

## Notes from the Editor

The editor of *ESQ* is pleased to announce the upcoming publication of a special number on Margaret Fuller (the first issue of 1998), featuring contributions by Phyllis Cole, Judith Mattson Bean, Anne Baker, and Mary-Jo Haronian.

Call for papers: Abstracts for papers and proposals for sessions are invited for the International Edgar Allan Poe Conference, commemorating the sesquicentennial of Poe's death. The event, to be held at the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond, Virginia, is sponsored by the Poe Studies Association, in conjunction with the Poe Foundation. All topics related to the life and works of Poe are appropriate; for a list of suggestions, see the Poe Studies Association website at <http://www.an.psu.edu/bac7/poe.html>. Please send abstracts for twenty-minute papers (and proposals for hour-and-twenty-minute sessions) by 31 December 1998 to Richard Kopley, Vice President of the PSA, Department of English, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802. Dr. Kopley also welcomes inquiries at [rxk3@psu.edu](mailto:rxk3@psu.edu).

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# Emerson/Nietzsche



Edited by Michael Lopez

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*Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), esp. chap. 5, "Counterfeiting Happiness: *His Girl Friday*," 161–87; and *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *CHU*, 50–54.

<sup>26</sup> Baumgarten, "Mitteilungen und Bemerkungen," 111.

<sup>27</sup> Thanks to Daniel Conway, David Owen, Fred Schueler, John Taber, and Sergio Tenenbaum for helpful discussions of this essay. Earlier versions were presented to a symposium on moral perfectionism at the meetings of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas in Utrecht, Holland, August 1996, and to the University of New Mexico Philosophy Department in November 1996.

## Emerson as Educator

(from "Nietzsche's Perfectionism:

A Reading of Schopenhauer as Educator")

James Conant

### Democracy and the Cultivation of the Self

[I]n the final analysis, the whole classification of duties into duties toward oneself and duties toward others . . . really rests on a completely immoral distinction. Out of it emerges the notion that there are, as it were, two completely different and conflicting attitudes that either ought to be kept carefully apart or else artificially reconciled by means of some petty arithmetic.

—Schlegel, *Athenaeum Fragments*

One motif in Nietzsche's writings that has helped to kindle elitist interpretations of his work is the occasional barbed remark concerning "the democratic movement of our times." Most commentators have taken it to be self-evident that a straightforward connection exists between these remarks and the emphasis throughout Nietzsche's work on the significance of great human beings. It is *because* Nietzsche is infatuated with the good of the outstanding individual, so the standard reading goes, that he deplores democracy. The problem with democracy, according to this reading, is that it lowers the standard of humanity as a whole by seeking to promote an overly inclusive good (that of the insignificant ordinary citizen) in-



stead of focusing exclusively on the only good that counts (that of the extraordinary individual).

Here is a representative example of Nietzsche's remarks concerning "the democratic movement of our times": "We have a different faith; to us the democratic movement is not only a form of the decay of political organization but a form of the decay, namely the diminution, of the human being, making him mediocre and lowering his value. Where, then, must *we* reach with our hopes?"<sup>1</sup> On the strength of such passages, it has seemed manifest to many commentators that Nietzsche seeks to advance some sort of anti-egalitarian political ideal (although it is usually by no means clear, even to them, what that ideal is supposed to be). One subsidiary aim of this essay is to argue that, insofar as Nietzsche's perfectionism is taken to constitute the nexus of his disagreement with democracy, a confrontation between his thought and democratic political theory is not as easy to arrange as commonly supposed. If perfectionism calls (as John Rawls imagines it does) for a form of society in which, as a matter of policy, certain privileges or goods are conferred upon some members of the society at the expense of others, then it clearly conflicts with a democratic commitment to treat each citizen equally.<sup>2</sup> There clearly are proponents of such anti-democratic social policies.<sup>3</sup> But where in his writings does Nietzsche advocate such policies? He certainly wants to pick a quarrel with "the democratic movement," but the question remains open: To what extent does the perfectionist dimension of Nietzsche's thought specifically conflict with a commitment to democracy? To what extent does his perfectionism promote something, call it the cultivation of the self, that competes with the aspirations of democracy?

It is worth noticing, to begin with, that nothing in the passage quoted above forces one to take what Nietzsche calls "the democratic movement" as an undistorted expression of the aspirations that underlie democracy. Indeed, such an equation (between the patent actuality of democracy and its highest possibilities) is often distasteful to those who most celebrate those aspirations. Many a theorist has discerned within "the democratic movement" a tendency to suppress democracy's capacity for criticism from within, a pressure to

collapse into (what Tocqueville calls) "a tyranny of the majority." John Adams, Matthew Arnold, William James, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, John Stuart Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville—not to mention Emerson and Thoreau—all dread that debasement of democracy which both Mill and Emerson refer to as "the despotism of conformity." There is a perfectionist strain within the tradition of democratic thought that urgently concerns itself with keeping the anti-perfectionist tendencies latent within the movement from eroding democracy's resources for criticism from within—where the pressure of such criticism is taken to be essential to democracy's capacity to remain faithful to its own aspirations.<sup>4</sup>

Each of the theorists of democracy listed above insists that democracy can flourish only if its citizens cultivate, rather than disdain, those virtues that formerly were the sole prerogative of aristocracy (such as independence of mind, disdain for fashion, eccentricity of conduct, and so on). The aim of democracy, as conceived for example in the correspondence between Adams and Jefferson, is not to overthrow the idea of a society "ruled by the best" but to exchange one form of aristocracy for another: to replace "an artificial aristocracy" founded on the contingent precedents of "wealth and birth" with "an unprecedented aristocracy" from whose ranks ideally no one is, as a matter of contingent social circumstance, excluded.<sup>5</sup> These early theorists of democracy are acutely aware that this is not an ideal easily attained, and hence that nascent within "the democratic movement" lies the danger that it will attempt to forestall disappointment by giving up on the ideal of an unprecedented democracy, exchanging its ideal of equality for another—one achieved through a leveling rather than a raising of its citizenry. From the point of view of these theorists, such an exchange would represent a betrayal of democracy's promise and an avoidable outcome of the democratic experiment; from Nietzsche's point of view, it would represent merely a predictable and rapidly impending consequence of the democratic political process.

