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Becoming Simple and Honest: Nietzsche's Practice of Spontaneous Life Writing

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ABSTRACT

Nietzsche (1844–1900) struggles with complexity and many-sidedness throughout his life. He is a nuanced thinker who offers fragments instead of a rigid philosophical system, yet he admires the 'virtuous energy' with which systematic thinkers, especially the pre-Socratic philosophers, express themselves. His ability to write with comparable energy is hindered by university philosophy, which privileges restraint and consistency. Therefore, he adopts a practice of spontaneous life writing in order to become simple and honest in thought and life. Inspired by figures such as Emerson, Diogenes, and Sterne, he grasps the 'nearest shoddy words' and continually produces new insights in disjointed monologues and aphorisms. Nietzsche's vague metaphors, loose language, inconsistency, and hyperbole stem from this practice, and his autobiography, *Ecce Homo* (1888), is the closest that he ever comes to rekindling the energy of the pre-Socratics.

KEYWORDS

Academic writing; Cynicism; free writing; hyperbole

Nietzsche often writes spontaneously. In GS 298 he declares, 'I caught this insight on the wing and quickly took the nearest shoddy words to fasten it lest it fly away from me' (Nietzsche 2001). Whereas scholars privilege consistent arguments, hedging, and precise language, Nietzsche's writings contain vague metaphors, loose language, inconsistency, and hyperbole. I argue that these features stem, in part, from his practice of spontaneous life writing (my term), which he adopts as a way of becoming 'simple and honest [*einfach* und *ehrlich*] in thought and life' (Nietzsche 1997 [SE 2]). In this context I caution against always taking his writings literally, as Nietzsche scholars often do.

I will clarify the scope of my argument from the outset. Firstly, I do not claim that Nietzsche always writes spontaneously, and I agree with Nehamas (1985, 12–41) that he has a multiplicity of styles. Spontaneous life writing is one style, but it is not necessarily the most important to Nietzsche, though some passages suggest that spontaneity is his default creative mode (e.g. *EH* 'Books' 4; *BGE* 213). In a letter to Lou Salomé, Nietzsche (1967– [eKGWB/BVN-1882, 288, my translation]) writes, 'One must first

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know exactly “what-and-what do I wish to say and present”, before one may write. Writing must be an imitation’. This implies forethought and planning as opposed to spontaneity and extemporisation.¹ Secondly, I do not claim that all of Nietzsche’s styles or literary devices (e.g. poems) are composed with equal spontaneity. His aphorisms are often laboriously edited, and it is difficult to rhyme spontaneously. Thirdly, I do not claim that he edits spontaneously, or that he never edits. We know from various biographical materials, including the printer’s manuscripts of *MM* and *WS* (Nietzsche 2013), that he plays an active role in editorial decisions and carefully arranges his monologues. Fourthly, I do not claim that his books are composed with equal spontaneity. Whereas the first draft of *TI* (Nietzsche 1998) is reportedly written in just over a week (Large 1998, ix), *SE* develops out of notes from the summer and autumn of the previous year and so is likely composed more slowly. Fifthly, I do not claim that his spontaneous writings lack constraint and discipline or that spontaneity involves ‘letting go [laissez aller]’ (Nietzsche 1973 [BGE 188]). Nietzsche never engages in incoherent scribbling, and we shall see that he remains constrained by logic and beauty.

Why does he write spontaneously? I argue that he does so in order to become ‘*simple* and *honest* [*einfach* und *ehrlich*] in thought and life’ (*SE* 2). Three things should be clarified. First, my explanation is compatible with the view that Nietzsche’s stylistic brevity was ‘an increasingly valuable power as the creative intervals between his bouts of illness became shorter’ (Prideaux 2018, 34). There is good textual evidence that he also has philosophical, rather than solely physiological, reasons for writing in short intervals. Second, he has other strategies for becoming simple and honest. For example, *SE* 3 endorses directly attacking the sources of complexity in his life (though these attacks may, of course, be composed spontaneously). Third, writing is not essential for becoming simple and honest. Diogenes, whom Nietzsche praises at the end of *SE* 8, becomes simple and honest without putting pen to paper. That said, Diogenes’s witticisms and retorts are delivered quickly, and it is precisely the speed with which he, plucked chicken in hand, debunks Plato’s ‘definition of man’ that exposes the superficiality of professional philosophy. Nietzsche’s own quips and off-the-cuff remarks—e.g. ‘Christianity is Plato for the “masses”’ (*BGE* ‘Foreword’)—dispense with overlong argumentation in a similarly Cynical fashion.²

Two objections to my argument can be anticipated. First, Nietzsche frequently admits to writing spontaneously in general, but it is difficult to know if a specific passage is spontaneously composed. Sometimes he says so (e.g. *GS* 298), but this still depends on the reliability of his testimony, and we can never access his cognitive behaviour at the time of writing. I provide ad hoc reasons for thinking that certain passages are written spontaneously, and my reasons are informed by Nietzsche’s underlying commitments to honesty and simplicity; yet, fundamentally, my case amounts to informed speculation. My contribution, then, is not to identify definitively spontaneous passages but to analyse a highly neglected practice and its interpretative implications. Second, it might be objected that Nietzsche would have published his notes verbatim were he truly committed to honesty (*Ehrlichkeit*), which he associates with nakedness (*Nacktheit*) and outspokenness (*SE* 1–3). To this I have three counterarguments. First, commitments are pointless without room for improvement. If Nietzsche were already perfectly honest, why would he commit himself to honesty? Second, he is never truly committed to ‘unconditional honesty

[unbedingte Ehrlichkeit]', despite endorsing it in *SE* 1, because he often cares more about style and presentation than unfiltered self-expression. Indeed, he becomes increasingly critical of unconditional value commitments, including his own commitment to honesty (see *MM* 56; Nietzsche 2011 [D 215]). Third, editing can make writings more, not less, honest (ehrlicher) as we find clearer or more forceful ways of expressing ourselves.

Spontaneous life writing has never been identified as a distinct practice with deep philosophical significance to Nietzsche. In his comparison of Nietzsche and Zhuang Zi, Mirabile (2008, 248) refers to Nietzsche's ideal of the noble philosopher, whose heart 'grasps then releases in one quick spontaneous act'. Mirabile (2008, 257) embodies the rhapsodic quality of spontaneous writing to great effect in his paper, but his descriptions—Nietzsche is 'moved by a "monster of energy" that causes eternal changing, flowing and flooding back'—are too alliterative to provide much scholarly insight, and there is no mention of the pre-Socratics or Nietzsche's lifelong commitment to simplicity and honesty. Zavatta (2019, 107) gives the topic more scholarly treatment, correctly emphasising the link between virtue and childlike spontaneity and the fact that Nietzsche inherits Emerson's call to 'live in a way that is autonomous and original', but she mentions neither spontaneous writing nor honesty (Ehrlichkeit).

