BAD CONSCIENCE

Nietzsche and Responsibility in Modernity

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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.

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### Abbreviations

All abbreviations refer to works of Nietzsche.

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Introduction

Responsibility in modernity as a philosophical problem

Nietzsche’s work raises the problem of responsibility on many levels. This statement may provoke a wry smile or weary grimace: perhaps more so than in the case of any other philosopher, readers of Nietzsche have been concerned to defend or judge his work in terms of its “responsibility” - or more often, the lack of it. In the case of those who see value in Nietzsche’s thought, this is frequently a matter of self-justification or self-preservation (impulses regarded with contempt by Nietzsche himself): it involves the desire to establish the responsible nature of one’s own interest in the work of a thinker who was once lauded by ideologues of the Nazi movement, or to ward off the spectre of Nietzschean madness. As Deleuze puts it, “Nietzsche’s posthumous fate has been burdened by two ambiguities: was his thought a forerunner of fascist thinking? And was this thought itself really philosophy or was it an over-violent poetry, made up of capricious aphorisms and pathological fragments?”

The present study does not escape entirely from the impulse to lay down this burden of ambiguity in favour of a “lighter” account of Nietzsche as a thinker, who, if not always responsible, is at least driven by a philosophical “will to responsibility.” However, its primary concern is neither to judge nor to defend Nietzsche, but rather to contemplate the ways in which his writings engage with the philosophical problem of responsibility in modernity. This does not imply a disavowal of the evaluative and creative aspects of the interpretation presented here: I follow Nietzsche in supposing that these are essential components of all contemplative work. It does, however, imply an effort to embrace the ambiguity of

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Nietzsche’s relation to responsibility, not as a burden, but as a challenge and a source of insight.

Irresponsibility and the role of the philosopher

Responsibility in modernity is a philosophical problem in two senses. It is a problem which has been analysed by modern philosophers, but it is also a problem for the very practice of philosophy in this era. Each of these versions of the “problem of responsibility” emerges vividly in Nietzsche’s writings, and the two occupy roughly equal importance in this study.

On the one hand, we shall consider Nietzsche’s analysis of various forms of responsibility and irresponsibility, and the relation of his ideas on these topics to those of other modern philosophers; on the other hand, Nietzsche’s vision of the problem of responsibility as it is encountered by “the philosopher” in modernity will lead us to investigate the methodological resources he draws upon in grappling with this problem in his own practice of philosophy. The difficulty of separating these two strands of Nietzsche’s work will quickly become evident.

Analysing the moral malaise of modern life from the perspective of the philosopher-physician, Nietzsche provides a striking diagnosis of the disorder of irresponsibility which he sees as endemic at every level of modern life: political, personal and social. He also proposes a demanding practice of “self-responsibility” as an agonistic response to the prevailing modern habit of living “very fast, very irresponsibly.” This response is closely associated with the “will to responsibility” which in Nietzsche’s view places the philosopher in contradiction to the prevailing values of his or her time. His claim that a will to responsibility is a defining feature of the philosopher in modernity does not amount to a transparent assertion of the responsible character of his own philosophical will, however. Rather, Nietzsche’s acute perception of modern decadence leads him to raise doubts about whether the type of “the philosopher” is in fact possible today. He suggests that if the rare bird, or
rather, rare butterfly of the philosophical spirit is possible in modernity, it will need to take on the motley of other forms in order to pursue its dangerous task: the modern philosopher must also be an actor.

To identify the philosopher as an actor is, however, to risk confusing this type with that of the typical late modern subject who is convinced of his or her capacity to take on almost any role. On Nietzsche’s analysis, such cocky “role faith” is a primary cause of the disorder of “modern irresponsibility,” due to the rapid shifts of allegiance and personal identity it engenders. The idea that the philosopher who analyses this condition is also, by necessity, a species of actor takes this problem to the heart of philosophical method as Nietzsche understands and practices it. In terms of responsibility, what can (possibly) distinguish Nietzsche’s own “performances” - in a dazzling variety of roles - from those of the irresponsible modern “actor” he criticizes? Nietzsche indicates the beginning of an answer when he declares that “methods, one must repeat ten times, are the essential, as well as being the most difficult, as well as being that which has habit and laziness against it longest” (AC 59).

A partial genealogy of Nietzsche’s methods

To examine the methods that mark Nietzsche’s work as that of a philosopher as well as an actor is to follow a winding path that opens onto the history of Western philosophy. Being a lover of brief habits, and a thinker for whom the “terrible par excellence” would be “a life entirely devoid of habits, a life that would demand perpetual improvisation,” Nietzsche draws on the intellectual “habits” or methods of an abundance of philosophical (and literary) predecessors, although as he remarks gratefully, his “bouts of sickness” create “a hundred backdoors” through which he can escape from habits which threaten to become enduring (GS 295). This fickleness gives rise to the suspicion that possibly Nietzsche is only ever acting the
part of the philosopher; on the other hand, it can be seen as evidence of a rigorously experimental approach to philosophical methodology.

