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The Need for Small Doses:
Nietzsche, Fanaticism, and Epicureanism

Keith Ansell-Pearson

...our object should be our own healing (Epicurus, 1993: 83)

Not the bare necessities, not desire – no, the love of power is humanity's
demon (Nietzsche, Dawn 262).

Introduction

Dawn (1881) is an important but neglected moment in Nietzsche's intellectual development. Read productively in recent years as an exercise in naturalism (see Clark and Leiter 1997) or an anticipation of phenomenology (see Safranski 2002), I am interested in the text as a work of ethical resistance. It is an avowedly anti-revolution work in which Nietzsche seeks to sever the enlightenment from revolution and to promote a philosophy of the morning based on "slow cures" (D 462) and "small doses" (D 534). In his middle period (and especially 1879-82) he displays a preference for individual therapy and self-cultivation over political revolution. In Dawn Nietzsche explicitly writes against impatient political invalids and argues instead in favour of "small doses" as a way of bringing about change (D 534). He is of the view that the last attempt in Europe at a transformation of evaluations, and specifically with regards to political matters, namely, the Great Revolution, "was nothing more than a pathetic and bloody quackery..." (D 534) Nietzsche is an admirer of the critical and rationalist spirit of the Enlightenment, of both the eighteenth-century version, as we find it in the likes of Voltaire and Lessing, and earlier incarnations, such as we find it in the likes of Epicurus, Petrarch, and Erasmus (see Martin 2008).¹ He is hostile to the French Revolution throughout his writings and seeks to sever the link between enlightenment and revolution because he

suspects that revolution breeds fanaticism and is a throwback to a lower stage of culture. He does not deny that revolutions can be a source of vital energy for a humanity that has grown feeble, but he contests the idea that it can work as an organizer and perfecter of human nature. The task, he says, is to continue the work of the Enlightenment in each and every individual but also “to strangle the Revolution at birth” and ensure it does not happen:

This Enlightenment we must now carry on – unperturbed that there has existed a “great Revolution” and then again a “great reaction” against it, that indeed both still exist: they are, after all, the mere ripple of waves in comparison to the truly great tide in which we surge and want to surge! (D 197)

In the book Nietzsche is addressing what he calls “our current, stressed, power-thirsty society (machtdürstigen Gesellschaft) in Europe and America” (D 271), and seeks to draw attention to the different ways in which the “feeling of power” is gratified through both individual and collective forms of agency (see D 184). At this stage in his thinking this is what he means by “grand politics” (grossen Politik), in which the “mightiest tide” driving forward individuals, masses, and nations is “the need for the feeling of power” (Machtgefühls) (D 189). Sometimes this assumes the form of the “pathos-ridden language of virtue”, and although Nietzsche has a concern over the fanatical elements of a politics of virtue, his main concern at this time is that such behaviour gives rise to the unleashing of “a plethora of squandering, sacrificing, hoping...over-audacious, fantastical instincts...” that are then utilized by ambitious princes to start up wars. (D 179) As one commentator points out, Nietzsche first introduces his infamous notion of power into his writings not as a metaphysical truth or as a normative principle, but as a hypothesis of psychology that seeks to explain the origins and development of the various cultural forms that human beings have fashioned in order to deal with their vulnerability or lack of power (Ure 2009: 63). As

Nietzsche points out in Dawn, in the development of human history the feeling of powerlessness has been extensive and is responsible for the creation of both superstitious rituals as well as cultural forms such as religion and metaphysics (D 23). The feeling of fear and powerlessness has been in state of “perpetual excitation” for so long a time that the actual feeling of power has developed to incredibly subtle degrees and levels and has, in fact, become our “strongest inclination” (D 23). We can safely say, he thinks, that the methods discovered to create this feeling constitute the history of culture (Cultur).

Today, Nietzsche notes, although the means of the appetite for power have altered the same volcano still burns: what was formerly done for the sake of God is now done for the sake of money, “for the sake of that which now imparts to the highest degree the feeling of power and a good conscience” (D 204). Nietzsche, therefore, attacks the upper classes for giving themselves over to “sanctioned fraud” and that has “the stock exchange and all forms of speculation on its conscience” (D 204). What troubles him about this terrible craving for and love of accumulated money is that it once again gives rise, albeit in a new form, to “that fanaticism (Fanatismus) of the appetite for power (Machtgelüsten) that formerly was ignited by the conviction of being in possession of the truth” (D 204)

Through his psychological probing of the “fantastical instincts” and of the need for the feeling of power Nietzsche is led to cultivate scepticism about politics in Dawn and favours instead a programme of therapeutic self-cultivation. He favours, for example, the cultivation of “personal wisdom” over any allegiances one might have to party politics (D 183). Moreover, as he says at one point in the book, we need to be honest with ourselves and know ourselves extremely well if we are to practice towards others “that philanthropic dissimulation that goes by the name of love and kindness” (D 335). Nietzsche ultimately favours a project of free-minded social transformation in which small groups of free spirits will practice experimental lives, sacrifice themselves for the superior health of future

generations, endeavour to get beyond their compassion, promote “universal interests”, and seek to “strengthen and elevate the general feeling of human power...” (D 146) Although it is impossible to avoid generating suffering in the promotion of these new universal interests through experimental free-minded modes of living, the means to be practised for the sublimated attainment of human power are primarily “ethical”, involving persuasion and temptation and requiring the setting up of new forms of pedagogy. I shall explore some of these aspects of Nietzsche’s teaching in what follows.

“Our age”, Nietzsche writes at one point in the text, “no matter how much it talks and talks about economy, is a squanderer: it squanders what is most precious, spirit” (D 179). Nietzsche succinctly articulates his concern in the following manner: “Political and economic affairs are not worthy of being the enforced concern of society’s most gifted spirits: such a wasteful use of the spirit is at bottom worse than having none at all” (D 179). Today, he goes on to note, everyone feels obliged to know what is going on every day to the point of neglecting their own work or therapy and in order to feel part of things, and “the whole arrangement has become a great and ludicrous piece of insanity” (D 179). The therapy Nietzsche is proposing in Dawn is, then, directed at those free spirits who exist on the margin or fringes of society and seek to cultivate or fashion new ways of thinking and feeling, attempting to do this by taking the time necessary to work through their experiences.