We should not, however, allow this disagreement between Nietzsche and theorists such as Mill or Emerson to obscure the extent of their underlying agreement. Nietzsche writes: "*Two kinds of*

*equality.*—The thirst for equality can express itself either as a desire to draw everyone down to oneself (through diminishing them, spying on them, obstructing their progress) or to raise oneself and *everyone else up* (through recognizing their virtues, helping them, rejoicing in their success)."<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche's quarrel with "the democratic movement" is a function of his belief that the ultimate consequence of its ascendancy will be to promote the first rather than the second of these "two kinds of equality." Nietzsche and the perfectionist theorists of democracy concur on the following point: within the democratic movement exists a pressure to substitute for a noble and elusive ideal of equality a very different and far more readily attainable ideal, one that purchases equality at the cost of "a diminution, of the human being." Their disagreement lies in their relative estimation of both the capacity and the inclination on the part of those engaged in the democratic experiment to withstand this pressure.

A related way of seeing that Nietzsche's quarrel with democracy cannot be taken as a straightforward consequence of his perfectionism is to note that his celebration of exemplary individuals echoes in the writings of many of these early theorists of democracy. Mill, for example, writes:

I insist thus emphatically on the importance of genius and the necessity of allowing it to unfold itself freely both in thought and in practice. . . . People think a genius a fine thing if it enables a man to write an exciting poem, or paint a picture. But in its true sense, that of originality in thought and action, though no one says that it is not a thing to be admired, nearly all, at heart, think that they can do very well without it. . . . Originality is the one thing which unoriginal minds cannot feel the use of. They cannot see what it is to do for them: how should they? If they could see what it would do for them, it would not be originality. The first service which originality has to render them, is that of opening their eyes: which being once fully done, they would have a chance of being themselves original.<sup>7</sup>

Proponents of the elitist interpretation of Nietzsche seize upon his touting of great human beings as if it *sufficed* to demonstrate sympathy for a militantly anti-democratic political ideal. Yet, not only is it difficult to distinguish some of his remarks on this topic from

# UNZEITGEMÄSSE BETRACHTUNGEN

VON

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DRITTES STÜCK:

SCHOPENHAUER ALS ERZIEHER.

SCHLOSS-CHEMNITZ.

VERLAG VON ERNST SCHMEITZNER.

1874.

those of Mill, Nietzsche himself is profoundly critical of the elitist conception of the great human being.<sup>8</sup> This affinity between Nietzsche's thought and that of certain theorists of democracy becomes less surprising when one discovers that his concept of the "exemplar," like a number of other concepts that figure prominently in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, derives in part from Emerson.<sup>9</sup> Not only is it unnecessary to conceive the moral significance of the exemplary individual (and the correlative idea of "attaching one's heart to some great human being") so as to conflict with those forms of relationship that a democracy should seek to foster, but—Emerson insists—if democracy is to flourish, it is *essential* that it not be so conceived.<sup>10</sup> Emerson insists upon this point through the manner in which he appropriates American political terminology to formulate his version of a perfectionist appeal to the role of an exemplar: in the *Essays*, his term for your exemplar is your "delegate," and in his later writings it is your "representative."<sup>11</sup> Emerson's vision of democracy, like Mill's, is one of a society in which the pursuit of an aristocratic ideal of excellence is the birthright of every citizen; but the pursuit of such an ideal cannot, for Emerson, be detached from (what he calls) "the proper uses of great men"—i.e., from our acknowledging and attending to those "representative men" who are able to help us discover the unacknowledged duties we bear to ourselves.<sup>12</sup>

How am I to identify those duties that I bear to myself and that I ought to, but do not as yet, acknowledge as *mine*? The answer that *Schopenhauer as Educator* as a whole suggests is: by learning to ask myself certain questions. At every critical juncture in the essay, Nietzsche pauses to recommend a particular question that one should press upon one's self, and he provides various indications of what might count as a sign that one has genuinely done so (e.g., feeling "ashamed of oneself without any accompanying feeling of distress"; see *SE*, 163 [6]). Each question that one is asked to ask oneself eventually gives way to a further such question. Here is the first of the essay's interlocking chain of questions: "Let the youthful soul look back on life with the question: what have you truly loved up to now, what has drawn your soul aloft, what has mastered it and at the same time blessed it?" Each person is to ask herself this question,

and each person will answer differently. It is not a question that can be posed collectively. If you press on yourself this question, "What have you truly loved up to now?" and then contemplate the answers you give, a discovery will ensue: "Set up these revered objects before you and perhaps their nature and their sequence will give you a law, the fundamental law of your own true self." The next sentence of the essay makes explicit that arriving at "the fundamental law of your own true self" is not a matter of disclosing the self "which you usually take yourself to be" but rather one of bringing into imagination a further, eventual (state of your) self that lies "immeasurably high above you" (*SE*, 129 [1]). What you are presently inclined to do and think and feel are not expressions of your true (unattained) self. Yet Nietzsche also says that in order to form some conception of your higher self, you first need to ask: What do I love? What do I admire? What do I desire? But you may wonder: how can putting such questions to yourself advance you if, at the outset of such a process, you have yet to cultivate any feelings or desires that are properly *yours*? It might seem that, as you stand now, you are not even in a position to ask (let alone answer) the question.

