BECOMING WHAT ONE IS: THINKING-ABOUT TRAUMA AND AUTHENTICITY

Ryan Wasser

Department of Philosophy, West Chester University

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**Preliminary Statements**

Despite the contentious attitude exhibited by contemporary academics toward the continued presence of "dead white men" within various literary canons, there is something about Friedrich Nietzsche—arguably the sheer fecundity of his works as an influence on philosophy and the world at large—that insulates him from reproach, if it does not situate him beyond it entirely. And while *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and *Beyond Good and Evil* are frequently (although not universally) lauded as some of his most important texts,[[1]](#footnote-1) it is the profound candor of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche's autobiography, that distinguishes it from the rest of his oeuvre and discloses, in no uncertain terms, a perpetually vital topic within the cultural zeitgeist: *trauma*. *Trauma* [*τραῦμα*], a Grecian term that traditionally refers to "a wound," underpins much of Nietzsche's writing, and is present in observations of his own lived experience, those of notable décadents such as Socrates and Wagner, and even his discussions of ethics and morality.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nietzsche's willingness to engage with his trauma—what he might refer as a Dionysian affirmation of being—is precisely what places him head and shoulders above other thinkers in terms of unadulterated authenticity. The relationship between trauma and authenticity is, if nothing else, a well-documented if not understated occurrence both in texts of antiquity as well as contemporary scholarship, therefore understanding trauma as it pertains *ek-sisting* beings[[3]](#footnote-3) is a concern of uncommon consequence. However, much writing about trauma focuses on moving beyond it, as if it were just another instance in a sequence of instances to be thought-through calculatively in order to achieve some semblance of an equilibrated life. What value, I wonder, might there be in abandoning attempts at thinking-through matters like trauma, even if only momentarily? What might thinking-about the nature of trauma look like, and were such think-about to occur is it possible that Nietzsche himself might serve as a set piece for such an endeavor? Even if it turns out that he should not, perhaps the attempt at thinking itself will disclose some forgotten thing about trauma and authenticity that is central to the experience of being human.

Seeing as the point of departure for thinking is Nietzsche and his ailments, it stands to reason that those issues must be splayed out before moving forward. That said, the exact details of the "torments" that forced Nietzsche to vacate his Basil professorship are nebulous to say the least, and scholars continue to speculate about them today as there are many disparate symptoms related to his condition that require special deliberation.[[4]](#footnote-4) While his later years would be punctuated by depression, dementia, and possible epileptic seizures responsible for second-order conditions such as disturbances in his speech and facial paresis,[[5]](#footnote-5) Nietzsche's primary concern—at least in the early chapters of *Ecce Homo* where he addresses such things—were the bouts of dyspepsia, migraines, and eyesight problems[[6]](#footnote-6) that in many cases incapacitated him to such a degree that he resorted to newly invented technology such as the typewriter[[7]](#footnote-7) and dictating his thoughts to former students in order to continue working.[[8]](#footnote-8) To say that Nietzsche was keenly aware of the impact his situation had on him would be a profound understatement: in his own words, "it was in the years of [his] lowest vitality that [he] *ceased* to be a pessimist," and that in those years "the instinct for self-recovery *forbade* to [him the] philosophy of indigence and discouragement" that characterized the culture that surrounded him.[[9]](#footnote-9) Similar conclusions about the positive impact malady has on one's existential condition were voiced earlier in *The Gay Science*,[[10]](#footnote-10) conclusions, one might suggest, that Nietzsche could only have been arrived at after a "long succession of years"[[11]](#footnote-11) that afforded him the "opportunity" to ruminate on such matters.

While the necessity of such meaningful contemplation—what I frequently refer to as *thinking-about* [*um-denken*]—is of paramount importance to any discussion about authenticity, such concerns shall have to be revisited at another time as it is crucial to first determine the nature of the condition that led to Nietzsche's extreme development in perspective both toward the world and his own particular being-as-such. The simplest and most obvious approach toward this aim would be to examine the "end result" first, and infer motivation afterward, but that method would offer, at best, cursory explanations for either phenomenon in question. In order to arrive at a different, hopefully deeper understanding of trauma, authenticity, and the relationship that binds them, it is necessary to embrace a longer way about; only after trauma is accounted for as a phenomenon can one attempt to think-about it in a way that can be taken to heart, that is to create a circumstance where trauma might be properly recognized for what it is.