There are two main aspects of Dawn I wish to illuminate in this essay: first, that of fanaticism, and second, that of Nietzsche’s Epicureanism, which is often taken to be an apolitical philosophy. The aim is to show that although Nietzsche is an astute observer of social and political developments taking place in his time, his project is primarily one of ethical reformation.

Nietzsche and Fanaticism

In his middle period writings Nietzsche is committed to a philosophical therapeutics in which the chief aim is to cool down the human mind. In part, he conceives the art of the maxim in therapeutic terms. The modern age has forgotten the art of reflection or observation, in which it is possible to gather maxims “from the thorniest and least gratifying stretches of our lives” so as to make ourselves feel better, to give ourselves a lift and a tonic. We can return to life revived rather than depressed from our encounter with thorny problems, and with “presence of mind in difficult situations and amusement in tedious surroundings”. There is a need, therefore, for modern spirits to learn how to derive pleasure from the art of the maxim, from its construction to its tasting. Nietzsche notes that it is virtually impossible to say whether the inquiry into the “human, all too human” will work more as a blessing than a curse to the welfare of humanity; at any rate, and for the time being, the issue is undecided (HH 38). He further notes that because science, like nature, does not aim at final ends, any fruitfulness in the way or promoting the welfare of humanity will be the result of science’s attaining something purposeful without having willed it. But where science is needed now, as part of general therapeutic practice of reflection and observation, is in cooling down the human mind: “shouldn’t we, the more spiritual human beings of an age that is visibly catching fire in more and more places, have to grasp all available means for quenching and cooling, so that we will remain at least as steady...and moderate as we are now...” (HH 38) The illnesses and neuroses we encounter in humanity require that “ice-packs” be placed on them (ibid.).

It is important to Nietzsche that his words are not those of a “fanatic”, that there is no “preaching”, and with no “faith” being demanded; rather, he is keen to write and philosophize in terms of what he calls a “delicate slowness” (EH Foreword; see also D Preface 5). In Ecce Homo he prides himself on his non-fanatical nature: “you will not find a trace of fanaticism

in my being” (EH “Why I am so clever”, 10). This “non-fanatical” Nietzsche emerges, or comes to the fore, in the middle period texts. We live in fanatical times for Nietzsche and fanaticism is to be understood as ranging across religion, morality, and philosophy.² Our attachment to “fanatical” ideas include: the idea that there is a single moral-making morality; the idea that true life is to be found in self-abandonment; and the idea that there are definitive, final truths. Nietzsche is a critic of all three ideas. At their core, then, the texts of Nietzsche’s middle period are parts of an enlightenment project that aims to work against all expressions of fanaticism, especially religious and moral and political, and in an effort to temper emotional and mental excess.³ Epicureanism, as we shall see, plays a key role in this project.

That fanaticism is a major concern of Nietzsche’s is made explicit in the 1886 preface to Dawn, where he also writes as a teacher of slow reading and a friend of lento. In it Nietzsche exposes the seductions of morality, claiming that it knows how to “inspire” or “enthuse” (begeistern); and with his attempt to render the ground for “majestic moral edifices” level and suitable for construction Kant set himself a “rapturous” or “enthusiastic goal” (schwärmerischen Absicht), one that makes him a true son of his century - a century which more than any other, Nietzsche stresses, can fairly be called “the century of “rapturous enthusiasm” or, indeed, “fanaticism” (Schwärmerei). Although Kant sought to keep enthusiasm (Enthusiasmus) and fanaticism (Schwärmerei) separate, Nietzsche is claiming that there is in his moral philosophy what Alberto Toscano has called a “ruse of transcendence”, or the return of universally binding abstract precepts and authorities that are beyond the domain of human and natural relations (Toscano 2010: 120-1). Nietzsche’s critical point is that Kant betrayed the cause of reason by positing a “moral realm” that cannot be assailed by reason. Indeed, Nietzsche holds that Kant was bitten by the “tarantula of morality Rousseau” and so “he too held in the very depths of his soul the idea of moral

fanaticism (moralischen Fanatismus) whose executor yet another disciple of Rousseau's, namely, Robespierre, felt and confessed himself to be..." (D Preface 3) Although he partakes of this "Frenchified fanaticism" (Franzosen-Fanatismus) Kant remains decidedly German for Nietzsche – he is said to be "thorough" and "profound" - in his positing of a "logical 'Beyond'", a "non-demonstrable world", so as to create a space for the "moral realm".⁴

The morality that humanity has cultivated and dedicated itself to is one of "enthusiastic devotion" and "self-sacrifice" in which it looks down from sublime heights on the more sober morality of self-control (which is regarded as egotistical). Nietzsche suggests that the reason why morality has been developed in this way is owing to the enjoyment of the state of intoxication that has stemmed from the thought that the person is at one with the powerful being to whom it consecrates itself; in this way the feeling of power is enjoyed and is confirmed by a sacrifice of the self. For Nietzsche, of course, such an overcoming of the human self is impossible: "In truth you only seem to sacrifice yourselves; instead, in your thoughts you transform yourselves into gods and take pleasure in yourselves as such" (D 215). Activities of self-sacrifice serve to intensify the feeling of power as one of the key needs of human life and are not to be taken at face value; this means that the sacrifice of the self is an appearance in which the value of the act resides in the pleasure one derives from it. In his consideration of intoxication, visions, trance, and so on, Nietzsche is, then, dealing with the problem of fanaticism that preoccupies him in his middle and late periods (D 57-8, 68, 204, 298; see also AOM 15; BGE 10; GS 347; AC 11, 54). As he notes, such "enthusiasts" or fanatics (Schwärmer) will seek to implant the faith in intoxication as "as being that which is actually living in life: a dreadful faith!" (D 50) Such is the extent of Nietzsche's anxiety that he wonders whether humanity as a whole will one day perish by its "spiritual fire-waters" and those who keep alive the desire for them. The "strange madness of moral judgements" is bound up with states of exaltation (Erhebung) and "the most exalted

language” (D 189). Nietzsche is advising us to be on our guard, to be vigilant as philosophers against, “the half-mad, the fantastic, the fanatical (fanatischer)”, including so-called human beings of genius who claim to have “visions” and to have seen things others do not see. We are to be cautious, not credulous, when confronted with the claims of visions, that is to say he adds, “of a profound mental disturbance...” (D 66)

