

Nietzsche on the Re-naturalization of Humanity in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

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In this chapter, I contend that Nietzsche's robust critiques of human exceptionalism and the "humanization of nature [Vermenschlichung der Natur]", as well as his positive, proto-ecocentric vision of the "naturalization of humanity [Vernatürlichung des Menschen]", afford contemporary environmental philosophy a novel perspective from which to critique anthropocentric conservation ideologies (according to which nature conservation ought to be motivated by the interests and aims of humanity, especially economic development and prosperity).¹ Importantly, I also argue that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the work in which Nietzsche's positive vision appears most conspicuously, as suggested by Zarathustra's relationship to the natural world and exhortations to "remain faithful to the earth."

As Nietzsche's critique of anthropocentrism reinforces his positive project, I will begin by detailing Nietzsche's rejection of human exceptionalism (section 1). In addition, I will analyze Nietzsche's critique of the "humanization of nature" (KSA 10:10[43]; 10:13[20]; 12:1[29]), emphasizing specific pernicious projections of human values onto the other-than-human world. Although these themes appear throughout Nietzsche's body of work, they are central to *Zarathustra*.

After describing Nietzsche's critical project, I present his positive, proto-ecocentric vision for humanity's re-naturalization, one he most emphatically endorses and fleshes out in *Zarathustra* (section 2). This positive vision can be found in his calls for the human being to become more natural and to cultivate a noble reverence and gratitude for the natural world so that we may learn from it about ourselves—rather than falsifying it for our ends and then insisting that we are part of this other, falsified nature. Only when we can see ourselves as natural beings—specifically, as living beings willing power, embedded in a world with other living beings who do the same—can we identify tasks and pursue aims that empower and strengthen us. In Nietzsche's view, this recognition results only from an attunement to the other-than-human world. Finally, after adding a few important caveats to proto-ecocentric strains in Nietzsche's thought, I briefly explain the contributions his thought might make to contemporary environmental philosophy and policy (section 3).

¹ Although Nietzsche refers only to the "naturalization of humanity", I frame this naturalization as a *re*-naturalization, keeping in mind his claim that we must "re-translate the human being back into nature" (BGE 230).

1. Nietzsche's critical project

Against human exceptionalism

Nietzsche is consistently and explicitly critical of human exceptionalism, the view that human beings have a special status among other living beings and that their extraordinary value derives from certain distinctly human capacities, including higher-order cognitive capacities (such as rational reflection, logical thought, self-consciousness, memory, and morality).² As we will see below, Nietzsche is often explicitly critical of such a view. Additionally, however, his skepticism about these characteristically human capacities also functions as an implicit critique of human exceptionalism, informing his more straightforward one.

Explicit critiques of human exceptionalism appear throughout Nietzsche's work. In GS, he notes that "[man] place[s] himself in a false rank order in relation to animals and nature," identifying this as one of the defining errors of humanity (GS 115). In unpublished notes, he both claims that "man does not represent progress over the animal" (KSA 12:5[71]) and makes a point of referring to humanity only as "the richest and most complex form [of life]" and "no longer the... 'higher type'" (KSA 13:15[118]). Nietzsche echoes these sentiments in *The Antichrist*, where he remarks that "[h]umanity does *not* represent a development for the better, does not represent something stronger or higher the way people these days think it does" (A 4). Nietzsche explicitly speaks against this tendency to understand human beings as "the goal of animal evolution"; his aim, instead, is to "[stick] human beings back among the animals" (A 14). There, after first claiming that all beings, including humans, "occupy the same level of perfection," he then insists more severely that "comparatively speaking, human beings are the biggest failures, the sickliest animals who have strayed the most dangerously far from their instincts" (ibid).

² See Ferré 1974, 65 and Thompson 2017. The term "human exceptionalism" comes from contemporary environmental ethical literature (and does *not* preclude human distinctiveness). Note, however, that proponents of human exceptionalism typically make a further prescriptive claim: that it is in virtue of these unique human capacities that human beings warrant special moral consideration (in a way that other-than-human beings do not). For the purposes of this chapter, I do not include this further claim in my definition of human exceptionalism (as the phenomenon of which Nietzsche is critical).

Nietzsche's diagnosis here continues a theme that appears earlier in A: human beings are corrupt; they are living beings alienated from their own will to power, which is the defining feature of all living things (Z II:12; BGE 13; GS 349; GM II:12). Our tendency to “[*prefer*] things that will harm [us]” (A 6) in the form of nihilistic, life-denying concepts and values turns us against our health and flourishing.³ Though in other species, it is a sign of grave sickness to prefer things that harm them or act in ways that hinder their power, this morbid disposition has become characteristic of the human species, given our habits of believing and valuing. For this reason, humanity in general represents animal regression rather than progress over the animal. To become stronger and healthier, then—and before a higher type beyond humanity can emerge—humans must re-learn how to be animal.⁴ At the level of our bodies, we must re-learn how to will power in ways that promote our health—that is, in part, how to orient our desires, thoughts, and actions around the healthy pursuit of power—whatever this might look like in each case.⁵ In short, human beings need to learn what comes naturally to other-than-human forms of life so that their distinctly human drive to create meaning and value can manifest itself in healthy and life-affirming ways.

Another, more subtle aspect of Nietzsche's critique of human exceptionalism is the way in which he troubles the value of certain distinctively human faculties, including intellect [Intellekt], reason [Vernunft], consciousness [Bewußtsein], language, memory, and morality. His skepticism (and, at times, outright hostility) towards these all-too-human capacities functions as an especially provocative critique of human exceptionalism. It is clear that Nietzsche intends it as such (HH 107; EH, Books: HH, 1): after all, it is in virtue of these capacities that many modern thinkers believe humans to be the “crown of creation” (A 14). Since Nietzsche's critical appraisal of these capacities has been covered extensively in the literature, I only sketch his critiques below, emphasizing how Nietzsche's critical reflections indicate an implicit critique of human exceptionalism.

