

Nietzsche's Will to Power

Nietzsche's Will to Power:

Eagles, Lions, and Serpents

By

Raymond Angelo Belliotti

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To Marcia, Angelo and Vittoria

Megghiu muriri 'ntra li granfì di lu liuni chi sutta la cuda di l'asinu.

(“Better to die in the clutches of the lion than under the tail of a jackass.”)

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PREFACE

Nietzsche's gleeful brandishing of various versions of the notion of will to power is perhaps his most seductive and maddening rhetorical weapon. (I will avoid the locution "the will to power" whenever possible because the article "the" suggests a substance, thing, or independent faculty. Thus, I use "will to power" as an alternative.) Readers are at once drawn to the idea that all human actions—Or is it all actions of living beings or even all movements of the physical universe?—are motivated in some sense by the insatiable demands of will to power, and repelled by the implication that social (or all) life is little more than the ongoing drama of the struggle of power relations. Socialized into accepting that our most cherished values and community understandings must embody substantive, independent moral currency, we are stunned by the possibility that they may merely represent the outcomes of class conflict and internecine warfare. Yet we harbor the suspicion that the terms of social existence are disproportionately determined by relatively few, those who are most powerful. Perhaps "might makes right" after all, although more subtly than initially supposed. Perhaps "winners write history" and transform to their advantage the historical, contingent triumph of their own values into a discovery of what is demanded by reason and is thus honored as appropriate, natural, and even inevitable.

Over the past few decades, when teaching courses involving Nietzsche's work, I have noticed that students exude increased energy when discussions turn to will to power. (We must imagine Nietzsche smiling at that result.) They invariably identify "power" with "oppression," which is in fact only one way of exercising power, and falls far short of defining the term. They typically view will to power as either a possible justification for their own contemplated, aggressive acts or as an idea that disqualifies Nietzsche from being taken seriously as a thinker. In either case, their perceptions reflect only "black or white" possibilities, scant appreciation for ambiguity, and insufficient recognition of nuance. (We must imagine Nietzsche bristling.)

Nietzsche employed the eagle as a literary symbol of soaring freely as an antidote to the pedestrian spirit of gravity; as the epitome of graceful solitude and unrepentant pride; and as a powerful bird of prey. He invokes the lion as the symbol of ferocity, strength, courage, deconstructing the

status quo, and laughter—as when the lion laughs at, roars, and exercises its power in the presence of the higher men. Nietzsche references the serpent as the symbol of desires, drives, and instincts and of wisdom. Taken together, these three animals best capture several dimensions of the psychological version of his doctrine of will to power.

To try to unpack Nietzsche's notion of will to power is to also confront the general problem of how to interpret his work and to grapple with some of his underlying epistemological and value commitments such as perspectivism, the order of human rank, his celebration of aristocracy, and his denial of objectivity. Nietzsche's concept of will to power cannot be understood adequately in isolation from other themes arising from his general philosophy.

Nietzsche revels in literary theatrics and his self-image, at least in his writings, is unapologetically positive. Examining whether his penchant for self-congratulations masks an underlying insecurity and amplified fear is beyond the scope of this work. But by closely attending to Nietzsche's invocation of will to power, we can better interpret his overall philosophy and, more important, better understand the human condition.

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Thanks also to Victoria Carruthers, authors' liaison, and the other staff members at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, who added expertise to the production process and who dealt patiently and considerately with an author who was too often impatient and annoying. Also, thanks to Alice Hodge, an expert of book formatting who corrected my numerous errors and prepared the final manuscript with unmatched efficiency and grace.

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Jesus or Nietzsche: How Should We Live Our Lives? (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi Editions, 2013).

Machiavelli's Secret: The Soul of the Statesman (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 2015).

Posthumous Harm: Why the Dead are Still Vulnerable (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

Power: Oppression, Subservience, and Resistance (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 2016).

INTRODUCTION

Most scholars distinguish three phases of Nietzsche's thought. The early period that features a host of essays and *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), and was greatly influenced by the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer and the music of Richard Wagner. The middle period that begins with *Untimely Meditations* (1873-1876) and ends with the first four sections of *The Gay Science* (1882). In this phase Nietzsche demonstrates some positivist inclinations and distances himself from metaphysics. The final period begins with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885) and includes the remainder of his published work. Here Nietzsche radically distances himself from the influences of science, Schopenhauer, and Wagner, and develops the ideas of eternal recurrence, the overman, will to power, and *amor fati*, some of which he had spawned or alluded to earlier. For example, elements of what is later christened "will to power" are found in his middle period and even to some extent in his early work.

