

Nietzsche's Postmoralism
Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude
to Philosophy's Future

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however, either of them easily could have; for they both make much of the phenomenon, and the term is highly apt.

8. See the sixth of his "Theses on Feuerbach."

9. See WS 350 in this connection.

Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of *Schopenhauer as Educator*

JAMES CONANT

Nietzsche says that the worst readers are those "who proceed like plundering soldiers . . . picking up only those few things they can use . . . and blaspheming the whole" (HH II:1:137),¹ and that the best readers are those who patiently develop an eye for the whole and know that reading must be practiced as an *art* — an art that "has been unlearned most thoroughly nowadays" (GM P:8).²

The prevailing tendency among contemporary scholars of Nietzsche's work, when expounding his views, is to refrain from concentrating on a single work. Nietzsche's corpus is often treated as if it were one enormous, disorganized text from which one can draw individual passages at will and consider them in isolation from their original home in a given work without cost to one's understanding of his thought. Arthur Danto begins his book *Nietzsche as Philosopher* with a candid defense of this procedure:

Nietzsche's books give the appearance of having been assembled rather than composed. They are made up, in the main, of short, pointed aphorisms, and of essays seldom more than a few pages long. . . . And any given aphorism or essay might as easily have been placed in one volume as in another without much affecting the unity or structure of either. And the books themselves . . . do not exhibit any special structure as a corpus. No one of them presupposes an acquaintance with any other. . . . [H]is writings may be read in pretty much any order, without this greatly impeding the comprehension of his ideas.³

The interpretative premise of this essay will be roughly the opposite of Danto's: namely, that Nietzsche's works are *composed*, rather than merely assembled, and indeed composed with an exquisite degree of care.⁴ Throughout his work, Nietzsche posts warnings to this effect, anticipating that the difficulty of his writings will fuel our natural propensity to scavenge about in search of isolated remarks that delight or offend

us, overlooking the challenge posed by the design of the whole.⁵ As Nietzsche's conception of his activity as an author develops, he is increasingly driven to search for a form of writing consonant with his philosophical aims, leading him to experiment with a variety of literary styles, genres, and devices. Those scholars of Nietzsche's thought who employ Danto's exegetical principles (such as "any given aphorism might as easily have been placed in one volume as in another") are thus apt to underestimate the development not only in *what* Nietzsche says but in *how* he says it. Their approach obscures not only the considerable evolution in Nietzsche's substantive first-order doctrines, but – even where there is continuity in doctrine – the equally considerable development in his conception of the mode of presentation best suited to his philosophical objectives.

Without careful attention to the structure and overall strategy of one of Nietzsche's works, one is bound to mistake the import of many, if not most, of the passages it contains. One cannot get ahold of what he thinks without attending to how he says it and why (he thinks) he must say it in the way he does. This problem (of the inextricability of Nietzsche's thinking from his mode of presentation) deepens as one moves into his later thought. I have therefore chosen here to focus on a very early work – one in which it is comparatively easy to assess the content of his thinking without an extended preliminary consideration of the authorial strategy of the work. Even here, however, as we shall see, such preliminaries cannot be dispensed with altogether.

Schopenhauer as Educator is the third of Nietzsche's four *Untimely Meditations*, all of which are written in the traditional essay form – a form that Nietzsche subsequently abandons. On the reading proposed here, the third meditation advances a version of moral perfectionism.⁶ That Nietzsche is some sort of perfectionist is hardly news. (As we shall see, Nietzsche tends to figure in contemporary discussions as *the* perfectionist par excellence.) But what does it mean to say that Nietzsche is a "perfectionist"? This essay will begin by trying to get clear what sort of perfectionist Nietzsche is *not* – and it will turn out that this is just the sort he is usually taken to be. It will emerge that Nietzsche's perfectionism does not (as is often assumed) take the form of a teleological (moral or political) theory that seeks to maximize certain social or cultural goods. It will emerge further that one cannot grasp the sense in which his philosophy is perfectionist apart from an understanding of why he thinks there is a problem about how philosophy, as he seeks to practice it, should be written and read. For the perfectionist moment in his work is tied to his conception of the manner in which that work seeks to engage its reader.⁷

Is Nietzsche an Elitist?

People are always complaining that German authors write for such a small circle, and even sometimes just for themselves.⁸

Nietzsche's perfectionism has often been taken to entail some form of (moral or political) elitism. Let us define elitism as the view that certain individuals are not to be counted as having the same weight in moral or political judgment as others. Let us now pose the question: Is Nietzsche an elitist?

The reading of Nietzsche as an elitist is generally not argued for in much more detail than Clarence Darrow bothered to argue for it. Darrow, in his famous plea for the defense in the trial of *The State of Illinois versus Nathun Leopold, Jr. and Richard Loeb*, pointed to his impressionable young clients' exposure to the philosophy of Nietzsche as the precipitating cause of their horrendous crime:

Your Honor, I have read almost everything Nietzsche ever wrote. He was a man of wonderful intellect; the most original philosopher of the last century. . . . Nietzsche believed that some time the superman would be born, that evolution was working towards the superman . . . and that the laws for good and the laws for evil do not apply to those who approach the superman. . . . Although no perfect superman has yet appeared in history, Nietzsche's types are to be found in the world's great figures. . . . They rightly felt themselves to be above the law. What they thought was right, not because sanctioned by any law, beyond themselves, but because they did it. . . . Here is a boy at sixteen or seventeen becoming obsessed with these doctrines. . . . He believed in a superman. He and Dickie Loeb were the supermen. . . . The ordinary commands of society were not for him. . . . Many of us read this philosophy but know that it has no actual application to life; but not he. He lived it and practiced it; he thought it applied to him. . . . Your honor, you are asked to hang a boy of his age . . . obsessed of a philosophy that destroyed his life, when there is no sort of question in the world as to what caused his downfall. . . . [T]his act would never have been committed or participated in by him excepting for the philosophy which he had taken literally . . . and which no one can take literally and practice literally and live.⁹

Darrow offers two options for reading Nietzsche appreciatively: (1) to regard Nietzsche (as Darrow himself does) as "a man of wonderful intellect" and "the most original philosopher of the last century," an option that remains open to you, Darrow thinks, only if you read him "poetically" – that is, if you do not take his philosophy "literally," and thus do not take it to have "actual application to life"; or (2) to read Nietzsche as Nathan Leopold Jr. and Richard Loeb did (and then hope you are lucky enough to secure Clarence Darrow's services as your attorney).

The question still remains with us today: Can one take Nietzsche seriously as a moral thinker – that is, as someone whose thought is properly taken to have (as Darrow puts it) an “actual application to life” and thus can be “lived and practiced” – without thereby certifying oneself to be either a moral lunatic or someone likely to be in immanent need of the services of a criminal defense lawyer? The question is made all the more poignant by the fact that it is still widely taken for granted – as if it were a well-established cultural fact – that if you need a handy and vivid example of a foaming-at-the-mouth elitist, you could hardly do better than Nietzsche. If the claim that Nietzsche is an elitist is at all supported, it is usually by quoting a few brief passages out of context. A favorite source for these passages is *Schopenhauer as Educator*. In a moment, we will look closely at some of the passages from that essay that have helped to establish Nietzsche’s notorious reputation in this regard.

It is, of course, no longer fashionable to suppose that Nietzsche would smile upon the exploits of Leopold and Loeb. Our Nietzsche of today is much less bloodthirsty than it was once fashionable to suppose him to be. Nevertheless, when people offer a sketch of Nietzsche’s political philosophy, they still assume he favors a particular sort of blueprint for how to organize a society. In particular, they assume that he favors institutions that promote the interest of an elite few, where those few are characterized as being in some general way “superior men.” They are gifted, talented.

On some readings, this is still explicated along biological lines; but this too has become unfashionable. It is now almost universally agreed that an elitist interpretation of his work can no longer be cashed out in terms of race, creed, or nationality. Yet it is still generally taken as uncontroversial that Nietzsche does think that the world divides into two sorts of human beings: the superior ones and the inferior ones. And it also is still assumed that his primary contribution to political thought consists of an argument in favor of promoting the welfare of the former at the expense of the latter. As the author of a recent book on perfectionism puts it, Nietzsche holds “that some human beings are intrinsically superior to other human beings and that political principles should take such differences of intrinsic worth into account.”¹⁰

The standard elitist reading of Nietzsche is often, in its cruder forms, coupled with an interpretation of his notion of the Overman. The way this is often understood is that the Overman designates a type of “superman.” (The term *Übermensch* is thus often translated – as Darrow prefers to translate it – as “superman.”) The supermen are certain extraordinary members of our society. This reading, in its original unvarnished form, is also no longer as popular as it once was – and for good reason. If one

looks carefully at the few occurrences of the notion of the *Übermensch* in Nietzsche’s writings, it becomes clear that he is not employing this expression as a designation for one of our fellow humans. But although these details of Darrow’s interpretation have been widely repudiated, the assumption remains that the *Übermensch* must refer to a certain kind of man – one who is in some way specially gifted or talented.

Bertrand Russell, in his chapter on Nietzsche in his *History of Western Philosophy*, offers a sanitized version of Darrow’s interpretation. Many of the details of Russell’s reading have, of course, been rebutted. Nevertheless, the broad outlines of his portrait of Nietzsche are retained in works that aspire to offer a careful scholarly exegesis of Nietzsche’s writings (something to which Russell’s own discussion hardly pretends). Thus, Russell’s formulation continues to be helpful in the pithiness of its candor:

Nietzsche’s criticism of religions and philosophies is dominated entirely by ethical motives. He admires certain qualities which he believes (perhaps rightly) to be only possible for an aristocratic minority; the majority, in his opinion, should be only means to the excellence of the few, and should not be regarded as having any independent claim to happiness or well-being. He alludes habitually to ordinary human beings as the “bungled and the botched,” and sees no objection to their suffering if it is necessary for the production of a great man.¹¹

Russell’s animus here is polemical. Nevertheless, his portrait of Nietzsche resembles in many respects the portrait of him that George Bernard Shaw was not only concurrently offering but also applauding. Shaw writes: “Nietzsche is the champion of privilege, of power, and of inequality.”¹² This reading clearly has its finger on an undeniable moment of exclusivity – one that reverberates throughout Nietzsche’s writings. Nietzsche does say, over and over again, that he is only “addressing the few.” This recurrent gesture is taken by both Russell and Shaw to indicate that he is simply dismissing the great “mass of humanity” from his concern. Russell assumes that this moment of exclusivity reflects Nietzsche’s adherence to some principle of exclusion – one that demarcates those individuals who really matter from those who do not.

The suggestion that something of importance is possible only for an aristocracy would seem to be implied by Nietzsche’s repeated insistence on how small the class of his “genuine readers” will prove to be. But in what sense is what is aimed at only possible for a minority? The passage from Russell quoted above suggests a certain direction of answer to this question. Russell writes: “[T]he majority, in [Nietzsche’s] opinion, should be only means to the excellence of the few, and should not be regarded as having any independent claim to happiness or well-being” (p. 762).

