

Postmodernism's Use and Abuse of Nietzsche

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I define postmodernism as incredulity towards meta-narratives.  
Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*

When the past speaks it always speaks as an oracle: only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it.  
Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life"

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Nietzsche is commonly invoked as a prophet of the postmodern. Both sympathizers and critics of the postmodern share this invocation. Thus Habermas, in his widely debated *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, in which he takes a decidedly critical view of postmodernism, tells us

Nietzsche appeals to experiences of self-disclosure of a decentered subjectivity, liberated from all constraints of cognitive and purposive activity, all imperatives of utility and morality. A "break-up" of the principle of individuation becomes the escape route from modernity. Habermas [1987], p. 94.

Nietzsche's perspectivism, his suspicion of metaphysics (ultimate ontology), his radical skepticism and interrogation of conventional notions of truth, all have been taken to mark him as an agent of dissolution, of polyphony, a practitioner of the hermeneutics of suspicion.<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche is cited as a model of deconstruction; for instance, his genealogical endeavors are held-up as a paradigm of disclosing the origin in opposites, the unmasking of a facade of unity that hides a congeries of mixed motives. Thus Michel Haar approvingly quotes Nietzsche as saying "We are a plurality that has imagined itself a unity" [Allison, 1985, p.18]. In this vein the name of Nietzsche travels in the company of Barthes, De Man, Lyotard,

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from Nietzsche make use of the following abbreviations, 'UM' for *The Untimely Meditations*, 'HAH' for *Human, All too Human*, 'GS' for *The Gay Science*, 'TSZ' for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 'BGE' for *Beyond Good and Evil*, 'GM' for *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 'EH' for *Ecce Homo*, 'TI' for *Twilight of the Idols*, 'A' for *The Antichrist*, 'WP' for *The Will to Power*, 'KSA' for *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe* and 'SB' *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe*. Full bibliographic references for these works are given at the end of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> In fact Ricoeur coined the phrase "hermeneutics of suspicion" principally to describe modernists such as Freud and Marx who claim that the apparent order disguises a deeper more causally fundamental order of meaning; thus Freud's distinction between the manifest and latent content of dreams. Such modernists are suspicious of the apparent order but do not reject the notion of meaning altogether. In this sense Nietzsche may rightly be counted as a practitioner of the hermeneutics of suspicion. However for postmodernists the notion of a hermeneutics of suspicion stands for a suspicion of all levels of meaning.

Foucault and Derrida.<sup>3</sup> Thus Hillis Miller cites Nietzsche as perhaps "the most systematic and cogent" of "all modern *deconstructors* of the idea of selfhood" [Hillis Miller, 1981, p. 248 - emphasis mine].

Yet Nietzsche was careful to describe himself as an affirmative spirit, one who says Yes and Yes again to Life, an opponent of Nihilism, a would-be architect of the future. In this affirmative mode Nietzsche typically stresses the importance of finding a unitary voice, of finding a means to retell history as a pathway to one's own constructed self.

What is meant is that a people to whom one attributes a culture has to be a single living unity and not fall wretchedly apart into inner and outer, content and form. He who wants to promote the culture of a people should strive for and promote this higher unity. [UM, II, 4]

How then are we to reconcile Lyotard's incredulity of meta-narratives with its resultant polyphony of voices, and Habermas's characterization of Nietzsche as offering a break-up of the principle of individuation, with Nietzsche's insistence that we must learn to appropriate the past, construct a unifying goal and interpret the past in the light of that goal?

In the following essay I will focus on the architectural metaphor of self-construction, in particular as it occurs in Nietzsche's essay "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life", in arguing for the claim that postmodern readings of Nietzsche typically misunderstand Nietzsche's various attacks on dogmatic philosophy as paving the way for acceptance of a self, a world, characterized by fundamental disunity. The architectural metaphoric is particularly helpful because Nietzsche, as we shall see below, explicitly uses it to contrast the idea of a centered construction with that of a building of mere pieces jumbled together. Nietzsche applies these architectural tropes both to individuals and cultures and they embody a mode of thought that runs throughout his corpus, though, as we shall see, it undergoes various vicissitudes. Examining Nietzsche's architectural

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, see chapter 1 of Alan Schrift's *Nietzsche's French Legacy*. Schrift says

The whole Nietzschean project of genealogy directs itself toward deconstructing the foundations of the dominant values of modernity (p.24)... In dispersing the subject within a system of textual relations, Derrida adopts a Nietzschean strategy of refusing to hypostasize the subject ( p. 30).

I should pause here to note that while writers sympathetic to Derrida such as Schrift, and writers unsympathetic to Derrida such as Habermas, take Derrida to valorize the dispersion of the subject, Derrida's texts are fairly subtle on this point. Indeed Derrida's texts often suggest an awareness of the fact that while Nietzsche argues that modern subjectivity is multiple and dispersed Nietzsche leaves open the possibility of the construction a new unified subjectivity.

metaphoric is of particular interest since theorists of postmodern architecture are among some of the most prominent of those many postmodernists who take Nietzsche to be a prophet of disunity. Nietzsche's use of architectural metaphoric to emphasize the notion of unity as a goal belies Nietzsche's adoption by theorists of postmodern architecture as a disciple of an anti-essentialist decentered pluralism. In contrast to the postmodern reading it will be argued here that Nietzsche's attack on essentialist dogmatic metaphysics is in fact a call to engage in a purposive self creation under a unifying will, a will that possesses the strength to reinterpret history as a pathway to the problem that we are. Nietzsche agrees with the postmodernists that unity is not a pre-given, but where he parts from them is in their complete rejection of unity as a goal. On the descriptive side, Nietzsche and the postmodernists agree that the received notion of the unified Cartesian subject is a myth, however on the prescriptive side, where the postmodernists typically celebrate the death of the subject, Nietzsche rejects this valorization of disunity as a form of nihilism and prescribes the creation of a genuine unified subjectivity to those few capable, and hence worthy, of such a goal. The de-centered self celebrated by the postmodernists is for Nietzsche the self-conception of the nihilistic Last Man. The construction of a unified self is the goal of Nietzsche's Overman. It will be argued here that to the extent postmodernists happily embrace the role of ironic epigones they are nearer Nietzsche's conception of the Last Man than his idea of the Overman. Robert Pippen has nicely summed up the difference between the modernist and postmodernist reaction to the perceived loss of a pre-given unity as follows

Whereas in modernism, the typical modern experience that 'all that is solid melts into air,' or 'the center does not hold,' had prompted the creation of a 'subjective center,' an autonomous self-defining artist, for post-modernism there is no [possible] center at all. [Pippen, (1991), p. 156]

Given this way of drawing the modernist/postmodernist distinction it is here argued that Nietzsche falls on the modernist side.