Kaufmann (1974) and Hui (2019) examine the fragmentary or 'monological' nature of Nietzsche's writings. I claim that Nietzsche often writes spontaneously, and disjointed monologues or fragments are the *forms* that most of his writings take (in my view largely as a result of his spontaneity). Kaufmann (1974, 81) and Hui (2019, 164–176) explain Nietzsche's monologues in the context of his opposition to metaphysical systems and Universitätsphilosophie, which I emphasise in my discussion of 'consistent writing', but they make no mention of spontaneous writing or its relation to simplicity and honesty. Previous commentators in *Life Writing* make passing remarks about the experimental nature of Nietzsche's writings, such as Zuern's (2010, 266) claim that his madness serves as 'a font of artistic creativity and philosophical innovation'. It is difficult to establish a causal link between Nietzsche's madness and features of his writings, but I agree that they often incorporate lived experiences: hence my reference to (spontaneous) life writing. Howe (2016, 292) refers to Nietzsche's experimental 'manner' of writing, but this assumes, falsely, that Nietzsche only has one style.

Other scholars claim that the disjointed nature of Nietzsche's writings undermines scholarly interpretation altogether. In one notebook he writes, 'I have forgotten my umbrella', and Derrida (1979, 125) famously leverages this to argue that many of Nietzsche's passages lack a definitive meaning available to interpreters because they lack a homogenous whole. I appreciate the emphasis that Derrida places on the disjointed nature of Nietzsche's passages, but they are not equally disjointed and contextless, and I agree with Clark (1991, 18) that many are decipherable only in context, including Nietzsche's motivation to become '*simple* and *honest* in thought and life' (*SE* 3). Derrida (1979, 123) may be right that Nietzsche's writings can never be understood with certainty, but Nehamas (1985, 12–41) is also right that certainty is not a prerequisite of Nietzsche interpretation. I examine spontaneous life writing in the context of Nietzsche's lifelong commitments to honesty and simplicity, but I make no claim to certainty and hope only to inspire more attentive research into his multifarious styles.

What is spontaneous life writing?

Opinions can be hyperbolic. This is especially true when they are new and exciting, or when they are suppressed. As such, an honest (ehrlich) way of expressing these opinions is to write pithy aphorisms and standalone monologues, as opposed to lengthy prose replete with caveats and hedging.³ Anyone who wishes to become more honest and outspoken, as Nietzsche does, might express themselves in disjointed assertions in response to separate bouts of inspiration. My own aphorisms—e.g. Aphorisms are seductive generalisations—are often written in this manner. We shall see that Emerson (2003, 183) influences Nietzsche, and the following declaration from *Self-Reliance* serves as an effective motto for what I shall call spontaneous life writing: ‘Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day’.

There is good evidence that Nietzsche writes spontaneously. In *BGE* 188 he offers something of a phenomenological description of artistic inspiration:

Every artist knows how far from the feeling of letting himself go his ‘natural’ condition is, the free ordering, placing, disposing, forming in the moment of ‘inspiration’ – and how strictly and subtly he then obeys thousandfold laws which precisely on account of their severity and definiteness mock all formulation in concepts.

When we are inspired, it feels as though we are immediately obeying certain prompts and solicitations. Nietzsche does not always know in advance which metaphors he will choose, which arguments he will make, or which philosophers he will cite. These arise during the writing process (*in medias res*) as he obeys the content of his inspirations. He also obeys their form and ‘tempo’. As he puts it, his ‘art of style’ involves communicating ‘a state, an inner tension of pathos through signs, including the tempo of these signs’ (Nietzsche 2007 [*EH* ‘Books’ 4]).

This is how he describes creative inspiration in general and his experience of writing *Z* in particular: ‘You hear, you do not search; you take, you do not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought lights up, inescapable, unhesitating as it its form — I never had a choice’ (*EH* ‘Books’ *Z* 3). Three features of this description are noteworthy. First, spontaneity (‘a thought lights up’) is combined, somewhat surprisingly, with constraint (‘I never had a choice’). This is surprising because constraint is often thought to impede spontaneity, as a cage might impede a bird. Nietzsche frequently attacks this assumption in his later writings (e.g. *BGE* 188). Second, the form of the thought is ‘unhesitating’ because he expresses it immediately and without alteration, which means that he does not edit or second-guess his words during the creative process. Third, the experience is characterised by obedience (‘you do not ask who gives’) as opposed to reflective activity. Nietzsche does not question or doubt the inspiration whilst writing (though the inspiration might take the form of a question or a doubt).

Nietzsche knows how difficult it is to communicate this experience, and in *BGE* 188 he suggests, rather evasively, that the ‘laws’ which spontaneous writers obey ‘mock all formulation in concepts’. In other words, the process of writing spontaneously transcends all descriptive power. Elsewhere he describes a ‘genuinely philosophical combination of a bold exuberant spirituality which runs *presto* and a dialectical severity and necessity which never takes a false step’ (*BGE* 213). The ‘combination’ of spontaneity (‘*presto* spirituality’) and constraint (‘dialectical severity’) brings to mind the vague ‘coupling’ of

Apolline and Dionysian forces that Nietzsche (1993b [BT 1]) thinks constitutes the genius of Attic tragedy. In *BGE* 213 he makes further appeals to mystery, suggesting that this genuinely philosophical combination of spontaneity and constraint ‘is to most thinkers and scholars unknown from experience and consequently, if someone should speak of it in their presence, incredible’. Again, he appeals to a mysterious process known only by a select few: ‘What a philosopher is, is hard to learn, because it cannot be taught: one has to “know” it from experience’ (*BGE* 213).

I agree that it is hard to explain spontaneous writing to those who have never experienced it, but we can improve on Nietzsche’s descriptions by drawing an analogy to musical improvisation and, more specifically, to jazz. Indeed, Nietzsche himself has music in mind when he mentions a ‘presto’ spirituality, and he explicitly compares ‘free’ writing (cf. ‘free ordering’ in *BGE* 188) to musical improvisation in a letter to Gersdorff in 1867: ‘a few gay spirits in my own style must once more be unchained; I must learn to play on them as on a keyboard, but not only pieces I have learned by heart—no—but also free fantasies, as free as possible, yet still always logical and beautiful’ (*eKGWB/BVN*-1867,540, my translation). His writings are unchained from *specific* constraints, such as forced consistency and scholarly hedging. Nietzsche never—or, to hedge, rarely—forgoes reason and intelligibility; and as for beauty, his writings abound with pretty turns of phrase and (Goethean) metaphors of new directions and new seas.