For Nietzsche, philosophy is "the most spiritual will to power" (BGE 21). Philosophers employ their will to truth to create the world in the image of their own values. Our truths reflect and sustain our own characters. As such, philosophy, at its best, embodies and exemplifies robust will to power, even if it does not acknowledge that reality. Thus Leslie Paul Thiele observes, "[Philosophy] finds its highest incarnation in the philosopher himself. The philosopher is his own experiment in living, in the enhancement and sublimation of the will to power. He is, in effect, his own artistic creation."¹

Nietzsche's first concern regarding will to power is as the primary, perhaps sole, motivation of human activity—what I am calling the psychological version of the doctrine. He does seem to extend the doctrine to include all organic life (the biological version) and at times, especially in his notebooks, to all of nature (the cosmological version). But only the psychological version is critical to his aspiration to transvalue existing values and to provide a salutary alternate to utilitarian hedonism and Schopenhauerian pessimism. Accordingly, I will make only a few allusions to the biological or cosmological versions of will to power, but not address them directly or fully. (My view is that Nietzsche did not accept the cosmological version as one of his considered judgments and if he did embrace the biological version—which is probably the case—what

he means by “will to power” there must vary significantly from what he means by that expression in the context of human psychology.)

I do not take Nietzsche's rendering of will to power to be a metaphysical depiction of the nature of the world or an analysis of human psychology arising from an external, transcendent vantage point. He is clear that his doctrine of will to power is necessarily an interpretation arising from his perspective which is a view from within the world and within human psychology (BGE 22, 36). Moreover, we should take him at his word: his account is autobiographical, an imposition of his values, and is itself an exercise of will to power—although he, unlike most other philosophers, self-consciously embraces all of this and discards second-order epistemological pretensions to objectivity, unconditionality, absolutism, and dogmatism (BGE 2, 5, 6, 9; GM III 12, 24).

In that vein, Nietzsche's work and particularly his notion of will to power exemplify and do not merely chronicle his philosophy. Nietzsche does not curry disciples, but seeks strong resistance in the form of worthy philosophical opposition to his views; he does not seek final victory and enshrinement as “the Truth” for his work, but instead yearns to continue the contest. As he explicitly observes that some philosophers are born “posthumously,” he lusts for new enemies and new battles even after death. Happily, he has achieved the destiny that he always fancied he would earn. Unfortunately, his collapse in Turin, on January 3, 1889, prevented him from experiencing more than an inkling of his kismet.

Nietzsche embodies and exemplifies a colony of general or broad themes: the perspectival nature of truth claims; the links between psychological types of human beings and their embrace of corresponding perspectives; the connection between writing and living; the inability of language to capture life's complexities and fluidity; the denial of absolutism and dogmatism; the human need to impose order and meaning on the world of Becoming; the salutary rhythms of deconstruction, re-imagination, and re-creation; the prescription to recognize and welcome the tragedy and contingency that constitute life; the enterprise of replacing the task of objectively disproving truth claims with the project of casting suspicion upon their origins and upon the psychology of those who embrace them; and the importance of self-overcoming, which includes subjecting one's own theoretical and practical commitments to the strictest ongoing scrutiny.

To remain true to his general themes, Nietzsche cannot merely *instruct* readers to strengthen will to power and their impulse to render evaluations. Instead, his own work must *exemplify* the themes he embodies and engage the drives of readers (if they are able) to interpret, value, and create. By

aspiring to increase the strength of these drives in the best of his readers, Nietzsche cautions that striving to eliminate the capability of "evil" is counter-productive because the actualization of higher human capabilities and most destructive impulses flow from the same passions, instincts, and drives.

Nietzsche denies absolute truth because he rejects its foundation: the presence of things-in-themselves. He also labels as erroneous the human enterprise of stabilizing the world of becoming through "objective" knowledge and truth claims. But he admits that such error is a condition of human life because our demand for fixed knowledge, even if obtained erroneously, is required to order, categorize, simplify, and secure our lives and our world (BGE 4, 16, 24, 34; GS 260, 265; A 56).

On Nietzsche's own account, our interpretations of the world reveal who we are, what we value, and the condition of our will to power. If we take his words seriously, Nietzsche holds the convictions he expresses because doing so increases his feelings of power. Perceiving the world as one of becoming, permits him possibilities for ongoing creative labor through his writings, and offers him the prospect of earning the posthumous fame to which he aspired and insisted he would garner. As a function of immanent critique, an examination and evaluation from within Nietzsche's own perspective, we should not take his doctrine of will to power as an aperspectival truth about the world, all organic life, or even human motivation. If allegiance to the doctrine of will to power became dominant in the philosophical world or, even worse, in the globe as a whole then Nietzsche's most cherished general themes would be sullied. His is an explicitly oppositional doctrine: it requires opponents against which to struggle; its self-perception is one of esoteric interpretation. Nietzsche exemplifies and does not merely recite the doctrine of will to power. The doctrine of will to power itself exemplifies its own content. Although we might embrace some of Nietzsche's general themes, parroting his specific pronouncements creates an internal self-referential paradox for Nietzsche. In that vein, any value code arising from will to power is susceptible to ongoing overcoming, the ceaseless creation of new forms. We cannot aspire to a fixed, final tablet of values, but can hope only to accelerate self-revision in service of greater life-enhancement.