**A Short Phenomenology of Trauma**

It was previously established in the preliminary remarks that the Greek term "trauma" [*τραῦμα*] specifically refers to "a wound,"[[12]](#footnote-12) however, it is not apparent that there have been sufficiently rigorous observations of traumatic experiences outside of occasional phenomenologies such as those conducted by Janice Beitz and Earl Goldberg.[[13]](#footnote-13) The problem is that these studies tend to be more ontical in consideration than ontological; they do not strike to the heart of the issue, nor do they address the hint that points to it. A legitimate procession would necessitate a dogged search for the word's wellspring, but, be that as it may, such endeavors prove difficult as they are delimited by the fundamental flaw of all hermeneutics, that being that to wreste a word from its father-tongue risks distorting, or worse, perverting the essential tiding such utterances bear. This consequence is unavoidable; after all, "one does not inhabit a country; one inhabits a language"[[14]](#footnote-14) and as such humans are at a significant disadvantage when they venture beyond the borders of their homeland. Still, what other recourse is there? At the very least paying heed to such concerns in advance will serve to temper our thinking as we grope, however impotently, at the obscured ground that lies ahead.

Whether it be the ancestral, Proto-Germanic *\*wuntho* or its younger, Old English variant *wund*, both understandings of "wound" are specific in that, while they clearly implicate "injury" as a decisive element in the word's meaning, they equally recognize the notion of a "sore,"[[15]](#footnote-15) specifically an "ulcer" as well,[[16]](#footnote-16) and it is precisely the distinction between that which is an ulcer and a mere injury that characterizes the essence of "a wound." For instance, a mere injury, while irritating, presents little challenge to the individual besides that of momentary discomfort. The fact that my corporeal encasement has sustained some modicum of damage when I papercut my hand manipulating an envelope has no profound or lasting impact on my Self. Such mild irritants heal easily and are easily forgotten. An ulcer, on the other hand, is an altogether different matter. According to Stephanie Gardner, ulcers are characterized, not just by pain and inflammation, but by swelling and a propensity toward tissue friability and breakdown. When one has an ulcer, they have sustained an injury that stays *open*—this openness is essential to a wound and a primary characteristic that differentiates it from mere injury. We understand "open" here as *being-unresolved*; a wound does not heal properly. Furthermore, the causes of wounds are often chronic, external pressures, not necessarily immediate instances of damage although the two things frequently go hand-and-hand.[[17]](#footnote-17) When a body builder sustains a "wound" such as a herniated disc, one might be inclined to believe that the immediate event of rupture—what we perceive as "injury"—is the wound itself. Given the understanding of wounds as phenomena thus far that cannot be farther from the case. A wound precedes the injury historically and projects itself forward as profound self-consciousness of how one comports oneself in the moment. As it pertains to our bodybuilder, the manifestation of the wound is not the result of one poorly executed movement but that of hundreds of repetitions of the same movement executed again and again and again under profound duress.

A generalized abstraction of this thinking would be to say that wounds are events that are a long time coming; events obfuscated in their unassumingness until they dramatically erupt. Therefore, the nature of a wound extends beyond the severity of its openness into longevity. Such a phenomenon *endures*; it persists and as such remains open, a cleft that reminds the bearer of its presence *in perpetua*. Whereas mere injuries are relegated to their corporeality, there is a profound metaphysicality to wounds, a metaphysicality that must be accounted for definitionally as we move forward. On these grounds "a wound"—trauma—can be tentatively defined as the enduring, oft-concealed rift that lays claim to and calls into question one's condition.[[18]](#footnote-18) While undoubtedly imperfect, this definition prepares the way to ask the following question: where and of what nature is the trauma that precipitated Nietzsche's profound authenticity?

As is to be expected, Nietzsche himself provides salient clues about the answer to this question:

When I was almost done for, *because* I was almost done for, I began to reflect on this fundamental irrationality of my life—'idealism'. It was only *sickness* that brought me to reason.[[19]](#footnote-19)

One might ask oneself: where precisely is the trauma in this statement? The most obvious answer is to point to Nietzsche's ailments—the manifold collection of bodily signs—as the source of his trauma, but, as has already been established, mere injury, in this instance physical malady, does not satisfy the prerequisite set forth in the previous discussion. Even so, in their own way Nietzsche's maladies act as signifiers for trauma yet undisclosed. Malady, in this instance, is a sign of things to come—it indicates a "condition" worthy of suspicion. As discussions of signs and signification are no trivial matter, it would be beneficial to clarify what one means when one says that something acts as a sign for another thing. Here a "sign" should be understood as a contingent thing that "points toward" another thing entirely. Hence, signs hinge their being on the being of some other phenomenon or entity. The "sign-ness" of the sign, its essential quality, is being-referential, and this applies to signs whether they be manmade, such as the signs one encounters walking down the street, or natural, such as the aposematic coloring of animals in the wild. Signs, according to Gadamer, "[are] nothing but what [their] function requires."[[20]](#footnote-20) So in the former instance the "Stop Sign" one confronts on the street gestures that one oughtto halt their vehicular advance in a particular location, and little if nothing more than that. Although it is likely there will be objections to such a moniker, for the purposes of the present discourse this type of sign should be understood as *external*, as in external to the body.