Here is another of those paradoxes perfectionist authors court: how am I to act only on those inclinations that accord with "the fundamental law of [my] own true self" if I, in my present undeveloped condition, have hitherto only sought to suppress such inclinations? Mill, an author with a limited taste for paradox, is perhaps the least coy of the theoreticians of this dilemma. Yet he, too, calls upon his reader to consult the desires of a self that has hitherto failed to express itself:

Not only in what concerns others, but in what concerns only themselves, the individual or the family do not ask themselves, what do I prefer? or, what would suit my character and disposition? or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play, and enable it to grow and thrive? They ask themselves, what is suitable to my position? what is usually done by persons of my station and pecuniary circumstances? or (worse still) what is usually done by persons of a station and circumstances superior to mine? I do not mean that they choose what is customary in preference to what suits their own inclination. It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary. Thus the mind itself is bowed

to the yoke: even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of; they like in crowds; they exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct are shunned equally with crimes: until by dint of not following their own nature they have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly of their own. Now is this, or is it not, the desirable condition of human nature? (*OL*, 58-59)

This passage, again, might have been lifted from *Schopenhauer as Educator*. Not only are the questions Mill says we fail to ask ourselves ("what do I prefer?" "what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play, and enable it to grow and thrive?") the same as those Nietzsche urges, but Mill's diagnosis of our condition is the same as well: our "*human* capacities are withered and starved" (emphasis added). (Nietzsche says one must learn "to hate one's own narrowness and shrivelled nature"; see *SE*, 163 [6].)

Yet if, as Mill says, I lack "any inclination, except for what is customary," how will asking myself the question "what do I prefer?" help me develop that "peculiarity of taste" which will allow me to nurture opinions and feelings that are properly my own? Indeed, in my present condition—where "the mind itself is bowed to the yoke" and "incapable of any . . . native pleasures"—can I even aspire properly to pose to myself Mill's concluding question concerning my present condition, namely: "is this, or is it not, the *desirable* condition of human nature?" (emphasis added). (Mill's sensitivity to the delicacy and intricacy of this problematic should provoke us to rethink what happens to the doctrine of utilitarianism in his hands—where the appeal to utility, he says, is to be understood as an appeal to "utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a *progressive being*" [*OL*, 10; emphasis added].) In standard introductory survey courses on the history of political philosophy, Mill and Nietzsche usually find themselves pitted against one another as the most eloquent friend and foe, respectively, of the ideals of liberal democracy. One way to mark the unsatisfactory character of this textbook opposition is to notice how any number of passages

from *On Liberty* can be mistaken for passages from *Schopenhauer as Educator*.

Nietzsche's solution to the dilemma of the unattained self parallels the one Emerson offers in "Self-Reliance" when he claims that "[i]n every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty" (*E&L*, 259). One trusts in the work of genius what one is unable to trust in one's (present) self, recognizing in such an exemplar a reflection of one's own rejected self.<sup>13</sup> An exemplar serves as "a rough and imperfect mirror."<sup>14</sup> "One becomes what one is" (to quote the subtitle Nietzsche gave to *Ecce Homo*) by learning to cultivate a trust in one's (higher) self as it appears reflected in what one admires. Nietzsche says of Schopenhauer, in the middle of this essay in which he declares his independence from Schopenhauer: "I trusted him at once and my trust is the same now" (*SE*, 133 [2]). The role of an exemplar is twofold: to allow us to arrive at an articulate conception of what we value, and to ensure that we "fasten" upon duties suited to our needs—duties stringent enough to require our transformation, yet not unfulfillable: "I am sure of only one thing: that from that ideal image it is possible to fasten upon ourselves a chain of fulfillable duties" (*SE*, 157 [5]). The delicacy of this operation lies in the difficulty of adjusting the trajectory of our ideal toward the optimal height:

The dangers are always great when things are made too difficult for a human being and when he is incapable of *fulfilling* any duties at all. . . . The hardest task still remains: to say how a new circle of duties may be derived from an ideal and how one can proceed towards so extravagant a goal through a practical activity—in short, to demonstrate how an ideal *educates*. (*SE*, 156–57 [5]; translation amended)

Schopenhauer is an educator only insofar as the ideal he represents is one that was able to educate. Nietzsche's essay justifies its exemplar's claim to be an educator by reporting on how its author was able to derive a circle of duties from the example of "his first teacher." But this only represents the retrospective dimension of the essay's demonstration of how an ideal educates; folded within

its pages is also a demonstration of how its author presently proceeds "towards so extravagant a goal through a practical activity"—where one aspect of that activity is the writing of the essay itself. To grasp how Nietzsche's essay seeks to exemplify what it teaches, we need to see not just what his relation to an exemplar *was*, but what it *is*—and to see this we need to notice how authoring the essay itself represents the writer's effort (not merely retrospectively to report on or imaginatively to describe, but in addition) to *exhibit* the sort of practical activity he seeks to commend.

### Quoting and Saying

The mind understands something only insofar as it absorbs it like a seed into itself, nurtures it, and lets it grow into blossom and fruit.

—Schlegel, *Ideas*

Commentators are fond of condescending to *Schopenhauer as Educator*, of pointing out how ill-conceived the essay is: its title promises a celebration of Schopenhauer, yet Schopenhauer is barely mentioned; much of the essay implicitly critiques Schopenhauer's doctrines, and it ends, after criticizing Schopenhauer, by praising Emerson.<sup>15</sup> Why is it that an essay whose ostensible purpose is to hold up Schopenhauer as an exemplar ends by replacing his name with Emerson's? The antepenultimate paragraph approvingly quotes a passage from Emerson's "Circles," italicizing the following sentence: "A new degree of culture would instantly revolutionize the entire system of human pursuits."<sup>16</sup> This statement echoes Emerson's earlier call, in "The American Scholar," for "the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture" (*E&L*, 67), which is, in turn, echoed in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. But closer examination reveals that Nietzsche's essay contains much more than this respectful closing nod in Emerson's direction: Emerson's sentences haunt the *entire* essay. Countless passages in *Schopenhauer as Educator* echo passages from Emerson.<sup>17</sup> The concepts of genius, exemplariness, culture, animality, timid-

ity, shame, custom, humanity, trusting oneself, conformity, longing, a circle of duties, and a higher self—these comprise only a handful among a seemingly endless number in *Schopenhauer as Educator* that either repeat or rhyme with concepts in Emerson's essays "Self-Reliance" and "Circles."<sup>18</sup>

