

Nietzsche on style

Mark Alfano, Macquarie University

Abstract

Nietzsche talks about style [*Stil* and cognates] in all of his published and authorized works, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Ecce Homo*. He refers to style in over one hundred passages. Yet the scholarly literature on Nietzsche and style includes only a handful of publications, among them Derrida's notorious *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (1978), which barely even engages with Nietzsche's writings (see also Magnus 1991 and Babich 2011, 2012). Much of the rest of the literature is about Nietzsche's style, rather than about what he has to say about style. And none of it is comprehensive. In this paper, I aim to fill the gap in the secondary literature by using digital humanities methods to systematically investigate the functions of style in Nietzsche's writings. I argue that, for Nietzsche style emerges in the context of a tradition in a community. It can then become personalized and individualized, though there are dangers with such innovations. One's personal style is expressive of one's psychology and physiology, and can go wrong by mis-expressing. Correlative with style, in Nietzsche's conception, is the taste of the audience. Only those who share important psychological characteristics with the stylist will be able to fully comprehend their expressions. Finally, moving beyond aesthetics, Nietzsche connects style with moral and intellectual character, contending that the good stylist seeks recognition as such from those with good taste.

Keywords

style, Nietzsche, culture, aesthetics, character

Introduction

Nietzsche talks about style [*Stil* and cognates] in all of his published and authorized works, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Ecce Homo*. He refers to style in over one hundred passages. Yet the scholarly literature on Nietzsche and style includes only a handful of publications, among them Derrida's notorious *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (1978), which barely even engages with Nietzsche's writings (see also Magnus 1991 and Babich 2011, 2012). Much of the rest of the literature is about Nietzsche's style, rather than about what he has to say about style. For instance, Higgins (1986), Boddicker (2021), and Alfano (2018a, 2019a) all discuss Nietzsche's humorous style and the various philosophical functions it has. However, none of the secondary literature on Nietzsche and style offers a comprehensive review of everything he has to say about this subject, despite his continued emphasis on its importance not only to philosophy but also to his own writings. In this paper, I aim to fill this gap in the literature by using digital humanities methods to systematically investigate style in Nietzsche's writings.¹

Substantively, I argue that, for Nietzsche, style emerges in the context of a tradition in a community. It can then become personalized and individualized, though there are dangers with such innovations. One's personal style is expressive of one's psychology and physiology, and can go wrong by mis-expressing them. Correlative with style, in Nietzsche's conception, is the taste of the audience. Only those who share important psychological characteristics with the stylist will be able to fully comprehend their expressions. Finally, moving beyond aesthetics, Nietzsche connects style with moral and intellectual character, contending that the good stylist seeks recognition as such from those with good taste.

Methodology

I first use hierarchical clustering to compare the language used in Nietzsche's published and authorized manuscripts, as shown in Figure 1. As Figure 1 shows, starting in 1880, Nietzsche's writings developed a distinctive style, with the free spirit works (HH, D, GS) clustering together while the mature works (BGE, GM) and the late works (EH, TI, though not A or CW) also cluster together. The analysis in this chapter covers Nietzsche's entire philosophical career, but I will primarily concentrate on these works.

¹ These methods were pioneered in Alfano (2018c, 2019a, 2019b, forthcoming) and made accessible to scholars with no coding background in Alfano & Cheong (2019). For that reason, I do not explain them at length in this chapter.