## 2. The Rejection of Dogma

The postmodernists and critics of postmodernism who cite Nietzsche as attacking the notion of the singular subject, the unified self, are of course well supported by textual evidence. Thus we have Nietzsche's famous dictum from the *Genealogy* "the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed" [GM, I, 13], his observation in *Beyond Good and Evil* [BGE 26] "our body is but a social structure composed of many souls" and the note from the 1885 *Nachlass* which reads "My hypothesis: the subject as multiplicity" [KSA, 11, 650, note 490 in *The Will to Power*].

Much of the work of the first essay of the *Genealogy* centers on the claim that the slave's reality principle - his realization that he can not directly attain his desires - has led to a repression of those very desires - the desires for the very qualities and successes of the envied and hated masters. This repression leads to a splitting-off, which renders those desires incapable of direct expression and conscious access. On this model we moderns, as descendants of the slaves, have become, in Nietzsche's memorable expression "strangers to ourselves"

[GM, Preface, 1]. Our deepest desires and convictions are hidden from us.

However, note that the claim that there is no doer behind the deed need not be taken as a blanket rejection of the notion of a doer. Rather the point of emphasis can be placed on the notion of a doer behind the deed. For the Christian there is behind the deed an immutable soul. It is this notion of a free choosing soul that is being rejected here, thus immediately before saying "the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed" Nietzsche says "there is no such substratum". For Nietzsche the doer is literally in the deeds.<sup>4</sup> Below it will be argued that for Nietzsche not every collection of deeds performed by a single body amounts to a doer. The right to say 'I', like the right to make promises (more on which soon) is in Nietzsche's view, an achievement vouchsafed to a precious few. More generally, Nietzsche, against the Christian and Cartesian tradition, takes things to be defined by their relational, rather than any intrinsic, properties. Thus his dictum that a thing is the sum of its effects and his continuous valorization of becoming over being.<sup>5</sup>

While what is directly at stake in Nietzsche's attacks on the notion of a unified, self-transparent Cartesian I, are the very presumptions of unity and self-transparency, his underlying theme is often a replacement notion of unity as a goal. The Cartesian claims to know first and foremost the existence and nature of the I, posing the construction of the external world as a problem. Reversing this formula Nietzsche problematizes the existence and nature of this I. Yet in problematizing the I Nietzsche is not seeking primarily to expose some kind of metaphysical error. For such a gesture would still fall under the dominion of the Christian inspired will to truth. In offering a critique of the notion of a unified self, as in his critique of the Christian world-view that assumes this notion of self, Nietzsche is not primarily aiming to expose a deception, a metaphysical error. As he says of Christianity, "it is not error as error that horrifies me at this sight [EH, "Why I am A Destiny", 7]. That the notion of the unified self is a deception; this in

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<sup>4</sup> The claim that doer is in the deeds amounts to the claim that the doer is no more than the collection of his deeds. This claim has a similar motivation to Hume's claim that a person is no more than the collection of their sensations. Both Hume's and Nietzsche's problematic reconstructions of selfhood are predicated on their common rejection of attempts to give the I, selfhood, some transcendental grounding.

<sup>5</sup> Note, the claim that things, in particular people, are defined by their relational rather than their intrinsic properties is perfectly consistent with the claim that their relational properties are to some extent determined by their categorical, intrinsic, properties. The categorical properties provide the basic potentialities that are a major, but not full, determinant of what a thing does, hence what a thing is. If one took the view that certain intrinsic, essential properties define who a person is then one no longer has available the space to argue that Nietzsche through his texts hopes to help certain individuals become what they are capable of becoming. After all, Nietzsche's texts cannot change his readers essence, but at most can help them realize some of the potentialities allowed by that essence.

itself matters only to those with a morality, which shuns all forms of deception. For Nietzsche the desire to escape all deception is another form of the ascetic ideal [cf. GM III, 25]. Deception for Nietzsche is an inevitable part of life, thus "[u]ltimately the point is to what end a lie is told". [A, 56]. The problem with the notion of the Cartesian self, the Christian soul, is that it is part of a slandering, a poisoning of life. It slanders life in that it suggests that our being and worth is not to be found in how we act, what we achieve, in this world, but in a supposed pre-given transcendental essence which is distinct from the natural world of material being.

The notion of a transparent singular self is, of course, the cornerstone of Cartesian foundationalist epistemology and metaphysics. Now Nietzsche, as postmodernists rightly observe, is a destroyer of all kinds of foundationalisms. They are right to interpret this as the force behind Nietzsche's madman's proclamation of the death of God [GS 125]. It is not simply the Christian worldview that is at stake here but all notions of an external authority that might provide some ultimate guarantor of beliefs. But postmodernists are wrong to take this rejection of the notion of an external, transcendent authority as a rejection of all authority. The postmodern rejection of all authority, all principle of order among the competing modes of representation, presents the very Nihilism that Nietzsche predicts, and warns against, as a natural result of the defeat of dogmatism. For Nietzsche there is still room for an immanent authority, an authority that comes from within. As the *Nachlass* of 1888 reads,

The multitude and disgregation of impulses and the lack of any systematic order among them results in a "weak will"; their coordination under a single predominant impulse results in a "strong" will: in the first case it is the oscillation and lack of gravity; in the later, the precision and clarity of direction. [KSA, 13, 394; note 46 of *The Will to Power*]

It is important to recall that while the madman of section 125 of *The Gay Science* begins with the disappearance and then the death of God he concludes with the suggestion that we ourselves, the slayers of God, must become Gods to be worthy of the deed. The importance of the death of God, the ultimate external foundation, is not, primarily, in the revealing of a metaphysical or epistemological error; it is in the task it opens up. We must become our own guarantors.

The problem Nietzsche finds with dogmatism is not that it represents some misunderstanding of our true situation. The problem with dogmatism, including Christian dogma, is that in its current form it serves only bad ends "the poisoning, slandering, denying or life" [A 56]. The dogma of a pre-given unified self generates certain complacency and that is the core of Nietzsche's objection.<sup>6</sup> Assuming a world of ready-made beings it allows for the suppression of the problem of becoming. In exposing, through genealogy, to what extent our motives are mixed and often beyond our understanding Nietzsche is pointing to

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<sup>6</sup> Here again we can concede that Nietzsche would allow some sympathy for the postmodern view of the self, for in rejecting the notion of a pre-given unified soul they at least open up the problem of the becoming of the self.

the conclusion that a creature with a genuine center, "an animal with the right to make promises" [GM, II, 1], is something to be achieved rather than something to be taken for granted.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, claims Nietzsche, it is something most humans, mere members of the herd as he is prone to designate them, are not capable of fully achieving.<sup>8</sup> To make a promise is to commit one's self for the future. Yet if one has no stable self who is it that is being committed? Consider his account of herd man; he is a mere collection of ever fluctuating, competing drives, with different drives dominating at different times. Such an animal cannot take on genuine commitments to the future, for such a being has no genuine continuity over time. There is little guarantee that the momentary configuration of drives that utter the words of promise will continue to exist up to the time when the commitment is to be fulfilled. Most humans are bound to be a mere collection of competing drives, as described by Zarathustra:

Motley, all ages and peoples look out of your veils, motley, all customs and faith speaks out of your gesture. [TSZ, II, 14]

There is in Zarathustra a pronounced voice that claims that the construction of a genuine, that is, unified, self is something yet to be achieved. Thus he says

And when my eyes flee from the present to the past, it always discovers the same thing: fragments and limbs and dreadful chances - but no men! ... I walk among men as among fragments of the future: of the future which I scan. And it is my art and aim, to compose into one and bring together what is fragment and riddle and dreadful chance. [TSZ, II, 21]

The theme of modern man as a mere jumble is echoed in *Beyond Good and Evil* where we are told

In the present age human beings have in their bodies the heritage of multiple origins, that is opposite and not merely opposite drives and value standards that fight each other and rarely permit each other any rest. Such human beings of late cultures and refracted lights will on the

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<sup>7</sup> While Nietzsche explicitly is proposing a genealogy not of our motives for being Christian but a genealogy of the motives of the original slaves who created and embraced Christianity, I take it that part of the function of Nietzsche's *Genealogy* is to force his readers to an act of self-recognition: We moderns are in fact much like the slaves; we embrace our current values out of impotence and a desire to justify our mediocrity. Indeed we are even less than the slaves since we do not share their creative powers, they after all created the values which we now complacently embrace.

<sup>8</sup> I interpret Nietzsche's question "To breed an animal with the right to make promises - is not this the paradoxical task nature has set itself in the case of man?" to mean that that task is yet to be completed. That we are now, and have long been, capable of making promises shows to what extent we have developed beyond mere brutes, thus Nietzsche goes on to say that "this problem has been solved *to a large extent*" [italics mine]. However to have a full right to make promise, for the problem to be solved in the full, is for man to achieve the kind of unified existence that would allow him to stand as a full guarantor for the future.

average be weaker human beings. [BGE 200]  
For "the vast majority who exist for service and the general advantage" [BGE, 61] such disunity is inevitable. What Nietzsche hopes to open up by exposing this disunity is a challenge applicable only to a few in each age. Nietzsche offers such a challenge to those few capable of making something of themselves, that is, of making a self of those conflicting drives they bodily contain.<sup>9</sup> By Nietzsche's high standards not every mere human is to count as a genuine person, thus he writes in the *Nachlass* under the heading "The Rank-ordering of Human Values"

(b) one should not at all assume that many humans are "people". Indeed many are multiple people, and most are none. Everywhere, where the average qualities that are important in order for a kind to continue, overweigh, it would be ludicrous to demand a "person." They are only carriers, transmission-tools.

(c) the "person" a relatively isolated fact; ....the development of a person requires isolation, a compulsion to an martial existence, a walling off, a greater strength of seclusion: and most of all, a lower degree of impressionability than the average human, whose humanity is contagious [KSA, 12, 491, translation mine]<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> On the view presented here Nietzsche, while generally in favor of multiplicity, is not unequivocally for multiplicity. For some multiplicity of perspectives can be enriching, for others it may be debilitating. This, arguably, contrasts with Deleuze's claim that "[t]he sense of Nietzsche's philosophy is that multiplicity, becoming and chance are objects of pure affirmation" [Deleuze (1983), p. 197]

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly the Kaufman-Hollingdale translation reads "One should not assume in any case that many men are "personalities" [WP, 886]. In fact Nietzsche's text uses "Personen" and not "Persönlichkeiten" or "Personalitäten". Perhaps this is a deliberate attempt by Kaufman-Hollingdale to soften the apparent implications of Nietzsche's text. In the section 2 of second Preface to *The Gay Science* Nietzsche uses the phrase "assuming that one is a person" again suggesting that he leaves open the possibility that not everyone is to count as a person. One might argue that, since outside of these isolated passages Nietzsche does not make such philosophical use of the term "Person", Nietzsche is best presented as recognizing that each biological human is indeed a person though he locates value not with mere persons but with higher persons. Besides not gibing with those texts cited above, I think this way of presenting things is awkward in that "person" in English and German already has the sense of a positive valuation. We take persons to be intrinsically valuable, to have rights. That is why those who do not have full rights in our society, for instance, infants and the insane, are often characterized as not being fully persons. Since Nietzsche rejects the claim that being a mere ordinary human being gives one a positive value, gives one rights, he is best presented as denying that every such human is a person. 'Person' in English and German is already a term of positive normative appraisal and not a merely descriptive term. Its indiscriminate



The potential political ramifications of such a view will be addressed in Section 5 below.

### 3. The Architecture of Selbst-Bildung

The creation of a self should not be viewed as a conscious purposive activity - indeed consciousness is typically viewed by Nietzsche as a weak, irrelevant force, little more than an after thought, and typically one that is an agent of, and/or expression of, dissipation.<sup>11</sup> Rather the reinterpretation of drives, their redirection, is something that occurs at a more fundamental level. Unification is not the result of a conscious subject pruning an overly luxuriant garden of drives according to some articulate master plan. Rather drives come with their own telic structure. In most individuals conflicting drives can only express themselves through the repression of other drives. However in some individuals drives form a hierarchy which allows some drives to redirect others so that the total can form a concerted singular expression.<sup>12</sup> The subject is not one who affects this concerted expression, rather he is the result of this expression. This notion of creating a self does not presume some voluntaristic master agent, or master drive, free from the constraints of the causal natural order. Rather it is an extraordinary case within the natural order. A striking description of this process occurs in Nietzsche's early essay on Wagner, "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth", where he says

The dramatic element in Wagner's development is quite unmistakable from the moment when his ruling passion became aware of itself and took his nature in its charge: from that time on there was an end to fumbling,

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application to all humans implicitly involves values that Nietzsche explicitly rejects.

<sup>11</sup> In *The Gay Science* 354 Nietzsche says

man, like every living creature, thinks unceasingly, but does not know it; the thinking which is becoming conscious of itself is only the smallest part thereof, we may say, the most superficial part, the worst part.

<sup>12</sup> The notion of the Nietzschean individual as a hierarchical organization of drives I take from Richardson [1996]. The idea of the self as an achievement is given its clearest and most sustained expression in Nehamas (1985) where he says, for instance,

But a person worthy of admiration, a person *who has (or is) a self*, is one whose thoughts, desires, and actions are not haphazard but are instead connected to one another in the intimate way that indicates in all cases the presence of style. [(1995) p. 7- emphasis mine]

and later

The unity of the self, which therefore also constitutes its identity, is not something given but something achieved [p. 182]

To some degree it may be said that Richardson in his account of the Overman (see below) gives a naturalistic reading of the connectedness and unity that Nehamas is here concerned with.

straying, to the proliferation of secondary shoots, and within the most convoluted courses and often daring trajectories assumed by his artistic plans there rules a single inner law, a will by which they can be explained. [UM, III, 2] <sup>13</sup>

The story of Wagner's achievement of a higher unity borne from some unconscious drive is of course the story Nietzsche would repeat about himself in the dramatic section of *Ecce Homo* where Nietzsche elaborates the subtitle of that work "How One Becomes What One Is":