The idea that suffering is necessary for there to be great men is a Nietzschean theme. But Russell suggests something more: namely, that the suffering of some (as it were, expendable) people is required in order that some *other* person (or set of people) can become great. In its refusal to mince words, Russell's unflattering portrait of Nietzsche highlights interpretative assumptions that persist in much of the secondary literature on Nietzsche – assumptions such as that (1) “the great man” (of whom Nietzsche so frequently speaks) is naturally endowed with extraordinary gifts or talents that mark him out as qualitatively distinct from ordinary humans,¹³ (2) it is the good of such extraordinary humans that we (ordinary humans) are asked to promote, and (3) we can only promote their good – and thereby the good of humanity as a whole – at the cost of our own good.¹⁴ Let us examine these assumptions in reverse order.

Rawls on Nietzsche

A perfect republic would have to be more than just democratic, it would have to be at the same time aristocratic.¹⁵

Why can we promote the good of “the great man” *only* at the expense of the good of everyone else? It is the merit of Rawls's discussion of Nietzsche to have provided a clear answer to this question. Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (TJ) advances enormously influential accounts both of perfectionism and of Nietzsche as perfectionist. Rawls's book seeks to demonstrate that there is room for a liberal democratic theory of justice between the competing alternatives of utilitarianism and perfectionism, and that such a theory – if it is to be a theory of *justice* – must distinguish itself clearly from each of these alternatives in certain respects. Rawls's fear concerning perfectionism is, in a word, that it will ask the claims of justice to take a back seat to the claims of excellence. When Rawls first introduces perfectionism, he says that, like utilitarianism, it is a teleological doctrine. And then he goes on to say: “Teleological doctrines differ, pretty closely, according to how the concept of the good is specified. If it is taken as the realization of human excellence in the various forms of culture, we have what may be called perfectionism.”¹⁶

Notice Rawls's words here: “human excellence in the various forms of culture.” A certain emphasis on the notions of “excellence” and “culture” are taken to represent a threat to the priority of the claims of justice. (Both of these words certainly occur frequently in SE.) Rawls immediately goes on to say: “This notion of perfectionism is found in Aristotle

and in Nietzsche, among others” (TJ p. 25). These appear to be his two favorite examples of perfectionists. Furthermore, it turns out that when he goes on to discuss perfectionism, it is Nietzsche, above all, who plays the role of a central example (to the extent that any single figure does).

Section 50 of *A Theory of Justice* (where Rawls engages in his only extended discussion of perfectionism) dismisses Nietzsche's version of perfectionism on the grounds that it is inherently undemocratic. In particular, Rawls takes Nietzsche to epitomize what he calls the “strong version” of perfectionism, which, through its extreme prioritization of the claims of excellence and culture, attempts to override what Rawls takes to be (given his aspiration to establish a democratic theory of justice) the stronger claims of liberty and justice. He is clearly worried that the principles of justice are jeopardized in Nietzsche's emphasis on (what Rawls calls) “the realization of human excellence in the various forms of culture” (TJ p. 325). For Rawls, the interests of culture – as he interprets the notion of culture in perfectionism – inevitably compete with the interests of justice. When he introduces perfectionism he says:

There are two variants of the principle of perfectionism: in the first, it is the sole principle of a teleological theory directing society to arrange institutions and to define the duties and obligations of individuals so as to maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture (*ibid.*).

This first variant is what Rawls calls the “strong” version of perfectionism, according to which the value placed on “the achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture” takes priority over all other goods. Perfectionism, on this interpretation, calls upon us to “maximize the achievement of human excellence” in such domains. The view that Rawls here ascribes to Nietzsche might be termed *excellence-consequentialism*. Rawls interprets the idea that we must “strive to produce great individuals” to mean (1) that the perfectionist is concerned with optimizing the conditions which promote the achievement of excellence in the arts and sciences, and (2) that the goodness of an action is to be assessed in accordance with the degree to which it maximizes such forms of excellence.¹⁷

Perfectionism, Rawls suggests, in its most extreme variants, calls upon us not to flinch at the moral or political consequences of a complete single-mindedness of purpose with respect to the goal of “producing” great men. Thus, Rawls, immediately following the passage quoted above, goes on to say: “The principle of perfectionism is obviously more demanding the higher it is pitched.” Nietzsche, it turns out, is an extreme instance of this (already extreme) sort of perfectionist: “The absolute weight that Nietzsche sometimes gives the lives of great men such as

Socrates and Goethe is unusual. At places he says that mankind must continually strive to produce great individuals" (TJ p. 325).

That's almost Russell's phrase again: "the production of a great man." But it takes on an even more ominous tone in this context. Rawls continues: "We give value to our lives by working for the good of the highest specimens" (ibid.). He offers this as a paraphrase of a quotation from Nietzsche. He precedes this paraphrase with the words: "Particularly striking is Nietzsche's statement" and supplies the following passage from SE as textual evidence:

Mankind must work continually to produce individual great human beings – this and nothing else is the task. . . . [F]or the question is this, how can your life, the individual life, retain the highest value, the deepest significance? . . . Only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable specimens [as quoted by Rawls, p. 325n].

I will henceforth refer to the above as "Rawls's version of the focal passage," and to the corresponding passage from Nietzsche's essay (of which the above is a translation of an excerpt) as "the focal passage." Rawls's version of the focal passage is the only textual support adduced by him for the claim that Nietzsche adheres to "the strong version of perfectionism." In a moment, we will look closely both at the context of the focal passage and at the translation of it upon which Rawls is relying. Suffice it to say for now that this quotation, in this translation, is a great favorite among commentators who read Nietzsche as a perfectionist.

As the first of two examples of how influential Rawls's treatment of these matters has proven to be, consider the following passage from Alan Donagan's book *The Theory of Morality*:

Yet, although the extent of their divergence is disputed, utilitarianism is evidently incompatible with traditional morality. And even among academic philosophers traditional morality has remained too strong, as a disposition, for many of them to have been able to embrace utilitarianism with a tranquil mind. Unfortunately, the only other constructive doctrine to have gained academic recognition has been perfectionism, which is representatively expressed by Nietzsche's answer to his own question: [then follows a *verbatim* quotation of Rawls's version of the focal passage].¹⁸

Donagan uncritically adopts Rawls's placement of perfectionism in a box together with utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is held by Donagan to be "evidently incompatible with traditional morality" because it instructs us to perform actions that maximize the happiness of the greatest number, even when such actions belong to the category of actions which "traditional morality" would regard as morally *unthinkable*. (If, for instance, you can save ten lives by killing your grandmother then, according to a

"strict utilitarian," you should overcome your squeamishness and do away with your grandmother.) Nietzsche's theory (as expressed in Rawls's version of the focal passage) is taken to have exactly this (teleological) structure – prescribing all and only those actions that promote the greatest good (even when such actions are by the lights of "traditional morality" unthinkable). Nietzscheanism is taken to differ from strict utilitarianism only in that it substitutes a different conception of wherein the greatest good consists. (If, for instance, you can optimize the degree of genius in the world by sacrificing the lives of countless mediocre individuals, then, according to the strict perfectionist, you should sacrifice them.) Hence perfectionism, according to Donagan, resembles utilitarianism in being a theory few are able to embrace with "a tranquil mind."

Thomas Hurka's recent book on perfectionism provides the second example of how influential Rawls's treatment of these matters has proven to be. Hurka, like Donagan, follows Rawls in taking it for granted that a perfectionist moral theory is a teleological theory – one that seeks to maximize those states of affairs that it deems desirable and that evaluates moral principles primarily according to the degree to which they maximize optimally. Nietzsche, however, according to Hurka, favors a particularly pernicious principle that rejects distributive neutrality in an anti-egalitarian direction. Since it is the opposite of Rawls's "maximin" principle, he suggests this principle be called "maximax." Maximax, according to Hurka, finds its "clearest expression" in a passage from SE:

According to maximax, each agent's overriding goal should be not a sum or average of lifetime value, but the greatest lifetime value of the single most perfect individual or, if perfections are not fully comparable, of the few most perfect individuals. There is a single goal for all agents to aim at, but not all agents figure in it. Global value is determined entirely by the good of the few best individuals. . . . Like averaging within lives, maximax across them finds its clearest expression in Nietzsche: [then follows a *verbatim* quotation of Rawls's version of the focal passage].¹⁹

Hurka's book, unlike Donagan's, seeks to defend perfectionism. It does so, however, not by challenging Rawls's characterization of the structure of the theories held by the major figures in the perfectionist tradition of moral thought, but rather by retaining the broad outlines of that characterization and isolating Nietzsche as an unrepresentatively nasty sort of perfectionist – one who seeks to base a calculus of social and cultural goods on teleological principles of an excessively anti-egalitarian nature: "Nietzsche equates the aggregate excellence in a society with the excellence of its few best members, and wants social policy to maximize

that.³⁰ (Where in his writings, it is worth pausing to ask, does Nietzsche ever address a question of "social policy"?) Rawls had already recast Nietzsche's theory so that it would yield a sketch of an answer to the question. What sorts of goods should a "social policy" seek to maximize? Hurka, with the aid of the maximax principle, fills in the sketch. Under the guise of merely paraphrasing (Rawls's version of) the focal passage into a contemporary moral-philosophical idiom, Hurka is thus able sharply to distinguish Nietzsche's brand of perfectionism from other (teleological) variants of perfectionism.

The final result is that a mode of ethical thought that once could seem sublime (and not only to Nathan Leopold Jr. and Richard Loeb) can now only seem monstrous. But the invitation to read Nietzsche as proposing some such form of moral arithmetic was already present in Rawls's and Donagan's – not to mention Hitler's – understandings of Nietzsche. Hurka's maximax principle merely casts into an unblushingly explicit form a reading of Nietzsche that has been with us ever since his sister first took control of his literary estate.

Rawls, as is his way, touches on these issues far more gingerly than does a Hitler or a Hurka. He expresses his central worry concerning what he takes to be the upshot of Nietzsche's perfectionism in the following terms:

The extent to which . . . a view is perfectionist depends, then, upon the weight given to the claims of excellence and culture. If for example it is maintained that in themselves the achievements of the Greeks in philosophy, science, and art justified the ancient practice of slavery . . . surely the conception is highly perfectionist. The requirements of perfection override the strong claims of liberty (TJ p. 325).