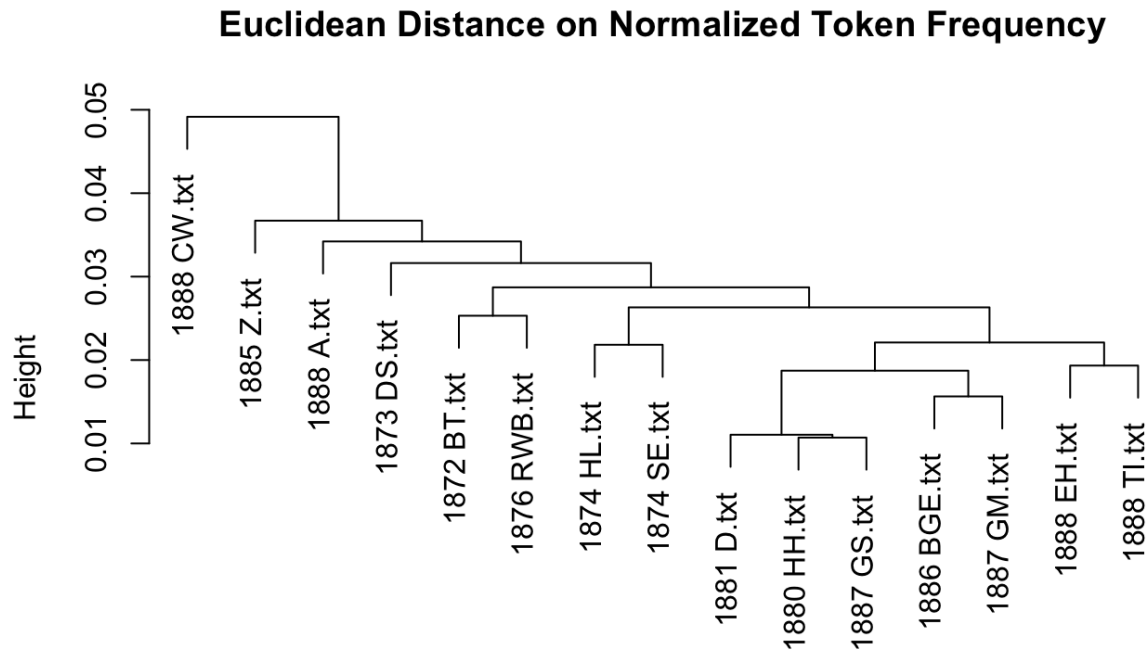


Figure 1: hierarchical clustering of Nietzsche's published and authorized manuscripts, based on final publication date in cases where multiple versions exist.

Next, Figure 2 displays the lexical dispersion of the three main German words that Nietzsche uses to talk about style (*Stil*, *Stils*, *Stile*). Each vertical line represents a usage of the relevant term, and the width of the bars represents the total word count of each book. For instance, *Human, All-too-human* is Nietzsche's longest book, which is why the bar representing it is the widest. It also primarily addresses style under the heading of *Stil*. By contrast, *Schopenhauer as Educator* only addresses style under the heading of *Stile*. These figures provide some context and demonstrate Nietzsche's ongoing concern with style across his philosophical career. Delving deeper, I next examine all passages in which the relevant terms occur and organize them around the origins, nature, and value of style in Nietzsche's writings.

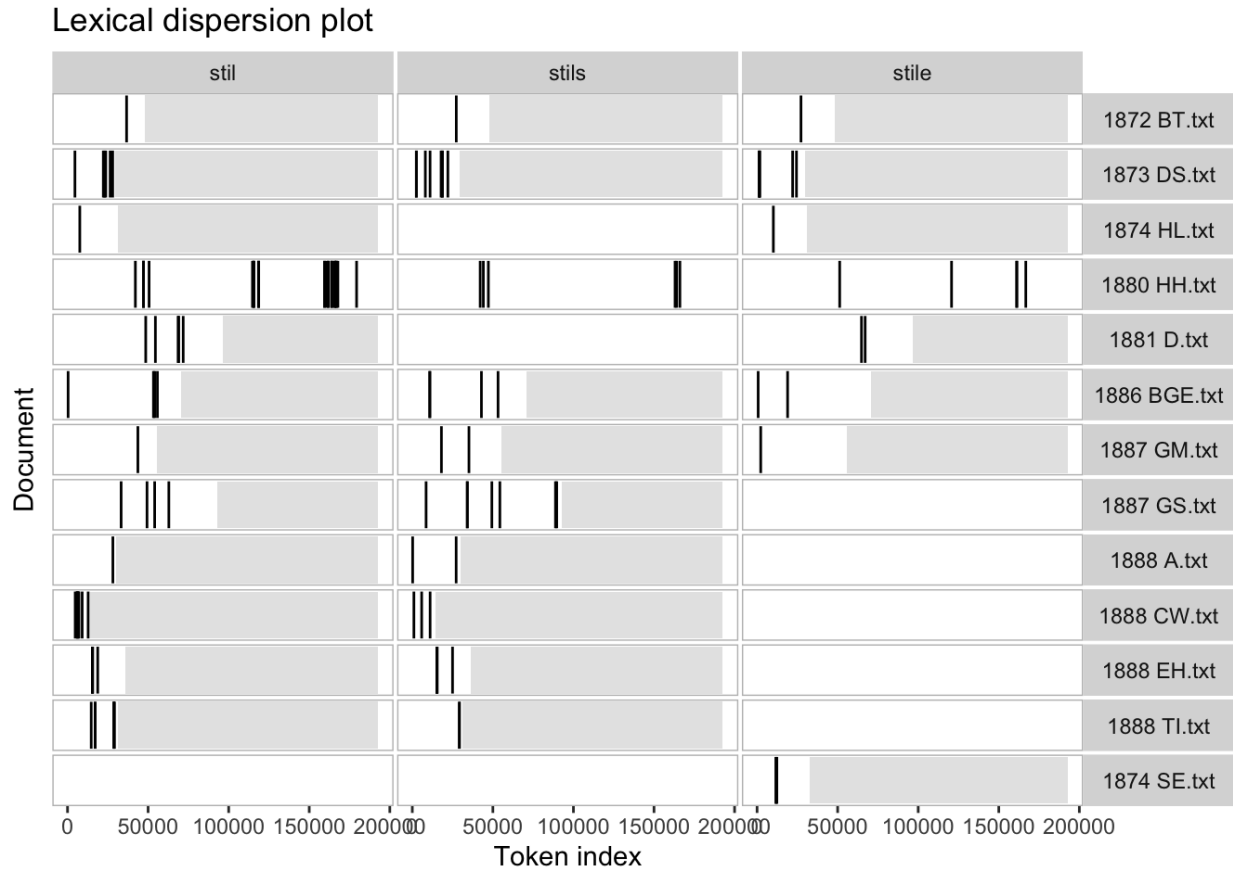


Figure 2: lexical dispersion of style in Nietzsche’s published and authorized manuscripts

Style emerges from a way of life and a communal tradition

Style is typically characterized as the distinctive way in which something – often an aesthetic production such as writing, art, or craft – is expressed. Functionally the same expressions may differ in their style. For instance, Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns all support structures but have different forms. Moreover, styles take time to develop and tend to be passed down from one generation to the next.