The task of tracing the complete genealogy of Nietzsche’s methods would be an enormous one; in this study, I consider only two of the established philosophical methods which are “reinterpreted to new ends” in Nietzsche’s work. They have been selected on the basis that they represent two exemplary models of philosophical responsibility, one drawn from the ancient world, the other from the dawn of modernity. The first is the Stoic “art of living” as it is recorded in the work of Epictetus. This form of philosophy as a way of life has the unquestionably responsible goal of bringing human thought and action into harmony with the eternal order of Logos. Its structures appear, in altered but clearly recognisable form, in Nietzsche’s early theory of history “in the service of life.” In Nietzsche’s mature work of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the Stoic lineage of Nietzsche’s “historical” method is still discernible, but has undergone a metamorphosis which reflects the delirious conditions of life in an age in which actors “become the real masters” (GS 356).

The second of Nietzsche’s methodological predecessors considered here is Descartes, whose method of philosophical meditation ushers in a distinctly modern concept of philosophical responsibility. For Descartes, the self-reflective individual mind is the locus of intellectual integrity and the autonomous foundation for the scientific pursuit of knowledge. It provides the metaphysical seed from which the tree of philosophical truth grows. By contrast, Sarah Kofman finds in Nietzsche’s philosophy an *arbre fantastique*: “Nietzsche’s tree is no longer really a tree: its soil is no longer secure, nor are its ‘high’ or its ‘low’; it grows in all directions and at all times.”2 As Alan D. Schrift puts it: “Rather than seeking the sturdy roots of the Cartesian tree in order to legitimize its fruits, Nietzsche prefers to play among the branches of

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this fantastic tree, tasting all the varied fruits that it brings forth.” 3 Among the ripest of these, on my reading, is a particularly fruity figure Nietzsche calls the “sovereign individual,” proud possessor of an “independent, protracted will and the right to make promises” (GM II.2). I argue, however, that Nietzsche is equally interested in the subterranean aspects of the Cartesian tree: the transformation of Cartesian methods in Nietzsche’s work comes about precisely because he is relentless in digging up the roots of the modern capacity for “responsible,” autonomous thought, seeking to show that they extend deep into the dark and blood-soaked soil of human history, or “prehistory.”

**Philosophical concepts of responsibility in modernity**

In the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche brings certain gnarled roots of human consciousness and conscience to the surface by telling the “long story of how responsibility originated” (GM II.2). Approached with the problem of responsibility in modernity in mind, this essay can be read as an incisive exposé of the genealogical relations between two dominant and competing modern philosophical visions of responsibility: those of Locke and Kant. Nietzsche is flamboyant in his endorsement of a Kantian ideal of responsibility based on autonomy, represented by the “sovereign individual.” He is equally if not more extravagant in his rejection of the culture of guilt and punishment he associates with Christianity and which I shall argue is closely connected to Locke’s concept of personal responsibility based on the operation of memory. Implicit in Nietzsche’s presentation of this material, however, is the suggestion that the Kantian ideal of autonomous responsibility is genealogically dependent upon the guilt of the Lockean person, for whom individual responsibility is a form of self-imposed accountability. Both versions of responsibility are grounded in what Nietzsche calls “bad conscience,” a form of consciousness which, on my

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reading, combines the related and ambiguous capacities of the “actor” and the “ascetic.”
These are the two human types which emerge with the rise of self-consciousness.

*Self-consciousness and the method of meditation*

In both Locke and Kant, the concept of self-consciousness plays a fundamental role in relation to responsibility. Although their understandings of this concept differ dramatically, I shall argue that for both thinkers self-consciousness is equivalent to self-possession: it reflexively defines and guarantees the existence of a responsible subject. For Descartes, on the other hand, “I think” and “I am” are two separate propositions, which means, among other things, that the problem of responsibility - and of certain foundations for knowledge - does not automatically dissolve into the solution of self-consciousness. Instead, a method is required to establish a secure relationship between thought and existence. In Descartes’ hands, the method of meditation famously leads his readers to discover for themselves the indubitable truth of the *cogito*. This principle suggests a static, rock-like relation between the consciousness and existence of the “I,” thus providing a foundation which allows the construction, not only of the Cartesian house of knowledge, but also of the increasingly elegant concepts of self-consciousness erected by subsequent philosophers. The impression of stability it creates is belied, however, by the more dynamic form of self-consciousness presupposed by the methods used to establish it.