To become what one is, one must not have the slightest notion of what one is... The whole surface of consciousness – consciousness is a surface – must be kept clear of all great imperatives... Meanwhile the organizing "idea" that is destined to rule keeps growing deep down – it begins to command; slowly it leads us *back* from side roads and wrong roads; it prepares single qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to be indispensable as a means towards the whole – one by one, it trains all subservient capacities before giving any hint of the dominant task, "goal", "aim", or "meaning". [EH, Why I am So Clever, 9]

Various factors, "internal" and "external", may explain what activates, or strengthens, a drive to engage in this hierarchical organizing of other drives. One possible influence is the reading of texts, the exposure to various examples. Thus Schopenhauer was such an influence on Wagner and both Wagner and Schopenhauer similarly influenced Nietzsche himself. Indeed this question of influence to some degree explains why Nietzsche often writes and claims to write in styles and fashions that attempt to move his select readers in ways much deeper than that of mere conscious recognition. Nietzsche hopes himself to be a catalyst for his more gifted readers. But these are matters beyond the scope of the present work. <sup>14</sup>

This idea of an organizing master drive does not sit well with Lyotard's characterization, noted in the opening quotation of this essay, of the postmodern as a disbelief in meta-narratives. Now the typical function of meta-narratives is to give a sense of individuation and order, a teleology, the very thing provided by the Nietzschean idea of a non-conscious master drive. For Lyotard's postmodern man there are but a series of language games, which have no external end or principle of order and which can be combined and recombined in various arbitrary ways. Following Lyotard, theorists of postmodern architecture such as Vidler and Kolb, claim that our awareness of the historical contingency of our

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<sup>13</sup> Of course Nietzsche would latter take a less favorable view of Wagner. One hopes that this change of opinion was partially produced by his reading of Wagner's deplorable "Judaism in Music". I have been unable to find definitive archival evidence that Nietzsche read that piece, though SB, 4, 38 strongly suggests he had read it. For more on Nietzsche and Wagner see Urs Marti (1993). It is Urs who directed me to SB, 4, 38.

<sup>14</sup> For more on this see Gemes (1992) section 6 and 7, and especially the excellent chapter 1 of Nehamas (1985).

various language games, our realization that they lack any transcendental grounding, has left us with an ironical stance towards the various games, the various genres initiated by our more naive predecessors. Kolb, citing Lyotard, posits this ironical stance as initiating a new sense of freedom and playfulness, for Lyotard our age is losing the total meanings characteristic of both the tradition and modernity. The central self is a myth and its pure rationality gives way to a diversity of language games and practices that are irreducible to each other. Amid this plurality we should play our games lightly, ironically, inventing new rules as we go. No one game can define us and there is no pure meta-game above them all. [Kolb, 1990, p.100]<sup>15</sup>

The language of Kolb here deliberately echoes Nietzschean descriptions of free spirits. However Lyotard's and Kolb's rejection of unity and their insistence on a hyper-self-conscious control of the various language games and hence ironical distance from one's own projects is the antithesis of Nietzsche's idea of self-formation under a unifying subconscious will. While Nietzschean free spirits are, like Lyotard's postmodern men, free of the constraints of received essentialist dogma, be it Christian, socialist, Cartesian, whatever, this is not to say that they are free of the constraint of a self imposed form. Their play is the serious play of self-creation.

In understanding the distinction between Nietzsche's rejection of a foundationalist, essentialist metaphysics and the postmodernist rejection of the notion of a unified self it is helpful to consider Derrida's attempted renovation of the notion of the feminine within Nietzsche's work.<sup>16</sup> Derrida in *Spurs* correctly notes that Nietzsche attempts a positive re-evaluation of the figure of woman by configuring her as an anti-essentialist who has forgone the transcendentalist longing for a deep and abiding permanent truth and learned to revel in the world of mere appearances; this is woman as the embodiment of free spirits. Here Nietzsche has taken the traditional misogynist charge that woman has no essence, no soul, no permanent unchanging core, and given it a positive valorization. However Derrida remains silent on, though presumably not ignorant of, the fact that while Nietzsche celebrates this anti-essentialist configuration of

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<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein Vidler characterizes Foucault and Barthes as being "sensitive to the world after Nietzsche" and thus opening "the possibility of what one might call a "restricted modernism"". Vidler concludes

Such a restrained art, conscious of its loss of positive ground and yet intimately aware of its own procedures, is bound to speak, even though its results are not only unpredictable but also impossible to endow with any unitary purpose. [Vidler (1992), p. 196]

<sup>16</sup> At its simplest the received view that Nietzsche (and postmodernists) reject is foundationalist and essentialist in the sense that it supposes that all values and existence ultimately rest on the existence of God and takes a thing's value to be determined by its unchanging intrinsic properties not in its worldly relations. However, save for considerations of space, a lot more could be said here.

the feminine he echoes the traditional charge that woman is a mere collection of appearances lacking any attempt at developing an even immanent principle of order. The point here is that a celebration of freedom from the stultifying constraints of essentialist metaphysics need not be identified as valorization of total disorder.

Nietzsche's essay "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life", the second of his *Untimely Meditations* is primarily a warning against such mislocated conceptions of freedom. For Nietzsche this type of historical, ironical sensibility divorced from any teleological drive, leaves us with a mere overwhelming sense of the accomplishments of the past with no sense of the possibility of having our own distinct voice and destiny, condemned to see ourselves as epigones free of the very illusions that gave our ancestors their creative vitality.

Close behind the pride of modern man there stands his ironic view of himself, his awareness that he has to live in an historicizing twilight mood.  
[UM, II, 7]

In this vein we become for Nietzsche "men of learning, the exhausted hens" [UM, II, 7] whose "buildings are carted together not constructed." [UM, II, 7]

The negative metaphor of the building as a decentered collection, as a mere assemblage of disparate materials lacking and unifying plan or form runs counter to the whole postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche. It runs counter to the postmodern configuration of Nietzsche as a prophet of an architecture of bricolage, the ironical assembling of mannered references to past genres and forms, championed by Kolb in particular. For Nietzsche the strength to achieve a natural unity, an organizing force within the competing drives, is a precondition for the appearance of genuine subjects, genuine cultures; "true culture must in any event presuppose unity of style" [UM, I, 2]. Where Kolb celebrates the notion of unrestrained pluralism, Nietzsche observes "In the end modern man drags around with him a huge quantity of indigestible stones" [UM, II, 4]. Such beings, for Nietzsche "resemble a field of ruins" [UM, III, 6]. It is the lack of integration that leads Nietzsche in the same place to claim "our modern culture.... is no real culture" and later to contrast our present situation with the ancient Greeks with the observation that "Hellenic culture was no mere aggregate.... The Greeks gradually learned to organize the chaos" [UM, II, 10].<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The reader may have noted that in the above paragraph unity is extolled, on Nietzsche's behalf, as a condition for "genuine subjects" and "real culture". The issue of the relations between conditions for culture and for genuine subjects is a complex issue that we can not get into here. However it is worth noting that Nietzsche himself often puts the two issues together in the context of extolling the importance of unity, for instance, in the section of *Human All Too Human* entitled "Microcosm and Macrocosm of Culture" where he again takes up the architectural metaphoric to say