Nietzsche often suggests that styles emerge from communal ways of life, where the community in question is organized around a language or nationality (or both). For example, in HH 221, Nietzsche discusses the style of French drama. And in BGE 247, he refers to German style. However, not all styles are specifically national or grounded in a language. Nietzsche also discusses supra-national and sub-national styles. For instance, in HL 3 he refers to the “hieratic style [*Stil*],” which originated in Egypt, that was sometimes practiced in ancient Greece. In the preface to BGE, Nietzsche says that “We owe the great style [*Stil*] of architecture in Asia and Egypt to astrology and its ‘supernatural’ claims.” And in BGE 245, Nietzsche refers to the European stylistic tradition in music connecting Beethoven and Mozart. This passage also suggests that the innovations that drive the evolution of style sometimes originate not through

blind cultural evolution but through the intentional creativity of individual exemplars, who set new standards by their actions. If this is right, then, in addition to shared communal styles, there can be individual styles characteristic of specific people. I explore this idea further in the next section.

In any case, different communities, whether they be national, linguistic, or otherwise, tend to develop distinct styles, which are sometimes so foreign as to be incommensurable. In BGE 28, Nietzsche suggests that “The hardest thing to translate from one language to another is the tempo of its style [*Stils*], which is grounded in the character of the race, or – to be more physiological – in the average tempo of its ‘metabolism.’”

Moreover, not all nations count as having a style for Nietzsche. He especially enjoys denigrating the Germans for their lack of style and culture. For example, in DS 11, Nietzsche complains, “public speech has in Germany not yet attained to a national style [*Stile*] or even to the desire for a style [*Stils*].” What seems to qualify a community to develop and maintain a traditional style, in Nietzsche’s view, is a kind of organic unity, in which the the parts are not merely assembled but interdependent: everything present is needed, and nothing that’s needed is missing. Nietzsche goes on to argue that German “language has not yet emerged from the stage of naive experimentation; so that there is no unified norm by which the writer may be guided.” Likewise, in HL 4, he says, “The culture of a people [is] defined as unity of artistic style [*Stile*] in all the expressions of the life of a people.” He then goes on to explain what he means by unity in this context: “a people to whom one attributes a culture has to be in all reality a single living unity and not fall wretchedly apart into inner and outer, content and form.” Later, in HH 203, Nietzsche again associates style with a language and the traditions that constitute it. He says that the most valuable thing that grammar school in Germany has accomplished is not the teaching of German or fields such as science and mathematics, but rather “the practice it afforded in Latin style [*Stil*]: for this was a *practice in art*, whereas all its other undertakings had only knowledge as their objective. To accord German composition a premier position is barbarism, for we have no model German style [*Stil*] evolved out of public eloquence.”

If this is right, then a communal style is a characteristic way of expressing a group’s way of life, which includes the organization of its sustenance, its politics, its religion and rituals, and so on. In other words, a national or linguistic or other style is the expression of a culture. And if two cultures are sufficiently disjoint because they have sufficiently different ways of life, then it may be difficult or even impossible to adequately translate expressions of one into expressions of the other. For Nietzsche, one important – perhaps even defining – aspect of a culture is its values. In BGE 52, he says that “The Jewish ‘Old Testament,’ the book of divine justice, has people, things, and speeches in such grand style [*Stile*] that it is without parallel in the written works of Greece and India.” He then goes on to say that “We stand in horror and awe before this monstrous vestige of what humanity once was. [...] the taste for the Old Testament is a touchstone for the ‘great’ and the ‘small’.” The implication is that the values expressed in the Old Testament (think of its many celebrated genocides, for instance) are so foreign to Nietzsche’s contemporary Europeans that most of them can barely comprehend the book. This passage raises

a theme that I explore in more detail below, namely, the idea that because style is an expression of character and values, only an audience with sufficiently similar values to the stylist is well-positioned to understand their expressions. Nietzsche returns to this theme in BGE 250, where he asks what “Europe owes to the Jews?” He answers his own question thus: “the grand style [*Stil*] in morality, the horror and majesty of infinite demands, infinite meanings, the whole romanticism and sublimity of the morally questionable [...] This is why, among the spectators and philosophers, artists like us regard the Jews with – gratitude.”