According to Noice et al. (2008, 63), the decisive feature of jazz is spontaneous variation. Unlike classical musicians, the jazz musician ‘varies the melody, rhythm, even the time-signature from one performance to the next’. Jazz involves muscular, rather than reflective, memory as the artist automatically elicits ‘highly practiced movements’ through retrieval cues (Noice et al. 2008, 63–65). Comparing Nietzsche to jazz musicians may seem anachronistic, but we should recall that his ‘dazzling keyboard improvisations’, as Prideaux (2018, 30–31) puts it, astounded his teachers and fellow pupils, who gathered around as he ‘embarked on [...] impassioned, free-flowing streams of melodic invention’. We cannot know with certainty, but it is reasonable to think that his musical talents informed his writing practices to some extent.

Elsewhere Nietzsche draws an analogy to dancing: ‘thinking needs to be learned just as dancing needs to be learned, as a kind of dancing’ (*TI* ‘Germans’ 7). He describes this type of thinking as a ‘slight shiver which spreads out to all the muscles from *light feet* in intellectual matters’, and he praises ‘the ability to dance with the feet, with concepts, with words; do I still need to say that you must also be able to dance with the *pen* – that you must learn to *write*?’ Dancing is disciplined. After years of practice (cf. Nietzsche 2004 [*HH* 163]) the ‘instrument’—that is, the body, piano, or pen—becomes a conduit for inspirations, such that we grasp, instinctively, whichever turns (of phrase) or figures (of speech) best convey particular sensations, ideas, and experiences.

Jazz musicians automatically retrieve their favourite scales or chord inversions from their ‘bag of tricks’ (Noice et al. 2008, 63–65). Nietzsche has a ‘bag of tricks’, of sorts, though his is filled with recurring themes (e.g. honesty, Dionysus, drives), philosophical opponents (e.g. Socrates, Rousseau, Schopenhauer), stock phrases (e.g. new seas, will-to-truth, will-to-power), punctuations (e.g. dashes, rhetorical questions, exclamation marks), and figures of speech (e.g. metaphors, irony, hyperbole). A jazz musician uses a lead sheet, which has relatively few prompts, whereas a classical musician repeats a memorised score during each performance. Nietzsche is arguably closer to jazz than to

classical music, and a ‘lead sheet’ is analogous to the sensations and insights to which he spontaneously responds. What jazz does to music, Nietzsche does to philosophy, broadening its creative horizons without abandoning logic, beauty, or the need for strict discipline.

Jazz musicians make creative decisions ‘in real time’, which means that they are frequently surprised by their own improvisations (Noice et al. 2008, 64). When Nietzsche looks back on his ‘shoddy words’ in GS 298 he is surprised by his failure to convey the full quality of his original insights (see also BGE 296). Another example of surprise and extemporaneity is a passage from his autobiography:

I have an instinct for cleanliness that is utterly uncanny in its sensitivity, which means that I can physiologically detect—*smell*—the proximity or (what am I saying?) the innermost aspect, the ‘innards’ of every soul ... I have psychological feelers attached to this sensitivity (EH ‘Wise’ 8).

The fact that Nietzsche asks himself, ‘what am I saying?’ halfway through this sentence suggests that he is surprised by his own writing. He seems to realise the ridiculousness of ‘smelling’ psychological states, but he goes along with it anyway, even doubling down on the metaphor with his comedic reference to ‘feelers’. I think he is responding, extemporaneously, to his ‘dancing’ pen and allowing his inspiration to continue undisturbed. This is speculation, as we can never know his intentions, but it is supported by his descriptions of artistic inspiration in BGE 188 and BGE 213.

Often Nietzsche expresses himself in ‘hard words’ in one monologue and then criticises himself, in equally hard words, in subsequent monologues. Sometimes his self-criticisms are part of the normal editing process, sometimes they are follow-up passages that nuance previous passages (e.g. the transitions from HH 233 to HH 244 and GM I.8 to GM I.9), and sometimes they target entire books (e.g. BT ‘Attempt at Self-Criticism’). Typically he expresses his reservations not by trying to bind everything together in a single philosophical system but by arguing against earlier assertions in separate moments of inspiration. This allows him to catch new insights, continually, without worrying how they might fit together, as this would disturb the creative process. Indeed, he is of the opinion that a book not only can but should arise in this unintentional manner: ‘I will no longer read any author who lets us perceive that he wanted to produce a book: but instead, only those whose thoughts have unintentionally turned into a book’ (WS 121).

Nietzsche compares scholars to gristmills: ‘just throw seed-corn into them!—they know how to grind corn small and make white dust of it’ (Nietzsche 1961 [Z II ‘Scholars’]). Certain truths must be expressed quickly; they escape us if we overthink them. As he puts it in GS 381,

I approach deep problems such as I do cold baths: fast in, fast out. [...] Does one absolutely have to sit firmly on [an issue] first? Have brooded on it as on an egg? [...] At least there are truths that are especially shy and ticklish and can’t be caught except suddenly – that one must *surprise* or leave alone.

Nietzsche does not specify the ‘deep problems’ or ‘ticklish truths’ in question, but his aphorisms often summarise problems and truths, and many lose their significance if we overthink them. Consider TI ‘Arrows and Epigrams’ 8: ‘What does not kill me makes me stronger’. We may object that many things, such as catastrophic brain injuries,

weaken us without killing us. We may also wonder what Nietzsche means by ‘stronger [stärker]’. These are legitimate questions, but they would have little relevance if Nietzsche’s aim were to express, spontaneously, the ‘ticklish’ truth that we can benefit from misfortune if we possess an affirmative mentality. This lesson he learns, not from university philosophy, but from the ‘military school of life’ and perhaps also from his life-long experiences of illness. Doubtless Nietzsche’s considered view is more complex and nuanced—*GM III* (Nietzsche 1996), after all, is a commentary on a single aphorism—but clearly he is not trying to be as nuanced as possible. Instead, he is most likely trying to pin down an insight before his scholarly faculties can interrupt the creative process with a host of reservations.

Why does Nietzsche write spontaneously?