Throughout his body of work, Nietzsche troubles the value of our higher-order cognitive faculties and their returns, thereby unsettling the human exceptionalism that many moderns took for

³ To say that will to power is the defining feature of all living things is first to say that living things are end-directed beings; they constantly engage in purposeful striving towards certain aims (where the “purpose” involved just is to engage in certain actions or activities (Katsafanas 2011, 168)). Though living beings often have different aims depending on their form of life (in virtue of the drives of which they are composed), their pursuit of these aims expresses a more basic or fundamental striving: a striving after power as growth and development in their own form of life (A 6). In order to flourish on Nietzsche's view, living beings must will power successfully. I discuss this biological interpretation of the will to power again below.

⁴ See Loeb and Tinsley 2019 for an account of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as a re-naturalized, superhuman species.

⁵ Nietzsche believes that human beings will also have to learn to *judge* their actions by the standard of power: that is, whether they enhance or hinder power.

granted. At times, he appraises these faculties in general terms, critically evaluating thought [Denken], cognition [Erkennen], and intellect, as well as the products of these capacities: knowledge [Wissen] and understanding [Erkenntnis]. In his early work, Nietzsche claims that our intellectual faculties not only falsify as much of the world as they reveal (HH 16); they also lead us to believe and act in ways that harm our form of life by hindering our flourishing (HH 16). This theme continues in *Z*, where Nietzsche rebukes the glorification of both pure, disinterested understanding and the state of “contemplation [Beschaulichkeit]” (*Z* II:15) one must inhabit in an attempt to acquire it. After all, to inhabit such a state would involve “viewing [the world] with a dead will” and “desir[ing] nothing from things, except that [one] may lie there before them like a mirror with a hundred eyes” (*ibid.*). According to Nietzsche, it is impossible to inhabit a “contemplative” state of this kind: the knowing human subject (or better, “subject-unity”) is an embodied complex of drives and affects; all knowing is embodied, gleaned from a diversity of (embodied) perspectives and affect-interpretations (GM III:12) shaped by one’s will to power. Perhaps more significantly, however, the pursuit of such a state slanders existence, stifles the will to power, and prevents us from being strong enough to “create over and beyond” ourselves.

Elsewhere, Nietzsche troubles the value of certain distinctively human capacities, but his targets are more specific: one by one, he unsettles the alleged merits of reason and rationality [Vernünftigkeit], consciousness, language, memory, and morality. In the first book of *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche deliberately diminishes reason, deeming it “your small reason [deine kleine Vernunft]” and demoting it to the status of a mere “tool of [the] body... a small tool and plaything of your great [embodied] reason” (*Z* I:4). Later, he reproaches the inventions of reason (“conceptual cobweb-spinning”) and designates pure rationality as “impossible” (*Z* III:4).⁶ According to Nietzsche, human beings do not have special access to some objective form of truth in virtue of their rationality; they come to “know” in the same way other living beings do. Additionally, by assuming that reason is truth-disclosing, we fail to attend to the ways in which it can compel us into error (II “Reason” 2). As Nietzsche argues in *GS*, attempting to grasp the world solely via “our four-cornered little human reason... demote[s] existence” by stripping it of its ambiguity (373). To think the world can be reduced to something rationally intelligible is not only mistaken but in poor taste, as it betrays a lack of reverence for things not yet understood, for those aspects of our world that exceed our intellectual understanding and defy rational categorization (*GS* 373).

⁶ See also GM III:12.

In GS 373, as in Z I:4 above, Nietzsche purposefully depreciates reason *qua* human reason; instead of an extraordinary human accomplishment, reason—“rationality at any cost, a cold, bright, cautious conscious life without instinct, opposed to instinct”—is a “sickness” (TI “Socrates” 11). Though we have come to view reason as “divine” (TI, “Reason” 5), a crowning achievement of humanity, Nietzsche wants to reverse this human exceptionalist evaluation. His critical assessment of consciousness calls for a similar reversal. In a note from 1888, Nietzsche decries our “senseless overestimation of consciousness” that frames consciousness as “the highest attainable form” (KSA 13:14[146]). Human beings typically understand “every progress [as]... progress towards becoming-conscious; every regress in becoming-unconscious” (ibid.)— and understand themselves, in turn, as a “higher type” of living being in virtue of the comparatively advanced form their consciousness takes. Yet, according to Nietzsche, this “old prejudice” (KSA 10:7[126]) mistakenly affirms our “most impoverished and error-prone organ” (GM II:16). Similar to his assessment of reason as a tool of the body in Z, Nietzsche argues in an 1883 note that consciousness is “just a tool” of embodied existence, an organ that is perhaps the most “poorly developed”, “erroneous”, and “defective” of all human organs (KSA 10:7 [126]). In this note, Nietzsche troubles the assumption that consciousness is a sign of more advanced life forms, calls for us to recognize the value of our unconscious, embodied life, and suggests we “reverse the rank-ordering” of consciousness and unconsciousness, given that consciousness emerges as a tool of unconscious, embodied life (as a “sign-language” of bodily existence). Other reasons Nietzsche offers for troubling the “achievement” of consciousness include its status as belonging to “the community and herd-aspects of [an individual’s] nature”—those aspects of one’s nature that tend to work against one’s will to power—and its tendencies to corrupt, falsify, make superficial, and overgeneralize (GS 354).⁷

For Nietzsche, the world’s debasement by consciousness connects to how human consciousness invents and deploys concepts so that human beings might communicate through language.⁸ In language, human beings recast the world, deploying “a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms” that reduces “unique and wholly individualized original experience[s]” into mutually intelligible concepts, “equating what is unequal” (TI 1).⁹ Furthermore, insofar as the “seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason petrified within it)”

⁷ See Katsafanas 2016, 48-54, 62-3.

⁸ For more on the connection between consciousness and language in Nietzsche, see Abel 2015, 51-3, Katsafanas 2016, 37-41, and Riccardi 2015, 225.

⁹ See also Nietzsche’s reflections on 1) “language-metaphysics” from TI, “Reason” 5 and 2) “philosophical mythology” from WS 11.

misleads us into thinking that humans are free, responsible, individual subjects, it diverts our attention from our nature as “driving, willing” animals (GM I:13).