In criticising fanaticism Nietzsche largely has in mind the Christian religion (though one also suspects he has Wagner in mind when he critically addresses genius). Christianity has brought into the world “a completely new and unlimited imperilment”, creating new securities, enjoyments, recreations, and evaluations. Although we moderns may be in the process of emancipating ourselves from such an imperilment we keep dragging into our existence the old habits associated with these securities and evaluations, even into our noblest arts and philosophies (D 57). Nietzsche holds that in wanting to return to the affects “in their utmost grandeur and strength” – for example, as love of God, fear of God, fanatical faith in God, and so on - Christianity represents a popular protest against philosophy and he appeals to the ancient sages against it since they advocated the triumph of reason over the affects (D 58).

As we have seen, in the preface to Dawn Nietzsche accuses Kant of fanaticism and claims that he was bitten by Rousseau, that “tarantula of morality” (D Preface 3).⁵ However, although he criticises the Kantian legacy in moral philosophy he is, in fact, close to Kant on a number of points. We can note the following: for Kant, (a) the task of the Enlightenment is to be perpetual⁶; and (b) revolution cannot produce a genuine reform in our modes of thinking but only result in new prejudices.⁷ Where he thinks Kant is inconsistent is with respect to his ambition of imposing the demands of a universalist morality upon humanity. For Nietzsche we simply lack enough knowledge to morally legislate for individuals, let alone for humanity as a whole, and this insight forms a crucial part of his independent

enlightenment project. Nietzsche contends, first, that the moral precepts directed at individuals are not, in fact, aimed at promoting their happiness; second, that such precepts are also not, in fact, concerned with the “happiness and welfare of humanity”. Here his concern is that we simply have words to which it is virtually impossible to attach definite concepts, “let alone to utilize them as a guiding star on the dark ocean of moral aspirations” (D 108). We cannot even appeal to evolution since “Evolution does not desire happiness; it wants evolution and nothing more” (D 108). Mankind lacks a universally recognized goal, so it is thus both irrational and frivolous to inflict upon humanity the demands of morality. Nietzsche does not rule out the possibility of recommending a goal that lies in humanity’s discretion, but this is something that for him lies in the distant future. There is much critical working through and enlightenment undermining to be done first.

Nietzsche’s stance contra revolution and on moral fanaticism – the objects he singles out for attack in the 1886 preface to Dawn – is part of an established tradition in German thought dating back to the 1780s and 1790s (for insight see La Vopa 1998: 90-91, 103-4). Although Nietzsche especially criticises Kant in the preface to the text he fails to consider in any serious or fair-minded way Kant’s position on morality and revolution, and he has nothing to say on Kant’s own critical position on the issue of fanaticism. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines fanaticism as “excessive enthusiasm”, especially in religious matters. Enthusiasm here is to be understood as “rapturous intensity of a feeling on behalf of a cause or a person” (see Passmore 2003: 212). This is part of Nietzsche’s understanding of fanaticism and informs his critique of it. As such, he is perhaps closer to the likes of Locke and Hume than he is to Kant: where Locke and Hume critique enthusiasm, identifying it with what we would today call fanaticism, Kant is careful in some of his writings to distinguish between enthusiasm (Enthusiasmus) and fanaticism (Schwärmerei): where enthusiasm functions as a sign of a moral tendency in humanity, the pious fanatic has otherworldly

intuitions.⁸ Kant thus locates fanaticism (Schwärmerei) in the “raving of reason” and “the delusion of wanting to SEE something beyond all bounds of sensibility”.⁹ Kant is looking for evidence of a “historical sign”, such as resides in an event (e.g. the French Revolution), that might indicate that man has the power of being the cause or author of his own improvement (Kant 1991: 181). However, Kant is acutely aware of not being dogmatic here, that is, we cannot have too high an expectation of human beings in their progressive improvements less our aspirations turn into “the fantasies of an overheated mind” (Kant 1991: 188). Of course, this does not save Kant completely from the charge of “moral fanaticism” (see La Vopa 1998: 105-6, 108-9), but it does serve to indicate something of the complexity of his position.

Ultimately, Nietzsche and Kant diverge owing to the fact that they each have a different conception of what makes for signs of our “moral maturity”. For Kant this resides not simply in our being “civilized” or “cultivated” and other semblance of morality, but in our “cosmopolitan” achievement and sense of moral purposiveness. For Nietzsche by contrast we stand in need of liberation from the “fanatical” presumptions of morality. There is a need to recognize our ethical complexity, for example, that it is naïve to posit a strict separation of egoistic and altruistic drives and actions, and that it is equally naïve to assume a unitary self that is completely transparent to itself. So what, in Nietzsche’s eyes, makes for moral maturity? It is a question and task of modesty and for Nietzsche, as he makes clear in the preface to Dawn, the attack on “morality” is based on a struggle for “more modest words” (bescheidenere Worte) (D Preface 4). For Nietzsche we simply lack the knowledge into moral matters that “morality” presumes, and for him this necessitates experimentalism in the domain of ethical life. For example, it is necessary to contest the idea that there is a single moral-making morality since every code of ethics that affirms itself in an exclusive manner “destroys too much valuable energy and costs humanity much too dearly” (D 164). In the future, he hopes, the inventive and fructifying person shall no longer be sacrificed and