How are we to understand the pervasiveness of Emerson's presence in this essay whose title bears Schopenhauer's name? Here is the way the essay introduces that name: "Certainly there may be other means of finding oneself, of coming to oneself out of the bewilderment in which one usually wanders as in a dark cloud, but I know of none better than to think on one's true educators. And so today I shall remember one of the teachers and taskmasters of whom I can boast, *Arthur Schopenhauer*—and later on I shall recall others" (*SE*, 130 [1]). Eventually Emerson's name is recalled, but it is Schopenhauer's that stands italicized here at the outset. Why? Nietzsche says, "[F]irst I shall remember one of the teachers of whom I can boast." Schopenhauer is a teacher of whom he can boast. Why can't he boast of Emerson? Nietzsche writes elsewhere: "*Emerson*.—Never have I felt so much at home in a book, and in *my* home, as—I may not praise it, it is too close to me."<sup>19</sup> Schopenhauer is a teacher of whom the author may boast because he is a teacher outgrown. Schopenhauer's sentences no longer represent sentences the author wishes to appropriate as his own. The essay tells us about how "Schopenhauer as a human being can serve as an example," describing a completed process of "profit[ing]" from "an example" (*SE*, 137, 136 [3]). Emerson, as the texture of the essay itself serves to reveal, continues to function as one of the author's current exemplars, thus underscoring that the task of relating oneself to one's "higher self" is not something to be done only once.

In denying that the task of self-perfection culminates in the telos of a perfected self, Nietzsche thereby aligns himself doctrinally with Emerson as well. What Emerson calls "conformity" is the condition in which one takes one's present self not only as final (as an end attained) but as last (as the end). The condition of self-reliance, (which Emerson defines as) the "aversion" of conformity, is one in which the attained self leans toward a (further) "unattained and at-

tainable self" (*E&L*, 261, 239).<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche pictures each of us as a series of attainable selves, each, once attained, leaning toward a further unattained yet attainable successor. He appears in *Schopenhauer as Educator* to recommend Schopenhauer as a figure who can play the role of exemplar for us—and who did play that role for him. A temptation here is to see this as something that happens only once for each of us—something that Schopenhauer did for Nietzsche and that now perhaps Nietzsche can do for us. Since Nietzsche's strategy is to elicit this temptation in order to frustrate it, he depicts his relation to two exemplary figures: the one to whom he once attached his heart, and the one to whom his heart is presently attached. This is what it is "to become who you are" for Nietzsche: to be negotiating the transition between a self attained and a self that is to be attained. "Becoming who you are" consists not in actualizing some preexisting entity called your "true self" but in properly managing this transition. Becoming who you are is not something you are ever finished doing, or for that matter, something you can utterly fail to be doing. The question is *how* you manage the economy of the structure of selfhood: whether you lean the attained self toward the attainable.

The recurring transcriptions of Emersonian sentences in Nietzsche's essay concretely demonstrate how to make use of an exemplar. Each sentence has been "absorb[ed] . . . like a seed," nurtured, and allowed to blossom afresh. The author, through questing in this manner for a voice that is not yet his, leans his attained self toward an as yet unattained self. This is how you, the reader, are to reclaim the rejected thoughts that you recognize as your own when they return "with a certain alienated majesty" in an exemplary work: make what you trust in such a work yours.<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche's essay seeks to illustrate how to do this. Just offering a series of sentences surrounded by quotation marks would fail to depict the desired relation to an exemplar; the essay ends with a quotation from Emerson only *after* it has unpacked the central thoughts that figure in the quotation and woven them through the fabric of the essay as a whole. Nietzsche's placement and appropriation of Emerson's sentences could usefully serve as an illustration of Emerson's point in his essay titled (and devoted to the topic of) "Quotation and Originality": "By necessity,



by proclivity and by delight, we all quote" (W, 8:178). The question that Emerson's essay explicitly poses is: under what conditions can an act of quotation amount to more than mere quotation? One can see Nietzsche's essay as implicitly posing this same question. Emerson's answer turns on how far you can measure, and let yourself be measured by, what your quotation says; he writes, "Next to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it" (W, 8:191). This is one way of summarizing the ambition of Nietzsche's early essay: to be the first quoter of an Emerson sentence. Being "the first quoter" (in this honorific sense) is a matter of being the second originator of a sentence, and it involves more than adding quotation marks—it involves making the words your own. You had not yet sought your own voice and you found this one; now you must find your own. This problematic of finding and losing a voice that both is and is not his own is enacted in Nietzsche's appropriation of Emerson's sentences.

The structure of Nietzsche's essay also mirrors a structural feature of the Emerson essay it quotes: both climax in a quotation. Emerson concludes his essay thus: "'A man,' said Oliver Cromwell, 'never rises so high as when he knows not whither he is going'" (E&L, 414). Very early in *Schopenhauer as Educator* we find the following: "Who was it who said: 'a man never rises so high as when he knows not whither he is going'" (SE, 129 [1]; translation amended). Emerson's "Circles" thus figures in both Nietzsche's opening and final segments, framing the body of the text.

What are we to make of this transposition of Emerson's closing quotation stripped of its attribution? Once we have decoded its relation to the essay inscribed in the conclusion of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, it certainly provokes us to ponder the relation between these two essays. But should we take it for granted that the answer to Nietzsche's question is simply "Emerson"? R. J. Hollingdale provides a footnote that purports to contain the answer: "Oliver Cromwell, as quoted by Cardinal de Retz in his *Memoirs*" (SE, 129). Is this the answer at which Nietzsche wishes us to arrive? Is the task he assigns us here one of tracing a series of nested quotations back to their (hidden) point of origination (so that the bit of addi-

tional erudition supplied by the provision of the name of Cardinal de Retz closes the question out)? Does this mean Emerson is not the answer to his question? (Is the author of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, who presents us with this quotation, thus also not an answer?) What counts as someone's having *said* something? *This* is the question Nietzsche's gesture of quoting Emerson quoting Cardinal de Retz quoting Cromwell (and asking "[w]ho was it who said" these words?) asks us to ask. Nietzsche has just remarked, in a sentence that almost immediately precedes his question, that if you let another bear you across the "stream of life" to your further self, you "put yourself in pawn and lose yourself" (SE, 129 [1]). While the words of another can disclose the way to your (further) self, they cannot carry you there. If you seek to adopt another's words as your own, you run the risk of depriving yourself of a self. The words of a Nietzschean/Emersonian essay are misunderstood, turned against their own ambition, the instant they are invoked as authority, the instant they are *merely* quoted.<sup>22</sup> How then does one *claim* the words of another as one's own (as opposed to merely *repeating* them)? *That* is what the relation of Nietzsche's essay to Emerson's is meant to exhibit.

