

# The Genealogy of Morals and Right Reading

## On the Nietzschean Aphorism and the Art of the Polemic

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Dionysus is, as is known, also the god of darkness.

—Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* “GM”

Like René Descartes, an excerpt from whose *Discourse on Method* had served “in lieu of a preface” to the first edition of Nietzsche’s *Human, All Too Human*, a book that was prototypical for both *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche was fond of betraying his intentions while nonetheless masking them: *larvatus prodeo*. Accordingly, Nietzsche attaches the warning subtitle, *A Polemic* to his *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Yet the title-page hint concerning the challenging dimension of the book has not prevented scholars from reading *On the Genealogy of Morals* as a *Tractatus* or straightforward account of Nietzsche’s thinking on moral philosophy, and it is a commonplace to claim that *GM* is Nietzsche’s most systematic and coherent book.<sup>1</sup>

Nietzsche himself was anxious about the likelihood of being misunderstood, above all: of being misread. Hence the anxiety of *noninfluence*, as we might call it, characterizes his most repeated tropes. The problem of misreading (a stylistic and rhetorical issue) is compounded by the subject matter of *GM* itself. In what follows, I question the rhetorical allusiveness of the book, an allusive indirection Nietzsche emphasizes in his bio-bibliographical reflections on the *Genealogy* in *Ecce Homo*:

“Every time a beginning calculated to mislead: cool, scientific, even ironic, deliberately foreground, deliberately holding back” (*EH* “GM”).

At the conclusion of the preface of *GM*, Nietzsche details what he regards as an essential prerequisite for an adequate reading.<sup>2</sup> Not a matter of authorial responsibility, “the fault,” Nietzsche writes, will rest with any reader who has not read his previous writings with unsparing attention. With this presupposition, Nietzsche demands more than that his readers be open to his writings—able, as he says referring to his *Zarathustra*, to be both “profoundly wounded and at the same time profoundly delighted by every word” (*GM* P:8). Beyond such readerly sensitivity, Nietzsche also supposes a writerly competence in the rhetorical form per se, a demand he placed on his readers following the failure of *The Birth of Tragedy* to find “right readers,” even among (especially among) philologists supposedly trained in rhetoric. The “difficulty some people have with the aphoristic form” was thus for Nietzsche a limitation stemming from a lack of training, that is, “from the fact that today this form is *not taken seriously enough*” (*GM* P:8).

In an earlier text, Nietzsche had already underlined the therapeutic efficacy of “psychological observations” or “reflection on what is human, all-too-human” (*HH* 35). This salutary benefit was the function of the aphorism or maxim with respect to the subject matter of his friend Paul Rée’s *On the History of Moral Sensations*<sup>3</sup> (a title Nietzsche uses in *HH*, and which could well have served as an alternate title for *GM*). True to its classical origins, in the psychological researches required for such a history (or genealogy) of morality, as Nietzsche recalls, the aphorism is a literary therapeutic form, a reference to both Hippocrates and the Stoic tradition in its Greek and its Roman instaurations. But Nietzsche would warn, and Pierre Hadot’s *Philosophy as a Way of Life* recalls this caveat for contemporary thought,<sup>4</sup> a veritable art (or practice) of reading but also the craft of writing (as Nietzsche emphasizes) is required in order to understand the aphorism: “even the subtlest mind is not capable of properly appreciating the art of polishing maxims if he has not himself been educated for it and competed at it” (*HH* 35). Unless one has practiced the aphoristic art in the service of life—such reflections constitute the “art of living” as Marcus Aurelius articulates this technical spiritual practice in his *Meditations*—one will be inclined, in Nietzsche’s words, to imagine the forming of maxims a trivial art, to think it “easier than it is” (*HH* 35).

In this way, Nietzsche’s claims regarding the understanding of his work assume a complex interplay between *readerly* and *writerly* approaches to his text. There are a number of issues at stake, but to begin to consider these approaches here, I return to the question (and it should be regarded as a genuine question) of the role of the aphorism in Nietzsche’s writings.

## THE APHORISM IN NIETZSCHE—AND PHILOSOPHY

The aphorism seems to cut philosophy down to size—bite size. Armed with teeth, as Nietzsche might have said, the cutting edge or, even, the *violence* of the aphorism

is manifest in the case of Nietzsche, nor is this less in evidence with respect to Heraclitus, his antique antecedent, nor indeed, though Nietzsche would have known nothing of this parallel, in the case of Wittgenstein.