The question, moving forward, is whether *bodily signs*—a term typically reserved for and relegated to colloquial, pop culture rhetoric—are signs in the same way as external signs, or if there is something distinct about bodily signs that requires deeper investigation. Indeed, there must be, if only because it is unclear what "the body" is in actuality. Though typically taken for granted, the very notion of "body" smacks of the representational; the symbolic, especially when one considers the term's Old English origin as the "trunk of a man or beast."[[21]](#footnote-21) The point is that one is not usually aware of what one's body "is" let alone what an individual means when they talk about seeing this thing, hearing that thing, or being in touch with another. And although phenomenologies of such matters— phenomenologies of "the body”—have become something *en vogue* for many a contemporary academic,[[22]](#footnote-22) the most thoughtful consideration of the matter remains a distinction of Martin Heidegger's, a consideration that will have to be summarized quickly in order to maintain heading for the present set of concerns. During a series of lectures held at the home of Medard Boss between 1959 and 1969, Heidegger states that

the body is not a thing, nor is it a corporeal thing, but each body that is, the body as body, is in each case my body. The *bodying forth* [*Leiben*] *of the body* is determined by my way of being.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Heidegger provides a practical example of "bodying-forth" only moments earlier in the transcript when he notes that by pointing to something, in that particular instance the crossbar of a window on the opposite side of the room, "[he as body] does not end at [his] fingertips," an observation that throws the unity of the corporeal thing and the body into question by delimiting the latter's ''reach," in many ways indefinitely.[[24]](#footnote-24) This in itself discloses a primary characteristic of the body: it is *not* entirely contingent on some other phenomenon, corporeality, for its presence and meaning. The body always extends outward, projecting as it were, toward something else, but coincidentally bringing the same into nearness. *This tacit acknowledgement of that-which-is-beyond through consciousness of that-which-is-immediate is a symbolic gesture in its most originary formulation*.

Trauma, therefore, spurs on a body's gesturing toward something outside the immediacy of its Self.[[25]](#footnote-25) Levinas might refer to this as experiencing the "face" of the Other, with the face being understood as the "way in which the Other presents himself" that "[exceeds] *the idea of the other in me*."[[26]](#footnote-26) For Gadamer, it is the hermeneutic priority of the question.[[27]](#footnote-27) Similar (albeit arguably different) sentiments are voiced by Kierkegaard about the nature of faith as an individual's standing in absolute relation to the Absolute.[[28]](#footnote-28) *Trauma*, *face*, *question*, *faith*—like a menagerie of Northern Lights, each phenomenon is a point of contact, a form of relation, says Deleuze,[[29]](#footnote-29) between one thing and something else; between the "I" and the "Other"; between the horizons of two or more interlocutors; between an individual and their god. Relations-as-such are the open possibility to a particular claim laid upon the Self by something beyond its immanent and fragmentary nature; they bring the individual face-to-face with that which lay in wait beyond the horizon, and therefore are of supreme moment to authenticity in life. After all and as Heidegger so poetically observes "[a]nything that gives us room" or is open "and allows us to do something gives us a possibility, that is, it gives what enables us."[[30]](#footnote-30) As such, trauma is not some mere instance in a sequence, but an event that gives that which is given. Armed with this understanding, one cannot avoid the question that now dares to be asked: what is it that trauma gives?

In order to answer this question, it becomes necessary to circle back around on our previous thinking-about trauma and wounds. Trauma, as defined, is the enduring, oft-concealed rift that lays claim to and calls into question one's condition. Assuming all other aspects of this definition have been sufficiently addressed, it immediately becomes clear that an explanation of what the phrase "one's condition" refers to is needed since its meaning cannot simply be presumed. The initial impulse would be to suggest that a "condition" is little more than the immediately present conditions of any particular individual—in the case of Nietzsche, his dyspepsia, migraines, and notable eyesight problems. Admittedly, acquiescing to such thinking would be easy as few people, at least in my opinion, would debate the profundity of such maladies. However, seeing as it has already been determined that Nietzsche's individual ailments cannot be the source of his trauma, but instead *represent*, as bodily signs, the source of his trauma, this line of thinking must be brought to a close. That said, by isolating "condition" and examining it terminologically, a central clue to the puzzle at hand is revealed: a condition is "a particular mode of being,"[[31]](#footnote-31) and accordingly must be characterized as an ontological expression. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the source of trauma is Being itself, or more appropriately the being of a particular entity that is insufficient or lacking—being that has the possibility of no-longer-being-a-being-as-such. In drawing this thinking out a most logically and universal conclusion comes into clarity: what traumatizes a human being most prolifically is coming face-to-face with *the* *finitude of its Self*.

**Being-authentic: Thinking-about the Self**

The ensuing discussion will not rely on the platitudes of earlier investigations into the nature of authenticity any more than is necessary to lay out an essential framework of what one means when speaking of *being-authentic*. To that end, radical considerations about authenticity such as those proffered by the likes of Sartre or Beauvoir will not be discussed as they ultimately deny the possibility of its attainment, nor will objections such as those levied by thinkers like Adorno or Foucault, who deny the possibility of authenticity altogether. This is not to say that those theories are without merit: to the contrary, each warrants thorough consideration within a much larger context, but are simply inappropriate given the particularity of the present discourse. The immediate concern moving forward is the relationship between authenticity and trauma, specifically whether trauma is recognized by our thinking-about it as a precondition for authenticity. Such a conclusion remains to be seen, and ultimately hinges upon what it means for an individual to be-authentic in the first place.