The investigation of the operation and sources of Cartesian meditation will bring us briefly back to the Stoic “art of living,” for meditational methods play a vital role in this philosophical tradition. During the medieval period, these ancient practices are preserved and slowly altered within the constraints of Christian culture. In the Cartesian *Meditations*, they might be said to break out of this religious cocoon to re-emerge in a distinctly philosophical form, but one which is “new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and pregnant with a future.” (cf. GM II.16) I argue that the future prepared by Descartes’ appropriation of
the meditational tradition includes not only the development of a new scientific form of consciousness, but also Nietzsche’s own creative appropriation of meditational methods to expose and interrogate the “bad conscience” which accompanies this modern achievement.

In Nietzsche’s hands, meditational methods are not employed in an effort to close the gap between consciousness and the “incomparably personal, unique and individual” actions that underlie it. He does not aim to guarantee the foundations of knowledge - or of responsibility. Instead, he uses such methods to provoke and reflect upon the passions which surge and subside in the space of “bad conscience” which stretches between consciousness and action. Nietzsche is not interested in building a philosophical house of knowledge. Rather, he wishes to learn the secrets of the passionate waves which are capable of undermining or flooding such structures. Some of these are dark secrets indeed: the passions provoked in the course of “Nietzschean meditations” include those of misogyny and anti-Semitism, elements which dramatically confirm Nietzsche’s description of the philosophical spirit in modernity as “dangerous.”

This aspect of Nietzsche’s work raises the problem of responsibility in a particularly confronting form, demonstrating, as no simple description could do, why responsibility is a problem for the modern type of the “actor.” Nietzsche’s meditations on “bad conscience” do more than expose, and risk exacerbating, the dangerous disorder of “modern irresponsibility,” however: the butterfly spirit of his philosophy is many-coloured, as well as dangerous. The colours of Nietzschean philosophy are perhaps most beautifully refracted in his teaching of the idea of “eternal return.” This study concludes with a reading of this teaching as a profound meditation upon responsibility and passion in a time of “bad conscience.”
A note on method

The methods of interpretation employed in this study find their precursors in the work of many previous interpreters of Nietzsche, in particular Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Klossowski, Alexander Nehamas, Michel Foucault and Georg Simmel. I have also been inspired by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty’s analysis of Cartesian method, and only temporarily crushed by her warning that: “[o]nly an intrepid, wildly courageous, and probably doomed philosopher would launch herself with an essay on philosophical methodology.” Nietzsche, of course, gives less “responsible” advice, famously teaching that “the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is - to live dangerously!” (GS 283).

The notion that to engage in philosophical methodology is to “live dangerously” lends this study a somewhat unexpected air of glamour and excitement; in reading Nietzsche, I have been more consistently conscious of a “will to responsibility” which demands the critical appraisal not only of concepts but also of the methods used to create them. This will is not merely mine: it emerges powerfully from Nietzsche’s finely crafted writings. The dramatic and contradictory qualities of his style defy any attempt to read his work without taking the question of method into account. This study aims to show that it is only in doing so that one can fully appreciate the remarkable manner in which Nietzsche contributes to what Rorty calls the “continuous conversation” which sustains “genuine philosophy,” and the relevance of that conversation to contemporary practices and conceptions of responsibility.

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5Because this study raises questions concerning Nietzsche’s own “will to responsibility” as a philosopher and a writer, or “performer” of philosophical ideas, it includes only occasional and supporting reference to texts which Nietzsche did not himself prepare for publication. In particular, the collection published as The Will to Power is disregarded, except insofar as it has influenced the secondary literature drawn upon here. (Klossowski, in particular, makes extensive use of this material in developing his reading of Nietzsche.)
Irresponsibility

The entire West has lost those instincts out of which institutions grow, out of which the future grows: perhaps nothing goes so much against the grain of its ‘modern spirit’ as this. One lives for today, one lives very fast - one lives very irresponsibly: it is precisely this which one calls ‘freedom.’ (T, “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 39)

This chapter reports the diagnosis of a modern ethical disorder. A proposed form of self-administered treatment for this condition will also be considered. As will become evident, however, the treatment referred to is best understood as a manifestation of the disorder, rather than a likely cure for it. Symptoms associated with the disorder include:

- feelings of isolation and loneliness
- depression
- a sense of helplessness
- anxiety linked to feelings of guilt
- self-destructive and masochistic behaviours
- mood swings
- apathy
- weariness
- over-excitability
- cowardliness
- pettiness
- smugness - also exaggerated assessment of one’s own capacities (the idea that one can “manage almost any role”)
- marriage breakdown, or inability to form long-term relationships
Central to the disorder is the failure or inability to take or meet responsibilities, both personal and political. Sufferers also complain of a lack of passion, or alternatively the sense that moments of passion, although intense, are fleeting and ultimately without meaning.