As Nietzsche proposes the series of questions you are to ask yourself, he provides in each case some words you are to say to your self. But what counts as your having asked (rather than merely repeated) the question? Nietzsche furnishes as an illustrative parable the following quotation from a letter of Heinrich von Kleist: "Not long ago, . . . I became acquainted with the Kantian philosophy— . . . I have no reason to fear it will shatter you so profoundly and painfully as it has me. . . . —If the point of this thought does not penetrate your heart, do not smile at one who feels wounded by it in the deepest and most sacred part of his being" (SE, 140–41 [3]). Kleist's attempt to ask Kant's question (concerning the nature and limits of human knowledge) leaves him "shatter[ed]" and "wounded by it in the deepest and most sacred part of his being"; yet Nietzsche presents Kleist's attempt as exemplary: "When, indeed, will human beings again feel in this natural Kleistian fashion, when will they again learn to assess the meaning of a philosophy in the 'most sacred part' of their being?" (SE, 141 [3]; translation amended).

Nietzsche then goes on to propose another of his queries: “[T]he glorious, creative human being is now to answer the question: ‘Do you affirm this existence in the depths of your heart? Is it sufficient for you? Would you be its advocate, its redeemer? For you have only to pronounce a single heartfelt Yes!—and life, though it faces such heavy accusations, shall go free’” (*SE*, 146 [3]). This question is evidently the precursor of (what Nietzsche later calls) “the thought of eternal recurrence.” The exercise of posing it serves as an antidote to what the essay identifies as our most deeply rooted inclination: namely, to “kill time” (*SE*, 128 [1]). The opening theme of *Schopenhauer as Educator* is that each of us most needs to affirm—and to shrink from—her own uniqueness: “In his heart every human being knows quite well that, being unique, he will be in the world only once and that no imaginable chance will for a second time gather together into a unity so strangely variegated an assortment as he is: he knows it but he hides it like a bad conscience—why?” (*SE*, 127 [1]; translation amended). Each of us “cloaks” herself in the “conventionality” of her neighbor (*SE*, 127), attempting to flee her uniqueness by making herself resemble others. Nietzsche’s question in *Schopenhauer as Educator* (which is the precursor of “the thought of eternal recurrence”) is designed to obstruct this path of flight. Much of his subsequent authorship concerns both how best to frame this question and what criteria to propose for what counts as having genuinely asked it.

The paradox underlying Nietzsche’s later reformulations of his question is that one is best able to measure the extent of the uniqueness of one’s life by imagining its recurrence. The question thus receives its most famous recasting in *The Gay Science*:

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!”

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.” If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, “Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?” would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?<sup>23</sup>

The question here takes the form of a thought-experiment, again invoking the Kleistian response as the criterion of whether one has fully measured the question (and thus whether it is *this* question one has addressed to one’s self): “If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you.” The demon whispers the inquiry to you in “your loneliest loneliness”—that is, under the very circumstances which Nietzsche identifies as those that allow the whisper of your conscience to become audible.<sup>24</sup>

Attempts to pose versions of this question recur throughout *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Playing on various adjectival senses, Zarathustra terms it *der abgründliche Gedanke*: the most difficult, the most repellent, and the most bottomless of thoughts.<sup>25</sup> It is literally an *abgründliche*—abysmal—question because to raise it requires that you reaffirm your life, as you live it, at every instant. As the demon says, its demand (that you continually renew your previous affirmation) is to lie upon your each and every action “as the greatest weight.” The thought-experiment, designed to place the fullest possible pressure on the point of the present moment,<sup>26</sup> requires that you *attend* to the endless domestic details of your everyday life:

[O]ne is bound to admit that most people see the *closest things of all* very badly and very rarely pay heed to them. . . . [B]eing *unknowledgeable in the smallest and most everyday things* and failing to keep an eye on them—this it is that transforms the earth for so many into a “vale of tears.” Let it not be said that, here as everywhere, it is a question of human *lack of understanding*: on the contrary—there exists enough, and more than enough understanding, only it is *employed in the wrong direction* and *artificially diverted* away from these smallest and closest things. (*HH*, 303–4 [2.2.6]; Nietzsche’s emphases)

The thought-experiment enables you to keep an eye on (as the demon puts it) "every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small . . . in your life." What usually passes for philosophy, according to Nietzsche, tends to diagnose our confusion as a "lack of understanding," thus "artificially divert[ing]" our vigilance away from the smallest and most everyday things—encouraging us to attempt an ever more sophisticated employment of the intellect in place of the requisite exercise of attention. This provides us with a broad specification for what Nietzsche takes as the task of philosophy: to help us see those closest things of all, which most of us see very badly and to which we very rarely pay heed.<sup>27</sup>

Thus *Spoke Zarathustra* as a whole offers a vivid allegory of the problematic of speaking and quoting adumbrated in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. The thought of eternal recurrence is first expressed by the figure named "the Dwarf," who enunciates it in the form of a doctrine, a cosmological hypothesis about the structure and nature of time. The Dwarf says, "[T]ime itself is a circle." Zarathustra responds, "[D]o not make things too easy for yourself," and chastises the Dwarf for not entering the thought through the gateway that has "inscribed above: 'Moment'" ("On the Vision and the Riddle," in Z, 270 [3.2.2]). To say that the Dwarf does not inscribe the thought of eternal recurrence under the aspect of the Moment is to say that his attempt to think it does not transform his relation to each moment of his life: it does not lie upon his actions as "the greatest weight." Later the thought of eternal recurrence finds expression again through Zarathustra's animals, this time, more properly, as an *attitude toward life*—but as a mere attitude, one of shallow optimism the attainment of which, still, requires no fundamental transformation of self. All of these characters in *Zarathustra* strive to give voice to a thought that they take to be the equivalent of the one to which Zarathustra aspires. In each case, Zarathustra turns on the speaker(s) and rejects the thought in their mouths as a counterfeit version of the "most abysmal thought." In each case, failure to meet the demand imposed by the task (of thinking this thought) does not, as Nietzsche says, turn on a *lack of understanding*: "there exists enough, and more than enough understanding, only it is *employed in the wrong direction*."<sup>28</sup>