“numerous novel experiments shall be made in ways of life and modes of society” (ibid). When this takes place we will find that an enormous load of guilty conscience has been purged from the world. Humanity has suffered for too long from teachers of morality who wanted too much all at once and sought to lay down precepts for everyone (D 194). In the future, care will need to be given to the most personal questions and create time for them (D 196). Small individual questions and experiments are no longer to be viewed with contempt and impatience (D 547). Contra “morality”, then, he holds that we ourselves are experiments and our task should be to want to be such. We are to build anew the laws of life and of behaviour by taking from the sciences of physiology, medicine, sociology, and solitude the foundation-stones for new ideals if not the new ideals themselves (D 453). As these sciences are not yet sure of themselves we find ourselves living in either a preliminary or a posterior existence, depending on our taste and talent, and in this interregnum the best strategy is for us to become our own reges (sovereigns) and establish small experimental states. Nietzsche’s model for the practice of self-cultivation is Epicurus’s garden. Let me now turn to illuminating the nature of his Epicurean commitments.

Nietzsche and Epicureanism

It seems clear that at this time Nietzsche sought to found a philosophical school modelled on Epicurus’s garden. Epicureanism is typically received as an anti-political philosophy. In contrast to the Stoics who philosophised in the agora of Athens, never far from the public eye, Epicurus and his followers conducted philosophy in a garden which bore the injunction “live unnoticed”. Another injunction was “do not get involved in political life” (see Clay 2009: 16). The school took the form of a community of friends who lived within the walls of the garden and worked together, studying under Epicurus, writing philosophical works, and growing their own food: going against the mores of the time it was open to both slaves and

women. So, the school was a community based on friendship and friendship was considered by the Epicureans to be the most important thing of all. As one commentator has written:

Members of the school were actively engaged in self-improvement and the improvement of others by mutual admonition and correction. The aim was to inculcate goodwill, gratitude, respect for wisdom, self-control, frankness, openness and moderation in all things. Arrogance, greed, jealousy, boastfulness, and anger were faults to be removed by gentle correction rather than by coercion or punishment (Campbell 2010: 222).

The ideal mental state to attain for the Epicurean is ataraxia (freedom from disturbances or imperturbability), and to achieve this the philosopher has to withdraw from the disturbances of everyday life as much as possible, including public affairs which are seen as a particular cause of mental disquiet and disturbance.¹⁰ Although Nietzsche has his own independent reasons for shunning politics he does have a concern with self-care and self-healing in his middle period that influences his judgement about politics. Nietzsche appropriates Epicurean teaching for the ends of an ethical reformation and a philosophical therapeutics. He shows little interest in Epicurean atomism and he does not look to Epicurus, as did the early Marx, for a doctrine of freedom in which the swerve breaks with the bonds of fate (Marx 1975).

At this time, then, Nietzsche is inspired by Epicurus's conception of friendship and the ideal of withdrawing from society and cultivating one's own garden.¹¹ He likes to refer to his project as 'My Epicurean garden' (KSB 5, 460). Like Epicurus, Nietzsche's philosophical therapy is in search of pupils and disciples: "What I envy in Epicurus are the disciples in his garden; in such circumstances one could certainly forget noble Greece and more certainly still ignoble Germany!" (ibid.: p. 436) In The Gay Science Nietzsche advises free spirits to:

Live in seclusion so that you can live for yourself. Live in ignorance about what seems most important to your age...the clamor of today, the noise of wars and revolutions should be a mere murmur for you. You will also wish to help – but only those whose distress you understand entirely because they share with you one suffering and one hope – your friends – and only in the manner in which you help yourself. I want to make them bolder, more persevering, simpler, gayer (GS 338).

For Nietzsche, Epicurus's teaching can show us how to quieten our being and so help to temper a human mind that is prone to neurosis. If philosophical therapeutics is centred on a concern with the healing of our own lives so as to return us to the joy of existing (Hadot 1995: p. 87), then in the texts of his middle period, including Dawn, Nietzsche can be seen to be an heir to this ancient tradition. The difference is that he is developing a therapy for the sicknesses of the soul under modern conditions of social control and discipline. Nevertheless, it is the case that Nietzsche at this time is seeking to revive an ancient conception of philosophy. In a note from 1881 he states that he considers the various moral schools of antiquity to be “experimental laboratories” containing a number of recipes for the art of living (Kunstgriffen der Lebensklugheit: literally “artifices for worldly wisdom”) and holds that these experiments now belong to us as our legitimate property: “we shall not hesitate to adopt a Stoic recipe just because we have profited in the past from Epicurean recipes” (KSA 9, 15 [59]).

In Dawn Epicurus is portrayed as the enemy of the idea of punishments in Hell after death, which was developed by numerous secret cults of in the Roman Empire and was taken up by Christianity. For Nietzsche the triumph of Epicurus's teaching resounds most beautifully in the mouth of the sombre Roman Lucretius but comes too early. Christianity takes the belief in “subterranean terrors” under its special protection and this foray into heathendom enables it to carry the day over the popularity of the Mithras and Isis cults, winning to its side the rank of the timorous as the most zealous adherents of the new faith

(Nietzsche notes that because of the extent of the Jews' attachment to life such an idea fell on barren ground). However, the teaching of Epicurus triumphs anew in the guise of modern science which has rejected "any other representation of death and any life beyond it" (D 72; for further insight see Rempel 2012). Nietzsche, then, is keen to encourage human beings to cultivate an attitude towards existence in which they accept their mortality and attain a new serenity about their dwelling on the earth, to conquer unjustified fears, and to reinstitute the role played by chance and chance events in the world and in human existence (D 13, 33, 36). As Hadot notes, for the Epicurean sage the world is the product of chance, not divine intervention, and this brings with it pleasure and peace of mind, freeing him from an unreasonable fear of the gods and allowing him to consider each moment as an unexpected miracle. Each moment of existence can be greeted with immense gratitude (Hadot 1995: 252).