This raises a question we will need to go into later: Does Nietzsche seek to *maximize* certain goods at the expense of certain other goods (such as liberty, justice)? The nature of the Nietzschean perfectionist's interest in culture looks to Rawls and other readers of Nietzsche as if it conflicts (1) with the interests of *liberty*, and (2) with the interests of *justice* (in that it seeks to enhance the liberty of a few at the expense of the liberty of many). Rawls sums up the inherently anti-egalitarian nature of perfectionism as follows: "The capacity for a higher life is a ground for treating men unequally" (TJ p. 326n). He offers the following account of what he takes the content of such "a higher life" to be: "In order to arrive at the ethic of perfectionism, we should have to attribute to the parties a prior acceptance of some natural duty, say the duty to develop persons of a certain style and aesthetic grace, and to advance the pursuit of knowledge and the cultivation of the arts" (TJ p. 328).

"A certain style and aesthetic grace," "the pursuit of knowledge," and "the cultivation of the arts" – these are the goods the perfectionist wants to see attained by some people, and its promotion is so important that other people can languish.³¹ The emphasis here on "a certain style and aesthetic grace" connects Rawls's interpretation of Nietzsche with that of Philippa Foot and others, according to which Nietzsche is concerned to champion aesthetic values at the expense of moral values. We will return to this issue. But first we need to take a closer look at the focal passage and the passages in in SE that surround it.

The Focal Passage

If the genius in art is always the first, the throng of imitators being always in his train, in morality, each agent has the prerogative of a genius. . . . [H]e who "imitates" the example of a moral creator or a sublime model is in his turn a creator. . . . The imitator of the [artistic] genius is a simple, talent; but the imitator of a hero is himself a hero.³²

The passage that Rawls, Donagan, and Hurka all invoke (apparently) concludes with the thought that we should live "for the good of the rarest and most valuable specimens." The time has come to take a closer look at that passage. First, let us look at it in the form that Rawls supplies it (quoted from a book on Nietzsche by R. J. Hollingdale):

Mankind must work continually to produce individual great human beings – this and nothing else is the task . . . for the question is this: how can your life, the individual life, retain the highest value, the deepest significance? . . . Only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable specimens.³³

If you listen to that quote out of context, it certainly seems to fit the reading of Nietzsche to which Russell, Rawls, and Shaw, among others, subscribe. Here is how Nietzsche's German reads in context:

Mitunter is es schwerer, eine Sache zuzugeben als sie einzusehen; und so gerade mag es den meisten ergehen, wenn sie den Satz überlegen: "die Menschheit soll fortwährend daran arbeiten, einzelne grosse Menschen zu erzeugen – und dies und nichts andere is ihre Aufgabe." . . . Denn die Frage lautet doch so: wie erhält dein, des Einzelnen Leben den höchsten Wert, die tiefste Bedeutung? Wie ist es am wenigsten verschwendet? Gewiss nur dadurch, dass du zum Vorteile der seltensten und wertvollsten Exemplare lebst.

Two things should strike us here. First of all, the opening sentence of the passage Rawls, Donagan, and Hurka all adduce (and the meaning of which they take to be self-evident) occurs in quotation marks in the

such works a rule for their reproduction, but rather by treating the products of genius as exemplars to be imitated. Judgments of taste possess what Kant calls an "exemplary necessity" – "a necessity of the assent of *everyone* to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that we are unable to state" (ibid., §18).

In SE Nietzsche is concerned to preserve the following four features of Kant's theory: (1) genius represents a kind of excellence which makes a demand on us; (2) the kind of demand it makes cannot be formulated in terms of an explicit rule and cannot be attained through following a rule-governed procedure; (3) this demand, its amorphous and inarticulate character notwithstanding, requires our assent; and (4) assent in such a case expresses itself in an effort to treat the source of the demand as an exemplar to be "followed" or "emulated." The question over which dispute arises is: In what manner are they to be "followed" or "emulated"?

Nietzsche sides with the German Romantics in their characteristically Romantic emendations of Kantian theory. The Romantics agree with Kant that the concept of *mere imitation* has no place in the characterization of the accomplishment of genius, but they go further and argue (1) that imitation has no proper place in fine art altogether, and (2) that (as Friedrich Schlegel puts it) "ethics and aesthetics should seek to become one," and thus that mere imitation – as opposed to emulation – should have no place in ethics either: Only the creative individual can be truly moral, and the pursuit of artistic excellence thus has an intrinsically moral dimension. (This line of thought was seen by some Romantics as a radicalization of the thought in *The Critique of Practical Reason* that mere conformity to the moral law does not suffice to confer moral worth upon an action.)

In the light of these emendations, the Romantics modify Kant's account of the relation we bear to an exemplar in the following two respects: (1) one emulates the example of genius only insofar as one strives to attain to genius oneself, and (2) it is morally incumbent upon everyone to strive to attain some form of genius (whether or not one is, in the narrow sense, an "artist").²⁶ To be an exemplar, according to this revised version of the Kantian theory, is to be someone whose way of life – whose effort to exemplify an answer to the question "How should one live?" – places a demand on others to emulate his example in a non-imitative fashion.

Nietzsche's numerous polemical wisecracks about Romanticism notwithstanding, this Romantic line of thought evidently left its mark on him: "A: 'What? You want no imitators?' B: 'I do not want to have people imitate my example; I wish that *everybody* would fashion his own

German. Indeed, the rest of §6 of Nietzsche's essay is offered as a commentary (one might say a reading) of *that* proposition – a proposition to which Nietzsche predicts we will at first find it difficult to accede. Second, the word that particularly jars in Rawls's version of the passage – especially against the background of Nietzsche's appropriation by the Nazis – is the word "specimens." It invites a biologicistic reading. But the English word "specimens" is a questionable translation of the German word that occurs here: *Exemplare* – which, after all, has an English cognate.

The term *Exemplar* and its adjectival form *exemplarisch* figure importantly in the history of German philosophical discussions of the concept of genius – a history in which, among others, Herder, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, Schlegel, and Novalis participate. Its locus classicus, unsurprisingly, is to be found in Kant. The most influential expression of Kant's theory of genius is §§46–50 of *The Critique of Judgment*. The following excerpts are the most pertinent for an understanding of the significance that the term *Exemplar* comes to acquire in subsequent German aesthetic theory:

[F]ine art is only possible as a product of genius. . . . [G]enius (1) is a *talent* for producing that for which no definite rule can be given: and not an aptitude in the way of cleverness for what can be learned according to some rule; and . . . consequently *originality* must be its primary property. (2) Since there may also be original nonsense, the products of genius must at the same time be models, i.e. be *exemplary* [*exemplarisch*]; and, consequently, though not themselves derived from imitation, they must serve that purpose for others, i.e. as a standard or rule of estimating. . . . Genius . . . is the exemplary originality of the natural endowments of an individual in the *free* employment of his cognitive faculties.²⁴

Here Kant only employs the adjectival form *exemplarisch*. Elsewhere he also employs the noun; for example, in §57 of his *Anthropology*, "On Originality of the Cognitive Power, or Genius":

[W]e apply this term [genius] only to artists. . . . Moreover, we do not apply it to mere imitators: we reserve it for artists who are disposed to produce their works *originally*, and, finally, for them only when their work is *exemplary* – that is, when it serves as an example (*exemplar*) to be imitated. So a man's genius is the exemplary originality of his talent.²⁵

According to Kant's theory of taste, taste cannot be acquired by learning to judge according to some antecedently specifiable standards or principles of aesthetic excellence. Aesthetic excellence, by its very nature, resists prescription. Taste can be cultivated only through the contemplation of exemplary instances of aesthetic production – what Kant calls "works of genius": works produced in a nonimitative fashion. Subsequent artists must practice their taste, not by attempting to derive from

example, as *I do*" (GS 255).²⁷ But Kant had his reasons for restricting the scope of the concept of genius. How can everyone attain to genius? It makes no sense to require of *everybody* something more than most are able to do – more than mere imitation of an exemplar. Nietzsche is thus concerned to repudiate a further assumption of the Kantian theory of genius: Kant's claim that genius represents an expression of *talent* – an "originality of the *natural endowments* of an individual." This concern, as we shall soon see, lies at the heart of Nietzsche's early essay.

It becomes impossible to see any of this, however, if *Exemplare* is translated as "specimens." Hollingdale, when he retranslated the focal passage (later in his career, when he translated the whole of SE), changed his own earlier translation, deciding instead on the English cognate "exemplars." It seems reasonable to suppose that, when turning to the task of translating the work as a whole, the question as to which English word to use came to seem of considerable importance to Hollingdale.²⁸ For the concept of the exemplar is one that is threaded throughout the argument of both the second and the third of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*.²⁹ Here is Hollingdale's later translation of the passage in context:

Sometimes it is harder to accede to a thing than to see its truth; and that is how most people may feel when they reflect on the proposition: "Mankind must work continually at the production of individual great men – that and nothing else is the task." . . . For the question is this: how can your life, the individual life, receive the highest value, the deepest significance? How can it be least squandered? Certainly only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable exemplars (SE p. 162).³⁰

As with any writer who depends on the accuracy of his prose as much as Nietzsche does, matters of translation are never *mere* matters of translation. What rests on the choice of the English word "exemplars" here? What is the difference between saying these are "specimens" and saying they are "exemplars"?³¹

Specimens are representative samples of a particular class or genus. This encourages the elitist reading of Nietzsche, which assumes that he wishes to promote the interests of a certain class of privileged individuals, and that the interests of anyone who is not in the class is of (at best) only secondary interest to him. If one reads Nietzsche as presenting the great human being to us as a specimen, then it becomes natural to assume that what the great human being is a specimen of is a genus to which we do not belong (of which we ourselves could not serve as specimens).³² Specimens are characterized by their *traits*; exemplars (in Nietzsche's sense), by their *excellence*. One cannot serve as a specimen of a genus unless one exhibits traits all (nondeficient) members of the genus

possess. But it is the whole point of an exemplar (in Nietzsche's sense) that other members of the genus do not share its excellence. A specimen exhibits what is essential in order to count as a member of a genus. An exemplar exemplifies one way of excelling *qua* member of a genus. A specimen is to be compared and contrasted with another specimen (that is, one with different traits and hence belonging to a *different* genus). An exemplar (in Nietzsche's sense) is to be contrasted with members of its *own* genus (whom it surpasses in the relevant respect).

Nietzsche's notion of an exemplar thus involves three aspects: (1) *com-monality of genus* – an exemplar is to be compared and contrasted with members of its own genus; (2) *exemplarity* – an exemplar illustrates a feature(s) of interest which other members of the genus display to varying degrees; (3) *exemplariness* – an exemplar is distinguished by the pronounced degree to which it displays the feature(s) in question, with the further implication that this represents a virtue or perfection.

These three features of the concept of an exemplar work together in Nietzsche's discussion: the exemplariness of an exemplar consists in its perspicuous realization of some possibility that, in its perfected form, is clearly recognizable as an excellence – an excellence to which other members of the genus can attain. As a matter of ordinary English grammar, it suffices if something fulfills the second condition (that of exemplarity) in order for it to qualify as an exemplar; but, in order to qualify as an exemplar in Nietzsche's sense, the third condition (that of exemplariness) must be fulfilled as well. Using the term successively in each of these senses, one could say: To be an exemplar in Nietzsche's sense one must be an exemplary exemplar. The third condition must be satisfied if the great man is to play an educative role in our lives: His exemplarity is the mark of his (essential) relatedness to us, his exemplariness is the mark of his (inessential) difference from us.