*Schopenhauer as Educator* ends with the following anecdote: "Diogenes said when someone praised a philosopher in his presence: 'How can he be considered great, since he has been a philosopher for so long and has never yet *disturbed* anybody?'" (SE, 194 [8]). This is the final question that you, upon completing Nietzsche's essay, are to ask yourself: has it disturbed you? If not, it has failed its purpose; and the epithet Nietzsche applies to academic philosophy should be applied to it as well: "That, indeed, ought to be the epitaph of university philosophy: 'it disturbed nobody'" (SE, 194). As our peek at *Zarathustra* indicates, Nietzsche's central ambition subsequently becomes finding a way of writing philosophy that defies the conferral of that epithet. The elaborations on the theme of quoting and saying in *Schopenhauer as Educator* represent the first, comparatively timid steps in the development of that project. The search for a form of authorship that successfully undercuts the reader's temptation merely to quote the text, to confer a false authority on his words, spurs the composition of texts that increasingly resist mere quotation. This leads not only to the abandonment of the essay form in Nietzsche's work but to the gradual disappearance of an authorial voice to whom "views" can be straightforwardly ascribed. Hiding behind what he later calls his "masks," he offers genealogies and polemics designed to serve as antidotes and correctives to our natural intellectual inclinations, repudiating in advance the reader who wishes simply to subscribe to some piece of doctrine he finds in Nietzsche's prose. One is thus led to wonder: would Nietzsche deem the contemporary reception of his (evidently quotable) work a measure of its success or its failure?<sup>29</sup>

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#### Notes

This essay is a slightly revised version of the conclusion to a much longer work, "Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of *Schopenhauer as Educator*," which will be published in its entirety in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Reassessments of Nietzsche's Philosophy*, ed. Richard Schacht (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press); reprinted with the permission of Cambridge Univ. Press. The epigraph comes from Friedrich Schlegel, sec. 371 in *Athenaeum Fragments*,

in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1991), 75–76; I have modified the translation.

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), 117 [203]; I have modified the translation. Nietzsche citations include bracketed references to part, chapter, and/or section numbers.

<sup>2</sup> See John Rawls, "The Principle of Perfection," sec. 50 in *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 1971), 325–32. In calling Nietzsche a "perfectionist," I rely on the characterization of perfectionism set forth by Stanley Cavell in his 1988 Carus Lectures, collected in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990). "[T]here is," Cavell writes, "no closed list of features that constitute perfectionism"; rather, perfectionism is "something like a dimension or tradition of the moral life that spans the course of Western thought and concerns what used to be called the state of one's soul" (4, 2). That tradition of perfectionist writers—which includes Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein (to name just a few cited by Cavell)—resists summary in a few sentences. For Cavell's preliminary discussion and definition of perfectionism as articulated in the work of both Emerson and Nietzsche, see xi–xxxviii and 1–9.

Stephen Mulhall provides a succinct overview of the significance of Nietzschean and Emersonian perfectionism in Cavell's recent work—and of Cavell's attempt to defend perfectionism from the critique set forth in Rawls's *Theory of Justice*; see "Emerson: Perfectionism, Idiosyncrasy, Justice," chap. 11 in *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 263–82. [Editor's note: The following excerpt from Mulhall is worth quoting at length since it helpfully summarizes the region of Cavell's concerns that set the agenda of the present essay: "Emersonian perfectionism, as it comes to be specified in [Cavell's] Carus Lectures, embodies an idea of the individual's truth to herself or to the humanity in herself; it is an understanding of the soul as on an upward or onward journey that begins by finding oneself lost to the world and requires a refusal of society in the name of some further, more cultivated or cultured, state of society and the self. . . . Even granting the coherence and attractiveness of this dimension of moral or spiritual thinking, however, there remains a key question—the question to which the Carus Lectures are primarily devoted: What does this have to do with the arrangements of modern democracies? The state of my soul might be of pressing importance to me, but why should it be of any concern to the arbitrators of what one might call public or social justice, i.e. to my fellow citizens, and to myself in the role of citizen? Indeed, is not the idea of such perfectionism inherently elitist? Can a vision which embodies some notion of

spiritual aristocracy even be rendered compatible with democratic aspirations? Cavell addresses these two questions by confronting Emerson with John Rawls and his *Theory of Justice*, since . . . Rawls explicitly sets his face against the idea that perfectionist doctrines might have a role to play in modern democratic life on the grounds that they involve elitist presuppositions" (265–67).]

<sup>3</sup> Bertrand de Jouvenal—the other thinker who, along with Nietzsche, Rawls cites in this connection (*Theory of Justice*, 326 n. 52)—is a much better example of someone who fits Rawls's, Alan Donagan's, and Thomas Hurka's characterizations of a perfectionist. For Donagan's discussion of Nietzsche's anti-democratic perfectionism, see *The Theory of Morality* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), 26–27; for Hurka's more recent treatment, see *Perfectionism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 75–76.

<sup>4</sup> I am here rehearsing a central theme of Cavell's *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, 28 October 1813, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul L. Ford (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1892–99), 10:425–28.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 136 [1.300]; translation amended and second emphasis added. This edition is hereafter cited parenthetically as *HH*.

<sup>7</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), 62–63; hereafter cited parenthetically as *OL*.

<sup>8</sup> It is the burden of the first two-thirds of the monograph from which this excerpt is drawn to establish not only that the standard elitist reading of Nietzsche is misguided but that Nietzsche himself is centrally concerned with criticizing and diagnosing the sources of our attraction to elitist modes of thought.