I think Nietzsche writes spontaneously in order to become ‘simple and honest in thought and life’ (*SE 2*). In *SE 2* he writes that ‘men have now become so complex and many-sided they are bound to become dishonest [unehrlich] whenever they speak at all, make assertions and try to act in accordance with them’. It is in this ‘condition of need’ that he first encounters Schopenhauer’s writings, which are characterised by their honesty. Fourteen years later, after living his entire life ‘exactly’ in accordance with the scheme of *SE* (*eKGWB/BVN-1888,1014*; see *eKGWB/BVN-1884,524*; *EH* ‘Books’ *UM 3*), Nietzsche claims to have ‘only ever suffered from “multitude” [Vielsamkeit]’ (*EH* ‘Clever’ 10). He struggles with complexity throughout his life, and his inability to express himself simply (*einfach*) and honestly (*ehrlich*) results in a gloomy, torpid struggle between ‘dissimulation and honesty [Verstellung und Ehrlichkeit]’ (*SE 3*).

Nietzsche never defines ‘honesty’ and ‘simplicity’. Nor does he ever offer necessary and sufficient conditions. However, he frequently pits two groups of concepts against each other: honesty, forgetfulness, and simplicity against dissimulation, history, and complexity. The concepts in each group do not guarantee each other. For instance, honesty does not guarantee forgetfulness because we can write honestly without being forgetful. Nevertheless, the two conceptual groups are frequently encountered in Nietzsche’s texts, and we should note that the *Nietzsche-Wörterbuch* associates simplicity (*Einfachheit*) with performing an action ‘spontaneously and without any particular reason’ (van Tongeren, Schänk, and Siemens 2011, 729).

In *PTAG*, written around 1873, Nietzsche (1962) distinguishes between one-sided (*Einseitigen*) pre-Socratic philosophers, from Thales to Socrates, and many-sided (*Vielseitigen*) philosophers, beginning with Plato. The pre-Socratics encountered life as individuals, rather than as members of philosophical schools, and produced simplistic metaphysical systems. Thales contended that everything is water, Heraclitus that all is flux, and so on. Subsequent philosophers learnt from Socrates that they ‘know only that they know nothing’, and the emergence of dialectics and ‘scientific reflection’ made it harder to speak in simple, honest terms. Post-Socratic philosophers thus became an amalgamation of different schools, lost their ‘unity of style’, and succumbed to the ‘wormlike probings and creepings-about’ of the separate sciences (*PTAG 2–3*). Nietzsche rejects metaphysical systems, but he admires the unity of character and ‘virtuous energy’ with which the pre-Socratics spoke their minds and interpreted life in

original ways and as individuals. Their thoughts and characters were related by the ‘strictest necessity’ (*PTAG* 1) in the sense that their simplistic metaphysical systems matched perfectly the naïve enthusiasm with which they beheld life. Here we should remember that, for most of the Ancients, philosophy begins with wonder (*thaûma*). They seemingly practiced their philosophies in public, without masks, and when Nietzsche appeals to honesty and simplicity he has in mind their outspokenness (see *SE* 8), ‘nakedness [*Nacktheit*]’ (*SE* 1), and ‘courageous visibility [*muthige Sichtbarkeit*]’ (*SE* 3). The opposite inclination, to mask or dissimulate, generally hinders our ability to be simple and honest.

Nietzsche explicitly links simplicity and honesty to a particular writing style, declaring that Schopenhauer ‘understands how to express the profound with simplicity [*das Tief-sinnige einfach*], the moving without rhetoric, the strictly scientific without pedantry’ (*SE* 2). The phrase ‘*simple* and *honest* [*einfach* und *ehrlich*] in thought and life’ (*SE* 3) first appears in a notebook entry from 1873 where Nietzsche is again thinking of Schopenhauer’s writing style:

He is simple and honest: he does not seek phrases. What power all his conceptions have, the will, negation, the representation of the genius of the species. [...] He is the most rigorous ideal of the writer that the Germans have; no one went about it as rigorously as he did (*eKGWB/NF-1873,28[6]*).

The notion of ‘rigour’ is directly comparable to the ‘virtuous energy’ of the pre-Socratics. Schopenhauer’s direct, digression-free prose powerfully ‘grasp[s] again the reason of existence’ (*eKGWB/NF-1873,28[6]*) and—for the early Nietzsche, at least—comes closest to rekindling the ancient ideals of simplicity and honesty.

Another text from the time of *SE* reveals further connections between simplicity, honesty, and forgetfulness. Following Schopenhauer (2010 [see *WWR* 1.36]), Nietzsche assumes in *HL* 1 that animals live unhistorically, whereas man necessarily remembers the past and anticipates the future. He explicitly mentions dissimulation and honesty, writing that the animal is

contained in the present, like a number without any awkward fraction left over; it does not know how to dissimulate [*verstellen*], it conceals nothing and at every instant appears wholly as it is; it can therefore never be anything but honest [*ehrlich*] (Nietzsche 1997 [*HL* 1]).

Whereas modern thinkers experience a tension between dissimulation and honesty, animals live ‘without boredom and dissimulation’ (*HL* 1). This makes them comparatively enthusiastic and happy (*glücklich*), and Nietzsche is inspired by their energetically forgetful mode of existence, which he once again associates with the Ancients (*HL* 10). He cultivates honesty and simplicity in an effort to become more like a child, who plays between ‘the hedges of past and future’ (*HL* 1), hiding nothing from the world. Later, in *Z* ‘Three Metamorphoses’, he describes the child as ‘innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes’. Once again Nietzsche appeals to a mixture of concepts—forgetfulness, naïveté, individuality, originality, and creativity—without offering rigid conceptual schemes, definitions, or necessary conditions, and we shall see shortly that his practice of spontaneous writing is characterised by loose language and a lack of definitions.

Emerson also influences Nietzsche's appreciation of simplicity and honesty.⁴ In an influential discussion of *SE*, Conant (1998, 191) rightly observes that 'Emerson's sentences haunt the *entire* essay'—which is also true of *HL* and *DS* (Nietzsche 1997). In all of his 'untimelies' Nietzsche thinks that knowledge should spur us to action and benefit our lives directly. He may get these ideas from de Montaigne's (2003) *Essays* (esp. *Of Pedantry*, 118–128), or he may generate them himself, but another probable source is Emerson's (2003, 35) *Nature*, which opens with: 'Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes'. Emerson and Nietzsche both criticise history when it becomes a type of antiquarian data-collection, and in *HL* Nietzsche warns that an excess of history can harm 'life' (more on this vague concept later). In *DS* 1–2, too, he coins the phrase 'cultural philistines' to describe people who base their stagnant cultures on the classic works of 'great heroic figures' instead of continually striving after new cultural horizons.