When we situate the focal passage back into its context in the essay, it becomes clear that you, the reader, are asked to ask yourself a question. The question you should ask yourself is: How can your life, the individual life, attain the highest value and the deepest significance? That's a question Nietzsche says you must ask yourself in solitude; and, in order to answer it, you must, at least inchoately, avail yourself of a conception of an exemplar – of the kind of being for whose good you should live. For Nietzsche, it is part of what it is to ask and answer this question for oneself that one arrives at the formulation of a concrete representation of whom one seeks to become – a representation enabling one to focus one's conception of what it is to which one aspires. It is the role of an exemplar to provide in this way a concrete representation of how one should live and to what one should aspire.³³ It is only through attempt-

ing to supply oneself in this manner with a paradigmatic example of an answer to the question "How should I live?" (or as Nietzsche prefers to put it: "How can I confer upon my life the greatest value?"), and then by attempting to emulate (as opposed to imitate) the example in question, that one eventually learns to answer the question for oneself.

In the paragraph immediately after the one in which he presents us with that question, Nietzsche goes on to say that by coming to this resolve (to live your life for the good of these exemplars) the individual thereby does something further: "By coming to this resolve, he places himself within the circle of *culture* [Nietzsche's emphasis]; for culture is the child of each individual's self-knowledge and dissatisfaction with himself" (SE p. 162).

The position of the word "culture" should interest us after the stress we've seen readers such as Rawls and Shaw place on that notion on Nietzsche's behalf. We are offered here a provisional gloss on this concept: Nietzsche says "culture is the child of *each* individual's self-knowledge and dissatisfaction with himself." How are these exemplars to provide avenues of self-dissatisfaction and self-knowledge? Face to face with both the exemplarity and the exemplariness of an exemplar – his being (generically) the same and yet so much more excellent – it is not hard to see how dissatisfaction with oneself might ensue. But how so self-knowledge? The question of elitism returns: What does it require to achieve this self-knowledge? Is this the prerequisite that restricts the scope of the genus? Does Nietzsche think that some special gift is required to follow the call of an exemplar?

What Nietzsche says next, immediately after what I have quoted above, is: Anyone who believes in culture is thereby saying: "I see above me something higher and more human than I am; let everyone help me to attain it, as I will help everyone who knows and suffers as I do" (ibid.). Notice: "let *everyone* help me to attain it, as I will help *everyone*." Nietzsche is clear on the following point: The person who believes in culture excludes no one else who believes in culture from his concern. Who believes in culture? Apparently anyone who says: "I see something higher and more human than I am." But what is this "something higher"? Is it some other person? And hence: not me?

Writing for Everyone and No One

You should demand genius from everyone, but not expect it. A Kantian would call this the categorical imperative of genius.³⁴

What does it take for one to be able to say the words "I see above me something higher and more human than I am" – which we are told one

needs to say in order to enter (what Nietzsche calls) "the circle of culture"? The answer to this question is prepared by the opening paragraph of SE:

The human being who does not wish to belong to the mass needs only to cease being comfortable with himself; let him follow his conscience, which calls to him: "Be yourself! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring is not you yourself" (p. 127, trans. amended).

What one apparently needs is the capacity to say to oneself: "I am not myself." How can I not be myself? Nietzsche suggests that when you say these words ("This is not *my* self") to your "self," you acknowledge the existence of a self that is not who you presently are.³⁵ Nietzsche courts this paradox of the absent self throughout his writing. The subtitle of *Ecce Homo* is "How One Becomes What One Is"; and at scattered moments throughout his authorship, Nietzsche hurls at his reader the enigmatic imperative "Become who you are!"³⁶ In the passage above, he tells us that this is, in fact, the imperative that our own conscience issues to us.³⁷ It is a person's conscience that calls: "Be yourself! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring is not you yourself." To *have* a conscience is to be able to hear a voice within oneself saying this to oneself. So his writing aspires to occupy the position of our conscience – as if we had somehow severed our connection with our own conscience, and his writing aimed to restore it. Yet Nietzsche also insinuates here that this is a connection we ourselves can establish at any moment: "The man who belongs to the mass *needs only* to cease being comfortable with himself."

This suggests that the merest of efforts is required. This is a further paradox Nietzsche will court: only the merest – and yet, nevertheless, the greatest of effort is required. What is needed is the most difficult thing of all – and yet anyone is capable of it at any time. This paradox, according to Nietzsche, is fundamental to the logic of self-knowledge. All one need do is become uncomfortable with the discrepancy between oneself and one's self – between who we are at present, and the self that is somehow ours and yet presently at a distance from us. So we have a specification of Nietzsche's audience here: He is addressing the person who can become uncomfortable with himself. His audience would therefore seem to comprise everyone who has a conscience.³⁸ This should raise for us the question: Who has a conscience? (If someone is being excluded from Nietzsche's audience here, do we have a clear proposal as to how he should go about including him?)

To *have* a conscience, for Nietzsche, is distinct from being *able to attend* to one's conscience. This again, however, is something for which no special talent is required. Yet virtually no one seems able to do it.

Nietzsche sees us all living lives dedicated to the business of fleeing from a voice that threatens incessantly to whisper something in our ear. Thus, the object of our lives tends to become one of elaborately arranging never to be sufficiently alone to hear what we have to say to ourselves:

In individual moments we all know how the most elaborate arrangements of our life are made only so as to flee from the tasks we actually ought to be performing, how we would like to hide our head somewhere as though our hundred-eyed conscience could not find us out there. . . . Haste is universal because everyone is in flight from himself. . . . [W]e live in fear of memory and of turning inward. But what is it that assails us so frequently, what is the gnat that will not let us sleep? Every moment of our life wants to say something to us, but we refuse to listen. . . . We are afraid that when we are alone and quiet something will be whispered into our ear, and so we hate quietness and deafen ourselves with sociability (SE p. 158).

This theme (of the self evading conversation with itself) is present from the opening pages of the essay. The second paragraph of SE begins: "Every youthful soul hears this call – 'Be yourself! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring is not you yourself' – day and night and trembles when he hears it" (p. 127).³⁹ The responsibility for our failure to attend to this call lies with us; for Nietzsche suggests that, if we choose to, we are able to hear what we need to hear at any time.

As I have already noted, Nietzsche is famous for saying that he writes "for only a few"; and I observed that this is generally taken to mean that all but a few are excluded from his audience. A careful reading of SE reveals that Nietzsche understands the process of exclusion with which the work is concerned to be one that is self-imposed: If most of us are excluded from the demand that his philosophy places on us, it is not because he excludes us. Richard Rorty writes: "Nietzsche . . . relegate[s] the vast majority of humanity to the status of dying animals."⁴⁰ On the reading of Nietzsche proposed here, if we are relegated to such a status, it is because we relegate ourselves.

Nietzsche's work is unquestionably esoteric; but the esotericism of his writing is not a function of the way in which it seeks to delimit the class of its readers in advance.⁴¹ It is rather a function of its criterion for what counts as its having been seriously read. It demands the *transformation* of its reader as the mark of its reception. Such writing divides its audience into insiders and outsiders – not, however, because it speaks in a language that only a few are equipped to understand. If its audience proves in the end to consist of only a few individuals, it is not because others are in principle debarred from the pursuit of the ideal it sets forth. One might be tempted to say that the esotericism of such work is simply a function of its difficulty. But it is a peculiar difficulty if what it turns on

is an acknowledgment of that which each of us cannot help but already know. Yet this, according to Nietzsche, is where the difficulty of his philosophy lies.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is subtitled "A Book for Everyone and No One."⁴² This paradoxical dedication encodes both the esoteric structure of Nietzsche's teaching and the exoteric moment in Nietzsche's undertaking that the elitist reading of his work occludes: namely, that his books are, in a sense, written "for everyone." Zarathustra, after having attracted a number of individuals whom he describes as his "disciples," turns to them and says:

Now I go alone, my disciples. You too go now alone. Thus I want it. Verily I counsel you: go away from me and resist Zarathustra. And even better: be ashamed of him. One repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil. Why do you not want to pluck at my wreath? You revere me, but what if your reverence tumbles one day? Beware lest a statue slay you. You say you believe in Zarathustra. But what matters Zarathustra? You are my believers, but what matter all believers? You had not yet sought yourselves, and you found me. Thus do all believers. Therefore all faith amounts to so little. Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves. And only when you have all denied me, will I return to you (Z I:22).

What Zarathustra faults in his "disciples" is precisely their discipleship. Zarathustra's auditors had not yet sought themselves and they found him. Nietzsche's text here, as his texts do, is furnishing us with directions for how to read it. It in effect says to us: "You had not yet sought yourself, and you found this text. Now this text bids you: Lose me and find yourself. The text wishes to elicit your resistance. Your posture of admiration – your mere belief in what the text says – casts suspicion not only on you, but on what you admire. If your teacher encourages discipleship, you should not only be ashamed of yourself but of your teacher."

Of course, Nietzsche is at his most seductive at moments such as this, in which he bids us to renounce him. He knows that an admiration for a teacher who claims he wants no followers can nurture a false sense of independence. He knows that the gesture of rejecting the reader will attract her. But he also knows how to turn his seductiveness to his own ends. The burden of throwing a reader back on herself is distributed over specific moments in the writing – moments that require that the text first be "deciphered" before it can be understood.

Frustrated by how most of his readers remained oblivious to the demands his writing sought to place on them, during the year 1886 Nietzsche contributed a new preface to each of his major works (and, from then on, continued the practice of providing his books with a cautionary preface). In each preface one finds a discussion of how the book

inclination to enter into premature agreement with the author. One of the "marks of the good writer" is that he "prefers to be understood rather than admired" (HH II:1:138), and that he be versed in the art of defeating those forms of admiration that obstruct understanding.

The relation Nietzsche wishes to encourage between his reader and his text is fundamentally of the same character as the relation he wishes to encourage between us and the great human being. What sort of relation is this? Zarathustra provides a preliminary answer to this question: "Only when you have denied me will I return to you." The implication is that one has not learned anything from the author of this work unless one has in some way denied him. Nietzsche writes books that demand of their reader that he learn to reach the point at which he can throw them away.⁴⁴ The sign of our genuine appropriation of them is that we ultimately reject them. Of course, we may want to throw them away immediately. Nietzsche pictures us as repelled by those books that might educate us, desperate to evade a claim they make upon us, while at the same time clinging to some other book (one we may think of as *The Book*). An integral part of what he seeks to teach is when to throw a book away.