<sup>9</sup> One of Nietzsche's *Nachlaß* notebooks from the fall of 1881 (which contains some virtual transcriptions of passages from Emerson) bears the title "Emerson—Exemplar" (in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari [Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag/de Gruyter, 1980], 9:618–22).

<sup>10</sup> [Editor's note: The sections that precede this excerpt from "Nietzsche's Perfectionism" discuss the importance of the "Exemplar" and the "exemplarisch" in Nietzsche's thought. This idea, and the aesthetic and moral necessity of "attaching one's heart to some great human being," were central concerns of eighteenth-century German philosophical writing and subsequent German romantic authors. One of Nietzsche's best-known in-

vocations of the exemplary individual—the passage that Rawls cites in his dismissal of Nietzschean perfectionism as inherently undemocratic (see *A Theory of Justice*, 325–26)—occurs in the sixth section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*: “Mankind must work continually at the production of individual great men—that and nothing else is its 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.” See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 161–62; for the specific notion of “attaching one’s heart” to such exemplars, see 163 (translation modified). All subsequent references to *Schopenhauer as Educator* will be to this edition, which will be cited parenthetically as *SE*.]

<sup>11</sup> “Each philosopher, each bard, each actor,” Emerson declares in “The American Scholar,” “has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself” (*E&L*, 67). And in “Uses of Great Men,” he develops at length the theme that the significance of the great man lies in his capacity to serve as “a representative” of another’s unrecognized possibilities: “We have never come at the true and best benefit of any genius, so long as we believe him an original force. . . . [W]ithin the limits of human education and agency, we may say, great men exist that there may be greater men” (*E&L*, 631–32).

<sup>12</sup> In “Emerson and the Inhibitions of Democracy” (in *The Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam [Lubbock: Texas Tech Univ. Press, 1993], 121–32), Judith Shklar argues that Emerson’s valorization of great men is in tension with his fondness for democracy, and she interprets his employment of the democratic terminology of “representative” and “delegate” as an ingenious ploy to paper over this tension. Shklar’s essay revolves around an opposition between the great man (who is averse to conformity) and the ordinary man (who is imprisoned by conformity); she writes of “a vast gap between the two kinds of men” and pictures greatness as a function of natural endowment (126). Her reading of Emerson thus recapitulates the same problematic we encounter in the elitist reading of Nietzsche. Shklar says great men “are delegated to us” (128, emphasis added). But Emerson says they are delegated by us to do what all of us can one day do for ourselves (*E&L*, 67). Shklar writes, “It is as absurd to speak of a hidden great man as of an ungifted genius” (128). Yet this is precisely what Emerson teaches: there is a great man hidden inside each one of us, whispering to get out. Shklar cites the following remark as an instance of Emerson’s irony: “great men:—the word is injurious” (127; see “Uses of Great Men,” in *E&L*, 629). But his point here is that the word is injurious for the very reasons Nietzsche cites, when he similarly enjoins us: “Do not talk about being gifted, or possessing

innate talent!” “One can name great men of all kinds,” Nietzsche adds, “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*, 86 [1.163]; translation modified). Emerson continues: “Is there caste? is there Fate? What becomes of the promise to virtue?” (*E&L*, 629). The opposition between great men and common men that Shklar presupposes is one that Emerson explicitly seeks to repudiate: “As to what we call the masses, and common men;—there are no common men” (*E&L*, 630).

<sup>13</sup> When Nietzsche speaks, as he does throughout *Schopenhauer as Educator*, of the unborn “genius” within us or of someone having “evaded his genius” (*SE*, 142, 128 [3, 1]), he is adopting Emerson’s grammar for the term. Genius, according to Emerson, appears to be the name of some rare commodity only because you shrink from an encounter with “your genius.” Thus he repeatedly enjoins his reader, “Follow your genius.”

<sup>14</sup> “What is the face of your friend anyway? It is your own face in a rough and imperfect mirror” (Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Friend,” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Viking, 1954], 168 [1.14]; hereafter cited parenthetically as *Z*). The role of the exemplar is an idealization of one aspect of (Nietzsche’s concept of) friendship. Nietzsche presents us with Schopenhauer as someone who is in this respect a (potential) friend, someone who can mediate the conversation between me and my higher self. According to Zarathustra, “the friend is always the third person,” for “I and me” should be “deep in conversation” (*Z*, 167–68 [1.14]).

<sup>15</sup> J. P. Stern, in his introduction to the Hollingdale translation of the *Untimely Meditations*, furnishes a representative example of this attitude of condescension (see xxv). The epigraph to this section comes from Schlegel, sec. 5 in *Ideas*, in *Philosophical Fragments*, 94.

<sup>16</sup> In its entirety, Nietzsche’s citation from “Circles” reads: “Beware,” says Emerson, ‘when the great God lets loose a thinker on this planet. Then all things are at risk. It is as when a conflagration has broken out in a great city, and no man knows what is safe, or where it will end. There is not a piece of science but its flank may be turned tomorrow; there is not any literary reputation, not the so-called eternal names of fame, that may not be revised and condemned; the things which are dear to men at this hour are so on account of the ideas which have emerged on their mental horizon, and which cause the present order of things, as a tree bears its apples. A new degree of culture would instantly revolutionize the entire system of human pursuits’ (*SE*, 193 [8]). (Though Hollingdale’s translation does not indicate the elision, Nietzsche’s citation from Emerson joins the first

part of the fourteenth paragraph of "Circles" to the last sentences of the sixteenth [cf. *E&L*, 407-8]).

<sup>17</sup> Cavell's way of putting this point is to say that Nietzsche's essay consists of more than one "virtual transcription" of Emerson: "Nietzsche's meditation on Schopenhauer is, to an as yet undisclosed extent, a transcription and elaboration of Emersonian passages" (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 4, 49). Here are a few examples beyond the ones Cavell gives:

- 1a. "[E]verything bears witness to what we are, our friendships and enmities, our glance and the clasp of our hand, our memory and that which we do not remember, our books and our handwriting" (*SE*, 129 [1]).
- 1b. "Character teaches above our wills. Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment" ("Self-Reliance," in *E&L*, 266).
- 2a. "I profit from a philosopher only insofar as he can be an example" (*SE*, 136 [3]).
- 2b. "Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul" ("Divinity School Address," in *E&L*, 79).
- 3a. "[R]ead your own life and comprehend from it the hieroglyphics of universal life" (*SE*, 141-42 [3]).
- 3b. "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense" ("Self-Reliance," in *E&L*, 259).
- 4a. "[Men] . . . are all timid. They hide themselves behind customs and opinions" (*SE*, 127 [1]).
- 4b. "Man is timid and apologetic; . . . he dares not say "I think," "I am," but quotes some saint or sage" ("Self-Reliance," in *E&L*, 270).