Emerson (2003, 35) prefigures these views when he entreats his contemporaries to produce their own original works: 'There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship'. New ideas should be caught, in the present moment, and then let go, and cultures that monumentalise history risk burying the present in the past. Where Emerson (2003, 35) describes the present generation as a 'faded wardrobe', Nietzsche laments that we are 'consuming the moral capital we have inherited from our forefathers' (*SE* 2). Where Emerson speaks of attaining an 'original relation to the universe', Nietzsche praises the pre-Socratics for producing all of the philosophical archetypes, of which the post-Socratics became disordered amalgamations (*PTAG* 1). Both writers consider history harmful if it hinders the production of original works in the present moment, which is why they prioritise spontaneity over consistency, and forgetfulness over remembrance.

The uninhibited, undirected accumulation of (historical) knowledge causes complexity in thought and life, which hinders our capacity to forget. But complexity also stems, more generally, from conventions that regulate scholarly writing. Nietzsche distinguishes simplicity and honesty from 'pedantry' (*SE* 2) and explicitly contrasts Schopenhauer's 'rigorous' writing style with 'scholarly digressing [gelehrtenhaftes Abziehen]' and 'lingering in scholasticism [Verweilen in der Scholastik]' (*eKGWB/NF-1873,28[6]*). The word 'lingering [das Verweilen]' signals Nietzsche's impatience with the slow pace of scholarship, which rewards scholars for belabouring points ad nauseum. Scholarly writing prioritises hedging, depersonalised prose, and consistent argumentation governed by central themes or organising principles. Nietzsche is not flatly opposed to these conventions, but he favours a bolder, more honest (*ehrlicher*) style that features powerful metaphors, hyperbole, structural disjointedness, and autobiography (i.e. life writing). He brands *Universitätsphilosophie* 'apparent philosophy [scheinbarer Philosophie]' because it never engages with the essential problems of life, such as how to become a better orator, writer, or person; instead it offers pedantry, nitpicking, and 'a critique of words by means of other words' (*SE* 8).⁵ Nietzsche's aversion to consistency and love of spontaneity may again be influenced by Emerson (2003, 183), whom he explicitly mentions in *SE* 8, and who writes in *Self-Reliance*, 'A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines'.

There are two specific problems with consistent writing. First, the writer must compare new claims with previous claims and adjust accordingly when inconsistencies arise. If Nietzsche claims that drives can be managed like plants in a garden (cf. *D* 560), then he must consider whether he claims elsewhere that man cannot manage or alter himself in any way. This would force him into a state of historical reflection, and we have just seen that an excess of historical reflection can obscure our first impressions and inhibit our ability to express ourselves at any given moment with the energy and forgetfulness of children and animals. As Nietzsche writes in *SE* 7,

He who lets concepts, opinions, past events, books, step between himself and things – he, that is to say, who is in the broadest sense born for history – will never have an immediate perception of things and will never be an immediately perceived thing himself.

By contrast, Schopenhauer's powerful conceptions and metaphors are the result of 'immediate' perceptions. In this context we can understand not only Nietzsche's appreciation of spontaneity but also his somewhat obscure claim that becoming 'simple and honest' means becoming untimely in the 'profoundest sense' of the word (*SE* 3). We are to become untimely in the sense of unfashionable or unconventional, but also in the creatively forgetful manner of children, animals, and pre-Socratic philosophers.

Second, writing according to central arguments and unifying themes requires us to exclude contradictions, disjointed thoughts, and extraneous interests, which can exacerbate the aforementioned struggle between honesty and dissimulation. The more disjointed our thoughts, the more dissimulation (in the form of editing and self-censorship) is required. Most scholarly publications focus on specific problems, develop central arguments from start to finish, and restate the main points in the conclusion. There are subtle differences between books and disciplines, but consistency must be actively worked into publications. After all, they do not spring forth fully formed from our minds. Consistency, impartiality, and self-restraint can alienate us from the manner in which we think—e.g. the tempo or form—resulting in contrived, even bloodless, publications. Nietzsche describes his experiences at Pforta and Basle in similar terms: 'Ungainly, boorish intellectual gestures, *clumsy* hands in grasping—these are so German that people abroad confuse them with the very essence of being German. Germans have no *fingers* for nuances' (*TI* 'Germans' 7).

Many philosophers today share his experiences. Williams (2000, 480) laments the sadly vaunted style of analytic philosophy that seeks 'precision by total mind control' and tries to remove in advance 'every conceivable misunderstanding or misinterpretation or objection'. Consistency is a particular problem for Nietzsche (1969, 44), who describes the 'vague diffuseness in the many directions taken by [his] talents'. A cursory glance at his middle-period writings (roughly 1878–1883) reveals their breadth and depth, with *HH II* (Nietzsche 2013) covering topics as diverse as vanity (*MM* 50), Louis the Fourteenth (*MM* 171), the fact that that pleasant odours smell strongest in cold air (*WS* 6), and Goethe's conversations with Eckermann (*WS* 109). Nietzsche's practice of spontaneous life writing often takes the form of aphorisms or standalone monologues, allowing him to incorporate diverse opinions into a single text without worrying too much how they might fit together, or which to exclude.

Nietzsche's simplicity and honesty never equals that of children or animals, for obvious reasons, but it also differs from that of pre-Socratic philosophers, who attain their one-sidedness and outspoken energy by ennobling their personal tastes in

ostensibly universal metaphysical systems. Confidence comes easily to the clueless, and everything seems simple to the simple-minded, but—to quote Murdoch (2002, 9)—‘subtle people [...] can see too much ever to give a straight answer’. Nietzsche is too nuanced and sceptical to trust metaphysical ‘systematisers’, whose longings for permanence he deems unscientific.⁶ As he writes in *HH* 22,

the individual human being himself goes through too many inner and outer developments now for him even to dare orienting himself permanently, once and for all, toward his own lifetime. A completely modern person who wants to build himself a house, for example, feels as if this would be the same as wanting to entomb his living body in a mausoleum.

Nietzsche cannot ‘orient himself permanently’ towards a fixed metaphysical position. Therefore, he produces ‘fragments [Stücken]’ (but not necessarily a fragmentary philosophy: see *MM* 128). This does not mean that he stands for nothing. Nietzsche holds many beliefs and is willing to express them confidently, even polemically (see *DS*, *GM*, *TI*, and *EH*). However, he is equally determined to challenge himself for the sake of attaining a more accurate understanding of himself and the world. Cunningham (1960, 79) once quipped, ‘This *Humanist* whom no beliefs constrained / Grew so broad-minded he was scatter brained’. Nietzsche is not constrained by his beliefs in the sense of never being willing or able to interrogate them. Therefore, the most honest (am ehrlichsten) form of expression, in his case, is writing in short bursts rather than finessing over time a system whose starting point or ‘opening’ he accepts from the outset (as per Kant, Schopenhauer, Hegel, and many of the pre-Socratics). Specific themes and arguments gradually emerge, and in his later writings Nietzsche is generally more unified and one-sided in his convictions, and far more outspoken (i.e. ehrlich) in expressing them, than he is in his middle-writings.