While there are arguments to be made about whether Plato ought to be included in discussions of authenticity, specifically his *Crito*'s consideration of how individuals respond to the whims of "the public" regarding matters of justice and truth,[[32]](#footnote-32) a more appropriate point of departure is Søren Kierkegaard's *The Crowd is Untruth*.[[33]](#footnote-33) In this short essay, the likes of which rival Nietzsche's writing in terms of poetical stature, Kierkegaard ruminates over truth—authenticity—being inherently linked to the capacities of the individual, a mode of thinking best characterized by his early usage of Paul the Apostle's immemorial axiom: "only one receives the prize." Interestingly, while teasing out his premise that "the Crowd is untruth," Kierkegaard expends considerable energy addressing the single individuals that constitute "the Crowd," what he refers to as an anonymous person; the "No One." This is not an insignificant sobriquet drawn on to melodramatize the stickiness of human being-with-others, but a clear distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity. In spite of contrary expectations—we do fancy ourselves a "global" species after all, especially with the advent of modern socialistic politics—every individual can, in fact, be a "One" and therefore receive the "prize," namely authenticity. However, the acquisition of this prize rests entirely on the individual's ability to resist withdrawing into the sanctimony of the Crowd; regardless of how authentic an individual may or may not be on their own, the moment they participate in the Crowd they immediately become inauthentic. This is the essential message of Kierkegaard's thesis.

A more thorough and ironically measured[[34]](#footnote-34) explication of the same issue is provided by Heidegger in his ontological analysis of Dasein. In *Being and Time,* Heidegger describes the Dasein—the kind of being humans have (*see* Footnote 3)—as always having the possibility of being-authentic or inauthentic, but in this possibility Dasein is forced into a situation where it either loses itself, which is to say that it dissolves into the everydayness dictated by "the They" [*das Man*], or it "wins" itself by adopting a resolute stance towards its own end, implying Dasein’s seizure of control over its own being.[[35]](#footnote-35) At first glance it is easy to mistake Heidegger's thinking as describing a catastrophic “either/or” scenario where individuals are relegated to choosing between slavery to the they-Self, and dominating the they-Self in order to assume genuine Selfhood. This, however, happens not to be the case. According to Heidegger, Dasein only wins its authenticity through constant communication and struggle, both with the world and the other entities it is always alongside-in-the-world as well as its own unfolding potentiality. In other words, authenticity for an individual depends on a continual although often fleeting, state of negotiation with one's Self, and it is precisely this "negotiation"—this remarkable back-and-forth movement or "play"—with which we are most concerned.

Nietzsche himself mulls over issues of authenticity in one form or another. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he rails against those who adhere to the mentality of "the herd" while championing the "*search* for one's own virtues," those values which align with "our most secret and heartfelt inclinations"[[36]](#footnote-36) as a preferable alternative to the virtuosity of the "disinterested" moralists of his day. Similar thinking is present in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: how else should one consider Zarathustra's discussion about the "Three Metamorphoses" if not as an observation about the necessary steps one must take in order to cultivate an authentic life? The very description of the final metamorphosis as a childlike spirit; a "self-propelled wheel" speaks explicitly of genuine individuality, and alone would be enough to spur conversations about the nature of the Self in relation to the trauma of the world.[[37]](#footnote-37) Another notable observation of authenticity and the one closest to the discussion at hand occurs in *Twilight of the Idols* when Nietzsche speaks about "the free man [as] a *warrior*," the psychological tyranny of "pitiless and dreadful instincts," and the necessity of "great danger" as a precursor to the state of being Nietzsche considers most "deserving [of] reverence."[[38]](#footnote-38) Each discussion has its own merits; each is profound in its own way, but a return to *Ecce Homo* provides the clearest window into Nietzsche's thinking-about authenticity:

To [take] oneself as a [F]ate, not to desire oneself 'different'—in such conditions this is great rationality itself.[[39]](#footnote-39)

What an innocuous phrase this seems to be; Nietzsche, who was at all times satisfied to compose with polysemic intent, buries under the surface of this passage, at varying degrees of depth, kernels of wisdom to be unearthed by readers armed with the fortitude to do so. Luckily, one puzzle piece—the mostcrucial puzzle piece—has already been disclosed, namely the "conditions" Nietzsche speaks of: the finitude of ek-sisting beings. Furthermore, one might presuppose that the "great rationality" Nietzsche alludes to is being-authentic, an understanding that agrees nicely with the theme of this discussion. That said, such a presumption would be tantamount to a shortcut to thinking, and a shortcut to thinking would rob us of the opportunity, as I have described it previously, to strike to the heart of the matter, namely to draw a line connecting the trauma of being-finite with individual authenticity. A more productive route—and I use this term with great trepidation, as it is unclear whether such enterprises should ever be matters of mere "knowledge production"—would be to interrogate the concept of "fate," especially as it is employed by Nietzsche with regard to "one's Self."