I shall refer to this condition as “modern irresponsibility.” There is reason to believe that it is related to the well-documented disorder of “modern nihilism.” However, the symptoms of modern irresponsibility may be observed in individuals who would reject the diagnosis of “nihilist.” Insofar as the two conditions overlap, the diagnosis of modern irresponsibility also represents a significant reinterpretation of the relevant symptoms, seeking to explain them primarily in terms of the practices and experiences, rather than the consciously-held beliefs or values of the subjects affected.

*The physician and his methods*

The “physician” chiefly responsible for the diagnosis of modern irresponsibility as it will be discussed here is Friedrich Nietzsche. The subject suffering this disorder is modern man, as seen through the lens of his philosophy. The question of whether and to what extent “modern man” includes “modern woman” will be examined as we make our way through the diagnosis. The complexity of this question relates to the fact that Nietzsche himself occupies an ambivalent position with respect to the condition. On the one hand, he approaches it as a philosopher, proposing an analysis of the complex of symptoms displayed by the generic object of his study: modern man (which potentially includes modern woman). On the other hand, he is himself a modern man and thus susceptible to the disorder. This gives him a subjective understanding of its effects, born of personal (and specifically male) experience. Nietzsche sees this dual perspective, or ability to reverse perspectives, as a distinct advantage and the basis of his diagnostic method: “Looking from the perspective of the sick toward healthier concepts and values and, conversely, looking again from the fullness and self-
assurance of a rich life down into the secret work of the instinct of decadence - in this I have had the longest training, my truest experience” (EH “Why I Am So Wise,” 1).

In accordance with this “training,” the style of Nietzsche’s account of modern irresponsibility shifts between epidemiological analysis and what appears to be more a symptomatic expression of the problems associated with the disorder than any objective appraisal or explanation of them.7 This may be seen as undesirable, from a scientific point of view. However, it is to some extent inevitable. The disorder of modern irresponsibility is a problem internal to modern Western culture. It is not a foreign phenomenon in which one might take an idle interest, but a state which demands attention because in varying degrees it affects us all. Our susceptibility to modern irresponsibility, and not only Nietzsche’s, must therefore be acknowledged and kept in mind while studying the condition.

This might sound like the blind leading the blind - worse, the irresponsible leading the irresponsible. However, any project of self-analysis poses similar difficulties. In addition, to the extent that this inquiry has a practical aim of responding to the suffering involved in the condition, rather than merely observing it, it is arguable that some degree of personal experience of the disorder is ethically indispensable if this response is to be based in subjective understanding and not merely technical capability, or an unavowed reaction of pity or fear. The methodological problem of how to establish an effective analytic distance, while simultaneously maintaining an appropriate empathic proximity to the condition, is one that must arise for the physician in diagnosing and treating any disorder. It is particularly acute in this instance, given the danger of simply compounding the condition of modern irresponsibility in the process of analysing it. What role ought personal experience to play in an inquiry of this type? How can the philosopher-physician or reader’s own capacity for

7As Daniel Conway puts it, “Nietzsche is the first serious critic of modernity to acknowledge his own complicity in the cultural crisis that he reveals and attempts to address.” Daniel W. Conway, Nietzsche’s Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 2.
irresponsibility be recognised without immediately undermining the integrity of his or her
diagnosis or understanding of the condition of modern irresponsibility? These are questions
which will recur in the course of this study (if not eternally). However, it would be premature
to attempt to address them fully before having discussed the disorder itself in any detail.

As intimated earlier, symptoms associated with modern irresponsibility affect performance in
both the political and personal spheres of life, with symptoms characteristic of the disorder
affecting performance in both areas. To begin with, however, it will be convenient to consider
the political and the personal aspects of modern irresponsibility as distinct although related
problems. The convenience of this approach consists in the fact that it will be familiar to the
reader, since to divide responsibilities according to whether they relate to public or to private
life is typical of the way responsibility is understood in the context of modern liberal
democracy. This understanding, although overwhelmingly dominant, is not without its critics,
however. In recent times feminists, in particular, have challenged the division between public
and private, and raised questions about the effects of conceptualising responsibility in this
way. Such work suggests that if responsibility has become a problem in modernity, the
strong tendency to compartmentalize responsibilities according to a perceived divide between
the public and the private spheres may be a contributing factor in the disorder, or at least a
barrier to understanding it.