In Chapter One, I sketch problems that all interpreters of Nietzsche confront, such as his apparent self-contradictions, the oxymoronic character of much of his work, his experimentalism, and penchant for viewing issues from multiple perspectives. I consider but eventually reject applying self-consciously a principle of interpretative charity, which would strive to place Nietzsche's cumulative work in its best and most

persuasive light. I continue by offering a framework to guide interpretation, one grounded in Nietzsche's broad themes and experimental outlook. I consider the various ways to regard the material in Nietzsche's unpublished notebooks and explain why I have chosen to ignore this material in analyzing his psychological version of will to power. I then describe the process of immanent critique which guides my analysis of his psychological version of will to power, a process that interprets and evaluates Nietzsche's version from his own general principles and values, which I also outline. I then conduct a lengthy examination of his epistemological perspectivism and the paradoxes of self-reference that Nietzsche invites. Finally, I discuss Nietzsche's use of genealogical critiques and explain why he does not fall prey to charges that he commits the genetic fallacy.

Attending carefully to Nietzsche's notion of will and to his supposed understanding of will to power, but ignoring the concept of power itself constitutes questionable methodology. We should not assume that the notion of power is unproblematic and is antecedently grasped by readers and interpreters.² In fact, the concept of power is uncommonly intriguing and maddeningly elusive. Establishing a common framework for power is a necessary condition for the possibility of interpreting plausibly Nietzsche's critical idea. In the absence of a discussion on power itself, readers are too prone to leap to the mistaken conclusion that "power" is entirely or mainly translatable as "oppression." In Chapter Two, I provide a more refined analysis of power prior to embarking on the interpretive project of unpacking Nietzsche's notion of will to power. In this chapter I sketch a general notion of power; discuss competing notions of what constitutes a person's interests and how they connect to exercises of power; distinguish between power-to and power-over; briefly discuss passive power and the difference between exerting influence and exercising power; introduce ideas about social power; and define and illustrate three major ways of exercising power-over.

In Chapter Three, I begin by chronicling some preliminary allusions—prior to invoking the phrase "will to power"—that Nietzsche lodges with respect to power, feelings of power, and the lust for power in his published work. I then analyze the over thirty passages that contain the expression "will to power" in Nietzsche's published writings. In so doing, I set the stage for a deeper examination of what Nietzsche embodies and exemplifies by "will to power," how it connects to his epistemological and metaphysical convictions, and what it might imply for living a robustly meaningful human life. Having surveyed the use of "will to power" in Nietzsche's published writings, I then advance the major questions that

must be addressed if we are to arrive at a deeper understanding of his doctrine. What does will to power designate? What does it presuppose? What effects does it engender? What is its status, epistemologically and metaphysically? How is will to power to be evaluated? How persuasive is will to power as an explanation of fundamental human instincts and as the lynchpin of a way of life?

In Chapter Four, I begin by chronicling the words of five prominent philosophers, Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre, Bertrand Russell, Frederick Copleston, and Daniel Dennett, who have harshly criticized Nietzsche's will to power. I then sketch the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer on Nietzsche's conception of will to power and explain how Nietzsche distanced himself from Schopenhauer by accepting and then transvaluing several of Schopenhauer's main themes about the nature of desire, striving, and the impossibility of final fulfillment. I then summarize Nietzsche's description in his published work in terms of the basic nature, process and actions, results, effects, and measure of value of will to power. To begin a thorough understanding of the doctrine of will to power, I then analyze the work of Walter Kaufmann, Maudemarie Clark, and Bernard Reginster. I also examine the question of whether will to power is inherently oppressive. I refine Reginster's rendering of will to power after addressing the work of Ivan Soll, and offer my interpretation which distinguishes robust will to power, moderate will to power, and attenuated will to power. I then summarize Nietzsche's way of evaluating various expressions and value of will to power. After so doing, I examine the epistemic status of will to power given Nietzsche's broader epistemological convictions such as perspectivism. I explain some ramifications of Nietzsche's notion of robust will to power such as his celebration of perfectionism, his ideal of the grand striver, and his understanding of worthy happiness which contrasts with the less vibrant happiness of the last man. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of Nietzsche's tragic view of human life which is prefigured by the philosophy of Machiavelli. For somewhat different reasons, both thinkers suggest that even the most glorious human beings must fail in the end.

In the final chapter, I address issues that are linked to Nietzsche's psychological version of will to power: his celebration of aristocratic privilege; his rendering of perfectionism; and his corollary proposition, which I call the principle of nobility. After exposing unpersuasive elements within these notions, I describe different ways to evaluate and rank human beings in accord with the extent to which they have actualized their basic potentials. I then consider two versions of a principle I call "psychological powerism" that Nietzsche may be thought to have

embraced. But I argue that if will to power is interpreted reasonably, both versions of psychological powerism fall far short of constituting telling criticisms against his work.

Understanding Nietzsche's psychological version of will to power as a first-order drive—perhaps on Nietzsche's view the only first-order drive—motivating all human action promotes conclusions such as will to power is merely a fundamental impulse to accumulate more power or merely a drive to exercise power oppressively. These conclusions are misconceived and arise from a failure to advance a host of required distinctions that I identify. Finally, I end by placing Nietzsche's psychological version of will to power in the context of my own work on the meaning of human life.