Such a cultural edifice in the single individual will have the greatest similarity to the cultural architecture of whole eras .... For wherever the great architecture of culture developed, it was its task to force opposing

Indeed Nietzsche offers a diagnosis of the ironical stance and suggests remedies by which it might be overcome. Rather than being overwhelmed by our own historical contingency, Nietzsche counsels that we would do better to forget the past and cultivate "the art and power of forgetting" [UM, II, 10]. This art of forgetting is not for Nietzsche the only alternative; it is that suggested for those who simply do not have the will to master the past and employ it to their own purposes. Stronger natures, including Nietzsche himself we may suppose, may acknowledge the accomplishments of the past while interpreting them as preconditions for their own form of self-expression. Thus when "the experienced and superior man" writes history then

When the past speaks it always speaks as an oracle: only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it ... only he who constructs the future has the right to judge the past. If you look ahead and set yourself a great goal, you at the same time restrain that rank analytical impulse which makes the present a desert ... Form within yourself an image to which the future will correspond and forget the supposition that you are epigones. [UM, II, 6].

Nietzsche's architectural metaphoric of modern man as a mere building carted together, in fact as a kind of ruin, his vision of the architect of the future as one who constructs a unifying goal, as one who puts the various pieces into a highly structured whole under a singular vision, runs counter to the whole postmodern appropriation of Nietzsche as celebrating a fragmentary decentered world.<sup>18</sup>

In the famous passage in *The Gay Science*, GS 290, where Nietzsche talks of the grand and rare art of giving style to one's character, he again contrasts those whose nature fashions itself "into an ingenious plan", who administer control "when they have palaces to build and gardens to lay out" with those "weak

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forces into harmony through an overwhelming aggregation of the remaining, less incompatible, powers, yet without suppressing or shackling them. [HAH, 276]

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the well known architectural critic Kenneth Frampton, in his classic *Modern Architecture; A critical History* offers the following criticism of post-modernist architecture,

In Post-modern architecture classical and vernacular 'quotations' tend to interpenetrate each other disconcertingly. Invariably rendered as unfocused images, they easily disintegrate and mix with other ...forms, for which the architect has no more respect than for his arbitrary historical allusions. [(1992), p. 307]

Summing up postmodern architecture he concludes

the result is an inconclusive and seemingly pointless 'cacophony' in which the architect loses control of his material. [ibid., p. 308]

These words are a, presumably, non-deliberate but near exact echo of Nietzschean sentiments.

characters who have no power over themselves, and hate the restriction of style", those whose creations are inevitably "wild, arbitrary, fantastic, confusing and surprising". Here, in characterizing those strong natures Nietzsche invokes the notion of a second nature being added while a portion of first nature has been taken away. This again brings us to the point, mentioned at the end of the last section, that for Nietzsche the conception of a created unity is thoroughly naturalistic and does not presume the notion of a conscious supra-natural agency. Nietzsche's attack on the notion of the Cartesian self is an attack on the notion of a transcendental unity existing outside of the natural causal order.

#### 4. Foucault's Reading of "The Use and Abuse of History for Life"

We have so far concentrated on Nietzsche's emphasis, in the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, on the importance of unity for the construction a true culture, a true self. Interestingly in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" Foucault takes up that very essay to emphasize Nietzsche's use of genealogy to disrupt the notion of a unified self;

The search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself. [Foucault (1997) p.147]

Moreover, Foucault does not simply intend this as a descriptive account of the effects of genealogy but also seeks to endorse this use of history by labeling it as effective history,

History becomes "effective" to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being - as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. "Effective" history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature ... It will uproot its traditional foundation and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity [ibid. p. 154.]

This account and endorsement of the use of historical genealogical investigations, of course, well expresses Foucault's own use of genealogy in such works as *The Birth of the Clinic*, "What is an author", and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it does indeed capture the use that Nietzsche puts genealogy to in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> While the early Foucault can with some accuracy be characterized as valorizing the dispersion of the subject, the late Foucault, for instance, the author of the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* is more sympathetic to the possibility of a new notion of the subject/self. These are complex matters that we cannot enter into here.

<sup>20</sup> However the term "effective" is Foucault's not Nietzsche's. Nietzsche in GM, Preface, 7, the passage cited by Foucault, in fact writes of "wirklichen Historie der Moral" which is better translated as "real history of morals". "Effective history" has the suggestion of history as a mere rhetorical tool for effecting certain goals. "Real history" has more the suggestion of a genuine expose of

How then are we to reconcile the use of history to construct a unitary coherent narrative, as described in our reading of the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, with the use of history in the *On the Genealogy of Morals* to disrupt unitary apparently coherent narratives?

The difference in emphasis between Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* and the *Genealogy* is part of a marked difference between his concern with the notion of unity in the early works such as "The Use and Abuse of History for Life" and the *Birth of Tragedy* and his concern with the notion of unity in the later works. Indeed it is striking to note that after his repeated use of 'Einheit' [unity] in the early works there is a dramatic fall-off in the number of uses of that term as the years progress till the period of the later works where its use undergoes a marked revival.<sup>21</sup> In the early works 'Einheit' is used often, and nearly invariably in a positive way. In the later works it is used sparingly and nearly always in a negative way. It might be tempting then to claim that the positive account of unity stressed here corresponds to an emphasis on his early works while the postmodern stress on Nietzsche as a champion of disunity corresponds to an emphasis on his later work. On this line one would have to accept that Nietzsche over the years changed his mind about the value of unity.

One problem with this interpretation is that even the later texts generally valorizes unity.<sup>22</sup> However the more serious failing of this line is that it misses a fundamental shift in Nietzsche's use of the term 'Einheit'. It is a shift in reference rather than a shift in value. To understand this shift we must take into account the difference in the targets of Nietzsche's works.

In the *Untimely Meditations* and, albeit, to a lesser extent, in the other of his early works, for instance *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche is addressing the problem of the last Man and the Age of Nihilism. It is a work primarily directed at overcoming Nihilism. That this Nihilism is only just coming to fruition, that Nihilism is his projection for the immediate future of Europe once the death of God has been fully absorbed explains why the mediations are labeled "Untimely". Nietzsche claims to have not only seen the inevitable future; the Age of Nihilism, but is already suggesting a remedy to overcome that future. In these works of the early period and the corresponding Nachlass 'Einheit' is used in a positive sense

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deep motivations. This little question of translation to some extent reflects the fault-line between modernist and post-modernists interpretations of Nietzsche.