Nietzsche also critically evaluates memory—a capacity potentially present in other living things (KSA 7:19[161]) but most developed in the human being (Loeb 2006, 168)—and castigates conventional morality. These distinguishing features of humanity, he argues, do not make us distinguished: both an abundance of memory (UM II:1, AOM 122, Z Preface:3; GM I:10)) and conventional morality (HH 107; GM I:13-14; TI “Morality” 4; A 6) tend to weaken the will to power, thus weakening strong forms of life and harming us.¹⁰ Given Nietzsche’s calls for humanity’s re-naturalization, his analysis of conventional morality—as that which weakens and domesticates the human animal, all while masquerading as an “improvement” of the “human beast” (TI “Humanity” 2)—is especially noteworthy.

Many of Nietzsche’s reflections on the potentially negative value of general human faculties, cognitive capacities, and intellectual products involve unequivocal attempts to de-center human beings and trouble humanity’s significance. In the well-known opening of TL, Nietzsche calls human beings “clever beasts” whose invention of cognition “was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of ‘world history,’ but nevertheless, it was only a minute” (TL 1).¹¹ Here, humanity is one species among many; the celebrated human intellect, which we assumed distinguished us from all other animals, is a fleeting, arbitrary, and ultimately pointless faculty. This same tendency—to frame his critical assessments of humanity’s faculties in ways that deliberately de-center human beings and resist human exceptionalism—is present in his critical assessments of memory (UM II:1) and morality (HH 107, BGE 44).

Nietzsche thus rejects human exceptionalism. In rejecting human exceptionalism, however, it is not the case that Nietzsche thereby denies the distinctiveness of human beings. After all, he designates human beings the deepest and most “interesting” of all animals (GM I:6; A 14).¹² Rather, Nietzsche does not understand “humanity in general” (A 4) as more valuable than other forms of life simply in virtue of its all-too-human capacities. Indeed, we find that Nietzsche is staunchly critical of human ways of being and thinking, arguing that they tend to lead to an impoverishment of life as will to power. As a species, Nietzsche argues that “humans are the biggest failures, the sickliest animals who have strayed the most dangerously far from their instincts” (A 14). Yet he also

¹⁰ See also Lemm 2004; Lemm 2009; Richardson 2020.

¹¹ Thanks to Gary Shapiro for reminding me of this passage.

¹² According to Nietzsche, these features emerge as “happy accidents” from a host of bungled instincts and uniquely human errors.

believes there are stronger, healthier human beings who learn to embrace their instincts, as well as a “higher type” beyond the human being, “a type of *Übermensch* in relation to humanity in general” (A 4) who overcomes these failures of humanity thus far.¹³ As we see in *Zarathustra*, both stronger, healthier individuals and that higher type become possible *only* when humanity is naturalized. But this first requires nature to be de-humanized.

The de-humanization of nature

In addition to his rejection of human exceptionalism, Nietzsche’s critique of anthropocentrism also includes a critical evaluation of what he calls the “humanization of nature [Vermenschlichung der Natur]” (KSA 10:10[43], 10:13[20]). The humanization of nature is the tendency of human beings to project their values and categories for understanding onto the natural world (KSA 9:11[7]; BGE 9; TI, “Skirmishes,” 19); it is “the interpretation according to us” (KSA 12:1[29]) involving the erroneous teachings that “nature is like man” (KSA 10:10[43]), that the natural world itself conforms to the human categories we employ to make sense of it. In an 1881 note, Nietzsche identifies this error and unequivocally calls for its correction: “Earlier, humanity and philosophers projected the human into nature — let’s de-humanize nature [entmenschlichen wir die Natur!]” (KSA 9:11[238]).

De-humanizing nature, for Nietzsche, involves noticing and excavating “aesthetic anthropomorphisms [ästhetischen Menschlichkeiten]” (GS 109): we must identify both our projection of rational order, beauty, wisdom, purpose, and morality onto the world and our failure so far to recognize these as human projections (instead of understanding the natural world as itself manifesting these qualities). In a late note, Nietzsche describes the humanization of nature and its danger in more detail:

All the values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world estimable for ourselves and which then proved inapplicable and therefore devaluated the world—all these values are, psychologically considered, the results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination— and they have been falsely projected into the essence of things. What we find here is still the hyperbolic naïveté of man: positing himself as the meaning and measure of the value of things. (KSA 13:11[99])

According to Nietzsche, it is only when we recognize our false, human-centric projections as such that we can begin to de-humanize nature, learn more about the natural world as it is (as “for all

¹³ Loeb and Tinsley 2019.

eternity chaos” (GS 109) or “*Chaos sive natura*” (KSA 9:11[197])), and come to know ourselves as natural beings. We see this in Z, too, when Zarathustra praises the open sky for its accidentality, purity, and innocence and attempts to clear it of the “drift-clouds” of purpose, freeing it from “servitude” under the human projection of purpose (Z III:4). In Z, the open sky is a stand-in for the natural world devoid of human projections and values. In the third book, as Laurence Lampert aptly notes, Nietzsche intends for Zarathustra to reveal that beliefs in purposiveness—specifically, beliefs that understand natural beings as participating in a shared, global purpose—are “‘human constructs of domination’ that have set themselves in the heavens as earth’s necessity, purpose, or guilt” (Lampert 1986, 175). Such constructs “will be justly cursed by [Zarathustra’s] new teaching on earth and sky” (ibid.), a teaching that affirms the inexhaustible, chaotic richness of the de-humanized natural world. Nietzsche’s call to “de-humanize” nature, then, is a call for human beings to unearth human projections (*qua* concepts and values that we impose in error on the natural world) and, when possible, withdraw these projections from the natural world. Of course, Nietzsche does not endorse a kind of disinterested realism, free of drive-based, affective interpretations (GS 57). Instead, he aims to disabuse us of our conventional assumption that our erroneous, unnatural human projections (especially metaphysical and theological constructs) are essentially truth-disclosing.

