

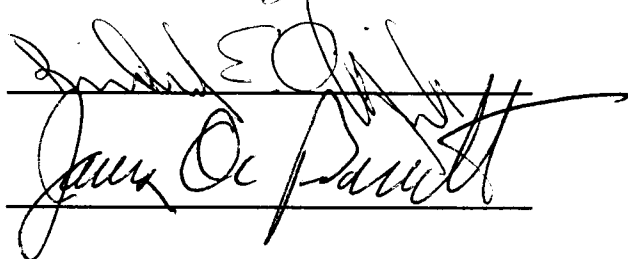
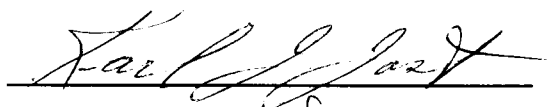
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Bedford Bryan Hilliard entitled "Nietzsche's *Übermensch*: A Philosophical Analysis." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Philosophy.



L. B. Cebik, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

NIETZSCHE'S *ÜBERMENSCH*: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Bedford Bryan Hilliard

August, 1992

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DEDICATION

For Brenda, whose unconditional love and understanding helps sustain my joyful affirmation of life.

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Finally, I would like to thank my wife Brenda. Her intelligence, wit, and gentle prodding contributed greatly to the completion of this project.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to set forth and defend an interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. The interpretation offered here is not an entirely new one, but one that represents a synthesis of two approaches that might be taken toward the *Übermensch* concept. This is not to say, however, that nothing new is to be found either in the interpretation itself, or in the consequences of the interpretation for Nietzsche scholarship. The originality of this study is manifested through several different aspects.

First, the *Übermensch* is not explained in the context of Nietzsche's biography or psychological make-up. Instead, the *Übermensch* is approached as a legitimate philosophical concept or idea, with the usual attendant errors and misinterpretations that accompany any concept or idea under philosophical scrutiny. Of course, it may be that the description "philosophical concept" itself takes on a different meaning when discussing Nietzsche as opposed to other philosophers. Nietzsche's conception of philosophy and what it means to do philosophy is explored, but here, too, the biographical is not allowed to play a role.

A second aspect of this study that contributes to its originality concerns the handling of Nietzsche's texts including the unpublished notes. Too often interpreters and scholars of Nietzsche interpret and critique a concept in isolation, looking

exclusively at passages where the particular concept is mentioned. Too, many scholars cite passages that support their particular reading of Nietzsche while ignoring others. Although this study is indebted to much previous Nietzsche scholarship, the method of "explanation through excision" is a particular problem for interpretations of the *Übermensch* and is abandoned here in favor of a more thorough reading of Nietzsche.

In addition to a more complete examination of Nietzsche's texts, other interpretations of the *Übermensch* are examined. A distinction is made between "*Übermensch* as ideal model" explanations and "*Übermensch* as idealized attitude" readings. For various reasons both kinds of interpretation are considered deficient; however, each kind of treatment has something to recommend it, and at this point a synthesis can begin to be constructed. Such a synthesis is only possible in the context of a full understanding of Nietzsche's overall project and the importance of other of Nietzsche's concepts and ideas in this project.

Toward this end Nietzsche's epistemology and ontology are examined. Nietzsche's perspectivism, his notion of will to truth, and the distinction between being and becoming are explored and evaluated. Nietzsche does not posit a theory of knowledge nor a theory of reality; his critique of such pursuits, as well as his objections to theories in and of themselves, contributes to an understanding of the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche's concepts of will to power and eternal recurrence also are

examined. The interpretation of *Übermensch* offered here will relate directly to these two concepts and will facilitate a better understanding of them.

Too often in the past interpreters of Nietzsche have considered his *Übermensch* idea an embarrassment, aberration, or something to be ignored altogether. This study draws none of these conclusions. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is understandable and valuable, but only as a synthesis of the ideal and attitude reading, and only if this synthesis is accomplished in the overall context of Nietzsche's aestheticism, stylistic pluralism, and critique of morality.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is little or no dispute in most quarters that Nietzsche is an important thinker. Nietzsche's importance has long been recognized in the European philosophical community, regardless of the fact that this recognition has often been sporadic and diverse. Only in recent years have English-speaking philosophers come to recognize and appreciate the significance of Nietzsche's thought. Myriad reasons account for the long period of neglect Nietzsche suffered in the English-speaking world. One such reason is the adaptation and mangling of Nietzsche's thought by fascists in the early twentieth century. Nietzsche's sister, perhaps the first Nazi, did her best to transform his philosophy into a destructive political manifesto. Another reason is the lack of adequate and accurate English translations of Nietzsche's works. For the first half of the twentieth century the only English translations of Nietzsche's works appeared in the Oscar Levy edition which, with its many flaws, did little to foster interest in Nietzsche's thought. These maladies for the most part have been remedied, and Nietzsche scholarship is now a respectable endeavor.

Of course, that it is now popular to "do Nietzsche" is one thing, but to "get Nietzsche right" is quite another matter altogether. Ironically, a direct correlation exists between the popularity of Nietzsche studies and the abundance of inadequate

and/or misleading interpretations of Nietzsche's thought; the more popular Nietzsche is, the greater the number of such interpretations. Particular bad interpretations, why such interpretations are bad, and the reasons for their creation will be examined later. However, simply asserting that "bad" interpretations of Nietzsche's thought exist has become controversial in itself. This study does not make the claim that there is only one way to read Nietzsche, or that there is only one interpretation or kind of interpretation of Nietzsche's thought. This is not the case at all. On the contrary, given Nietzsche's utilization of disparate styles and the importance he attaches to his notion of perspectivism, insistence upon one way of reading Nietzsche or upon one definitive interpretation of his thought would be sheer folly. A recommendation of extreme relativism with regard to reading and interpreting Nietzsche's philosophy now seems to be in order. Paradoxically enough, this study refuses to make such a recommendation.

The result of these observations is that this study wants it both ways; there do exist inadequate or misleading interpretations of Nietzsche's thought *and yet* there may exist several legitimate contenders for how to read and interpret Nietzsche. That is, one must guard against adopting or accepting inadequate interpretations while at the same time realizing that there are different, yet valid, readings of Nietzsche's philosophy. Several commentators do indeed posit and defend adequate, if not excellent, interpretations of Nietzsche's philosophy, interpretations that this

study itself will use to facilitate understanding of Nietzsche's thought. Yet, such interpretations may be radically different from one another.

This seemingly contradictory approach to Nietzsche studies need not involve a contradiction at all if the method of working within certain specified guidelines or parameters is introduced. Within certain parameters several different ways of reading Nietzsche and several different interpretations of his thought may be appropriate. Such parameters might include, but are not necessarily limited to, a careful reading of all Nietzsche's texts (or at least a careful reading of all of one text), a general understanding of Nietzsche's overall task, an appreciation of Nietzsche's views concerning philosophy and philosophers, and a careful consideration of some of the ideas and concepts Nietzsche espoused. When these basics are ignored, either willfully or accidentally, "bad" interpretations result.

This study adheres to the above basic parameters, and the result should be a better understanding of Nietzsche's thought as a whole and a better grasp of some of the particulars of that thought. Of course, one might well object that this method of positing particular guidelines and adhering to them is itself controversial and needs defending. To the extent that this method of positing particular guidelines is indicative of a certain attitude (perhaps even the fulfillment of a particular agenda) toward Nietzsche studies, then perhaps something by way of a defense is in order. However, such a justification presently can be undertaken only by way of a few brief introductory remarks. A complete and more detailed defense resides within the

study as a whole; consequently, a final appraisal and critique will be delayed, if but for a little while.

This study originates from and consistently utilizes two basic sets of assumptions; the first set concerns Nietzsche studies itself, and the second set concerns the very nature and purpose of philosophy. First, with respect to Nietzsche studies, I maintain that Nietzsche's thought should be approached without any preconceived notions, to whatever extent possible. The temptation to use Nietzsche's various ideas and concepts to fit a particular agenda, to mold and shape his thought to meet one's own ends, is great. There are those who want Nietzsche to succeed, or fail, as an analytic philosopher, and there are those who wish to deconstruct his thought, discovering in Nietzsche's writings a new kind of literature. But these agendas, and the efforts undertaken to mold Nietzsche on their behalf, tend to misrepresent and/or neglect much of what is important in Nietzsche's thought.

My agenda in pursuing this study of Nietzsche is to have no agenda, no preconceived notions of what Nietzsche's philosophy should or should not be. If this study has any agenda at all, it is to let Nietzsche be Nietzsche. That is, this study begins from the assumption that Nietzsche's philosophy in and of itself, Nietzsche's philosophy simpliciter, is valuable and worthy of explication and critique. Of course, more will be said later on this three-fold distinction between ways of reading and interpreting Nietzsche's philosophy. Suffice it to say, of paramount importance for this study will be an explication of Nietzsche's overall task (or at least what

Nietzsche took that overall task to be), an explication of Nietzsche's views on philosophy and philosophers, and a critical analysis of some of Nietzsche's concepts and ideas. There are several different ways of approaching these aspects; this study represents one way. In particular, this study will concentrate on a critical analysis of one of Nietzsche's concepts and its relationship, if there is one, to other aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy, including his many and controversial remarks regarding morality, ontology, and epistemology. Concentrating on Nietzsche's thought simpliciter, as well as the different relationships between certain aspects of that thought, should generate a better way of understanding and appreciating Nietzsche.

Intertwined with assumptions and preconceptions of how Nietzsche should be approached and studied are preconceptions of, and commitments to, how philosophy qua philosophy should be approached and studied. Those who approach Nietzsche in the hope of fulfilling certain agendas usually bring with them, as basic presuppositions of these agendas, rigid and narrowly defined views concerning the proper function of philosophy. The commentator who would turn Nietzsche into an analytic philosopher brings to his/her study of Nietzsche certain views of philosophy informed by commitments to logical form, valid arguments, and strict inferences. The commentator who would "deconstruct" Nietzsche's thought is committed to the context in which Nietzsche's thought appears and to the literary value of his texts. Both the analytic philosopher and the deconstructionist incorporate into their study of Nietzsche certain assumptions, whether overt or covert, about how philosophy

should be undertaken and what philosophy should accomplish. Such commitments bind the commentator to a certain set of beliefs and practices which in turn impact upon how they explicate and critique Nietzsche. The analytic philosopher refuses (sometimes willfully) to take into consideration Nietzsche's myriad styles of writing and his wit. The deconstructionist refuses (sometimes willfully) to take into consideration Nietzsche's use of argument and his reliance on certain concepts. In either case, something important is neglected.

In this study the issue of how and how not to practice philosophy and what philosophy should and should not accomplish will be left open, at least for the time being. Of course, that I wish not to express any prior commitments that I might hold toward the field of philosophy is, in and of itself, somewhat indicative of the basic assumptions I carry into this study. Indeed, I might characterize my view of philosophy as one which is "looser" than the analytic philosopher would like but "tighter" than the deconstructionist's view. This description will have to remain, at least for the moment, vague. As this study progresses, both clarification of and argumentation for my commitments to philosophy will emerge.

The above comments addressing the issue of prior assumptions and commitments, both to Nietzsche scholarship and to philosophy itself, have been deliberately kept brief and simplistic. Obviously, there are more complexities involved in the analytic versus deconstructionist debate, both with respect to Nietzsche studies and to philosophy itself, than were presented in the above sketch.

These complexities and their attendant problems will emerge as the study progresses. The above outline does serve the dual purpose of highlighting two of the basic concerns of this study and of providing a point of departure from which to begin a study of Nietzsche and one of his most basic concepts.

Perhaps the concept for which Nietzsche is most famous is his notion of the *Übermensch* and its attendant, *Übermenschlichkeit*.¹ One need only glance at the vast amount of literature on Nietzsche to see that this concept plays an important, if not central, role in the minds of most commentators. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the *Übermensch* is little more than mentioned; if a detailed treatment is offered, more often than not such treatments are filled with errors. A paradox of sorts occurs in which commentators claim that the *Übermensch* is somehow

¹It is interesting to note that Nietzsche was not the first to use the term *Übermensch*. The term appears, in its plural, at line 490 in Part One of Goethe's *Faust*; "*Da bin ich!--Welch erbärmlich Grauen Fasst Übermenschen dich!*"

Throughout this study I will use the German terms *Übermensch*, *Übermenschlichkeit*, and *Übermenschheit*. The purpose of this usage is precision. The most common translation, "superman" has obvious problems, and the term "overman", which has become more popular in Nietzsche scholarship, seems just as awkward. It is tempting to posit "crossing over man" as a translation, but this too seems awkward. The fact that no adequate English substitute can be found may say something about the importance and special nature of the term. In any event, explicating and evaluating the concept will be difficult enough without the clutter that accompanies inadequate, if not silly, translations of Nietzsche's most important concept.

I should also like to point out that Nietzsche, as far as I can tell, rarely if ever uses the term *Übermenschlichkeit*. I use this term as a tool in my attempt at understanding what it would be like to be an *Übermensch*.

important to Nietzsche's thought, yet these same commentators are unable or unwilling to give the concept the attention it deserves.

Nietzsche's concept certainly has been the object of misunderstanding and perhaps outright abuse. Interpretations of the *Übermensch* range from the poetic to the ethical, and in between resides the argument that the *Übermensch* is some type of blond beast bent on world domination. Even among those interpretations which, *prima facie* at least, are more philosophically significant and truer to Nietzsche's intention, there are problems and ambiguities. For example, two interpretations that are enjoying some degree of popularity and seem "right" are the "*Übermensch* as ideal" and the "*Übermensch* as attitude" readings. While one or the other of these treatments, or a combination of both, may be the "right" interpretation, many problems remain. What exactly is meant by "ideal"? Are there not different meanings to the term? What exactly is an "attitude"? The amount of philosophical scrutiny and investigation unfortunately has not kept pace with the degree of popular acceptance that these two interpretations have received. The purpose of this study, simply put, is to do better.

At this point we would do well to consider briefly the phrases "*Übermensch* as ideal" and "*Übermensch* as attitude" and what they and their accompanying interpretations might mean. Three possibilities exist. First, Nietzsche might have in mind a definite "ideal" individual who possesses a certain attitude. The *Übermensch* simply would be one who possesses this attitude. Under this reading

such a being does not exist and may not ever exist, or at least did not ever exist in Nietzsche's lifetime. On this question of existence turns the further distinction between "mere" ideal and "realizable" ideal. The second possibility concerns the attitude of the readers of Nietzsche or his potential readers. This reading emphasizes *our* attitude, or our possession of a certain attitude--not the existence of some ideal being and *its own* possession of a certain attitude. A third approach, which is similar to the above two possibilities, also exists. On this third reading we might hope for the production of *Übermenschen*, and these *Übermenschen* (Nietzsche's readers) would possess a special attitude. Here we have elements of both "attitude" and "ideal" readings, but the "ideal" is much *less* ideal than in the first possibility since we might convert ourselves into approximations of *Übermenschen*.²

These three readings of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, while different, are not necessarily mutually exclusive; the first and third readings, for example, are compatible. And Nietzsche himself may not have been clear on just how he saw the *Übermensch*. There is evidence, for example, that Nietzsche was genuinely torn between construing the *Übermensch* as an actual human being and positing the notion that the *Übermensch* represents some kind of being beyond humanity. We also should note that the "ideal" and "attitude" interpretations are not necessarily a package deal; they could be separated and in fact will be separated later. What is certain is that the distinction is more than grammatical and that commentators ignore

²I want to thank Richard Aquila for showing me this distinction.

the importance of the distinction. This distinction will be examined later in much more detail.

As I have suggested, my goal to do better need not necessarily imply that I am setting forth the definitive interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. Any attempt to posit a final and definitive interpretation of anything in Nietzsche's philosophy is doomed to failure. Several reasons support this claim. First, philosophical theories and concepts in and of themselves are not receptive of final interpretations. The philosophical text of any philosopher can, and perhaps should, be read differently at different times. Second, concepts and theories may and often do change in meaning from text to text and even within the same text. Much of this is inadvertent, but often the same concept or term may be used to identify or describe different things at different times. Much in Nietzsche's philosophy appears in a state of flux; the will to power may be the quintessential example of a concept that Nietzsche was continually struggling to develop. Thus any given interpretation may depend upon which text is given the greatest emphasis. Both of these reasons for not positing a final interpretation apply to all philosophers, but one must admit that Nietzsche represents a special challenge.

Any commentator on Nietzsche who would elucidate a definitive interpretation faces particular problems or pitfalls that are peculiar to Nietzsche scholarship. First, there are the concepts themselves. They appear and disappear irregularly both between texts and within the same text. This makes following a line

of argument difficult and not a task for the lazy commentator. Second, the method Nietzsche employs in discussing, analyzing, and evaluating his own concepts is, at best, a little unusual. He does not employ what might be thought of as conventional methods of argumentation. Third, Nietzsche appears to be too "easy" to read. That Nietzsche is not easy to read will be apparent to anyone who spends some time with the material, yet the perception persists that Nietzsche is "easy." We shall examine this particular problem in more detail in the next chapter. And a final problem peculiar to Nietzsche--a problem that ties the first three together--is Nietzsche's conception of just what philosophy is. His view of philosophy, including its content and purpose, is radically different from that of many of those who study him. Within this context we encounter what I call Nietzsche's aestheticism and the place and function of art and the artist within a critical examination of human existence. Some commentators are quick to acknowledge the importance of Nietzsche's conception of philosophy and his aestheticism, but many others are not; I maintain that the efforts of the latter group are doomed to failure. (Here again we see the problems caused by adherence to certain agendas and prior commitments.) We shall return to Nietzsche's conception of philosophy as well as the role of aesthetics later.

Noting the difficulties with, if not the outright impossibility of, positing and defending a definitive interpretation of particular concepts and ideas is not the same as claiming that there are not "bad" interpretations, or that some interpretations are not "better" than others. Earlier, the possibility of inadequate interpretations and

how they could result was mentioned. Some commentators often skew or distort a philosopher's thought and often commit outright errors. Nietzsche, perhaps more than any other thinker, has been the victim of such distortion and error. The blame for some of this distortion rests, to be sure, with Nietzsche. His attitude toward philosophy in general and toward philosophical systems in particular indicates that he will not proceed in a traditional, seemingly orderly way.

Systematisers practice a kind of play-acting; in as much as they want to fill out a system and round off its horizon, they have to try to present their weaker qualities in the same style as their stronger--they try to impersonate whole and uniformly strong natures.³

Nietzsche's abhorrence for philosophical systems influences his style of writing, a style that complicates matters even further. Nietzsche even seems to take great delight in the fact that his style is difficult.

Those who can breathe the air of my writings know that it is an air of the heights, a *strong* air. One must be made for it. Otherwise there is no small danger that one may catch cold in it. The ice is near, the solitude tremendous--but how calmly all things lie in the light! How freely one breathes! How much one feels *beneath* oneself.⁴

³Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 158, Sec. 318, "Beware of Systematisers!". Nietzsche's attitude toward philosophy and his special approach to philosophy will be discussed in much greater detail in the next chapter.

⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 218, Sec 3, "Preface."

The problems mentioned above certainly contribute to bad interpretations of Nietzsche's texts, but Nietzsche is not the only one at fault. Commentators of Nietzsche, at least some of them, also deserve much, if not most, of the blame. There are several reasons why commentators will not, or cannot, interpret Nietzsche correctly. Some of these reasons will be explored in later chapters in connection with the *Übermensch* and other of Nietzsche's concepts. However, we might just mention one problem that many readers have with Nietzsche's texts: "explanation through excision."⁵ By explanation through excision I mean the process by which interpreters set forth an interpretation of a particular concept or group of concepts by omitting from their consideration a large portion of important material. Such deletions may or may not be deliberate, but they are certainly damaging to a cogent interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy. Consider for example the charge of misogyny leveled against Nietzsche based on the passage, "You are going to women? Do not forget the whip!"⁶ Too, there are interpretations of the will to power as "might makes right" stemming from such lines as, "Benefitting and hurting others are ways of exercising one's power upon others; that is all one desires in such

⁵I owe a debt of gratitude to Greg Seals for his helpful comments on this and other points.

⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, Penguin Books, 1976), p. 179, "On Little Old and Young Women."

cases."⁷ Such misreadings occur because Nietzsche is read and interpreted out of context, a problem which also informs discussions of the *Übermensch*. Such charges, of course, should not be made against all commentators of Nietzsche, and this study owes much to those who engage in thoughtful, careful consideration of Nietzsche's thought. However, a few careless interpreters can do a great deal of damage.

One purpose of this dissertation is to point out and overcome such pitfalls as explanation through excision and to point out and overcome any difficulties that Nietzsche himself might put in the way of interpreting the idea of the *Übermensch*. One of the more interesting aspects of Nietzsche scholarship is that these two kinds of problems exist with regard to interpreting Nietzsche's thought. There are the problems commentators make for themselves through such practices as the above mentioned explanation through excision and other practices that will be examined later. And then there are the problems that Nietzsche himself causes, sometimes willfully and sometimes not. Toward this latter end we will examine in Chapter II Nietzsche's style, his view of philosophy and philosophers, and what he took to be his overall philosophical task. These three areas are intricately connected to one another and indispensable to understanding Nietzsche's thought. If we can begin to grasp the manner by which Nietzsche viewed philosophy and how he went about

⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 86, Sec. 13.

explicating his ideas, we might begin to see how best to interpret many of his ideas and concepts, including the *Übermensch*.

Chapters III and IV will offer an explication and critique of certain kinds of interpretations of the *Übermensch*. This amount of attention reflects the complex set of distinctions to be made between kinds of interpretations. By way of introducing the interpretations to be discussed in these two chapters, Chapter III begins by presenting exactly what Nietzsche says concerning the *Übermensch*. While *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* contains the majority of such passages, other texts are cited also. What Nietzsche says concerning the *Übermensch* in *Zarathustra* obviously is very important, and we will have occasion to return to this text throughout these two chapters. Given, however, the structural and philosophical difficulties with this text, *Zarathustra* is not relied upon exclusively for an explication and interpretation of the *Übermensch*. Chapter III will include such treatments of the *Übermensch* as "ethical ideal," "blond beast," "higher man as opposite of the last man," and "Jesus in Caesar's body." Along the way I will examine the history behind this notion of an ideal person or an ideal of perfection. If Nietzsche has in mind some sort of notion of human perfectibility represented by the *Übermensch*, then he is not the first philosopher to entertain such a notion. Yet such notions as human perfectibility seem to be indicative of certain views about philosophy that Nietzsche eschewed. I conclude that attempts at interpreting the *Übermensch* as some sort of ideal model of human perfection are extremely problematic. However, I argue that one version

of the ideal model reading may represent a beginning toward understanding what Nietzsche means by the *Übermensch*.

Chapter IV examines the "*Übermensch* as attitude" interpretation, or what I have retitled, for purposes of clarification, the "*Übermensch* as idealized attitude" reading. I will draw and defend distinctions between the possible meanings of the term "attitude" to determine just what it could and could not mean to say that *Übermensch* is an attitude, or that *Übermensch* embodies an attitude, or that the *Übermensch* represents an attitude. We shall see that the "*Übermensch* as idealized attitude" interpretation, if we can clarify the meaning of "attitude," is very promising. I also consider the issue of metaphor and the place of metaphor, if any, in Nietzsche's philosophy in general and in interpretations of the *Übermensch* in particular. A connection exists between an "idealized attitude" reading of *Übermensch*, at least an "attitude" reading of some sort, and an "*Übermensch* as metaphor" interpretation. We will see that there is also a connection between the "metaphor" reading and one or more versions of the "idealized model" reading. These connections will be examined in some detail to determine what, if any, contributions the "metaphor" reading makes to an understanding of the *Übermensch*.

Nietzsche's thoughts regarding and arguments concerning metaphysics, epistemology, and morality are examined in depth in Chapter V. Here we return to themes introduced in Chapter II concerning stylistic pluralism, aestheticism, and Nietzsche's positive and negative views concerning philosophy and philosophers.

This chapter examines the issue of whether or not Nietzsche is engaged in answering traditional philosophical questions; if so, the method employed by Nietzsche is certainly nontraditional. Or there exists the possibility that Nietzsche does not posit any particular metaphysical or epistemological theory. I claim and defend a position in which Nietzsche is not "against" metaphysics, epistemology, or morality. Rather, Nietzsche is "against" *theories* of metaphysics, epistemology, and morality. For Nietzsche, theories about anything are, by virtue of being theories, ugly. I defend this position in the context of Nietzsche's own conception of what philosophy should be and in the context of his aestheticism. We might begin to prepare ourselves for the very real possibility that Nietzsche himself was not entirely clear about him meaning with regard to any ontological or epistemological scheme, or that he might have changed his mind several times on what he wanted to say regarding these matters. These possibilities are especially important in the context of the distinction we made above between the ideal models reading and the idealized attitude reading of the *Übermensch*. But such observations may not, given Nietzsche's conception of philosophy, count as objections.

If we can be clear on Nietzsche's ontological and epistemological framework, or at least be clear on the possibility that Nietzsche himself was not clear, then we can use this as a backdrop for a critical analysis of both Nietzsche's conception of morality and an interpretation of two of his important concepts, will to power and eternal recurrence. These two concepts along with considerations on morality are

so important to Nietzsche that it is inconceivable that they should have no impact on interpretations of the *Übermensch*. Chapter VI explicates, clarifies, and analyzes this connection between will to power, eternal recurrence, and morality on the one hand, and Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* on the other. Much discussion and debate surrounds the two concepts of will to power and eternal recurrence. The will to power has been variously construed as a metaphysical theory, a cosmological hypothesis, an empirical principle, and a psychological concept. The concept of eternal recurrence has been described as a metaphysical, cosmological, and normative ethical principle. There is, of course, debate over whether or not these two conceptions are even intelligible. I argue that both concepts are indeed intelligible and contribute much to our understanding of the *Übermensch*. Involved in this discussion are also such notions as *ressentiment*, and *amor fati*. These notions are not only important for understanding Nietzsche's concepts of will to power, eternal recurrence, and his conception of morality, but they also play an important role in understanding the *Übermensch*. At this point we begin to see that not only is a synthesis between one version of the ideal model reading and one version of the idealized attitude reading possible, such a synthesis might actually be desirable in attempting to understand the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit*. We also will examine the consequences of this interpretation for Nietzsche's philosophy in general, as well as for future Nietzsche scholarship.

I should offer a brief note concerning translations and citations of Nietzsche's texts. Most of Nietzsche's works, including his notes, have been translated and published by Walter Kaufmann, and it is these translations to which most of the notes in this study refer. On occasion, however, I have opted to drop the Kaufmann translation in favor of either leaving a particular German word, phrase, or sentence untranslated, or using another translation. Whenever this occurs I will make note of it. The best edition of Nietzsche's works in German is *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967, (referred to as KGW). While I have not matched citations between Kaufmann and the KGW, I do give section numbers and/or titles of sections which will facilitate such cross-referencing. I use Nietzsche's section numbers and/or titles of sections for the additional reason that it helps preserve continuity in and between Nietzsche's texts.

CHAPTER II

READING NIETZSCHE: THOUGHTS ON STYLE AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL ENTERPRISE

Explicating and evaluating Nietzsche's overall philosophical task is a necessary condition for understanding and analyzing any exigent concepts present in his philosophical thought. That some commentators posit untenable interpretations of some aspect or other of Nietzsche's thought without first standing back and taking a long look at the overall picture hardly needs to be documented. Such concepts as eternal recurrence, will to power, and Nietzsche's concept of woman are common victims of this failure; perhaps the most common victim of all is the *Übermensch*. While "standing back and taking a long look" is not a sufficient condition for a correct understanding of Nietzsche, or any philosopher for that matter, it is a necessary beginning and helps to keep at bay that phenomenon I call "explanation through excision." This chapter takes such a long look and sets forth a critical examination and analysis of Nietzsche's overall task.

This chapter will focus on three specific areas: Nietzsche's style, his view of philosophers and philosophy, and Nietzsche's own notion of the purpose of philosophy. Often discussions of Nietzsche's thought ignore one or more of these concerns or, on those rare occasions when they are discussed, no distinction between

the three is delineated. I maintain that each concern--Nietzsche's method of communicating ideas, his negative thoughts and comments regarding philosophy and philosophers, and his positive (I might use the term constructive) views of philosophy--is vital to understanding Nietzsche's philosophy. We shall see that not only are these three areas connected, but that each bears directly on an interpretation of the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit*.

1. Nietzsche's Style

The following observations and accompanying questions express clearly and forcibly the challenge of Nietzsche's style:

Nietzsche, the one who questions everything, the one who puts everything into doubt, his own work included, who calls his philosophy a school of suspicion, who describes himself as the philosopher of the "dangerous perhaps," who tempts us with his attempts and temptations (*Versuche und Versuchungen*), how do we read him? Nietzsche who has cast the strongest doubt on language itself, how are we to comprehend his language, and how do we use ours in commenting on his work?¹

¹Rudolf E. Kuenzli, "Nietzsche's Zerography: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*," in Daniel T. O'Hara, ed., *Why Nietzsche Now?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 99. Of the three aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy discussed in this chapter, his style has received the most attention. Alexander Nehamas is quite correct when he notes, "Works on Nietzsche conventionally begin with some commonplaces about his style." While Nehamas's work is no exception, he does a better job than most commentators in discussing and analyzing the importance of Nietzsche's style. See Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 14-41. I will have occasion to refer to Nehamas's observations below.

Nietzsche's philosophy is indeed filled with attempts and temptations. He is constantly attempting to understand the world and human existence in new, exciting, and, perhaps for many, disturbing ways. And he is constantly tempting his readers with new ideas, exciting thought experiments, and unique conceptions. Even the method of communication represents attempts and temptations. Nietzsche's style is difficult and, as I have noted earlier, he takes some delight in this fact. Consider, for example, the subtitles to four of Nietzsche's texts: "A Book for Free Spirits," "A Book for All and None," "How One Philosophizes with a Tuning Fork," and "How One Becomes What One Is."² Not only are these titles odd, but it would be difficult if not impossible to find other philosophical works that incorporate both the power and the ambiguity that Nietzsche employs in his titles. His use of such strange titles leads the reader to draw erroneous conclusions both about the content and the style of his texts. It is this latter point, Nietzsche's style, that I want to address here; more specifically, I want to consider the problem of just how we should read Nietzsche.