When it is pursued in the resolute and uncompromising spirit of a Nietzsche, the paradoxicality of such a literary undertaking is not easily overestimated: It requires a form of writing that seeks to enter into agreement with its reader in order to provoke him to disagreement. Nietzsche's prose seeks alternately to ingratiate and disingratiate. Thus, he is able to say of one of his works: "I do not allow that anyone knows that book who has not at some time been profoundly wounded and at some time profoundly delighted by every word in it" (GM P:8).⁴⁵ The numerous labels and subtitles he confers on his various writings announce his intention to write against the grain of his readers' sensibility – "an antidotal work," "a corrective to the age," "a polemic." The last of these is the subtitle of GM, subtitled in German "*Eine Streitschrift*" – a piece of writing that seeks to pick a quarrel, to engage in confrontation. Referring to one of his earlier works, Nietzsche writes:

Even then my real concern was something much more important than hypothesis-mongering. . . . What was at stake was the value of morality – and over this I had to come to terms almost exclusively with my great teacher Schopenhauer, to whom that book of mine, the passion and the concealed contradiction of that book, addressed itself as if to a contemporary (– for that book, too, was a "polemic" [*eine "Streitschrift"*]) (GM P:5).⁴⁶

SE similarly seeks "to come to terms" with Nietzsche's "great teacher" – to demonstrate the teacher's capacity to educate by showing that his

in question is to be read, along with some observation such as the following: "Nowadays it is not only my habit, it is also my taste – a malicious taste perhaps? – no longer to write anything which does not reduce to despair every sort of person who is 'in a hurry.'" ⁴³

The final sentence of the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals* puts the point even more dramatically, observing that writings such as his are "readable" only for one who is able to practice the requisite "art of reading" – and for that "one thing is necessary above all, something for which one has almost to be a cow: *das Wiederkäuen*." A *Wiederkäuer* is a ruminant, and *Wiederkäuen* means "ruminating" – or literally, to re-chew, to hold in one's mouth and work over with one's teeth thoroughly before attempting to digest. Nietzsche's works are to a reader as vegetable matter is to a ruminant – only assimilable after painstaking preliminary processing.

Of course, some readers will neither ruminate nor be reduced to despair, but will just continue to hurry past each remark, assimilating only those remarks that (appear to) bear their meaning on their sleeve. For the benefit of such readers, within the body of each of his texts, Nietzsche issues the occasional speeding ticket and provides further instructions as to how the work in question is to be read. It is in the context of his offering such instructions that one most often encounters Nietzsche's insistence that he does not write for "just anybody": "It is not by any means necessarily an objection to a book when anyone finds it impossible to understand; perhaps this was part of the author's intention – he did not want to be understood by just 'anyone'" (GS 381).

Nietzsche calls the art of reading that his books presuppose – and that they aim to impart – *philology*, saying that he writes only for those who are willing to *learn* this art:

A book like this . . . is in no hurry; we both, I just as much as my book, are friends of *lento*. . . . I am a philologist still, that is to say, a teacher of slow reading. . . . For philology is that venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to take the long route, to take time, to become still, to become slow – it is a goldsmith's art and connoisseurship of the *word* which has nothing but delicate, cautious work to do and achieves nothing if it does not achieve its *lento*. . . . [I]n the midst of this age of "work," that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to "get everything done" at once . . . – this art does not so easily get anything done, it *teaches* to read well, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously, before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers. . . . My patient friends, this book desires for itself only perfect readers and philologists: *learn* to read me well! (D P:5).

In order for a work to teach the art of *lento* – and wean the reader from his love of *allegro* – the work must first be able to defeat the reader's

student is more than disciple. Nietzsche's commentators, if they bother to mention SE, invariably remark on how poorly conceived the essay is: Although Nietzsche claims he admires Schopenhauer greatly, on the whole he does not talk about him very much; and furthermore, the views put forward in the essay seem to contradict Schopenhauer's own philosophical views. Zarathustra says to his disciples: "Only when you have denied me will I return to you. Only when Nietzsche denies Schopenhauer does Schopenhauer return to him – the author of the essay is now able to invoke Schopenhauer as his educator only because he has denied him."⁴⁷

Nietzsche's Concept of an Exemplar

One can only become a philosopher, not be one. As soon as one thinks one is a philosopher, one stops becoming one.⁴⁸

We are now ready to tackle the following three questions: (1) Who are *my* exemplars? (2) What is (or should be) *my relation* to an exemplar? (3) *What* does an exemplar disclose? We will take them in reverse order. Shortly after the focal passage, Nietzsche writes:

It is hard to create in anyone this condition of intrepid self-knowledge because it is impossible to teach love; for it is love alone that can bestow on the soul, not only a clear, discriminating and self-contemptuous view of itself, but also the desire to look beyond itself and to seek with all its might for a higher self as yet still concealed from it (SE p. 163).

There is at play, in the beginning of this passage, an attitude of contempt – but it is directed at our (present) selves, a contempt of ourselves that we are told, we can only achieve through love.⁴⁹ The end of this passage answers the third of our questions. What does an exemplar disclose? It discloses to you your own "higher self" – which is "as yet still concealed" from you. That you possess such a "higher self" is a central topic of the essay: "[F]or your true nature lies, not concealed deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you usually take yourself to be" (SE p. 129).

We can now begin to see part of what is fundamentally misguided in the elitist reading of Nietzsche: If an exemplar is to awaken you to your "higher self," then she can't be understood as somebody who is qualitatively unlike you. One may be tempted to exclaim at this point: "But what, according to Nietzsche, *is* an exemplar? Is it someone else, some exemplary *other*; and thus *not* me? Or is it *me*, or some eventual state of myself?" Nietzsche purposely allows the term "exemplar" to slide between these two significations. For your "higher self," according to him,

comes into view only through your confrontation with what you trust and admire in an exemplary other. The lineaments of such a self are not specifiable in advance of such a confrontation. Thus, (what Nietzsche calls) *your* higher self necessarily confronts you, at first, as *other*. Among those most valuable exemplars for whose good you are to live (if your life is to acquire "the highest value") is the one you are to become, if you are "to become who you are."

Rawls, Donagan, and Hurka take the focal passage's answer to its own question ("How can *your* life, the individual life, receive the highest value, the deepest significance?") to be that you should live in subservience to great men, helping them to do what they need to do, thereby serving humanity by raising the standard of humanity as a whole. This leaves out what the context of the focal passage makes clear: that your life – "the individual life" that is yours alone to lead – can acquire the highest value and the deepest significance only if *your higher self* is among the exemplars for whose good you are to live. Nietzsche takes for granted just what the elitist denies:

Everyone has his good days when he discovers his higher self; and true humanity demands that *everyone* be evaluated only in the light of this condition and not merely in the light of his workaday unfreedom and servitude (HH I:624, my emphases).

Not only does *everyone* have a higher self, and not only is everyone *able* to "discover his higher self," but, Nietzsche says here, there are days when everyone *in fact* discovers his higher self. The difficulty lies not where the elitist imagines it to lie (namely, in what it takes to possess or acquire the capacity to make such a discovery) but elsewhere: namely, in what it takes to remain faithful to what one thus discovers – and it belongs to the nature of such a difficulty that it is one that is equally difficult for everyone.

Nietzsche pictures you as split in two: You consist of who you are now and who (he thinks) you really are – the self you could or should be. It is the latter *for* whom he is writing, but it is the former *to* whom he writes. (A yet closer reading, as we shall see, reveals that he pictures each of us as a *series* of such selves, each in flight from, and yet each also representing a stepping stone toward, its own unique, exemplary successor.) One aim of this essay of Nietzsche's is to furnish an example of what it means to *write* "for the good of the highest exemplars," and hence to furnish an illustration of *one* way of following the instruction of the focal passage – the way that the author of SE has chosen.

Rawls and Shaw both imagine that Nietzsche is concerned above all with the great artist or philosopher – and that he is concerned with them

rather than with everyone else. But what he *says* he is interested in is *our* relation to the artist and the philosopher. This takes us to our second question: What is the nature of the affiliation that each of us bears to an exemplar? Shortly before the focal passage, Nietzsche has this to say about our relation to the artist and the philosopher: "It is incontestable that we are all related and allied to the saint, just as we are related to the philosopher and artist" (SE p. 161). Later on in SE he says quite explicitly who he thinks should feel addressed by the exemplariness of the artist and the philosopher: "The artist and the philosopher . . . strike home at only a few, while they ought to strike home at everybody" (SE p. 178). Nietzsche insists here on what I earlier called the *exemplarity* of the artist and the philosopher – that we are all members of the same genus. They *ought* to strike home at each and every one of us.

Nietzsche's hubris lies in his wishing to occupy the position of the great artist or the great philosopher for us, interpolating himself between us and the unattained self that calls to us. In the absence of our having, in our "laziness," supplied ourselves with a genuine exemplar who requires of us the task of our own self-transformation, he forces himself upon us.⁵⁰ He makes no attempt to conceal the arrogance of his undertaking: such arrogance, he thinks, is a precondition of his enterprise. It is an arrogance that requires its own special sort of humility – one that lies in the author's being so completely interested in us, his reader: in our mutual relations as reader and author, in our relation to other authors, in our relation to other potential exemplars, and, above all, in our relation to that exemplar that Nietzsche awkwardly persists in calling our "self."

Immediately after introducing the concept of an "as yet still concealed higher self," Nietzsche continues: "Thus only he who has attached his heart to some great human being is by that act *consecrated to culture*" (SE p. 163).⁵¹ I have broken this passage off in mid-sentence. The phrase "only he who has attached his heart to some great human being" calls forth the image of a disciple, apparently inviting the (elitist) construal of the essay. This proposal – that one attach one's heart to some great human being – provides the best textual support the essay has to offer for one aspect of the reading of Nietzsche that Darrow, Rawls, and Russell take for granted: Nietzsche calls upon us (ordinary folk) to worship the great man, place him on a pedestal, and sacrifice our own good for his.

But in the second half of this sentence, he specifies what he has in mind: "the sign of that consecration is that one is ashamed of oneself without any accompanying feeling of distress." This is a critical concept for Nietzsche: the concept of a distinctively self-revelatory sort of shame. When one experiences this sort of shame, it is the sign that one is on the

path to self-overcoming – that one has entered that "condition of interpid self-knowledge" that enables one to attain the right sort of "dis-criminating and self-contemptuous view" of one's (present) self, thus filling one with "the desire to look beyond" one's present self and to seek "a higher self as yet still concealed" from one (*ibid.*). The characteristic mark of this sort of shame is that one is able to experience it – that is, feel genuinely ashamed of who or what one is – without thereby experiencing the feeling of distress that ordinarily accompanies shame. The role of an exemplar is to occasion the experience of this distinctive sort of shame.

