BAD CONSCIENCE

Nietzsche and Responsibility in Modernity

Justine McGill

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts
The University of Sydney

August 2004
Abstract

Bad Conscience: Nietzsche and Responsibility in Modernity

Nietzsche is a name not often invoked in relation to the topic of responsibility. This study reveals, however, that his work engages vigorously with the problem of responsibility in modernity on both the conceptual and methodological levels. In the concept of "bad conscience," Nietzsche presents a "dangerous and multi-coloured" alternative to the more monochrome varieties of self-consciousness which ground theories of individual responsibility in the work of other modern philosophers, such as Locke and Kant. The complexity of Nietzsche's approach to self-consciousness allows him to shed light on the range of interconnected practices of responsibility and irresponsibility that characterize modern life. It also raises pressing questions about the possibility and conditions of philosophy in modernity.

In grappling with "bad conscience" within the performative structures of his own thought, Nietzsche makes experimental use of methodological resources drawn from both the ancient and modern traditions of Western philosophy. In particular, this study examines Nietzsche's appropriation and "reinterpretation" of meditational methods which form part of the ancient philosophical "art of living," and which re-emerge in altered form, in the work of Descartes. In Nietzsche's writings, such methods are used to provoke and reflect upon the passions of "bad conscience," a dangerous practice which involves the risk of exacerbating this "illness," but which also promises to give birth to new insight and skill in confronting the problem of responsibility in modernity.

Significant secondary sources for the interpretation of Nietzsche presented here include the work of Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Klossowski, Alexander Nehamas, Michel Foucault, Georg Simmel and (in relation to Cartesian methodology) Amélie Oksenberg Rorty.
Acknowledgements

My supervisors, Paul Redding and Paul Patton, have both been vital sources of inspiration, guidance and practical assistance to me during the preparation of this work. Paul Patton’s work on Nietzsche’s “problem of the actor” was an important starting point for this study, while the influence of Paul Redding’s work on Kant and the role of affect in thought has enriched and shaped the development of my understanding both of Nietzsche and of the practice of philosophy. I have also benefited from countless suggestions from each regarding points of argument and useful literature. On the practical side, this thesis was largely written on a trusty laptop computer inherited from Paul Patton, who also showed great generosity in creating opportunities for me to present conference papers and study overseas. The resources accumulated in the course of such experiences would never have resulted in the completion of this study, however, without the encouragement and detailed supervision of Paul Redding.

For the various parts they have played in bringing this work to fruition, my heartfelt thanks also go to: my mother, Virginia McGill, who inspired me by her example, and accommodated me, in more senses than one, during the writing of this work; my superb “team” of proof-readers: Virginia McGill, Tessa Hockly, Anthony Blair and Bruce Williams (it was a great pleasure to be corrected by each of them); Robert Mowbray for his seemingly infinite flexibility and understanding with regard to requests for leave from work; Ashley Baksa for his technical genius; members of the Philosophy Department and fellow graduate students at the University of Sydney for collegiate support; and other friends and family for alternately cracking the whip and luring me “into decadence” as the occasion required, and also for their generosity. Special mention must be made of Maryann Keady, Heinz Schweers and the ergonomic keyboard of Tessa Hockly and Bill Langevad. Philosophical discussions with Justin Tauber and Johanna Gullberg were an especially pleasurable element in the creation of this work. Warm thanks for various forms of guidance, support and assistance also go to John McGill, Sally Baksa, Gavin McGill, Anthony Blair, Dean Bell, Tamara Joseph, Olivier Jacobi, Venerable Kovidha, Venerable Tejadhammo, Peter Wales and the members of the Smiling Heart Sangha.
# Table of contents

Abbreviations .................................................................................................................. v

Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1

Irresponsibility ................................................................................................................. 10
  1.1 Political irresponsibility ....................................................................................... 15
  1.2 Personal irresponsibility .................................................................................... 19
  1.3 Social irresponsibility ....................................................................................... 37

Method in Madness ......................................................................................................... 45
  2.1 The philosopher as actor .................................................................................... 48
  2.2 Axis of delirium: Klossowski’s reading of Nietzsche ........................................ 53
  2.3 Nietzsche as “teacher” ....................................................................................... 57
  2.4 The art of living: Nehamas’ reading of Nietzsche ............................................. 62
  2.5 An untimely meditation upon history ................................................................. 68
  2.6 Nietzsche in the role of “historian” ................................................................... 75

Responsibility ................................................................................................................... 85
  3.1 Sovereign responsibility and Kantian ideals ...................................................... 88
  3.2 Locke’s theory of personal identity ................................................................... 93
  3.3 Nietzsche’s genealogy of memory ..................................................................... 99
  3.4 (Lockean) accountability vs. (Kantian) responsibility ..................................... 103
  3.5 Living with the guilt of “bad conscience” .......................................................... 110

Self-consciousness ......................................................................................................... 117
  4.1 Locke, Kant and Nietzsche on self-consciousness ............................................. 118
  4.2 Nietzsche, Descartes, and the method of meditation ........................................ 130
  4.3 Foucault’s reading of the Meditations ............................................................... 146
  4.4 A Nietzschean reading of the Cartesian Meditations ................................ ....... 154

Passion ............................................................................................................................ 160
  5.1 Descartes and Nietzsche: two very passionate and dark creatures (compared to fish) 161
  5.2 Grand passion and Nietzschean meditation ..................................................... 165
  5.3 Into treacherous waters: Nietzschean misogyny and anti-Semitism .............. 180
  5.4 The eternal return of passion .......................................................................... 188

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 212

Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 218
**Abbreviations**

All abbreviations refer to works of Nietzsche.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td><em>The Anti-Christ.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td><em>Beyond Good and Evil.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td><em>The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td><em>Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EH</td>
<td><em>Ecce Homo.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GM</td>
<td><em>On the Genealogy of Morals.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td><em>The Gay Science, with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH</td>
<td><em>Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSA</td>
<td><em>Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TI</td>
<td><em>Twilight of the Idols.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UM</td>
<td><em>Untimely Meditations.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td><em>Thus Spoke Zarathustra.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>