My conclusions may frustrate readers: if Nietzsche is in effect only revealing himself through his doctrine of will to power, how might we engage him in philosophical disputation? The answer may be, again on his own account, that our responses to Nietzsche reveal who we are, what we value, and the condition of our own will to power. He scorns abject cheerleaders and sycophantic disciples. He welcomes warriors of the spirit who will struggle against the resistance he provides, especially those who self-consciously understand that all philosophy, or at least all great philosophy, is autobiographical and that the will to truth is exercised in service of personal agenda. We all need, he reminds us, worthy opponents in order to grow, increase our capabilities, and experience the feelings of power, which do not necessarily imply the products of oppression. Those of us, who reject as a false dilemma his alternatives—either (a) venerate the nobles and regard the masses only instrumentally or (b) cherish the mediocre and suffocate the instinct for excellence—must demonstrate other cultural options. We must resist and overcome Nietzsche's sardonic wit and relentless critical attacks, and reveal and sustain who we are by accepting his challenge. To the extent that we prove to be worthy philosophical adversaries we merit his respect. To the degree we replicate the worst instincts of last men we earn his derision. But should we care? Do we require external validation from the likes of Nietzsche? Was his life of the spirit, a life lived most robustly internally and in solitude, sufficient to generate our respect? The answers to such questions restate the motivation that animates this work: by confronting Nietzsche we divulge the people that we are and the people we might become.

TEXTS AND THEIR ABBREVIATIONS

As is the common practice in Nietzsche scholarship, when I have cited from Nietzsche's writings the references in all cases have been given immediately in the text and not in the notes. I used the following translations of Nietzsche's published work: *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966); *Ecco Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967); *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967); *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974); *Untimely Mediations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967); *The Antichrist, Human, All-Too Human, Twilight of the Idols, The Wanderer and His Shadow, Untimely Meditations, The Dawn, The Birth of Tragedy, Thus Spoke Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1954); *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967).

All references are to sections, not page numbers. I have used the following abbreviations:

AC	<i>The Antichrist</i> (1895)
BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> (1886)
BT	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> (1872)
D	<i>The Dawn</i> (1881)
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i> (1908)
EH	Pref. "Preface"
EH I	"Why I Am So Wise"
EH II	"Why I Am So Clever"
EH III	"Why I Write Such Good Books"
EH IV	"Why I Am a Destiny"
EH Wagner	"The Case of Wagner"

The other chapters of EH are referred to using the abbreviations stated here. For example, EH BT 4 refers to the chapter dedicated to *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 4.

GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> (1887)
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i> (1882)
HAH	<i>Human, All-Too-Human</i> (1878)
HAH	first volume
HAH IIa	“Assorted Opinions and Maxims”
HAH IIb	“The Wanderer and his Shadow”
NCW	<i>Nietzsche Contra Wagner</i> (1888)
TI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i> (1889)
UM	<i>Untimely Meditations</i> (1873-1876)
UM I	“David Strauss, the Confessor and Writer”
UM II	“On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”
UM III	“Schopenhauer as Educator”
UM IV	“Richard Wagner in Bayreuth”
WP	<i>The Will to Power</i> (unpublished notebooks, 1883-1888)
WS	<i>The Wanderer and His Shadow</i> (1880)
Z	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> (1883-1885)

CHAPTER ONE

INTERPRETING NIETZSCHE

In this chapter, I sketch problems that all interpreters of Nietzsche confront, such as his apparent self-contradictions, the oxymoronic character of much of his work, his experimentalism, and penchant for viewing issues from multiple perspectives. I consider but eventually reject applying self-consciously a principle of interpretative charity, which would strive to place Nietzsche's cumulative work in its best and most persuasive light. I continue by offering a framework to guide interpretation, one grounded in Nietzsche's broad themes and experimental outlook. I consider the various ways to regard the material in Nietzsche's unpublished notebooks and explain why I have chosen to ignore this material in analyzing his psychological version of will to power. I then describe the process of immanent critique which guides my analysis of his psychological version of will to power, a process that interprets and evaluates Nietzsche's version from his own general principles and values, which I also outline. I then conduct a lengthy examination of his epistemological perspectivism and the paradoxes of self-reference that Nietzsche invites. Finally, I discuss Nietzsche's use of genealogical critiques and explain why he does not fall prey to charges that he commits the genetic fallacy.

Defining the Task

Interpreting the work of Friedrich Nietzsche is akin to hunting snipe, hugging rainbows, or capturing moonbeams. Or perhaps it is merely a matter of peering into a mirror and projecting the reflection onto the pages of critical assessment. Or maybe we can best interpret Nietzsche by going back to his time and place, retracing his upbringing and socialism, reading the sources that most influenced him, and then imagining ourselves as him. Yet he fancied himself a thinker far ahead of his time and not merely a product of his age. So we might have to conjure ourselves as a Nietzsche who is both influenced by his context but highly resistant to it. But do we really want to transform ourselves into ersatz versions of the author in

order to understand his work? Can we genuinely accomplish such a fantastic transformation even if we so desire?