²These are the subtitles to, respectively, *Human, All Too Human*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Ecce Homo*. As with many of Nietzsche's titles and subtitles subtle variations in translation are possible, and may not even be that important. At least one exception to this occurs in the subtitle to *Twilight of the Idols*. In German the subtitle reads, *Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophirt*, and this is usually translated, "How to Philosophize with a Hammer." I have used the phrase "tuning fork" instead of "hammer" because it more accurately reflects Nietzsche's meaning. On this point see, Walter Kaufmann's preface to *Twilight of the Idols* in his *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 464; also, R. J. Hollingdale's introduction to his *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ* (New York: Penguin, 1968), pp. 14-15.

During the past one hundred years interpreters, commentators, and even lay readers have set forth an 'either/or' situation, a situation that is actually a false dilemma. Many have asserted that Nietzsche must be read as an analytic philosopher, in which case he is not a very good philosopher. On the other hand there are those who have asserted that Nietzsche must be read as a poet, in which case he is not a very good poet. Nietzsche's ideas and observations, and any contributions which these might make, get lost in the shuffle. This battle over how to characterize Nietzsche's style of communication and consequently how to read Nietzsche was alluded to in the previous chapter. To assert, however, that one must "either read Nietzsche analytically, or read him as poetry" presupposes no middle ground.³ While Nietzsche's philosophy does not fit into the mode of the traditional eighteenth- or nineteenth-century German thinkers, neither should his thought be viewed as mere poetry or metaphor. Nietzsche's philosophy is a philosophy of life, a philosophy of the individual. He makes no claim to any school or movement, and this simple fact contributes to the problems with reading him. I caution that making such assertions as "Nietzsche's philosophy is a philosophy of life" can easily

³In recent years this middle position has been recognized and explored by a few commentators. See for example J. P. Stern's *A Study of Nietzsche* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and Bernd Magnus' *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). Stern comments on Nietzsche's style of writing as "somewhere between individuation and concern with particulars which is the language area of creative literature, and conceptual generalities and abstractions which make up the language area of traditional Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy" (p. 199).

deteriorate into sloganeering. We will return to Nietzsche's particular brand of philosophy in a moment.

Nietzsche often writes in aphorisms. Even when he writes in long paragraphs and chapters, his style is aphoristic. This simple observation is the key to why Nietzsche is so "easy" to read yet difficult to understand. In the section "On Reading and Writing" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche makes the following observation concerning his aphorisms and those who read them.

Whoever writes in blood and aphorisms does not want to be read but to be learned by heart. In the mountains the shortest way is from peak to peak; but for that one must have long legs. Aphorisms should be peaks--and those who are addressed, tall and lofty. The air thin and pure, danger near, and the spirit full of gay sarcasm: these go well together. I want to have goblins around me, for I am courageous. Courage that puts ghosts to flight creates goblins for itself: courage wants to laugh.⁴

Nietzsche's aphoristic style certainly contributes to the difficulty many readers have in understanding his thought. This difficulty is ironic in that it is this very style that attracts people to him in the first place. Not only do commentators find Nietzsche easy to read, they find him, because of his aphorisms, easy to

⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, Penguin Books, 1976), p. 152, First Part, "On Reading and Writing." This entire section of the first part of *Zarathustra*, along with other sections and aphorisms throughout Nietzsche's works suggest another quite radical approach to understanding Nietzsche that few commentators have taken; perhaps the best way to understand Nietzsche is through his humor. This approach will be hinted at throughout this study, but will not be addressed directly at this time.

interpret. As a result Nietzsche is read and interpreted out of context, resulting in what I call explanation through excision.

Those commentators who form their interpretations by engaging in explanation through excision do so for several reasons. The method is employed because the commentator has a certain agenda to set forth, and he/she can distort Nietzsche to fit that agenda. Some possible agendas were noted in the previous chapter. Or the interpreter consciously or unconsciously rearranges part of what Nietzsche says and ignores other parts in order to further a particular interpretation of a particular concept. Whether the explanation through excision is conscious, unconscious, or a little of both, the result is disastrous for Nietzsche scholarship.

To some extent the temptation to engage in explanation through excision as a means of interpretation is furthered, not halted, by the very act of drawing attention to Nietzsche's style in the first place. (Drawing attention to Nietzsche's style also fosters the belief that he is much easier to read than other philosophers.) When one claims, as this study does, that Nietzsche's style is important and thus must be explored and explained, the impression is given that there is little of substance in Nietzsche's thought. Nehamas's caution to those who would rigorously consider Nietzsche's style is well taken.

In the coarsest sense, to say that Nietzsche's style is important is to say that his writing is unusual and idiosyncratic. This in turn is just to say that his works do not exhibit the features we have been accustomed to expect of philosophical treatises. And, forgetting that philosophical treatises themselves have been written in the most

various styles imaginable, this has often been taken to show that Nietzsche's works are not, in some sense, philosophical.⁵

The risks, then, of coming to terms with and explaining Nietzsche's style are many. Such attempts may mislead and/or confuse the reader. I argue, however, that failing to undertake a discussion of Nietzsche's style or discussing the issue only at a superficial level is far riskier, eliminating, perhaps entirely, any possibility of achieving a critical understanding of Nietzsche's thought. I now want to make some further observations and draw some particular conclusions concerning Nietzsche's method of writing. Such observations and conclusions will, of course, have to be examined anew in the light of Nietzsche's negative and positive comments regarding philosophy and philosophers.

I have observed already that Nietzsche's style can be characterized as aphoristic. Indeed, even when he sets aside the short, pithy statements in favor of longer paragraphs and chapters, one cannot help but sense that Nietzsche is still writing in aphorisms. While this characterization of Nietzsche's style is certainly correct, it does not go far enough in explaining how Nietzsche writes or the importance of why he writes the way he does. I would like to maintain, and argue for, a rather different depiction of Nietzsche's style, a depiction that more closely captures Nietzsche's method of writing and that will perhaps facilitate a better understanding of both the importance and purpose of this method.

⁵Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, p. 14.

I maintain that Nietzsche actually employed many different styles of writing as a way of communicating his ideas; the aphorism may be the dominant method, but it is not the only method Nietzsche uses. Nietzsche engages in a method of communication that utilizes many styles; therefore, it perhaps should be termed stylistic pluralism.⁶ This phrase more accurately describes the different ways in which Nietzsche communicates throughout his texts. I now want to take a closer look at the specific styles Nietzsche employs.

Even the briefest of excursions into Nietzsche's texts demonstrates that Nietzsche uses many different styles. The aphorism characterizes only that phase in Nietzsche's writing called the middle period. In such texts as *Daybreak*, *Human, All-Too-Human*, *The Gay Science*, sections of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *Twilight of the Idols* the aphorism is dominant. But in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche's first text, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, one of the last texts in the middle period, the aphorism does not appear at all. In these texts Nietzsche employs the form of the scholarly treatise, though he certainly employs the form rather loosely. In such texts as *The Case of Wagner*, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, and *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche's style turns polemical. In one of his last works, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche employs, with great effect, the form of the

⁶I take this depiction of Nietzsche's style from Alexander Nehamas. Nehamas uses this description to, in part, explain Nietzsche's perspectivism. I believe Nehamas is correct in making this connection but I want to leave until later any discussion of perspectivism. See Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, pp. 18-41.

autobiography. And, of course, there are other styles of writing employed by Nietzsche from time to time and from text to text such as poetry, fragments, exaggeration, and hyperbole.⁷ Given this diversity of styles, one must wonder how it became fashionable for commentators to describe Nietzsche's style as aphoristic and only aphoristic.

Nietzsche is certainly aware of his stylistic pluralism and he even provides some justification for its use.

To communicate a state, an inward tension of pathos, by means of signs, including the tempo of these signs--that is the meaning of every style; and considering that the multiplicity of inward states is exceptionally large in my case, I have many stylistic possibilities--the most multifarious art of style that has ever been at the disposal of one man. *Good* is any style that really communicates an inward state, that makes no mistake about the signs, the tempo of the signs, the gestures--all the laws about long periods are concerned with the art of gestures. Here my instinct is infallible.⁸

In this passage Nietzsche does not address the reasons he might have for switching from one style of writing to another from text to text and within the same text. But he does admit to using many styles and to using them for the purpose of communicating effectively all his thoughts and ideas. Of course, we might well wish that Nietzsche would use less exaggeration and more specifics regarding what it is he wishes to communicate. In some sense Nietzsche is specific regarding what it is

⁷I take this catalogue of styles from Nehamas's *Nietzsche*, pp. 18-22.

⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 265, "Why I Write Such Good Books," Sec. 4.

he wishes to communicate; these specifics constitute the focus of the next two sections of this chapter.

It is a difficult task indeed to come to grips with and explain Nietzsche's style. Nietzsche's unique style is due partially to his conscious desire to make it so and partially to his negative conception of philosophers and how to do philosophy. But Nietzsche does not only concentrate on the negative, he has a positive or constructive view of philosophy; communicating this view to his readers is another reason for the particular styles he employs. That Nietzsche purposely writes in order to confuse, bewilder, and aggravate is obvious. (We also might add that Nietzsche wants to make us laugh, for it is through laughter that we come to see the world as it really is; see above n. 4.) He admits as much when he calls himself one of the incomprehensible ones.

We incomprehensible ones--Have we ever complained because we are misunderstood, misjudged, misidentified, slandered, misheard, and not heard? Precisely this is our fate--oh, for a long time yet! Let us say, to be modest, until 1901--it is also our distinction; we should not honor ourselves sufficiently if we wished that it were otherwise. We are misidentified--because we ourselves keep growing, keep changing, we shed our old bark, we shed our skins every spring, we keep becoming younger, fuller of future, taller, stronger, we push our roots ever more powerfully into the depths--into evil--while at the same time we embrace the heavens ever more lovingly, more broadly, imbibing their light ever more thirstily with all our twigs and leaves. Like trees we grow--this is hard to understand, as is all of life--not in one place only but everywhere, not in one direction but equally upward and outward and inward and downward; our energy is at work simultaneously in the trunk, branches, and roots; we are no

longer free to do only one particular thing, to *be* only one particular thing.⁹

I quote this passage at length because it reveals so much about Nietzsche's style. He genuinely feels that he is doing something important, so important that it requires a new way of writing and communicating. That this new way of writing involves a pluralism of styles purposely invoked should be obvious. If we are unable to understand exactly what he is communicating, then that simply demonstrates that greater effort is needed to comprehend his thought. His style is pluralistic because human beings are pluralistic. His method of communication is multifaceted because there are many facets that compose a human being. Nietzsche wants intelligent, creative readers, and his style serves as one test to weed out those who are not so intelligent, so creative. This desire of Nietzsche's for the proper reader is not expressed openly, but masked behind a style that is all his own. "From this moment forward all my writings are fish hooks: perhaps I know how to fish as well as anyone?--If nothing was caught, I am not to blame. *There were no fish.*"¹⁰

⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. and ed., by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), pp. 331-332, Sec. 371. For a detailed discussion of this passage see Walter Kaufmann's note on p. 331. Kaufmann is quite right to call the aphorism "profoundly revealing" in that it allows the reader an opportunity to understand Nietzsche's style, temperament, and the meaning of the Dionysian in Nietzsche's works.

¹⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 310, Sec. 1, "Beyond Good and Evil." To not appreciate Nietzsche's style, indeed to misunderstand and mock it, inevitably leads to the phenomenon we are discussing, explanation through deletion. While such a method of interpretation is often accidental, there are those who purposely adopt this

2. Nietzsche's Negative View of Philosophy

Of the several influences on Nietzsche's style none is more important than what Nietzsche considers to be his philosophical task. Any discussion of this task should make a distinction between its positive and negative constituents. By positive constituents I mean what Nietzsche thinks philosophy should be and what he tries to make it: the components of a "free-spirited philosophy" and the traits of the "free-spirited philosopher." By negative constituents I mean what Nietzsche thinks philosophy is, but should not be: the components of a "malicious philosophy" and the components of the "malicious philosopher." Nietzsche displays a great deal of dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy throughout the texts, yet he also holds a great deal of hope for what philosophy could be. Only by bringing this distinction to the fore, exploring and explaining both the positive and negative sides, can we hope to grasp the meaning of philosophy for Nietzsche. Such a grasp reaps benefits

method. Arthur Danto gives what I take to be the quintessential statement on employing explanation through deletion. "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, except for their chronological ordering, do not exhibit any special structure as a corpus. No one of them presupposes an acquaintance with any other . . . his writings may be read in pretty much any order, without this greatly impeding the comprehension of his ideas." Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Macmillan, 1965, p. 19). That Danto so blatantly engages in this method of interpretation is bad enough, but the fact that many of his conclusions concerning Nietzsche's philosophy are false only adds insult to injury. In Chapter III we shall take up the case of Danto's interpretation of the *Übermensch* and demonstrate just how it is misleading. My discussion shall also demonstrate the untenability of the explanation through deletion technique.

later in interpreting the *Übermensch*. We begin with an examination of what, for Nietzsche, are the problems with philosophy and his criticisms of philosophers.

Throughout most of his texts Nietzsche takes time to look at philosophy and philosophers "half suspiciously" and "half mockingly." This suspicion and mocking is present from one of his earliest works, *Human, All-Too-Human* ("A lack of historical sense is the congenital defect of all philosophers"¹¹) through one of the last works of his middle period, *Beyond Good and Evil* ("A philosopher--alas, a being that often runs away from itself, often is afraid of itself"¹²). These pronouncements, which appear throughout all of Nietzsche's texts and sound excessive, actually derive from careful and methodical thought on the problems with philosophy and philosophers. We will now look at some specific problems and criticisms that Nietzsche offers against philosophy and philosophers.

The first problem Nietzsche discerns is that philosophers have failed to understand the nature of philosophical activity itself. Philosophy, according to Nietzsche, has been and continues to be dogmatic and concentrates entirely too much

¹¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p. 14, Sec. 2, "Of First and Last Things." The first two aphorisms of the first section titled "Of First and Last Things" discusses the problems with philosophy and philosophers. Nietzsche makes the distinction between metaphysical philosophy and historical philosophy and criticizes both. There is no need to enter into the details of this distinction here; the distinction will become apparent in the discussion of the problems with philosophy which we will enter into below.

¹²Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 230.

on analyzing, systematizing, and setting forth conceptual and evaluative schemes.¹³ It is not that such schemes are bad in and of themselves; rather, it is that such evaluations are seen by philosophers to be examples of or coming from objective knowledge. But such frameworks are not based on any such objective knowledge. They are instead the products of the individual philosopher's own perspective. As a result Nietzsche never tires of attacking the dogmatism of philosophers.

Another related problem Nietzsche has with philosophers centers around something much more damaging than the observation that philosophers operate from within their own perspectives. Nietzsche contends that philosophers lack *intellectual integrity*. It is bad enough, in Nietzsche's estimation, that philosophers come to philosophy with differing perspectives, but these perspectives themselves are filled with prejudices. These prejudices are hidden behind the demand for dispassionate argumentation that philosophers are fond of making. For Nietzsche, philosophers and the philosophies they espouse lack intellectual integrity to the extent that they mask their prejudices and partiality behind a cloak of objective argumentation. (Here we can see a direct correlation between Nietzsche's negative views of philosophy and his insistence on a stylistic pluralism.) There are many different kinds of prejudices to which philosophers fall victim.

¹³Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 20. Schacht does a good job of detailing the problems Nietzsche finds with philosophy and philosophers. Much of this discussion comes from his text.

While Nietzsche distinguishes several kinds of prejudices, our purposes shall be met by discussing two. There are, first, the evaluative prejudices: philosophers are prejudiced against certain features of human existence and experience. An example of what Nietzsche has in mind would be the prejudice throughout the history of philosophy against appearance and change. A second type of prejudice concerns the tendency of philosophers to rely on such things as language, concepts, and logic without first pausing to question their foundations. Philosophers, in Nietzsche's view, take for granted the very things they should doubt and investigate.

The problems Nietzsche discerns with philosophy and philosophers and, in particular, the problem of prejudice is discussed in some detail in the first essay of *Beyond Good and Evil*, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers." In this work Nietzsche tries to present everything he considers wrong with philosophers and philosophy. The following three passages should clearly illustrate this point.

This way of judging constitutes the typical prejudgment and prejudice which give away the metaphysicians of all ages; this kind of valuation looms in the background of all their logical procedures; it is on account of this "faith" that they trouble themselves about "knowledge," about something that is finally baptized solemnly as "the truth." The fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is *the faith in opposite values*. It has not even occurred to the most cautious among them that one might have a doubt right here at the threshold where it was surely most necessary--even if they vowed to themselves, *de omnibus dubitandum*.¹⁴

¹⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 10, Sec. 2, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers."

Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, too, there stand valuations or, more clearly, physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life. For example, that the definite should be worth more than the indefinite, and mere appearance worth less than "truth"--such estimates might be, in spite of their regulative importance for *us*, nevertheless mere foreground estimates, a certain kind of *niaiserie* which may be necessary for the preservation of just such beings as we are. Supposing, that is, that not just man is the "measure of things."¹⁵

Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; also that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown. Indeed, if one would explain how the abstrusest metaphysical claims of a philosopher really came about, it is always well (and wise) to ask first: at what morality does all this (does *he*) aim?¹⁶

The purpose here is not to defend Nietzsche and his remarks concerning philosophy; Nietzsche simply seeks to call attention to the problems with philosophy and with those who would profess to practice it. Philosophy claims for itself a special status whereby it has direct access to what is truth, to what really exists, and to what is of real value. Philosophers believe that they can objectively arrive at a list of certainties concerning the nature of existence. Such claims to certainty are, for Nietzsche, dubious at best. First, there is the personal history of the philosopher him/herself. Philosophers, as with everyone else, operate within a context and with

¹⁵*Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 11, Sec. 3, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers."

¹⁶Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 13, Sec. 6, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers."

certain convictions. Try as they might, and Nietzsche believes they do not try very hard, philosophers cannot escape their own convictions, their own sets of values.

A second, more profound, reason to question philosophy's claim to certainty centers around the very nature of language and grammar. Many of the problems philosophers find and then set out to solve are at bottom nothing but problems of language. One of Nietzsche's examples of the problems with language concerns willing. Willing seems to be a complicated matter even though it is only one word-- "and it is precisely in this one word that the popular prejudice lurks, which has defeated the always inadequate caution of philosophers."¹⁷ Out of his concern for language and its capacity to mislead, Nietzsche makes the following observations:

There are still harmless self-observers who believe that there are "immediate certainties"; for example, "I think," or as the superstition of Schopenhauer put it, "I will"; as though knowledge here got hold of its object purely and nakedly as "the thing in itself," without any falsification on the part of either the subject or the object. But that "immediate certainty," as well as "absolute knowledge" and the "thing in itself," involve a *contradictio in adjecto*, I shall repeat a hundred times; we ought to free ourselves from the seduction of words!¹⁸

That Nietzsche is justified in his condemnations of philosophy and philosophers is not really the point (although I suspect that Nietzsche is at least partially correct in his estimations); rather we need to keep his observations in mind

¹⁷Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 25, Sec. 19, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers."

¹⁸Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 23, Sec. 16, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers."

when we turn to interpretations of the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche's criticisms of theories that espouse certainty about the nature of existence impact directly on the nature of *Übermenschlichkeit*. But if we are to store away the above for further reference, we have only the negative side of the story. What we are missing is the positive side of Nietzsche's views regarding philosophy. That is to say, we need to examine what Nietzsche thought he was doing--his philosophical task. Now it is true that we can glean some idea of his task from his remarks concerning what is wrong with philosophy. And it is true that much of our understanding of his task will emerge gradually, as it must, from the explanation and critique that we have yet to undertake. However, we can make some useful prefatory remarks concerning the task Nietzsche set for himself.

3. Nietzsche's Positive View of Philosophy

I intend to present only a brief description of Nietzsche's task, thus perhaps all I need say is that Nietzsche's philosophy is a philosophy of life, of living, of affirmation. The full importance of this assertion may not be understood until we formulate an accurate interpretation of the *Übermensch*. While such an assertion is accurate, it suffers from two problems: it obviously is overly simplistic, and it leads to an equally obvious objection. We can begin to correct the former by first looking at the latter.

The obvious objection to the claim that Nietzsche's philosophy is a philosophy of life is that it leads to the conclusion that all other philosophies and all other philosophers are concerned only with the dead.¹⁹ That is to say, critics are quick to jump on such characterizations of Nietzsche's thought as "a philosophy of life" or as "a philosophy of the love of life" and call these descriptions nonsense or trivial. These critics point out that such descriptions imply that no other philosopher or philosopher's system of thought has been concerned with life and living. This objection is well-taken, but it misses the import of the assertion. To say that Nietzsche is a philosopher of life is to claim that he feels an aversion to those ways of thinking which emphasize the otherworldly, the otherworldly being anything that detracts from this life. We have already seen this aversion on the part of Nietzsche in the above discussion of the problems with philosophy. In one sense, if we are not allowed to recognize the importance of life and affirmation in Nietzsche's thought, then we subtract from his task: "In the end we receive life's great gifts, perhaps the greatest it can bestow--we regain *our* task."²⁰ We may then indeed say with some qualification that Nietzsche espouses a philosophy of life.

¹⁹Martin Heidegger, "Nietzsche as Metaphysician," in Robert C. Solomon, ed., *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), p. 112. Given Heidegger's claim that Nietzsche posited a type of metaphysics it is not surprising that he makes this objection. I would make the claim (a claim that will be supported in the following pages) that Heidegger is totally wrong in this regard.

²⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, Part II, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 8, Sec. 5, "Preface".

Another aspect of Nietzsche's task, and one closely related to his concern for life, is the emphasis he places on creativity and especially artistic creativity. This particular aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy I term his aestheticism.²¹ Nietzsche is concerned with the ability of the individual to live creatively, and he discredits anything that would interfere with this ability. This concern is evident from *The Birth of Tragedy* onward. In that early work Nietzsche asserts, "It is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified."²² Nietzsche's task, with its dual aspects of life and artistic creativity, will ultimately play an important role in interpreting the *Übermensch*. As a result we will discuss all of this in much more detail later. We also will have another opportunity to raise and discuss the problems Nietzsche has with philosophy.

The significance of these three basic aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy should become evident quite quickly when we attend to Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch*. In communicating the idea of the *Übermensch* Nietzsche employs a style that is at once interesting and captivating. Also, one can find in discussions of the *Übermensch* idea hints of both Nietzsche's positive and negative views

²¹Alexander Nehamas makes use of this term in his *Nietzsche* as a means of coming to grips with Nietzsche's perspectivism. I, in contrast to Nehamas, use the term in a different way as simply meaning that Nietzsche views the world as a work of art. It does not follow from my reading of aestheticism that Nietzsche sees the world as a literary text. As a matter of fact I would like to avoid this particular consequence of using the term.

²²Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 52, Sec. 5.

concerning philosophy. The significance of this connection between these aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy and his idea of the *Übermensch* remains to be spelled out; however, the significance of the connection between the three aspects themselves now should be much clearer. Commentators who dismiss the importance of either Nietzsche's style, his negative views of philosophy, and/or his positive formulations of what philosophy should be, do a great disservice to Nietzsche scholarship.

The three aspects covered in this chapter also serve a collective function of helping prepare the way for "doing better" with respect to interpreting the *Übermensch*. We now have a better idea of how to approach Nietzsche and of how to understand his work once we have made this approach. The controversial views and ideas Nietzsche attempts to communicate and the method he employs to do so will make it tough to comprehend Nietzsche's exact meaning. The material I have covered will help minimize this difficulty and perhaps lead to new insights into Nietzsche's thought. In following chapters we shall see how taking Nietzsche's style for granted and not coming to grips with his views on philosophy have led to difficulties in interpreting the *Übermensch*. This is, of course, not the only problem with such interpretations, but it is a major one. As we examine these interpretations we should keep in mind Nietzsche's style and views on philosophy; more material will be added with regard to both as we progress.

CHAPTER III

THE "IDEAL MODELS" APPROACH TO THE *ÜBERMENSCH*

This chapter and the next will delineate two groups or kinds of interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit* which appear in the literature. They are the "*Übermensch* as ideal model" interpretation and the "*Übermensch* as idealized attitude" interpretation, respectively. While each interpretation is distinct in its own right, that is not to say that there is no overlap. The reason for the possibility of overlap becomes evident when we examine the various distinctions to be made within each major type of interpretation. That neither the "ideal model" nor the "idealized attitude" interpretation is clearly right nor clearly wrong also may be the case. Both kinds may have something to offer, and, as already mentioned, Nietzsche does not discuss and criticize the *Übermensch* idea as clearly as we might wish he had. We shall see, and this will be spelled out clearly in both this chapter and the next, that both interpretations taken by themselves are problematic and could not possibly be what Nietzsche has in mind. However, we also shall discover in our attempt to understand the *Übermensch* that each interpretation may have something important to offer.

More specific observations and comments need making first regarding the formulation of this dichotomy of interpretations and the attending terminology and

rhetoric employed by the dichotomy. Such observations serve two functions: first, they justify the procedure employed in both this chapter and the next; second, they serve to highlight the carelessness of some commentators when discussing the *Übermensch*.

The first observation concerns external commitments and agendas engendered by subscribing to one or the other of the two kinds of interpretation. As I point out in a moment, it is misleading to talk as if there is an "ideal" interpretation simpliciter or an "attitude" interpretation simpliciter--there are several variations within each major class of interpretation--but each interpretation brings with it preconceived notions of how Nietzsche should be read and understood. Those who subscribe to one or other variation of the "ideal" reading tend to regard philosophy as a discipline with specific problems and solutions, and they tend to regard Nietzsche as working within that discipline positing his own particular problems and solutions. Those who subscribe to one or other variation of the "attitude" reading tend to view philosophy as individual texts which are open to subjective interpretations, and they tend to view Nietzsche's thought as very elastic, susceptible to whomever is interpreting it at the time. One point of contrast then occurs between very different, even antagonistic, sets of commitments, commitments to both philosophy and to Nietzsche studies. This is only a preliminary observation, but such commitments should be kept in mind while considering both this chapter and the next.

The second observation concerns terminology and revolves specifically around the term "ideal." In the literature one often finds such phrases as "*Übermensch* as ideal" or "*Übermensch* as ideal-type" with little or no attention given to how "ideal" or "ideal type" is being used. The phrase is so indefinite that several possibilities or models emerge from the "*Übermensch* as ideal" interpretation. These include:

- IM1) *Übermensch* as a model having static, definite characteristics or properties possessed by at least some human beings in the past, and perhaps the present, and at least ideally to be possessed (and ideally by even *more*) human beings in the future.
- IM2) *Übermensch* as a model having static, definite characteristics or properties which human beings at least probably never have possessed and probably never will possess--and perhaps never *could* possess--but which nevertheless could serve human beings as an ideal for a *direction of human development*.
- IM3) *Übermensch* as a model having static, definite characteristics or properties which human beings can never possess, but which should serve as an ideal for a *direction of post-human development*.

These three models are not exclusive, nor are they hermetically sealed. However, they do provide the parameters within which the "ideal," perhaps we should say "ideal model," interpretation will be discussed. Is Nietzsche positing a goal of human perfectibility, or a goal of perfectibility beyond humanity?¹ If Nietzsche is positing a goal of human perfectibility or a direction of human

¹I owe a debt of gratitude to L. B. Cebik and Richard Aquila for helping me enumerate and understand the various distinctions to be made within the ideal interpretation.

development, is it or is it not the case that humans could achieve such perfection? If Nietzsche has in mind a kind of perfectibility beyond humanity or an ideal direction for post-human development, is it or is it not the case that some being beyond humanity can achieve such status? These questions in conjunction with the three distinctions outlined above will guide the discussion in this chapter.

It is important to note that, as I have delineated and outlined the three variations, each subtype of the "ideal model" contains the phrase "*Übermensch* as a model having static, definite characteristics or properties." This phrase, specifically the terms "static" and "definite," stand in need of clarification. A defining characteristic of the "ideal model" interpretation, no matter which variation is under discussion, involves the positing of certain qualities or properties or virtues that all *Übermenschen* must possess. The *Übermensch*--a human being, a superior human being, a being of this earth but not a human, or a being beyond this earth--must carry out actions A-Z and possess certain qualities A-Z. Under the ideal model such a list of mandates and qualities may be specific (e.g., denounce Christianity) or vague (e.g., love the earth). In any event, under the ideal model there is a list of static, definite characteristics or properties or virtues which provide the content of the ideal model in question.

One example of such an enumeration of static, definite properties or virtues--an example of the IM1) subtype--can be found in Walter Kaufmann's interpretation

of the *Übermensch*. Consider the specifics presented by Kaufmann concerning Nietzsche's meaning in his concept of the *Übermensch*:

The *Übermensch* is the "Dionysian" man who is depicted under the name of Goethe at the end of *Götzen-Dämmerung* (IX, 49). He has overcome his animal nature, organized the chaos of his passions, sublimated his impulses, and given style to his character--or, as Nietzsche said of Goethe: "He disciplined himself to wholeness, he *created* himself" and became "the man of tolerance, not from weakness but from strength," "a spirit who has *become free*."²

Here Kaufmann provides an explicit, detailed characterization of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. The *Übermensch* embodies the perfect combination of Dionysian and Apollonian traits (called simply Dionysian) and is in total control of his passions and impulses. The *Übermensch* operates from a position of strength and wholeness, and is a completely free and autonomous being. For Kaufmann, such a being did exist in the past, could exist in the present, and probably will exist in the future. I believe there is something fundamentally right in Kaufmann's description, yet the description is incomplete. We will examine Kaufmann's interpretation, as well as others which represent all three subtypes, shortly. It is certainly the case that the ideal model's insistence on static and definite characteristics and properties becomes important, especially as a point of contrast, when we examine "attitude" interpretations.