The aphorism begins historically in the *αφορισμοί* of Hippocrates, that is, maxims in place of a handbook or physician's manual for the physician who would have no time to consult one in the field. Particularly apposite, we can recall the first and most famous of these: "Life is short, art long, opportunity fleeting."<sup>5</sup> Said otherwise, for the physician in the field, the life of the wounded soldier hangs in the balance, the conventions of the *art* of healing are protracted and cumbersome, the *chance* to act quickly lost, and so on.

On the battlefield, and this locus was shared by Nietzsche's favorite laconic poet-mercenary Archilochus, the healer had to carry his maxims in mind. Their brevity (and this is the ingeniousness of the structured design) is the reason the aphorism can be remembered. Above all, this same brevity is why it can be understood, at least in part. Short, one is able to *get* some bit of the point, even if one finds, in retrospect, that one has missed the half or more.

This is the beauty of the quick take. Quickly read, like the cold baths Nietzsche suggested as the best way to sidestep the announced visitation of nothing so seemingly unobtrusive as a letter (and today's experience of the urgency of e-mail offers a contemporary illustration of Nietzsche's sense of violation): the same tactical concision corresponds to the author's vanity, to offer and, at the same time, to conceal his offering (thereby an offering for everyone and no one).

Nietzsche expresses this ambitious presumption in *Zarathustra*, as he speaks of writing in blood: "Anyone who writes in blood and sayings does not want to be read but learnt by heart" (Z:I "On Reading and Writing"). More emphatically still, Nietzsche later affirms his "ambition" to say in the aphorism what others say—interrupting himself with a thought-slash (*Gedankenstrich*) to sharpen his point: "—what everyone else *does not say* in a book" (TI "Skirmishes" 51).

Unlike Hume, unlike Kant, unlike Heidegger (in spite of Heidegger's best efforts to imitate Nietzsche),<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche writes—or, as he says: he *composes* or *casts*—his aphorisms. And if Wittgenstein also wrote in aphorisms, Nietzsche is more readable by half and then some, (which is not to say that he is understood).

For the sake of a review of the complexity of the aphorism as a self-elaborating form of self-deconstruction and, simultaneously, of self-protection, we consider Nietzsche's own prefatory comment on the way an aphorism functions just because it reflects his prescription for reading his aphorisms, and thereby, his writings. Like the essay, treatise, or indeed, like the epigraph (with which, in the case of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, it is peculiarly liable to be mistaken), the aphorism is a particular literary form.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the rhetorical and poeticological, the aphorism has a singularly philosophical or reflective dimension.<sup>8</sup> In Nietzsche's hands, I argue, the aphorism implicates the reader in the reading and at the same time, formulaically and all too comfortably (we will return to this point later), the aphorism seems to absolve Nietzsche as author. It is also worth noting that, at least for some contempo-

rary scholars, part of the difficulty in reading Nietzsche's aphorisms has been the problem of their identification.

Obviously enough, not everything Nietzsche wrote was an aphorism, what is more: the aphoristic form was one that he developed and perfected throughout his writings. But the first problem of identifying and distinguishing Nietzsche's aphorisms has called forth an instructively *nonhermeneutic* engagement on the part of traditionally analytically trained philosophers.<sup>9</sup> These scholars undertook the task of identifying the particular aphorism Nietzsche "fitted" or "pre-fixed" or, perhaps better, "set at the beginning (*vorangestellt*) of the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the aphorism for which, in his words, "the entirety" of the third essay "is a commentary" (*sie selbst ist dessen Commentator*) (*GM P:8*). For many commentators, and this reading continues, a likely candidate for the contested aphorism has tended to be the epigraph to the third essay, but John Wilcox and Maudemarie Clark observe, and I agree, that it is rather the first section of third essay, titled "What is the meaning of ascetic ideals?" It is key to my reading that this identification that the second section (*GM III:2*) likewise begins with the same title question, the title question to be sure of the third essay as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

The first section of the third essay thus begins with a review of the meaning of ascetic ideals in the case of artists, philosophers and scholars, women, the "physiologically deformed,"—who constitute (as Nietzsche parenthetically tells us) "the majority of mortals"—as well as ascetic ideals in the case of priests and saints. This roster recalls the emphases advanced in the first and second essays, but the point here is that the overdetermination of ascetic ideals, that one would "rather will *nothingness* than *not* will" at all (cf., the final section of the third essay, *GM III:28*), requires the "art of exegesis" first invoked in Nietzsche's preface. Thus the first section of the third essay concludes with a resumé of the conclusion to the preface itself (and it could not be clearer that the whole of the third essay will thus serve as a commentary or explication): "—Am I understood? . . . Have I been understood? . . . *Not at all my dear sir!*—Well then, let us start again, from the beginning."<sup>11</sup>