Observations of "fate" are typically or often entirely terminal in nature, the unfortunate cause and end of any and every particular tragedy. As will become apparent, there is truth in this claim, but be that as it may, for the time being such a conceptualization must be regarded as incomplete. Having said that, the best example and possible progenitor of this colloquially incomplete view might be Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which relies heavily on the idea that fate is an event that simply befalls an individual as is the case with most of the story's principal characters.[[40]](#footnote-40) This trope, which manifests across many literary and cinematic genres,[[41]](#footnote-41) accords with current definitions held by institutions such as Cambridge, which describe "fate" as either "what happens to a particular person or thing, especially something final or negative," or "a power that some people believe causes and controls all events."[[42]](#footnote-42) However useful the former understanding may be, it ultimately falls flat in comparison to the latter which speaks to the essential character of primordial understanding of "fate," or, as it turns out, "the Fates." Viewed mythopoetically—an appropriate lens given Nietzsche's penchant for Grecian lore—the Fates typically stand as a female tripartite: The Virgin (*having-been*), the Mother (*being-present*), and the Crone (*becoming*). Whether it be the Morai of the Greek world or their Roman counterpart, the Parcae;[[43]](#footnote-43) the Slavic Zorya; the Morrigan of the Irish; the triple Guinevere of the ancient Britons,[[44]](#footnote-44) or the Norns [*Nurnir*] of Proto-Germanic legend,[[45]](#footnote-45) the structure of the Fates remain similar across most respects, and not without consequence as each unified structure describes a coexisting "past," "present," and "future" pertaining to an individual as a "totality."[[46]](#footnote-46) Therefore, the Fates as "Fate" are significant, not just in terms of mythology, but also ontologically as they describe, in no uncertain terms, human *temporality*.

Here it is necessary to pay homage to the idea of temporality according to Nietzsche, as one could easily argue his thinking directly (or even indirectly) influences the thinking of others, most notably Heidegger for whom temporality was a vital concern. For Nietzsche, temporality takes the form of the *eternal recurrence*, a way of understanding the "original law" of ek-sisting beings as "the repetition of the dice-throw,"[[47]](#footnote-47) that all occurrences of a given, particular world come back around; "fall back" on themselves indefinitely. Here we understand "world" as the place of relational possibility; as "the *manifestness of beings as such as a whole.*"[[48]](#footnote-48) For Nietzsche, this circumambulatory, inward mode of being in the face of externality is a central tenet of his collected works, one most poetically displayed in *The Gay Science* when, under the auspices of some demon, readers are forced to consider whether they would relive the entirety of their life exactly as they had until that moment if given the chance.[[49]](#footnote-49) The necessity of the act and its concomitant responsibility is understood as *affirmation*, and this attitude of affirmation, says Deleuze, is an essential form of comportment pertaining to Nietzsche's ontology. Affirmation places primacy on "the will" as a precondition for becoming, and rightfully so.[[50]](#footnote-50) This way of thought discloses an uncertain degree of play or action—what the Greeks might refer to as *kinesis* [*κίνηση*]—between the individual in-the-moment and the factical Self as they relate to and understand the Self as historically effected potential.[[51]](#footnote-51) Being a Fate in this regard is being-beside-oneself [*ἔκστασις*]: to be a "temporal entity" or Fate paradoxically recognizes a being that is at all times unified but unintegrated; whose constitutive parts remain essentially, dialogically connected yet consciously detached. Stated simply what this means is that every individual as a Fate, regardless of degree of awareness, is at all times the historical thing that manifests moment-to-moment as that which "is," "is-as-such," and that which "is-becoming." To take one's Self as a Fate is Nietzschean affirmation *par excellence*.

The trauma of finitude discloses the possibility of authenticity to individual ek-sisting beings by bringing being-beside-oneself [*ἔκστασις*]—temporality—to bear; it rests on affirmation, taking one's Self as a Fate. But what does it mean to "take" one's Self as a Fate, a temporal entity, and not to desire one's Self to be different? What does it mean to "take" any particular thing at all?

The first point that must be addressed is the indisputable dynamic quality implicit in the act of "taking." There can be no denial that interpretations which construe the German term "nehmen" as "accepting" (*see* footnote 37) lack a certain degree of assertiveness that has come to be associated with Nietzsche. When one accepts a gift, for example, one does so graciously, thus exhibiting magnanimous humility. One the other hand, seizing such tidings in any way that might be perceived as aggressive in fashion would be quite unseemly to say the least. In other cases this mistaken passiveness might be construed as unproblematic, however, as such a tone seems anathema to the spirit of Nietzsche himself it ought to be considered incommensurate with *Ecce Homo* as well as his body of work as a whole. One simply cannot avoid canvassing decisive characteristics when interrogating what it means to "take" things of a specific nature.