In his middle period writings Nietzsche confesses to having dwelled like Odysseus in the underworld and says that he will often be found there again. As a "sacrificer" who sacrifices so as to talk to the dead he states that there are four pairs of thinkers from whom he will accept judgement, and Epicurus and Montaigne make up the first pair he mentions (AOM 408).¹² Epicurus, along with Epictetus, is revered as a thinker in whom wisdom assumes bodily form (AOM 224). Indeed, Nietzsche admits at this time to being inspired by the example of Epicurus whom he calls one of the greatest human beings to have ever graced the earth and the inventor of a "heroic-idyllic mode of philosophizing" (WS 295). It is heroic because overcomings or conquests are involved, such as the fear of death, and idyllic obviously because Epicurus philosophised, serenely and away from crowd, in a garden. In The Wanderer and his Shadow Nietzsche describes Epicurus as "the soul-soother (Seelen-Beschwichtiger) of later antiquity" who had the wonderful insight that to quieten our being it is not necessary to have resolved the ultimate and outermost theoretical questions (WS 7). To

those who are tormented by the fear of the gods, one points out that if the gods exist they do not concern themselves with us and that it is unnecessary to engage in fruitless disputation over the ultimate question as to whether they exist or not. Furthermore, in response to the consideration of a hypothesis, half belonging to physics and half to ethics, and that may cast gloom over our spirits, it is wise to refrain from refuting the hypothesis and instead offer a rival hypothesis, even a multiplicity of hypotheses. To someone who wishes to offer consolation – for example, to the unfortunate, to ill-doers, to hypochondriacs, and so on – one can call to mind two pacifying formulae of Epicurus that are capable of being applied to many questions: “firstly, if that is how things are they do not concern us; secondly, things may be thus but they may also be otherwise” (WS 7). The concern with a cooling down of the human spirit continues in Dawn where Nietzsche’s anxiety over the spread of fanaticism – especially of moral and religious thinking - is made more explicit (see D 50). Epicurean philosophy can play a key role here. Along with science in general, it serves to make us “colder and more sceptical,” helping to cool down “the fiery stream of belief in ultimate definitive truths,” a stream that has grown so turbulent through Christianity (HH 244).

Taken as a whole, Dawn perhaps represents Nietzsche’s most avowedly Epicurean moment. It is an attempt to revitalise for a modern age ancient philosophical concerns, notably a teaching for mortal souls who wish to be liberated from the fear and anguish of existence, as well as from God, the metaphysical need, and are able to affirm their mortal conditions of existence. Here one might adopt Hadot’s insight into the therapeutic ambitions of ancient philosophy which was, he claims, “intended to cure mankind’s anguish” (for example, anguish over our mortality) (Hadot 1995: 265-6). This is evident in the teaching of Epicurus which sought to demonstrate the mortality of the soul and whose aim was, in the words of a recent commentator, “to free humans from ‘the fears of the mind’” (Wilson 2008: 7). Similarly, Nietzsche’s teaching in Dawn is for mortal souls (see D 501). Dawn occupies a

special place in Nietzsche's development because it's with this work, he stresses in Ecce Homo, that there begins in earnest his "campaign against morality", although he adds that here – and this is important – we should not detect the whiff of gunpowder but smell something quite different and much sweeter. Although at this time Nietzsche is in favour of free-minded and progressive social transformation, he is no advocate of revolution: the process of change should be one of administering the means to change in the smallest doses and unremittingly over long periods of time, and indeed in Dawn we find Nietzsche outlining a therapy made up of "slow cures" (D 462) and "small doses" (D 534). If Nietzsche wants his readers to achieve a free-mindedness with respect to religion (D 96), the same is also the case with morality, for example, relinquishing the idea that there is a simple "definition" of morality and embracing the idea that there is no single moral-making morality.

Nietzsche's Epicureanism in Dawn is perhaps most evident in the way he mounts his polemic against morality. The campaign centres largely on a critique of what Nietzsche sees as the modern tendency, the tendency of his own century, to identify morality with the sympathetic affects, especially Mitleid, so as to give us a "definition" of morality. Nietzsche has specific arguments against the value accorded to these affects, but he also wants to advocate the view that there are several ways of living morally or ethically and the morality he wants to defend is what we can call an ethics of self-cultivation. In Ecce Homo Nietzsche further reveals that Dawn is an enlightenment text that seeks to pour out its light and delicacy over nothing but bad things and to restore to them their good conscience, such as cultivating a rich and healthy egoism. Throughout Dawn, Nietzsche operates with several critical conceptions of morality. He is keen to attack the view that everything that exists has a connection with morality and thus a moral significance can be projected onto the world (D 3, 90, 100, 197, 563). He voices an opposition to both "picturesque morality" (D141) and "petty bourgeois morality" (D 146), and speaks of his own "audacious morality" (verwegenen

Moralität) (D 432). With regards to the modern prejudice, which is one of the main foci of his polemic in the book, here there is the presumption that we know “what actually constitutes morality”: “It seems to do every single person good these days to hear that society is on the road to adapting the individual to fit the needs of the throng and that the individual’s happiness as well as his sacrifice consist in feeling himself to be a useful member of the whole...” (D 132) As Nietzsche sees it, then, the modern emphasis is on defining the moral in terms of the sympathetic affects and compassion (Mitleid). We can, he thinks, explain the modern in terms of a movement towards managing more cheaply, safely, and uniformly individuals in terms of “large bodies and their limbs”. This, he says, is “the basic moral current of our age”: “Everything that in some way supports both this drive to form bodies and limbs and its abetting drives is felt to be good...” (D 132)

For Nietzsche, then, the principal prejudice that holds sway in the Europe of his day is that the sympathetic affects define the essence of the moral, such as actions deemed to be congenial, disinterested, of general utility, and so on. He also thinks we are busy building a society of “security” in which the chief goal is to protect individuals from various hazards of life and so reduce human suffering and conflict. In Dawn Nietzsche’s focus is not, as is widely supposed, on Christianity as the religion of pity or compassion – he maintains that until the eighteenth century such a virtue was a subsidiary and nonessential aspect of this religion. The view that morality means nothing other than disinterested, useful, and congenial actions is the residuum of Christian sentiments once the strictly egotistical, foundational belief in the importance of eternal personal salvation, and the dogmas on which this belief rested, receded and there then came into the foreground ancillary beliefs in love and love thy neighbour which harmonized with ecclesiastical charity. There emerges in modernity a cult of love for humanity and the idea of surpassing the Christian ideal became, “a secret spur of

all French freethinkers from Voltaire through to August Comte”, for example, the latter’s moral formula of “vivre pour autrui” (live for others) (D 132).