Finally, consider BGE 223, which refers to the “masquerade of styles [*Stil-Maskeraden*]” in contemporary Europe. This passage is especially interesting because it suggests that, while styles are expressions of a way of life or a culture, they can also be temporarily adopted by those who do not fully share that way of life, as in a masquerade. However, according to Nietzsche, such donning and doffing of styles is ultimately unsatisfying: “nothing suits.” Presumably this is because the expression without the underlying ground of culture is inauthentic. As we will see in the next section, the same sort of disconnect can also arise in the case of individual style when someone tries to express character or values that they lack.

Individual style

As I suggested above, while Nietzsche thinks that styles originate in communities and are grounded in their way of life and culture, he also thinks that individuals can have styles of their own. They do so as exemplars within their community, showcasing and sometimes innovating on the stylistic traditions in which they have been enculturated – for better or worse.² For instance, in DS 11, which I quoted above, Nietzsche turns from a critique of German style writ large to a lambasting of David Strauss’s individual style, saying that Strauss is a “worthless stylist [*Stilisten*].” He then goes on to decry Strauss for exhibiting “his strength only in warding off a real, artistically vigorous cultural style [*Kulturstils*],” going on to say that “through steadfastness in warding off” Strauss “arrives at a homogeneity of expression which almost resembles a unity of style [*Stiles*].” Just as German language has not risen to the level of vigorous style, so the writings of its exemplar Strauss only barely count as a style.

Strauss is not the only individual stylist to face Nietzsche’s wrath. In HH WS 118, Nietzsche says that Herder had an individual style that “flickers, crackles, and smokes” rather than burning like a “*great* flame.” In TI Skirmishes 1 and 6, he complains (rather misogynistically) about George Sand’s romantic style. Perhaps more than any other target, though, Wagner stands out as a recipient of Nietzsche’s stylistic criticism. Nietzsche devoted two whole books (*Nietzsche Contra Wagner* and *The Case of Wagner*) to attacking Wagner, with special emphasis on his style. I will not quote all of the many relevant passages here, but the following from CW 7 is emblematic:

For the moment I am only going to look at the question of *style* [*Stils*]. – What is the hallmark of all *literary* decadence? The fact that life does not reside in the

² For more on Nietzsche and exemplarism, see Alfano (2018b and 2019a, chapter 4).

totality any more. The word becomes sovereign and jumps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and blots out the meaning of the page, the page comes to life at the expense of the whole – the whole is not whole anymore.

In the previous section, we saw that Nietzsche thinks that a style is constituted by and expressive of an organic unity. In this passage, he uses exactly the same criterion in the case of the individual. Wagner's decadent style, according to Nietzsche, is expressive of Wagner's own decadence. The fact that his life is disunified is reflected in the lack of unity of his work.

Nietzsche is not always so harsh. In HH AOM 113, for instance, he praises the "endless melody" of Laurence Sterne's style. In HH WS 144, he says that both Thucydides and Tacitus composed their writings with an eye to the "*style [Stil] of immortality.*" And in TI Skirmishes 11, Nietzsche describes architects as expressing their pride and will to power through buildings, which he calls "a visible manifestation of pride, the victory over gravity, the will to power." He goes on to say that "architecture is a way for power to achieve eloquence through form [...] The highest feelings of power and self-assurance achieve expression in a *great style [Stil].*"

And of course, the one person whose style Nietzsche has nothing but praise for is himself. Most notably, in *Ecce Homo*, he devotes an extended passage (section 4 on *Zarathustra* from the chapter *Why I Write Such Great Books*) to what he calls "my *art of style [Stil].*" He begins by saying what he means by individual style: "To *communicate* a state, an inner tension of pathos, with signs, including the tempo of these signs – that is the meaning of every style." This is a notion that should be familiar by now. Just as the Old Testament expresses the values of the ancient Jewish people, so an individual's style expresses or communicates their character ("inner tension of pathos"). Nietzsche also uses the metaphor of tempo here that we saw above in BGE 28. He goes on, saying that because "I have an extraordinary number of inner states, I also have a lot of stylistic possibilities – the most multifarious art of style that anyone has ever had at his disposal." The idea here is that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the psychological and physiological state being expressed and the style in which it is expressed. Thus, for someone with a diverse palette of states there will correspondingly be a diverse range of styles in which to express them.

The correlation between inner states and their stylistic expressions suggests that one can go wrong by expressing a state that one does not have or by failing to express a state in a way that aptly communicates it. This aptness criterion is not new to *Ecce Homo*. As early as *Human, All-too-human*, Nietzsche articulated similar norms. For instance, in HH AOM 117 he says "The florid style [*Stil*] in art is the consequence of a poverty of organizing power in the face of a superabundance of means and ends." The florid style expresses, in other words, too much – more than is really there in the psychology of the stylist. In HH AOM 144, Nietzsche says that "a lack of dialectics or inadequacy in expressive or narrative ability, combined with an over-abundant, pressing formal impulsion, gives rise to that stylistic genre called the *baroque [Barockstil].*" In HH WS 111, Nietzsche cautions against quoting language superior to one's own: "Every word, every idea, wants to dwell only *in its own company*: that is the moral of high style [*Stils*]." The claim here is that by using the superior language of another person, one puts on display the