One final observation needs making before proceeding, and it also concerns terminology, specifically the term "attitude." We might well wonder what exactly is to be contrasted in the contrast between "ideal" and "attitude" interpretations of

²Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 316.

the *Übermensch*. Bernd Magnus has popularized the distinction, but he and those who follow him are notoriously unclear concerning the meaning of attitude and how attitude is to be differentiated from ideal. Just as I have translated "ideal" interpretations of the *Übermensch* into the "ideal models" approach, I maintain that "attitude" interpretations of the *Übermensch* should be read as "idealized attitude" readings of the *Übermensch*. Just as several possibilities exist for understanding ideal model, there also exist several readings of idealized attitude. These include:

- IA1) *Übermensch* as a representation of a fluid, indefinite conceptual or psychological form of life possessed by at least some human beings in the past, and perhaps the present, and at least ideally to be possessed by (and ideally by even *more*) human beings in the future.
- IA2) *Übermensch* as a representation of a fluid, indefinite conceptual or psychological form of life which human beings at least probably never have possessed and probably never will possess--and perhaps never *could* possess--but which nevertheless should serve human beings as an ideal for a *direction of human development*.
- IA3) *Übermensch* as a representation of a fluid, indefinite conceptual or psychological form of life which human beings can never possess, but which should serve as an ideal for a *direction of post-human development*.

It would be inappropriate to discuss in detail IA1)-IA3) at this time, but these are the readings to contrast with IM1)-IM 3). Bernd Magnus is the most influential proponent of what I call the idealized attitude reading. There is some question, however, as to which of the last two versions Magnus subscribes. The next chapter deals specifically with the idealized attitude reading in and of itself, Magnus's own version(s) of the interpretation, and my arguments against Magnus. Consequently,

some further preliminary remarks should be made now regarding the contrast between idealized models or goals and idealized attitudes. As we shall see eventually, one contrast to be made is between the desire to read Nietzsche as an analytic philosopher and the desire to let Nietzsche be Nietzsche no matter the consequences. (We receive a hint of this distinction when we note the phrase "form of life" in all three of the idealized attitude readings and contrast this phrase with "static, definite characteristics or properties" which appears in all three ideal model readings.) The issue then becomes one of determining exactly what "is at stake" between the ideal models approach and the idealized attitude reading.

One of the issues at stake in the debate over ideal model versus idealized attitude reading concerns the place, if any, of Nietzsche's unpublished notes. The status of the *Nachlass* goes right to the heart of Nietzsche scholarship. Some commentators take Nietzsche's unpublished notes, the *Nachlass*, to be just as important as (if not more than) those texts Nietzsche published and those he desired to publish; however, other commentators make a distinction between the published and unpublished texts and hesitate to ascribe very much importance to the latter. At the heart of this debate lies the issue of how to interpret the *Übermensch*. Magnus, in discussing this issue, gives rather descriptive names to these two different approaches and even identifies particular commentators in each camp.

Lumpers come in all shapes and traditions. Heidegger, Jaspers, Deleuze, Müller-Lauter, Danto, and Schacht are paradigmatic lumpers, for my purposes. In contrast to lumpers there are what I shall call "splitters." Hollingdale, Alderman, Montinari, and Strong

tend to be splitters, as I am when I am not incautious. Parenthetically, the late Walter Kaufmann was a special case in this taxonomy. He generally claimed to be a splitter but in practice was frequently a lumper. . . . This methodological difference between lumpers and splitters--this difference of opinion about the use and value of Nietzsche's literary estate--can sometimes become substantive, as can be illustrated in discussions of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, eternal recurrence, perspectivism, and will to power.³

Magnus's taxonomy is at once informative and helpful, and has implications for Nietzsche's philosophical task in general. But, as stated earlier, these further implications will be explored later. For now, the conclusions Magnus draws concerning the *Übermensch* arising from the lumpers/splitters distinction are of paramount importance.

Magnus draws the conclusion that lumpers tend to see the *Übermensch* in the context of an ideal models reading, it could be IM1), IM2), or IM3). Splitters, on the other hand, tend to argue for a more complex conception of the *Übermensch*. For Magnus, a splitter, this complex picture will include the attitudinal interpretation. Of course, not all splitters will agree with each other because of the complexities involved in their view of Nietzsche's texts and thoughts. (These very complexities make the splitters' position a more appropriate one, but this will have to be discussed in Chapter IV.) Lumpers take a more simplistic and hence an easier to characterize approach to the *Übermensch*. Of course, Magnus also wants to say

³ Bernd Magnus, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888: *The Will to Power* and the *Übermensch*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (January 1986): 82-83. This article is, unless otherwise stated, the source for the following discussion.

that the approach taken by the lumpers is less appropriate. For Magnus, lumpers have the following view of the *Übermensch*.

Lumpers tend to construe the *Übermensch* as the essence of Nietzsche's notion of a higher humanity (Schacht): an ideal of perfectibility. The *Übermensch* has overcome his animal nature, sublimated his impulses, organized the chaos of his passions, and has given style to his character (Kaufmann). He is a free human being, joyous, without guilt, the master of instinctual drives which do not overpower him (Danto). The *Übermensch* overflows with vitality and health, spirituality, refinement, manners, independence of mind and action, intellectual honesty and astuteness (Schacht).⁴

The above characterization of certain lumpers with certain descriptions of the *Übermensch* is, while perhaps oversimplified, for the most part correct. We now may begin to glean just how much is at stake between the two kinds of interpretation; people who subscribe to one or more versions of the "ideal models" interpretation tend to consider Nietzsche's unpublished notes as just as important (if not more so) than the actual published texts. There is indeed "evidence" for one version of the ideal models reading in the unpublished notes known under the title *The Will to Power*, and this evidence as well as the arguments against it will be discussed shortly.

The above discussion of "lumpers" allows us to return to the ideal models approach in general. Nietzsche is the philosopher of the *Übermensch* and of *Übermenschlichkeit*. Both scholars and those readers only slightly familiar with Nietzsche's philosophy subscribe to this observation or characterization. That

⁴Magnus, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888," p. 83.

Nietzsche should be so connected with one of his concepts (the terms "superman" or "overman" are usually substituted for *Übermensch*, and the phrase "what it is like to be an overman or superman" is usually substituted for *Übermenschlichkeit*) is a gross oversimplification and results in much misunderstanding and misinterpretation of his philosophy. The inclination of many, scholars and lay readers alike, is to take the "Nietzsche is the philosopher of the *Übermensch*" label and declare that Nietzsche's philosophy itself is simple, not worth studying, not deserving of philosophical scrutiny. This occurs because many equate *Übermensch* with "perfect something" or "perfect someone", and then proceed to quickly dismiss such a project as silly or impossible. My contention, while simple and straightforward, is nonetheless important; even if we think of Nietzsche as the philosopher of the *Übermensch*, even if we think of Nietzsche as positing some sort of notion involving human perfectibility or a model of human perfection, we have no justification to conclude that his thought is not worthy of philosophical scrutiny and debate. That is to say, even if we were to exclusively think of Nietzsche as the philosopher of the *Übermensch*, no one is warranted on the basis of this description alone in claiming that Nietzsche's philosophy is trivial. I want to now examine the evidence, and I believe the evidence to be significant indeed, for the claim that even if Nietzsche's sole concern was the *Übermensch* idea, and even if this idea should be taken at its most simplistic level, this in and of itself does not and cannot warrant a charge of triviality.

The evidence is historical in nature. If we examine the history of philosophy, we see that Nietzsche was not the first to posit a notion of human perfectibility. Other philosophers have set forth, argued for, and developed their own notions of what a perfect human being might be like and the specific characteristics such a human being might possess.⁵ I want to take a brief look at several of these conceptions to see what, if anything, we might apply to Nietzsche's conception of a "perfect something."

In the *Republic* Plato presents a notion of perfection, a perfect something; it is the philosopher-king.

Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils,--no, nor the human race, as I believe,--and then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day.⁶

Plato continues by elaborating on this notion of the philosopher-king; the true philosopher is a lover of truth. What we have here in the *Republic* is a blueprint for a perfect something.

⁵For a brief discussion of this see Bernd Magnus, "Overman: An Attitude or an Ideal?" in David Goicoechea, ed., *The Great Year of Zarathustra (1881-1981)* New York: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 142-165. Magnus's brief discussion is rather good and much of what I say below comes from this article. However, Magnus's article, including its title, raises some interesting points and problems in the "ideal" versus "attitude" debate; we will come back to this later.

⁶Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 473d.

This notion of a perfect something also appears in Aristotle in his principle of *megalopsychia*, which might be translated as "greatness of soul" or "high-mindedness." In Book IV of his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle writes:

Megalopsychia, as its very name suggests, seems to be concerned with great and lofty matters. Let us take the nature of these matters as the first point of our discussion. It makes no difference whether we investigate the characteristic or the man who is characterized by it. A man is regarded as high-minded when he thinks he deserves great things and actually deserves them; one who thinks he deserves them but does not is a fool, and no man, insofar as he is virtuous, is either foolish or senseless. This then is the description of the high-minded man. A person who deserves little is not high-minded, but is a man who knows his limitations. For high-mindedness implies greatness, just as beauty implies stature in body. . . .⁷

Here, as in Plato, we find the notion of a goal toward which humans may strive. Both Plato and Aristotle expend some time and energy developing and supporting their notions or principles of perfection. I have only mentioned these two, but there are other examples. Kant, for example, in his discussion of the categorical imperative and the good will seems to present some notion of perfection. While all three of these philosophers, and others with similar projects, are subjected to criticisms of the manner in which they defend their particular principles of perfection or present them, none are ridiculed for engaging in the task itself. For example, Aristotle may be criticized for how he formulates his notion of

⁷Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Martin Ostwald, trans. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 1123b.

megalopsychia, or for how he argues for this notion, but he is not criticized for the principle of *megalopsychia* in and of itself.

The point is that, in some sense, Nietzsche, in positing his notion of the *Übermensch*, could be interpreted as following in the footsteps of other figures in the history of philosophy. Thus Nietzsche is only the latest in a long and distinguished line of philosophers who have set forth and defended a model of human perfection, an ideal of human perfectibility. Those who would criticize Nietzsche for the task in and of itself seem to forget this. Of course, I should point out that Nietzsche himself would not be appreciative of this defense because of his disdain for other philosophers, especially systematic philosophers. However, this defense keeps his critics at bay. I now wish to turn to Nietzsche's comments regarding the *Übermensch* concept and to the "*Übermensch* as ideal model" interpretation.

Before I begin my discussion and critique of the "ideal model" reading I want to present in as much detail as possible exactly what Nietzsche says concerning the *Übermensch*. In the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* we have the most explicit and most lengthy discussion of the *Übermensch* to be found in any of Nietzsche's texts. In other texts Nietzsche provides commentary on the *Übermensch* as it appears in *Zarathustra* as well as thoughts on the concept in and of itself. Before turning to interpretations of the *Übermensch*, it might be best to examine and consider carefully exactly what Nietzsche says. Nietzsche's comments regarding the *Übermensch* should not be viewed in a vacuum, but examined (perhaps even

appreciated) in the context of stylistic pluralism and his negative and positive comments regarding the philosophical enterprise.

1. The *Übermensch* in Nietzsche's Texts

To facilitate both understanding of and appreciation for Nietzsche's comments regarding the *Übermensch* I present, without the interruption of commentary, eight passages in which the *Übermensch* either explicitly or implicitly appears. These are by no means the only passages where Nietzsche discusses the concept of the *Übermensch*, but these do impact directly on the ideal models interpretation. I designate each passage with a letter to aid in the commentary which will follow.

The first appearance of the word *Übermensch* seems to be in aphorism 143 of *The Gay Science*. What follows is the middle section of that aphorism.

(A)

There was only one norm, *man*; and every people thought that it possessed this one ultimate norm. But above and outside, in some distant overworld, one was permitted to behold a *plurality of norms*; one god was not considered a denial of another god, nor blasphemy against him. It was here that the luxury of individuals was first permitted; it was here that one first honored the rights of individuals. The invention of gods, heroes, and *Übermenschen* of all kinds, as well as near-men and under-men, dwarfs, fairies, centaurs, satyrs, demons, and devils was the inestimable preliminary exercise for the justification of the egoism and sovereignty of the individual: the freedom that one conceded to a god in his relation to other gods--one

eventually also granted to oneself in relation to laws, customs, and neighbors.⁸

The next four passages are taken, in order of appearance, from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

(B)

I teach you the *Übermensch*. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the *Übermensch*: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now, man is more ape than any ape. . . . Behold, I teach you the *Übermensch*. The *Übermensch* is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the *Übermensch* shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes!

Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go . . . Man is a rope, tied between beast and *Übermensch*--a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping . . . What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under . . . I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may some day become the *Übermensch*'s. I love him who lives to know, and who wants to know so that the *Übermensch* may live some day. And thus he wants to go under. I love him who works and invents to build a

⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp. 191-192, Sec. 143, "The Greatest Advantage of Polytheism."

house for the *Übermensch* and to prepare earth, animal, and plant for him: for thus he wants to go under.⁹

(C)

Never yet has there been an *Übermensch*. Naked I saw both the greatest and the smallest man: they are still all-too-similar to each other. Verily, even the greatest I found all-too-human.¹⁰

(D)

Alas, there are so many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have dreamed. And especially *above* the heavens: for all gods are poets' parables, poets' prevarications. Verily, it always lifts us higher--specifically, to the realm of the clouds: upon these we place our motley bastards and call them gods and *Übermenschen*. For they are just light enough for these chairs--all these gods and *Übermenschen*. Ah, how weary I am of all the imperfection which must at all costs become event! Ah, how weary I am of poets!¹¹

(E)

Not the height but the precipice is terrible. That precipice where the glance plunges *down* and the hand reaches up. There the heart becomes giddy confronted with its double will. Alas, friends, can you guess what is my heart's double will? This, this is *my* precipice and my danger, that my glance plunges into the height and that my hand would grasp and hold on to the depth. My will clings to man; with fetters I bind myself to man because I am swept up toward the *Übermensch*; for that way my other will wants to go. And therefore I live blind among men as if I did not know them, that my hand might not wholly lose its faith in what is firm.¹²

⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche* trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), pp. 124-127, Secs. 3 and 4 of "Zarathustra's Prologue."

¹⁰Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 205, Part II, "On Priests."

¹¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 240, Part II, "On Poets."

¹²Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 254, Part II, "On Human Prudence."

The next two passages come from *Ecce Homo*.

(F)

The word *Übermensch* as the designation of a type of supreme achievement, as opposed to "modern" men, to "good" men, to Christians and other nihilists--a word that in the mouth of a Zarathustra, the annihilator of morality, becomes a very pensive word--has been understood almost everywhere with the utmost innocence in the sense of those very values whose opposite Zarathustra was met to represent--that is, as an "idealistic" type of a higher kind of man, half "saint," half "genius."¹³

(G)

And how Zarathustra descends and says to everyone what is most good-natured! How gently he handles even his antagonists, the priests, and suffers of them with them!--Here man has been overcome at every moment; the concept of the *Übermensch* has here become the greatest reality--whatever was so far considered great in man lies beneath him at an infinite distance. The halcyon, the light feet, the omnipresence of malice and exuberance, and whatever else is typical of the type of Zarathustra--none of this has ever before been dreamed of as essential to greatness. Precisely in this width of space and this accessibility for what is contradictory, Zarathustra experiences himself as the supreme type of all beings. . . .¹⁴

The last of these eight passages comes from one of Nietzsche's last works, *The Antichrist*.

(H)

Mankind does *not* represent a development of the better or the stronger or the higher in the way that is believed today. "Progress" is merely a modern idea, that is to say a false idea. The European of today is of far less value than the European of the Renaissance; onward development is not by *any* means, by any necessity the same

¹³Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 261. Sec. 1, "Why I Write Such Good Books."

¹⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 305, Sec. 6, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra."

thing as elevation, advance, strengthening. In another sense there are cases of individual success constantly appearing in the most various parts of the earth and from the most various cultures in which a *higher type* does manifest itself: something which in relation to collective mankind is a sort of *Übermensch*. Such chance occurrences of great success have always been possible and perhaps always will be possible. And even entire races, tribes, nations can under certain circumstances represent such a *lucky hit*.¹⁵

These passages represent some of the first and last comments Nietzsche makes regarding the *Übermensch*. These passages are not the only pieces of evidence to which commentators appeal when discussing the "ideal models" reading and variations on that reading, but they do serve as a point of departure from which to explicate and critique what commentators have to say on the *Übermensch*. With these passages in mind, we can now turn to particular treatments of the concept.

Above I delineated three different readings within the "ideal models" interpretation; readings IM1) and IM2) are the most interesting and the most prominent in the literature. Before turning to these two readings in detail I wish to comment on, and thereby dismiss, reading IM3).

If we look at passages (A) through (H) we see that (A), (C), (D), and (E) come the closest to recommending the *Übermensch* as an ideal model having static, definite characteristics or qualities which no human being could possess but which should serve as an ideal for a *direction of post-human development*. In passage (A)

¹⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1968), p. 116, Sec. 4.

Nietzsche discusses the notion of some distant over-world above and beyond this world in which there might exist gods, heroes, and *Übermenschen*. In (C) Nietzsche asserts that there never has been an *Übermensch* even among those whom Nietzsche regards as superior men. In (D) Nietzsche talks of the realm of the clouds in which there exist gods and *Übermenschen*. And finally, in (E), we see Zarathustra doing his best to "cling to man," but he finds himself "swept up toward the *Übermensch*." In these passages Nietzsche does not seem to have in mind personality structures of individuals which might be somehow improved, rather he seems to be discussing beings beyond humanity who exhibit some particular brand of perfection, some particular set of ideal character traits. Or he is simply discussing a status that no being, either in or out of this world, could obtain.

These passages--(A), (C), (D), and (E)--support, or at least they seem to support, an interpretation of the *Übermensch* that is at once radical and extreme. For Nietzsche the *Übermensch* is not a human being, not even a superior human being, but a representation of a kind of perfectibility that is beyond humanity, beyond this life and this earth. Such a representation serves as a model for post-human development. Such a representation also can be found in the unpublished notes, and it is here that we return to the lumpers/splitters controversy and to one of the contrasts between the ideal models reading and the idealized attitude approach.

Consider the following note from Spring-Fall, 1888.

The need to show that as the consumption of man and mankind becomes more and more economical and the "machinery" of interests

and services is integrated ever more intricately, a countermovement is inevitable. I designate this as the secretion of a luxury surplus of mankind: it aims to bring to light a stronger species, a higher type that arises and preserves itself under different conditions from those of the average man. My concept, my metaphor for this type is, as one knows, the word "overman."¹⁶

Indeed, this does seem to say that the *Übermensch* should be considered as some type of human being, some ideal of human perfectibility; in fact, this passage seems to recommend the IM3) reading. How much weight to attribute to this unpublished note of Nietzsche's is, of course, the issue. Several things should be kept in mind. First, Nietzsche did *not* publish some of his thoughts, but he did publish many others. It does not seem unreasonable to assume that those thoughts and ideas he did publish were the ones he wanted read and considered, and that perhaps the ideas and thoughts he did not publish were meant as something else, thought experiments perhaps. Second, if it is said, as many lumpers want to say, that Nietzsche's unpublished notes *represent* his thought, then what of the many pages in the *Nachlass* which Nietzsche copied from other writers? Given this fact there is a special problem with the term "represent."

. . . some of the *Nachlass* consists of pages of the writings of *others* which Nietzsche dutifully copied, for example the dozens of pages of Baudelaire he copied in 1888. Are Baudelaire's thoughts to be

¹⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 463. Other places where there is explicit mention of the *Übermensch* are notes 983, 1001, and 1060.

construed as Nietzsche's thoughts then? And if not, how do the former "represent" the latter?¹⁷

Commentators should keep in mind several distinctions when considering how much importance to attribute to the *Nachlass*. Magnus is quite right in presenting these distinctions, and they merit careful reading and consideration.

- 1) Sometimes the *Nachlass* "represents" his thought in the sense that the published writings and *Nachlass* are virtually identical, e.g., as in the case of the notes surrounding *Die Geburt der Tragodie*, which are almost *verbatim* the published text.
- 2) Sometimes Nietzsche's *Nachlass* may be said to "represent" his thinking in the asymmetrical sense that he had these plans and/or entries at time *t* but elected *not* to pursue them further at time *t*, i.e., he deliberately abandoned them, e.g., as in the case of the 5 prefaces for five unwritten books Nietzsche prepared for Lou Salome, or the *Wille zur Macht* plan of March 1887 which he abandoned in February 1888, or the bulk of the entries published under the *Der Wille zur Macht* title.
- 3) Sometimes the *Nachlass* "represents" Nietzsche's thought in the sense that the notes are raw materials which are modified, typically substantially, in the published *oeuvre*. . . . These are the hardest cases and ones for which no algorithm will serve.¹⁸

I maintain that this radical version of the "ideal model" reading is not what Nietzsche has in mind by his concept; my reservations concerning the significance of the *Nachlass* form only one part of my argument. My reasoning is based also in part on an examination of the published passages and in part on an interpretation of

¹⁷Magnus, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888," p. 91.

¹⁸Magnus, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888," pp. 91-92.

Nietzsche's overall task. It will be enough, for now, to simply analyze the passages in question, leaving the complexities of Nietzsche's project for later.

The published passages from which the IM3) interpretation emerges are problematic in that they do not really support such a reading. In (A), where Nietzsche discusses the "invention of gods, heroes, and *Übermenschen*," the central concern is not the *Übermensch* idea as such but rather the notions of freedom of thought and individuality. A careful examination of the passage demonstrates that Nietzsche is not positing the existence of beings beyond humanity. Rather, Nietzsche is contrasting the advantages of polytheism with the disadvantages of monotheism as his way of arguing that it is not an aberration for human beings to posit their own ideals from which to derive their own laws, joys, and rights.

Three of the four passages cited from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* also seem to support the notion of the *Übermensch* as an ideal of perfectibility that is beyond humanity. Yet upon closer inspection we see that either the passages do not support at all such a reading or the evidence is inconclusive. I contend that the emphasis in these passages is not the positing of some ideal of perfection beyond humanity, but rather Zarathustra's (read Nietzsche's) disgust and disappointment with present humanity. In (C) Zarathustra's disgust with humanity and his realization that the worst and best humans still remain all-too-similar to each other are evident. In (D) we see Zarathustra's weariness with human beings begin to take its toll such that he becomes tempted by the notion that beings beyond this world might exist. But even

in this passage, as well as in (E), Zarathustra is quick to mock himself for thinking such otherworldly thoughts and struggles to remain faithful to the earth and to this life. Not one of these four passages serves as good evidence for understanding the *Übermensch* as an ideal for a direction of post-human development.

While these passages seem to support, at least on first appearance, version 3) of the "ideal model," they really do not support such a reading at all. Such interpretations arise because some commentators engage in a practice of explanation through excision and because they ignore what Nietzsche considers to be his main task. We will return to this latter point in coming chapters.

However, lest I also commit the mistake of interpreting Nietzsche's philosophy by explanation through excision, I wish to make some further comments regarding the above passages from *Zarathustra*, in particular (E). I maintain that Nietzsche, in positing his notion of the *Übermensch*, does not have in mind a reading of the IM3) type. Yet I believe it is possible (and this possibility should be admitted and confronted) that Nietzsche may have subscribed to IM3), even if for but a brief time. Nietzsche asks his readers ". . . can you guess what is my heart's double will?" and thereby admits that he is torn between the reality that is human and of this earth and some ideal reality beyond humanity and this world. A genuine and profound struggle is taking place within Nietzsche, a struggle that he allows his readers to witness. ". . . if I were on guard against men, how could man then be

an anchor for my ball? I should be swept up and away too easily."¹⁹ Nietzsche does resolve the struggle, and he does so on the side of humanity and life in this world. That is, Nietzsche abandons his interest in providing a direction for post-human development in favor of concentrating on present humanity. In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche allows us to see his struggle and its eventual resolution:

How does it come about that man, so admirable as a reality, deserves no respect when he expresses desires? Does he have to atone for being so able as a reality? Does he have to compensate for his activity, for the exertion of will and hand involved in all activity, with a relaxation in the imaginary and absurd?--The history of his desiderata has hitherto been the *partie honteuse* of man: one should take care not to read too long in it. What justifies man is his reality--it will justify him eternally. How much more valuable an actual man is compared with any sort of merely desired, dreamed of, odious lie of a man? with any sort of *ideal* man?²⁰

There remain two other versions of the "ideal model" interpretation of the *Übermensch*, readings IM1) and IM2) as outlined above. These two readings are more popular and more easily defensible than IM3). Each version, IM1) and IM2), is complex and deserves special attention. In addition, these two versions of the "ideal model" interpretation are to be contrasted and compared with the "idealized attitude" interpretation discussed in the next chapter. By way of anticipating the conclusion of this chapter, I maintain that IM1) holds the most promise for

¹⁹Thus Spoke Zarathustra, "On Human Prudence," p. 254.

²⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Sec. 32, p. 85. I owe a strong debt of gratitude to Jim Bennett, who introduced me to Nietzsche's "double will" and helped me to realize its significance.

understanding Nietzsche's concept; that is, it is the most promising within the context of an "ideal model" reading.

2. *Übermensch* as Possible Ideal Human Being

On one reading of the *Übermensch* as ideal model we might mean an ideal human being who perhaps was in existence, or now is in existence, but in any case *hopefully* (that being the *point*) will be in existence at least in some (hopefully greater) number in the future. That is to say, there have been human beings, or there are human beings, or there will be human beings who somehow personify what Nietzsche means by *Übermensch*. This reading is specified by IM1) above in which the *Übermensch* is a model having static, definite characteristics or properties which human beings have had in the past, possess now, or hopefully will possess in the future. In this version of the ideal model of *Übermenschlichkeit* a human being would possess such qualities or character traits of perfection that might involve power, creativity, and/or freedom. This reading is rather common, though perhaps not as common as it once was. In what follows I will present the supporting evidence for this reading and begin to lay the foundation for arguing that this particular reading is a part of the concept which Nietzsche has in mind. I maintain that this reading, IM1), is correct, but *correct only up to a point*. Specifically, those character traits or virtues delineated by Kaufmann seem right, seem to be part of what it must mean to be an *Übermensch*. However, I argue that there is "something

missing" in Kaufmann's construction; IM1) captures only part of Nietzsche's meaning.

If we return to the eight passages quoted above, we see that the remaining four--(B), (F), (G) and (H)--support, in varying degrees of clarity and strength, reading 1) under the "ideal models" interpretation. In (B) Zarathustra (Nietzsche) tells us that the *Übermensch* is the meaning of the earth and that man should prepare the earth for the *Übermensch*. In (F) Nietzsche complains that people have misunderstood Zarathustra's assertions concerning the *Übermensch* and that this notion actually represents a higher type of humanity. In (G) the concept is described as having the greatest reality. And finally, in (H) Nietzsche asserts not only the possibility of individual human beings becoming *Übermenschen*, but he goes on to say that perhaps entire cultures and races could achieve this status.

Obviously these passages need further explication and analysis; however, this task might best be addressed when we discuss individual arguments and objections concerning the *Übermensch* as possible perfect human being. Much of what Nietzsche says can be taken out of context, twisted, and then used to support some very strange interpretations indeed. I wish to discuss briefly one such interpretation. Such a discussion may serve to remind us that we must consider carefully not only what Nietzsche says but also the context in which he says it.

The interpretation of the *Übermensch* as a notion of human perfectibility which has, is, or could be in existence has been accepted for a long time. As a

matter of fact, this interpretation was espoused while Nietzsche was still alive. Nietzsche's sister may have been the first to set forth this interpretation, and her statement of it captures perfectly the meaning of the interpretation, or at least it captures her particular version of the interpretation.

The phrase "the meaning of the *Übermensch*" has very often been misunderstood. By the word "meaning", in this case, is meant the act of modifying by means of new and higher values--values which, as laws and guides of conduct and opinion, are now to rule over mankind . . . a new table of valuations must be placed over mankind--namely, that of the strong, mighty, and magnificent men, overflowing with life and elevated to his zenith--the *Übermensch*, who is now put before us with overpowering passion as the aim of our life, hope, and will. And just as the old system of valuing, which only extolled the qualities favorable to the weak, the suffering, and the oppressed, has succeeded in producing a weak, suffering, and "modern" race, so this new and reversed system of valuing ought to rear a healthy, strong, lively, and courageous type, which would be a glory to life itself. Stated briefly, the leading principle of this new system of valuing would be: "All that proceeds from power is good, all that springs from weakness is bad." This type must not be regarded as a fanciful figure: . . . it is meant to be a possibility which men of the present could realize with all their spiritual and physical energies, provided they adopted the new values.²¹

Förster-Nietzsche is presenting a model of the *Übermensch* concept whereby human beings can achieve such status, but they can only achieve it by adopting and embracing the notion of power. I do not quote this passage at length because I

²¹This passage is quoted from Bernd Magnus, "Overman: An Attitude or An Ideal?" in David Goicoechea, ed., *The Great Year of Zarathustra (1881-1981)* (New York: University Press of America, 1983), p. 146. Much of the following discussion on the ideal interpretation comes from Magnus's article.

believe those who subscribe to this reading of *Übermensch* are in agreement with Nietzsche's sister. No reputable Nietzsche scholar, as far as I know, would agree with her. I quote the passage at length to show, first, that this type of interpretation has existed for a long time. Second, the passage is an illustration of the interpretation itself: "This type must not be regarded as a fanciful figure: . . . it is meant to be a possibility. . . ." This emphasis on fanatical use of power and human beings as power-mongers is mirrored by J. P. Stern when he asserts that Nietzsche:

seems unaware that he is giving us nothing to distinguish the fanaticism that goes with bad faith from his own belief in the unconditioned value of self-realization and self-becoming--that is, from his own belief in the Super man. We for our part are bound to look askance at this questionable doctrine. We can hardly forget that the solemn avowal of this reduplicated self--the pathos of personal authenticity--was the chief tenet of fascism and National Socialism. No man came closer to the full realization of self-created "values" than A. Hitler.²²

Therefore, both Förster-Nietzsche and Stern advance a reading of the *Übermensch* that relies on a total misunderstanding and total disregard of what Nietzsche has to say concerning power and German nationalism. Other than these two readers, I know of no Nietzsche scholar who would subscribe to such a reading. I now want to examine carefully some of the arguments advanced by a few contemporary Nietzsche scholars for subscribing to different kinds of ideal model of perfection.

²²J. P. Stern, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 85-86.