In *HL*, for instance, Nietzsche writes, ‘we shall thus have to account the capacity to feel to a certain degree unhistorically as being more vital’ (*HL* 1, my emphasis). He never claims that living unhistorically is healthy, or that living historically is unhealthy. Rather, he claims that the capacity to feel ‘to a certain degree’ unhistorically is healthy. Someone who is comparatively ‘one-sided’ might dispense with these weasel words and champion a single mode of history, but Nietzsche, being Nietzsche, is receptive to the uses and disadvantages of three different modes. He constantly examines and re-examines his perspectives—Stoicism, Epicureanism, Cynicism, and so on—finding uses and disadvantages in them all. His perspectives are too nuanced to permit easy categorisation, his interests too broad and disjointed to fit a single system or doctrine. Writing spontaneously is perhaps the only way that someone as nuanced as he could ever hope to rekindle the virtuous energy of the pre-Socratics.

We must remember that Laurence Sterne is, in Nietzsche’s estimation,

the freest writer of all ages, in comparison with whom all others seem stiff, stolid, intolerant, and boorishly direct. [...] [He] soars above as a masterful exception to what all literary artists demand from themselves: discipline, tenacity, character, steadfastness of intentions, comprehensiveness, simplicity, restraint in pace and demeanour (*MM* 113).

The plot of *Tristram Shandy* is non-linear, the punctuation inconsistent, and the novel as a whole little more than a labyrinth of digressions. In Chapter LXXXIII, for instance, Sterne (2003, 425) writes, ‘I am now beginning to get fairly into my work; and by the

help of a vegetable diet, with a few of the cold seeds, I make no doubt but I shall be able to go on with my uncle *Toby's* story, and with my own, in a tolerable straight line'. This, of course, is followed by five diagrams of zigzags and squiggles that represent the plots of the previous five volumes; and Sterne (2003, 426) further mocks the compulsion to write consistently with the words, 'The best line! say cabbage planters—is the shortest line'.

Nietzsche craves the spontaneous, subversive freedom of Sterne's writings, but he never commits himself to the same degree of anarchy and 'laissez aller' (*BGE* 188). Indeed, he makes it clear that Sterne is 'the worst model and the truly inimitable author among all the great writers' (*MM* 113). Whereas Sterne is content to remain inconsistent, Nietzsche is eager to attain a higher degree of stylistic unity and simplicity, albeit not by means of naïve metaphysical systems. In terms of disjointedness, he is stylistically somewhere between Sterne and the great system-builders of German Idealism, Kant and Hegel, whose philosophical consistency he thinks stems from a lack of self-doubt, scepticism, and integrity (*TI* 'Arrows and Epigrams' 26). Nietzsche never practices free writing in the sense of forming nonsensical word associations or jotting down the first thing that comes to mind, and he obeys syntactical rules and logic to a greater extent than does Sterne. Although he sometimes writes obscurely in order to deter certain unsavoury groups (see *MM* 368; *WS* 'Prologue'), his writings are usually intelligible to those who read him carefully and in context. By 1888, the end of his productive life, Nietzsche even views stylistic disjointedness as a symptom of literary *décadence*: 'What characterizes every *literary décadence*? The fact that life no longer dwells in the whole. [...] Everywhere paralysis, adversity, torpor, or animosity and chaos' (Nietzsche 2021 [*CW* 7]). Nietzsche writes disjointedly, but we should not assume that he is content to remain disjointed.

What are the implications?

There are important implications for our understanding of four particular features of Nietzsche's writings: vague metaphors, contradictions, loose language, and hyperbole. Note that these four features are closely interrelated: hyperbole, for instance, is likely to be vague and contradictory. We can begin with vague metaphors. Nietzsche refers to the 'stream of life' (*SE* 1), being 'aware precisely of life', and 'the realms of life and nature' (*SE* 4) in *SE*. Similarly, in his 1872 lectures on the future of Germany's educational institutions he declares that a correctly educated young person 'will unconsciously sympathise with the metaphysical oneness of all things in the great metaphor of nature' (Nietzsche 1980 [*KSA* 1:715–716, my translation]). He already rejects Schopenhauer's metaphysical system by this time (see Janaway 1998, 4). Therefore, his reference to the 'metaphysical oneness of all things' should probably be taken as a poetic gesture. The important point is that Nietzsche continues to employ, perhaps spontaneously, Schopenhauerian language despite rejecting the corresponding metaphysical system. Clearly he does not expect his audience to take him literally all of the time.

At no point in *SE* or *HL* does Nietzsche define 'life' or 'nature'; indeed, definitions are rarely encountered in his writings. There are only a handful of examples, and they are less definitions and more hyperbolic statements of a position. One example is *EH* 'Destiny' 7: 'Definition of morality: morality—the idiosyncrasy of *decadents*'. Another is *TI* 'Skirmishes' 43: 'step by step further in *décadence* (this is *my* definition of progress)'.

Finally there is *EH* ‘Books’ 5: ‘Love—war in its means, at bottom the deadly hatred of the sexes’. There is sometimes a fine line between definitions and aphorisms: e.g. ‘This world is will to power—and nothing else!’ (*eKGWB/NF-1885,38[12]*). At any rate, definitions are infrequent and even rarer in Nietzsche’s early and middle-period writings, when he is less convinced of his opinions, or less likely to *act* convinced. For instance, he uses the word ‘dissimulation [Verstellung]’ throughout *SE*, *HH*, and *HH II*, but the closest thing to a definition is a set of indicators from *TL*: ‘deception, flattery, lying and cheating, backbiting, posturing, living in borrowed splendour, wearing a mask, hiding behind convention, play-acting in front of others and oneself’ (Nietzsche 1993a [*TL* 1]). Bishop (2022, 15) suggests that Nietzsche ‘defines life as “that dark, driving power that insatiably thirsts for itself”’ in *HL* 3, but I see this as another, possibly spontaneous, moment of Schopenhauerian embellishment.