mismatch between one's own psychology or character and that of the person quoted. Moreover, doing so destroys the organic unity of the writing – precisely the same criticism Nietzsche levels against Wagnerian decadence in CW 7. Or consider HH WS 88, where Nietzsche says, “The teaching of style [*Stil*] can [...] be the teaching that one ought to discover the means of expression by virtue of which every state of mind can be conveyed to the reader or auditor.” He follows this up in HH WS 136 by saying that “To desire to *demonstrate* more feeling for a thing than one actually *has* corrupts one's style [*Stil*], in both language and all the arts.” Finally, moving to a different work, in D 332, Nietzsche says that “An artist who wants, not to discharge his high-swollen feelings in his work and so unburden himself, but rather to communicate precisely this feeling of swollenness, is bombastic, and his style [*Stil*] is the inflated style.”

To return to EH Books Z 4, Nietzsche says, “Every style that really communicates an inner state is *good*, every style that is not wrong about signs, about the tempo of signs, about *gestures* – all laws concerning periods involve the art of gesture. My instinct here is unailing.” If this is right, then there is no such thing as non-relativized good style; the quality of individual style is instead always indexed to the state it's meant to express. Or, as Nietzsche puts it, “Good style *in itself* – this is *pure stupidity*, just ‘idealism’, somewhat like ‘Beauty *in itself*’, ‘the Good *in itself*’, the ‘thing *in itself*.’” He concludes with praise for *Zarathustra*:

It remained to be shown that this sort of thing was possible in German, of all languages: I myself would have been the first to deny it. Before I came along, no one knew what the German language was capable of, – what was possible with language in general. – I was the first to discover the art of *great* rhythm, the *great style* of the period, to express an incredible up and down of sublime, of overmanly passion.

As we saw above, earlier in his philosophical career (DS 11, which was published in 1873), Nietzsche claimed that Germany had “not yet attained to a national style or even to the desire for a style.” His contention in this passage (written in 1889) is that, in writing *Zarathustra*, he overcame this challenge. If he is right, then in so doing, his individual style opened up possibilities for expression (and hence for thought, feeling, emotion, and valuing) that had hitherto been foreclosed.

Correlative nature of style and taste

For Nietzsche, an individual's style is apt when it adequately expresses their internal psychological state. Correlatively, taste is the capacity to appreciate just such an expression. Just as style can go wrong by expressing too much or too little, taste can go wrong by appreciating too much or too little. In other words, if one appreciates aspects of a work in a way that does not aptly respond to the actual psychology being expressed by them (by seeing more in an expression than is really there, or by failing to see what is there), then one's taste has missed the mark. Nietzsche thinks that many people have a poor capacity for taste and a poor appreciation

of their own poor taste, failings that he frequently laments. But he also envisions a sort of esotericism that's made possible by such failings.

In HH 161 Nietzsche says, “We all think that a work of art, an artist, is proved to be of high quality if it seizes hold on us and profoundly moves us. But for this to be so, our *own high quality* in judgment and sensibility would first have to be proved: which is not the case.” Merely moving people, even a lot of people for a long time, “proves nothing in regard to the quality or lasting validity of a style [*Stils*].” This is because work of art might move its audience even if they don't aptly comprehend what it expresses. Nietzsche returns to this theme in HH 168, which is titled, “*The artist and his following must keep in step.*” In this passage Nietzsche explicitly refers to the need for style and taste to correlate: “Progress from one stylistic level [*Stufe des Stils*] to the next must proceed so slowly that not only the artists but the auditors and spectators too can participate in this progress and know exactly what is going on. [...] For when the artist no longer raises his public up, it swiftly sinks downwards, and it plunges the deeper and more perilously the higher a genius has borne it.” Later, in D 375 (see also D 292), Nietzsche says that when it comes to “the most spiritual things” “we sometimes communicate too clearly, with too great exactitude, because those we are communicating to would otherwise not understand us. Consequently, the perfect and easy style [*Stil*] is *permissible* only before a perfect audience.” In a similar passage titled “*The distrustful and style*” (GS 226, see also GS 101 and BGE 246), Nietzsche says “We say the strongest things simply, provided that we are among people who believe in our strength – such an environment breeds ‘simplicity of style [*Stil*]’. The distrustful speak emphatically; the distrustful make emphatic.” These passages suggest that, in addition to aptly expressing their own internal states, stylists must take into account the capacity for taste in their audience. There is thus a feedback loop between the capacity for style in the artist or writer, on the one hand, and the (perceived) capacity for taste in the auditor or reader, on the other hand.³

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche uses his own capacity for taste to praise and criticize writers of the ancient world. For instance, in a discussion of taste in TI Ancients 1, he says, “My sense of style [*Stil*], of epigrams as style, was roused almost immediately by contact with Sallust.” He characterizes this as a “*Roman style*” that is “Concise, severe, with as much substance as possible at its base, a cold malice against ‘beautiful words’ as well as ‘beautiful feelings’ [...] *nobility par excellence.*” Of course, Nietzsche himself was also a paragon of the epigram, so this passage shows how homophily between a writer's style and his audience's taste can lead to recognition and appreciation. By contrast, in TI Ancients 2, Nietzsche says that he is a “total skeptic” when it comes to “the conventional scholarly admiration of the *artist Plato.*” Moreover, he says, “I have the most refined ancient arbiters of taste on my side. It seems to me that Plato mixes up all the forms of style [*Stils*], which makes him a *first-rate* decadent of style” – exactly the same criticism that Nietzsche levels against Wagner.