Walter Kaufmann, perhaps the most influential American Nietzsche scholar, subscribes to and argues for an interpretation of the *Übermensch* as a realizable (past, present, future) model of perfection. Kaufmann claims:

The unphilosophic and inartistic mass remain animalic, while the man who overcomes himself, sublimating his impulses, consecrating his passions, and giving style to his character, become truly human or--as Zarathustra would say, enraptured by the word *Über-superhuman*.²³

I have already introduced Kaufmann's interpretation of this concept, but it bears repeating:

The *Übermensch* . . . is the "Dionysian" man who is depicted under the name of Goethe at the end of the *Götzen-Dämmerung* (IX, 49). He has overcome his animal nature, organized the chaos of his passions, sublimated his impulses, and given style to his character.²⁴

Kaufmann's interpretation is certainly an example of what I call the IM1) reading. The best piece of evidence used by Kaufmann in support of his interpretation comes from the passage in *The Gay Science* entitled "The Greatest Advantage of Polytheism." This passage was quoted above and designated as (A). I am in complete agreement with Kaufmann's assessment of this passage. Kaufmann writes:

To Nietzsche these *Übermenschen* appear as symbols of the repudiation of any conformity to a single norm: antitheses to mediocrity and stagnation. As he himself had tried to break with

²³Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 12.

²⁴Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 316.

conformity in order to realize his own unique individuality--looking for an "educator" in whose most beloved features he might behold his ideal self "immeasurably high above"--the Greeks envisaged their ideal individualities in their *Übermenschen*. This aphorism is significant because it contains one of the few references to the overman before *Zarathustra* and was written just before that work.²⁵

In arguing for his interpretation Kaufmann also appeals to the passages I designate as (F) and (H). As I have claimed earlier, Kaufmann's treatment of the *Übermensch* is right; however, the interpretation is incomplete. (I will treat the issue of incompleteness in the next chapter.) Furthermore, problems with some of Kaufmann's other arguments in support of his interpretation arise.

For example, one of Kaufmann's arguments for his interpretation of the concept seems to be, at bottom, an appeal to neatness. After claiming that the *Übermensch* is a person with specific character traits, Kaufmann notes that this interpretation connects well with what he is about to say regarding eternal recurrence. Also, Kaufmann, not unlike some other commentators, is in the habit of interpreting Nietzsche's concepts, whether it be the *Übermensch*, eternal recurrence, or some other doctrine, in the context of Nietzsche's biography. Kaufmann contends that if we could just understand and appreciate the tragic life Nietzsche suffered, then we could arrive at a fuller and more accurate interpretation of Nietzsche's doctrines. Kaufmann implores us to understand Nietzsche's ideas in the context of his experience, ". . . the supreme experience of a life unusually rich

²⁵Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, p. 309.

in suffering, pain, agony."²⁶ This perception lies at the heart of Kaufmann's interpretation of the *Übermensch*, eternal recurrence, and other doctrines. Consider the manner in which Kaufmann views *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

And the most important clue to *Zarathustra* is that it is the work of an utterly lonely man . . . The eternal recurrence of his solitude and despair and of all the agonies of his tormented body! And yet it was not his own recurrence that he found hardest to accept, but that of the small man too. For the existence of paltriness and pettiness seemed meaningless even after he had succeeded in giving meaning to his own inherently meaningless suffering. Were not his work and his love of his work and joy in it inseparable from his tortures? And man is capable of standing superhuman suffering if only he feels sure that there is some point and purpose to it, while much less pain will seem intolerable if devoid of meaning.²⁷

While such psychological and biographical insertions are interesting, they shed little light on the meaning of certain concepts. If we are to consider such insertions as one basis for Kaufmann's interpretation, then Nietzsche himself provides the first refutation of such an interpretation. "I am one thing, my writings are another matter."²⁸ Failure to draw and adhere to this distinction between biography on the one hand and concepts and ideas on the other often leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of not only ideas and concepts but of whole books. For Kaufmann, the *Übermensch* is, or could be, an actual human being; the

²⁶Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, p. 323.

²⁷Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 103, 111.

²⁸Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 259, Sec. 1, "Why I Write Such Good Books".

eternal recurrence can only be understood as that which emerges from Nietzsche's solitude; and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* must be viewed and understood as the work of a lonely man. These conclusions stem from failing to recognize the distinction between how one lives and what one writes. Nietzsche is very explicit on this point, so much so that it is surprising that Kaufmann and others miss it.

Another, yet similar, expression of the *Übermensch* as ideal model human being (either past, present, or future) is found in Arthur Danto's *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. Danto writes:

The *Übermensch* is not the blond beast. The blond beast remains behind, hopefully forever. The *Übermensch* lies ahead. . . . Nietzsche was an inveterate worshipper of heroes. He held a high regard for Goethe, Napoleon, Michelangelo, Julius Caesar and--more idiosyncratically--for Cesare Borgia.²⁹

Just a few lines later Danto is even more specific:

The *Übermensch*, accordingly, is not the blond giant dominating his lesser fellows. He is merely a joyous, guiltless, free human being, in possession of instinctual drives which do not overpower him. He is the master and not the slave of his drives, and so he is in a position to make something of himself rather than being the product of instinctual discharge and external obstacle.³⁰

Here in Danto, as in Kaufmann, we find a typical description of the *Übermensch* as an ideal model of the 1) variety. Danto views the *Übermensch* as a model having static, definite characteristics or properties which human beings have

²⁹Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 198.

³⁰Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, pp. 199-200.

possessed, are now possessing, or could in the future possess. At the same time, however, Danto's exposition of the *Übermensch* is somewhat confused. Sometimes, as with the above, Danto seems to be saying that the *Übermensch* could be an actual human being. At other times he seems to suggest that Nietzsche was confused and that what Nietzsche really has in mind is a human being that could not be actualized. These two readings by Danto, while related, are different, and the latter reading shall be examined later in this chapter. If Danto subscribes to the first reading, which indeed he does if only for a moment, then the reasons for his interpretation need to be explored. This task is the more difficult given Danto's brief and all but superficial discussion of the concept in the first place. However, Danto's rationale appears to be two-fold.

The first rationale, one that Kaufmann uses and which has already been discussed, is an appeal to Nietzsche's biography. Nietzsche may have worshipped heroes, but it is not clear how this translates into the assertion that the *Übermensch* was Goethe, or will be some Goethe. This phrase, "worshipped heroes," that Danto uses is vague in any case. Certainly, Nietzsche admired Goethe and select others, but he never states that Goethe or any of these others are *Übermenschen*. Danto, as with Kaufmann, is confusing Nietzsche's life with Nietzsche's writings.

The second rationale to which Danto appeals is much more intricate and interesting. This argument, also used by Kaufmann, is at the heart of the

interpretation of the *Übermensch* as ideal human being. The argument goes something like this:

1. Nietzsche admires persons like Goethe.
 2. Goethe is referred to by Nietzsche as a "free spirit" or higher man.
 3. Nietzsche writes that in the past a "higher type" of person has appeared--something which in relation to collective mankind is a sort of *Übermensch*.
 4. Goethe was a real person, and his personality traits could be found in future human beings.
- ∴ Nietzsche intended for the *Übermensch* concept to apply to persons, past, present, or future.

This is the basic argument for the interpretation, posited and subscribed to by Danto, Kaufmann, and others. I believe this argument, in conjunction with much of what Nietzsche writes, presents a rather strong case for the IM1) interpretation; Nietzsche's *Übermensch* concept does involve a model having static, definite characteristics or properties possessed by at least some human beings in the past, and perhaps the present, and at least ideally to be possessed by human beings in the future. However, the IM1) reading of the *Übermensch* does not capture entirely the importance Nietzsche ascribes to the concept. Part of the problem, as I have already stated, resides in the manner in which the reading is argued or defended. A second, more fundamental problem concerns the blurring of the distinction between *freigeist* and *Übermensch*.

This study contends that there is a distinction between *Freigeist*³¹ and *Übermensch* and that this distinction is extremely important for understanding the *Übermensch*. Of course, a better understanding of and appreciation for *Freigeist* and *freie Geister* also will follow.

The notion of *Freigeist* is introduced in great detail in *Human, All Too Human*.

A man is called a *Freigeist* if he thinks otherwise than would be expected, based on his origin, environment, class, and position, or based on prevailing contemporary views. He is the exception: . . . it is not part of the nature of the *Freigeist* that his views are more correct, but rather that he has released himself from tradition, be it successfully or unsuccessfully. Usually, however, he has truth, or at least the spirit of the search for truth, on his side: he demands reasons, while others demand faith.³²

Freigeist is compared and contrasted to the notion of bound spirit.

The bound spirit assumes a position, not for reasons, but out of habit; he is a Christian, for example, not because he has insight into the

³¹The translation of *Freigeist* is problematic, it could be translated "free thinker" or "free spirit." The phrase "*freie Geister*", the plural, could mean free spirits or free minds. I shall leave these terms untranslated for the reason that I do not want the English associated with the term *Übermensch*. I believe it is proper, following Marion Faber's translation, to think of these words as meaning "free spirit" and "free spirits" respectively. However, Faber is quite correct to point out the fact that "'free spirit' in English also suggests something devil-may-care or flighty, but it is a risk we have to take, and, for all that, it may not be entirely out of keeping with Nietzsche's intentions." See Marion Faber's introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* trans. and ed., Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1984), pp. xxv-xxvi.

³²Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* trans. and ed., Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1984), pp. 139-140, Sec. 225, "The Free Spirit as Relative Concept."

various religions and chose among them; he is an Englishman not because he decided for England; but rather, Christianity and England were givens, and he accepted them without having reasons, as someone who was born in wine country becomes a wine drinker. Later, when he was a Christian and an Englishman, he may also have devised some reasons in favor of his habit; even if these reasons are overthrown, he, in his whole position, is not. Ask a bound spirit for his reasons against bigamy, for example, and you will learn whether his holy zeal for monogamy is based on reasons or on habit. The habit of intellectual principles without reasons is called faith.³³

The *Freigeist* notion is a particular construct of Nietzsche's that involves particular personality traits; *Freigeist* is a certain personality structure. The *Freigeist* is a person who is intelligent, strong, committed; a person who does not automatically accept the tenets of the society in which he is raised; and a person who gives reasons for what he does and does not believe. (Here we should not regard "giving reasons" as an indication of Nietzsche's reliance on and acceptance of traditional philosophical notions of rationality. Nietzsche often disdains such notions for various reasons, and while it may be the case that Nietzsche accepts the very notions he is attacking, this is no such instance. Here "giving reasons" should be viewed only in the context of opposing the blind faith of the bound spirit.) Nietzsche often discusses such persons, such *freie Geister*, throughout his texts. Kaufmann and Danto are quite right in their assertions that Nietzsche often does allude to such persons as Caesar and Goethe as people worth admiring and perhaps

³³Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, p. 140, Sec. 226, "Origin of Faith." Nietzsche's remarks on *Freigeist* are scattered throughout the text. See for example, sections 2, 3, and 7 of Nietzsche's preface, and aphorisms 30, 34, 227, 229-232, 282, 291, 464, and 595.

emulating. But these persons, and other actual persons, are only mentioned in the context of the notion of the concept of *Freigeist*; they are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the context of the concept of the *Übermensch*.³⁴

There is a distinction to be made between *Freigeist* and *Übermensch*; they are two entirely different concepts. At least I would like to maintain that they are different. If we return to passage (C) quoted above we see that Zarathustra provides a rather compelling piece of evidence for the validity of this distinction. I again cite this passage.

Never yet has there been an *Übermensch*. Naked I saw both the greatest and the smallest man: They are still all-too-similar to each other. Verily, even the greatest I found all-too-human.³⁵

This passage from the second part of *Zarathustra* shows that there is a difference between the *Übermensch* and the *Freigeist*, or at least Nietzsche thought there was a difference. However, I want to maintain that the *Übermensch*, at least in part, does represent a human ideal of perfectibility that can be realized. Nietzsche's pronouncements to this effect and the importance he ascribed to the *Freigeist* concept must be taken into account when discussing the concept of the *Übermensch*. However, it still remains to be seen whether or not the *Übermensch*

³⁴See for example, *Human All Too Human*, Sec. 164, "Danger and Benefit of Worshipping the Genius", and *Twilight of the Idols*, Sec. 38, and Secs. 49-51 of "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man."

³⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 205, "On Priests."

could be interpreted as a perfect human being, but a human being who could not be actualized. This possibility shall now be considered.

3. *Übermensch* as Unrealizable Ideal Human Being

Some commentators present and argue for the possibility that what Nietzsche has in mind is not an actual human being with a certain personality structure living in the past, present, or future, but rather an abstract human being with a certain personality structure. Apparently it is the human being that is abstract; the set of personality traits, while they may be difficult to describe and even more difficult to achieve, are nonetheless actual. On this reading Nietzsche provides a formula for human beings to follow, but either the formula itself is too difficult to understand or human beings as a species cannot, or will not, follow the formula. As a result, Nietzsche, in positing the idea of the *Übermensch*, is setting forth an ideal of self-perfection, but it is an unrealizable ideal. Perhaps some abstract human being of sorts could follow the formula, but no human being qua human being could. At times Danto seems to subscribe to this position.

Nietzsche seems to have believed that the *Übermensch* ideal was not going to be automatically attained or realized through the natural course of events. His doctrine in this respect is anything but Darwinian. We know, in fact, that he believed that it was the *unfit* who survive and prevail, and that more and more individuals, who are more and more alike, are going, in the course of time, to crowd the exceptional individual who might break through to a new perspective and a more exalted form of life. He speaks at times as though the deterioration in the human material were so great, the unanimity of thought and outlook so widely instantiated, that further

achievement and progress must be impossible: there must be a leveling off of the human type and a stasis in spiritual evolution.³⁶

Danto is quite right in part of this claim. Nietzsche is certainly concerned with the status of the human race, and this concern is evident throughout his works. Often he speaks of the last man and the dominance the last man will have over society. That this translates into an interpretation of the *Übermensch* as some abstract ideal example of self-perfection is not clear. As a matter of fact, Nietzsche appears to address this concern, and thereby Danto's interpretation, directly when he writes:

The last thing *I* should promise would be to "improve" mankind. No new idols are erected by me; let the old ones learn what feet of clay mean. *Overthrowing idols* (my word for "ideals")--that comes closer to being part of my craft. One has deprived reality of its value, its meaning, its truthfulness, to precisely the extent to which one has mendaciously invented an ideal world.³⁷

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this passage in interpreting Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* and for understanding his philosophy as a whole. For the moment, interpretations of the *Übermensch* are of primary concern; in chapters V and VI Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole as well as certain aspects within that philosophy shall be the primary focus.

This second variation on the "*Übermensch* as ideal model" interpretation, the *Übermensch* as a model having static, definite characteristics or properties which

³⁶Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, pp. 200-201.

³⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 218, Sec. 2, "Preface."

human beings could possess but never will, (designated as IM2), is expressly repudiated by Nietzsche. Given what Nietzsche says concerning the *Übermensch* and his view of the purpose of philosophy, he would never accord such a status to this concept. The possibility arises, of course, that the *Übermensch* must be given this kind of status, and hence the concept does not fit into Nietzsche's overall philosophy. It is too early to draw this conclusion. There may be other interpretations of the concept that do fit into Nietzsche's overall scheme. In the next chapter I will explore a reading that I designate the "*Übermensch* as idealized attitude" interpretation. A synthesis of interpretations possibly may emerge as the best reading of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*.

CHAPTER IV

THE "IDEALIZED ATTITUDE" APPROACH TO THE *ÜBERMENSCH*

Throughout the past one hundred years of Nietzsche scholarship the most common interpretations of the *Übermensch* have come from within the "ideal models" reading. This "ideal models" approach generates three specific variations, all of which were discussed in the previous chapter. (I admit that one might be able to generate more possible variations within the ideal models approach, but I would not be clear as to what would be gained by doing so.) However, we have seen that such an interpretation is problematic, no matter the various guises in which it appears. I contend that, as problematic as the ideal reading may be, the variation I designate IM1) is probably close to what Nietzsche has in mind. That it is *not exactly* what Nietzsche has in mind is the point of departure for this present chapter.

The "*Übermensch* as idealized attitude" interpretation can be posited as an addition to or as an alternative for the "ideal model" reading. In Chapter I the problem of how to define "attitude" and exactly what might be meant by the term was explored in minimal detail. This brief exploration is due in part to the fact that the interpretation is a recent development in Nietzsche scholarship and in part because some commentators have simply not delved deeply enough into the nuances involved in such a reading. Problems and confusions with the term "attitude" and the phrase "*Übermensch* as attitude" have yet to be explored. (As a way of

beginning to eliminate confusion I have introduced the phrases "idealized attitude" and "*Übermenschlichkeit* as an idealized attitude," thus reflecting my belief that the "attitude" interpretation shares some aspects in common with the "ideal models" approach.) Cashing out exactly what such phrases mean and clarifying their consequences will facilitate understanding and analysis of this interpretation. If all this seems like a needless semantical exercise, it should not. Eliminating these preliminary confusions will help in determining how tenable the interpretation is, either as an addition to IM1) or as a complete substitute.

In the previous chapter I delineated three kinds or three variations of the idealized attitude reading for the purpose of future contrast and comparison with the ideal models reading and its variations. I designate these variations of the idealized attitude reading IA1)-IA3) and, as a convenience, restate them here.

- IA1) The *Übermensch* should be construed as a representation of a fluid, indefinite conceptual or psychological form of life possessed by at least some human beings in the past, and perhaps the present, and at least ideally to be possessed by (and ideally by even *more*) human beings in the future.
- IA2) The *Übermensch* should be construed as a representation of a fluid, indefinite conceptual or psychological form of life which human beings at least probably never have possessed and probably never will possess--and perhaps never *could* possess--but which nevertheless should serve human beings as an ideal for a *direction of human development*.
- IA3) The *Übermensch* should be construed as a representation of a fluid, indefinite conceptual or psychological form of life which human beings can never possess, but which should serve as an ideal for a *direction of post-human development*.

If we return now to the ideal models approach, specifically the subtype I designate IM1), we see that there is quite a difference. I again state the reading I designate IM1):

IM1) The *Übermensch* should be construed as a model of perfectibility having static, definite characteristics or properties possessed by at least some human beings in the past, and perhaps the present, and at least ideally to be possessed by (and ideally by even *more*) human beings in the future.

The main differences between IM1) and the "idealized attitude" interpretation of either subtype should be immediately clear and striking. Where IM1) constitutes a human ideal of perfectibility which can be reached if only a specific set of characteristics or qualities or personality traits are embraced, the "idealized attitude" reading, whether IA1), IA2), or IA3) does not maintain that human beings must do this or that. IM1) recommends or endorses a specific set of character traits or virtues the particulars of which depend upon one's philosophical and/or political leanings. Each philosopher has in mind a different list of specific qualities or virtues, and we examined some of these lists in the previous chapter. The "idealized attitude" reading makes no such specific recommendations concerning character traits or virtues, but instead sees the *Übermensch* as a representation of a particular attitude toward life; a form of life. Where ideal models are static and definite, idealized attitude readings are indefinite and fluid. Of course, if a particular variation of the idealized attitude reading recommends the adoption of a particular attitude toward life or attitude in life, then that reading is less fluid, less indefinite than otherwise might be expected. On such occasions where very specific attitudes

are recommended, especially if such a recommendation occurs in the context of an enumeration of specific character traits or virtues, the distinction between the ideal models reading and the idealized attitude reading becomes blurred. I will discuss this particular problem later when I turn to Magnus's version of the attitude reading.

There is one final difference between the three idealized attitude readings and IM1) that should be noted and discussed. IM1) presents a picture of the *Übermensch* that is clear, precise, and specific, and which construes Nietzsche's presentation of the concept as clear, precise, and specific. The "idealized attitude" reading--whether IA1), IA2), or IA3)--is a little muddled, a little unclear; consequently, it construes Nietzsche's discussion of the concept as a little muddled, a little unclear. Of course, as I proceed in discussing and analyzing the "idealized reading," some of the vagueness and ambiguity will dissipate, but not entirely. While I may be premature in saying so, I will argue that, at least with respect to *my* version of the idealized attitude reading, some small degree of vagueness and ambiguity might be in order.

There are those, of course, who do think that Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* is unclear and perhaps not fully developed. Further, these same commentators argue that no version of the "ideal models" reading, and especially not IM1), captures what Nietzsche means. Not even the "idealized attitude" reading captures what Nietzsche has in mind. Some commentators want to view the *Übermensch* as a metaphor. Before discussing the "idealized attitude" reading any further, I would like to briefly examine this particular interpretation.

1. The *Übermensch* As Metaphor

There is another interpretation of the *Übermensch* and of *Übermenschlichkeit* that, while not popular, deserves some attention. The following brief sketch of this interpretation provides some of its basic parameters, which are then explicated and criticized. This interpretation is usually presented in opposition to any ideal model reading of the *Übermensch*, but it is especially opposed to IM1). I do not believe this interpretation has much to recommend it. However, the discussion that follows may serve as a suitable segue into the "idealized attitude" interpretation.

Perhaps the *Übermensch* is a metaphor, a symbol. But for what would it be a metaphor, of what a symbol? In Chapter II I discussed Nietzsche's many stylistic possibilities for communicating thoughts and ideas. One of these possibilities is the metaphor; Nietzsche is not averse to couching concepts in metaphorical terms. We need only recall the three metamorphoses in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (which will be discussed in great detail in the next section of this chapter) and Nietzsche's use of the cow in his earlier work, *The Use and Abuse of History*. Given Nietzsche's disdain for much of the manner in which philosophy is practiced, his use of this particular style should not be surprising. Consider the following description of the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit* offered by Ofelia Schutte.

As a metaphor of fulfillment in transcendence, Nietzsche's idea functions as an affirmation of the process of self-overcoming and as a criticism of all forms of human stagnation. The *Übermensch* stands

against the fixation of boundaries within human life (body/soul) and between the human being and the world (subject/object).¹

Schutte continues her description of the *Übermensch* by asserting:

The *Übermensch* transcends the present possibilities of human beings. It is the child and creation of human beings. The *Übermensch* is a metaphor for what it means to transcend the dualism and alienation of the human condition. To do this one must learn about life's spontaneity from children and one must prepare the world for children whose consciousness will not have been as impaired with nihilistic values as ours has. The superior man is someone who becomes a master of dualism, whereas the *Übermensch* stands for the transcendence of dualism. There could be no more telling difference between the two types.²

In this passage Schutte makes the distinction between superior men and *Übermenschen*; where the former (only) master dualism, the latter transcend dualism. I greatly appreciate Schutte's distinction between Nietzsche's concept of *freigeist* and his concept of the *Übermensch*. There is certainly a difference between the two conceptions. I also appreciate her taking the *Übermensch* concept seriously; Nietzsche has something important to convey with his use of this concept. However, Schutte's interpretation of the *Übermensch* is terribly flawed, and her desire to lend the concept the prominence in Nietzsche's philosophy that it deserves has the opposite effect.

For Schutte, the *Übermensch* is a metaphor, a metaphor for an act of transcendence of dualism. As long as dualism exists, there never can be an

¹Ofelia Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche Without Masks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 123.

²Ofelia Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism*, p. 123.

Übermensch; the most that humans can hope for is a glimpse of the *Übermensch*. (Schutte is unclear with regard to the existence of dualism and provides no details on this glimpse). To think of the *Übermensch* as an ideal of perfectibility which human beings can achieve, upon acquiring specific virtues or character traits, is misguided. That is, IM1) is wrong. Several observations and objections can be raised against Schutte's reading of the *Übermensch*.

The first observation concerns the textual evidence Schutte employs to support her interpretation; she appeals exclusively to passages in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. As a matter of fact, she uses the passages I designated as (C), (D), and (E) in my discussion of IM3) in the previous chapter. Schutte is quite correct that these passages seem to indicate that Nietzsche did not have in mind the possibility of human beings becoming *Übermenschen*. However, she totally refuses to address or even acknowledge the existence of passages both in *Zarathustra* and in other works, most notably *The Antichrist*, which directly oppose her reading of the *Übermensch*. Within this context of ignoring passages, we are entitled to charge Schutte with explanation through excision. At the very least, we can note that Schutte does not take into account Nietzsche's deep and profound struggle concerning his *Übermensch* concept.

The second observation concerns Schutte's description of her interpretation of the *Übermensch* as metaphorical. In classifying the *Übermensch* as a metaphor for some distant goal beyond humanity, it looks as though Schutte is actually subscribing to some kind of "ideal model" reading. Specifically, Schutte seems to

be doing nothing more than positing the version of the ideal models reading that I designated IM3). Given the passages from *Zarathustra* to which she appeals, it seems even more likely that she is subscribing to and defending either IM2) or IM3), with IM3) being the closest approximation. As a result, all the problems with these variations on the "ideal models" reading also apply to Schutte's interpretation.

And finally, it seems that Schutte, even if we allow her the metaphorical interpretation she desires, is caught in an apparent contradiction. On the one hand Schutte presents the *Übermensch* concept as something beyond humanity which no human being could achieve, while on the other hand she asserts that the concept embodies the transcendence of dualism. Nietzsche, of course, holds tremendous disdain for dualism, a fact that will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. However, the charge of contradiction against Schutte is not warranted.³ Nietzsche himself, in passage (B), introduces the transhuman reading of the *Übermensch* at the same time that he admonishes his readers to be faithful to the earth. Such a passage seems to involve the very dualism Nietzsche claims he wants to overcome. Consider the following:

Behold, I teach you the *Übermensch*. The *Übermensch* is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the *Übermensch shall be* the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of other worldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not.

³I am grateful to Jim Bennett for preventing me from making an unfair charge against Schutte's position.

Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go.⁴

If Nietzsche has in mind a new kind of being that can evolve on this earth, then perhaps there is no contradiction. This raises the issue of Lamarckian evolution in which change in a species results from gradual accumulation of acquired modifications over several generations.⁵ If Nietzsche did indeed have in mind such a being, then such a type would not really be beyond humanity, would not exist in a some kind of heaven.

Schutte's interpretation of the *Übermensch* as a metaphor is not successful. Neither is the reading tenable within Schutte's own scheme, nor when examining Nietzsche's other remarks both in and out of *Zarathustra*. Schutte is so convinced that Danto's and Kaufmann's readings of the *Übermensch* (which belong to that version of the "ideal models" interpretation designated as IM1) are misguided and inflict damage to Nietzsche's thought that she fails to see that she is doing even worse damage. Where Schutte wants to disregard IM1) altogether, I want to "save" it, or at least part of it. Schutte, in noting the importance of Nietzsche's three metamorphoses of the spirit, opens a new avenue of inquiry from which the *Übermensch* might be approached and understood.

⁴Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 125, Sec 3, "Zarathustra's Prologue."

⁵William T. Keeton, *Biological Science*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 587.

2. Magnus's "Attitude" Interpretation

Perhaps more than anyone else in Nietzsche scholarship, Bernd Magnus deserves credit for making discussion and debate concerning Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* not only a more respectable endeavor but a more fruitful one as well. Magnus is responsible for the formulation and current popularity of the "Übermensch as attitude" interpretation.⁶ The following discussion will present exactly what I consider to be Magnus's position, the arguments for that position, and its consequences. I agree with much of Magnus's commentary concerning the *Übermensch*, but there are important points of disagreement. That is, it is my position that Magnus makes a start toward providing a tenable interpretation of the *Übermensch*; however, his interpretation is just that, a start. Before beginning

⁶Magnus presents and argues for his conception of the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit*, and at the same time argues against what he calls simply the "ideal" reading, in several places. With few exceptions Magnus says pretty much the same thing regarding the *Übermensch* in all of the following sources. These are: "Aristotle and Nietzsche: *Megalopsychia* and *Übermensch*," in *The Greeks and the Good Life*, ed., David J. Depew, pp. 260-295; "Author, Writer, Text: *The Will to Power*," *International Studies in Philosophy*, 22, 2(1990): 49-57; "Nietzsche and the Project of Bringing Philosophy to an End," *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 14(1983): 304-320; "Nietzsche's Eternalistic Counter-Myth," *Review of Metaphysics*, 26(1973): 604-616; *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978; "Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888: *The Will to Power* and the *Übermensch*," *Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 24, 1(1986); "Overman: An Attitude or an Ideal?" in *The Great Year of Zarathustra (1881-1981)*, ed. David Goicoechea, pp. 142-165; "Perfectibility and Attitude in Nietzsche's *Übermensch*," *Review of Metaphysics*, 36(1983): 633-660; "Self-Consuming Concepts," *International Studies in Philosophy*, 21, 2(1989): 63-71. I will use most of these sources in presenting and analyzing Magnus's position.

Magnus's interpretation proper, I will make some comments regarding the very basic distinction between "ideal" and "attitude" interpretations in their simplest form.

All "ideal model" interpretations of the *Übermensch*--at least IM1) and IM2)--stress the psychology of the *Übermensch* as a possible or actual human being. This stress on psychology or personality structure severely limits the notion of the *Übermensch*. "Attitude" interpretations instead place no *a posteriori* limits on the notion. The concern in "attitude" interpretations is conceptual analysis, rather than the psychological availability in some or most persons, of Nietzsche's higher type. This same limiting condition--namely, the imposition of human psychology as a filter through which understanding of the *Übermensch* must pass--proves to be rather static and oversimplified to many (at least Magnus and I) who study Nietzsche and Nietzsche's concept seriously.

Regardless of whether Nietzsche's fictional characters (e.g., Zarathustra), real life heroes (e.g., Goethe), or avid readers (e.g., Hilliard) are considered psychological paragons of *Übermenschlichkeit*, none can be counted on to give an accurate or even a complete account of the idea Nietzsche presents. (The exception to this assertion may be IM1), though Magnus also would include this model in his criticism.) Ideal models (at least IM2)-IM4)) cannot, because an account of human psychology, however complete and accurate it may be, cannot set a limit to the idea or the psychology of that which is said to come not from man but be beyond man. Instead of psychological and personality structure assessment, Magnus seems to assert that the notion of the *Übermensch* must be subjected to conceptual analysis on

its own terms. The *Übermensch* should be treated *simpliciter*, that is, treated as "the doctrine of the *Übermensch* as the recommendation of a certain attitude." The family of "attitude" interpretations, so understood, enjoys a hermeneutical advantage that "ideal model" interpretations cannot.