It is as readers or scholars that we remain "unknown to ourselves" (*GM P:1*), an inevitable ignorance, Nietzsche reminds us at the start of his preface, because, "we have never sought ourselves" (*ibid.*). Thus we recall that at the end of the preface, the reader will be upbraided on the same terms. In an aggressive swipe at Aristotle and the straightforward ideal of authorial clarity, as we recall, Nietzsche challenges the reader who finds his writing "difficult to understand,"<sup>12</sup> declaring his texts "clear enough, presuming what I presume: that one has first read my early writing and without sparing oneself a few pains in the process" (*GM P:8*).

For Nietzsche, we recall further, the aphorism is not taken seriously enough. Note the compound complexity of Nietzsche's complaint as we have analyzed its function above. If the allure of the aphorism lies in its brevity and if the beauty of brief things is that one take them fast and light, like a witticism or a clever saying (and here we see why the epigraph could have been taken for the aphorism in question), Nietzsche's prescription to us is, by contrast, to take his aphorisms more slowly, *seriously*,

as good medicine: and that is also to say, as philosophy, that is, again, the art of living.

This dissonant dimension echoes in Nietzsche's concluding word in his prefatory reflection on reading in his *GM*, where he also adds, for the art of reading his texts, a metaphor usually reserved for religious writings: sweet as honey, such texts are to be eaten.<sup>13</sup> Thus we are told that the way to understand Nietzsche's words will be to chew them over and over, to turn them over in ourselves, in our mouths, again and again, rumination, *das Wiederkauen* (*GM* P:8).

But such rumination fails us, and we hastily pass over passage after passage, spurred on as often as not by well-meaning introductory works by noted scholars or the encouraging advice of helpful translators. One is advised to read Nietzsche until one finds a passage one likes, then look for another, and so on, just as one might surf the Internet, moving from link to link, until one finds something vaguely worthy of being "bookmarked" as a "favorite," or else, as one might take a tour through a vacation spot or shopping mall. By contrast with such "searching and finding," to use metaphors borrowed from the scholarly disaster that is an electronic or searchable text, Nietzsche instructs us that "an aphorism consummately coined and molded, is not yet 'deciphered' in that it is read out; much rather has the interpretation first to begin" (*GM* P:8). Nor is it enough simply to begin to interpret. The hermeneutic *work* of reading is required here: we need an "art of interpretation" (*ibid.*).

The task of so interpreting Nietzsche's aphorism thus requires a commentary—indeed, a commentary that would otherwise be matched to what others say (or fail to say) "in a book." Nor do we lack an illustration of what such a commentary would look like. Nietzsche offers us an example of such a reading illuminated on the musical model of a coda. Note again that this is not simply prescribed or recommended on Nietzsche's part as a task for the reader to accomplish as he or she will. Instead, and this is the point, an example is provided in an elaborate form, going so far as to position a résumé (the scholar's nutshell) at the beginning of the third essay of the book, just where the author tells us to find it at the conclusion of his preface: "In the third essay of the book, I offer an exemplar of that which I name 'interpretation' in such a case" (*ibid.*).

The Nietzschean aphorism can be as short as a sentence set on its own. Alternately, it can be a fragment of a longer sentence in a longer paragraph: "Assuming as a given, that truth is a woman" (*BGE* P), famously followed with an elaborate reflection on philosophers, on dogma, and dogmatists.<sup>14</sup> And the Nietzschean aphorism can be very long indeed, as can be seen especially in the case of *HH* but also elsewhere, particularly in *Z*, if we do not read this book as a veritable novel of aphorisms but if we take it as a single aphorism, varied and tuned: Zarathustra as music. If brevity is the prime characteristic of the aphorism, it is not the only characteristic in Nietzsche's case.

The differential point above would suggest that the aphorism elaborated in *GM* III:1 resumes itself in its own recapitulation, an elaboration of which extends to the author's own commentary on it in the third part of the book as a whole. We have

to do with an aphorism within an aphorism (indeed, and, of course, in a book of such aphorisms). This recapitulation is the effective point at the end of the aphorism, confirming the working power of Nietzsche's aphoristic style, where he poses the question, "What is the meaning of ascetic ideals?" This question appears three times in succession, two-thirds of the way into a book on the generation of those same ideals: one doesn't get it? is it still unclear? (The question, of course, replays an earlier question as we recall: *GM* I, especially 1:8 and 1:9.) The answer given is not coincidentally adapted from the dancing master or conductor: Shall we take it from the top! *da capo!* (*GM* III:1, cf. *BGE* 56).