A second problem with dividing responsibilities in this way is the fact that the notion of a
“public/private” distinction is not a simple one. In its classical form, the distinction refers to a
division between two institutional domains: the private domain of the household and the
public domain of the body politic. This is the sense in which Aristotle defines it in Book 1 of
the Politics. In modernity, on the other hand, it is most often taken to refer to the liberal

8For an overview of the considerable body literature in this area, see Susan B. Boyd,
“Challenging the Public/Private Divide: An Overview,” Challenging the Public/Private
Divide: Feminism, Law, and Public Policy, ed. Susan B. Boyd (Toronto, Buffalo, London:
University of Toronto Press, 1997) 3-33.
distinction between the political and the social. This version of the “public/private” distinction emerges in the work of the modern contract theorists. In their vision, the “private” loses its previously clear institutional basis. As Daniela Gobetti puts it, “[t]he contours of this private domain do not coincide with any particular institution - the family, the economy, the church, and so forth - but are in constant flux, because they depend on the partially unpredictable activities in which the person chooses to engage, and on the impact which these activities have on the lives and rights of others.”

The distinction then undergoes yet another modification. From the Romantic perspective which has been incorporated by many contemporary liberals, it is used to indicate a division between the social and the personal or intimate. In combination, the two modern versions of the public-private distinction yield a vision of modern life in the form of a triptych, comprising the political, the social and the personal. If this point of view is accepted, it suggests that to treat all responsibility as either political or personal is to ignore the crucial (and widely neglected) modern question of how the concept of responsibility applies to the burgeoning domain of social life. This overview of the disorder of modern irresponsibility will therefore conclude with a discussion of “social irresponsibility” as Nietzsche understands it. In all three domains, however, the focus will be on the individual’s experience of irresponsibility.

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1.1 Political irresponsibility

_symptom: feelings of isolation and loneliness_

To his famous definition of man as a “political animal” Aristotle recognised two exceptions: “Any one who by his nature and not simply by ill-luck has no state is either too bad or too good, either subhuman or superhuman - he is like the war-mad man condemned in Homer’s words as ‘having no family, no law, no home’; for he who is such by nature is mad on war: he is a non-cooperator like an isolated piece in a game of draughts.” In modernity, in Nietzsche’s view, these exceptions have become the rule; modern man is not a political but an “isolated” animal, a “non-cooperator” who sees himself primarily as an individual, and only secondarily and accidentally as part of a greater political whole. If he is not “superhuman,” this means he is “subhuman” by Aristotle’s standard; in Nietzsche’s terminology, he is no longer a “political” but simply a “herd” animal.

The “isolation” which characterizes the apolitical individual is not the same in modernity as it was in the ancient world, however. Aristotle’s discussion suggests that the “non-cooperator” in Ancient Greece lacks the usual social and cultural connections as well as the political ties that bind human beings to one another. The modern “herd animal,” on the other hand, is not asocial, despite being apolitical. Where social and political life were inextricably intertwined in the ancient world, in modernity it becomes possible to take part in civil society without assuming any significant political responsibilities. The isolation of the modern “herd” animal is thus an isolation within society. It is the atomistic existence of the individual who, despite forming part of a social “herd,” nevertheless remains politically and personally isolated.  

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12 As Gobetti puts it: “The modern citizen is a moral, rather than a political animal. She is alone with her conscience, first, and her judgment later. She moves into the world not from within the massive walls of a premodern household, but from the fragile private world of her
symptom: cowardliness, pettiness, smugness

Nietzsche suggests that the modern experience of political alienation and isolation within the crowd is a result of institutional change, brought about by the liberal revolution. He argues that ancient and feudal societies were permeated by “the will to tradition, to authority, to centuries-long responsibility, to solidarity between succeeding generations backwards and forwards in infinitum” (TI “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 39). This spirit sustained the institutions which guaranteed responsibility in such societies - at the price of individual freedom. The struggle to overcome the constraints of this order and to establish new, liberal institutions initially represented a mighty promotion of freedom and the will to self-responsibility. However once established, says Nietzsche, liberal institutions “immediately cease to be liberal.” Rather than promoting either societal or individual responsibility, they “make small, cowardly and smug.” They cultivate bureaucratic pettiness and personal egoism: “it is the herd animal which triumphs with them every time” (TI, “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 38).

Marx provides a similar analysis of the effects of the liberal revolution in politics. Like Nietzsche, he points to a “flagrant contradiction” 13 between revolutionary practice and theory. Whilst the struggle to establish a new political community demands the heroic sacrifice of private interests and the punishment of egoism as a crime, paradoxically this is done in the name of what Marx calls “egoistic man.” The celebrated rights of man are based on a view of man as “an isolated monad” whose right to liberty boils down to “the right of self-interest.” 14 In breaking down the structures of feudal society, the political revolution

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14 Marx 40.
frees politics from its confusion with civil life, but it also emancipates civil society from politics. Civil society is not itself revolutionized or submitted to criticism, but is instead regarded as the natural foundation of the revolution. The liberal institutions won through heroic displays of what Nietzsche calls the “will to self-responsibility,” thus end by serving the “herd animal,” the egoistic bourgeois of civil society who is indifferent to the responsibilities of political life.