Nietzsche indicts mankind’s tendency to humanize nature in part because such a tendency functions like other processes of the human intellect mentioned above: nature humanized is nature falsified. Even more critical from Nietzsche’s perspective, however, is that the unwitting humanization of nature precludes the naturalization of humanity, as the process of humanity’s naturalization follows nature’s de-humanization. In an early note, he identifies his task as “the de-humanization of nature [Entmenschung der Natur] and then the naturalization of man [Vernatürlichung des Menschen], after he has attained the pure concept ‘nature’” (KSA 9: 11[211]). This ordering is no anomaly: Nietzsche consistently frames the de-humanization of nature as a precursor to the naturalization of the human being (GS 109, BGE 230, TI “Raids” 37).¹⁴ In the second book of Z, Nietzsche has Zarathustra teach four consecutive lessons that sketch the process of the de-humanization of nature and re-naturalization of humanity. After Zarathustra foreshadows the importance of naturalizing humanity by framing human beings as animals ashamed of their instincts and recommending that the “seeker of knowledge wanders among human beings *as* among

¹⁴ See also Loeb 2016, 22-26.

animals” (Z II:3), he describes how the “false values and words of delusion” of the priests make human beings ashamed of their naturalness and hide it from them: “Who created such caves and stairs of penitence? Were they not those who wanted to hide and were ashamed before the pure sky?” (Z II:4). In this section, Zarathustra hints that the only path to healthier individuals, life affirmation, and the *Übermensch* is for individuals to attune themselves to their embodied, animal nature. This involves resisting those all-too-human compartments and values that have been dominant thus far so that they can recognize the importance of natural, more-than-human values and “the pure sky [can peek] again through the broken ceilings and down upon grass and red poppy and broken walls” (ibid.).¹⁵ Zarathustra goes on to describe how de-humanization of nature, as the excavation and removal of human projections, “tear[s] open the ground of [the] souls [of the virtuous]” (Z II:5). In order for human beings to become receptive to the natural world and their own naturalness—to make room for more-than-human values, new ways of envisioning virtue, and the creation of new goods—their all-too-human, conventionally virtuous souls must be broken open via the “plowshare” of Zarathustra’s teaching. Only then, when one excavates the projections of humanity and other “rabble” values from the natural world (and *oneself* as a piece of nature), can one learn to become natural again, “neighbor[] to eagles, neighbor[] to snow, neighbor to sun” (Z II:6). Moreover, only by becoming re-naturalized can individual human beings identify empowering tasks and find a “wellspring of joy” in the “highest regions” where they can “build our nest in the tree called future [and] eagles shall bring us solitary ones food in their beaks” (ibid.).

When we humanize nature, we understand ourselves as beings with the capacity to make sense of the natural world as it actually is, instead of understanding the natural world (and our place in it) as a means through which we can make sense of *ourselves* as we actually are (as living beings willing power). Not only do our tendencies to project human values onto the natural world and to understand human values as the *only* values prevent us from recognizing value in the natural world apart from human projections; they also prevent a much-needed familiarity with how other natural beings value that allows us to recognize who we truly are (living beings willing power) and what is truly valuable (power in Nietzsche’s sense). Before we can “re-translate the human being back into nature [Den Menschen nämlich zurückübersetzen in die Natur]” (BGE 230), then, we must “become master over the many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over that eternal basic text of *homo natura*” (ibid). In sum, we

¹⁵ I say “more-than-human” values rather than “other-than-human” values here because human beings can share certain values with other-than-human life forms, on Nietzsche’s view.

must 1) see how even humanity's *own* naturalness has been humanized by a host of projections and misunderstandings that function to obscure this naturalness, 2) recover those pieces of nature in ourselves, and 3) adopt or create values that enable us to flourish as the natural beings we are.

Nietzsche also resists human projections of agency (and corresponding notions of moral accountability and duty) because they constitute an unwarranted, falsifying humanization of nature. In HH, Nietzsche remarks that man “has been accustomed to seeing in accountability and duty the patent of nobility of his humanity” (107). Yet because his actions are “nature and necessity... [just as] he stands before plants, so must he stand before the actions of men and before his own. He can admire their strength, beauty, fullness, but he may not find any merit in them” (ibid).¹⁶ This early critique, which draws our attention to how falsifying human projections of agency and moral accountability result in unwarranted approbation and disapprobation, is preserved in Nietzsche's later work (GM I:13). According to Nietzsche, humanity celebrates morality as a noble and characteristically human development. More specifically, he argues that modern Europeans tend to understand actions congruous with conventional Christian morality as praiseworthy accomplishments. Yet Nietzsche suggests that learning our actions are the result of “nature and necessity”—that we could not have done otherwise—troubles our understanding of accountability, leads us to doubt the merit of our actions, and strips those actions of their all-too-human “patent of nobility.” When we recognize how our actions generally follow from nature and necessity, we can begin to understand how we are more like plants than we might otherwise be inclined to admit.

Nietzsche draws this same parallel between plants and human beings in BGE 44, where he argues that morality that strives for “the universal green-pasture happiness of the herd” hinders the growth of “the plant ‘man’”—whereas “everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents serves the enhancement of the species’ man” *as much as its opposite does.*” Here, Nietzsche explicitly calls the human being “the plant ‘man’” to emphasize the shared nature of plants and human beings—their nature, that is, as living beings—and argues that man's most basic, plant-like, animalistic instincts serve to improve humanity. Such reflections again indicate a Nietzschean agenda to re-naturalize humanity, to recognize “the basic text of *homo natura*” (that is, “the human being as a creature of nature” (Lemm 2020)) and to “re-translate the human back into nature” (BGE 230). Once this re-translation occurs—specifically, once we understand human beings fundamentally as living beings willing power—we will see that for morality to be “healthy,” it must be “governed by

¹⁶ In his claim that we “may not find any merit” in our actions and the actions of others in HH 107, Nietzsche utilizes a conventionally moral sense of “merit.”

an instinct of life” (II “Morality” 4). Additionally, human beings can understand what is good for us by understanding ourselves as natural, living beings, as complexes of drives willing power, just like other living beings. When we re-translate ourselves back into nature, in short, we recognize the good as “[e]verything that enhances the feeling of power in man, will to power, power itself” (A 3).