In any act of "taking" an individual grasps at a given thing, which is to say that one reaches or gropes about in a way not dissimilar from the way this discussion has groped at the essence of trauma. When one grapples with a physical thing in such a way one attempts to *take-into-hand* that which is particular; to get a feel for it.[[52]](#footnote-52) To return to the previous weightlifting analogy, when an individual grasps the shaft of a barbell it is not the mere act of "holding on" to the material that situates the lifter. The weightlifter seizes the bar, their fingers negotiate and renegotiate the knurling to ensure as optimal a connection as possible with the equipmental thing. It should come as no surprise then—this being common knowledge within weightlifting circles[[53]](#footnote-53)—that athletes tend to favor certain pieces of equipment over others. A deep interconnectedness develops by routinely taking-into-hand "things," regardless of their nature. In many ways, an oft-handled piece of equipment acts as an extension of the body[[54]](#footnote-54); the body *understands* the equipment, which is to say it stands-under it, grounds it, and acts through it as if it were its own.

Alternatively, although not dissimilarly, there are things that can grasped beyond mere materiality. After all, when somebody says that they are "taking matters into their own hands" there may be a hint of literalness in the sense that palpable things may come into play during the course of events, but the overarching concern of such statements rest on the understanding that an individual is prepared to take the onus of a specific issue squarely on their own shoulders. For the sake of differentiation, this form of grasping will be described as *taking-into-consideration* matters of a conceptual nature, although here, despite the essential difference in predicates, the pattern of "getting under" what is at hand will be revealed to be central to the act of taking. How so? Such "things"—concepts—lack the tangibility of their material counterparts. There is no bar to reach for nor knurling to come to grips with, but all the same the thinking person engages in similar comportment with respect to the intangible concept: they get a feel for it through a form of manipulation yet undisclosed. How is such understanding possible? What form of negotiation allows for the taking of a conceptual thing?

Again, Nietzsche provides insight into the matter:

Another form of recovery, in certain cases even more suited to me, is to *sound out idols* . . . For once to pose questions with a hammer and perhaps to receive for answer that famous hollow sound for which speaks of inflated bowels—what a delight for one who has ears behind his ears . . .[[55]](#footnote-55)

This statement is notable in that it is what many people—Nietzsche included—refer to when they speak of "[philosophizing] with a hammer."[[56]](#footnote-56) A hammer, as it turns out, is a marvelous little piece of equipment, both constructive and destructive in capacity although the latter is the impression that typically presides over discussions about the famous pessimist. That said, it is easy to overlook a hammer's analytic qualities, qualities, it should be noted, that are more in-line with Nietzsche's actual *modus operandi*. Tap-hammering, for instance, is a form of audible sonic testing used to detect structural discontinuities in things such as jet aircraft, specifically the honeycomb structure of various wing and stabilizer components.[[57]](#footnote-57) Similar percussive techniques are also a mainstay in medical diagnoses, and can be used to identify enlarged organs surrounded by excess amounts of pathological fluids before more invasive modes of examination are required or employed.[[58]](#footnote-58) For Nietzsche, hammering "to *sound out idols*" is a means of questioning the things that stand before him whether it be the morality of an entire species, a critique of values, or even his own malady-strewn life. Questioning is an attempt to detect discontinuity, both in materials and in any individual's particular world-structure, and it is a skill that requires exceptional earnestness to become proficient at. As such, questioning is an essential element of any act of taking, because every questioning is preceded by a rift that necessitates the question in the first place. Every grasping-at indicates an essentially *unresolved* *openness* that stands before it. Gadamer calls this openness the "negativity of experience"; we recognize it as trauma—the wound that lays claim on this thing or that.[[59]](#footnote-59) Therefore the act of taking anything as anything in particular implies a questioning of that which is essential to the thing itself, and every honest questioning is an attempt at understanding.

Armed with this new appreciation of his experiences, Nietzsche can begin to be addressed in a manner more fitting for his mode of thinking: what does it mean for Nietzsche "[t]o [take] oneself as a [F]ate," and "not to desire oneself 'different'" when faced with the conditions of one's finitude?[[60]](#footnote-60) One might begin by formalizing Nietzsche's statement as follows: to take-oneself-into-consideration as a Fate is to call into question the totality of the Self as a finite being; to affirm one's Self, having borne witness to its end, as historically projected beyond perpetuity.