*Schopenhauer as Educator* and "Self-Reliance" share numerous such twinings, a correlation that is not unprecedented in Nietzsche's work. Reformulations of Emersonian thoughts are to be found among his earliest writings. Two of Nietzsche's earliest essays, "Fate and History" and "Free Will and Fate," are in fact transparent attempts to recast two Emerson essays: "History" and "Fate" (see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke und Briefe: Historische-Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Munich: C. H. Beck, 1933-42], 2:54-63).

<sup>18</sup> A parallel line of filiation also runs from Emerson's Over-soul to Nietzsche's *Ueberschensch*.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in Walter Kaufmann, translator's introduction to *The Gay Science* (New York: Random House, 1974), 12. Kaufmann goes on to cite another of Nietzsche's well-known remarks on Emerson: "The author who has been richest in ideas in this century so far has been an American" (12).

<sup>20</sup> See the introduction to *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (esp. 12) for a discussion of this region of Emerson's thought; for Cavell's treatment of Emerson's remark that self-reliance is the "aversion" of conformity, see 37 and 138.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche's essays in fact encode at one remove a parallel demonstration (concerning the process by which one philosopher may appropriate the prose of another) in the relation Emerson's *Essays* bear to Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason*. The way in which Emerson's prose incorporates and shifts the philosophical valence of assorted pieces of Kantian philosophical terminology forms a subsidiary topic of a number of Cavell's essays on Emerson. See especially "Emerson, Coleridge, Kant (Terms as Conditions)," chap. 2 of *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), 27-49; and "Aversive Thinking: Emersonian Representations in Heidegger and Nietzsche," chap. 1 of *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 33-63.

<sup>22</sup> Zarathustra says: "'This is my way; where is yours?—thus I answered those who asked me 'the way.' For the way—that does not exist" ("On the Spirit of Gravity," in *Z*, 307 [3.11.2]).

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *Gay Science* (Kaufmann), 273-74 [341].

<sup>24</sup> What it is that the voice of our conscience says to us forms the opening topic of *Schopenhauer as Educator* (see *SE*, 127 [1]) and remains a central topic throughout the remainder of the essay. For the thought that this voice speaks most audibly when it speaks to us in a whisper ("when we are alone and quiet"), see *SE*, 158-59 [5].

<sup>25</sup> In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer says of the thought of eternal recurrence that if you were seriously to attempt to think it—fully to contemplate the prospect of living your life over again exactly as before—you would go insane (*The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne [New York: Dover, 1966], 1:279-80, 324). From *Schopenhauer as Educator* on, Nietzsche seeks to contest Schopenhauer's assertion that one's attitude toward one's own existence, if honest, must be as follows: "[A]t the end of his life, no man, if he be sincere and at the same time in possession of his faculties, will ever wish to go through it again. Rather than this, he will much prefer to choose complete non-existence" (*World as Will*, 1:324).

<sup>26</sup> In this, as in other respects, Nietzsche's thought-experiment is cousin to Kierkegaard's concept of Repetition.

<sup>27</sup> To this extent, the purpose served by the thought-experiment of eternal recurrence parallels that served by the contemplation of an exemplar: both enable us to attend to that which lies closest of all and yet is most difficult to heed.

<sup>28</sup> In the final book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, our hero, after much struggle, finally rises to the thought, and we are shown how it transforms him: he becomes capable of a "laughter that [is] no human laughter" ("On the Vision and the Riddle," in *Z*, 272 [3.2.2]). Nietzsche in his later work (particularly in *Ecce Homo*) often refers to Zarathustra as "the thinker of the thought of eternal recurrence"—a statement that might be read as Nietzsche's refusal to confer this title upon himself.

<sup>29</sup> This essay has been through many versions. It grew out of coteaching successive versions of an undergraduate course on moral perfectionism at Harvard with Stanley Cavell and is greatly indebted to material presented in Cavell's lectures for that course, some of which has found its way into print in his *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*. This essay is, in addition, indebted to conversations with Steve Affeldt, Bill Bristow, Greg Fayer, Arata Hamawaki, John McNees, Hilary Putnam, and Martin Stone; the final version owes a special debt to improvements suggested by David Finkelstein and by Robert Haraldsson. And it never would have found its way into its present form but for the encouragement, perseverance, and *übermenschliche Geduld* of Richard Schacht.

## Floods of Life" around "Granite of Fate":

### Emerson and Nietzsche as

### Thinkers of Nature

Graham Parkes

He has said the best things about nature that ever were said.  
—Emerson, "Goethe; or, The Writer"

We seem nowadays less "[e]mbosomed . . . in nature" than when Emerson published his first book, the "little azure-coloured *Nature*," in 1836; and if the "floods of life" that "stream around us and through us" do indeed "invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature," we appear to have declined or ignored that invitation (*E&L*, 7). Instead, we have perpetrated so many ill-proportioned acts on that long-suffering Mother that she becomes ever less able to sustain the floods of life on which the human species depends. The contribution that follows is part of a grander project aligned against this tendency, and thus calls for a preliminary outline.

One of the grounds for slow progress on environmental issues is that the problems tend to be seen, and the debates conducted, within the horizons of a modern world view deriving from Platonic, Christian, and Cartesian-Newtonian philosophies. Such parochial discourses are proving ineffectual in the face of the global predicament that now confronts us: what is required is a radical transformation of perspective. Heeding Marx's injunction to philosophers (in *Theses on Feuerbach*) to "change the world" rather than merely "interpret it in various ways," let us look to thinkers who interpret the