If these distinctions are examined carefully, their importance becomes evident. Each has different consequences for the interpretation of Nietzsche's notion; not paying attention to the meaning of attitude, or blurring the meaning, only confuses the issue and makes understanding the *Übermensch* impossible. Another reason for keeping this distinction in mind is that it is not clear that Nietzsche did. That is, Nietzsche may have wandered between the different readings. Even more confusing, some of Nietzsche's interpreters may have wandered with him when considering different interpretations of the *Übermensch*.⁷

In discussing Bernd Magnus's interpretation of the *Übermensch* as an attitude, the three-fold distinction made above should be kept in mind. (To summarize: I make the distinction between the *Übermensch* as a type which possesses a certain attitude, the readers of Nietzsche who possess a certain attitude, and the doctrine of the *Übermensch* as the recommendation of a certain attitude.) Although Magnus presents a convincing reading of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, it is not clear that Magnus himself keeps all three possibilities separate. To be sure, Magnus is aware of the basic distinction between "ideal" and "attitude" reading. He notes:

⁷I owe a great debt of thanks to Greg Seals and Richard Aquila for helping me with the distinction between different meanings of "attitude" as well as helping me to express this distinction in a coherent manner.

The contrast to be marked is between the "ideal type" reading and the attitudinal or diagnostic reading of the *Übermensch*. The contrast is not as sharp, nor is it as clear as one should like it to be; nor is it an all or nothing affair. But what I have in mind when I refer to the attitudinal interpretation is that it does *not* necessarily emphasize the *Übermensch* as a human ideal of perfectibility, an ideal which can be realized if only we were to do something or other--sublimate our impulses, consecrate our passions, spiritualize our instincts, give style to our character, live authentically . . .⁸

Magnus makes this assertion in the belief that his reading directly opposes those readings proposed by Kaufmann, Danto, Schacht, and others. Consider another, more specific example of the kind of reading of the *Übermensch* that Magnus opposes.

The *Übermensch* represents Nietzsche's nondualistic vision of human perfectibility. Like Goethe, the *Übermensch* is the Dionysian who has overcome his animal nature, has sublimated his impulses, organized the chaos of his passions, lived authentically, and has given style to his character. He is a free human being, joyous, without guilt, the master of instinctual drives which do not overpower him. He represents ascending life, self-overcoming, and self-possession. In him intelligence, strength of character and will, autonomy, passion, and taste are fully integrated. Think of him as Christ's soul in Caesar's body, or as instinct spiritualized.⁹

Here Magnus is describing the version of the "ideal models" reading that I have designated IM1). In criticizing this reading Magnus contends that what is at stake is not a certain human being or type of human being, but a representation of a certain attitude. It is not clear, however, whether Magnus can make the claim that

⁸Bernd Magnus, "Overman: An Attitude or an Ideal?" in David Goicoechea, ed., *The Great Year of Zarathustra (1881-1981)* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 150-151.

⁹Bernd Magnus, "Nietzsche and the Project of Bringing Philosophy to an End," in *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker*, ed., Y. Yovel (Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), p. 54.

his interpretation is radically different from Kaufmann's, Danto's, Schacht's or anyone else's "ideal model" interpretation. Yet Magnus does seem to want to make this claim; he does say that he is offering an attitudinal/diagnostic reading of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. Before evaluating the legitimacy of this claim, the actual interpretation itself needs to be examined. In several places Magnus presents and then argues for exactly what he means (what he thinks Nietzsche means) by *Übermensch*,¹⁰ and *Übermenschlichkeit*.

I take the *Übermensch* to be the *nonspecific* representation, the underdetermined embodiment if you will, of a certain attitude toward life and world--the attitude that finds them worthy of *infinite* repetition.¹¹

And again,

The *Übermensch* is not yet another link in a long chain which attempts to articulate the human ideal, an ideal which can be realized if only we were to do something or other--sublimate our impulses, consecrate our passions, spiritualize our instincts, give style to our

¹⁰Magnus presents and argues for his conception of the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit* in several places. The five sources for his discussion are: "Overman: An Attitude or an Ideal?" in David Goicoechea, ed., *The Great Year of Zarathustra (1881-1981)* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 142-165; *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); "Perfectibility and Attitude in Nietzsche's *Übermensch*," *Review of Metaphysics*, 36, (1983), 633-659; "Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888: *The Will to Power* and the *Übermensch*," *Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 24, 1 (January 1986); and "Nietzsche and the Project of Bringing Philosophy to an End." in Yirmiyahu Yovel, ed., *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), pp. 39-57. All five sources are good, though Magnus says pretty much the same thing in all of them. Most of these will be used in presenting Magnus's position.

¹¹Bernd Magnus, "Overman: An Attitude or an Ideal?" in David Goicoechea, ed., *The Great Year of Zarathustra (1881-1981)* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), p. 151.

character, live authentically--assuming all the while, of course, that we would know how to begin to do any of these things. Rather, the *Übermensch* is the *nonspecific* representation--the undetermined embodiment--of a certain attitude toward life and world--the attitude which finds them worthy of *infinite* repetition. An *Übermensch*, and only an *Übermensch*, would be so well disposed to himself and the world that he would crave *nothing* more fervently than the eternal repetition of his life, not even the life of God or the gods.¹²

And finally,

. . . an *Übermensch* is Nietzsche's inverted secular god equivalent. For consider again the defining disposition of an *Übermensch*, the person who would crave nothing more fervently than the repetition of each and every moment of his or her life. Thought through carefully, it seems to me that this means that an *Übermensch* cannot live or imagine his life under erasure, edited, amended in this way or that. Rather an *Übermensch* must love each and every moment of life unconditionally.¹³

While running the risk of boring the reader and engaging in needless repetition, I quote these passages at length to show exactly what Magnus means by the *Übermensch*. For Magnus the *Übermensch* is not an ideal of perfectibility, but a representation of a particular attitude toward life; the *Übermensch* is the undetermined embodiment of an attitude that accepts the eternal recurrence. This then is Magnus's interpretation of the *Übermensch*, and it is at once an intriguing and ingenious reading. However, the interpretation's tenability remains to be seen. The following examination considers Magnus's interpretation from both an internal and external perspective. I believe, and will attempt to demonstrate, that Magnus

¹²Bernd Magnus, "Nietzsche and the Project of Bringing Philosophy to an End," p. 54.

¹³Bernd Magnus, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888: The *Will to Power* and the *Übermensch*," p. 95.

is confused both about his interpretation and the IM1) reading. For example, I am not convinced that Magnus's reading and IM1) are as distinct as he thinks they are. I will argue that some of Magnus's commentary can be saved, but only if we begin to think in terms of an "idealized attitude" approach to the *Übermensch*. First, I want to examine Magnus's arguments for his position.

Magnus offers several arguments in favor of his interpretation, arguments that originate within Nietzsche's published texts and unpublished notes as well as arguments outside Nietzsche's writings that take a particular stance on how to view Nietzsche's thought in and of itself and philosophy in general. With respect to the first set of arguments (internal considerations), Magnus appeals to both published and unpublished notes written by Nietzsche to support his conception of the *Übermensch*. Another argument Magnus uses (also an internal consideration) concerns his particular interpretation of eternal recurrence. This second argument will be addressed later in the context of Magnus's discussion of eternal recurrence.

Magnus also presents a second set of arguments which may be called external or metaphilosophical arguments; these arguments in support of Magnus's attitudinal/diagnostic interpretation of *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit* consist of considerations over and above what Nietzsche actually wrote and thought. The first external argument surrounds the issue of how much importance to attribute to Nietzsche's unpublished notes, the *Nachlass*. I examined this consideration in some detail in Chapter III and see no need to cover it again here. The second argument, which will be addressed later, concerns the issue of how commentators should view

Nietzsche's philosophical project and what Nietzsche really meant by "doing" philosophy. For convenience I have developed the following formulation.

Magnus's Internal Considerations

1. Nietzsche's published texts, and to a lesser degree his unpublished notes, support the attitude reading.
2. Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence must be viewed as an particular attitude in life, and this in turn supports the "*Übermensch* as attitude" reading.

Magnus's External Considerations

3. The peculiar nature of Nietzsche's unpublished notes, the *Nachlass*, once understood, supports the attitude interpretation (discussed in Chapter III).
4. If we can reach the proper understanding and appreciation of Nietzsche's philosophical task and what he took philosophy to be, then we will see that the attitudinal reading is correct.

What Magnus does, then, is present four arguments--two that are internal and two that are external to Nietzsche's writings--to support his interpretation. One of these arguments, the internal argument dealing with Nietzsche's published texts, will now be examined. The other two will be addressed later. These arguments, if they are found to be tenable, support an interpretation of the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit* that is one of the most promising developments in recent Nietzsche scholarship. Even if, as will be seen to be the case, there are some problems with Magnus's reading, some adjustments to the interpretation may produce a significant and coherent reading of one of Nietzsche's most vague of all concepts.

The textual evidence, while perhaps not in direct support of the attitudinal interpretation, does do quite a great amount of damage to the "ideal models" reading of the *Übermensch*, or at least Magnus would like to think it does. Some of this evidence has been brought to the fore in the preceding chapter, but it will be useful to review some of it along with new textual citations in the light of this new proposed attitudinal reading. Keep in mind, since it sometimes seems to be the case that Magnus does not, that textual evidence directly opposed to the "ideal" reading does not thereby automatically support the attitudinal reading. In any event, the following excerpts from Nietzsche's texts should be regarded in the light of Magnus's descriptions of the *Übermensch* given above.

In the first of his speeches in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Zarathustra proclaims: "Of three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child."¹⁴ This metamorphosis, this transfiguration from camel to lion to child, is not a natural event that everyone will experience; a few may move from camel to lion, but only a very few will progress all the way to the child stage. Hence it becomes even more important to know exactly the significance of each stage.

The camel spirit is that beast that bears all. The camel spirit wants to be well-loaded and to carry as much as it can; this is its excellence and most exalted

¹⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 137. All the quotes from Nietzsche come from this section until otherwise noted, and much of the discussion on this section is from Magnus's *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, pp. 34-38.

activity. Perhaps most of humanity is represented by the spirit of the camel. "The camel-spirit is a paragon of its culture, the embodied highest standards and achievements of its own crowd. For many people, perhaps most people, that is what life is."¹⁵ But sometimes the tremendous burden suffered by the camel spirit will cause it to begin to reflect on its lot, and the camel spirit will enter into a stage of deep reflection.

We must exercise care to avoid confusion regarding the issue of self-consciousness and self-reflection; in all three stages of the metamorphosis self-consciousness and self-reflection are present. The camel takes upon him/herself all the values, goals, fears, and desires of the culture, *and the camel understands that it is carrying this load*. Those people who take upon themselves this heavy load and do not understand what they are doing are, ironically enough, not yet even at the camel stage. The camel is self-aware and self-reflective concerning the load it bears; as the load grows heavier, so deepens the camel's understanding of what it is doing. The camel bears the values and goals of the culture until it can no longer bear to do so.¹⁶ At this point begins the second metamorphosis, powerfully described by Nietzsche.

¹⁵Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, p. 35.

¹⁶L. B. Cebik reminded me of the need to clarify this possible confusion and I am in his debt. For a more detailed discussion of Zarathustra's three metamorphoses see Kathleen Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), especially chapter 7. See also Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), especially Part 1.

In the loneliest desert, however, the second metamorphosis occurs: here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master of his own desert. Here he seeks out his last master: he wants to fight him and his last god; for ultimate victory he wants to fight with the great dragon. Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and god? "Thou shalt" is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, "I will." "Thou shalt" lies in his way, sparkling like gold, an animal covered with scales, and on every scale shines a golden "Thou Shalt."¹⁷

The lion is the "dialectical negation of the camel." The lion rises up and negates the values of the camel, all values and any values. The dragon represents all values, values *simpliciter*; the dragon is itself the value-positing activity. The lion says "no" to these values, all value; however, this is all the lion can do--say "no." Yet saying "no" is not enough; hence, the third stage, the stage of the child.

But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.¹⁸

The child is the last, most important stage in the metamorphosis. The child can say "yes" to new values, say "yes" to the world. It is important to note that one cannot just become a child; the first two stages are necessary. The stage of the camel-spirit (again, the stage where most of us remain for all our lives) bears the burden; the stage of lion-spirit says "no" to all burdens; the stage of the child is

¹⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 138-139.

¹⁸Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 139.

where the "yes" saying occurs, and only in this stage can it occur. Magnus recognizes very well the importance of the child stage for Zarathustra.

The child presumably "sees" the world anew. The vision of the child is the creation of new value in the sense that its pristine innocence is unburdened by the perceptual set which informs the vision of the camel and the lion. One must see beyond the moral and metaphysical fetters which bind our vision, in the sense of no longer seeing through them. It is a matter of surpassing, going beyond the tradition; not by ignoring it but by overcoming it.¹⁹

This speech of Zarathustra's on the three metamorphoses of the spirit serves as one piece of textual evidence for the "*Übermensch* as attitude" interpretation for Magnus. For Magnus, the *Übermensch* and the child share certain similarities, similarities that, when brought to the fore, demonstrate just what the *Übermensch* is.

Like the child of the three metamorphoses, the integration of intelligence, strength of character and will, autonomy, passion, taste, and prowess have become *natural* in the *Übermensch*. The form he has given his life now *is* his life. And again, as in the case of the child, the form of life which the *Übermensch* is, is not burdened by derivation from the lives of others. He lives his life in authentic self-possession.²⁰

For Magnus, the *Übermensch* represents effortless activity; the *Übermensch* represents a certain attitude toward life that becomes, in essence, a new form of life. Magnus believes his interpretation is radically different from "ideal model" interpretations, but Magnus's interpretation is not obviously different. Magnus

¹⁹Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, p. 37.

²⁰Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, p. 38. All the words in italics are Magnus's.

provides another piece of textual evidence that may better demonstrate his meaning.

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche writes:

The last thing *I* should promise would be to "improve" mankind. No new idols are erected by me; let the old ones learn what feet of clay mean. *Overthrowing idols* (my word for "ideals")--that comes closer to being part of my craft. One has deprived reality of its value, its meaning, its truthfulness, to precisely the extent to which one has mendaciously invented an ideal world.²¹

Whereas Zarathustra's speech on the three metamorphoses does not directly address the "ideal" interpretation, the above passage from *Ecce Homo* does. Magnus is quite right to cite this passage as evidence against the "ideal models" reading, especially IM1), but it is not immediately clear that the passage achieves what Magnus wants it to achieve. Nietzsche is rejecting the notion of ideals and idols; consequently, the *Übermensch* also would reject the notion of subscribing to ideals and idols. That the passage recommends the attitude/diagnostic reading that Magnus desires is far from clear. As a matter of fact, Magnus admits that just a few lines later in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche seems to contradict what he said above.²²

²¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), pp. 217-218, Preface, Sec. 2.

²²The passage Magnus cites is also from the Preface, Sec. 2 in which Nietzsche writes, "The *lie* of the ideal has so far been the curse on reality; on account of it, mankind itself has become mendacious and false down to its most fundamental instincts--to the point of worshiping the *opposite* values of those which alone would guarantee its health, its future, the lofty *right* to its future." Magnus puts all the words from the dash onward in italics and admits that this contradicts his "attitude" reading of *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit*. This admission will be discussed later.

Before Magnus moves on to other arguments, he provides two more textual citations in support of his interpretation. Both come from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The first is, "humanity is a rope tied between beast and *Übermensch*."²³ And the second, "Naked had I once seen both, the greatest man and the smallest man: all-too-similar to each other, even the greatest all-too-human. All-too-small the greatest! That was my disgust with man!"²⁴ Magnus believes that these two passages, along with the other passages above, support his interpretation over the "ideal" reading. That Magnus is entitled to be so confident is not clear. Much of the textual evidence that Magnus cites, and some that he does not, only demonstrates that the "ideal models" reading of *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit*, at least in two of its three variations, is problematic, if not outright wrong. Magnus is quite right to disparage such a reading. The previous chapter was absorbed in just such a task, but the textual evidence, at least in and of itself, does not support Magnus's attitudinal/diagnostic interpretation. Of course, three other types of arguments remain at Magnus's disposal, one of which will be examined now.

On another level Magnus is less successful. As in the case of the first internal argument--the textual one--Magnus once again would like the reader to conclude that the attitudinal/diagnostic reading of the *Übermensch* is the most appropriate reading. On this score Magnus is not entitled to the conclusion he

²³Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 126, "Zarathustra's Prologue."

²⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 331, Sec. 2, "The Convalescent."

wants. As with the textual argument, the only conclusion one can justifiably draw from the external concern Magnus raises is that the "ideal model" interpretation, specifically IM1), needs more detail, more elaboration. There remain open to Magnus two further arguments--one internal, involving eternal recurrence, and one external, involving Nietzsche's philosophical project and his views of philosophy--that he will use in his attempt to convince the reader of his interpretation. However, and here we anticipate the conclusion to be drawn concerning Magnus's entire project with respect to the *Übermensch*, two basic problems remain.

3. A Return to the "Idealized Attitude" Reading

I now wish to return to my "idealized attitude" reading of the *Übermensch*, the three formulations of the reading which I delineated, and the place of Magnus's interpretation within this reading. Perhaps the best way to accomplish this task is to consider further problems with and make further comments about Magnus's reading.

The first problem revolves around the attitudinal/diagnostic interpretation itself. It is not entirely clear that what Magnus is setting forth as the correct interpretation of the *Übermensch* is all that different from one or other of the "ideal models" interpretations that he claims is wrong. For Magnus, the *Übermensch*, and only the *Übermensch*, "would be so well disposed to himself and the world that he would crave nothing more fervently than the eternal repetition of his life." Magnus formulates his reading in this way (the italics are his).

*Only God and Übermenschen love each moment unconditionally, want nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Only for God, Leibniz and Übermenschen is this the best of all possible worlds.*²⁵

If this description and others that Magnus gives are examined closely, it seems possible to conclude that Magnus is not really providing a reading of the *Übermensch* that is all that different from a form of the "ideal models" interpretation. As a matter of fact, Magnus's description of the *Übermensch* sounds a great deal like either IM2) or IM3). That is, Magnus is actually describing a model having static, definite characteristics or properties which human beings can never possess, or he is describing a model having static, definite characteristics which no human being could ever possess but which might serve as an ideal for a direction of post-human development. The static, definite characteristic or property in this case is the acceptance of eternal recurrence as understood by Magnus. The eternal recurrence, as well as Magnus's particular conception of it, will have to be discussed in Chapter VI.

The second problem with Magnus's treatment has not to do so much with the interpretation itself, but with Magnus's own attitude concerning the relationship between his "attitude" interpretation and the "ideal models" treatment he supposedly disdains. Magnus seems to want it both ways on the *Übermensch* reading. Of course, there is nothing wrong in being conciliatory and willing to admit that both readings have something to recommend them (as a matter of fact, this dissertation

²⁵Bernd Magnus, "Self-Consuming Concepts," *International Studies in Philosophy* 21, 2(1989), p. 70.

will reach the same kind of conclusion); however, given what Magnus says, it seems that he unnecessarily diminishes his treatment of and arguments for the *Übermensch*. Magnus writes, "The contrast is not as sharp, nor is it as clear as one should like it to be; nor is it an all or nothing affair."²⁶ Perhaps Magnus should struggle with the semantics of "attitude" (as previously discussed); perhaps there is more of a contrast to be made than Magnus is willing to admit.

These observations bring us back to the justification of my use of the phrase "idealized attitude" to denote a certain kind of interpretation, a kind of interpretation that is to be contrasted with what I have termed the "ideal models" approach. As with the "ideal models" interpretation, I distinguish between three different, but similar, subtypes. In the subtype designated IA1) the *Übermensch* is a representation of a fluid, indefinite conceptual or psychological form of life possessed by at least some human beings in the past, and perhaps the present, and at least ideally to be possessed by (and ideally by even *more*) human beings in the future. In the subtype designated IA2) the *Übermensch* is a representation of a fluid, indefinite conceptual or psychological form of life which human beings at least probably never have possessed and probably never will possess--and perhaps never could possess--but which nevertheless should serve human beings as an ideal for a *direction of human development*. And, in the IA3) reading, the *Übermensch* represents a form of life which no human being could possess, but which should serve as an ideal for a

²⁶Bernd Magnus, "Overman: An Attitude or an Ideal," p. 150.

direction of post-human development. Magnus's reading of the *Übermensch*, to the degree that it is an "idealized attitude" interpretation, belongs somewhere in or between IA2) and IA3). If Magnus's position should be regarded as an example of IA2) or IA3) and not IM2) or IM3), then it is solely because he insists that the *Übermensch* must love each and every moment in and of itself with no thought to the past or future.

On this last point I take exception to Magnus's position. I want to argue that IA1) is the proper interpretation of the *Übermensch*, or at least it constitutes a beginning to a proper understanding of the concept. Part of what I mean by adopting this subtype of the "idealized attitude" approach is the incorporation of the possibility that human beings--rare human beings--have, are, or can become *Übermenschen*. As a result I find something to recommend IM1).

Furthermore, there is another, perhaps even more important, aspect of my use of IA1). Where Magnus wishes to connect the *Übermensch* with Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, I want to draw the connection between *Übermenschlichkeit* and Nietzsche's aestheticism. Art and the artist play an important role in almost all of Nietzsche's works. In addition to positing particular virtues and character traits, Nietzsche has in mind an attitude that the *Übermensch* would represent. This fluid, indefinite conceptual or psychological form of life would involve the notion of living life and living in the world as if both were aesthetic phenomena. Consider what Nietzsche has to say about the importance of art and the artist in one of his early works.

Art incidentally performs the task of preserving, even touching up extinct, faded ideas; when it accomplishes this task it weaves a band around various eras, and causes their spirits to return. Only a semblance of life, as over graves, or the return of dead loved ones in dreams, results from this, of course, but for moments at least, the old feeling revives and the heart beats to an otherwise forgotten rhythm. Because art has this general benefit, one must excuse the artist himself if he does not stand in the front ranks of the enlightenment, of mankind's progressive *maturation*. He has remained his whole life long a child or youth, and has stood still at the point where his artistic drive came upon him; but feelings from the first stages of life are admittedly closer to feelings of earlier eras than to those of the present century. His unwitting task becomes the juvenescence of mankind: this is his glory and his limitation.²⁷

In the chapters that follow part of my task will be to develop this theme of aestheticism and its connection to the *Übermensch*. I will accomplish this by examining Nietzsche's epistemology, metaphysics, and morality. I also will examine Nietzsche's doctrines of will to power and eternal recurrence. This discussion is necessary if I am to demonstrate that the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit* can best be understood only by drawing a connection between IM1) and IA1).

The purpose of Chapters III and IV has been to examine, analyze, and critique various interpretations offered by commentators for explaining the *Übermensch*. These interpretations were divided into two groups, "ideal" readings and "attitude" readings. This taxonomy is misleading because the phrase "*Übermensch* as attitude" is much more complicated than it initially appears. From the discussion in these two chapters it looks as though "ideal" readings of the *Übermensch* will be unsatisfactory, though some "ideal" readings are *more*

²⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, p. 104, "From the Soul of Artists and Writers," Sec. 147.

unsatisfactory than others. The group of "attitude" interpretations offers more promise, especially if the meaning of the term "attitude" can be unpacked and clarified. The present discussion is not complete and must be extended into the following chapters. Continuing this discussion and examining aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy will help us keep in mind that Nietzsche himself may have wandered between some of the interpretations. Moreover, Nietzsche might have changed his mind, or he might not have thought as carefully as he should have, when he formulated his concept of the *Übermensch*. Perhaps an examination of other aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy, including a discussion of the will to power and eternal recurrence, will help to determine exactly what Nietzsche has in mind.

CHAPTER V

CERTAINTY, UNCERTAINTY, AND THE MEANING OF THE WORLD

For the moment my discussion of the "*Übermensch* as idealized attitude" interpretation must be halted. Further discussion of this reading, including explication and evaluation of Magnus's two remaining arguments, will have to be deferred until Chapter VI. This deferral is necessary given the thrust of Magnus's two remaining arguments and in order to fully understand and appreciate the overall discussion. Magnus's argument concerning the eternal recurrence (an internal concern) and his argument regarding how commentators and schools of commentators have understood Nietzsche's philosophical task (an external concern) can be understood only when Nietzsche is examined on his own terms.

The discussion begun in Chapter II serves as the foundation for a more complex and in-depth examination of Nietzsche's metaphysics and epistemology. Oftentimes, discussions of the *Übermensch* are undertaken in a vacuum; that is, the concept itself is explored while other concepts within Nietzsche's philosophy, and Nietzsche's philosophical project as a whole, are ignored. Damage is done both to the *Übermensch* and to other aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy when commentators engage in such narrow treatments. This chapter in particular, as well as this study as a whole, serves as a corrective to such procedures. The purpose of this chapter is the exploration of Nietzsche's philosophical project *qua* project. Such an

undertaking not only facilitates a better understanding of Nietzsche's thought and task but also provides a more accurate reading of the *Übermensch*.

The reasons many commentators treat particular concepts in isolation are easy to discern. One reason, Nietzsche's stylistic pluralism, has already been discussed: Nietzsche's aphorisms and use of metaphor, rather than giving pause for thoughtful consideration, contribute to the phenomenon of explanation through excision. Another reason for only selective and isolated treatment of particular concepts is the tremendous difficulty involved in understanding just what Nietzsche has in mind when he "does philosophy." That is, it is difficult to come to a conclusion, much less argue about, Nietzsche's metaphysics, or epistemology, or conception of morality. It is not even clear if Nietzsche *has* an ontology, or a theory of knowledge, or a positive morality. Connected to these broad concerns are more narrow, but just as important, problems involving Nietzsche's view of language, truth, and his perspectivism.

The purpose of the following pages is not to provide the definitive, ultimate interpretation of Nietzsche's metaphysics (or lack of a metaphysical system) or Nietzsche's epistemology (or lack of a theory of knowledge). Rather, this chapter provides a defensible framework in which Nietzsche's primary concerns and what he considers to be his tasks can be formulated, discussed, and understood. This is accomplished with as little reference as possible to eternal recurrence, will to power, or even the *Übermensch*. It is frequently tempting to circumvent discussion of

Nietzsche's main project, and the attendant problems and possible contradictions with the project, by concentrating too heavily on what Nietzsche says or does not say about this or that concept. The concepts, especially the concept of the *Übermensch*, should become more focused if a successful standpoint from which to view Nietzsche's philosophical project can be developed. That there is a connection between one's view of the manner in which Nietzsche does or does not "do" metaphysics and epistemology and the manner in which one interprets such concepts as will to power or the *Übermensch* should be obvious. It may not be obvious, however, that one's view of the entire project should precede any particular interpretations of particular concepts. However, I maintain and support the claim that an understandable and defensible framework in which to view Nietzsche's philosophical tasks must be constructed. That is, Nietzsche has a world view, a picture of reality from which he operates and which he supports and defends. Nietzsche's conception of reality, as well as the certainties and uncertainties that compose that reality, must be investigated. I argue that Nietzsche is fond of uncertainty, that he disparages any theory that proposes a stable, universal, immutable picture of reality; Nietzsche distrusts certainty. Nietzsche's dislike of theories becomes evident in discussions of his ontology, epistemology, and morality.

The framework that emerges in the following pages has some aspects in common with other discussions of Nietzsche's philosophical project that have appeared in the literature. By the same token, there is much in the following

discussion that has nothing in common with other treatments; hence there is much with which many scholars will take issue. Similarities, as well as differences, with other commentators will be noted; however, the following is not a review of the literature. Instead, a clear, concise, well-supported and well-argued position (at least as well-supported and well-argued a position as Nietzsche will allow) regarding Nietzsche's view of metaphysics and epistemology should emerge. Even though well-defined assertions have been substituted for traditional arguments (not an uncommon practice in Nietzsche scholarship), the picture that emerges of Nietzsche's philosophy is a useful and coherent one.

1. Nietzsche's Ontology

There are those who would argue that such a project as the one undertaken here is doomed from the start. In his fourth poem of the "Zeitgedichte" Stefan George writes of Nietzsche: "He should have sung/Not spoken, this new soul!"¹ Indeed, it appears that Nietzsche himself would agree with George, for he writes in his "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" which appears in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

¹These lines are quoted from Peter Pütz, "Nietzsche: Art and Intellectual Inquiry," p. 1. In Malcolm Pasley, ed., *Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 1-32. For an interesting discussion of the relationship between Stefan George and Nietzsche see Peter Lutz Lehmann, "Stefan George contra Nietzsche," in *Nietzsche: Literature and Values*, edited by Volker Dürr, Reinhold Grimm, and Kathy Harms (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), pp. 125-36.

How I regret now that in those days I still lacked the courage (or immodesty?) to permit myself in every way an individual language of my own for such individual views and hazards--and that instead I tried laboriously to express by means of Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulas strange and new valuations which were basically at odds with Kant's and Schopenhauer's spirit and taste!²

If some readers believe that all of Nietzsche's work is poetry (George is not the only one), and if Nietzsche himself wishes that he had been more poetic, then there might not be much of philosophical significance to say about Nietzsche's ontology; in fact the whole project becomes absurd. Such a conclusion, however, should not be drawn. George and Nietzsche may initially appear to agree, but they actually do not. While George intended his pronouncements to apply to all of Nietzsche's texts, Nietzsche intended his observation from "An Attempt at a Self-Criticism" to apply only to *The Birth of Tragedy*. Moreover, such texts as *The Gay Science*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and especially *On The Genealogy of Morals* exhibit as much philosophical sophistication (and freedom from Schopenhauer and Kant) as one could want. And finally, even if Nietzsche has concerns that usually are not regarded as part of the philosophical mainstream (including the Dionysian/Apollonian distinction, the affirmation of life, and the aesthetic dimensions of living), such concerns cannot be summarily dismissed as philosophically unimportant. This study assumes the view that there is philosophical significance to be gleaned from such elements; even certain aspects of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* have something of

²Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 24, Sec. 6 of "Attempt at a Self-Criticism."

significance to offer. Thus there is reason to continue with an attempt to develop a framework in which Nietzsche's philosophy is characterized.

This study subscribes to and argues in support of the position that Nietzsche does not posit any metaphysical theory. So stated, this assertion is vague and stands in need of much clarification. Toward that end, the position taken here should be considered as directly opposed to Heidegger's assertion that Nietzsche "was the last metaphysician of the west."³ For Heidegger, metaphysics involves the asking of *the* fundamental question; the thinking involved in the asking of this question is characterized by the name "metaphysics." "Meta" means away from and beyond, and "physics" means the something. "From the Greeks to Nietzsche all Western thinking has been metaphysical thinking. Every age of Western thinking is grounded in its own metaphysic."⁴ And the question toward which all thinking is directed is the question about the essence of Being. For Heidegger, "Being means being present. Being, if it is to be thought in the highest instance, must be thought of as pure presence, that is, as the presence that persists, the abiding present, the steadily

³Martin Heidegger, "Nietzsche as Metaphysician," in Robert C. Solomon, ed., *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), p. 112.