To employ the language of contemporary social science, Nietzsche generally prefers ‘background concepts’ to ‘systematised concepts’. That is, he prefers loose language to working definitions. Whereas a background concept encompasses ‘the constellation of potentially diverse meanings associated with a given concept’, a systematised concept is ‘the specific formulation of a concept adopted by a particular researcher’ (Adcock and Collier 2001, 530). It should come as no surprise that Nietzsche prefers loose language, given his willingness to grasp the ‘nearest shoddy words’. Systematised concepts are common in the (social) sciences, but Nietzsche is not a (social) scientist. He writes in the style of essayists, such as Montaigne; poets, such as Emerson; and aphorists, such as La Rochefoucauld. None of these writers provides a philosophy of definitions, yet they are all intelligible on the basis of our creative interpretations, shared background concepts, sensitivity to context, and general reading comprehension.

Vague metaphors appear throughout *Z*, and for this reason it is widely neglected by Anglo-American Nietzsche scholarship. Huddleston (2020, 6) offers a representative view of *Z* as an ‘ill-judged, pompously-inflated, crudely-didactic, and nearly unreadable confection of outlandish mock-biblical mumbo jumbo’. Loose language is vexatious to many scholars due in large part to the influence of analytic philosophy, with its compulsion, mocked almost heretically by Williams, to remove in advance every conceivable cause of misunderstanding from one’s prose. It is myopic to judge *Z* in terms of consistency, modesty, and restraint because these are precisely the ideals that Nietzsche resists (but does not abandon wholesale) in his opposition to *Universitätsphilosophie*. Alliterative prose stimulates original interpretations, and an inability to generate a creative response to *Z*, the least scholarly book in his corpus, may say less about its ‘unreadability’ than it does about the ubiquity of scholarly literal-mindedness. Granted, we can never know definitively the meaning of every passage in *Z*, but it is a far cry from ‘nearly unreadable’. Many passages can be understood in context: as we saw earlier, *Z* ‘Three Metamorphoses’ is prefigured by Nietzsche’s ideal of childlike forgetfulness in *HL* 1.

Sometimes Nietzsche’s metaphors are literally inconsistent, which may be another sign that he is writing spontaneously. A good example is the series of metaphors of self-hood in *SE*. Nietzsche writes,

How can man know himself? He is a thing dark and veiled; and if the hare has seven skins, man can slough off seventy times seven and still not be able to say: ‘this is really you, this is no longer outer shell’ (*SE* 1).

Taken literally, this Emersonian metaphor suggests that one's true self exists beneath innumerable layers of public opinion. Nietzsche retains this notion with the subsequent metaphor: 'it is a painful and dangerous undertaking thus to tunnel into oneself and to force one's way down into the shaft of one's being by the nearest path'. However, he goes on to say, in the same paragraph, 'your true nature lies, not concealed deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you usually take yourself to be' (SE 1). Nietzsche seemingly changes his mind, abandoning the idea that selves are buried within us and settling instead on the idea that they are located above us. Yet he never redacts the metaphor of skinning a hare, and the fact that he has no interest in revising old claims may indicate that he is throwing metaphors around spontaneously. It would be misleading to conclude that he settles once and for all on the idea that your true nature lies 'immeasurably high above you' because he soon returns, perhaps on a whim, to the idea that it is buried within us, that is, beneath things that are 'soldered' on to us (SE 3).

On another occasion he writes that we should ask ourselves what we desire in order to become our true selves; yet he also writes that nothing we presently do or ask is an expression of our true selves (SE 1–2). Faced with this contradiction, Conant (1998, 190) sets out to resolve what he calls the 'dilemma of the unattained self'. If nothing we presently do expresses our true self, then, Conant (1998, 188) writes, we are 'not even in a position to ask (let alone answer) the question [of what we desire]'. Conant (1998, 190) never considers the possibility that Nietzsche's contradictory statements are simply contradictory (as a result of writing spontaneously). Instead, he offers the following 'solution': that we begin to trust in those rejected elements of our self when we encounter them again in exemplars—a point which, conveniently, Emerson makes in *Self-Reliance*. Whether this solution makes sense theoretically does not tell us whether Nietzsche would recognise it as his own, but it is curious that he never thought to eliminate grounds for confusion. Given his willingness to write spontaneously, it is conceivable that he does not care about the consistency of these arguments (or metaphors). As such, Conant may have committed what Skinner (1969, 19) calls the 'mythology of coherence', which occurs when an interpreter explains away genuine inconsistencies on the assumption that a text necessarily exhibits some 'inner coherence'. Contradictions are often nothing more than contradictions, and we should expect them of a writer who sometimes writes spontaneously.

In a similar vein, Heitsch identifies several contradictions in Z 'Seven Seals', including the fact that Nietzsche disregards the sequence of tenses in the hypothesis of the first stanza. Heitsch (1999, 419–420) claims that Nietzsche deliberately uses the present tense, instead of continuing the past tense, as a way of encouraging his readers 'to read slowly and carefully and to take in the many poetic elements, such as climactic adjective enumerations, metaphors, and proverbs'. This may be true (how could we know?), but an alternative reading is that Nietzsche grasps the nearest shoddy words at the cost of grammatical consistency because he is expressing himself, as best he can, with the energy and honesty of pre-Socratic philosophers. Indeed, he may not have any readers in mind when he writes this particular passage, for he claims on one occasion that 'we should not write for our readers' (N IV.5.47[7], cited in *HH II*).⁷ It is surely impossible to know which explanation is more accurate, but my reading at least fits

with his descriptions of creative inspiration and his motivation to become simple and honest in thought and life.

The abundance of hyperbole in Nietzsche's writings is widely recognised, with one commentator describing an example of 'typically Nietzschean rhetorical exaggeration' (Donnellan 1979, 305). From a purely quantitative perspective, Large (2020, 379) has shown that *EH*, Nietzsche's autobiography, contains more superlatives and hyperbole than any of his other writings, even more than *BT* 'Preface', *BT* 'Attempt at Self-Criticism', and *Z*.⁸ Most commentaries overlook Nietzsche's underlying commitments to spontaneity, simplicity, forgetfulness, and honesty (*Ehrlichkeit*). Heitsch (1999, 426) describes Nietzsche's claim in *EH* 'Clever' 3 that he has not touched a book in half a year, remarking that this hyperbolic claim 'can be explained by Nietzsche's treatment of style'. It is far from obvious how Nietzsche treats 'style' (note the reference to a singular style) or how hyperbole relates to this treatment, and Heitsch does not elaborate. Nehamas (1985, 28) observes that 'Nietzsche's writing is irreducibly hyperbolic', and that 'the whole of *Ecce Homo* is remarkable for its stridency', and his explanation is that Nietzsche is unable to tolerate indifference; that hyperbole is his way of generating a reaction. This is conceivably part of the story, but it does not sit well with the presence of hyperbole in Nietzsche's unpublished writings. Nehamas also treats hyperbole as a negative quality, whereas Nietzsche praises Schopenhauer's 'rigorous [streng]' style, the 'power' of his conceptions, and the 'virtuous energy' of the pre-Socratics.