Beginning in this way with the question, "What is the meaning of ascetic ideals?" the aphorism answers its own question by emphasizing both the problem of understanding and the need to *begin* a reflection. The task of reading, like writing, but also thinking or loving, is the kind of thing that needs, as Nietzsche always repeated, first to be learnt. In this sense, the aphoristic structure of *GM* III:1 announces itself as problematic, bearing out the need for commentary and although we cannot pursue this question further here, the aphoristic structure per se calls for an adequate hermeneutic. But the art of reading, the hermeneutic art, according to Nietzsche, is "something that has been unlearned most thoroughly nowadays" (*GM* P:8).

### ON READING THE APHORISM

The aphorism as self-contained, as self-referring, as something that can and should be chewed over but also as something that can be carried beyond the text itself, has to be read both in itself and against itself. As a word, aphorism has the roots, as Liddell and Scott remind us, ἀφ-/ἀπ- from, off, away; ὀρίζω: to divide, set apart, separate as a boundary. Hence and substantively, the essence of aphorism is almost preternaturally phenomenological. Nor has this gone without remark. One author observes that the word itself means "formal 'de-limitation' and simultaneously substantively something 'manifestly removed from its usual horizon.'"<sup>15</sup> In this way, the aphorism presupposes or better said, and this is why Nietzsche favored it as a stylistic form, it *accomplishes*, achieves, or effects an *epoché* or bracketing of the phenomenon.

Nietzsche's aphorisms thus read themselves into the reader and what is intriguing about his stylization of this form is that they do this in spite of the reader's prejudices and more often than not *because* of these: playing with such readerly convictions and turning them inside out. An example of this reader-involved efficacy is Nietzsche's discussion of Jewish morality in the first part of the *Genealogy* (*GM* 1:7).

Reading the working of the aphorism in this way, we note that its tactical tempo only increases in its intensity—a plainly seductive appeal playing to the prejudices of the anti-Semite. This play is at work from the start in *On the Genealogy of Morals* as Nietzsche orients his reflections on the genealogical provenance of morality to the scientific ears and utilitarian sensibility of what he called the "English psychologists"

(*GM* I:1), while the very Darwinian oblivion of mechanical habit and sociocultural reinforcement is exactly under fire. Here, in *GM* I:7, the text is directed to, and hence it begins by, appealing to the most typical prejudices of all-too Christian anti-Semitism.

The Christian/anti-Semite is drawn into, seduced into the text, as the first section of *GM* throughout its repeated emphasis on the meaning of words as a defense of a “lordly” or “noble” Greco-Roman past, a charge held against Jewish antiquity. Thus one reads that everything ever done against the historical phantasm or “ideal” of the “noble” must fade into inconsequentiality compared with what “the *Jews* have done against them” (*GM* I:7). The doubling of the aphoristic stylizing of this text (I have elsewhere called it the barb of Nietzsche’s style referring not to Derrida’s spurs but Nietzsche’s “fisher of men” language as he regards his texts as so many “fish hooks”) turns the reader’s conviction against the reader himself or herself. The recoil is all the more effective the more deeply anti-Semitic the reader, an effect intensified in the course of reading. Indeed, as he or she continues to read, the anti-Semite will have no choice but to be caught in the middle of the text.

Identifying the Jew as the one who first inverts the “aristocratic value equation,” overturning the noble self-sufficiency of strength, confidence, and joy (“good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God” [*GM* I:7]) using the alchemy not of love but of the most “abysmal hatred,” Nietzsche transcribes the new, slavely moral equation as it now appears in the (now-dissonantly) *Christian* litany of the indemnification of the disenfranchised, made good again, as we recognize the well-known message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5, 1:13). Nietzsche will later elaborate this new equation in terms of *ressentiment*. But first Nietzsche sets nothing other than plain Christian values into the mouth of this very same Jewish revaluation: “the wretched alone are the good, the poor, powerless, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God” (ibid.). The newly revalued equation is thus articulated as a reweighting of the original values of strength (the “lordly” or noble values of antiquity) not for the nostalgic sake of a return to such pristine values but to identify and to trace the consequences of this same genesis: “One knows *who* appropriated the legacy of this Jewish revaluation” (ibid.). With this provocation, the reader is caught in his or her own assumptions.