In all of these critiques, we find Nietzsche de-centering humanity and characteristically human capacities and pursuits, instead directing our attention to the animal (and even vegetable) qualities retained by the human being as a living being who wills power. Nietzsche encourages his readers to come to recognize and embrace these qualities and instincts in themselves, to learn to repair that “forcible breach with [their] animal past” resulting from “a declaration of war against all the old instincts” (Genealogy, Essay II, §16). In each of these passages, Nietzsche calls for humanity’s re-naturalization so that we may become healthier and flourish.

2. Nietzsche’s positive vision: Re-naturalizing humanity and proto-ecocentric strains in his thought

Together with Nietzsche’s critique of human exceptionalism and his call to de-humanize nature, we also find support for a positive, proto-ecocentric view: a vision that recognizes the other-than-human world (both the biotic community and the inorganic elements of our world that condition human life) as a source of value. In such a view, living well and meaningfully requires one to acknowledge and incorporate other-than-human sources of value into the living of one’s life, instead of projecting existing human values onto the other-than-human natural world and understanding that world merely as a means to achieving one’s own (human-centric) value/s. Below, I detail three key elements of Nietzsche’s positive, proto-ecocentric vision: 1) the value of other-than-human life; 2) his project of the “naturalization of humanity”; and 3) his call for an ecological conscience.¹⁷

Although we see glimmers of ecocentrism throughout Nietzsche’s corpus, they appear most clearly and forcefully in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It will hardly be surprising that Nietzsche comes closest to articulating what can be characterized as an environmental ethical view—a theory underpinning how human beings ought to relate to and behave towards the natural, other-than-

¹⁷ Importantly, I am not arguing that we can infer that 1) the other-than-human world has value to which we can attune ourselves from 2) Nietzsche’s claim that, when possible, we ought to withdraw human projections from nature. Rather, I see these two separate moments—the withdrawal of human projections from nature and the recognition of more-than-human values—of Nietzsche’s de-humanization/re-naturalization program.

human world—in *Zarathustra*. After all, the text is rife with symbolic natural imagery. Nietzsche situates Zarathustra’s entire transformative journey in the natural world: he stumbles through the desert wilderness, wanders through the forest, sails across the sea, converses with the sun and open sky, and ascends the mountains in his solitude. Zarathustra’s closest and most loyal friends are his animals, his eagle and his serpent, who can sense truly elevated individuals who do not breathe “bad air” and who breathe better air than the higher men do (Z IV:14).

The value of other-than-human life

According to Nietzsche, humans are not the only beings with ends all their own: all living beings have ends and goals towards which they direct themselves (Z II:12). Animals, plants, and even amoebae have their own ways of being end-directed, of pursuing certain characteristic aims and activities, and ultimately, of valuing (KSA 11:35[58]; 13:14[81]). These are important upshots of Nietzsche’s biological conception of the will to power (BGE 13; GS 349; GM II:12), which he proposes for the first time in the second book of *Zarathustra*, asserting that “only where life is, is there also... will to power!” (Z II:12).¹⁸

In Nietzsche’s view, human values have their basis in our drives and the aims we have in virtue of those drives. If I value economic flourishing, for example, I must (at a minimum) possess activities associated with economic success as goals towards which I aim (in virtue of one or more of my drives). Something similar is true of other-than-human living things, according to Nietzsche, although we do not typically think of other-than-human beings as having values of their own.

Let us consider an example. Imagine a pineapple sage plant [*Salvia elegans*]. On this view, since photosynthesis is an end-directed process the pineapple sage must undergo to grow and thrive, one of a pineapple sage plant’s aims is to photosynthesize.¹⁹ Because of this aim, the pineapple sage is situated in the world in a particular way: it has the potential to be transformed in certain ways (by the presence or absence of light) and to transform its world in certain ways (in this case, either using sunlight to “split” water—separating hydrogen from carbon dioxide, and turning carbon dioxide into sugars for energy—or failing to split water in the absence of sunlight). For this reason, the pineapple sage can be said to have a positive evaluative orientation towards sunlight. From this

¹⁸ Richardson famously frames the will to power as a biological principle (2004). While I am in agreement with this assessment, I do not agree with his interpretation in its entirety.

¹⁹ To say that the plant must photosynthesize to grow and thrive is to acknowledge that photosynthesis is an activity through which the plant *wills power* in Nietzsche’s sense. Note that willing power here clearly does not involve anything like a typical “will” as conscious intentionality. More on this below.

perspective, then, understanding plants, animals, and other living beings as end-directed allows us to make sense of the claim that such beings have values all their own. Otherwise put, the evaluative orientations other-than-human life forms have in virtue of their end-directedness (their nature as living beings willing power) constitute other-than-human values. These evaluative orientations emerge from the specific ways in which other-than-human life forms aim at ends as they will power.

My claim here is not that human and other-than-human values are structurally identical. While other-than-human values can be fully explained with an appeal to evaluative orientations to which living beings are disposed in virtue of certain of their ends/aims (such that for a plant, *to value x is just to have x as an end/aim*), human values require both an end/aim and some second-order assessment of that end/aim (either a reflective endorsement of that aim or, as Katsafanas argues, a lack of disapproval when one is presented with that aim (2016, 131)). Additionally, on this Nietzschean view, it is still the case that “*all attributions of... value are anthropogenic: originating in and dependent upon human acts of evaluation [emphasis mine]*” (Thompson 2017, 81 paraphrasing Callicott 1989, 133). Though plants have values of their own (in virtue of their aims or ends), they do not *attribute* value to things. For example, although the pineapple sage plant is positively disposed towards sunlight, it does not attribute value to the sunlight. Nietzsche draws our attention to this when he claims that “[i]t is we, the thinking-sensing ones, who really and continually make something that is not yet there: the whole perpetually growing world of valuations, colors, weights, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations” (GS 301).

This account of other-than-human value might seem at odds with Nietzsche’s well-known claim that “nature is always value-less—[it] has... been given, granted value, and we were the givers and granters” (GS 301). But the aim of GS 301 is not to assert that there are no evaluative orientations other than those of human beings. Instead, Nietzsche’s claim that “nature is valueless” brings attention to the fact that those absolute, non-contingent values human beings have long projected onto nature do not inhere in nature itself (KSA 12:6[14]). Indeed, the evaluative orientations of other-than-human life forms are contingent on the ends of the beings to which they belong; there are no absolute or non-contingent values in nature itself.