While Marx believes that this situation will be overcome by a future revolution of the proletariat, Nietzsche is skeptical about the socialist dream of a “free society” in which a strong sense of political responsibility, stretching into the distant future, might be renewed or created. In his view, the modern decline of institutions that once supported “centuries-long responsibility” is irreversible, not only because the old institutions cannot be saved or renewed, but because a society “in the old sense of that word” is no longer possible. “All of us are no longer material for a society; this is a truth for which the time has come” (GS 356).

**symptom: exaggerated assessment of one's own capacities**

In a passage of The Gay Science on “How things will become ever more ‘artistic’ in Europe,” Nietzsche suggests that modern man is well advanced along a road trodden before him by the Greek of the Periclean age: he has lost any sense of himself as permanently defined by his place in the social order, and has begun to improvise and experiment with his own identity, convinced that he “can manage almost any role” (GS 356). This contrasts with ages in which individuals believe in their predestination for a certain function in the life of their community, and unquestioningly carry on a way of life - a trade or profession, for example - which is usually handed down through generations within a family. In democratic ages this belief is displaced by what Nietzsche calls “role faith.” This way of thinking regards any particular way of making a living as a role that is chosen and can thus be cast aside or altered at the will
of the individual. It implies an artistic, but also personally responsible approach to one’s own identity.

The “rather odd” metamorphosis that Nietzsche sees taking place in modern life goes beyond the democratic conversion to “role faith,” however. Having discovered “how he is playing a role, and how he can be an actor” the individual “becomes an actor” (GS 356). At this point, “role faith” drops away. The “actor” is no longer concerned with the moral qualities of the roles he plays, but purely with the quality and success of his performance. Faith in the self as a substantial soul which bears the burden of political and personal responsibility for the roles it chooses to play gives way to a sense that this “soul” is “really” an actor whose genius is to perform skilfully in any role it is given or is able to create. The liberal “person” is displaced by what we might now call the postmodern “subject.”

Nietzsche is ambivalent about this transformation. On the one hand, it gives rise to the “most interesting” ages of history, when a diversity of “human flora and fauna” emerge which would have been suppressed in “more solid and limited ages.” On the other hand, this means that the human type of the “architect,” who possesses a genius for organization and the courage to make plans which encompass the distant future, is disadvantaged and finally made impossible. “For what is dying out is the fundamental faith that would enable us to calculate, to promise, to anticipate the future in plans of such scope, and to sacrifice the future to them - namely, the faith that man has value and meaning only insofar as he is a stone in a great edifice; and to that end he must be solid first of all, a “stone” - and above all not an actor!” (GS 356).

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One might say that what is dying out is the faith that allowed Aristotle to define man as a “political animal,” where political means something more than gregarious. The actor is a sociable animal, certainly, but he is not political. He cannot be relied upon to adhere to the common view of good and evil that Aristotle says “makes a household and a state.”\textsuperscript{16} We shall turn now from the state to the “household” and consider the effects of institutional change on personal relations in modernity. At this stage, unsurprisingly, women begin to appear in the discussion. To this point, I have followed Nietzsche and Aristotle in referring only to masculine subjects since I take it that their observations concerning “man’s” capacity for political responsibility relate literally to men. Along with challenges to the definition of man as a political animal, however, come challenges to the assumption that the responsible human is a male animal.

1.2 Personal irresponsibility

\textit{symptom: marriage breakdown, inability to form long-term relationships}

In the passage of \textit{Twilight of the Idols} where Nietzsche sets out his “\textit{Criticism of modernity}” he selects one institution in particular to illustrate his claim that “we are no longer fit” for the kind of responsibility ancient and feudal social institutions entail. “It is obvious,” he remarks, “that all sense has gone out of modern marriage: which is, however, no objection to marriage but to modernity.” He goes on to analyse marriage in terms of interlocking layers of responsibility: that of the man, the family and the society as a whole. On the level of the individual, the “rationale of marriage lay in the legal sole responsibility of the man.” On the next level, it lay in the family’s responsibility for “the selection of mates.” The fulfillment of this responsibility allowed the family to retain and enhance its power, influence and wealth “so as to prepare for protracted tasks, for a solidarity of instinct between the centuries.” Finally, marriage took its meaning from the capacity of the society as a whole to “\textit{stand}  

\textsuperscript{16}Aristotle, \textit{The Politics} 60 (1253a7).
security for itself to the most distant generations” (TI, “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 39).