The reversal of the aphorism already occurs in the double ellipsis *included* in Nietzsche’s own text. Nietzsche seduces the anti-Semitic reader into the text only to turn his or her reflections against the ultimate consequences of his or her own convictions. It now transpires that the anti-Semite *is* himself or herself a Jew and thus everything turns out to be coordinately on the way to becoming “Judaized, Christianized”—and for good, socialist, and atheistic measure (that is to say: to make it worse), Nietzsche includes an allusion to the “people” as well (*GM* I:9). With regard to the title of Christian or Jew, Nietzsche asks “what do words matter” (ibid.), and as he will later remind us in his *Anti-Christian*, the Christian is nothing more than a Jew of a more catholic (broader) “confession” (A 44).<sup>16</sup>

For the sake of the reader who might be “incapable of seeing something that required two thousand years to achieve victory” (*GM* I:8), Nietzsche repeats the redoubling emphasis in his next section with an exactly overwrought or agonized reflection on the working of revenge and *ressentiment* in religion and moral values. Describing such “a grand politics of revenge”—and recollecting as we shall detail below, the spiritual danger of “grand politics” as he describes it in *Human, All Too Human*—Nietzsche argues that Israel itself has had to “deny the active instrument of its revenge before all the world as its mortal enemy and nail it to the cross” (*GM* I:8). This denial ensures that “the opponents of Israel” swallow the bait, precisely as they are defined in reactive terms by contrast with Israel. Nietzsche’s text thus plays to the reader’s anti-Semitism (conscious or not), just as it convicts the reader on the very same terms.<sup>17</sup>

The Nietzschean aphorism exceeds the stylistic rhetoric of an author who can write against the prejudices of anti-Semitic conviction exposing the Semite within, the self-loathing of prejudice against the other as it betrays us in ourselves. To read Nietzsche’s aphorisms in this way requires a doubled reading, an *acromatic* or discursive reflection. Reading Nietzsche requires, as he expresses it, that the reader have “ears” for his words.<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche thus insinuates a dialogical dimension into the text by means of the aphorism as a saying (*Sprüche*), and in order to begin to engage the text critically, the reader must advert to the resonances of this acoustic dimension.

To take a further example, to illustrate a more patent, conceptual resonance, consider what might at first glance seem the incidental aphorism that relates the contest between memory and pride. “I have done that,” says my memory. ‘I cannot have done that’—says my pride, and remains adamant. At last—memory yields” (*BGE* 68). The reflex here turns on the balance of pride and memory and, in particular, on the conviction that the one belongs to a primary (and more objective) and the other to a secondary (and more subjective) mental order. Nietzsche’s reflection upon the ultimate primacy of what had appeared to be the secondary faculty of pride, the corrigible, merely subjective faculty, now supplants and corrects the supposedly primary (objective) faculty of memory. Between memory and desire or pride (this is the teasing point contra objectivity), fading memory defers to desire in recollection itself. The truth to life of this reflection catches the confidence of objective self-knowledge and both memory and pride are resolved into the soul’s sentiments, each on equal terms in the struggle of the self to tell itself.

It is worth noting that Nietzsche’s use of the aphorism is not the same in his earlier and later writings. Even where we read Nietzsche’s reflections on the art of the aphorism (reading and writing) in *Human, All Too Human* (*HH* I:35, 163, etc.), we are reading Nietzsche on the way, as it were, to what we tend to recognize as the specifically Nietzschean aphorism. For such an early example, we may consider the above cited “Grand Politics and their Costs” (*HH* 481). Weaving several threads into his account of grand politics (that is to say: war) Nietzsche finds that the greatest cost of war is not material but rather the sacrifice of spiritual “capital” (*Kopf- und Herz-Capitale*). The mode of expression in this early work is one of agonized



repetition, expressing the *unsung* dangers of war for the body politic itself and on the individual level. For Nietzsche, this is “the cost involved in the removal year in, year out of an extraordinary number of its efficient and industrious men from their proper professions and occupations in order that they might become soldiers” (*HH* 481). Turning his point concerning such wasted talent, he goes on to say that from the moment a people begins to preoccupy itself with war (whether for defense or conquest), “a great number of the most leading talents are sacrificed upon the ‘Altar of the Fatherland’ or national honor, where other spheres of action had formerly been open to the talents now absorbed by the political” (*ibid.*). Thus the true cost of war is the decadence of the genial spirit. He says this in yet another complex reprise, drawing the key consequence henceforward invoked as the dangers of “reading newspapers” as a daily occupation (*ibid. GM III:26*).<sup>19</sup> In addition to the device of repetition, this aphorism is also articulated by what will become the more dominant rhetorical device of dialectical engagement with the reader’s anticipations and subsequent recollections (projections/convictions). Both aspects of this dialectical tension have to do with the working of the text on the reader’s *pathē*. The ultimate “cost” of war is thus what Nietzsche named *decadence*—the literal sacrifice or degradation of a society. This devastation is the inevitable and invisible “price” of war: “. . . the sum total of all these sacrifices and costs in individual energy and work is so tremendous that the political emergence of a people almost necessarily draws after it a spiritual impoverishment and an enfeeblement and a diminution of the capacity for undertakings demanding great concentration and application” (*ibid.*).