Arguments as to whether or not Nietzsche understood this explicitly in this way are irrelevant as strong evidence within his works supports such a claim, most prolifically the foreword of *Ecce Homo* where he acknowledges the indispensability of "saying *who* [*he is*]," if only to draw attention to the "disparity of the greatness of [his] task and the *smallness* of [his] contemporaries."[[61]](#footnote-61) But who *is* Nietzsche? Nietzsche is one who repaid his teachers well,[[62]](#footnote-62) if by teachers one is referring to his genetic and memetic forebears. How else should one understand relationships such as those that he had with his father Carl Ludwig, Schopenhauer, and later, Wagner?[[63]](#footnote-63) In each case the morbidity of the "teacher" paved the way for the student to ascend: his father's liturgical response to illness, which shared many characteristics with Nietzsche's ailments; Schopenhauer's philosophy of compassion [*mitleid*][[64]](#footnote-64); or Wagner's "[veering] straight round into his opposite" from sensuality to chastity; each progenitor's hallmark served as a distinct touchstone for Nietzsche's burgeoning philosophy.[[65]](#footnote-65) However, the facticality of Nietzsche's life, while instrumental to the development of his worldview, is not the ground for his being-authentic, but the seeds that were sown into a ground rendered fertile by the trauma of finitude. Authenticity is the genuine refection, the "great rationality" one commits to "in such conditions."[[66]](#footnote-66) Who among us in this unprecedented age of technology has the capacity for such rationality? This question, I fear, is destined to remain unanswered.

To those uninitiated in phenomenological endeavors or those steeped in the calculative tradition of the post-Cartesian sciences, this investigation will undoubtedly come across as little more than a game of circular semantics. Indeed, there is some truth in that claim, especially when one considers that a semantic argument is always an argument about the meaning of this word or that, and is therefore essentially hermeneutic in nature. That said, and in accordance with Heidegger, "[a]ll great thinkers think the same—this same is so essential (deep) and rich that no single thinker accomplishes (exhausts) it; rather every thinker is bound even tighter and more rigorously to it."[[67]](#footnote-67) Attempting to parse the meaning of well-worn terms like trauma and authenticity through phenomenology is undoubtedly a matter of great circularity, and we are bound to the same all the more tightly in no small part by the universality of the condition—finitude—that precedes them. Even so, one cannot help but wonder whether this circle of thought is vicious or virtuous. This remains to be seen, but what should be acknowledged in the meantime is that a circle is only vicious if its way leads back to the precise point from whence it began. Therefore, the value of this work rests on whether its circularity has led to a deeper way of thinking-about trauma, even if that way was previously known and covered over by time or is currently known and taken for granted. The real question here is not whether we have thought through issues of trauma and authenticity in their entirety, but whether we have really thought-about trauma and authenticity at all. While no circumambulatory philosophy can ever really be "brought to a close" in any concrete way, the evidence presented here seems to suggest that such a thinking-about has occurred, however modestly.

Trauma is the precondition for authenticity. The simplicity of this statement belies its sophistication and that of the hypothesis it carries. This is not to say that trauma is what makes authenticity possible in the first place; far from it. Not unlike a plough that tills soil so that it can bear the fruit for which it is already predisposed, trauma only readies the ground from which authenticity springs: an individual's wound is an openness to the possibility of their being-authentic. One must be consciously aware of such things; must keep eyes on their trauma in order to recognize their potential being-authentic. Nietzsche's life exemplifies this truth; his writings on tragedy, the reconciliation of the original human paradox, and the affirmation of "proper Dionysian *suffering*," the wounded unitary Self, are a testament to the same.[[68]](#footnote-68) Given this position one might claim categorically that the trauma of being-finite—a trauma shared by all ek-sisting beings; human beings— is itself the ultimate precondition for authenticity, however such a claim necessitates further questioning about the possibility of "smaller," more idiosyncratic traumas, namely: are there traumas that are disconnected from the finitude of human being, or is every form of trauma ultimately an issue of temporality? At this point we can only conjecture about whether such traumas exist; whether they hold sway over the authenticity of an individual. Similar questions and conjectures about the nature of authenticity also come into view, specifically what authenticity "is" and whether it is necessary or even preferable. Regardless of how thought provoking these questions may be, such conversations are best left for another time after such matters have been thought-about carefully.

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1. *see* Evangelos Tsirmpas, "5 Essential Texts by Friedrich Nietzsche You Should Read," *Culture Trip*, March 29, 2018, https://theculturetrip.com/europe/germany/articles/the-best-books-by-friedrich-nietzsche-you-should-read/.