Traditional marriage is presented in this passage as an institution that both expresses and forms an essential element of societal responsibility. Under modern conditions it has lost its meaning, according to Nietzsche. While exclusive male responsibility once provided it with a “centre of gravity,” it now “limps with both legs.” Its foundation has been undermined by the indulgence of love matches. This has allowed instincts which privilege “the accidents of feeling, passion and the moment,” to prevail over the socially organized and organizing forces of the sexual drive, the drive to own property (“wife and child considered as property”) and in general, the drive to dominate. (TI “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 39)

This analysis provides an interesting counter-point to Marx’s suggestion that it is the emancipation of civil society from the restrictions of the feudal political order that creates the modern crisis of responsibility. Where Marx emphasizes the rampant materialism that results from the modern liberation of capital, Nietzsche is more concerned by the rampant passion associated with the modern emancipation not only of markets, but also of women. One might say that Marx wishes to explain (and combat) the economic conditions which undermine responsibility in modernity, while Nietzsche is more interested in the psychological patterns which determine or accompany the rise of irresponsibility. It is his focus on the state of the modern ‘soul’ that leads to Nietzsche’s pessimism about the chances of renewing responsibility at a societal level; for him the problem involves not merely economic and political conditions, but also the arrival at a psychological or spiritual point of no return - or rather, of “eternal return.”

Nietzsche makes no plea for the defence or restoration of marital responsibilities. His conclusion that modern marriage “has lost its meaning - consequently it is being abolished” is announced with a certain insouciant finality (TI “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 39). A
few paragraphs later, he advises conservatives that a “crabwise retrogression” to an earlier standard of virtue and responsibility is “quite impossible.” No one, he says, “is free to be a crab. There is nothing for it: one has to go forward, which is to say step by step further into décadence” (TI “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 43).

At first glance, this might seem to imply an attitude of pessimistic - or opportunistic - abandon with respect to any standard of virtue or personal responsibility. However, Nietzsche does not speak of (or for) the decadent as one who is free of responsibility or simply incapable of it. On the contrary, Nietzsche’s own avowed experience of decadence leads him to acknowledge a sense of shared responsibility for the decline of institutions such as marriage: “Our institutions are no longer fit for anything: everyone is unanimous about that. But the fault lies not in them but in us. Having lost all the instincts out of which institutions grow, we are losing the institutions themselves, because we are no longer fit for them” (TI “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 39).

On the other hand, Nietzsche also describes a form of responsibility that does not depend upon institutions, but rather upon the personal strength and integrity of the individual. Such “self-responsibility” is part of what he refers to as “[m]y conception of freedom. [. . .] What is freedom? That one has the will to self-responsibility. That one preserves the distance which divides us. That one has become more indifferent to hardship, toil, privation, even to life. That one is ready to sacrifice men to one’s cause, oneself not excepted” (TI “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 38). This conception of freedom contrasts sharply with the view Nietzsche suggests is more common in modernity, a period in which “[o]ne lives for today, one lives very fast - one lives very irresponsibly: it is precisely this which one calls ‘freedom!’” (TI “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 39).

A sense of antagonistic opposition to the age is essential not only to Nietzsche’s ideas of freedom and self-responsibility, but also to his understanding of the role of the philosopher.
The will to self-responsibility arises, says Nietzsche, under the conditions of “war” or of the upheaval of dramatic social change: as mentioned earlier, the struggle to establish liberal institutions is a key example of a conflict which created such conditions. Similarly, the philosopher, says Nietzsche, “has always found himself and had to find himself in contradiction to his today: his enemy has always been the ideal of today” (BGE 212). In the period of modernity, when according to Nietzsche irresponsibility is honoured as freedom and “nothing is so completely timely as weakness of will,” the philosopher - as one capable of responsibility - requires an equal and opposite strength of will, which is to say “the hardness and capacity for protracted decisions” (BGE 212).

Here we see the capacities earlier attributed to families and whole societies, where “protracted decisions” were made possible by enduring institutions, transferred to the solitary individual whose self-responsibility pits him against the values of his time. It is as though this individual has become a society unto himself, reproducing the lost structures of societal responsibility within his own psyche. In particular, the male dominance involved in these structures, which emerged so clearly in Nietzsche’s analysis of marital responsibilities, reappears in metaphorical form in his discussion of the instincts involved in the will to self-responsibility. “Freedom means that the manly instincts that delight in war and victory have gained mastery over the other instincts - for example, over the instinct for ‘happiness.’” Nietzsche associates the “other,” unmanly, instincts not simply with women, but rather with a monstrous composition of “shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats.” It is the “contemptible sort of well-being” dreamed of by such beings which will be spurned by the “mind that has become free” (TI “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 38).