⁴Heidegger, "Nietzsche as Metaphysician," pp. 111-112. See also Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959); and Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), especially the introduction.

standing 'now'.⁵ Heidegger is concerned with the distinction between beings as entities (individually or as a whole) and "Being whose dominance alone grants or denies to each being that it be *that* being which it is able to be."⁶ Being can be described as eternity and independence of time, where "time" means a passing away.

All of the above, of course, can be related to the *Übermensch*. For Heidegger, all of Nietzsche's important concepts--such as eternal recurrence, will to power, and the *Übermensch*--are metaphysical concepts. The *Übermensch* is he who enters into the Being which wills the eternal recurrence, and as such, the being wills nothing else but itself. Zarathustra simply is the being of the *Übermensch* and is the teacher of the eternal recurrence. Heidegger argues that these two notions do not contradict each other, but do in fact belong together because "in both doctrines there is thought at the same time that which belongs together from the beginning and thus inevitably must be thought together--the Being of beings and its relatedness to the nature of man."⁷

This brief description of Heidegger's position, void of argumentation and clarification as it is, is intended only as a first step on the way to clarifying the assertion of this study that Nietzsche does not have, nor does he posit, a

⁵Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 102.

⁶Heidegger, "Nietzsche as Metaphysician," p. 110.

⁷Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, p. 106.

metaphysical theory. Heidegger's position is influential and has informed those views which hold that Nietzsche does posit some sort of ontology. Of course, it is true that Heidegger's treatment of Nietzsche, at least in some of its aspects, is unlike any other interpretation of Nietzsche's thought. In Heidegger's interpretation, Nietzsche "appears as a metaphysician even though he scorned metaphysics, as a Platonist even though he thought of himself as the anti-Platonist, as a nihilist even though he said he overcame nihilism."⁸ But there are enough similarities between Heidegger and other interpreters that objections raised against Heidegger also may be applied to other commentators.

There are two preliminary objections to Heidegger's reading which, while they may strike some as *ad hominem* arguments, nonetheless deserve to be considered. First, Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, to which the above quote alludes, is odd. Heidegger makes claims about, and derives conclusions from, Nietzsche's philosophy that even the most casual reader of Nietzsche finds curious. For example, Heidegger claims that Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence represents the "final thought of Western metaphysics"⁹ even though many view

⁸Laurence Lampert, "Heidegger's Nietzsche Interpretation," *Man and World*, 7, (November 1974), p. 353.

⁹Martin Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra", in David B. Allison, ed., *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1977), pp. 64-79. Heidegger's characterization of eternal recurrence is somewhat more complex than this and so this description may be misleading. We will explore all of this below.

Nietzsche as arguing vehemently against metaphysical theories. Admittedly, accusations of oddity do not a refutation make; however, such instances of oddity should give one pause for thought. Second, one has to wonder at Heidegger's claim that Nietzsche is the last metaphysician of the west. (It should be noted here that Heidegger does think Nietzsche is a critic of metaphysics; for Heidegger, Nietzsche does *not* escape the system he so criticizes. This is often a point of confusion.) It is tempting to think that Heidegger makes this claim so that *he* might be considered the *first* nonmetaphysician of the west. This objection is not really substantial because it questions Heidegger's motivation, not his claims. However, other objections are more substantial, and it is to these objections that attention is now turned.

Perhaps the strongest argument to be made against those commentators, Heidegger or anyone else, who would find in Nietzsche a metaphysics, reluctant or otherwise, arises from an examination of just what Nietzsche has to say about systems in general and metaphysics in particular. Of course, Nietzsche's disdain of philosophical systems of any kind is legendary: "the will to a system is a lack of integrity." However, more important than the fact of Nietzsche's dislike for systems is the reasoning for the dislike. It is Nietzsche's position (one might say conviction) that all philosophical systems rest on the biases of their authors. Those who set forth grand systems to explain grand things claim that their ideas rest on rigid argumentation, but this is a pretense. "There is a point in every philosophy when

the philosopher's 'conviction' appears on the stage."¹⁰ This suspicion of systems encourages and, in Nietzsche's mind, legitimizes not only what Nietzsche says but also how he says it. Nietzsche desires that philosophy be approached and practiced differently and is to some extent very successful; philosophers are preoccupied with erecting elaborate explanations that really have nothing to do with the world or how human beings live in the world. Nietzsche believes he has done better. "I tasted all good and even little things, as others cannot easily taste them--I turned my will to health, to life, into a philosophy."¹¹ Contrasting, as Nietzsche does, those who would formulate systems with those who would love life, may be unfair; more can be said about this later. The point remains that Nietzsche sees metaphysicians as systematizers, and the latter are certainly enemies of life. Perhaps the best way to express this idea is by stating that Nietzsche eschews the formalities and technicalities that many people (including philosophers and scientists) want to employ in their attempts to understand the world.

Nietzsche is not interested in the technicalities of philosophy; he either ignores traditional formal questions or offers to solve them in his own, nontechnical way, or again rides roughshod over them. He . . . earns the contempt of professional philosophers by disregarding

¹⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 15, Sec 8, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers."

¹¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 224, Sec 2, "Why I am so Wise".

the pigeon-holing of distinct inquiries and by directing his attention unhesitatingly toward the largest questions.¹²

These larger questions will be examined later, but it is enough to say that the answers Nietzsche provides are not systematic, or at least they are not systematic in the common philosophical sense. Of course, Nietzsche's disdain for the systematic method does not automatically mean that Nietzsche does not set forth a metaphysics; perhaps he posits a disorganized and unsystematic metaphysics. Let us turn to this possibility.

Just as Nietzsche has much to say about systems and those who would formulate them, he also has a great deal to say, again negatively, about metaphysics. Consider the following two examples.

Metaphysical world. It is true, there might be a metaphysical world; one can hardly dispute the absolute possibility of it. We see all things by means of our human head, and cannot chop it off, though it remains to wonder what would be left of the world if indeed it had been cut off. This is a purely scientific problem, and not very suited to cause men worry. But all that has produced metaphysical assumptions and made them *valuable, horrible, pleasurable*, to men thus far is passion, error, and self-deception. The very worst methods of knowledge, not the very best, have taught us to believe in them. When one has disclosed these methods to be the foundation of all existing religions and metaphysical systems, one has refuted them. That other possibility still remains, but we cannot begin to do anything with it, let alone allow our happiness, salvation, and life to depend on the spider webs of such a possibility. For there is nothing

¹²J. P. Stern, "Nietzsche's Heirs and the Justification through Art," in *Nietzsche: Literature and Values*, edited by Volker Dürr, Reinhold Grimm, and Kathy Harms (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 137. Stern's description of the impact of Nietzsche's rejection of systems on professional philosophy is apt, but this study does not agree with much of anything else in Stern's analysis.

at all we could state about the metaphysical world except its differentness, a differentness inaccessible and incomprehensible to us. It would be a thing with negative qualities. No matter how well proven the existence of such a world might be, it would still hold true that the knowledge of it would be the most inconsequential of all knowledge, even more inconsequential than the knowledge of the chemical analysis of water must be to the boatman facing a storm.¹³

Of the origin of religion. The metaphysical need is not the *origin* of religions, as Schopenhauer supposed, but merely a late offshoot. Under the rule of religious ideas, one has become accustomed to the notion of "another world (behind, below, above)"--and when religious ideas are destroyed one is troubled by an uncomfortable emptiness and deprivation. From this feeling grows once again "another world," but now merely a metaphysical one that is no longer religious. But what first led to the positing of "another world" in primeval times was not some impulse or need but an *error* in the interpretation of certain natural events, a failure of the intellect.¹⁴

These two passages are quoted at length because they say so much about Nietzsche's position toward metaphysics. Several ideas should be extracted from these passages and noted. First, Nietzsche describes metaphysics as a "need," a rather interesting term to use. Human beings "need" to see the world a certain way, and metaphysics provides a palatable view. A second observation of Nietzsche's is also interesting: the linking of metaphysics with religion. It is safe to assume that what Nietzsche has in mind here is Christianity, which is about the only thing he finds more deplorable than metaphysics. A final observation, perhaps the most

¹³Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), pp. 17-18, Sec. 9, "Of First and Last Things."

¹⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 196. Sec. 151.

important of all, to be gleaned from the above passages concerns Nietzsche's claim that even if one or another metaphysical theory is determined to be true, it is worthless. An argument for this assertion also exists within the passages cited. It is an argument from analogy in which belief in another world as useful is considered analogous to the usefulness of the knowledge of the chemical makeup of water for a drowning sailor. There is, for Nietzsche, only the empirical world, the world of appearance. It is possible there exists another world, a real world, a world of essence, but such a world is useless. Human beings have to live, work, and play in this world, and they form concepts that will enable them to do just that. Positing a metaphysical world means that human beings no longer trust their instincts, their senses, their own conceptual analysis of how things are. Positing a metaphysical world becomes especially problematic in the realm of morality, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Explaining and arguing the case for Nietzsche's negative metaphysics is perhaps easy enough, but there remains the issue of whether or not Nietzsche ends up subscribing to some sort of metaphysical system anyway. Nietzsche himself is not as helpful on this issue as one might wish, and there is the additional problem of actually determining his final position on the thing-in-itself. This concept of the thing-in-itself is discussed a great deal in the texts, but the discussion is not as clear as it might be. In his essay "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" and in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche seems to accept the possibility of the thing-in-

itself even though he finds this concept useless. In these texts Nietzsche equates the thing-in-itself with the essence of things. In latter texts, such as *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche continues to identify the thing-in-itself with the essence of things, but now he denies any plausibility at all for the conception.¹⁵

The following two passages are crucial.

What is "appearance" for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance! Certainly not a dead mask that one could place on an unknown x or remove from it!¹⁶

There are still harmless self-observers who believe that there are "immediate certainties"; for example, "I think," or as the superstition of Schopenhauer put it, "I will"; as though knowledge here got hold of its object purely and nakedly as "the thing in itself," without any falsification on the part of either the subject or the object. But that "immediate certainty," as well as "absolute knowledge" and the "thing in itself," involve a *contradictio in adjecto*, I shall repeat a hundred times; we really ought to free ourselves from the seduction of words!¹⁷

Beginning in these passages and continuing throughout the rest of the published texts Nietzsche rejects the notion of a thing-in-itself; he rejects the idea that the essence of things can be known by human beings. For Nietzsche, and this

¹⁵Much of this discussion comes from Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 98-104. Clark's book presents an excellent treatment of Nietzsche's views on metaphysics and truth. She also does a very good job of surveying the literature, past and current, on Nietzsche's views.

¹⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 116, Sec. 54, Book One.

¹⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 23, Sec. 16, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers."

seems to be the only explicit argument he gives for rejecting the thing-in-itself, there is only one way to conceive of a thing and that is through its appearance to living human beings.¹⁸ This is not the whole of the argument: we shall find supplemental, implicit arguments that Nietzsche uses for his claim. Some of these arguments will emerge later when Nietzsche's epistemology and such concepts as will to power and eternal recurrence are discussed.

With the rejection of the thing-in-itself and the subsequent reliance on appearance, Nietzsche believes he has rejected any metaphysical system of any type, a position toward which this study is sympathetic. Whether or not Nietzsche is justified in so doing, given the arguments he uses, is another issue. There is also the problem of contradiction; Nietzsche may believe that he has abandoned metaphysics while at the same time positing concepts that are actually metaphysical in nature. We can interpret Heidegger as taking this stance. The issue of Nietzsche's possible contradictory stance on metaphysics and Heidegger's employment of this stance is elaborated quite well by Maudemarie Clark:

Nietzsche's understanding and rejection of metaphysics is itself metaphysical, according to Heidegger, for it ignores Being and understands metaphysics instead in terms of values. That is, Nietzsche understands metaphysics as the acceptance of a true or transcendent world that devalues this world, and eventually leads to nihilism, when the values protected by metaphysics are devalued. Nietzsche aims to overcome nihilism by overcoming metaphysics, apparently by means of his doctrines of the eternal recurrence, which rules out a transcendent world, and of the will to power, which

¹⁸Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, p. 100.

provides the principle for a new valuation. However, Heidegger insists that these doctrines are themselves metaphysical since they offer Nietzsche's answer to the question concerning the Being (will to power as the essence, eternal recurrence as the mode of existence) of beings.¹⁹

Clark is quite correct to note that accusations of contradiction revolve around the concepts of will to power, eternal recurrence, and, to a lesser degree, the *Übermensch*. This study rejects the charge of contradiction and argues that the three concepts listed above are not metaphysical in nature. Arguments in support of this assertion are examined in the next chapter. Our attention will be turned now to an exploration of Nietzsche's thoughts on truth, language, and perspectivism. Such considerations are certainly related to the issue of metaphysics and will shed some light on how best to interpret certain of Nietzsche's concepts.

2. Nietzsche's Epistemology

A discussion of Nietzsche's theory of knowledge is more complex and problematic than considerations of Nietzsche's views on metaphysics. Assertions such as, "Nietzsche rejects all metaphysical systems" and "Nietzsche concludes that the concept of the thing-in-itself is contradictory," do not come as easily, nor are they as easy to defend, when the discussion turns to Nietzsche's views on knowledge. There is, to be sure, an "easy" side to discussions of Nietzsche's views

¹⁹Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 9.

on knowledge; just as with metaphysics, Nietzsche has many negative things to say about epistemology proper. Nietzsche disparaged those who would claim an absolutism in epistemology, and he espoused grave doubts about the possibility of ever attaining knowledge or truth, at least knowledge and truth in a certain sense. Surely Nietzsche's views on metaphysics informed his thoughts on epistemology. To this extent, then, explicating the negative side of Nietzsche's thoughts is rather easy. This is the skeptical approach and, while relatively easy to engage and to some extent beneficial, has its limitations. After all, there is just so much one can say about Nietzsche's disdain for this or that aspect or concept. If progress is to be made in understanding both Nietzsche's thought and such contributions as might have been made by that thought, then the skeptical approach becomes self-defeating and not very helpful at all.

The past few years have seen a recognition of the limitations of the skeptical approach and, consequently, the emergence of a body of literature that attempts to struggle with not only the problems but also the possibilities of Nietzsche's views on knowledge. This study is an example of such literature and attempts to make intelligent and useful contributions with regard to Nietzsche's views of truth, perspectivism, knowledge, and language. Although no overview of the literature is presented (albeit an interesting endeavor)²⁰, certain aspects of certain commentators

²⁰Maudemarie Clark, in her *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, presents an excellent overview of the scholarly literature dealing with Nietzsche on truth. She makes a distinction between traditional interpretations (Kaufmann and Heidegger)

are discussed and adopted. Perhaps the best way to begin such a discussion is to point to a major problem that seems to emerge no matter what approach is taken to Nietzsche's epistemology.

Nietzsche says much about truth and knowledge, but the result frequently seems to be contradiction; either Nietzsche contradicts himself or particular treatments of Nietzsche's views end by containing positions that are themselves contradictory.

With respect to the former, one can draw the conclusion that Nietzsche's practice is often at odds with his theory. First, Nietzsche wants to say that it is true that there is no truth, but then there is at least one truth after all. Second, Nietzsche wants to make certain claims about values, such as the claim that morality is an expression of resentment and the negation of life. He seems to want to base this claim on a further claim that truths are illusions. These claims then produce the following problem.

But if truths are illusions, the illusion involved in moral judgment can hardly give us reason to abandon it, assuming, as we must, that Nietzsche does not demand that we abstain from judgment altogether. Nietzsche's apparent nihilism in regard to truth thus threatens the coherence of his critique of morality, and of his entire philosophy--insofar as the latter commits Nietzsche to certain truths while at the

and nontraditional treatments (Danto's analytic approach and Derrida's deconstructionist strategy). Clark's own approach is a combination of the two, and it is similar to the one taken here.

For another interesting, though less helpful, summary of views dealing with Nietzsche's epistemology see John T. Wilcox, "Nietzsche's Epistemology: Recent American Discussions," *International Studies in Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (1983), 66-77.

same time it denies that there are any truths. Nietzsche's own practice is apparently at odds with his theory.²¹

Nietzsche's view of morality will be discussed later in this chapter. For now the epistemological problems will be considered in isolation. Of course, it may be that some self-contradiction and inconsistency will have to be tolerated. The position presented and defended here intends to tolerate as little of this as possible and to say something useful, especially with regard to interpreting the concept of the *Übermensch*.

Perhaps the best way to begin to understand anything at all about Nietzsche's epistemology is to look at his perspectivism. This aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy is one of his most famous and has been the object of much recent interpretation and misinterpretation. The simplest way to define perspectivism is to say that it is the view that all knowledge is perspectival. Such a definition is not very helpful; perhaps Nietzsche can clarify what he means.

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject"; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason," "absolute spirituality," "knowledge in itself": these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, and eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing *something*, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective "knowing"; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete

²¹Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, pp. 3-4.

will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this--what would that mean but to *castrate* the intellect?²²

This passage speaks to perspectivism in the context of both metaphysics and epistemology; the passage relates well with the claims made above in the section on metaphysics, but epistemology, most specifically truth, is now our concern. Nietzsche claims that there is only a perspective seeing and a perspective knowing; all is interpretation. The issue becomes one of how to interpret these claims and to delineate their consequences.²³

One way of trying to understand Nietzsche's meaning of perspectivism is to make it as explicit as possible. Consider the following analogy:

Imagine, if you would, a physical object with a camera circling 360° about it in equidistant orbits, orbits which eventually traverse the object as if it were encased in an invisible globe. Imagine further that this camera constantly took pictures of the object in question as it moved in its relentless spherical orbits.²⁴

²²Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 119, Sec. 12, Third Essay.

²³Maudemarie Clark, in chapter 5 of her *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, provides an excellent overview of many of the most common interpretations of Nietzsche's perspectivism. This study does not agree with Clark's claim that perspectivism is a metaphor, but this will be discussed in more detail.

²⁴Bernd Magnus, "The Deification of the Commonplace: *Twilight of the Idols*," in *Reading Nietzsche*, edited by Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 152. This analogy is also discussed in Clark's *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*.

Given this analogy, to "see" or "know" something in a non-perspectival manner is to take all the pictures simultaneously of the object, not successively. There are now, assuming the analogy will stick for a while, several sets of distinctions to bring to bear, to discuss, to argue, and finally, from which to choose.

The first distinction involves the difference (supposed difference) regarding the point of emphasis. On one reading, the reader should notice that seeing or knowing is always from a particular perspective, and this place or perspective will affect the viewer or knower. On the other reading, the focus is on the fact that there are other vantage points than the one occupied by any particular perceiver. The first reading argues that there is no nonperspectival seeing or knowing. The second reading argues that there is no omniperspectival seeing or knowing.²⁵

The second distinction involves two kinds of claims, one epistemic and the other ontological. The first kind of claim, the epistemic one, says that Nietzsche's perspectivism should be taken to mean that there is no final account or knowledge of an object or state-of-affairs. Under this interpretation it makes no sense to ask which perspective is the correct one ". . . *without reference to further specifying conditions*. It suggests that there is no one true or privileged perspective *simpliciter*,

²⁵This distinction is discussed in Clark's *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, p. 145. Clark subscribes to the first reading; she stresses that there is no nonperspectival seeing. Magnus, and most other commentators, subscribe to the second reading; he stresses that there is no omniperspectival seeing or knowing.

no absolute standpoint."²⁶ The second, ontological claim, asserts that it makes no sense to talk about the thing-in-itself; such a notion is incoherent. (This last metaphysical claim was discussed in detail above and is adopted by this study, but for different reasons.)

The implicit, sometimes explicit, assumption is that one must choose between these distinctions and interpretations when discussing them. It is not altogether clear, however, that this is the case at all. Take for example, the first set of distinctions involving the placement of emphasis in treating Nietzsche's perspectivism. The reader must choose between arguing that there is no nonperspectival knowing and arguing that there is no omniperspectival knowing. This study wants to make the suggestion, perhaps a radical one, that it really makes no difference one way or the other which emphasis the reader chooses to adopt. That is, this study makes the claim that both readings come to about the same thing; Nietzsche's perspectivism implies that one sees or knows the world from a particular perspective (yes, there is no nonperspective) *and* Nietzsche's perspectivism implies that there are many perspectives from which to view the world and that none is *privileged* (yes, there is no omniperspective). When Nietzsche criticizes knowledge claims, and elaborate systems that incorporate such claims, he is saying that humans are trapped in a certain language use, from a particular perspective or point of view;

²⁶Bernd Magnus, "The Deification of the Commonplace: *Twilight of the Idols*," p. 153. The italics are Magnus's.

all human beings see and know the world from a perspective. Nietzsche is also saying that there is no absolute perspective, no God's-eye-view from which to view the world and from which to derive absolute meaning.

The second distinction, one that is often made between epistemic and ontological claims, may seem to imply an ambiguity, or incompatibility. In presenting his perspectivism, Nietzsche should be taken to mean that he is making an epistemic claim *or* that he is making an ontological claim, *but not both*. This study wants to claim that the two readings are different, but they are not incompatible. That is, Nietzsche is claiming that there is no special perspective from which to judge or know the world (see above). And Nietzsche is also claiming that, given his perspectivism, the notion of the thing-in-itself does not make sense, hence it is useless.

Given Nietzsche's perspectivism (everything is interpretation) several assertions can now be put forth and maintained. Some of these assertions have been made already, but the above discussion of perspectivism adds support for them. If everything is interpretation, Nietzsche's skepticism of systematic philosophy is understandable. It now becomes even clearer how one can draw the conclusion, against Heidegger, that Nietzsche is not a metaphysician. And finally, given Nietzsche's perspectivism, it must follow that he does reject the notion of the thing-in-itself. Problems remain, however. These problems concern Nietzsche's view of truth and the special problem of trivialization that perspectivism brings.

This study asserts that Nietzsche rejects any notion of metaphysical truth but does accept empirical truth, or at least some notion of empirical truth.²⁷ The qualification "at least some notion of empirical truth" is important since it does sometimes seem as if Nietzsche is denying all truths. It is tempting to say that by "truth," Nietzsche means what is useful.²⁸ The problem with this statement is that Nietzsche sometimes equates truth with illusion and wants to say that what is false is also useful. The question, of course, becomes how one interprets such concepts as will to power, eternal recurrence, and the *Übermensch* given this notion of truth. Nietzsche wants to say, or he seems to want to say, that these concepts are in some sense "true." In the next chapter this problem will be examined, but one can see already that the answer probably will have something to do with perspectivism.

And with respect to this perspectivism, there arises the problem of trivialization. That is, if everything is a matter of interpretation, and if Nietzsche is offering just one more interpretation, then what makes Nietzsche's interpretation any more important than any other interpretation? There seems to be no rhyme or

²⁷The position I take here is similar to that of Walter Kaufmann's and John Wilcox's. See Kaufmann's *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. and Wilcox's *Truth and Value in Nietzsche*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974). Objections to this view are presented and discussed in Clark's *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*.

²⁸Here it is tempting to ascribe to Nietzsche a pragmatic theory of truth of the type that Richard Rorty does. But while I think Rorty has a lot to say about Nietzsche that is important, he seems to be off the mark on this point. I offer reasons for this above.

reason for choosing, or not choosing, one interpretation over another. But Nietzsche often claims that humans would be better off if they listened to him. Either he is contradicting himself, or he is not doing anything significant. If by this is meant that Nietzsche offers no absolute, unique interpretation of the world, then the charge is correct. Nietzsche's claim is that we, as human beings, see and know the world in many different ways, and these differences should be recognized. However, the above charge could mean something different. It could mean that Nietzsche is claiming that any interpretation of the world or of a particular object is just as good as any other interpretation of the world or of a particular object; this, however, is not what he is claiming. Nietzsche's position is that some interpretations are better than others. Nietzsche claims, and it seems understandable that many could agree with him, that some perspectives *really* are more shallow, more unhelpful, more superficial, more poorly argued, and more inadequate than others. This study agrees with Nietzsche and argues that if Nietzsche's philosophy is seen in its proper context of affirmation of life, then the claim that some perspectives are better than others becomes easy to substantiate.

The discussion thus far has concerned itself with Nietzsche's metaphysics and epistemology. An overview has been presented in which some general, and not so general, assertions and arguments were made. Such a brief discussion cannot do justice to the topics, but more will emerge when specific concepts are discussed in

the next chapter. The third category in this discussion of Nietzsche's overall philosophy is morality, and to this subject we now turn.

3. Nietzsche's Morality

A discussion of Nietzsche's conception of morality is, in some respects, much easier than either a discussion of his ontology or a discussion of his theory of knowledge. So much more attention has been devoted to his pronouncements on morality than to any other aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy that presenting Nietzsche's exact thoughts on the subject might seem extremely easy. But this feeling of easiness, when it does exist among commentators, is deceptive, especially when the focus is on Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch*. This study takes the position that any well-thought explication of the *Übermensch* must include an understanding of Nietzsche's thoughts on morality. Previous chapters have hinted at the importance of this topic, and discussion will continue into the next chapter. The following brief remarks intend to provide the reader with a more complete understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole.

As with earlier discussions of metaphysics and epistemology, emphasis can be, and often is, placed on Nietzsche's negative remarks concerning morality. That Nietzsche demonstrates a great deal of abhorrence toward theories of morality, just as he does toward theories of ontology and knowledge, goes without saying. It is interesting to note that many of Nietzsche's negative remarks concerning morality

appear hand-in-hand with his negative remarks concerning metaphysics and epistemology. Many of these remarks occur in the context of Christianity, as when Nietzsche says:

Christianity was from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, life's nausea and disgust with life, merely concealed behind, masked by, dressed up as, faith in "another" or "better" life. Hatred of "the world," condemnations of the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a beyond invented the better to slander this life, at bottom a craving for the nothing, for the end, for respite, for the "sabbath of sabbaths"--all this always struck me, no less than the unconditional will of Christianity to recognize *only* moral values, as the most dangerous and uncanny form of all possible forms of a "will to decline"--at the very least a sign of abysmal sickness, weariness, discouragement, exhaustion, and the impoverishment of life.²⁹

There are many such passages in Nietzsche's texts, with the longest sustained treatments occurring in *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. One reason Nietzsche lashes out so strongly against morality can be found in his perspectivism; people (moralists and Christians) view the world a certain way, and they wish to impose their view on the rest of humanity. This moral view of how things should be gains momentum, it even takes on a history of its own, and it finally becomes the way things are done. To go against the way things are done is to be immoral. Nietzsche observes early in his treatment

²⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 23, Sec. 5, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism."

of morality, "The most moral man is he who *sacrifices* the most to custom."³⁰ And this theme is continued and elaborated later in the texts.

Nothing has been bought more dearly than the modicum of human reason and feeling of freedom that are now our pride. It is this pride, however, that makes it almost impossible for us today to empathize with that vast era of the "morality of mores" which preceded "world history" as the truly decisive history that determined the character of mankind: when suffering was everywhere counted as a virtue, cruelty as a virtue, dissembling as a virtue, revenge as a virtue, slander of reason as a virtue, and when on the other hand well-being was counted as a danger, thirst for knowledge as a danger, peace as a danger, pity as a danger, being pitied as a disgrace, work as a disgrace, madness as divine, *change* as the very essence of immorality and pregnant with disaster.³¹

This one objection of Nietzsche's against morality, that moral values arise out of authoritarian custom, is certainly subject to problems.³² And there are other criticisms made by Nietzsche, those based on herd mentality and the distinction between master and slave morality, against which one also could raise objections and responses. This, however, is not really the focus here. (This study is very sympathetic to Nietzsche's negative view of morality in general, and Christianity in particular.) Rather, the focus is to introduce the positive aspects that might emerge

³⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 9, Sec. 9, "Concept of Morality of Custom."

³¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 114, Sec. 9, Third Essay.

³²Some interesting objections to this particular point can be found in Frithjof Bergmann, "Nietzsche's Critique of Morality," in *Reading Nietzsche*, pp. 29-45.

from Nietzsche's critique to consider whether they help in understanding the *Übermensch*.

Accentuating the negative aspects is easy, but even in the passages quoted above the positive facets of Nietzsche's treatment of morality emerge. Among these positive aspects are a love of this world, a respect for the individual's ability to think and reason, a respect for and acceptance of the passions, a celebration of strength, wellness, and exuberance. These are characteristics, attitudes, behaviors, that Nietzsche finds valuable and which he finds lacking in morality, or at least morality as he sees it. For Nietzsche, perhaps the most positive aspect missing from morality is a sense of the importance of aesthetic value. In his first book Nietzsche asserts that "the existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon."³³

Exactly what Nietzsche has in mind in making this assertion remains to be seen. However, it does seem that it involves such things as creativity, self-determination, and a willingness to stress the significance of this world and this life, as opposed to the notion of "another worldly life." Seeing the world in its aesthetic dimension must involve the mastering of the passions and the recognition that such concept pairs as "good" and "evil" must be abandoned. Morality's refusal to do all this makes it sick and a sign of weariness with life.

³³Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 22, Sec. 5, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism."

It is this perspective of Nietzsche's, his insistence on valuing the aesthetic dimension of life, that informs his criticisms of not only morality, but metaphysics and epistemology as well. The common notion that Nietzsche spends all of his time destroying traditional issues of great concern to philosophers is only half true. There is another side, a side that informs all of Nietzsche's philosophical project; it is a side that is not destructive, but, quite the contrary, is very creative.

This positive aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, this emphasis on creative and artistic living, is set forth rather eloquently (although the eloquent sometimes unfortunately equals the oblique) in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. There are, to be sure, other expressions and formulations of what might be called Nietzsche's positive philosophy; *Ecce Homo*³⁴ is one such example. However, it is the character of Zarathustra that exudes the affirmation of life with which Nietzsche is so concerned. It is in *Zarathustra* that one will find the most vehement objections to metaphysics, epistemology, and morality. And it is in *Zarathustra* that the concept of the *Übermensch*, as well as the concepts of will to power and eternal recurrence, is introduced. This study argues that there is a connection between the concept of the *Übermensch* and Nietzsche's positive philosophy. This positive philosophy is spelled

³⁴Alexander Nehamas, in his *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, argues that *Ecce Homo* should be considered as an example of where Nietzsche set forth his positive ideal; it is in this text that, according to Nehamas, Nietzsche turns his life into literature. For objections to Nehamas on this point see, Daniel W. Conway, "Literature as Life: Nietzsche's Positive Morality," *International Studies in Philosophy*, 21, no. 2 (1989): 40-53.

out in *Zarathustra*, but the only way to comprehend it is through an examination of will to power and eternal recurrence. Uncovering what Nietzsche might have meant in positing these concepts will help in understanding the *Übermensch*.