It is worth contrasting this (Nietzschean notion of a) special sort of shame with ordinary shame. The latter is an important topic in Kant, and Rawls occasionally alludes to it and Kant's discussion of it, as, for example, in the following passage:

Kant's main aim is to deepen and to justify Rousseau's idea that liberty is acting in accordance with a law that we give to ourselves. . . . Kant speaks of the failure to act on the moral law as giving rise to shame and not to feelings of guilt. . . . Such actions therefore strike at our self-respect . . . and the experience of this loss is shame (TJ p. 256).

There are parallels between what Rawls says here about how such actions "strike at" us and what Nietzsche says about how the great man should "strike home." But what interests us at the moment are the differences. Kantian moral shame is an emotion that one strives to overcome (or avoid) through the cultivation of virtue; whereas Nietzschean impersonal shame is an emotion that one strives to engender in oneself so as to overcome (or avoid) a false sense of virtue. The former seeks the restoration of genuine self-respect; the latter, the exposure of counterfeit self-respect. Rawls explicates moral shame as the emotion that follows upon the loss of something valuable: namely, "our sense of our own worth" (*ibid.*). But the onslaught of the feeling of impersonal shame (which is the sign of our "consecration to culture") occurs "without any accompanying feeling of distress," precisely because it is not the loss of anything valuable. It is the shattering of a facade of self-satisfaction, which Nietzsche claims serves to disguise our "laziness" (SE p. 127). Rawls argues convincingly that shame crucially involves "our relations with others" (TJ p. 446): Face-to-face with the other, our loss of self-respect becomes palpable to us. Nietzsche agrees. However, in regard to the experience of the ethically desirable sort of shame, he thinks it is not just face-to-face with any human being that one experiences this sort of shame.

We are now in a position to answer our remaining question: Who are

your exemplars? They are those individuals who are able to trigger this experience of impersonal shame in you. (How rare such individuals are will depend partly upon who you are.)

Part of what goes missing in the elitist construal of the focal passage is Nietzsche's insistence that the life you are to lead is an *individual* life – that is, not just one that is numerically distinct (something it could hardly fail to be), but one that is qualitatively distinct (that is, one that displays, rather than conceals, the distinctive marks of its individuality). From Nietzsche's point of view, the elitist understanding of perfectionism (according to which our relation to an exemplar should be one of discipleship) and the Kantian understanding of genius (according to which the role of an exemplar is to furnish a model for imitation) rest upon a common lack of appreciation of the (ethical, political, and aesthetic) significance of individuality. Nietzsche's own view represents the radical antithesis of such views insofar as it rests on the assumption that each person's individuality carries obligations with it – in particular, an obligation of what he calls (in this lovely quatrain from §7 of the Prelude to *The Gay Science*) "faithfulness" to oneself:

*Es lockt dich meine Art und Sprach;
Du folgst mir, du gehst mir nach;
Geh nur dir selber treulich nach;
So folgst du mir – gemacht! gemacht!*

"Following" an exemplar is not a matter of following in someone's footsteps (*jemandem nachgehen*), but of regarding someone as an exemplary instance of (how to instantiate the paradoxical concept) "faithfully following in one's own footsteps" (*sich selber treulich nachgehen*). Zarathustra says he seeks companions "who follow me because they want to follow themselves [weil sie sich selber folgen wollen]" (Z I:P:9). To treat an exemplar as a model for mere imitation is to fail faithfully to follow oneself. This faithlessness to oneself, viewed in its ethical aspect, amounts to a failure of fulfilling one's duties to oneself; viewed in its aesthetic aspect, it amounts to a failure of originality. Nietzsche thinks our tendency to partition philosophy into artificially isolated departments of thought (politics from aesthetics and both from ethics) helps to obscure how elitist political theory and Kantian aesthetic theory prescribe, each in a different guise, the same mode of self-betrayal.

Nietzsche's later paradoxical notion that you should faithfully follow your *own* footsteps finds its equivalent in SE in the notion that there is a path along which no one can go but you, but that there is no answer to the question "Whither does it lead?" until you have gone along it:

No one can construct for you the bridge upon which precisely you must cross the stream of life, no one but you yourself alone. There are, to be sure, countless paths and bridges and demi-gods which would bear you through this stream; but only at the cost of your self: you would put yourself in pawn and lose yourself. There exists in the world a single path along which no one can go except you. Whither does it lead? Do not ask; go along it (SE p. 129, trans. amended).⁵²

To let someone else bear you across the stream of life would be to put yourself in pawn, Nietzsche says. Conversely, the manner in which you can best promote the good of others is not by helping to ease their load, but by fashioning your own exemplar of how the individual life can "receive the highest value, the deepest significance." If there is a role for the (exemplary) other to play in your life, it is not that of furnishing you with an opportunity for discipleship or a model for imitation. Rather, as the passage says, it is the role of revealing a path to you that you then have to go alone. The role of the great human being in your life lies in her capacity to reveal to you your own repressed knowledge of your "higher self." It is the testimony of (what, in this early essay, Nietzsche is happy to call) your "bad conscience" (SE p. 127), which signals that you possess such knowledge.⁵³ It is the role of exemplary individuals to undo such repression.

In depicting his confrontation with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche is thus not *prescribing* an ideal in the sense in which (what analytic philosophers think of as) "a moral theory" prescribes certain sorts of actions. SE does not aspire to "prescribe" anything to a reader she has not (at least inchoately) prescribed to herself. Its announced aim is to provoke a reader to attend to the duties prescribed to her by her own higher self.⁵⁴ The only "prescriptions" the essay's elaboration of its central concepts (such as higher self, exemplar, bad conscience) issues in is a set of recommendations for going about the task of discovering and remaining faithful to that which you *already* value.⁵⁵

Nietzsche's essay bears the title *Schopenhauer as Educator*. We have arrived at the point where we can ask what, in this essay, the function of the example of Schopenhauer is meant to be. In what sense is this essay about Schopenhauer (who is, after all, barely mentioned in the essay)? Schopenhauer played the role of an exemplar for him: He enabled Nietzsche to define for himself a conception of who he wanted to become.⁵⁶ Schopenhauer thus furnishes an example of an answer to the question that Nietzsche tells us "one finally asks oneself: where are we, scholars and unscholarly, placed high and low, to find the moral exemplars and models among our contemporaries, the visible epitome of morality for our time?" (SE p. 132). Where are we – high and low,

scholarly and *unscholarly* – to find these exemplars? Nietzsche offers us Schopenhauer, saying:

I sensed that in him, Schopenhauer, I had discovered that educator and philosopher I had sought for so long. . . . I strove . . . to see through the book and to imagine the living man . . . who promised to make his heirs only those who would and could be more than merely his readers (SE p. 136).

This signals that we shouldn't expect in these pages an explication of the writings of Schopenhauer. If Nietzsche is offering us (*his* readers) a reading of Schopenhauer, then he is remaining merely Schopenhauer's reader – nothing more. His relation to Schopenhauer will have failed to exemplify the "educative" (that is, transformative) role that an exemplar should play in our lives. The role of the exemplar is (to borrow a phrase of Emerson's) to *unsettle* us.⁵⁷ Yet our tendency is to react to his capacity to unsettle us with a craving to be just like him, to imitate him. In order for an exemplar to play an educative role in our lives, he must know how to defeat our tendency to want to mimic, rather than be provoked by, his example.⁵⁸

Nietzsche's essay thus aims to exemplify the relation between a youthful soul and the exemplar who stirs his conscience. This exemplification occurs at several levels. Most evident among these, announced in the title of the essay, is the fact that Nietzsche is naming Schopenhauer as the great human being to whom he "attached his heart." Nietzsche's depiction of his relation to Schopenhauer, however, seeks to exemplify something further: the relation this text wishes its reader to enter into with it.⁵⁹ This is a pervasive feature of a tradition of philosophical writing (which I am here calling "perfectionist") – one that begins with Plato's dialogues.⁶⁰

It is characteristic of such writing that a relation obtaining between voices *in* the text mirrors a relation into which the reader is invited to enter *with* the text. This relation, in turn, models a further relation: one into which the reader is called upon to enter with her (higher) self. The text enables you to read *it* in order to reveal that it is able to read *you*.⁶¹ The horror and the exhilaration of the discovery that a text can uncover your unacknowledged secrets is conferred by a structure that is designed to yield a further discovery, at once more terrifying and more exhilarating: namely, that this is something you can do *without* the text. (Both the horror and the exhilaration, Nietzsche suggests, are a measure of an effort each of us has invested in evading this discovery.) The horror is tied to the thought of the past (what we have thus far made of our lives). The exhilaration is tied to the thought of the future (what we have now learned we can make of our lives).

Nietzsche's Critique of the Elitist Conception of Genius

Every complete human being has some sort of genius. True virtue is genius.⁶²

Early in his essay "Self-Reliance" Emerson writes, "In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts. They come back to us with a certain alienated majesty" (*Essays and Lectures*, p. 259). Such writing enacts the very phenomenon it describes. The burden of such writing is to allow you to recover your own rejected thoughts, to appropriate them as *your* thoughts. The name both Emerson and Nietzsche give to the author of those of your rejected thoughts that return to you with alienated majesty is "your genius."⁶³ These various relations between reader and text (between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer's text, between us as readers of SE and the text itself) aspire to mirror the proper relation between you and your genius.

This is the sense in which the text is to function as an exemplar. Nietzsche's text strives to exemplify the character of one's relationship to an exemplar in a way that will defeat our tendency to picture our relation to the great human being as one that calls for admiration unaccompanied by inner change. Hero-worship, as we shall see in a moment, is interpreted by Nietzsche as a strategy for evading an inwardly felt demand for self-transformation through the cultivation of ethically impotent forms of admiration.

Nietzsche's essay, in its role as exemplar, works to depict his confrontation with Schopenhauer as a model of the confrontation it wishes to provoke with its reader. To depict Schopenhauer as his *educator* requires demonstrating himself no longer to be merely his chosen teacher's pupil. To attach one's heart to a great human being may be the sign of one's "consecration to culture"; but the ideal (to which one thereby consecrates oneself) is only first *realized* as one approaches the point when that attachment becomes superfluous. It is a recurring theme in Nietzsche's work that the glory of great human beings lies in their capacity to render themselves superfluous:

Of what account is genius if it does not communicate to him who contemplates and reverses it such freedom and elevation of feeling that he no longer has need of genius! – *Rendering themselves superfluous* – that is the glory of all great human beings (HH II:1:407).

Rawls and Russell read Nietzsche as saying that those who are not great are superfluous, and that what matters is promoting the good of those who are. This has it backwards. To read Nietzsche as recommending that one neglect one's own good and give one's life over to the higher good

of "culture" – and hence recommending a manner of "attaching one's heart to a great human being" that frees one from the obligation to give birth to one's (higher) self – is to fail to grasp what he thinks culture is: "culture is the child of *each* individual's self-knowledge and dissatisfaction with himself" (SE p. 162).