The numerous, indeed countless, conflicting interpretations of Nietzsche's work composed throughout the past six score years are both impressive and mind-numbing. To sketch only a sample: We have Nietzsche the precursor of existentialism; the prefigurement of and apologist for Nazism; the playful anticipator of postmodernism; the neo-Kantian who in his later writing manifests a coherent notion of truth and cognitive understanding compatible with analytic philosophy; the apparent scornor of women who in fact provides a host of principles expropriated by contemporary feminism; the derider of romanticism who nevertheless exuded a host of romantic impulses and ideas; the anti-realist who was the harbinger of contemporary pragmatism; and the childish dreamer who fantasied the ideal of an overman to compensate for his own physical and social shortcomings. One is tempted to conclude that Nietzsche was at once all of these archetypes and none of them. Certainly, Nietzsche would appreciate *that* paradox and would not endeavor to unravel it.

The oxymoronic character of Nietzsche's writing invites competing interpretations. He enjoys talking about "false truths," "selfish altruism" "irreligious religion," "compassionate contempt," "self-interested pity," and the like. Such linguistic pairings add interpretive difficulties. Moreover, Nietzsche employs a variety of literary styles and moves facilely among a host of critical perspectives. Aphorisms, metaphors, calculated exaggerations, genealogical critiques, personal invectives, and experimental hypotheses coalesce uneasily in his work. Both the forms and contents of Nietzsche's writing often strike novice readers as hopelessly contradictory and intentionally misleading. He cultivates such reactions by relishing self-referential paradoxes and passages where he seems to self-consciously refute his earlier positions.

In that vein, Karl Jaspers claims that "self-contradiction is the fundamental ingredient in Nietzsche's thought. For nearly every single one of Nietzsche's judgments, one can also find the opposite."¹ Although many of these self-contradictions are merely apparent—as they result from Nietzsche's calculated verbal equivocations or readers' failure to attend carefully to different contexts—others reflect Nietzsche's understanding that the complexity of reality requires "seeing" with many different sets of eyes:

Let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts such as 'pure reason,' 'absolute spirituality,' 'knowledge in itself' . . . There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival 'knowing': and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can

use to observe one thing, the more complex will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' be (GM III 12).

So, in accord with his own epistemological commitments, Nietzsche must view an issue from multiple perspectives in order to refine and deepen his conception of it and attain the only patina of "objectivity" available to us. Although this rumination on perspectivism allows us to explain many of Nietzsche's apparent self-contradictions and experimental hypotheses, what emerges as his considered judgment on the issues he investigates remains in dispute.

The interpretive adventure becomes even more precarious when Nietzsche distinguishes exoteric from esoteric interpretations (BGE 30). Exoteric approaches judge and evaluate from an external vantage point and, more important, "see things from below." Esoteric approaches evaluate from the inside and "look down from above" from the "heights of the soul." Extolling the order of human rank and deriding egalitarianism, Nietzsche insists that "books for all the world are always foul-smelling." Such passages are thought by some contemporary thinkers to signal that Nietzsche often neither says what he means nor means what he says in his books, at least not at the surface level.² Instead, he sets literary traps that ensnare the commonplace reader employing exoteric interpretation, while those few readers of higher rank self-consciously use esoteric interpretation to dismantle the snares. From this angle, Nietzsche considers the majority of his audience unworthy readers who deserve to be fooled, while only those of the highest human rank are capable of understanding his discourse. Of course, even if we accept Nietzsche's distinction and his calculated misdirection, the issue of *which* of numerous possible esoteric readings is preferable remains contestable. Also, one must imagine Nietzsche nodding approvingly as this or that philosopher presents a new esoteric interpretation and proclaims himself or herself the first genuine reader of the master. The self-congratulatory dimension of the proclamation itself honors the Nietzschean spirit.

Nietzsche also instructs us that multiple, conflicting drives form the core of the human spirit. Just as he cannot offer universal prescriptions for interpreting, evaluating, and living, given his commitment to certain broad epistemological and normative themes, he must eschew a single, univocal reading of his own work: "This is *my* way; where is yours? . . . For *the* way—that does not exist" (Z III "On the Spirit of Gravity," 2). Accordingly, given his own convictions, no fixed, final way to read and interpret Nietzsche exists (BGE 30, 288, 289). We are left only with a passel of plausible, often incompatible interpretations.

A Principle of Interpretive Charity

We might try to resolve interpretive conflicts by appealing to the principle of charity that requires us to put the work in the best possible light prior to evaluating it. That is, we should interpret Nietzsche in a fashion that demonstrates that his work is rational, avoids obvious falsehoods and fallacies, and forms a coherent whole. We begin by trying to appreciate the work instead of by foraging for perceived contradictions and weaknesses; we aspire to understand his thinking in its most powerful, persuasive form; and if more than one interpretation of a particular matter is available, we select the most credible. Moreover, we attend sympathetically to innovative ideas while suspending our own settled convictions on the matter; we focus carefully on how a phrase or concept can be used in various contexts and with different connotations, choosing the meaning that best supports the author's conclusions; we avoid accepting sweeping statements that undermine those conclusions and instead recognize distinctions that might salvage the author's evidence. In short, we read the text in the manner that renders it most compelling and evaluate its theses only after we are satisfied that we have interpreted it charitably.