<sup>21</sup> While this is true of the published works it is even more striking in the *Nachlass*. For instance, in the *Nachlass* from 69-72 the term 'Einheit' occurs 50 times in a text of approximately 93,000 words; in the *Nachlass* of 80-81 it occurs 5 times in a text of approximately 100,000 word; and in the *Nachlass* of 88-89 it occurs 17 times in a text of approximately 100,000 words.

<sup>22</sup> For instance note 46 from the *Will to Power* quoted above is from 1888 and the positive characterization of Zarathustra "in him all opposites are blended into a higher unity" quoted below is from the 1888 work *Ecco Homo*. Note while it is claimed here that he continues to valorize unity as a goal we shall soon see that he rejects certain false notions of unity and this rejection comes to dominate his use of the term 'Einheit'.

with the contrast being primarily between the unity of style achieved by the classical Greeks and the disunity and hence lack of culture that characterizes the present age. This we have already seen in our analysis of the second of the *Untimely Meditations*. This is echoed in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*;

A time which suffers from so-called general education but has no culture and no unity of style in its life can make no real use of philosophy even if it were proclaimed by the genius of truth in the street and the marketplace. In such a time philosophy remains a learned monologue of the solitary walker, accidental loot of individuals, secret of the recluse, or inconsequential gossip between academic geese and children. [KSA, vol.1, p.812 - my translation]

*On The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), like many of Nietzsche's later works, including the 1886 *Beyond Good and Evil* and the 1888 *Antichrist*, aims, primarily, at disrupting the Judeo-Christian heritage. This heritage remains at the core of European thought, even in its modern secular mode where the Christian ascetic ideal continues with the worship of truth as an end in itself being substituted for prostration before God.<sup>23</sup> The construction of a narrative which serves to expose the disunity of repressed motives (envy of, and desire to destroy, the healthy and strong) and the expressed philosophy (of love and humility) in the Judeo-Christian world-view helps subvert the grip of that view. The true destruction of that world-view would pave the way for the advent of Nihilism. *On the Genealogy of Morals* is one of Nietzsche's works which paves the way for the new Age of Nihilism and the Last Man.<sup>24</sup> In this destructive mode Nietzsche typically uses 'Einheit' to refer, disparagingly, to the Cartesian notion of

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<sup>23</sup> Put simply, the worship of truth is the secular substitute for the worship of God in that in both cases the value for life is not given primary importance. More deeply, both represent a kind of transcendental longing, a desire to escape involvement in this world. The Christian escapes this world by postulating a more important world to come, the worshiper of truth similarly takes the position of being above the mere fray of worldly involvement, he digs past mere appearances to the ultimate truth. The unconditional desire to understand the true order of things is, for Nietzsche, a form of revenge taken by the weak against a world that resists their desires. This is true of both the Christian ascetic and his modern ascetic counterpart the secular scientist. This is the point of Nietzsche's claim in the third essay of the *Genealogy*

These two, science and the ascetic ideal, they do, stand on the same ground ... namely on the same overestimation of truth. [GM, III, 25]

<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that the advent of Nihilism is Nietzsche's ultimate aim. The point is that Nietzsche claims that nihilism is the inevitable first result of a full recognition of the death of God. It is a precondition for the inventing of new values:

Why has the advent of nihilism become necessary? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence...We require, sometime, new values. [KSA, vol. 13, p. 190]



a transcendental unified soul or self possessed of free will. Nietzsche's aim here is to bring his audience to realize that there is no such unified Cartesian self and hence the construction of a self is a task for the future.<sup>25</sup> Hence he disparages the presumed unity that the Cartesian philosophy so unquestioningly assumes. The most direct examples of Nietzsche using the term 'Einheit' to refer to what he takes to be a mythological Cartesian subject occur in the *Nachlass* from 1888, which contain such notes as

The monstrous false concepts:

- (1) the senseless overvaluation of consciousness, a unity made of it, a being, "the spirit", "the soul", that feels, that thinks [KSA, 13, 330 - translation mine]

and

- (b) The false unity "soul", "I", "person",  
even more "eternal person" [KSA, 13, 593 - translation mine]

Indeed already by the time of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche was attacking this false notion of a unified consciousness and hinting that genuine consciousness is something that we may in a slow process of maturation acquire in the future.

Thus he says

Consciousness is the last and latest development of the organic, and hence what is most unfinished and unstrong.... One thinks it constitutes the kernel of man; what is abiding, eternal, ultimate, and most original in him. One takes consciousness for determined magnitude, one denies its growth and its intermittences. One takes it for the "unity of the organism.

This ridiculous overestimation of consciousness has the very useful consequence that it prevents an all too fast development of consciousness. Believing that they possess consciousness, men have not exerted themselves very much to acquire it. [GS, 1, 12]

As noted above, the problem with the notion of a unified free Cartesian soul is not that it is a metaphysical error but that it covers up the problem of becoming.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> That the construction of an authentic self is a task for the future is most eloquently, though elliptically, expressed in the famous "God is dead" passage of *The Gay Science*, GS 125. There Nietzsche's madman accuses his audience of not understanding the true meaning of the death of God, namely the collapse of all hitherto accepted values, and after posing the fateful question "Must we ourselves not become Gods [i.e. authors of our own values] to appear worthy of it?" answers "I have come too early". This is of a piece with Nietzsche's awareness that he is "untimely" and that perhaps he will be "born posthumously".

<sup>26</sup> Generally, Nietzsche presents himself as an advocate of becoming while characterizing his enemies as advocates of being. This covers a complex set of issues. Part of what is at stake is Nietzsche's sense that philosophy should be striving not to describe the world but to shape it. Also it adverts to his sense that the value and meaning, of a thing is to be found in its historical relations, its causes and effects, not in its intrinsic properties. For Nietzsche the

This is clearly expressed in the *Nachlass* of 1885 where he says,

To indulge the fable of "unity", "soul", "person", this we have forbidden, with such hypotheses one only cover-up the problem [KSA, 11, 577 - my translation].

If this interpretation of the difference of reference between Nietzsche's early and later uses of the term 'Einheit' is right, then the message of the early works is really one that can only be absorbed after one has digested the message of the later works. The need to bring unity to our lives that is so pronounced in the early works can only be appreciated if one has already accepted the message of the later works that our complacent assumption of the unity of the Cartesian I is an error. Here I think we see the common maturing process of an author with a revolutionary agenda. In his early works he takes his audience to realize the basic problems he is addressing and proposes his various solutions. As he matures he realizes that others do not heed his message because they have not even come to realize the problem at hand and so are not ready to hear his solutions. He then engages the assumptions that have made the problem inaccessible to his audience. As Nietzsche matured he came to believe that our deeply held Judeo-Christian values prevented us from seeing the malaise at the heart of our modern "culture". Thus he came to polemicize in an ever more strident fashion against that heritage. In the early works where he takes his audience to have some awareness of the problems of our times he holds unity as a possibility for our future and hence uses 'Einheit' to denote a positive value. In the later works where he has realized his audience does not understand the basic problems of the times he attacks their assumption that they already have a unified self. Here 'Einheit' is used in a negative fashion.