A proponent of the elitist interpretation of Nietzsche will nonetheless insist: Only those individuals who are distinguished by some special gift or quality (or set of gifts or qualities) will be *able* to rise to the task of self-overcoming. Is this Nietzsche's view? SE explicitly addresses this question in its commentary on Schopenhauer's conception of the heroic life. The commentary is appended to the only passage from Schopenhauer quoted in the entire essay: "A happy life is impossible: the highest that the human being can attain to is a *heroic one*."⁶⁴ He leads it who, in whatever shape or forms, struggles against great difficulties for something that is to the benefit of all" (SE pp. 153–4; trans. amended).⁶⁵ Nietzsche's commentary runs as follows:

Such a heroic life, to be sure, together with the mortification accomplished in it, corresponds least of all to the paltry conception of those who make the most noise about it, celebrate festivals to the memory of great human beings, and believe that a great human being is great [*gross*] in the same way that small men are small [*klein*], as it were through a gift and for his own satisfaction, or by a mechanical operation and in blind obedience to this inner compulsion: so that he who has not received this gift, or does not feel this compulsion, has the same right to be small as some other man has the right to be great (SE p. 154, trans. amended).

The play on language here is difficult to capture in English. The English word "great" can mean either (1) very large in size, or (2) remarkable or superior in quality or character. But, in modern English, the former of these meanings, even when applicable, tends to be eclipsed by the latter. This is not true of the German *gross*, which is equally frequently used both to mean great in quality or character and to mean merely large. Being great (*gross*) can therefore be opposed both to being not (or not yet) great in quality or character or to being (physically) small (both of which are captured by the German *klein*). The former is something one can become, the latter is something one is or is not. Greatness is a mark of virtue, largeness is a trait. One is a feature of an exemplar, the other of a specimen.

Our tendency, says Nietzsche, is to conceive of greatness on the paradigm of a natural attribute (such as physical size) – as if it were something one either is or is not, like being a certain kind of specimen. Nietzsche says quite explicitly here that, if it is in virtue of a gift that certain men are great, then their kind of "greatness" is of precisely no

interest to us. If a person's "greatness" is simply, as it were, a result of his "blind obedience" to "an inner compulsion," then the "great" man is something he could not help but be. If he is "great" simply by dint of forces beyond his control, then his greatness makes no claim upon us. He is a distraction from our task. He does not represent the heroic life. But it is a distraction we crave and therefore manufacture. Our difference from the great man is a measure of our failure – a failure we are eager to forget.

This picture of "greatness," Nietzsche says, is a perversion of the heroic life.⁶⁶ What brings about this perversion? Nietzsche goes on:

But being gifted, or being compelled, are contemptible words designed to enable one to ignore an inner admonition, slanders on him who has paid heed to this admonition, that is to say on the great man; he least of all lets himself be given gifts or be compelled – he knows as well as any little man how to take life easily and how soft the bed is on which he could lie down. . . . [F]or the objective of all human arrangements is through distracting one's thoughts to cease to be aware of life (SE p. 154).

The suggestion is that we make great men "heroes" – we put them on a pedestal, manufacture their fame – precisely in order to differentiate ourselves from them. *They* can do what we cannot; they're heroes. They no longer represent an admonition. If they are mounted on a pedestal, we can ignore what Nietzsche calls our own "inner admonition." Each of us, he claims, is aware of such an "imperious voice" within her.⁶⁷ Our praise of great human beings is actually slander because we attempt to camouflage their true accomplishment. The greatness, and the terror, of their accomplishment is tied to the fact that they are in no relevant way different from us – *that* is the insight we attempt to bribe them into sparing us. Fame is a mechanism for depriving the individual of his moral claim on us. We attempt to hide from ourselves the knowledge that what attracts us to the great man is "the virtue in ourselves."

Insofar as Nietzsche, as an author, aspires to make such a moral claim on his readers (to attract the virtue in each of us), he is placed in the paradoxical position of having to defeat the prospect of his eventual canonization. Hence the ambivalence with which he predicts his own posthumous fame, and the relentlessness with which he attempts to subvert various lines along which we might seek to admire (and therefore disarm) him. A central aspect of the modernist predicament in the arts – that the artist must repudiate the audience that seeks to admire her, and that the author can only write for her readers by writing against them – is revealed by Nietzsche here, at the inception of the modernist period, to be tied to a moral demand that such art seeks to exert: a demand

such art anticipates we will attempt to evade, through a strategy of admiration.⁶⁸

Nietzsche begins the previous passage with the observation that "being gifted, or being compelled, are contemptible words designed to enable one to ignore an inner admonition." He here denounces precisely the conception of "greatness" that Russell and Rawls take him to espouse – and he goes on in this passage to denounce precisely the sort of relation to the great human being they take him to advocate. These passages from SE by no means represent an isolated case in Nietzsche's corpus of a repudiation of such a reading of his work. The same theme recurs throughout his work – although it has remained extraordinarily invisible to commentators:

Do not talk of being gifted, or possessing innate talent! One can name great men of all kinds who were not very gifted. They *acquired* greatness, became "geniuses" (as we put it), through making the most of qualities which no one would care to admit he did not have: they all possessed the seriousness of the efficient workman (HH I:163, trans. amended).

This passage makes the point clearly: "Genius," in Nietzsche's writings, should not be taken to denote the product of inborn gifts or innate talents – of extraordinary powers of intuition or understanding – that great human beings possess and the rest of us lack.⁶⁹ It signifies rather an achievement that requires "making the most of qualities which no one would care to admit he did not have." That about a person which others are most likely to interpret as "a gift," Nietzsche insists, is that about him which is most due to himself: "a person's higher self . . . is often called a gift of the gods, whereas in reality it is everything else that is a gift of the gods (of chance): this however is the man himself" (HH I:624).

As recurrent as Nietzsche's insistence that "being gifted or being compelled are contemptible words" is his diagnosis as to why we are prone to conceive of genius in this "contemptible" manner. We do so in order to remain undisturbed by the example of genius – in order to preserve (what Nietzsche calls, in the following passage) our "vanity":

Because we think well of ourselves, but nonetheless never suppose ourselves capable of producing a painting like one of Raphael's or a dramatic scene like one of Shakespeare's, we convince ourselves that the capacity to do so is quite extraordinarily marvelous, a wholly uncommon accident, or, if we are still religiously inclined, a mercy from on high. Thus our vanity, our self-love, promotes the cult of genius: for the only way to keep the genius from aggravating us is to think of him as being very remote from us, as a *miraculum*. . . . But, once we put to one side these suggestions of our vanity, the activity of genius no longer

appears in any way fundamentally different in kind from that of the inventor of machines, the scholar of astronomy or history, or the master tactician. . . . The genius, too, does nothing other than first learn how to lay foundation stones, then how to build, always in search of material and always forming and reforming itself around the material it has found. . . . What then is the source of our belief that genius exists only in the artist, orator and philosopher? . . . It is clear that people speak of genius only where the effects of the great intellect are most agreeable to them and they have no desire to feel envious. To call someone "divine" means: "here there is no need for us to compete" (HH I:162, trans. amended).

We promote "the cult of genius" in order to keep the example of genius from aggravating us. This analysis of excessive admiration as a form of moral evasion pervades nineteenth-century perfectionist writing. Such authors advert to concrete exemplars of the moral life – not in order to recommend to the reader that she pursue their good instead of her own, but rather – as part of an ad hominem strategy for exhibiting to a reader – that she is (and feels herself to be) beholden to demands she otherwise evades (or seeks to deny). This is roughly the opposite of what Rawls takes the source of perfectionism's preoccupation with certain exemplary individuals to be – namely, a desire to confer special rights or privileges on those individuals who possess special gifts or talents. But such an understanding of the moral claim that the lives of great human beings make upon us is not one that perfectionists (such as Nietzsche) endorse; it is one into which they predict that we will fall. On their diagnosis, our attraction to such an understanding is a measure of our eagerness to evade an alternative understanding of the claim such lives make upon us.⁷⁰

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche argues not only that his eventual fame is an inevitability, but moreover that it is equally inevitable that it will come about posthumously.⁷¹ In the third *Meditation* (SE) he explores the logic of this problematic with respect to the fate of Schopenhauer's authorship. For, as author of an essay entitled *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche is in danger of encouraging the very phenomenon of canonization that he condemns. Hence Schopenhauer figures *only* insofar as he can serve as an educator. If Nietzsche were to present him as an extraordinary human being, where what "extraordinary" means is that he is possessed of fabulous gifts and talents, then he would be unable to serve as an exemplar. He would fail to make a claim on us. Nietzsche's portrait of Schopenhauer must depict him as human; both his strengths and his failings must present themselves as achievements and failures that reflect upon (and therefore educate us to) our own capacities. Hence he writes of Schopenhauer:

He bore many scars and open wounds, it is true; and he had acquired a disposition that may perhaps seem a little too asiringent and sometimes also too pugnacious. But even the greatest of human beings cannot attain to his own ideal. That Schopenhauer can offer us a model is certain, all these scars and blemishes notwithstanding. One might say, indeed, that in his nature which was imperfect and all too human brings us closer to him in a human sense, for it lets us see him as a fellow sufferer and not only in the remote heights of a genius (SE p. 143, trans. amended).

This emphasis on (what Nietzsche calls) our "affinity" or "relatedness" to the hero is to be contrasted with the widely disseminated stereotype of the Nietzschean superman. Consult the definition offered in virtually any dictionary. *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* offers the following:

superman, noun. 1. In the philosophy of Nietzsche, an ideal man of superior physique and capacity to dominate, to be produced by the evolutionary struggle for survival. 2. A man of superhuman powers.

The notion of the "superman" that figures in the second entry is what Nietzsche himself terms the "superstitious belief in genius" – the "religious or semi-religious superstition" that some individuals "are of supra-human origin and possess certain miraculous abilities," thus attaining their ends "by quite other means than the rest of mankind" (HH I:164).⁷² If Schopenhauer were in any sense what is here defined as a "superman," he would be of precisely no use to the author of *Schopenhauer as Educator*: he would fail to be exemplary. He would not be someone in whom each of us could discover his or her own deferred possibilities.

The first entry in the Webster's definition of "superman" rests on the idea that the superman "is to be produced by the evolutionary struggle for survival." In the second *Meditation* (HL), Nietzsche writes: "The time will come when one will prudently refrain from all constructions of the world-process or even the history of human being" (UM/HL p. 111, trans. amended).⁷³ The ideal we are supposed to subserve, for Nietzsche, does not lie in the realization of some historical or evolutionary telos. Since the demise of Nazism, few commentators have been tempted to argue (in the face of the textual evidence to the contrary) that Nietzsche thinks that the superman represents the eventual culmination of some process of biological or historical evolution. But little progress is made if one substitutes for the Nazi reading a Social Darwinist reading of Nietzsche, according to which Nietzsche views society as a competitive arena in which (some cultural analogue of) natural selection allows "superior" individuals to rise to the top.