³ For a more contemporary reflection on such feedback loops in the context of ordinary conversation rather than artistic production, see Grice (1989).

The stylist can take the audience's capacity into account in multiple ways. One, as seen above, is to warp one's expression in order to make it comprehensible even to those with faulty taste. Another, which Nietzsche explores in GS 381, is to purposefully express oneself in ways that only a select subset of one's audience will comprehend. Nietzsche writes:

One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely *not* to be understood. It is by no means necessarily an objection to a book when anyone finds it incomprehensible: perhaps that was part of the author's intention – he didn't *want* to be understood by just 'anybody'. Every nobler spirit and taste selects his audience when he wants to communicate; in selecting it, he simultaneously erects barriers against 'the others'. All subtler laws of a style [*Stils*] originated therein: they simultaneously keep away, create a distance, forbid 'entrance', understanding, as said above – while they open the ears of those whose ears are related to ours.

This is a counsel of esotericism, but it does not rely on secret texts, cryptography, or intentional obscurity. Instead, the work is publicly available, and the stylist expresses himself in a way that will be readily comprehensible to those with good taste, who are able to divine the inner state expressed by the work, yet incomprehensible to or misunderstood by those with faulty taste or no taste at all. In light of this, it should be clear what Nietzsche meant when he subtitled *Zarathustra* “*A Book for All and None*.” It was “for all” in the sense that anyone could pick up a copy and read it. But it was “for none” because, at least in Nietzsche's estimation, no one then alive had the capacity – the taste level – to appreciate it aptly.

Nietzsche returns to the same theme in the preface to *The Antichrist*, warning his readers, “This book belongs to the very few. Perhaps none of them are even alive yet. Maybe they are the ones who will understand my *Zarathustra*. There are ears to hear some people – but how could I ever think there were ears to hear me? – my day won't come until the day after tomorrow.” He famously concludes, “Some people are born posthumously.” To reinforce the connection between style and taste, Nietzsche then explicitly connects the psychological states expressed through style with the psychological states induced in the reader. He lists a range of “conditions required to understand me”:

When it comes to spiritual matters, you need to be honest to the point of hardness just to be able to tolerate my seriousness, my passion. You need to be used to living on mountains – to seeing the miserable, ephemeral little gossip of politics and national self-interest *beneath* you. You need to have become indifferent, you need never to ask whether truth does any good, whether it will be our undoing... The sort of predilection strength has for questions that require more courage than anyone possesses today; a courage for the *forbidden*; a predestination for the labyrinth. Any experience from out of seven solitudes. New ears for new music. New eyes for the most distant things. A new conscience for truths that have kept silent until now.

Honesty, courage, curiosity, pathos of distance, solitude. These are precisely Nietzsche's own virtues.⁴ Thus, what he is insisting on in this preface is that to comprehend his expressions, the audience must also embody his psychology, including his virtues and the emotions in which they manifest. He concludes with a restatement of his esotericism: "These are my only readers, my true readers, my predestined readers: and who cares about the *rest of them*? The rest are just humanity. You need to be far above humanity in strength, in *elevation* of soul, – in contempt..."

In a final endorsement of esotericism (EH Books Z 4, which we encountered above in Nietzsche's lengthy pyan to his own "*art of style*"), Nietzsche says that his capacity for stylistic expression, especially when it comes to *Zarathustra*, has to some extent been hampered by the taste of his contemporaries: "Always supposing that there are ears – that there are people capable and worthy of a similar pathos, that there are people you *can* communicate with. – Meanwhile, my *Zarathustra*, for instance, looks for people like this – and oh! He will have to look for a long time!"

"Only as an aesthetic phenomenon": Style and character

In this final section, I argue that Nietzsche's reflections on style subsequent to *The Birth of Tragedy* can be interpreted as an attempt to vindicate his claim that "our highest dignity lies in our significance as works of art – for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*" (BT 5). As originally formulated, this claim presupposed a bizarre and untenable Schopenhauerian metaphysics. But, as Nietzsche reformulated his philosophy in naturalistic terms, he came to a new understanding of the connections between style and character. This is because, as we saw above, he conceives of style as an expression of one's inner psychological states. So, to the extent that someone manages to achieve unity of style, they thereby demonstrate unity of character. And because Nietzsche independently endorses a modest unity-of-virtue thesis, such unity of character is constitutive of virtue.⁵