Towards the “naturalization of humanity”

Above, I fleshed out Nietzsche’s critical assessment of the humanization of nature and his attempts to de-humanize nature. There, I also began to sketch the re-naturalization of humanity: what it means to “re-translate the human back into nature” (BGE 230) after engaging in practices to de-

humanize nature (including attempts to de-humanize ourselves as natural beings): that is, practices that allow us to recognize and disentangle the natural world and ourselves from harmful and erroneous human projections. In this section, I expand this sketch, offering a detailed account of the naturalization of humanity [Vernatürlichung des Menschen]: that is, Nietzsche's call for the human being to become more natural (KSA 12:10[53]; 12:9[121]). It is only by seeing ourselves as natural beings, as willing power in the world as will to power, that we can identify our tasks and become strong individuals. In no other text is Nietzsche's project of humanity's re-naturalization as central as in *Zarathustra*.

Nietzsche hints at his project of re-naturalization in the way he likens features of Zarathustra and other characters from the text to natural features and events and life-affirming values to artifacts discovered in nature (those "colorful shells" (Z:II:5)). That "wellspring of joy" found in the "highest regions" flows forth into the overfull sea of Zarathustra's soul and thus cannot become "murky" (Z II:6); like the "lightning" of the overman (Z I:Prologue,4) and the "hailstorm" of the annihilators of previous values (Z II:6), Nietzsche likens Zarathustra to natural weather events (he is a "strong wind to all lowlands" (Z II:6)) and his moods to seasons (ibid.). Nietzsche even naturalizes those who have not yet been re-naturalized: priests are "black ponds" (Z II:4) and the rabble are described as poisoning "holy water" with their all-too-human attitudes and virtues (Z II:6).

At the beginning of *Z*, Zarathustra more explicitly describes his project. First, he calls upon those who listen to "*remain faithful to the earth*" (Z I:Prologue,3) so that a healthier, more life-affirming form of humanity can arise (Z I:Prologue,4). In addition to instructing humans on how to become healthier living beings, he also teaches "humans the meaning of their being, which is the *Übermensch*" (Z I:Prologue,7), heralding a noble superhuman species made possible by the existence of stronger, healthier human beings. In Zarathustra's claim that faithfulness to the earth is required for healthier human beings and the advent of a superhuman species, Nietzsche expounds his project of humanity's re-naturalization, a project that requires the affirmation of human life *as embodied, driven life*. To become re-naturalized, we must not only recognize ourselves as animals, as living beings containing bits of wild nature and complexes of drives willing power, but learn to revere our naturalness, our embodiment, and our animality. Humanized nature is the will of the weak, life-denying individuals who cannot accept themselves and affirm themselves as pieces of nature; naturalized humanity is the will of strong, life-affirming individuals who, in understanding themselves as pieces of nature, learn healthy ways to value.

Nietzsche's call for humanity's re-naturalization in *Z* is perhaps most apparent in the contrast he draws between tame, domesticated animals and wild animals or "beasts of prey" that recurs throughout *Z*. The symbolic descriptions of these two different kinds of animals are exceptionally revealing. Camels are burdened, weighed-down pack animals who take on life-denying values with an attitude of reverence (*Z* I:1); they represent human beings weighed down by unnatural values that lead them to deny their instincts (*Z* III:11,2). Nietzsche describes moles as blind, subterranean animals who are lame [lahm] and paralyzing [lähmend] (*Z* III:2,1); they symbolize human beings who prescribe universal goods and evils, values that function to debilitate and paralyze the will to power (*Z* III:11,2). Cows are lazy ruminants who avoid effort and make everything they eat into something palatable (*Z* 1:2) and avoid effortful activities. They, like the swine who "[chew] and [digest] everything" (*Z* III:11,2) regardless of its value for them, represent overly tolerant, "all-complacent" (*ibid.*) human beings who aim for comfort and small forms of human happiness and activity (including "hectic work and unrest" (*Z* I:9)). Their tolerance results in a failure to discriminate among values, an inability to discern which values enhance their instincts and which values hinder those instincts. In this respect, they resemble the ass, the animal who affirms every human value with an indiscriminating yes (*Z* III:11,2). In each of these cases, the type of human being the animal represents is insufficiently natural; in each case, the human being invests in human projections of value and characteristically human goals to the detriment of their instincts— and, ultimately, to the detriment of their flourishing as a living being willing power. The "animal tamers" who preach these all-too-human values and goals (whether they be priests or humanists) are designated as such because they preach the humanization of humanity's naturalness. By domesticating the human animal, these animal tamers turn the human being into "the most bungled of all the animals" (*A* 14); they make the human being "a heavy burden to himself" (*Z* III:11,2).

Nietzsche's descriptions of wild animals and "beasts of prey" in *Z*, on the other hand, are laudatory and aspirational. Nietzsche frames these animals as proud inhabitants of the natural world who embrace it courageously despite its dangers as the venue in which they can retain their wildness. Eagles are lofty and light; they fly high above the rabble and its rabble-happiness (*Z* I:Prologue, 10; *Z* II:6). Though their loftiness and their height make for a lonely and solitary existence (*Z* IV:13), they fly proudly and courageously: they embrace the unknown abyss of the open sky but retain a lightness (*Z* IV:13,4). Zarathustra celebrates the lion as "hungry, violent, lonely, godless" (*Z* II:8)— representative of those human beings who destroy previous values (*Z* I:1)—and the wolf as wild,

violent, and evil (Z II:8). The lion and the wolf are in stark contrast to those “well-fed, famous wise men” who live among the rabble to serve “the people... and the people’s superstition,” functioning as “draft animals... [who] remain servants and harnessed, even if they gleam in golden harnesses” (ibid.).