That interpreters should attribute the most reasonable and most persuasive view to the texts they later judge seems both honorable and uncontestable, at least at first glance. But first impressions, like visiting relatives and telemarketing evangelists, often belie their initial appearances. Applying the principle of charity requires an antecedent notion of what constitutes a text's "most persuasive form" or "best light" or "most powerful rendering." Is Nietzsche's work interpreted most charitably when he is viewed as an apologist and inspiration for Nazism? Not if the interpreter is a contemporary, egalitarian, analytic philosopher. But Alfred Baeumler was thrilled to place Nietzsche in that light given his profound commitment to The Third Reich. Is Nietzsche's work interpreted most charitably when he is seen as a neo-Kantian whose thought developed in ways compatible to the measures of contemporary analytic philosophy? Not if the interpreter is a postmodernist who bristles at the restrictions of classical logic and derides the methods of conceptual analysis. But analytic philosophers will take Nietzsche seriously only if he is interpreted in that fashion. I could continue, but the point is obvious: the standard for the most charitable interpretation of Nietzsche's or anyone else's work arises from the perspective of the person doing the interpreting. What is taken to be the "best light" is that rendering that conforms most closely to the standards that the interpreter embraces. The

most charitable interpretation reduces to the rendering that most closely mirrors the interpreter's deepest philosophical convictions.

The dangers are two-fold. First, applying the principle of charity may domesticate Nietzsche's work if wielded by an analytic interpreter, or falsify it if brandished by an opportunistic political thinker, or reduce it to only a carnival of paradox and linguistic play if applied by a postmodernist. And the list goes on. Ironically, when we impose our own deepest philosophical convictions onto texts written in a different context and age we may unwittingly exemplify Nietzsche's judgment that philosophers project their values onto their subject matter while claiming only to have unearthed discoveries. Furthermore, when describing and evaluating the work of other philosophers, Nietzsche eschews the principle of interpretive charity. He is convinced that great philosophers represent more than one thing and that they have multiple relations to history. He is also concerned about falsifying the work of and thereby insulting the philosophers to whom we apply the principle interpretive "charity." After all, Nietzsche insists countless times that philosophers cast their own values onto the subject matter that they interpret. Worse, the principle of charity bears the stench of pity, a disposition that is a consistent target of Nietzsche's disdain (BGE 29, 30, 186, 190, 191, 196, 211).

The danger of applying a principle of charity is to conflate the results of an interpreter's application of his or her own values with what Nietzsche embodies and exemplifies. Worse, if Nietzsche is correct, charity only masks an assertion of superiority and mendaciously expresses contempt. Perhaps the best we can do is *admit* that our interpretation of Nietzsche's work, whether "charitable" or not, is an expression of the values constituting our perspective and that our claims to truth are exercised in service of those values. In avoiding an explicit invocation of the principle of charity we are being true to Nietzsche's own disposition. He neither dispenses nor requests charitable interpretations of philosophical writing. He is suspicious of the motives from which invocations of the principle of charity arise and suggests that an unworthy dissatisfaction with the self may impel the drive to charity in general (BGE 194; Z III "On the Spirit of Gravity," 2). Perhaps in the end invoking a principle of charity is nothing but a veil to conceal that our interpretations, even if claiming to be charitable, serve our values and express will to power.

Accordingly, we are better advised to strive to be charitable by making sense of Nietzsche's texts on Nietzsche's terms and by limiting to the extent possible our well-intentioned, but often falsifying interventions. The distinction between these approaches is itself thin and adds to the tenuousness of the interpretive mission.

An Interpretive Framework

In fact composing a book, such as this one, that purports to describe and critically assess an aspect of his writing—in this case his understanding of will to power—makes it almost impossible not to entomb Nietzsche's thought in a non-Nietzschean metaphysical language of explanation. An author seemingly cannot fabricate a rational system of Nietzsche's thinking without betraying Nietzsche's guiding impulse. To fulfill readers' expectations to learn what Nietzsche "really meant" in unequivocal terms is to domesticate his literary style and to defeat his central aspirations. Readers must confront Nietzsche's work directly to experience the episodic rhythms and psychological drives that constitute his thought. Those authors who fancy themselves interpreters of Nietzsche must struggle with the relationships between Nietzsche's broad themes, his critique of mainstream philosophy, his general observations on living life, his specific background views which energize his observations on living life, his world views which often embody warrior rhetoric, his genealogical suspicions about conventional wisdom, and his often vague vision of the future.