The spiritual impoverishment Nietzsche deplors here is the wastage of nihilism. In complete accord with Plato (the social philosopher Jacques Rancière has explored this in a different direction<sup>20</sup>), Nietzsche indissolubly links politics and greed, and he goes further in a *Nachlaß* note where he reflects on the widespread character and tendencies of his age: “Here the ghostly finger of the spiritualists, there the mathematical-magical conjurer, then the brain-wasting cult of music, there the re-awakened vulgarities of the persecution of the Jews—all mark the universal training in hatred” (*KSA* 9, 213).

Hence prior to this section, we recall, reading backward—as one must always read Nietzsche’s aphorisms in resonant counterpoint: backward and forward, reading those texts that precede and those texts that follow a particular aphorism—that a few sections earlier, writing against nationalism and on behalf of the “good European” (*HH* 475, cf. *GM III:27*) Nietzsche had identified the Jews as those “free-thinkers, scholars, and physicians who held fast to the banner of enlightenment and of spiritual independence while under the harshest personal pressure and defended Europe against Asia” (*HH* 475). In this way, Nietzsche asserts that Judaism is the very influence that renders “Europe’s mission and history into a continuation of the Greeks” (*ibid.*). The context of Nietzsche’s emphasis here is reviewed in his earlier reproach of Christianity in the aphorism entitled “The non-Greek element in Chris-

tianity” which concludes by describing Christianity as “barbaric, Asiatic, ignoble, non-Greek” (*HH* 114, cf. *BT* 12).

If Nietzsche began the *Genealogy* by setting Jewish values against noble values, he concludes with nothing less than a focus on Christian values, going so far as to repeat a favorite theme, his antipathy toward the New Testament itself (*GM* III:22) but also to reprise the impatient sentiments he elsewhere expressed as signs of the Jewishness of “familiarity with God” in thoroughly Christian terms (*ibid.*).

Nietzsche’s at times convoluted expression in *Human, All Too Human* gives way so some have argued to an increased elegance or mastery of style in the later work. But this stylistic change does not transform Nietzsche’s emphases. Hence, Nietzsche repeats the same grave insight in *Twilight of the Idols*: “Coming to power is a costly business: power makes stupid. . . . Politics devours all seriousness for really intellectual things, *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* was, I fear, the end of German philosophy.” From *uman, All Too Human* to *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche would seem to have maintained the conviction that one cannot indulge a concern for politics, especially global politics, without a corresponding intellectual sacrifice, in other words: without losing one’s soul.

The provocative quandary, damned if one does, damned if one does not, is the philosophical engine of Nietzsche’s aphorism. The conclusion, like the related premises invoked by association, is enthymematic: alluded to but not given and in fact only alluded to *in potentia*: the resolution of an aphorism is not fixed and can always change. The shifting reference in part accounts for Nietzsche’s apparent mutability in meaning from reading to reading. And the same mutability seems in turn to justify multifarious and even racist, fascist, dangerously criminal readings. If we attend, as we began, to Nietzsche’s remonstrations, the problem of understanding Nietzsche’s political sentiments as they manifestly persist must be located on the side of our own readerly “convictions:” “*adventavit asinus/pulcher et fortissimos* (the ass appears, beautiful and overweening strong)” (*BGE* 8 my translation; cf. “the great stupidity which we are” *BGE* 231), not in the dissonance of Nietzsche’s texts. But a reflection on stupidity, however esoterically expressed with a reference to Ovid’s mysteries (as in *BGE* 8), does not resolve our problem. We are thus returned to the question of Nietzsche’s style as an effective or *working* style.

Nietzsche himself famously affirms what is now a commonly accepted assessment of his writing style: “Before me it was not known what could be done with the German language—what could be done with language in general” (*EH* “Books” 4) Yet we cannot but ask, if Nietzsche could do so much with words, given his rhetorical mastery, why then did he not secure his words against malicious appropriation?<sup>21</sup> This ethical question corresponds to Nietzsche’s own charge against Christian stylistics, against the pastiche style and aura of the New Testament: “It was a piece of subtle refinement that God learned Greek when he wanted to become a writer—and that he did not learn it better” (*BGE* 121). As the same Nietzsche was associated, from the perspective of British politics, with the exemplification of German aggression in World War I and again in World War II (like Hölderlin’s writings, Nietz-

sche's *Zarathustra* was published in soldiers' editions, for the "field"), perhaps we might say that Nietzsche himself should have learnt his own rhetorical polishing of his German language style much "better" than he did in the end.