Much progress already has been made toward the goal of interpreting the *Übermensch*. This chapter has tried to sketch and explain some of the most important aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy in an effort to reach this goal. Of paramount importance has been the explication and clarification of Nietzsche's world view. Central to that world view is the notion of uncertainty. I have tried to argue that the best way to understand Nietzsche's ontology and epistemology is by recognizing Nietzsche's embrace of uncertainty. We can detect this uncertainty (perhaps I should say we can detect the *value* Nietzsche places on uncertainty) by paying close attention not only to Nietzsche's style of writing but also to what he has to say about metaphysical and epistemological theories. Theories by their very nature value certainty, hence the problem with much of what is done with respect to metaphysics and epistemology. If the world should be viewed as a work of art, then we can characterize theories as ugly. Any theory that claims to establish stability, immutability, and certainty is, according to Nietzsche's aestheticism, ugly. Nietzsche's views regarding the inherent difficulties with theories will facilitate a better understanding of other concepts employed by Nietzsche. In addition, we now are better prepared to return to the discussion of the "*Übermensch* as attitude" interpretation and Magnus's remaining two arguments. More will have to be said,

of course, concerning Nietzsche's ontology, epistemology, and aesthetics; these topics will arise again when other of Nietzsche's concepts are discussed in the next chapter. This chapter paves the way for a clearer and more accurate understanding of these concepts. Nietzsche's position on morality, both his negative and positive remarks, still has an important part to play. The focus should now shift to specific concepts that Nietzsche formulated and considered important.

CHAPTER VI
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
THE *ÜBERMENSCH*
AND NIETZSCHE'S OTHER DOCTRINES

Discussions of Nietzsche's ontology and theory of knowledge were conducted in the previous chapter without invoking the specter of will to power or eternal recurrence. Too often these concepts are invoked while attempting to explain or explain away Nietzsche's views of the thing-in-itself and truth; the result is that particular concepts, as well as Nietzsche's ontological or epistemic views, are not explained and interpreted very clearly. Yet one cannot help escape the feeling that something is missing from the previous discussion by not dealing with the concepts of will to power and eternal recurrence. The purpose of the present chapter is to fill in the missing parts by explicating and analyzing these two concepts, hence providing a much better understanding of them. The present discussion also addresses some of the omissions in the previous chapter and provides one more step on the way to interpreting the *Übermensch*.

This chapter also will address again the arguments offered by Magnus in favor of the "*Übermensch* as attitude" interpretation. In Chapter IV four arguments, two external and two internal, were introduced. At that time only one argument from each group was discussed; one was an internal concern stemming from

Nietzsche's actual textual evidence and the other was an external concern surrounding the role of the *Nachlass*. The two remaining arguments offered by Magnus, an internal argument centering on a reading of eternal recurrence and an external argument concerning Nietzsche's project qua project, are discussed and evaluated here. Magnus's interpretation is one of the best formulated and one of the most well-thought treatments of the *Übermensch* to be found in the literature. However, by way of anticipating one of the conclusions of this chapter, Magnus's account does not fully capture the significance of the doctrine, neither the significance for Nietzsche nor the significance for Nietzsche's readers. (That Magnus seems more than willing to weaken his own treatment of the *Übermensch* by stating that both his and the "ideal" reading might be right only serves as further justification for this conclusion.) Magnus's remarks regarding how to view Nietzsche's project have been present all along but not made explicit until now. The following remarks, and the position one finally takes on these remarks, directly impact on interpretations of the *Übermensch* as well as the other concepts discussed in this chapter.

Chapter II devoted a great deal of attention to Nietzsche's style and his view of philosophy but did not deal with the issue of how scholars view Nietzsche; however, the way in which scholars view Nietzsche and his philosophy is of utmost importance. Different scholars have different orientations and agendas, and these orientations and agendas affect which of Nietzsche's texts are read and not read,

which aphorisms are stressed and which are ignored, and what importance is given or not given to the unpublished notes (on this last matter, refer to Chapter IV). Magnus has developed a three-fold distinction between different kinds of scholars, and it is this distinction that lies at the heart of Magnus's argument. In discussing this distinction, we should keep in mind another distinction from Magnus discussed earlier, that of lumpers versus splitters.

The three kinds of scholars that Magnus delineates are: 1) analytic philosophers, 2) deconstructionists, and 3) what Magnus calls reconstructionists.¹ This tripartite contrast established by Magnus is a metaphilosophical one, hence our labeling it an external concern. That is, distinguishing between and discussing the consequences of different approaches has nothing to do with Nietzsche's philosophy in and of itself. Rather, the issue is a group of second-order concerns centering around what should and should not be explained in Nietzsche and what is and is not important in his thought. Something needs to be said about each type of scholarship, keeping in mind that such a set of distinctions is a crude one at best. However, given that we are about to discuss will to power and eternal recurrence in some detail and to evaluate Magnus's "attitude" interpretation, such an examination should be helpful. In addition, this study has metaphilosophical commitments that, while

¹These distinctions are discussed in "Nietzsche and the Project of Bringing Philosophy to an End," in *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker*, pp. 39-57, and "Overman: An Attitude or an Ideal?" in *The Great Year of Zarathustra, (1881-1981)*, pp. 142-165.

they may be obvious already, can be allowed to come to the fore in this discussion.

The analytical type of scholarship or interpretation stresses the ability or inability of Nietzsche to address and answer traditional philosophical questions concerning such issues as the theory of truth and theory of knowledge. If Nietzsche can satisfactorily deal with such problems, then he is a "great philosopher"; if not, then he is not a philosopher at all and no harm is done. This type of scholarship carries with it the underlying assumption that "philosophy is itself the foundational enterprise *par excellence*."²

The deconstructionist type of scholarship or interpretation stresses an individualistic reading of Nietzsche. This reading permits the commentator to take whatever he/she may want from Nietzsche and leave the rest. The deconstructionist asserts that only the individual can adequately interpret Nietzsche, and that such interpretations, no matter what they are, stand above and beyond any so-called objective criteria by which we judge interpretations.

The reconstructionist type of scholarship or interpretation stresses the importance of letting Nietzsche be Nietzsche and encourages Nietzsche scholarship *simpliciter*. Under this type of reading, interpretations that ignore the texts are implausible. Magnus describes persons who engage in this approach as "simply

²Bernd Magnus, "Overman: An Attitude or an Ideal?", p. 158.

interested in Nietzsche--without attempting to assimilate him to or understand him in terms of a particular school or method."³

This study takes the position, perhaps evident from the previous chapters, that while all three readings have something to recommend them, the reconstructionist reading provides the fairest, most accurate interpretations of Nietzsche's thought. That is, to the extent possible, Nietzsche should be approached, studied, and appreciated without the constraints imposed by such stringent commitments as those that accompany the other two readings. Obviously the reconstructionist reading, just as with the other two, sets the stage for particular interpretations of particular concepts found in Nietzsche. All three methods of scholarship should be kept in mind, then, when evaluating the interpretations to follow, as well as those previously discussed. If the interpretations of will to power and eternal recurrence that follow, stemming as they do from the reconstructionist reading, are coherent and internally and externally consistent, then this approach will be recommended.

1. Will to Power

It is entirely likely that no concept in Nietzsche's philosophy has received more attention than will to power.⁴ While a myriad number of interpretations of

³Bernd Magnus, "Overman: At Attitude or an Ideal?", p. 157.

⁴Ofelia Schutte, in *Beyond Nihilism*, states: "One of the most controversial aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy is the interpretation of the idea of the will to power," p. 76.

this concept exist, some certainly better than others, the purpose of this section is to posit and defend only one.⁵ Of course, some of the better interpretations have influenced what will be stated here. The ultimate goal, however, is to present a reading of will to power that is consistent and coherent with Nietzsche's texts and that, at the same time, helps with understanding the *Übermensch*. Highlighting Nietzsche's comments regarding the will to power is the best way to begin.

While there are some implicit and very much underdeveloped references to the will to power in *The Gay Science*, the first text where the doctrine occurs,⁶ Nietzsche's first overt and extended discussion of the idea occurs in the section "On Self-Overcoming" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra describes the idea in various ways; it is unfortunate that all of these first references are, at best, opaque and confusing. The will to power is described as the will that has become smooth and reflects on itself; it is the inexhaustible procreative will of life. And, although this does nothing to make the matter clear, Zarathustra makes the following

⁵The doctrine of will to power has been construed as a theory of domination, an ontological/cosmological theory, a psychological explanation, and as a moral theory. Ofelia Schutte, in her *Beyond Nihilism*, goes into considerable detail discussing these interpretations. She does a rather good job, however, her distinction between psychological and moral interpretations is not completely satisfactory. This study takes the position that the will to power should be seen as both a psychological and moral theory. I should point out though that I am sympathetic to the idea that will to power is a metaphor, especially since I, along with Schutte, maintain that Nietzsche never fully developed the notion of will to power. All of this will be discussed below.

⁶See, for example, aphorisms 13, 110, and 349.

declarations: "My will to power walks on the heels of your will to truth"; "Only where there is life is there also will: not will to life but--thus I teach you--will to power"; "There is much that life esteems more highly than life itself; but out of the esteeming itself speaks the will to power."⁷

As confusing and unclear as these statements may be, they denote two aspects of the will to power that are important to both the idea itself and to our search for the proper understanding of the *Übermensch*. These two aspects are love of life and self-overcoming, both of which already have been mentioned. Before referring to these aspects again, other of Nietzsche's passages where the will to power is explicitly discussed should be noted. These, too, will bring to the fore the notions of love of life and self-overcoming.

In "On the Prejudices of Philosophers" in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes:

All psychology so far has got stuck in moral prejudices and fears; it has not dared to descend into the depths. To understand it as morphology and *the doctrine of the development of will to power*, as I do--nobody has yet come close to doing this even in thought--insofar as it is permissible to recognize in what has been written so far a symptom of what has so far been kept silent. The power of moral prejudices has penetrated deeply into the most spiritual world, which would seem to be the coldest and most devoid of presuppositions, and has obviously operated in an injurious, inhibiting, blinding, and distorting manner.⁸

⁷All of the above quotes come from "On Self-Overcoming" in Part II of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 227-228.

⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Sec. 23, p. 31.

And finally, consider what Nietzsche writes in *The Antichrist*:

Life itself is to my mind the instinct for growth, for durability, for an accumulation of forces, for *power*: where the will to power is lacking there is decline. It is my contention that all the supreme values of mankind *lack* this will--that the values which are symptomatic of decline, *nihilistic* values, are lording it under the holiest names.⁹

Nietzsche wants to claim that all human beings and all human activities are expressions of will to power. In a note from 1885 he writes: "*This world is the will to power--and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power--and nothing besides!"¹⁰ It is not at all clear what Nietzsche means by this; that Nietzsche posits this declaration as his meaning to *this world* (Nietzsche's italics) offers no help. Certainly part of the impetus for the will to power lies in Nietzsche's break with Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism. Nietzsche became dissatisfied with Schopenhauer's employment of the concept of the one will and his rejection of the importance of the individual. But Nietzsche, at least in the middle and later texts, has more in mind for his conception than simply the repudiation of Schopenhauer.

Perhaps the best way to begin to understand what Nietzsche might have meant by will to power is to admit the very real possibility that Nietzsche himself

⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 572.

¹⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 550.

was not entirely clear on the notion. The evidence for this possibility comes from the fact that the will to power concept emerges slowly and changes dramatically throughout Nietzsche's philosophy. Walter Kaufmann is quite correct when he notes:

The will to power did not spring from Nietzsche's head full grown. There is no point in his writings where it suddenly appears as a surprising inspiration, although no published work refers to it by name before its proclamation by Zarathustra.¹¹

Certainly the will to power does emerge slowly in Nietzsche's thought; as a result he may never have had a clearly defined conception of the notion or, as is perhaps more likely, he had several clearly defined conceptions of the notion. If this last possibility is the case, it may be that Nietzsche wants the notion of the will to power to do too much work for him. Nietzsche, in positing the will to power, may have had two specific tasks in mind, describing the living of life in and of itself and the recommendation of self-overcoming. Both of these aspects have been mentioned above, and they seem to emerge from the quoted passages. What Nietzsche might

¹¹Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 179. Although this study is only interested in what might be called Nietzsche's mature notion of will to power, Kaufmann does an excellent job of tracing the notion back through Nietzsche's texts. See especially his chapter 6. There is also an interesting debate among scholars, again beyond the scope of this study, as to whether or not there is some similarity between Nietzsche's early conception of power and the later will to power. See, for example, Willard Mittelman, "The Relation Between Nietzsche's Theory of the Will to Power and his Earlier Conception of Power," *Nietzsche-Studien* 9 (Berlin: 1980), pp. 122-141.

have in mind for the will to power is that it serve both a psychological and a moral function. Consider what Nietzsche has Zarathustra say about the will to power:

A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcomings; behold, it is the voice of their will to power. Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people, whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult--that they call holy.¹²

The will to power is not mentioned again until the second part of *Zarathustra* (see the passages quoted above). The conception retains its poetic connotation throughout *Zarathustra* and into other texts. That the concept often occurs in the context of self-overcoming and values is the key to understanding Nietzsche's meaning of the will to power.

According to Nietzsche, the human race is a part of nature. To be sure, the human race constitutes a "special" part of nature, but a part of nature nonetheless. Human beings should recognize this fact, accept it, and even embrace it. But much stands in the way of reaching this recognition; this series of roadblocks goes under one name, dualism. There are many types of dualism: metaphysical, Christian, and moral. Nietzsche recognizes all three and never tires of arguing that all three must be abolished. After all, dualism in its many forms is one of the most dangerous enemies of life and of the creative living of life. The creative living of life and the

¹²Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On the Thousand and One Goals," p. 170.

overcoming of dualism are dominant themes in Nietzsche; they are never far from his thinking even when he is positing and experimenting with new concepts.

The will to power, a conception which Nietzsche posits and with which he experiments, is a method (perhaps one of several) by which Nietzsche seeks to overcome dualism. If the will to power is the method by which Nietzsche rejects dualism, then the method itself cannot be cosmological or metaphysical in nature. Of course, the method by which Nietzsche employs will to power to reject dualism needs to be clarified.

Nietzsche implores the human race to no longer divide the world into two parts, one of reality and one of appearance, one of good values and behaviors and one of bad values and behaviors. Nietzsche claims that life is the will to power, the world is the will to power, and human beings themselves are the will to power. Nietzsche's perspectivism--his insistence that the world is full of varied interpretations, some tenable and some flawed--keeps these phrases from being empty and meaningless. The world, for Nietzsche, is will to power just because such a description explains much about the world and how we live in it. But how does will to power act as an explanation of the world? One example, and there are others, centers around Nietzsche's embrace of uncertainty and disdain for certainty. Language and logic impose certainty on the world; they place us in the habit of believing universal truth exists. Even though language deceives us, we have no choice in the matter.

We believe in reason: this, however, is the philosophy of gray *concepts*. Language depends on the most naive prejudices. Now we read disharmonies and problems into things because we think *only* in the form of language--and thus believe in the "eternal truth" of "reason" (e.g., subject, attribute, etc.). *We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language*; we barely reach the doubt that sees this limitation as a limitation. *Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off.*¹³

Part of what Nietzsche means by the will to power and, hence, part of the explanatory nature of the concept is the view that there is no structure, no certainty in the world, that any language could capture. This inability to capture the ultimate structure of the world also applies to metaphysical theories such as dualism. The explanation of the world as will to power is a good explanation as far as Nietzsche is concerned; no longer is there a need for dualism.

There is the additional aspect of the conception involving the notion of self-overcoming. As with dualism, self-overcoming is a prominent theme in Nietzsche's texts; it is often associated with the *Übermensch*. That this study associates self-overcoming with the will to power may help in understanding both will to power and the *Übermensch*. This additional aspect of the will to power stems from Nietzsche's contention that there are two manifestations of the will to power, one positive and

¹³Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 283, Sec. 522. Nehamas, in his *Nietzsche*, makes the same point I am making. However, he does not help his case by using only a fraction of the unpublished note that I quote in full above. For a much more detailed study of Nietzsche's conception of language than is offered by either me or Nehamas see Claudia Crawford, *The Beginnings of Nietzsche's Theory of Language* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988).

the other negative. The negative manifestation of will to power appears in the herd and in particular groups composed of members of the herd. In these groups we see at work two concepts, resentment and revenge. Members of the herd congregate in groups and practice resentment and revenge; this is slave morality.

. . . slave morality from the outset says No to what is "outside," what is "different," what is "not itself"; and *this* No is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye--this *need* to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself--is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all--its action is fundamentally reaction.¹⁴

Negative manifestations of will to power are found in the herd and the actions of the herd. Certainly the notions of resentment, revenge, and reaction are the antithesis of what Nietzsche means by the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit*.

The notion of self-overcoming embodies this positive manifestation. When Nietzsche makes the claim that we are will to power, he is, in addition to addressing the issue of dualism, stating that our beliefs, values, and behaviors are products of internal amounts of power. Most people behave, value, and believe in a manner that conforms to some sort of external standard; Nietzsche's term for these people is the herd. On the other hand, there are people, admittedly a few, who break away from the herd, who want to be creative human beings and to live creative lives. The desire to go beyond the behavior, the values, and the beliefs of the herd is what

¹⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 36-37, Essay One, Sec. 10.

characterizes the creative human being, the human being who is engaged in self-overcoming.¹⁵ In such an individual we see the positive manifestation of will to power--power to overcome all dualism and power to overcome oneself.

The consequences for both Nietzsche scholarship and interpretations of will to power and the *Übermensch* are numerous and significant. The will to power is not a metaphysical or cosmological construction; it is a hypothesis concerning how the world might be and human beings ought to live in the world. This principle may not be as clear as we might wish, but the fact remains that Nietzsche intended it to be an empirical principle. This explanation of will to power provides us with one more piece of evidence against any "ideal human" reading of the *Übermensch*. The will to power will be addressed again later, but in an indirect manner. Additional comments need to be made concerning self-overcoming and living life creatively, and this will be best accomplished in the context of discussing eternal recurrence.¹⁶

¹⁵Willard Mittleman, "The Relation Between Nietzsche's Theory of the Will to Power and his Earlier Conception of Power," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 9(1980), pp. 132-133.

¹⁶My interpretation of will to power owes much to Walter Kaufmann, Ofelia Schutte, and Maudemarie Clark. This is not to say that all three posit the same interpretation; they do not. But all three approach the concept of will to power that is faithful to Nietzsche's published texts, and there are some important similarities between the three.

2. The Eternal Recurrence

Whereas the will to power has received the most critical attention in Nietzsche scholarship, no concept has intrigued scholars more nor been linked more often with the *Übermensch* than that of eternal recurrence. As with the will to power, a myriad number of interpretations of eternal recurrence, some tenable and some absurd, have been posited. However, the purpose here is to posit and defend only one interpretation of eternal recurrence.¹⁷ Much of the following discussion will impact directly on Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* and how that conception should be understood. Of particular interest will be Magnus's treatment of the recurrence and how that treatment itself serves as an argument for his particular type of "attitude" reading of the *Übermensch*. As with the will to power above, we will begin by highlighting Nietzsche's exact comments concerning eternal recurrence.

The doctrine of eternal recurrence first appears in *The Gay Science*. Two passages in particular are significant, and it is important for the reader to consider them carefully. For these reasons I quote both passages at length.

¹⁷There have been many interpretations of eternal recurrence. These include: the eternal recurrence as a cosmological hypothesis, as a type of metaphysics, as an ethical imperative, and as a consequence of the death of God. I believe all of these treatments to be, in the main, misguided and not at all what Nietzsche intends by the concept. Since the emphasis here is the *Übermensch* and not eternal recurrence per se, positing and defending my own interpretation of the recurrence will have to suffice. Much of my interpretation relies on Bernd Magnus's discussion of eternal recurrence.

"You will never pray again, never adore again, never again rest in endless trust; you do not permit yourself to stop before any ultimate wisdom, ultimate goodness, ultimate power, while unharnessing your thoughts; you have no perpetual guardian and friend for your seven solitudes; you live without a view of mountains with snow on their peaks and fire in their hearts; there is no avenger for you any more nor any final improver; there is no longer any reason in what happens, no love in what will happen to you; no resting place is open any longer to your heart, where it only needs to find and no longer to seek; you resist any ultimate peace; you will the eternal recurrence of war and peace: man of renunciation, all this you wish to renounce? Who will give you the strength for that? Nobody yet has had this strength!" There is a lake that one day ceased to permit itself to flow off; it formed a dam where it had hitherto flown off; and ever since this lake is rising higher and higher. Perhaps this very renunciation will also lend us the strength needed to bear this renunciation; perhaps man will rise ever higher as soon as he ceases to *flow out* into a god.¹⁸

And,

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

¹⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Sec. 285, "Excelsior," pp. 229-230.

would you have to become to yourself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?¹⁹

Quoting these passages at length, not just extracting a few sentences, gives the reader a more complete sense of what Nietzsche is trying to communicate and exposes the reader, yet again, to what Nietzsche is trying to accomplish. Woven between the overt references to eternal recurrence are much more subtle ideas with which Nietzsche is concerned. These ideas include the renunciation of god, embracing and loving this life, and the notion of self-overcoming. These ideas are central to an understanding of not only eternal recurrence but also of the *Übermensch*.

Nietzsche is concerned with man's life and actions in the sense that he wants man to escape the mundane and petty existence which is the consequence of dualism of any kind. Nietzsche desires man to rise higher and higher; he desires man to become so well-disposed toward himself and life that man will crave eternal repetition of his/her exact same life. To do all of this man will have to renounce any ultimate wisdom or goodness; man must cease searching for the ultimate guardian or friend. In short, man must renounce god and heaven, good and evil. Such a renunciation requires strength. That is, such a renunciation requires a strong will or strong determination, and such strength is represented and achieved through eternal recurrence. Nietzsche's metaphor of a lake provides an excellent example

¹⁹Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Sec. 341, "The Greatest Weight," pp. 273-274.

of the consequences of renunciation. Just as a lake will rise higher and higher once it is dammed up, so too, man will realize his full potential once he wills eternal recurrence. The lake, once dammed, ceases to "flow off" and hence is able to rise. The human race, once it is well-disposed to itself and to life and accepts eternal recurrence, ceases to "flow out" into a god and the otherworldly; the human race is then able to experience the greatness of itself and the greatness of life.

Of course, the strength to renounce otherworldly matters--it might be called the strength to embrace this life--will be difficult to attain. Remember that, for Nietzsche, otherworldly matters include metaphysics, Christianity, and absolutist moral theories. The strength to begin the task of overcoming such matters, not to mention the strength needed to see the task through successful completion, will require a healthy disposition toward oneself and toward life. The temptation to seek ultimate answers is strong and easily undertaken as a habit. But once this temptation is arrested, once the human race ceases to "go outside" itself and "go outside" life, then the result is a joyous affirmation of both the individual and life. It is this affirmation of life, made possible by acceptance of eternal recurrence, that brings us back to one of Magnus's arguments in favor of the "*Übermensch* as attitude" reading. For Magnus, the eternal recurrence and the *Übermensch* are entwined in such a way that both seem to rely on the other. Indeed, there seems to be a special relationship between the two concepts, and it is this relationship and Magnus's arguments that now need to be examined. As useful as the above remarks have been

in understanding the eternal recurrence, they have remained on the fringes of what exactly an interpretation of the recurrence should entail. Consider Magnus's interpretation of eternal recurrence and how he begins to relate his interpretation to his understanding of the *Übermensch*.

Recurrence is a diagnostic tool. When the real or possible truth of recurrence is called upon to play a role at all, that role is primarily diagnostic. Recurrence (and its real or possible truth) is a representation of a particular attitude toward life. The attitude toward life Nietzsche wishes to portray is the opposite of decadence, decline of life, world-weariness. The attitude he wishes to portray is the attitude of affirmation, of overfulness; the attitude which expresses ascending life, life as a celebration, life in celebration. . . . Eternal recurrence, in its principal sense, is offered by Nietzsche as an illustration of the attitude of *Übermenschlichkeit*, of what it is like to be a superman. It illustrates the being-in-the-world--the basic attunement--of the *Übermensch*.²⁰

These remarks of Magnus's serve several purposes. First, they precisely clarify Magnus's interpretation of the eternal recurrence. Second, they draw the connection between recurrence and the *Übermensch*. And third, perhaps most important for the purposes of this study, these remarks present the fourth and final argument given by Magnus in favor of his "*Übermensch* as attitude" reading. (Since we are rapidly approaching the crux of the matter, it might be prudent to briefly recall what I have detailed as Magnus's four arguments in favor of the "attitude" reading. There are two external arguments: one regarding the role of the *Nachlass*,

²⁰Bernd Magnus, "Nietzsche and the Project of Bringing Philosophy to an End," pp. 53-54. This same interpretation of eternal recurrence and its connection to the *Übermensch* can also be found in Magnus's *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*.

and the other concerning the issue of how to characterize and then deal with Nietzsche's project qua project. There are two internal arguments: one regarding the textual evidence for the "attitude" reading, and one concerning the eternal recurrence as itself an "attitude.") Obviously, the validity of Magnus's fourth argument depends on the validity of his interpretation of eternal recurrence. If the latter fails, then so will the former. However, it is not necessarily the case that the success of the latter mandates the acceptance of the former.

Magnus's interpretation of eternal recurrence is a credible one and this for several reasons. Magnus remains faithful to Nietzsche's published texts; viewing eternal recurrence as an attitude does justice to the section from *The Gay Science* quoted above ("The Greatest Weight"). Magnus appreciates the power and significance of this passage for Nietzsche. Magnus's interpretation does not rely on the *Nachlass* for its justification; this is another point in his favor. We may recall the distinction between lumpers and splitters made by Magnus. The former use the *Nachlass* sometimes to the total exclusion of the published texts and tend to interpret the eternal recurrence as a cosmological or metaphysical conception. Another reason for accepting Magnus's reading of eternal recurrence is that it draws a direct connection to the manner in which the *Übermensch* should be understood. This connection is rather appealing, and we can see it directly when Magnus's thesis is elaborated.

Magnus's position can be presented in the following way. First, eternal recurrence is an illustration of the attitude of *Übermenschheit*. (We have seen this already.) Second, this attitude expresses the overcoming of nihilism. And third, the *form* of the expressed attitude is eternal recurrence.²¹ As tempting as it might be to accept Magnus's interpretation of eternal recurrence, there are problems. The main difficulty with Magnus's reading (a difficulty to which we have alluded in Chapter IV) centers around his insistence on, and continued use of, the term "attitude." The term is ambiguous and Magnus does little to clarify and make precise his use of the term. The ambiguity lies in the fact that attitude can be too easily construed to mean particular attitudes *in* life. Consider, for example, the term "disposition"; we have dispositions to do and not to do certain things. This is one level on which attitude might be understood. However, there is another connotation to be considered, and that is an attitude *toward* life *in its totality*. No longer do we think of particular dispositions at a particular moment in life, but we consider all of life in its entirety; this is the level on which Nietzsche would view attitude. It may be in fact what Magnus intends, but Magnus too often leaves the impression that the

²¹This three part thesis can be found on p. 140, p. 142, and p. 222 of Magnus's *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*. While Magnus's treatment of recurrence is one of the best in the literature, there are problems which are discussed above. Two additional problems with Magnus's position might be briefly mentioned here. The first problem concerns the second part of Magnus's thesis; Magnus is not clear as to how an attitude can express the overcoming of nihilism. The second problem concerns the third part; Magnus wants to claim that this third part is important, but he does not discuss it in much detail.

former meaning is the one he has in mind. For example, Magnus believes that the passage "The Greatest Weight" as a whole and the eternal recurrence in particular produce the following two questions: "For any X, do you want *this* once more and innumerable times more?; For any X, do you crave nothing more fervently than this eternal confirmation and seal?"²² In explaining the significance of these two questions, Magnus at once indicates the very problem with his interpretation.

The first question specifies what is to be placed under the yoke of eternal repetition--not a life taken as a whole, but each and every thing *within* that life. The second question asks how well disposed one would have to be to oneself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than the eternal recurrence of each moment of one's life--not even imagined alternative lives, alternative selves and worlds.²³

Magnus's interpretation of eternal recurrence is partly right; it errs when it places too much emphasis on attitudes in life. Nietzsche is not as concerned as Magnus thinks he is with particular attitudes within life, though perhaps he should have been. Magnus's interpretation of eternal recurrence has the further unfortunate consequence of trivializing the concept of the *Übermensch*, though Magnus probably would deny this. Magnus seems to be caught between two alternatives, and he cannot make up his mind which alternative he wants to pursue or endorse. He seems to decide that both alternatives are legitimate, but it is not at all clear that he presents a convincing case. Consider the following two characterizations or

²²Bernd Magnus, "Self-Consuming Concepts," *International Studies in Philosophy* 21, no. 2(1989): p. 69.

²³Magnus, "Self-Consuming Concepts," p. 69.

descriptions of the *Übermensch* presented by Magnus. The first description seems to be consistent with an "attitude" reading while the second description appears to be a formulation of an "ideal human" reading.

The *Übermensch* is not yet another link in a long chain which attempts to articulate the human ideal, an ideal which can be realized if only we were to do something or other--sublimate our impulses, consecrate our passions, spiritualize our instincts, give style to our character, live authentically--assuming all the while, of course, that we would know how to begin to *do* any of these things. Rather, the *Übermensch* is the *nonspecific* representation--the underdetermined embodiment--of a certain attitude toward life and world--the attitude which finds them worthy of *infinite* repetition. An *Übermensch*, and only an *Übermensch*, would be so well disposed to himself and the world that he would crave *nothing* more fervently than the eternal repetition of his life, not even the life of God or the gods.²⁴

And,

If the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition could be said to have an attitude towards his own life and his world it would have coincided with the attitude of an *Übermensch*. Only God and *Übermenschen* love each moment unconditionally, want nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Only for God, Leibniz and *Übermenschen* is this the best of all possible worlds.²⁵

Note that the first passage is radically different from the second. In the first, Magnus is giving an "attitude" reading to the *Übermensch*, while in the second he seems to be returning to the notion of the *Übermensch* as an ideal of human perfectibility. As a matter of fact, since Magnus is comparing the *Übermensch* to

²⁴Magnus, "Nietzsche and the Project of Bringing Philosophy to an End," p. 54.