Nietzsche’s main target in the book, then, is what he sees as the fundamental tendency of modern commercial society and its attempt at a “collectivity-building project that aims at disciplining bodies and selves and integrating them into a uniform whole” (Ure 2006: p. 88 note 45). Here “morality” denotes the means of adapting the individual to the needs of the whole, making him a useful member of society. This requires that every individual is made to feel, as its primary emotion, a connectedness or bondedness with the whole, with society, in which anything truly individual is regarded as prodigal, costly, inimical, extravagant, and so on. In response to developments in commercial society he has the worry that genuine individuality and a healthy concern with self-fashioning will be sacrificed and this, in large part, informs his critique of what he sees as the cult of sympathetic affects within modernity and directs his project of ethical reformation. In place of what he sees as the ruling ethic of sympathy, which he thinks can assume the form of a tyrannical encroachment, Nietzsche invites individuals to engage in self-fashioning, cultivating a self that others can look at with pleasure, and here the allusion to Epicurus and his mode of living is made explicit:

Moral fashion of a commercial society – Behind the fundamental principle of the contemporary moral fashion: “moral actions are generated by sympathy (Sympathie) for others”, I see the work of a collective drive toward timidity masquerading behind an intellectual front: this drive desires...that life be rid of all the dangers it once held and that each and every person should help toward this end with all one’s might: therefore only actions aimed at the common security and at society’s sense of security may be accorded the rating “good!” – How little pleasure people take in themselves these days, however, when such a tyranny of timidity dictates to them the uppermost moral law (Sittengesetz), when, without so much as a protest, they let themselves be commanded to ignore and look beyond themselves and yet have eagle-eyes for every distress and every suffering existing elsewhere! Are we not, with this prodigious intent to grate off all the rough and sharp edges from life, well on the way to turning humanity into sand?...In the meantime, the question itself remains open as to whether

one is more useful to another by immediately and constantly leaping to his side and helping him – which can, in any case, only transpire very superficially, provided the help doesn't turn into a tyrannical encroachment and transformation – or by fashioning out of oneself something the other will behold with pleasure, a lovely, peaceful, self-enclosed garden, for instance, with high walls to protect against the dangers and dust of the roadway, but with a hospitable gate as well (D 174).

Nietzsche appears to have been exposed to the term “commercial society” from his reading of Taine’s history of English literature (Taine 1906, p. 191).¹³ As one commentator notes, those who favoured commercial society, such as the French *philosophes*, including thinkers such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, held that by “establishing bonds among people and making life more comfortable, commerce softens and refines people’s manners and promotes humaneness and civility” (Rasmussen 2008, p. 18). It is clear that in the aphorism I have just cited Nietzsche is expressing an anxiety that other nineteenth century social analysts, such as Tocqueville, have, namely, that market-driven atomization and de-individuation can readily lead to a form of communitarian tyranny (see Ure 2006: 82). Unknown to ourselves we live within the effect of general opinions about “the human being”, which is a “bloodless abstraction” and “fiction” (D 105). Even the modern glorification of work and talk of its blessings can be interpreted as a fear of everything individual. The subjection to hard industriousness from early until late serves as “the best policeman” since it keeps everyone in bounds and hinders the development of reason, desire, and the craving for independence. It uses vast amounts of nervous energy which could be given over to reflection, brooding, dreaming, loving and hating and working through our experiences: “...a society in which there is continuous hard work will have more security: and security is currently worshipped as the supreme divinity” (D 173).

Nietzsche’s ethical commitment is clear from his articulation of it in Dawn 179: a pleasure and care of self that strives for independence and self-sufficiency. One does not

isolate oneself from others, but neither does one seek to effect a tyrannical encroachment on them. Instead, one offers a “hospitable gate” through which others can freely enter and leave, and through self-cultivation one fashions a style of existing that others will behold with pleasure. As Michael Ure has helpfully shown, in opposition to the desert of undifferentiated atoms offered by modern commercial culture Nietzsche provides the image of an oasis and one that depicts neither the past glories of Homeric agonism nor the resplendent isolation of the noble individual (Ure 2006: 84). The image Nietzsche comes up with of a self-enclosed garden clearly draws on ideas of paradise in the Western tradition (our word “paradise” etymologically derives from the Persian for “walled garden”, paradeiza), and he provocatively counters the Christian idea of a locked gate or porta clausa with that of a hospitable one: “To cultivate oneself...is to create oneself as a paradise garden for the other” (Ure 2006: 85).