Furthermore, I conjecture that the reason why Nietzsche is so keen to connect his unity-of-virtue thesis with the unity of style is that he adopts an ancient Greek conception of what constitutes full virtue. For him, it is not enough simply to *be* good. Nor is it enough to *be* good and *be recognized as* good. Rather, he seems to think that what constitutes virtue is to *be* good and to *be recognized by the good as* good (and perhaps also to be scorned by the bad as bad).⁶ For instance, in HH 170, Nietzsche describes ancient poets' ambition as the desire to "*be* more excellent; then they exact agreement from others as to their own assessment of themselves and confirmation of their own judgment. To aspire to honor here means 'to make oneself superior and to wish this superiority to be publicly acknowledged'." Nietzsche then goes on to distinguish vanity, where one seeks acknowledgement of excellence without embodying

⁴ For a full account of Nietzsche's virtues, see Alfano (2019a, chapters 6-10).

⁵ For more on Nietzsche's modest unity-of-virtue thesis, see Alfano (2015 and 2019a, chapter 4).

⁶ For more on this conception of virtue, especially in Homer, see Nagy (1979). For a pathological variant of this phenomenon, see HH 89.

excellence, from pride, where one embodies excellence without seeking its acknowledgement. If this is right, then it makes his esotericism not simply a piece of elitism but a necessary component of his account of virtue.

To begin this argument, consider HH WS 79, where Nietzsche recruits style to make a moral argument: “If the style [*Stil*] and total manner of expression of the priest, in both speech and writing, do not already proclaim the *religious* man, then one no longer needs to take his opinions on religion and in favor of religion seriously.” This might seem like a shallow *ad hominem* approach, but it gets its bite from Nietzsche’s association of style and character. He goes on to say that the opinions of such a priest “have become *invalid* for their possessor himself if, as his style [*Stil*] betrays, he is given to irony, presumption, malice, hatred and all the confusions and changes the feelings are subject to, just like the most irreligious man.” It is possible for style to *betray* flaws in one’s character precisely because style is an expression of one’s inner states. Nietzsche cites such stylistic betrayals in both Hegel (D 193), whom he accuses of betraying his moral cowardice in his writings, and Wagner (GS 99), whom he accuses of betraying his resentments in his art (see also GS 282).

Later in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, Nietzsche offers several aphoristic reflections on the relationship between style and character. In HH WS 96 he says, “Grand style [*Stil*] originates when the beautiful carries off the victory over the monstrous.” By contrast, in HH WS 120 he says, “The invented style [*Stil*] is an offense to the friend of fine style [*Stils*].” Even more explicitly, in HH WS 131 he declaims, “To improve one’s style [*Stil*] – means to improve one’s thoughts and nothing else!” This is so because Nietzsche understands style, as we saw above, as an expression of one’s psychological states. Summing things up in HH WS 148, which is titled, “*The grandiloquent style [Stil] and what is higher*,” Nietzsche tells us, “One learns how to write grandiloquently more quickly than one learns how to write simply and easily. The reasons for this merge into the realm of morality.” Just as sophomoric writing is often grandiloquent because the writer is trying to express more than he genuinely feels, so sophomoric conduct is often overly grandiose because the agent is trying to express more than he genuinely is.

In perhaps his most famous passage about the relationship between style and character (GS 290), Nietzsche contrasts two different ways in which someone can “*attain* satisfaction with himself.” The first, which he clearly prefers, is to “‘give style [*Stil*]’ to one’s character – a great and rare art!” Nietzsche says that this great art is “practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye.” In other words, giving style to one’s character is a sort of perfectionism: it amounts to forging oneself into the sort of organic unity discussed above. Nietzsche goes on to describe the various techniques that can be used to give style to one’s character:

Here a great mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of first nature removed – both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it is reinterpreted into sublimity. Much that is vague and resisted shaping has been saved and employed for distant

views – it is supposed to beckon towards the remote and immense. In the end, when the work is complete, it becomes clear how it was the force of a single taste that rules and shaped everything great and small – whether the taste was good or bad means less than one may think; it’s enough that it was one taste! It will be the strong and domineering natures who experience their most exquisite pleasure under such coercion, in being bound by but also perfected under their own law; the passion of their tremendous will becomes less intense in the face of all stylized [*stilsirten*] nature, all conquered and serving nature.

Nietzsche contrasts such strong characters with their weak counterparts, who possess “no power over themselves.” Such weak characters, he says, “*hate* the constraint of style [*Stils*].” In the case of both strong and weak natures, however, a key component is the social reception of the style one gives to one’s character and the way in which one expresses it. For, only by attaining – by hook or by crook – satisfaction with oneself does one become “at all tolerable to behold! Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually prepared to avenge himself for this, and we wotchers will be his victims if only by having to endure his sight. For the sight of something ugly makes one bad and gloomy.”