The postmodernists who take Nietzsche's disparaging comments about unity as an endorsement of a decentered pluralism have mistaken the target of Nietzsche's polemic. He is not against unity but rather wants to expose our lack of unity by exposing the myth of the Cartesian unified self. Throughout Nietzsche's works unity remains a goal however his use of the term 'Einheit' shifts its reference as he comes to understand the immensity of his own task. Before he can construct an ideal of the future unified active self of the Overman he must destroy the idol of the unified Cartesian self.

##### 5. The Politics of Estheticism

Is there a reason why the postmodernists have overlooked the side of Nietzsche that emphasizes the positive construction of a new unified self?

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being/becoming dichotomy is closely related to the reality/appearance and permanence/change dichotomies. Where traditional philosophy privileges the first term in each of these three dichotomies Nietzsche champions the second. At his most grandiose he characterizes this as the battle between the Crucified and Dionysus [EH, *Why I am A Destiny*, 9]. These themes are dealt with at greater length in Gemes (1992).

Perhaps in some cases they are well aware of the difference between the Overman and the Last Man but have chosen to deliberately ignore Nietzsche's suggestions for the overcoming of Nihilism.<sup>27</sup>

When we consider the uses that Nietzsche has been put to I think we can discern a possible motive for such a, possibly deliberate, oversight.

In the light of the events of the 20th century, the reading of Nietzsche I have been offering, centering on the notion of a unified architectonic of the self, suggests a dubious, indeed, offensive social politic. We saw above that Nietzsche's concept of what it is to have a genuine self, to be a person, carries with it the consequence that most mere humans do not count as having a self, of being persons. His valorization of the creation of genuine selves and his emphasis on unity as a condition for the emergence of a self may seem to suggest that forces that threaten such unity need to be isolated and repressed. Projected from the case of the individual to the body politic, to the question of culture, which, as we have already noted, Nietzsche himself was inclined to do, this is but one step from the most disastrous paranoid fantasies. The idea that a genuine culture must incorporate some organic unity can easily seem to lend support to the conclusion that in order to achieve such a unity foreign elements must be exorcised.

It is here worth noting that Nietzsche's advocacy of unity in culture and his identification of culture with architecture was mirrored in his fascist appropriation. Both Italian and German fascists of the 20th century literally and metaphorically saw themselves as architects of the future; thus their emphasis on monumental architecture and their talk of constructing a new man.

There are a number of ways of answering the charge that Nietzsche is paving the way for a fascist aesthetics. I will here consider two.

First, what this type of extrapolation misses is that Nietzsche's invocation of the notion of unity never indulges in the nostalgic moment, the invocation of a lost purity. Nietzsche rejects the romantic notion that we were at one time whole but now are sundered. Indeed, Nietzsche radically reverses the temporality of unity; where romantics typically locate unity in the past, thus Mussolini spoke of recapturing the glory of the Roman empire and the Renaissance and Hitler longed for a return to purity of the original Aryan race, Nietzsche posits unity as a possible future achievement. The Nietzsche of *The Gay Science* is careful to say, "[w]e conserve nothing neither do we want to return to any past periods" [GS 377].<sup>28</sup>

Second, and most importantly, this interpretation is for Nietzsche fundamentally mistaken in its model of health. His model of health is not that of a pure being free of all external contamination. Rather, his model of health is of one who has been thoroughly contaminated by a myriad of influences, a myriad

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<sup>27</sup> I think this is particularly true for Derrida and perhaps also for Foucault.

<sup>28</sup> There are of course deeply romantic strains in Nietzsche's thought, for instance his emphasis on genius, creativity and nature. For more on this very complex topic see Del Carlo [1989]

of strong challenges but has managed to make something out of those challenges. Nineteenth Century post-Darwinian social scientists and Kulturkritiker tended to entertain biologicistic models of individual and cultural development. Certain elements of society could thus be nominated as virulent strains that need to be isolated and controlled.<sup>29</sup> The dominant metaphoric here is that of contamination and infection, the ideal state being one of pure health, free of diseased influences. While Nietzsche participates in this biologicistic rhetoric, he rejects the metaphysics of purity. For Nietzsche this kind of purity is a total impoverishment that precludes the conditions of true health, namely, genuine challenges which are not to be simply defeated by extirpation but overcome through incorporation into a higher unity. This is the point behind Nietzsche's famous dictum "What does not kill me makes me stronger".

Indeed Nietzsche is near unique in claiming that degeneration is in fact a precondition of progress.<sup>30</sup> Thus in *Human, All too Human*, in a passage headed by the title "Ennoblement through degeneration", he writes,

Precisely at this wounded weakened place, the common body is inoculated, so to speak, with something new; however the community's strength must be great enough to take this new thing into its bloodstream and assimilate it. Every progress of the whole must be proceeded by a partial weakening.... Something is similar also happens in the individual.... it must be possible to attain higher goals when the degenerating natures partially weaken or wound the stable power; it is precisely the weaker nature, as more delicate and free, that makes progress possible at all. If a people starts to crumble and grow weak at some one place, but is still strong and healthy in general, it can accept being infected with something new, and can incorporate it to its advantage. [HAH, 224]

Yet, whatever Nietzsche's intentions, his use of the biologicistic rhetoric of unity, coupled with his talk of infections and degeneration found a sinister echo in the rhetoric of German National Socialism and Italian Fascism. I suspect this is one of the main reasons postmodernists have been loath to acknowledge that Nietzschean voice which so positively valorizes unity. The affinity to fascist esthetics makes that voice unacceptable to readers who lay claim to the title of being Nietzsche's heirs. Consider the following passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche excoriates the Europeans of his day,

In the new generation, that as it were, has inherited in its blood diverse standards and values, everything is unrest, disturbance, doubt, attempt; the best forces have an inhibiting effect, the very virtues do not allow each other to grow and become strong; balance, a center of gravity and perpendicular poise are lacking in body and soul. But what becomes

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<sup>29</sup> These ideas are suggested, either explicitly or implicitly, in the works such writers as Lombroso, Morel, Gobineau, Vogt, Nordau and, arguably, even Darwin himself.

<sup>30</sup> In my forthcoming book *The Biology of Evil* I argue that Baudelaire and, to some extent, Freud share Nietzsche's notion of health through infection.

sickest and degenerates most in such hybrids is the will.[BGE 208]  
This is followed by the ominous prediction  
The time for petty politics is over: the very next century will bring the fight for domination of the earth - the compulsion to large scale politics. [BGE 208]

Here the talk of the lack of center of gravity is chillingly coupled with talk of the apparently degenerative effects of the mixing of blood and an apparently approving prediction of some future large scale fight for domination. After the cataclysmic events of this century it is of little wonder that this is a side of Nietzsche that many would be disciples are not keen on emphasizing.