In Dawn, then, Nietzsche employs what we can call an antique care of the self as a way of taking to task what he identifies as some troubling developments in modern society. Here the chief goal or end of the cultivation of self-sufficiency is freedom (Epicurus 1993: 85) In addition to Epicurus, I acknowledge that he also draws on the Stoic Epictetus to promote such a care of self, and what he admires in him is a non-fanatical (nicht fanatisch) mode of living. Although this ancient thinker was a slave, the exemplar he invokes is without class and is possible in every class. He serves as a counterweight to modern idealists who are greedy for expansion. Epictetus’s ideal human being, lacking all fear of God and believing rigorously in reason, “is not a preacher of penitence” (D 546). He has a pride in himself that does not wish to trouble and encroach on others: “he admits a certain mild rapprochement and does not wish to spoil anyone’s good mood – Yes, he can smile! There is a great deal of ancient humanity in this ideal!” (ibid.). The Epictetean is self-sufficient, “defends himself against the outside world” and “lives in a state of highest valor” (ibid.). Nietzsche offers this

portrait of the Epictetean as a point of contrast to the Christian. The Christian lives in hope (and in the consolation of “unspeakable glories” to come) and allows himself to be given gifts, expecting the best of life not to come from himself and his own resources but from divine love and grace. By contrast Epictetus “does not hope and does allow his best to be given him – he possesses it, he holds it valiantly in his hand, and he would take on the whole world if it tries to rob him of it” (ibid.).

This portrait of Epictetus contra the Christian provides us with a set of valuable insights into how Nietzsche conceives the difference between fanatical and non-fanatical modes of living: one way of life is self-sufficient and finds its pride in this, renouncing hope and living in the present; the other devotes itself to living through and for others, its attention is focused on the future (as that which is to come), and it lacks the quiet and calm dignity of self-sufficiency that is the Epictetean ideal (see also D 131). It’s clear that with this usage of Epictetus Nietzsche is seeking a counter ideal to the ideal of “morality”. It conforms to his expectation of “modesty” and it works against the aspirations of morality.

It might be argued that Nietzsche presents our becoming-ethical in uninviting terms: we are to remove ourselves from the mass of humanity, we need to endure long periods of solitude, we need to resist the temptation of the sympathetic affections, and we need to get beyond our compassion. Writing in Nietzsche’s time in 1878 Jean-Marie Guyau writes in praise of ancient and modern Epicureanism but makes a fundamental criticism of the doctrine when he argues that the Epicurean conception of self-development is limited by its attachment to a pure egoism (Guyau 1878: 281-3). To what extent is this critical point applicable to Nietzsche’s interest in Epicureanism? Is it the case, as one commentator has argued, that Nietzsche is more concerned with narcissism than with relatedness? (Jurist 2000: 261) My view is that the criticism one might make of Nietzsche’s commitment to egoism is misplaced. On the one hand, it’s clear that he is of the view that self-love needs to form the

basis of an adequate relation to others. We go wrong when we fail to attend to the needs of the ego and flee from it. We can stick to the idea that benevolence and beneficence are what constitute a good person, but such a person must first be benevolently and beneficently disposed towards themselves. A “bad” person is one that runs from himself and hates himself, causing injury to himself. Such a person is rescuing himself from himself in others, and this running from the ego (ego), living in others and for others “has, heretofore, been called, just as unreflectedly as assuredly, “unegotistical” and consequently “good!”” (D 516) On the other hand, it is also clear that he thinks we do have duties to others: his concern is with how this can be transformed into something pleasurable or, as he puts it, become “occasions for pleasant feelings for us”, and he acknowledges that this can only take place after years of practice (D 339).

Moreover, one also needs to pay attention to Nietzsche’s conception of “ideal selfishness” in Dawn. Here one cares for the soul, guards over it and keeps it in repose, in order to try and ensure that one’s fructification “comes to a beautiful conclusion...” In this “mediate way”, Nietzsche thinks, we actually “care for and guard over the benefit of all”; indeed, living in “this proud and tempered mood” serves as a balsam “that extends far and wide around us even into restless souls” (D 552). Indeed, in the text Nietzsche is keen to espouse the cause of a new kind of teacher who armed with a handful of knowledge and a bag full of experiences becomes, “a doctor of the spirit to the indigent and to aid people here and there whose head is disturbed by opinions...” (D 449) The aim is not to prove that one is right before another person but rather, “to speak with him in such a way that...he himself says what is right and, proud of the fact, walks away!” Such a teacher exists like a beacon of light offering illumination. Nietzsche imagines this teacher existing in the manner of a new kind of curer of overburdened souls and inspired by a new sublime:

To have no advantage, neither better food, nor purer air, nor a more joyful spirit – but to share, to give back, to communicate, to grow poorer! To be able to be humble so as to be accessible to many and humiliating to none! To have experienced much injustice and have crawled through the worm-tunnels of every kind of error in order to be able to reach many hidden souls along their secret paths! Always in a type of love and a type of self-interest and self-enjoyment! To be in possession of a dominion and at the same time inconspicuous and renouncing! To lie constantly in the sun and the kindness of grace and yet to know that the paths rising to the sublime (zum Erhabenen) are right at hand! – That would be a life! That would be a reason to live, to live a long time. (ibid)

The portrait depicted seems to be that of some new sage, a person who has tempered emotional and mental excess, and who can be a doctor of the spirit to the indigent, aiding people whose heads are subject to the reign of doxa. One lives without praise or gratitude, silently and even namelessly. The aid offered to the other is, therefore, of a delicate kind: one seeks to preserve one's own space in the process and to ensure that the integrity of the other person is respected. 'Love' is perhaps a strong word for Nietzsche to use in this example, but he is clearly hinting at a special mode of care of others, and one that is not at all free of self-interest and self-enjoyment.

Conclusion

In Dawn Nietzsche discloses the nature of his political scepticism: he has a distrust of the allegiances people show to party politics and an even deeper distrust of the psychological motivations for pursuing grand politics, such as the need to satisfy the feeling of power as it manifests itself in masses and nations and that often leads to war. On the one hand, Nietzsche seeks to encourage individuals to undertake the work of therapeutic self-cultivation so as to prepare the ground for new individual and social relations resting on friendship and mutual aid. On the other hand, in seeking to promote new "universal interests" through effecting a diversification in human modes and habits of living, he acknowledges that groups of free

spirits will need to inflict (mental) suffering on others and for this task we will need “to get beyond our compassion” (D 146). But what is the “human power” that will be strengthened and elevated through this process free-minded ethical reformation? The answer lies in Nietzsche’s preference for “self-reliant” (selbständigen) and “independent” (unabhängigen) human beings: these for him are the goals of culture and the embodiments of a strong civilization (D 163). Such human beings have power over themselves: they are equal to the fortunes of fate, they want to live as what they are (experiments) (D 453), and they are beneficent to both themselves and others and acknowledge the need for independence and for personal integrity. After centuries of training in morality and religion they seek to bring joy (Freude) into the world (WS 350) and regard bringing joy as the greatest of all joys because, “we thereby bring joy to our separate fifty drives at one fell swoop” (D 422).