The translation of *Exemplare* as "specimens" can help to encourage such a reading. One then reads the focal passage as saying that our duty

is to facilitate and oppose those who obstruct this process of natural selection. There is, in this connection, another favorite passage (in this case from HL) that, often in conjunction with the focal passage, commentators love to quote out of context. It is usually given as follows: "The goal of humanity cannot lie in its end, but only in its highest specimens." This passage is then interpreted as saying that the high points of human history lie, along the way, in "the fittest specimens" thrown up by this process of social evolution. Let us retranslate the passage and restore some of its context:

These [great] individuals do not carry forward any kind of process but live contemporaneously with one another. . . . They live as that republic of genius of which Schopenhauer once spoke. . . . It is the task of history to be the mediator between these individuals and thus again and again to inspire and lend the strength for the production of the great human being. No, the goal of humanity cannot lie in its end, but only in its highest exemplars (UM/HL p. 111, trans. amended).

To say that "the end lies in humanity's highest exemplars" only specifies an end to the extent that such individuals prove able to serve as exemplars – as representatives of "that republic of genius of which Schopenhauer once spoke."⁷⁴ As we shall see, this Schopenhauerian theme turns out to be a central topic of the next *Meditation*, SE. Nietzsche, in this passage, specifies something that he is willing to call "the task of history," which, as we shall also see in a moment, turns out to be identical to what he (both in this meditation and the next) calls "the goal of culture." This additional clue, however, does not provide much illumination unless one is clear about what Nietzsche thinks *culture* is.

To some recent commentators on Nietzsche's work, it has seemed evident that his perfectionism calls for the realization of some sort of cultural or aesthetico-literary – as opposed to some sort of biological or historical – ideal. This at least provides a salutary alternative to an elitist construal of Nietzsche's emphasis on the importance of exemplars. According to this reading of Nietzsche, what an exemplar provides is a model of a certain sort of *aesthetic* perfection. But the substitution of a notion of culture or aesthetics for one of history or biology still does not mark much progress in the interpretation of Nietzsche's work, if one takes this to mean (as many recent commentators have) that the telos that Nietzsche's perfectionism calls upon us to promote is one that is *merely* cultural or *merely* aesthetic. Thus, the relevant sort of perfection might be attained through, say, cultivating "a beautiful self," or unfettering one's "artistic genius," or fashioning an aesthetically well-integrated "literary persona" – where a stress on the concepts of the beautiful, the

artistic, or the literary is taken to mark a desire on Nietzsche's part to see some other species of valuation take over the role formerly played in our lives by moral valuation. Such a reading of Nietzsche saves him from one charge of moral lunacy, only to leave him open to another.

Aestheticism and Perfectionism

Everyone is an artist whose central purpose in life is to educate his spirit.⁷⁵

A worry that repeatedly arises in Nietzsche scholarship is whether Nietzsche's conception of the "higher human being" is so inclusive as to encompass individuals who are morally reprehensible. This worry is exacerbated by the thought that Nietzsche is commending to us a way of life on (what appear to be) merely aesthetic grounds. Alexander Nehamas puts the worry as follows:

Nietzsche's emphasis on the aesthetic organizational features of people's lives and characters . . . brings out a . . . difficulty that attends [his "aesthetic model"]. . . . This involves what one may feel compelled to consider a moral dimension. A literary character . . . may be a perfect character but (represent) a dreadful person. . . . [T]he uncomfortable feeling exists that someone might achieve Nietzsche's ideal life and still be nothing short of repugnant.⁷⁶

The worry is that Nietzsche's conception of the "ideal life" does not rule out the possibility that a "dreadful person" might qualify as "a perfect character." This worry makes two assumptions about the sort of "ideal life" or "perfect character" Nietzsche seeks to commend to our attention: (1) that Nietzsche seeks to impose his own idiosyncratic conception of wherein such perfection consists, and (2) that this conception is to be specified in purely "aesthetic" or "organizational" terms – in terms, that is, which, at least in principle, license the admiration of a morally monstrous character.

The first assumption presupposes the idea that the content of your unattained self is something Nietzsche seeks to prescribe to you in advance of your confrontation with an exemplar, and thus that what (Nietzsche thinks) ought to strike you as ideal might actually strike you as repulsive. According to Nietzsche, however, it is the "mark" of his or her greatness that you *do* find yourself attracted to the great human being. What is misguided in the second assumption comes to the fore in Nietzsche's formulation of the guiding question of SE: "Where are we to find the *moral* exemplars and models among our contemporaries, the visible epitome of *morality* for our time?" (SE p. 132, my emphasis).

What attracts us to an exemplar, Nietzsche says, is that we recognize him to be a "visible epitome of *morality*"; or, as Nietzsche puts it when speaking of the friend: He attracts the *virtue* in you. You admire him because you trust in him what you want (but are unable) to trust in yourself.

In his later writings, Nietzsche openly opposes (what he calls) "Christian morality" and is pleased to refer to himself as an "immoralist." The unabashed call in this early essay for a "visible epitome of morality for our time" raises the question whether Nietzsche here champions, under the banner of "morality," something he later attacks (under the banner of 'immoralism'). Getting the answer to this question right requires seeing that the rhetorical strategy underlying Nietzsche's later repudiation of (something called) "morality" concedes only the term – and not the concept – to the enemy. Nietzsche justifies his choice of the term "immoralism" by invoking an Emersonian concept that figures centrally in SE – that of *provocation*: "I needed a word whose meaning would serve as a provocation for everyone" (EH IV:22, trans. amended). Nietzsche's later "immoralism" still seeks to make something we may still call a *moral* claim on its reader. But it becomes impossible to see how this might be the case, if one remains wedded to a reading of Nietzsche according to which he utterly disdains the idea that other persons might count in moral judgment with the same weight as oneself – as long, that is, as he appears to fail to grasp the concept of the moral altogether.

The irony here is that Nietzsche, too, wants to accuse someone – namely, his contemporaries – of failing to grasp the moral concepts they employ. The situation, as he sees it, is outlined in GS 292. People "talk from morning to night of the happiness of virtue, of composure of the soul, [and] of justice," until the "the gold gradually wears off" these ways of speaking, and these words have only the value of paper currency in a bankrupt economy: from "so much handling . . . all the gold turns to lead." In this section Nietzsche nicely sums up this process of the gradual impoverishment of our moral concepts in a single phrase: "inverse alchemy" – a process that accomplishes "the devaluation of the most valuable." Nietzsche's aim as an author is to place our moral vocabulary back on the gold standard. But first he must render his reader unable to rest complacent in the thought that she is already possessed of a linguistic means for laying hands on good things. The strategy for accomplishing this is also outlined in GS 292: "*Dery* these good things, withdraw the mob's acclaim from them as well as their easy currency; make them once again . . . [available] to solitary souls."⁷⁷ Nietzsche's rhetorical strategy of *denying* "morality" is thus in the service of reversing the process of inverse alchemy: rendering devalued valuables valuable once again.

One goes utterly astray in reading Nietzsche's later writings if one

artistic, or the literary is taken to mark a desire on Nietzsche's part to see some other species of valuation take over the role formerly played in our lives by moral valuation. Such a reading of Nietzsche saves him from one charge of moral lunacy, only to leave him open to another.

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The worry is that Nietzsche's conception of the "ideal life" does not rule out the possibility that a "dreadful person" might qualify as "a perfect character." This worry makes two assumptions about the sort of "ideal life" or "perfect character" Nietzsche seeks to commend to our attention: (1) that Nietzsche seeks to impose his own idiosyncratic conception of wherein such perfection consists, and (2) that this conception is to be specified in purely "aesthetic" or "organizational" terms – in terms, that is, which, at least in principle, license the admiration of a morally monstrous character.

The first assumption presupposes the idea that the content of your unattained self is something Nietzsche seeks to prescribe to you in advance of your confrontation with an exemplar, and thus that what (Nietzsche thinks) ought to strike you as ideal might actually strike you as repulsive. According to Nietzsche, however, it is the "mark" of his or her greatness that you *do* find yourself attracted to the great human being. What is misguided in the second assumption comes to the fore in Nietzsche's formulation of the guiding question of SE: "Where are we to find the *moral* exemplars and models among our contemporaries, the visible epitome of *morality* for our time?" (SE p. 132, my emphasis).

What attracts us to an exemplar, Nietzsche says, is that we recognize him to be a "visible epitome of *morality*"; or, as Nietzsche puts it when speaking of the friend: He attracts the *virtue* in you. You admire him because you trust in him what you want (but are unable) to trust in yourself.

In his later writings, Nietzsche openly opposes (what he calls) "Christian morality" and is pleased to refer to himself as an "immoralist." The unabashed call in this early essay for a "visible epitome of morality for our time" raises the question whether Nietzsche here champions, under the banner of "morality," something he later attacks (under the banner of "immoralism"). Getting the answer to this question right requires seeing that the rhetorical strategy underlying Nietzsche's later repudiation of (something called) "morality" concedes only the term – and not the concept – to the enemy. Nietzsche justifies his choice of the term "immoralism" by invoking an Emersonian concept that figures centrally in SE – that of *provocation*: "I needed a word whose meaning would serve as a provocation for everyone" (EH IV:22, trans. amended). Nietzsche's later "immoralism" still seeks to make something we may still call a *moral* claim on its reader. But it becomes impossible to see how this might be the case, if one remains wedded to a reading of Nietzsche according to which he utterly disdains the idea that other persons might count in moral judgment with the same weight as oneself – as long, that is, as he appears to fail to grasp the concept of the moral altogether.

The irony here is that Nietzsche, too, wants to accuse someone – namely, his contemporaries – of failing to grasp the moral concepts they employ. The situation, as he sees it, is outlined in GS 292. People "talk from morning to night of the happiness of virtue, of composure of the soul, [and] of justice," until the "the gold gradually wears off" these ways of speaking, and these words have only the value of paper currency in a bankrupt economy: from "so much handling . . . all the gold turns to lead." In this section Nietzsche nicely sums up this process of the gradual impoverishment of our moral concepts in a single phrase: "inverse alchemy" – a process that accomplishes "the devaluation of the most valuable." Nietzsche's aim as an author is to place our moral vocabulary back on the gold standard. But first he must render his reader unable to rest complacent in the thought that she is already possessed of a linguistic means for laying hands on good things. The strategy for accomplishing this is also outlined in GS 292: "*Dery* these good things, withdraw the mob's acclaim from them as well as their easy currency; make them once again . . . [available] to solitary souls."⁵⁷ Nietzsche's rhetorical strategy of *derying* "morality" is thus in the service of reversing the process of inverse alchemy: rendering devalued valuables valuable once again.

One goes utterly astray in reading Nietzsche's later writings if one