By Nietzsche's *broad themes* I mean his most fundamental, recurring convictions: the inescapability of inner conflict; the perspectival nature of truth claims; the links between psychological types of human beings and their embrace of corresponding perspectives; the need to perceive reality from multiple perspectives; and the connection between writing and living; the inability of language to capture life's complexities and fluidity. Also, the denial of absolutism and dogmatism; the human need to impose order and meaning on the world of Becoming; the salutary rhythms of deconstruction, re-imagination, and re-creation; the prescription to recognize and welcome the tragedy and contingency that constitute life; and the enterprise of replacing the task of objectively disproving truth claims with the project of casting suspicion upon their origins and upon the psychology of those who embrace them. Finally, the stress on the importance of self-overcoming, which includes subjecting one's own theoretical and practical commitments to the strictest ongoing scrutiny; and the call to luxuriate in the immediacy of life. These broad themes, taken collectively, resist unambiguous doctrinal exposition.

Nietzsche's avowed experimentalism haunts those striving to interpret his work. How much of what he writes is provisional and discarded, implicitly or explicitly, later in his work? How much illustrates a mind in flux? To what extent is the central character in one of his major books, Zarathustra, a projection of Nietzsche's own thinking and to what extent is

Zarathustra merely a literary character intended to represent a variety of attitudes and stages of life, some of which are decidedly non-Nietzschean? Furthermore, Nietzsche reveals a penchant for self-parody, warns us not to regard his work as the redemptive final word, and insists that the only disciples worth addressing are those who seek to surpass, not abjectly parrot, their teachers.

The Nachlass

In addition, to what extent are Nietzsche's *Nachlass*, his voluminous, unpublished notebooks, admissible as evidence of Nietzsche's considered judgments? By far the best-known part of the *Nachlass* is a volume, *The Will to Power*, first edited and published by Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth Forster-Nietzsche, in 1901. The volume contains selections from Nietzsche's notebooks covering the years 1883-1888. Elisabeth, not Nietzsche, arranged and numbered the selections. Subsequent editions, with inclusions by various editors, were published in 1904, 1906, 1911, 1930, 1940, and 1956. Walter Kaufmann published a version of *The Will to Power* in 1967 with this caution: "These notes were not intended [by Nietzsche] for publication in this form . . . This book is not comparable to the works Nietzsche finished and polished, and we do him a disservice if we fudge the distinction between these hasty notes and his often gemlike aphorisms."³ Kaufmann, then, warns us about using *The Will to Power* when advancing what we take to be Nietzsche's considered judgments, yet fully participated in producing the text.

Some philosophers, most notably Martin Heidegger, regard the *Nachlass* as the key to Nietzsche's thoughts. Heidegger took Nietzsche's published work to be the mask of an author who insisted on the need for disguises. Citing passages in the *Nachlass* where Nietzsche claims to write only for himself and not for readers; and paragraphs in his published work where Nietzsche speaks of the importance of authorial masks and of being born "posthumously," interpreters in this camp are likely to render Nietzsche more philosophically, metaphysically, systematically, and doctrinally than other interpreters see him. But why, then, did Nietzsche publish? Did he do so only for style, effect, and his own amusement? Why did Nietzsche not simply keep all of his writing private? Why was he so disappointed in the tepid sales his books generated? What would be the point of *only* writing to mislead readers, the overwhelming numbers of whom were antecedently utterly uninterested in Nietzsche?

At the other extreme are philosophers such as Bernd Magnus, who distinguish sharply between Nietzsche's published work and the *Nachlass*.

Under the commonsense assumption that unpublished thoughts scribbled into notebooks, often during long walks, should not be regarded equally with polished, published work, Magnus and those of his ilk rule the *Nachlass* inadmissible. The interpreters in this camp are more likely to portray Nietzsche as a precursor of postmodernism who paved the way for contemporary thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, and Rorty.

Between the extremes of totally ignoring the *Nachlass* and of accepting the *Nachlass* as the definitive Nietzsche, are several intermediary positions. Some interpreters simply regard the material contained in the *Nachlass* equally with his published work. They might insist that all of Nietzsche's thoughts alike are subject to exposure and dissection. Other interpreters confer privilege of place to Nietzsche's published work, but invoke material from the *Nachlass* only when doing so is compatible with and amplifies convictions expressed in Nietzsche's published work. They might argue that such judicious use of the *Nachlass* aids our understanding of Nietzsche's overall project.

One is tempted to throw up his or her hands and declare that Nietzsche is an empty vessel into which readers pour their own deepest hopes and fears. While claiming to interpret his work, we are in fact merely affirming his general views about how philosophers structure the world in accord with their own values and convictions, and then claim to have discovered the objective truth of the matter at hand. If so, the genius of Nietzsche is to have composed a vast literature that invites readers to reflect unconsciously their own autobiographies in their interpretations of it, all of which amounts to unintended self-parody in the light of one of Nietzsche's most cherished axioms.

But things are not so simple. If an interpreter concluded that Nietzsche firmly believed in the existence and accessibility of things-in-themselves; or that he venerated egalitarianism; or that he extolled the glories of an indolent human life; or that he celebrated fixed, objective truths underwritten by divine imperatives or commanded by reason itself or discoverable as part of the "furniture of the universe," he or she would be repudiated universally despite the thinker's invocation of "esotericism." Although inviting numerous, conflicting interpretations, Nietzsche's texts do not permit every possible reading. Thus, his work is not merely an empty vessel awaiting and accepting any content offered.