An Epicureanism not only influences Nietzsche in his thinking about an ethical reformation in his middle period, it also defines significant aspects of his philosophical project as a whole at this time and centred on a therapeutic cooling down of the human mind. Nietzsche doesn’t want his readers to simply believe in what he is suggesting and outlining in his writings: we are not to be moral “fanatics” in pursuit of the free-spirited cause and this suggests the need for both an ethical pedagogy and an experimental skepsis (see GS 51). But how representative are Nietzsche’s middle period Epicurean commitments of his stance towards politics as a whole? Horst Hutter has argued that Nietzsche’s ultimate goal is the shaping of the future of European humanity and society, and on this conception of his philosophy the retreat into an Epicurean-inspired community of friends is merely a temporary expedient in which free spirits work on themselves so as to become philosophical legislators of a future culture. He writes: “such fraternities of free spirits would be necessary to traverse the period of nihilism until a future point in time, when direct political action would again

become possible” (Hutter 2006: 5). One thinks in this regard of what Nietzsche says in The Wanderer and his Shadow:

We withdraw into concealment: but not out of any kind of personal ill-humour, as though the political and social situation of the present day were not good enough for us, but because through our withdrawal we want to economize and assemble forces of which culture will later have great need, and more so if this present remains this present and as such fulfils its task. We are accumulating capital and seeking to make it secure: but, as in times of great peril, to do that we have to bury it (WS 229).

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¹ For insight into the relation between Epicureanism and enlightenment thinking see the classic study by Gay (1966). More recently see Leddy & Avi S. Lifschitz (2009).

² In an article on fanaticism and philosophy John Passmore has written that "...philosophical, as distinct from psychological or historical, works which announce that they are directed against

fanaticism are exceedingly rare” (Passmore 2003). One might reasonably contend that Nietzsche’s *Dawn* is one such work.

³ Nietzsche’s love of knowledge, according to Paul Franco, is part of “an ongoing therapeutic praxis” designed to work against the seductions of philosophical and epistemological rhetoric, and this resistance may explain “why he also enlists a fresh vocabulary to express himself, one free of the hazardous emotional baggage of traditional philosophy” (Franco 2011: 61). This is true but one also needs to appreciate Nietzsche’s reliance on Epicurean teaching.

⁴ Nietzsche does not come to this insight into Kant and fanaticism until the 1886 preface to *Dawn*; he also criticises him for making a sacrifice to the “Moloch of abstraction” in *The Anti-Christ* (AC 11). In *Dawn* itself he actually praises Kant for standing outside the modern movement of ethics with its emphasis on the sympathetic affects (D 132). The problem with Kant’s ethics is that it can only show duty to be always a burden and never how it can become habit and custom, and in this there is a “remnant of ascetic cruelty” (D 339).

⁵ Nietzsche locates in the French Revolution’s “histrionicism”, a “bestial cruelty”, as well as a “sentimentality” and “self-intoxication”, and holds Rousseau responsible for being its intellectual inspiration and for setting the Enlightenment on “its fanatical (*fanatische*) head” and with “perfidious enthusiasm (*Begeisterung*)” (WS 221). However, as one commentator observes, Rousseau was terrified at the prospect of revolution (Brooke 2012: p. 207). His intention was not to foment revolt and he was of the view that in our postlapsarian state insurrections could only intensify the enslavement they are so keen to remedy (Kavanagh 2010: p. 127).

⁶ See Kant (1991: 57): “One age cannot enter into an alliance on oath to put the next age in a position where it would be impossible to extend and correct its knowledge...or to make any progress whatsoever in enlightenment”.

⁷ Compare Kant (1991: 55): “A revolution may well put an end to an autocratic despotism and to rapacious or power-seeking oppression, but it will never produce a true reform in ways of thinking. Instead new prejudices, like the ones replaced, will serve as a leash to control the great unthinking mass”.

⁸ For example, see Hume 1998: 38-43. For Kant on “genuine enthusiasm” see the essay, “An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race constantly progressing?” in Kant 1963: 137-54.

⁹ Kant 1989: 135. As Toscano rightly points out, for Kant fanaticism is immanent to human rationality: “Vigilance against unreason is no longer simply a matter of proper political arrangements or social therapies, of establishing secularism or policing madness: it is intrinsic to reason’s own operations and capacities, requiring reason’s immanent, legitimate uses to be separated from its transcendent or illegitimate ones” (Toscano 2010: 121).

¹⁰ The reader should take note of the way Nietzsche portrays Epicurean *ataraxia* in GS 45. See also the valuable insights offered by Berry (2004).

¹¹ Catherine Wilson neatly lays out the central tenets of the Epicurean system in her recent study. They include: the denial of supernatural agency engaged in the design and maintenance of the world; the view that self-moving, subvisible particles acting blindly bring about all growth, change, and decline; and the insistence that the goal of ethical self-discipline, which involves asceticism, is the minimization of mental and physical suffering’ (Wilson 2008: 37). It is on this last point that Nietzsche will come to later criticize Epicureanism in *The Anti-Christ* and describe Epicurus as a typical decadent.

¹² The other three pairs are: Goethe and Spinoza, Plato and Rousseau, and Pascal and Schopenhauer. On Montaigne's relation to Epicurean doctrine see Jones (1992), 159-62.

¹³ See Taine 1906: 191. Taine writes here of 'aristocratical and commercial society...'. My thanks to Andreas Sommer for this reference to Taine.