Here, we can only concede that in spite of everything Nietzsche could with do words, it remains true that his achievements in this domain are as limited socially and politically, indeed exactly as limited as so many scholars have rightfully observed.<sup>22</sup> This is especially the case where "the art of reading" that Nietzsche repeatedly enjoins upon us as his readers, has made less, not more, progress in the interim.

In the end, seeking a point of redemptive transformation, it is perhaps worth underscoring not Nietzsche's rhetorical prowess but his relative impotence instead. Nietzsche's words failed to arrest world history (in advance), just as his longing failed to bring back the Greece of the past (even in the form of a rebirth of the tragic art in the music of his age, whether Wagner or Bizet). As much as Nietzsche endeavored to change the world in his writing (and, here more classicist than philologist, he did this from the start), it is perhaps more relevant, and certainly more human, even transcendently so, to recall that he came himself to recognize the limitations of his efforts and would express himself with increasingly impatient frustration (in letters and postcards to friends) for the rest of his life. And thus I read the anti-writerly, anti-readerly rhetoric of one of his last notes in which he declares, "I am having all anti-Semites shot."

## NOTES

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1. See Richard Schacht, ed., *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (New York, Routledge, 2002), Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience: Six Character Studies from the Genealogy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), and so on. Apparent exceptions seem to be: Simon May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on "Morality"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Werner Stegmaier, *Nietzsches "Genealogie der Moral"* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft, 1994).

2. See also Nietzsche's own comments distinguishing the kind of "aphoristic books" he writes from treatises (which are, as Nietzsche notes here, for "asses and for readers of newspapers" (*KSA* 11, 579).

3. In connection with Rée, see Robin Small's reflections on Nietzsche and the aphorism (and beyond) in Small, *Nietzsche and Rée: A Star Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57–65.

4. Note the subtitle of Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

5. *Hippocrates, Volume III*, W. H. S. Jones, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press [Loeb]: 1995 [1923]). It is Seneca's elaboration of the first two points made in the first line (cited by Seneca from the "most famed physician": "*vitam brevem esse, longam arte*") that has ensured its survival. See Seneca, *De brevitae vitae / Von der Kürze des Lebens*, trans. Josef Feix (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1977).

6. I find evidence of this effort to imitate Nietzsche in the structure (and genesis) of Heidegger's *Beiträge*. I discuss this (and its limitations) in chapter 14 of Babich, *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Poetry and Philosophy, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Heidegger* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

7. Although one can use an aphorism as an epigraph, an epigraph need not be an aphorism but can be a poem or a motto, or a quote alluding to another text, like the epigraph found as an object example at the start of the present chapter (quoting Nietzsche's reflections on the *Genealogy* in his *Ecce Homo*), or like Nietzsche's reference to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in the epigraph he placed at the start of the third essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

8. See, for one example, Heinz Krüger's, *Studien über den Aphorismus als philosophischer Form* (Frankfurt: Nest Verlag, 1956). Krüger's book is articulated in opposition to Kurt Besser's more properly philological, *Die Problematik der aphoristischer Form bei Lichtenberg, Schlegel, Novalis, und Nietzsche* (Berlin: Junker and Dünhaupt, 1935). See for a more recent and very comprehensive general discussion: Detlef Otto, *Wendungen der Metapher. Zur Übertragung in poetologischer, rhetorischer, und erkenntnistheoretischer Hinsicht bei Aristoteles und Nietzsche* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1998). Recently, English language scholars have turned their attention to the role of the aphorism in Nietzsche's thought. See Small's *Nietzsche and Rée*, cited above, in addition to further references in the notes below.