This emphasis on both being and being recognized as good recurs in BGE 253, where Nietzsche describes “far-flying spirits of the highest type,” whom he characterizes as “people who can do things in the grand style [*Stil*], the creators.” Nietzsche says that these people “have to be something new, mean something new, and present new values!” While his esotericism is not explicit in this passage, he talks about esotericism just a few pages earlier in BGE 246. Finally, in A 2, Nietzsche asks himself “What is good?” and answers (among other things), “Not contentedness, but more power; not peace, but war; not virtue, but prowess (virtue in the style of the Renaissance [*Renaissance-Stile*], *virtú*, moraline-free virtue [*moralinfreie Tugend*]).” He re-uses the neologism *moralinfreie Tugend* in another late work, EH *Clever* 1. Notably, the Renaissance was a time in which ancient traditions were revived, including the ancient insistence on not only being good, but also on being recognized by the good as good.

Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that Nietzsche understands style, first, as a distinctive way of doing something that emerges from traditions characteristic of a community’s way of life. I then showed that Nietzsche thinks that individual exemplars sometimes innovate on their community’s styles, developing a style of their own. They succeed in doing so when they manage to match their individual style to their own psychology. Furthermore, they can then induce – at least in a sufficiently like-minded audience with apt taste – correlative psychological states. Nietzsche includes not only occurrent psychological states such as emotions and feelings in this feedback loop, but also dispositions such as character traits. He thinks that the unity of one’s character is thus expressed in the unity of one’s style. Moreover, he adopts an ancient evaluative standard, according to which the excellence and unity of one’s character, expressed

through the excellence and unity of one's style, must be recognized by others who themselves embody correlative excellence.

List of abbreviations of Nietzsche's works and translations

A	<i>The Antichrist</i>
AOM	<i>Assorted Opinions and Maxims</i> (in part two of HH)
BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
BT	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>
CW	<i>The Case of Wagner</i>
D	<i>Daybreak</i>
DS	<i>David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer</i>
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i>
HH	<i>Human, All-too-human</i>
HL	<i>On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life</i>
SE	<i>Schopenhauer as Educator</i>
TI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i>
WS	<i>The Wanderer and His Shadow</i> (in part two of HH)
Z	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>

I have used the following translations of Nietzsche's works, sometimes with minor modifications to improve clarity or continuity:

- Nietzsche, F. (1986). *Human, All Too Human*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (1997). *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. Edited by M. Clark & B. Leiter. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (1997). *Untimely Meditations*. Edited by D. Breazeale. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (1999). *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Edited by R. Geuss & R. Speirs. Translated by R. Speirs. Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (2001). *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Edited by R.-P. Horstmann & J. Norman. Translated by J. Norman. Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (2001). *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix in Songs*. Edited by B. Williams. Translated by J. Nauckhoff. Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (2005). *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*. Edited by A. Ridley & J. Norman. Translated by J. Norman. Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (2006). *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by K. Ansell-Pearson. Translated by C. Diethe. Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (2006). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Edited by A. del Caro & R. Pippin. Translated by A. del Caro. Cambridge University Press.

References

- Alfano, M. (2015). An enchanting abundance of types: Nietzsche's modest unity of virtue thesis. *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 49(3): 417-35.
- Alfano, M. (2018a). The epistemic function of contempt and laughter in Nietzsche. Michelle Mason *The Moral Psychology of Contempt*, (57–76). London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Alfano, M. (2018b). Nietzsche's polychrome exemplarism. *Ethics & Politics*, 20(2): 45-64.
- Alfano, M. (201c). Digital humanities for history of philosophy: A case study on Nietzsche. In L. Levenberg, T. Neilson, & D. Rheams (eds.), *Handbook of Methods in the Digital Humanities*. Palgrave.
- Alfano, M. (2019a). *Nietzsche's Moral Psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Alfano, M. (2019b). Nietzsche's affective perspectivism as a philosophical methodology. In P. Loeb & M. Meyer (eds.), *Nietzsche's Metaphilosophy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Alfano, M. (forthcoming). Nietzsche on humility and modesty. In J. Steinberg (ed.), *Humility: A History*. Oxford University Press.
- Alfano, M. & Cheong, M. (2019). Guest editors' introduction: Examining moral emotions in Nietzsche with the 'Semantic Web Exploration Tool: Nietzsche'. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 50(1): 1-10.
- Babich, B. (2011). Nietzsche's Zarathustra and parodic style: On Lucian's hyperanthropos and Nietzsche's übermensch. *Diogenes* 58 (4):58-74.
- Babich, B. (2012). On Nietzsche's judgment of style and Hume's quixotic taste: On the science of aesthetics and "playing" the satyr. *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43 (2):240-259.
- Boddicker, C. (2021). Humour in Nietzsche's style. *European Journal of Philosophy* 29 (2):447-458.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. University of Chicago Press.
- Grice, H. P. (1989). *Studies in the Ways of Words*. Harvard University Press.
- Higgins, K. (1986). Nietzsche's view of philosophical style. *International Studies in Philosophy* 18 (2):67-81.
- Magnus, B. (1991). Deconstruction site: The "problem of style" in Nietzsche's philosophy. *Philosophical Topics* 19 (2):215-243.
- Nagy, G. (1979). *The Best of the Achaeans*. Johns Hopkins University Press.