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    [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "Trauma," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed December 4, 2020, https://www.etymonline.com/word/trauma#etymonline\_v\_16912. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Here I invoke Heidegger's conceptualization of Dasein, which translates to “there-being," and indicates the existential condition [*eksistenz* or *eksistence* depending on the text] of a being for whom Being is a concern i.e. human beings. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 8-9.  
    [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dmitri Hemelsoet, Karen Hemelsoet, and D. Devreese, "The Neurological Illness of Friedrich Nietzsche," *Acta Neurologica Belgica* 108 (2008): 11, www.researchgate.net/publication/5279485. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 9.   
    [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nicholas Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?," *The Atlantic*, July 2008, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/.  
    [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Curtis Cate, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (London: Hutchinson, 2006), 211, eBook, https://archive.org/details/friedrichnietzsc00curt/page/n743/mode/2up.  
    [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Nietzsche, 10.  
    [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.  
     "Finally, lest what is most important remain unsaid: from such abysses, from such severe illness, also from the illness of severe suspicion, one returns newborn, having shed one's skin, more ticklish and malicious, with a more delicate taste for joy, with a more tender tongue for all good things, with merrier senses, joyful with a more dangerous second innocence, more childlike, and at the same time a hundred times subtler than one had ever been before." [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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14. E.M. Cioran, *Anathemas and Admirations*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012), 12.  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
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     [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. "Wound," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed December 13, 2020, https://www.etymonline.com/word/wound#etymonline\_v\_10862. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Stephanie S. Gardner, "What is a Skin Ulcer?," *MedicineNet*, accessed December 14, 2020, https://www.medicinenet.com/skin\_ulcer/article.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. From this point forward, the two terms—trauma and wound—ought to be considered synonymous and interchangeable. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. "Body," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed January 25, 2021, https://www. etymonline.com/search?q=body. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *see* Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press: 2006).  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols—Conversations—Letters*, ed. Medard Boss, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols—Conversations—Letters*, ed. Medard Boss, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. It is important here to specify here that immediacy does not necessarily imply "nearness" [*in-der-Nähr*]. In all likelihood it would be more reasonable to assume, given the phenomenological nature of this discussion, that that which is immediate is actually quite "faraway" [*weit-weg*] from the individual. A deeper discussion of this matter can be found in the first part of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 50.   
     [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 370. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
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     [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Thomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
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31. "Condition," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed December 18, 2020, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=condition. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Plato, "Crito," *The Essential Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Pedro de Blas, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), 305.   
     It should also be noted that *Apology* has more than a thing or two to say about authentic living and dying. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Søren Kierkegaard, "The Crowd is Untruth," accessed December 19, 2020, http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/Philosophers/Kierkegaard/kierkegaard\_the\_crowd\_is\_untruth.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. I make this point because a principal concern of Heidegger's in his later career was moving toward a more primordial, meditative mode of thinking than the calculative thinking that punctuates, in his opinion and my own, philosophy after the Cartesian revolution. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 68/H. 43.  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern, last updated February 3, 2013, sect. 214, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4363/4363-h/4363-h.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
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38. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 16.  
     It is important to note that the original, German version of this phrase in *Ecce Homo* (*see* the Project Gutenbergbibliography entry) is "Sich selbst wie ein Fatum nehmen." Notably, the word "*nehmen*" does not translate to "accept," [*akzeptieren*] as it is translated in the Hollingdale version of the text, but "to take."  
     Additionally, it is important to note that in the original German text, as is the case with German in general, the noun for "fate" is capitalized. While it would be improper to speculate about the original meaning for this, I fear as though the previously mentioned danger of interpretation requires observation here. I worry that something stands to be lost in translation. Therefore, I have maintained the proper version of the word "Fate" throughout this text.  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Lee Jamieson, "The Role of 'Fate' in *Romeo and Juliet*," ThoughtCo., March 29, 2020, https://www.thoughtco.com/fate-in-romeo-and-juliet-2985040. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *see* Suri Do, "5 Films About Destiny that You Absolutely Can't Miss," Medium, March 6, 2017, https://medium.com/@do\_suri/5-films-about-destiny-that-you-absolutely-cant-miss-4876b846882. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
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45. Claude Lecouteux, *Encyclopedia of Norse and Germanic Folklore, Mythology, and Magic*, ed. Michael Moynihan, trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2016), 210.  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Lecouteux, 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
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52. "Grasp," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed December 28, 2020, https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=grasp. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Alan Thrall, "Barbells Are Overrated," December 22, 2018, video, 7:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irGvzG1GHaI.  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
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55. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*/*The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 31.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 7.  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
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    Author Note: I actually have firsthand knowledge of this inspection technique as I was a inspection technician during my time in the Air Force. That said, there is something to be said for providing supplementary information for readers. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Charlie Goldberg, "Examination of the Abdomen" (presentation materials, UC San Diego School of Medicine, November 6, 2019), https://meded.ucsd.edu/clinicalmed/assets/docs/ Abdominal%20Exam.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 375.  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Nietzsche, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Nietzsche, 6.

    This is a reference to Nietzsche's statement that "[o]ne repays a teacher badly if one remains a pupil." [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. This, obviously, is only a very small selection of individuals that would have had a direct impact on Nietzsche. While I might just have easily selected his mother, Cosima, his sister, Elisabeth, or even Immanuel Kant, I decided on his father, Schopenhauer, and Wagner as each are interconnected by their paternal link to Nietzsche. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Oscar Levy (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co, 1921), 170-171, https://archive.org/details/selectedletterso00 nietuoft/page/170/mode/2up?q=Schopenhauer.  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
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