To become re-naturalized, then, the human being must 1) be unburdened of harmful aspects of humanity—those human projections, activities, and tendencies that leave her in ill health and unable to affirm this life and world—and 2) learn to recognize herself as a piece of nature, as a living being willing power, and to affirm this discovery. In the language of *Zarathustra*, the re-naturalization of humanity requires becoming less domesticated and more like a wild animal. To become more natural, we must immerse ourselves in the wild, natural world and come to see power as the highest value by both observing natural beings willing power and acknowledging our status as natural beings.

On developing an ecological conscience

As demonstrated above, Nietzsche’s project of the re-naturalization of humanity requires human beings to recognize that we are fundamentally natural beings, more like plants and other-than-human animals than we like to admit. Importantly, Nietzsche’s vision for how this can be accomplished includes his call for human beings to develop an ecological conscience.²⁰ Developing an ecological conscience in Nietzsche’s sense involves 1) attuning oneself to the natural world and 2) recognizing one’s status as a natural being. Human beings who develop an ecological conscience cultivate a noble reverence and gratitude for the natural world (BGE 14, KSA 12:10[157]) so that we may learn from it about ourselves (KSA 12:10[157]; A 14) rather than falsifying it for our ends (A 24). Additionally, developing an ecological conscience requires one to apprehend the fundamental relationality between oneself and the natural world as an environment that conditions one’s

²⁰ Although I characterize Nietzsche as calling for human beings to develop an ecological conscience, it is worth noting that Nietzsche does *not* use the term “ecology [*Ökologie*]” in his work issuing such a call. In fact, there are good reasons for why Nietzsche doesn't use the word "ecology" or describe his project as "ecological". First, Ernst Haeckel only coined the term *Ökologie* in 1866, so it was nowhere near as widely used as today. Additionally, his use of *Ökologie* was narrower than ours: while "ecology" today is a field that studies a variety of interactions between organisms and their environment, Haeckel proposed "ecology" as a new branch of biology that would exclusively study how organisms *adapt* to their environment. We can see, then, why Nietzsche (though he read Haeckel) would not have adopted this term or characterized his thought as "ecological" thinking. Nietzsche rejects Haeckel's account of organisms' development through mere adaptation to their environment and understands Haeckel's account as incompatible with his account of the will to power (which, as a biological thesis, offers a "competing" account of how organisms develop) (KSA 12:7[9]).

existence. According to Nietzsche, only when we can see ourselves as natural beings, as willing power in the world as will to power just like all living things, can we identify strengthening tasks around which our lives should be oriented and become more healthy, life-affirming human beings.

A key strategy Nietzsche believes one can employ to develop an ecological conscience is taking time to distance oneself from human communities and situate oneself in natural places and environments, in solitude, to observe how the natural world unfolds.²¹ To remain faithful to the earth—to natural, embodied existence—one has to, after all, come to know it first-personally, in one's own way.²² It is only by going into the desert wilderness [Wüste], “suffering thirst with beasts of prey” (rather than drinking from “poisoned” cisterns with camels and camel drivers) and coming to know ourselves as living beings willing power that we can learn how to become natural again (Z II:6). Once one is situated in the natural world, one must attune oneself to it, recognizing how living beings value and which conditions promote their flourishing. We see the importance of this attunement in the significance of a fundamental receptivity in Zarathustra, a listening to the earth that recognizes that “[t]here are a thousand paths that have never yet been walked; a thousand healths and hidden islands of life” (Z I:22,2). Later, Nietzsche also reflects upon the “the unfathomable” parts of life, the depths of which man so far has been unable to comprehend, in part because he is too busy bestowing his own “virtues” onto her (Z II:10) instead of listening for the wisdom of the other-than-human world.

The significance of this attunement becomes especially clear when one notices 1) how Nietzsche's attunement to values he found in the natural world—such as preservation, incorporation, and growth, all essential to power—informed his critical thoughts on morality (as well as his positive account of cultivation and self-overcoming) and 2) how Nietzsche ties the potential of humanity (and individual human beings) to the quality of the “soil” in which they grow. Regarding the former, cultivating an ecological conscience requires recognizing that striving to advance oneself in a world in which limiting, artificial values efface natural values leads to an impoverishment of life. This recognition, however, involves being attuned to the workings of life itself. When one attunes oneself to life, one can come to realize that closing oneself off to “homo-exclusive” values (Acampora 1994) potentially forestalls expansive possibilities for being and acting. Attending to values in the natural world, on the other hand, points the human being towards

²¹ Zarathustra himself employs and recommends this strategy (Z I:Prologue,1; Z I:12; Z II:1, 22; Z III:1,9; and so on).

²² On an earlier draft, Keith Ansell-Pearson suggested a clear kinship between Nietzsche and Thoreau on this point and others. Although a treatment of Thoreau is beyond the scope of this paper, I appreciate this generative suggestion.

stronger, healthier ways to will. After all, only a “corrupt” being “chooses...prefers...what is *injurious* to it” (A 6)—and Nietzsche understands a tendency towards this kind of corruption as typically human. Indeed, this tendency is responsible for the dominance of Christianity, a belief system that Nietzsche argues teaches individuals to despise their bodies and desires and ultimately denies life.²³ Becoming a healthier human being and a more life-affirming individual, then, requires one to become like the other-than-human, attuning oneself mindfully to conditions that promote one’s flourishing and seeking them out.

Becoming a healthier human being also requires recognizing the importance of the “soil” in which one grows. This too is a lesson that one can learn from the natural world: just as hardy plants and adaptive fauna learn to live and thrive in harsh environments, the “richest” soil for the development of great human beings are wild, unpredictable, chaotic conditions, “regions where it is hard to live” (Z I:Prologue,5) that can serve as arenas for strife and struggle (Acampora 2013). Otherwise put, wilderness and wild nature are exceedingly favorable conditions for the development of strong individuals (KSA 12:7[46]; GM I:11; GM II:16; TI “Skirmishes” 45), though the wilderness of which Nietzsche speaks here is usually the wild nature of strong human beings as they will power in their own way.