My explanation, which is compatible with those aforementioned, is that hyperbole stems from Nietzsche's desire to combat the gloomy struggle between dissimulation and honesty (described above) by means of spontaneous life writing. He moves beyond scholarly hedging, temperance, and consistency and allows himself to write in simple, honest terms. When we write spontaneously, we disclose everything that we have hidden from ourselves and others. There is no time to second-guess ourselves or temper our claims in retrospect, which could be why, in the 1886 preface to *HH*, Nietzsche describes himself as a volcano (see also *SE* 3). Spontaneous life writing is his way of rekindling the virtuous energy of the pre-Socratics, but this explosive energy has a natural tendency towards excess. On this point we must note that honesty (*Ehrlichkeit*) does not guarantee accuracy; it guarantees only nakedness, earnestness, and outspokenness. (A different, more intellectual type of honesty, called *Redlichkeit*, does guarantee accuracy: see Lane 2007, 28; Logan 2023.) Nietzsche preserves the original intensity and form of his insights by expressing them in 'hard' or 'shoddy' words, even if this means exaggerating. Temperance would disrupt the creative process and his train of thought, and honesty (*Ehrlichkeit*) means expressing not only what he thinks but also the extravagance of how he thinks, especially when his ideas are untimely and forbidden.

In contrast to scholarly publications, which are restrained and modest, every page of *EH* is an explosion. There are important debates about whether *EH* is performative or authentic, or both. At any rate, a personality of some kind is unmistakably, unmistakably present in both form and content and has not been edited out for the sake of restraint or impartiality. In *SE* 3 Nietzsche mentions that he wishes to become simple and honest, and in *EH* 'Books' *UM* 3 he explicitly links *SE* to the development of his writing style:

in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, my innermost story [innerste Geschichte], my *becoming*, is inscribed. Above all, my *oath!* What I am today, *where* I am today — at a height where I no longer speak with words but with bolts of lightning — oh, how far I was then from all that!

His strident writing style develops over time, reaching a crescendo (by that time, at least) in *EH*. Hyperbole is apparent not only in the content but also the form of this sentence, with its repetitive dashes, exclamation marks, and italicisations. Nietzsche is more self-assured here than he ever is in his middle writings. In the place of modesty and disjointedness we find a uniform style that approximates or caricaturises (or both) the energetic one-sidedness of the pre-Socratics.⁹ Whereas they were effortlessly simple and honest, Nietzsche cultivates these virtues over the course of his life by writing spontaneously and in ‘hard words’.

Conclusion

Nietzsche writes spontaneously in order to become simple and honest in thought and life. Inspired by figures such as Emerson, Diogenes, and Sterne, he resists the scholarly ideals of consistency and temperance. His practice of spontaneous life writing is characterised by constraint and strict discipline, which I explored through an analogy to jazz. The presence of vague metaphors, loose language, inconsistency, and hyperbole in his writings stems, in part, from his willingness to write spontaneously. Over time, he becomes simpler and more honest, and *Ecce Homo* is the closest that he ever gets to the energy and one-sidedness of the pre-Socratics.

Notes

1. Forethought may precede spontaneity. Hesse (in Kaufmann 1974, 418) suggests that we should let our reactions ‘accumulate to the point of *spontaneous activity*’. However, it is surely impossible to know how much forethought preceded Nietzsche’s spontaneous activities: how could it be measured?
2. For a fuller comparison of Nietzsche and Diogenes in terms of honesty (Ehrlichkeit), see Logan (2023).
3. Nietzsche associates honesty (Ehrlichkeit) with simplicity (Einfachheit), nakedness (Nacktheit), and a lack of dissimulation (*SE* 1–3; see also *HH* 313, 404; *MM* 170; *WS* 73, 275, 280, 286; *D* 529). In his middle-writings he nuances, but never fully abandons (see *HH* 52–53, 68; *MM* 32, 56; *D* 60, 142, 215, 248, 322, 543), the distinction between honesty and dissimulation (Verstellung).
4. Nietzsche read Emerson extensively at school and engaged with his writings (in translation) throughout his life, even using an epigraph from Emerson in the first edition of *GS*. For a meticulous treatment of Nietzsche’s engagement with Emerson, see Zavatta (2019).
5. Nietzsche makes wide-ranging objections to Universitätsphilosophie in his writings. He even goes so far as to say that philosophical genius only emerges when there is ‘no scholarly education’ (*SE* 8). However, he also appreciates close reading, the virtues of philology (*D* ‘Preface’ 5), and certain scholarly traits, such as ‘good-naturedness’ (*BGE* 39). Many scholars acknowledge Nietzsche’s objections (see, e.g. Kaufmann 1974, 81–82; Richardson 2018, 274), but more research is needed into the specific details, their development over time, and differences across publications.
6. Here I use the word ‘skeptical’ in the everyday sense of doubtful (of convictions), critical, and scientific. Nietzsche uses skepticism loosely in *HH* 22, where it appears alongside ‘science’, ‘doubt’, and ‘mistrust’ (see also Nietzsche 2021 [A 54]). It has more specific

meanings elsewhere: in *BGE* 210, for instance, he distinguishes between the critic and the sceptic. For a detailed commentary on scepticism in Nietzsche, see Berry (2011).

7. Nietzsche may not always care about his readers whilst writing, but he certainly cares about their responses and likely edits with readers in mind. As Ure (2019, 154; also 174–177) suggests, ‘Nietzsche’s aphoristic form becomes his way of training his readers not to subscribe to a doctrine or a particular Nietzschean view of life, but rather to create and craft their own philosophy of life’.
8. Large (2020) challenges the conventional view that the wildly hyperbolic tone of *EH* stems from Nietzsche’s incipient madness. Commentators have traditionally asserted this without evidence and without considering the philosophical importance of hyperbole to Nietzsche. I agree with Large (2020, 383) that ‘even in a very late text like *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche is still rigorously pursuing the same philosophical themes that have marked his mature work as a whole’.
9. My reading supports, and is supported by, Large’s (2020, 383) claim that Nietzsche uses hyperbole in order to attain ‘stylistic singularity’.

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