Of course, Nietzsche, as noted above, often extols the mixing of diverse strains. Indeed one may argue that the passage just quoted is not arguing against all such mixing but rather pointing out some of its effects in current Europe. His point being that in weak vessels such mixing can have deleterious effects. While Nietzsche scholars may believe that his many positive accounts of mixtures, his continual disparagement of German nationalism and his many positive comments about Jews, exonerate him from responsibility for the crudest readings of the above type passages, I think those who take seriously Nietzsche's dictum that "a thing is the sum of its effects" and understand how destructive the biologicistic rhetoric of degeneration has been for Europe will find little solace here. To this extent I sympathize with the postmodernists repression of this aspect of Nietzsche.<sup>31</sup>

## 6. Slave, Master, Last Man, Overman

John Richardson in his excellent *Nietzsche's System* uses the model of strength through incorporation of diverse elements to explain Nietzsche's slave-master-overman typology. Richardson, while noting that Nietzsche clearly admires the masters for their ability to immediately discharge their instincts in action, their ability to avoid the repression that leads to resentment, makes the traditional gesture of pointing out that he also admires the slaves for the formative power that issues from their repression of desire for immediate gratification. Thus the *Genealogy* tells us,

It is under the slave revolt that "man first became an interesting animal"  
[GM, I, 6.]

and

Human history would be altogether too stupid a thing without the spirit the impotent have introduced into it. [GM, I, 7]

Altogether, the slave is seen as a much richer more complex psychological type

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<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche on degeneration, like Nietzsche on Jews (see below) and Nietzsche on woman, is a fascinating and extremely complicated topic. Particularly fascinating is his tendency in all three cases to indulge the rhetoric of his day yet give it a radical re-evaluation, characterizing alleged weakness as a kind of strength. These topics will be dealt with in more detail in my forthcoming book *The Biology of Evil*.

then the master - and for Nietzsche, most pointedly, this cleverness, does not preclude creativity. It is worth briefly noting that here again Nietzsche takes a common 19th Century metaphoric and gives it a positive reading - recall our discussion of Nietzsche's valuative inversion of the traditional negative metaphoric of woman as lacking depth, as lacking essence, as being wholly inscribed within the world of appearances. While Nietzsche indulges the traditional metaphoric of the slave, and in particular the Jew, as castrated, he points to this castration as the source of a deep form of creativity. Were the Jews cleverness was typically configured as a kind of reflective unoriginal intelligence, Nietzsche claims that Jewish cleverness is a manifestation of a source of deep originality.<sup>32</sup>

On this model it is clear why Nietzsche harbors no real longing for a return to the world of the masters. He finds the return to such simple, uncomplicated natures both impossible and undesirable. Richardson suggestion is that Nietzsche's Overman represents a synthesis of the slave and master. The slave has complexity, a myriad, of competing drives, including a drive for the very successes achieved by the master, as well as a drive to denigrate those successes beyond his reach. The master has a rigid simplicity of drives which allows for their singular expression in action, actions which inevitably reflects the simplicity of their origin. Faced with an opposing view the master does not try to understand it, incorporate it, he merely fails to recognize it, or, should it prove a genuine obstacle, he takes up arms against it.<sup>33</sup>

The Overman, or "higher" Man, is one who contains all the complexity of the slave but has managed to integrate that complexity into an active whole.<sup>34</sup> Faced

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<sup>32</sup> That the homeless "castrated" Jew should be creative runs counter to that old German "Blut und Boden" saw, "Wir [the Germans] haben Kultur. Sie [the Jews] haben nur Civilization". Indeed, Nietzsche claims that Christian culture is the invention of the Jews at their most creative, and that actual Christians are merely the Jews' sterile inheritors. It is worth pondering the irony in the fact that Nietzsche runs the line, roughly, that there was only one truly creative Christian and that was the Jew Paul, while Freud, in some ways an inheritor of Nietzsche (for instance, both take repression as a primal cause of creativity), runs the line, roughly, that there was only one truly creative Jew and that was Moses, who according to Freud was an Egyptian non-Jew (see Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*). Such grandiose claims from two of the founding fathers of "the hermeneutics of suspicion"!

<sup>33</sup> Recall Odysseus's response to the foot soldier Thersites who complains that he has no stake, or interest in fighting the Trojans. Odysseus does not consider the soldier's, by our lights, reasonable view. He does not attempt to reason with him but simply beats him into submission. The foot soldier, for Odysseus, is merely a tool, like his trusty sword, and when it performs other than to specifications, he corrects it accordingly.

<sup>34</sup> Brian Leiter in his forthcoming *Nietzsche on Morality* argues that generally we do better do talk of the higher man rather than the Übermensch since the later notion is specific to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, while talk of the higher man is

with the inevitability of conflicting drives he does not suppress, or seek to extirpate any drive, this being the typical genesis of resentment, but rather he achieves a redirection of various drives. In support of Richardson's notion of the Overman as the ideal of a Hegelian *Aufhebung* of the master-slave dichotomy we should note that in the very place where Nietzsche first introduces the terms "slave morality" and "master morality", namely BGE 260, he says "in all higher and more mixed cultures there also appears an attempt at mediation between these two moralities". In *Human, All too Human* he writes,

For wherever the great architecture of culture developed, it was its task to force opposing forces into harmony, through an overwhelming aggregation of the remaining, less incompatible powers, yet without suppressing or shackling them. [HAH 276]

On this model the Overman is a complete construction, a building of hierarchical forms, containing diverse elements structured towards a unitary goal. As Nietzsche says of Zarathustra in *Ecce Homo*, "in him all opposites are blended into a new unity" [EH, p303]. Nietzsche's Overman, unlike the Last Man, is no mere assemblage of disparate pieces carted together. His understanding of the past does not indulge in the dogmatist's refuge in some transcendental authority; the will of God, progress towards the summum bonum. Nor is it a product of the nihilist's ironic distance from his own projects. Rather he respects the past for the individuals it has achieved and for providing the materials from which his new subjectivity has been fashioned. For Nietzsche, where the Overman is a labyrinth whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere, The Last Man, his prescient prefiguration of postmodern man, is a labyrinth whose center is nowhere and circumference everywhere.<sup>35</sup>

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repeated throughout Nietzsche's work. However until the notion of higher man is given a concrete characterization which reveals how it is different from the as yet equally ephemeral notion of *Übermensch* I see no problem in simply equating the two. *Übermensch* seems more descriptive since it has the helpful suggestion of a feat of overcoming.

overcoming. Indeed in the those passages where Nietzsche refers both to higher men and *Übermensch*, for instance, KSA, vol. 13, p. 190, he seem to pretty much equate the two.

<sup>35</sup> This article has greatly improved through feedback from Pia Conti, Brian Leiter, Peter Levine, John Richardson, and Chris Williams. The enormous influence of my teacher Alexander Nehamas I take to be too obvious to detail. This essay is dedicated to the two other Alexanders in my life, my father Alexander Gemes who, as much as anyone I have ever known, struggled heroically with the problem of making a self of his many conflicting drives, and my son Alexander Conti-Gemes who I hope will succeed where his grandfather failed.

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