The kind of ecological conscience for which Nietzsche calls is unique. For example, one who possesses an ecological conscience of the kind Nietzsche describes would not sacrifice the values of healthy, flourishing human life to extra-human values with the belief that other life forms ultimately take priority, or have more value. Instead, cultivating a Nietzschean ecological conscience requires one to apprehend and appreciate one’s fundamental relationality: as a living thing among living things, one wills power in the world as will to power.²⁴ One who has developed an ecological conscience affirms life in its totality, especially that complex network of wills to power to which one belongs as inexhaustible wellspring and experimental site for potentially new ways of being, living, and creating meaning—that is, new forms of life. This network is a more-than-human ecosystem of sorts in relation to which human beings develop and through which they can be empowered.

As an environmental ethical view—a view about how human beings should relate to the natural world—Nietzsche’s view is also distinctive. As I argue above, Nietzsche believes not *only* that all living beings have value, but that other-than-human beings have lessons to teach us. Since the

²³ I say Christianity *ultimately* denies life because it is clear that Nietzsche believes it plays a life-preserving function for a time insofar as it allows certain human beings to avoid “suicidal nihilism” (GM III:28).

²⁴ Of course, insofar as will to power is a biological principle, the “world” here is the *organic* world.

comportment we ought to have towards other-than-human nature involves recognizing its value *to us*, part of its value is instrumental. To call attention to this emphasizes another distinctive feature of the proto-ecocentric strains in Nietzsche's thought we have discussed so far: his explanation for *why* we ought to respect the natural world. For Nietzsche, a sizeable part of what should motivate such respect and reverence (his meta-ethical explanation of why we should value what we value)—apart from the overflowing gratitude of an overfull soul (Z III:14; EH, "Birth, 2)—is the natural world's status as the venue in which healthier human beings become possible, in which they can discover new meanings for themselves. In Nietzsche's view, higher individuals are grateful to the natural world because attending to natural values shows them new ways to revere themselves. In this sense, the natural world is the condition of the possibility of a stronger, healthier humanity. Without the fruitful chaos of nature (Drenthen 326) and the superfluity of undiscovered values nature offers (for which we must listen (Z I:22,2)), we risk becoming those shapeless, aimless, "objective" men from BGE 207 (or "last men" (Z:Prologue,5)), comfortable with small pleasures and little conflict, assured of our perspective on things.

Nietzsche's environmental ethical view is distinctive in another way. Rather than prescribing clear-cut, action-guiding principles for how we ought to engage with the other-than-human world, he offers his readers a theoretical framework that shapes how we relate to that world, an opportunity for his readers to come to know the natural world—and themselves—differently. Although human beings share in the same "nature and necessity" (HH 107) of other living things, coming to know ourselves as natural beings akin to plants and animals, he thinks, will be transformative: this knowledge transforms the necessity that we are. In HH 34, for example, Nietzsche describes how knowledge functions not only to reveal our necessity, but also to free us from external forces (customs and other "ordinary fetters of life") and reconfigure the necessity that we are via a rearrangement of our inner lives (in part by freeing one from "the thought that one is not only nature or more than nature").

Importantly, however, Nietzsche thinks we will not come to know ourselves as natural beings unless we attune ourselves to the natural world, cultivating an attitude of receptivity so that we might learn from it. Once we develop this ecological conscience and come to know ourselves as natural beings, he expects that we will be motivated to relate to the natural world differently: we will learn to revere the natural, other-than-human world (in part, as a site of self-knowledge) and affirm that world as part of the ecosystem we inhabit that conditions our strength and growth, a venue in which we can thrive.

3. Nietzsche's significance for environmental philosophy and policy

The proto-ecocentric strains in Nietzsche's thought outlined above have unique and valuable contributions to make to contemporary debates in environmental ethics, not least because they afford us a perspective from which to critique anthropocentric environmental ethical frameworks (according to which the natural world is either merely or primarily instrumentally valuable). In them, we find a call to value the ecosphere both in itself and as a way to experience a matrix of aims, meanings, and values that allow us to recognize that we live in a meaningful world with values that both exceed us and can inform how we live.

First, just as we limit and falsify the world when we try to apprehend it via our "four-cornered little human reason" or make it intelligible by inventing and deploying human concepts and values, so too can understanding the value of the natural world primarily in terms of human values preclude us from recognizing more-than-human values that exceed limiting, conventional projections of human value. Projecting human values onto the natural world and understanding the natural world as valuable *only with reference to those values* simply constitutes a new way of falsifying the world by making ourselves the "meaning and measure of things." In doing so, we run roughshod over the values of other-than-human life in a way that prevents a discernment of those values—a discernment which, as we see above, is critical for Nietzsche.

Additionally, Nietzsche claims that we have much to learn from the natural world. In particular, attending to the natural world and more-than-human values can help us recognize how we, as living beings, value—which can (and should) be transformative. For Nietzsche, then, anthropocentric environmental ethical views that prioritize strictly human values would not only hinder our discernment of more-than-human values; they would also function to potentially block transformative growth, health, and well-being. By understanding the natural world's value only in terms of already-existing human values, they reinscribe conventional values rather than revaluing values from life's perspective and ends, as Nietzsche recommends.

Nietzsche argues that when we incorporate lessons from the other-than-human world on how to live and value, we learn to affirm life in its totality. Such a practice enables us to recognize that we live in a world of inexhaustible richness, an ecosphere full of other-than-human beings willing power whose end-directedness and purposeful striving we share. This recognition allows us to resist both 1) the otherworldly nihilism towards which we tend when we avow humanity as the sole source of value and 2) the nihilism of self-denial (or affective nihilism) involving the

suppression of our instincts or the dissolution of our will.²⁵ Inhabiting such a life-affirming stance both promotes reverence for the ecosphere generally and the ends of its other-than-human denizens and shapes how we think the natural world ought to be treated. Nietzsche's environmental thought can inform environmental policy, then, because it offers us a perspective from which we can critique overly anthropocentric, resource-oriented conservation ideologies, according to which conservation decision-making should be oriented primarily around conventional human interests and values. Moreover, in a time when the Earth is increasingly dominated by humanity and exploited in the interest of leveling conventional values, remaining faithful to the earth is more important than ever— for the Earth, but also for us.

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²⁵ Creasy 2020.

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