9. For a discussion of these problems as they have haunted the analytic as well as the literary tradition of philosophic scholarship, and the particular danger of mistaking an epigraph for an aphorism (never a good idea with a scholar of rhetoric such as Nietzsche was), see John T. Wilcox, "What Aphorism Does Nietzsche Explicate in *Genealogy of Morals* Essay III?" and Maudemarie Clark, "From the Nietzsche Archive: Concerning the Aphorism Explicated in *Genealogy* III." Both published in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35/4 (1997): 593–633. See also Wilcox, "That Exegesis of an Aphorism in 'Genealogy III': Reflections on the Scholarship," *Nietzsche-Studien* 28 (1998): 448–62. See also Paul Miklowitz's reply to Wilcox in *Nietzsche-Studien* 29 (1999): 267–69. The issue is not a settled affair and Christoph Cox cites the epigraph as the aphorism in question at the start of his book, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 15. Still more recently, Jill Marsden likewise favors the epigraph from Zarathustra in her "Nietzsche and the Art of the Aphorism," in Keith Ansell Pearson, ed., *A Companion to Nietzsche* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 22–38, esp. 32–37. Marsden herself follows Kelly Oliver's reading. See Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche: Philosophy's Relation to the "Feminine"* (London: Routledge, 1995).

10. In her editor's notes to the 1998 translation (with Alan J. Swenson) of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Clark observes that from "an examination of the printer's manuscript, it is clear that when Nietzsche began writing it out, the third treatise begins with what is now section 2." (Hackett, 1998), 198. Clark also adds a further reference to Christopher Janaway's independent corroboration of this point at this same locus.

11. Despite this tour through so very many forms of the ascetic ideal (and the thrice-repeated title of the third essay *What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?* tells us that this variety

is crucial), in place of *GM* III:I, readers, as the above references attest, continue to identify the epigraph to the third section as the aphorism Nietzsche had in mind: “Untroubled, mocking, violent—thus will wisdom have us: she is a woman, she always loves only a warrior.—*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*” (*GM* III, *Epigraph*). Wilcox and Clark certainly had their work lined up for them, at least as Wilcox stated the problem and certainly as Clark resolved it by the expedient of taking a visit to the Nietzsche archives for a look at the original manuscript. It is important to note that neither Wilcox nor Clark disagree with the above identification of the aphorism in question. The only difference in my reading is that I offer the above identification in classically “continental” fashion, that is, by way of the traditionally hermeneutic expedient of readerly exegesis (and I submit that a hermeneutic, or “art of reading” is precisely what Nietzsche expected).

12. Aristotle located the responsibility for being understood on the plain side of the author and the lucidity of prose.

13. There are other, most notably Augustinian, loci for this image. But a fine instantiation of this textual sensibility, precisely because of the comprehension of the full range of the incarnate sensuality of the letter and the book, is Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary on Hugh's Didascalicon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), chapter 3, esp. 54ff.

14. This is the point of departure for the late Jacques Derrida's discussion of style, using the (gallically stylistic) conceit of, “woman” in *Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, Barbara Johnson, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979). I raise this question from another perspective in terms of the Nietzsche's question of the problem of the artist in Babich, “The Logic of Woman in Nietzsche: The Dogmatist's Story,” *New Political Science* 36 (1996): 7–17.

15. Krüger, *Studien über den Aphorismos als philosophischer Form*, 26.

16. It is worth noting that any Christian preacher or priest would say the same thing.

17. Apart from readerly anti-Semitism, I elsewhere follow the dynamic of this writing as it engages prejudicial convictions in reviewing the functioning of Nietzsche's critique of ascetic ideals in terms not only of religion anterior to morality but science. Babich, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), see chapter 4 and, in particular, chapter 5.

18. I discuss this point in terms of Nietzsche's original philological impetus for writing his *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* in Babich, “The Science of Words or Philology: Music in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the Alchemy of Love in *The Gay Science*,” *Revista di estetica*, edited by Tiziana Andina 45:28 (2005): 47–78. See further, Manfred Riedel, *Hören auf die Sprache. Die akroamatische Dimension der Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989) and Holger Schmid, *Kunst des Hörens: Orte und Grenzen philosophische Spracherfahrung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999).

19. “But aside from these public hecatombs and at bottom much more horrible, there occurs a spectacle played out continually in a hundred thousand simultaneous acts: every efficient, industrious, intelligent, energetic man belonging to such a people lusting after political laurels is dominated by this same lust and no longer belongs completely to his own domain as once he did” (*HH* 481).

20. Jacques Ranciere, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker, trans. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). See also, Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, Priscilla Ferguson et al., trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). See further *KSA* 9, 213.

21. Berel Lang raises exactly this question in his contribution to Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich, eds., *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism: On the Uses and Abuses of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

22. See, for an example, again, Golomb and Wistrich, eds., *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism*. But see, too, the contributions, including my editor's introduction, "Habermas, Nietzsche, and the Future of Critique: Irrationality, *The Will to Power*, and War," *Nietzsche, Habermas, and Critical Theory*, edited by Babette E. Babich (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books [Humanity Books Imprint] 2004), 13–46.