²⁵Bernd Magnus, "Self-Consuming Concepts," p. 70.

God, we are left with Nietzsche defending a notion of an ideal personality type that is nonrealizable; no human being could ever be, or should ever hope to be, an *Übermensch*. From the second passage and its implied consequences, Magnus concludes that the concept of *Übermensch* constitutes Nietzsche's most abysmal thought.

That Magnus wants it both ways is clear from the above passages. For Magnus, the eternal recurrence and the *Übermensch* are attitudes, but the *Übermensch* also is the embodiment of an attitude, the attitude of eternal recurrence. Magnus's project is tenable and his attempt at argumentation is commendable, but something has gone wrong with Magnus's argument; the problem lies in the meaning of the term "attitude" and with a misunderstanding of what Nietzsche is trying to accomplish.

It is Magnus's position that eternal recurrence is an attitude *in* life. From this assertion Magnus posits an interpretation of the *Übermensch* whereby it, too, is a representation of a particular attitude *in* life. That Magnus can draw this conclusion is not clear. Above we discussed the problem with Magnus's characterization of eternal recurrence as a particular attitude *in* life. Is the eternal recurrence an attitude *in* life or, as I want to suggest, is it an attitude *toward* life? It may be that if Magnus is wrong about the eternal recurrence, then he is also wrong about the *Übermensch*. I have argued previously that, with respect to eternal recurrence, distinguishing between the notion of an attitude *in* life and the notion of

an attitude toward life is of great importance. Perhaps this same distinction obtains with respect to the *Übermensch*. If the distinction does obtain and can be supported, then Magnus's interpretation, as promising as it might seem, will have to be called into question. The way still might be open, however, for the positing of some sort of synthesis; a synthesis that accurately reflects Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* and that is consistent with other of Nietzsche's concepts such as will to power and eternal recurrence.

3. An Attempt at a Synthesis

This study has argued that the "ideal human" reading of the *Übermensch*, whether the ideal is realizable or not, is an unsatisfactory interpretation of this notion. Yet certain aspects of this reading, either variety, are appealing. The accompanying adjectival phrases such as "self-directed activity," "controlled passions," and "love of this world" lend the *Übermensch* much of its force and popularity. On the other hand, this study has argued that the "attitude" interpretation also is deficient; at least Magnus's version has proven inadequate. Yet certain aspects of this treatment of the *Übermensch* are also appealing. Nietzsche is obviously concerned with the "living of life," and an important part of this concern must focus on attitudes and dispositions toward and/or in life. We have, in a sense, returned full circle to the beginning of this study. Even if there are problems with both the "ideal human" and "attitude" readings (and indeed there are), we still have

made progress toward the achievement of a more complete understanding of the *Übermensch* concept.

Perhaps a synthesis of some sort is possible. There may be a way to combine the "ideal human" and "attitude" readings into a coherent, accurate interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. The *Übermensch* may in fact be that point at which Nietzsche's concern for and preoccupation with a form of higher humanity (Freigister or free spirits) and his concern for and preoccupation with healthy attitudes toward life converge. The child of the three metamorphoses in *Zarathustra* and the *Übermensch* become the same thing; both bring to mind such adjectives as self-overcoming, controlled passion, and love of life, and both are representative of an attitude or set of attitudes toward life. The *Übermensch* must be understood in context, in Nietzsche's context of the free spirit and the overcoming of dualism, all dualism.

On this reading of the *Übermensch* all we must do to understand and appreciate the concept is understand and appreciate Nietzsche's philosophical task. If it is Nietzsche's task to overcome dualism--whether it be metaphysical, Christian, or moral--and if it is his task to recommend the affirmation of life and self-overcoming, then the *Übermensch* must be understood in this context. If we pay attention to context, then certain interpretations of the *Übermensch* can be eliminated, or perhaps altered to coincide with Nietzsche's purpose.

The version of the "*Übermensch* as ideal human" reading in which the *Übermensch* is seen as some type of unrealizable ideal of perfection with some kind of mysterious ontological standing must be abandoned; Nietzsche is not a metaphysician. The version of the "*Übermensch* as ideal human" reading in which certain members of the human race have been, are, or might hope to be *Übermenschen* will have to be altered. (I hesitate to recommend total abolishment of this notion, not because Nietzsche has something like it in mind, but because the notion helps us to keep in mind the adjectives discussed above. In addition, certain people may "need" this reading of the *Übermensch*, and Nietzsche may not be opposed to this need.) This version of the reading will have to be altered because Nietzsche discusses in great detail the notion of the *Freigeist*; these are actual human beings with certain character traits.

The version of "*Übermensch* as attitude" reading in which the *Übermensch* is viewed as somehow representing a particular attitude in life also will have to be abandoned. There is little evidence to suggest that Nietzsche is concerned with particular attitudes or dispositions *in* life. As a matter of fact, quite the contrary appears to be the case. Nietzsche is concerned with life and the living of life in their totality, and the *Übermensch* as well as eternal recurrence are concerned with this totality.

The question remains whether or not such a synthesis can be constructed. There is certainly ample evidence that Nietzsche is not opposed to the idea of

constructing a synthesis in and of itself. We need only briefly recall the combination of the Apollonian and the Dionysian into the Dionysian concept.

In Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, two key conceptions are outlined and explicated: these are the Dionysian and the Apollonian. These two contrasting art deities are in continuous opposition to each other. They may be regarded as two different tendencies; the Apollonian represents the world of dreams, the Dionysian represents the world of intoxication. The Dionysian is a celebration in which man and man-reaffirmed come together. Man, through song and dance, feels himself to be a member of a higher community, a god. "He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art."²⁶ In contrast, Apollo represents measured restraint and calm. Apollo is "the deity of light, is also ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy."²⁷ Of the two, Nietzsche emphasizes the Dionysian, but he notes that it took both to make Greek tragedy possible.

Nietzsche brings the Dionysian and Apollonian together, and it is through them that man is able to experience the creative life, the creative existence. As a matter of fact, as early as *The Gay Science* and certainly by *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche combines the two ideas into the single term "Dionysian." It is through the conjunction of these two ideas that the artist is able to create and hence *give* meaning to existence. Thus Nietzsche concludes that, ". . . it is only as an *aesthetic*

²⁶Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 37.

²⁷Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 35.

phenomenon that existence and the world are *justified*."²⁸ A synthesis is constructed by Nietzsche, namely the Dionysian, which represents a whole range of ideas.

Just as the Dionysian represents a coming together of the Dionysian and Apollonian concepts, so too the *Übermensch* might well represent a coming together of the two notions, higher humanity that is realizable and an attitude toward life as a whole. Interpreting the *Übermensch* in this manner does not leave one with as streamlined and clear a reading as one might like, but such a reading does do justice to Nietzsche's texts and to his task. Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* invites us to imagine a human being with certain character traits and behaviors and to whom a specific set of descriptors apply, *and* the conception invites us to imagine just what it would be like to hold a certain attitude toward life in its totality. This is the synthesis, and this is what Nietzsche has in mind, or could have had in mind, when he conceived of his notion of the *Übermensch*.

Of course, this notion of a synthesis will have to be cashed out further and the consequences of subscribing to such a reading will have to be examined. This will be done by way of conclusion.

²⁸Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 52. J. P. Stern, in his *A Study of Nietzsche*, notes that the reason why Nietzsche places human existence in the realm of the aesthetic is because, ". . . more than any other human product, the work of art escapes the sphere of association and lives by the appearance of uniqueness" (p. 190). This is important since we want to emphasize the creative life of the individual.

CHAPTER VII

THE *ÜBERMENSCH* AND THE POSSIBILITY OF EFFORTLESS, CREATIVE AFFIRMATION

Nietzsche's philosophy contains a wealth of ideas, observations, concepts, and analyses. And Nietzsche employs a wealth of styles or genres in which to communicate his thoughts: the aphorism, the metaphor, the scholarly treatise, and even the joke all converge to form his stylistic pluralism. One must draw the conclusion that Nietzsche is an atypical philosopher, not only for his particular ideas and concepts but also for the manner in which he communicates them. These observations form the backdrop of this study, the main purpose of which has been to articulate and defend an interpretation of one aspect of Nietzsche's thought, the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit*. This interpretation in turn generates a complete and more accurate understanding of Nietzsche's entire philosophical project. Part of this study has been designed to argue that the two--Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* and his philosophical task or project--are inextricably connected; one cannot be understood without the other. Although I have separately examined the *Übermensch* and Nietzsche's philosophical task in previous pages, an integration of the two is now appropriate.

Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* is certainly a difficult idea to explicate and analyze. The difficulties involved are not, however, the result of carelessness on Nietzsche's part nor are they the result of inattentive or malicious readers. No, the obstacles are real and a necessary part of the concept itself. In an unpublished note from Summer, 1883 Nietzsche writes: "Having created the *Übermensch*, I arranged the great veil of becoming around him and let the sun stand over him at noon."¹ Such a description provides no help whatsoever in defining and understanding the *Übermensch*. In another unpublished note from the summer of the same year Nietzsche admits that he does not offer much in the way of critical explication. "I know the word and the sign of the *Übermensch*: but I do not reveal it, not even to myself."²

As unclear as Nietzsche is on many occasions regarding his concept, he is on rare occasions extremely clear about its meaning. In an unpublished note Nietzsche writes, "The antithesis of the *Übermensch* is the *last man*: I created him conjointly with the former."³ Nietzsche repeats this thought in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* when he asserts: "Behold, I teach you the *Übermensch*. The *Übermensch* is the meaning

¹KGW VII 1, 421. This unpublished note, as well as the one that follows, is discussed by Richard Perkins in his "The Genius and the Better Player: Superman and the Elements of Play," *International Studies in Philosophy* 15, 2(1983): 13.

²KGW VII 1, 391.

³KGW VII 1, 171. Alan Schrift cites but does not discuss this note in his *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 206.

of the earth. Let your will say: the *Übermensch* shall be the meaning of the earth."⁴ Nietzsche presents the reader with a rather strange state of affairs: in discussing the same concept he is both clear and vague, specific and general. The serious reader of Nietzsche is left wondering what, if anything, is to be gleaned from such a concept. Perhaps Nietzsche was serious about his *Übermensch* concept but not astute at, nor interested in, argumentation, explication, and analysis. "A man who wishes to demand something difficult from another man must not conceive of the matter as a problem, but rather simply lay out his plan, as if it were the only possibility."⁵ Or perhaps Nietzsche was not serious at all, employing his concept only to elicit laughter from his readers. "Should I begin to think about a comic solution?"⁶ I maintain that neither of these possibilities is tenable.

The problem remains: Nietzsche is both clear and vague, both specific and inexact about his concept. My reading of the *Übermensch* suggests that, rather than being a liability, this problem becomes an asset. I maintain that the *Übermensch* is a model having static, definite characteristics or properties possessed by at least some human beings in the past, and perhaps the present, and at least ideally to be possessed by human beings in the future; *and* a representation of a fluid, indefinite conceptual or psychological form of life possessed by at least some human beings

⁴Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 125, Part I, "Zarathustra's Prologue."

⁵Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, p. 184, Sec. 350, "Man in Society."

⁶Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 197, Sec. 153.

in the past, and perhaps the present, and at least ideally to be possessed by human beings in the future. I present here a combination, a conjunction, of one version of the "ideal models" approach with one version of the "idealized attitude" reading of the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit*. This melding of the constituents IM1) and IA1) provides only the outline of my interpretation, an outline in need of elaboration.

The *Übermensch* concept, with its dual structure of IM1) and IA1), should be viewed as Nietzsche's invention--an invention which emerges from his originality. Nietzsche places much value on the notions of invention and originality, and these notions provide the point of departure from which to cash out the *Übermensch* concept.

Nietzsche's interest in invention and originality begins early in his thought and continues throughout his mature period. The following four passages are significant not only for what they communicate but also for the context in which they appear.

For the origin of historical culture, and of its absolutely radical antagonism to the spirit of a new time and a "modern consciousness," must itself be known by a historical process. History must solve the problem of history, science must turn its sting against itself. This threefold "must" is the imperative of the "new spirit," if it is really to contain something new, powerful, vital, and original.⁷

Originality--Not that a man sees something new as the first one to do so, but that he sees something old, familiar, seen but overlooked by

⁷Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, p. 50, Sec. VIII.

everyone, *as though it were new*, is what distinguishes true originality. The first discoverer is usually that quite commonplace and mindless fantasist--chance.⁸

Men of chance--The essential part of every invention is the work of chance, but most men never encounter this chance.⁹

Originality--What is originality? *To see* something that has no name as yet and hence cannot be mentioned although it stares us all in the face. The way men usually are, it takes a name to make something visible for them. Those with originality have for the most part also assigned names.¹⁰

These remarks on the notions of invention and originality address directly Nietzsche's concerns and his project for dealing with these concerns. If we can discern the content of his originality and the nature of his invention, then the *Übermensch* concept becomes much clearer. First, the issue of originality will be addressed.

In addition to considering himself a profound thinker, Nietzsche certainly saw himself as original, and there is some justification for agreeing with him, at least on this last point. Does Nietzsche have in mind some thing, or notion, or idea that "stares us all in the face" and yet must be named so that we will notice it? I argue that Nietzsche wishes us to abandon certainty and embrace uncertainty. That is,

⁸Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, Vol. II, "Assorted Opinions and Maxims," p. 261, Sec. 200.

⁹Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, p. 167, Sec. 363.

¹⁰Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 218, Sec. 261.

Nietzsche implores us to live *this* life, to love *this* life and to dismiss as "life's nausea and disgust with life" all that is otherworldly. Nietzsche is quite explicit on these matters:

Hatred of "the world," condemnation of the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a beyond invented the better to slander this life, at bottom a craving for the nothing, for the end, for respite, for "the sabbath of sabbaths"--all this always struck me, no less than the unconditional will of Christianity to recognize *only* moral values, as the most dangerous and uncanny form of all possible forms of a "will to decline"--at the very least a sign of abysmal sickness, weariness, discouragement, exhaustion, and the impoverishment of life.¹¹

Nietzsche's originality stems from his ability, his desire to look at life and the living of life in a different manner, in a manner that human beings "know" about but refuse to acknowledge. Nietzsche asks human beings to abandon all those actions and ideas that represent an impoverishment of life, all those habits and customs that are in actuality a manifestation of "life's nausea and disgust with life."¹² Nietzsche's thoughts concerning life and action for life deserve the characterization of originality not because people have never entertained such thoughts of affirmation, but because "these thoughts are out of season."¹³ Nietzsche's originality manifests itself in both positive and negative ways, in ideas that are both creative and destructive.

¹¹Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 23, Sec. 5, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism."

¹²Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 23, Sec. 5, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism."

¹³Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History for Life*, p. 4, "Preface."

Nietzsche soon realizes that his originality, his new and exciting way of looking at life, is not enough to jolt man out of his mediocrity. The institutions, ideas, concepts, and habits of human beings exert a strong influence over them and force them into a herd mentality and a herd morality. Their metaphysical systems, religions, moralities, and quest for knowledge that is only scientific leads them into an attitude of "hatred of the world." These human beings are known by the concept "herd" or "the last man" and they are all too prevalent. "The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small . . . the last man lives longest."¹⁴ And, "The earth is full of the superfluous; life is spoiled by the all-too-many."¹⁵ The question arises, why does the last man live longest? Why is herd mentality and herd morality so pervasive?

Nietzsche answers these questions early in his philosophical thought. His answers are several, but one stands out from the rest.

But what is it that constrains the individual to fear his neighbour, to think and act like a member of a herd, and to have no joy in himself? Modesty, perhaps, in a few rare cases. With the great majority it is indolence, inertia, in short that tendency to laziness of which the traveller spoke. He is right: men are even lazier than they are timid, and fear most of all the inconveniences with which unconditional honesty and nakedness would burden them.¹⁶

¹⁴Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 129, Part I, "Zarathustra's Prologue."

¹⁵Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 156, Part I, "On the Preachers of Death."

¹⁶Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, in *Untimely Meditations*, p. 127, Sec. 1.

If the main problem with mankind is laziness, Nietzsche provides advice on overcoming the problem, a corrective of sorts.

The man who does not wish to belong to the mass needs only to cease taking himself easily; let him follow his conscience, which calls to him: "Be your self! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself."¹⁷

Nietzsche's explanation for the world weariness of the herd is that human beings are lazy. This laziness is not physical, but arises from within the individual. The person who "takes himself easily" is the person who pities, the person who subscribes to slave morality, the person of *ressentiment*, the person who refuses to go beyond good and evil. Many human beings are aware of their situation and find it deplorable. But this brings us back to Nietzsche's conception of originality: to see something that no one else sees yet it stares them in the face. Human beings are aware of their plight; moreover, on some level at least, they "know" how to escape their predicament. The temptation to deny this knowledge and engage in such practices as *ressentiment* is great; indeed, human beings are in the habit of "taking the easy way out." "In order to predict the behavior of ordinary men, we must assume that they always expend the least possible amount of intellect to free themselves from a disagreeable situation."¹⁸ Mankind is in a disagreeable

¹⁷Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, in *Untimely Meditations*, p. 127, Sec 1.

¹⁸Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, p. 243, Sec. 551, "Man Alone with Himself."

situation, both from Nietzsche's standpoint and from the standpoint of mankind itself. This situation involving world-denying and life-denying behaviors and attitudes must change.

The instrument of change, the invention that springs from Nietzsche's originality, is the concept of the *Übermensch* and of *Übermenschlichkeit*. Nietzsche has Zarathustra proclaim, "I teach you the *Übermensch*," thereby naming his instrument of change, his invention. Unfortunately, Zarathustra's proclamations concerning the *Übermensch* come much more easily than Nietzsche's explication of the concept. Perhaps we should remember that Nietzsche accuses mankind of laziness and recommends that human beings cease taking themselves easily; that is, human beings need to work to understand this concept. However, there are occasions in which Nietzsche's discussion of the *Übermensch* is clear and straightforward. We return to the problem--perhaps puzzle would be a better term--of why Nietzsche is at times clear and specific about his concept, while at other times he seems to go out of his way to be vague.

I argue that the concept of the *Übermensch* can best be understood if we realize that the concept has two components. One component is IM1) and the other is IA1). The former component is prescriptive and details a set of character traits, virtues, and behaviors to which some human beings could aspire. The latter component is diagnostic and represents certain attitudes that human beings could possess toward life. The two components merge to form that concept which

Nietzsche has named the *Übermensch*. The *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit* represent effortless, creative affirmation of life and world.

My interpretation has one advantage that should be immediately obvious: the problem or puzzle of why some of Nietzsche's comments regarding the *Übermensch* are clear and specific while many other of his remarks are vague is now solved. The very nature of the *Übermensch* concept, with its dual constituents of IM1) and IA1), demands both clarity and vagueness. That is, Nietzsche is not inconsistent, nor careless, nor malicious when he makes comments that are radically different from one another regarding the *Übermensch*. When Nietzsche writes "The antithesis of the *Übermensch* is the last man: I created him conjointly with the former," he has in mind that component of the *Übermensch* I designate IM1). When, on the other hand, Nietzsche writes, "Having created the *Übermensch*, I arranged the great veil of becoming around him and let the sun stand over him at noon," he has in mind that aspect of his concept I designate IA1). The contrast to be marked, then, is between a certain set of character traits and behaviors on the one hand and the holding of certain attitudes toward life on the other. Throughout this study I have attempted to delineate exactly these character traits and virtues.

Nietzsche's criticisms of and objections to the human, all-too-human present him with the opportunity to delineate, recommend, and extol certain character traits, virtues, and behaviors that are the antithesis of those who are members of the herd.

When we consider Nietzsche's description of the last man, we begin to glean an idea of what Nietzsche has in mind by his concept of the *Übermensch*. The last man:

derives his perceptual set from the herd. He understands his will to power in terms of the will-to-power of the other. He is other-directed. Even his attempts at excellence, his strivings, are understood in the context of and in terms of the achievements and valuations of others. . . . He dreams the dreams of the other; lives the life of the other.¹⁹

Such is the description of the last man, the man of the herd, the slave in Nietzsche's slave morality. These qualities represent for Nietzsche everything loathsome, despicable, world-denying, and life-denying. Out of the human, all-too-human arises Nietzsche's *Übermensch* who, as a realizable ideal model of perfectibility, represents everything the last man is not. In the following passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche discusses the character traits, virtues, and behaviors that are in opposition to the character traits, virtues, and behaviors of the last man. This passage also serves as an introduction to the second component of the *Übermensch* concept, the idealized attitude.

Whoever has endeavoured with some enigmatic longing, as I have, to think pessimism through to its depths and to liberate it from the half-Christian, half-German narrowness and simplicity in which it has finally presented itself to our century, namely, in the form of Schopenhauer's philosophy; whoever has really, with an Asiatic and supra-Asiatic eye, looked into, down into the most world-denying of all possible ways of thinking--beyond good and evil and no longer, like the Buddha and Schopenhauer, under the spell and delusion of morality--may just thereby, without really meaning to do so, have opened his eyes to the opposite ideal: the ideal of the most high-

¹⁹Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, p. 33.

spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably *da capo*--not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle, and not only to a spectacle but at bottom to him who needs precisely this spectacle--and who makes it necessary because again and again he needs himself--and makes himself necessary--What? And this wouldn't be--*circulus vitiosus deus*?²⁰

In Chapter III I argued that Kaufmann's description of the *Übermensch* serves as the best example, the most easily defensible version, of the IM1) reading. Given my previous comments concerning the ideal model, Kaufmann's description bears repeating.

The *Übermensch* . . . is the "Dionysian" man who is depicted under the name of Goethe at the end of the *Götzen-Dämmerung* (IX, 49). He has overcome his animal nature, organized the chaos of his passions, sublimated his impulses, and given style to his character.²¹

In section 49 of *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche describes and esteems those human beings who are tolerant "not out of weakness, but out of strength," human beings for whom "everything is redeemed and affirmed," and human beings who possess a faith that is "the highest of all possible faiths."²² These descriptions constitute the first component of the *Übermensch* concept. The *Übermensch* in this context is a realizable ideal model of human perfectibility which human beings could attain. However, this is only one part of the *Übermensch* concept.

²⁰Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 68, Sec. 56, "What is Religious."

²¹Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 316.

²²Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 103, Sec 49.

In the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* quoted above Nietzsche describes a world-affirming human being who "wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity." Here Nietzsche supplements his list of specific character traits and virtues with the notion of attitude and having an attitude toward life. In this instance Nietzsche is discussing the concept of eternal recurrence. The eternal recurrence is part of what I have in mind when I argue that the *Übermensch* concept consists also of an idealized attitude component. The theme of desiring what was and is appears throughout Nietzsche's writings. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche writes: "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity."²³

I argued in Chapter IV and VI that the "idealized attitude" reading of the *Übermensch*, especially that subtype of the reading designated IA1), holds a great deal of promise in understanding the *Übermensch* concept. Especially promising is that formulation of the attitude reading by Magnus in which the *Übermensch* is interpreted as the "nonspecific representation, the underdetermined embodiment, of a certain attitude toward life and world." Certainly the eternal recurrence is an important part of the idealized attitude constituent of the *Übermensch*, but it is only one part.

My version of the idealized attitude reading, IA1), makes the following claim: the *Übermensch* is a representation of a fluid, indefinite conceptual or

²³Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 258, Sec. 10, "Why I am so Clever."

psychological form of life possessed by at least some human beings in the past, and perhaps the present, and at least ideally to be possessed by (and ideally by even *more*) human beings in the future. This reading stands in stark contrast to IA2) and IA3) in that realizable ideal attitudes are possible to hold and probably have been held by human beings. Subscribing to eternal recurrence is one possible conceptual or psychological form of life in which human beings, rare human beings, can participate; but the eternal recurrence is only one attitude among several to which the *Übermensch* might subscribe.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche writes: "The existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon."²⁴ Nietzsche discusses aesthetics, art, and the artist throughout his works and holds the function of art in high esteem. "Beginning with art, one can more easily move on to a truly liberating philosophical science."²⁵ By "philosophical science" Nietzsche does not mean to imply rigid scientific knowledge, but rather *fröhliche Wissenschaft*, gay science. One of the main functions of art and aesthetics is to combat metaphysical and scientific knowledge because they endorse actions and beliefs that are life-denying.

When Nietzsche implores us to live in the world as if the world were an aesthetic phenomenon he is asking us to view the world as a work of art. Works of

²⁴Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 22, Sec. 5, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism."

²⁵Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, p. 32, Sec. 27, "On First and Last Things."

art are not readily susceptible to stringent theories, observations, and explanations. For Nietzsche, theories are ugly. Theories drain all the pleasure and beauty from life. They take the human condition that is naturally filled with uncertainty and change and try to impose on it a state of being, a state of certainty. The theories of dogmatic philosophers and moralists ask human beings to do what is, in a sense, unnatural.

Once again we return to the issue of Nietzsche's emphasis on living creative lives, of living creatively in the world. Instead of discussing a set of specific character traits or virtues, we are discussing the issue of creative affirmation in the context of attitudes toward life. Nietzsche's aestheticism is an important part of the IA1) construct. Nietzsche understands the realm of the aesthetic as that which embraces the whole world and the whole of life.²⁶ Nietzsche desires that human beings live creative lives, that they live artistically. (Nietzsche's aestheticism and my understanding of it were discussed in Chapter V.)

The idealized attitude component of the *Übermensch* concept, unlike the ideal model constituent, is vague and more difficult to grasp and characterize. As a result, the *Übermensch* concept as a whole remains vague and susceptible to inferior interpretations. Those readers who are "easy on themselves" will not understand and

²⁶This notion of the aesthetic is discussed in Alan Megill's *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). See also Alan D. Schrift's *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

appreciate the *Übermensch* concept. Of course, misinterpretation and sloppy scholarship on the part of readers is not limited to Nietzsche; other philosophers suffer from this phenomenon as well. What is surprising is that Nietzsche anticipated the abuse his ideas would suffer. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche is quite specific regarding the manner in which this abuse will originate:

It is not easily possible to understand the blood of another: I hate reading idlers. Whoever knows the reader will henceforth do nothing for the reader. Another century of readers--and the spirit itself will stink. That everyone may learn to read, in the long run corrupts not only writing but also thinking.²⁷

Nietzsche predicts that he will be misunderstood by people who do not know how to read, reading idlers. Here Nietzsche is using reading in an equivocal sense: there is reading for the purpose of passing the time and there is reading for the purpose of understanding. That he will not be read for understanding is, according to Nietzsche, a consequence of the advent of mass education. Explicit in Nietzsche's remarks is the belief that as more and more people learn to read, fewer and fewer people will truly read. As fewer and fewer people truly read, fewer and fewer people will learn to master the ability to think and understand. As fewer and fewer people learn to think, language itself is made meaningless, and superficiality and mediocrity become the order of the day.

Behold the superfluous! They steal the works of the inventors and the treasures of the sages for themselves; "education" they call their theft

²⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 152, Part I, "On Reading and Writing."

--and everything turns to sickness and misfortune for them. Behold the superfluous! They are always sick; they vomit their gall and call it a newspaper. They devour each other and cannot even digest themselves. Behold the superfluous! They gather riches and become poorer with them. They want power and first the lever of power, much money--the impotent paupers!²⁸

Nietzsche's fears of a culture inhabited by superficial, mediocre people thinking superficial, mediocre thoughts and engaging in superficial, mediocre activities have been realized. These people comprise the herd of which Nietzsche speaks so frequently. These are the people for whom the concept slave morality applies and who practice revenge and *ressentiment*. Nietzsche is well aware that such people will attempt to read him and thereby misunderstand him. Nietzsche's precaution against such infringements takes the form of a mask behind which to hide his concepts and ideas. In a sense we might say that Nietzsche is forced to adopt a mask to thwart these readers and that this mask takes the form of the aphorism and

²⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 162, Part I, "On The New Idol." Much of my discussion on not reading well and Nietzsche's critique of mass education comes from Richard Lowell Howey, "Some Difficulties About Reading Nietzsche," *Nietzsche-Studien* 9(1979): 378-388. Howey's article is particularly instructive for those wishing a detailed introduction to how to read Nietzsche. Howey's discussion of the distinction between the two different kinds of reading is helpful for those wishing to analyze different interpretations of Nietzsche. "One could then say that for Nietzsche there is *das Lesen* which designates an authentic sense of reading, a kind of reading that necessarily involves interpretive understanding (*Verstehen*) and that there is *die Leserei* which is the mass consumption of intellectual trivia, the sort of reading that has as its primary object the filling up of time. And in a similar fashion there is *das Schreiben* and *die Schreiberei* and *das Denken* and *die Denkerei*," p. 380.

other styles of writing. Of course, there is a certain irony in this: Nietzsche's use of the aphorism in the hopes of dissuading reading idlers only attracts more of them.

Nietzsche's stylistic pluralism, while it may invite misinterpretation and misunderstanding, complements the *Übermensch* concept rather well. Nietzsche's idea of the *Übermensch* itself involves a plurality: the *Übermensch* recommends a personality structure with certain character traits and virtues, *and* it recommends a certain form of life composed of attitudes toward life and world. Perhaps in the final analysis the distinction between the two kinds of readings collapses; in some sense both interpretations need each other and both have something to contribute to understanding Nietzsche. As a matter of fact, Nietzsche scholarship in general might benefit from the collapse of two such influential readings. Taken separately, each interpretation has misled and confused the reader. The *Übermensch*, in its dual role of prescribing character traits and behaviors and representing the embodiment of the aesthetic attitude toward life, serves to remind us of the nature of the world and of life. It becomes the ultimate manifestation of Nietzsche's originality and his concern for cultures, societies, and the future of the human race. In a sense, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is his sign of life; it is his name for living life as completely, as authentically, and as joyously as possible. The *Übermensch* becomes Nietzsche's catch phrase for life affirmation. If we construe the *Übermensch* and *Übermenschlichkeit* in this manner, if we construe these concepts as both IM1) and

IA1), then we see that we must move beyond narrow interpretations and theories and work toward embracing a creative means of living in this world.

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