The Strategy of Immanent Critique

Well, so much for philosophical whining. Instead of concluding that the resistance of Nietzsche's work to uncontested, univocal interpretation—

what some might attribute to his lack of analytic precision—merits mournful rituals and collective lamentations, we might better revel in the possibilities thereby produced. We academic philosophers—those whom Nietzsche excoriates in different contexts as mere “scientific laborers” (BGE 211); embracers of “frog perspectives” (BGE 2); as harmless as an “old woman” (UM III 8); “completely abysmal . . . hodgepodge philosophers” (BGE 204); lacking “historical sense” (HAH 2); “world-denying, hostile to life, suspicious of the senses, freed from sensuality” (GM III 10); “scribbling slaves of the democratic taste” (BGE 44); “academic ‘ruminants’” (EH UM 3); “presumptuous little dwarves” (BGE 58); “old maids” (BGE 206); and “scholarly oxen” (EH III 1)—can till fertile conceptual soil with enormous freedom to unveil our plausible, “innovative” findings, thereby parasitically amplifying our resumes by gnawing at Nietzsche’s philosophical carcass. Characteristically, Nietzsche would at once deride and appreciate our exertions.

Still, some strategy or other for approaching and evaluating Nietzsche’s work must be embraced and revealed. I will employ a form of immanent critique. That is, I will interpret and evaluate Nietzsche’s notion of will to power from the standpoint of his own general principles and values.

What are the standards that Nietzsche provides? First, he insists that all great philosophy is autobiographical (BGE 6). Despite the truculent protestations of academic philosophers, particularly those within the analytic tradition, to the contrary, philosophical investigation is not merely a dispassionate, impartial, objective search for truth. Instead, Nietzsche proclaims, philosophical writing is “the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir.” Although philosophers present their arguments and conclusions as if they are discoveries of independent reason, in fact they bear witness to who their authors are “in what order of rank the innermost drives of [their] natures stand in relation to each other.” Especially important are a philosopher’s moral values and drives, at least if Nietzsche is correct. Accordingly, Nietzsche’s notion of will to power must arise from and reveal much about Nietzsche. Moreover, my interpretation of Nietzsche’s work must reflect my values and must divulge much about me. (Sidebar: if Nietzsche intends his remark to pertain only to “great” philosophy then, presumably, my interpretation of his work does not automatically fall under its domain. I will interpret Nietzsche’s remark more generally because I am convinced he is correct and that his observation also pertains to the ruminations of scholarly oxen, a group into which I have earned membership.)

Second, Nietzsche deepens the first point by adding that philosophers invariably claim to have arrived at their conclusions through “the self-

development of a cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic,” but in fact they project their own values, hunches, and “desires of the heart” and only later defend their findings with *ex post facto* reasons (BGE 5). Nietzsche is untroubled by the process and he may well think it inevitable: “[Philosophy] always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise” (BGE 9). However, he objects to the mendacity involved in the presentation. That is, philosophers do not admit or recognize the process for what it is. Instead, they try to maintain the ruse that their findings are derived independently of their values, passions, and desires—separately from their own images.

Contra Nietzsche, the distinction between the context of discovery and the context of justification has been acknowledged for decades. The procedures, motivations, and ways we arrive at various findings differ from the justifications and explanations by which we demonstrate those discoveries to be truths.⁴ Contemporary scientists, members of the judiciary, and philosophers would stress that the context of justification is more important: our rational beliefs that a proposition is true, it is often argued, are not necessarily linked with the processes by which the proposition was derived. At bottom, the paramount question is whether the justifications offered are sound, whether they are persuasive enough to withstand critical scrutiny.

Still, even in the face of this reasonable distinction, Nietzsche would object to the pretense pervading the context of discovery. To remain true to immanent critique, I will assume that Nietzsche’s findings reflect his values, hunches, passions, and desires; that he is aware of all that; and that he abrogates any pretension to the contrary. To remain in my investigatory role, I must also assume that my interpretations of Nietzsche’s will to power are not neutral, dispassionate exercises, but are instead a reflection of my values, hunches, passions, and desires. I must remain conscious of all this and not fall prey to any fakery to the contrary.

Third, I will explain and examine will to power only in terms of Nietzsche’s published work. In the past, when writing on Nietzsche, I have adopted the conventional approach of citing the *Nachlass*, especially the fabricated *The Will to Power*, only when a passage from his unpublished musings supports or amplifies Nietzsche’s position in a published work.⁵ But I will not do that here. Why not? Because the topic of the moment is will to power and that notion arises in three different versions, at least when we consider all of Nietzsche’s surviving writing. At times, Nietzsche seems to entertain or even subscribe to a cosmological version of will to power: the entire *world* is will to power and nothing else. At other times, Nietzsche seems to entertain or even subscribe to an organic version of