "I approach deep problems like cold baths: quickly into them and quickly out again." If you object that serious problems need protracted analysis, he replies that "there are truths that are singularly shy and ticklish and cannot be caught except suddenly—that must be surprised or left alone" (GS, 381).

Strange, but with all his antisystem thunder, Nietzsche did eventually have a somewhat coherent pattern of thought not as coherent as Hegel's, of course, but far more than a jumble of disparate ideas. It was in the last year of his sanity that he slowly began to see this unity. It was, however, more organic than a logical unity; it was the growth of a person, not just of an idea, of a life, not just an intellectual system. In May 1888, he told Brandes that he had begun to perceive the overall unity in his philosophical system.

In our age of Existentialism, people are not much bothered by all of Nietzsche's contradictions. To ask Friedrich Nietzsche to be orderly is like asking an earthquake to be orderly. Life is not perfectly consistent, and any philosophy anchored in life will have some ragged edges; it will not necessarily resemble a Dutch flower garden. We shall have occasion to discuss some of Nietzsche's serious contradictions, but we cannot suppress a secret admiration for the man who can exclaim, "Damn the contradictions! Full speed ahead!" Nietzsche is a soul on fire, an emotional thinker spilling his guts on paper for all the world to read. You may accuse him of many things, but you probably won't accuse him of being uninteresting.