At this point, any expectation or hope that Nietzsche’s “will to self-responsibility” might in some way replace the institution of marriage in providing an ethical basis for personal relations between men and women begins to look wildly misplaced. On the other hand, Nietzsche’s remarks suggest that in modernity it might well be the “war of the sexes” which
provides the conditions of conflict he regards as a prerequisite to the emergence of the will to self-responsibility. His criticism of liberal institutions is that they “level mountain and valley” and exalt this process as a moral principle, thereby eliminating the dangers and resistances that have made great achievements and great responsibility possible in the public life of earlier societies. The inclusion of Englishmen in the list of those responsible for this state of affairs suggests that Nietzsche’s real targets here are not so much women as utilitarian philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. However, the gendered terms in which Nietzsche veils his attack point to an interesting possibility. If liberal institutions have leached political life in Western democracies of almost any sense of urgent conflict - at least at the level of domestic politics -, one might suppose that this has had the effect, not simply of eliminating the experience of danger and resistance, but of displacing it to the field of personal relations. In particular, without marriage as the cornerstone of societal responsibility to hold the passions in check, the arena of sexual relations has become the modern battlefield - the site in which the modern individual most urgently and regularly encounters both conflict and calls for responsibility.

This vision of relations between the sexes brings out a further aspect of the isolation experienced by the individual in modernity. The decline of the institution of marriage means that isolation is likely to be a feature not only of political but also of personal life. In spite of his social nature, the actor is frequently alienated not only politically, but also intimately. In its insistence that “one preserves the distance which divides us,” Nietzsche’s “conception of freedom” does not so much oppose as affirm this aspect of modern life. Indeed, in the context of his discussion of the role of the philosopher, Nietzsche explicitly associates the “need for self-responsibility” with “wanting to be by oneself” (BGE 212).
In glorifying isolation, Nietzsche’s concept of self-responsibility thus makes a virtue of necessity: it offers a vision of responsibility that corresponds to the conditions of decadence. Its relation to decadence is an open question, however. On the one hand, self-responsibility might be seen as an idea which brings out the potential within the state of decadence for its own self-overcoming. Modern decadence is, after all, a complex historical phenomenon, subject to change and development - and as Nietzsche would emphasize, subject to reinterpretation; it has no eternally fixed “meaning.” The will to self-responsibility, on this view, would be a means of actively reinterpreting the modern experience of personal isolation. Rather than an anchorless state in which relationships are necessarily fleeting, it becomes a deliberately and cheerfully adopted position of strength and self-reliance from which at least the possibility of enduring alliances might be envisaged.

On the other hand, in avoiding the insecurity involved in any dependence upon others, the will to self-responsibility runs the risk of becoming a defensive will to isolation that protects the individual from disappointment and externally caused injury, but at the high price of cutting off all possibility of harmonious or productive relations with others. Ultimately, this form of self-imposed isolation might also become a willful form of self-destruction: as Nietzsche says, it leads one to become more indifferent “even to life.” (Under contemporary

17Cf GM II.12
18Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay on “Self-Reliance” links solitude and greatness in a way that resembles and possibly foreshadows Nietzsche’s linking of “self-responsibility” and greatness. For Emerson, “the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude” (The Portable Emerson, ed. Carl Bode, with Malcolm Cowley (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1981) 143). Emerson emphasizes, however, that the isolation he admires and recommends to his readers “must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation” (154). One reading of Nietzsche’s “will to self-responsibility” is that it advocates a similar rejection or transformation of the “mechanical” isolation of the modern subject in favour of the “elevated” isolation of the great man. For discussion of Emerson’s influence upon Nietzsche, see Walter Kaufmann, “Translator’s Introduction,” The Gay Science, by Friedrich Nietzsche (New York: Random House, 1974) 7-13, George J. Stack, Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992).
conditions, the idea of an ideal of “self-responsibility” which involves a willingness “to
sacrifice men to one’s cause, oneself not excepted” brings to mind the disturbing figure of the
suicide bomber.)

On a third hand (assuming there are at least one man and one woman involved in the struggle
which gives rise to self-responsibility, we have a minimum of four hands to work with), the
notion of self-responsibility might equally be seen as a fantasy that is likely to mire those who
succumb to it even deeper in the egoistic and irresponsible ways of modern life which has
produced it. For what would an actor’s favoured notion of “responsibility” be? Surely a role
as dramatic and heroic as possible, one that places the self exclusively in the spotlight,
obscuring the ambitions of all lesser beings, regarded as “extras” that may at any moment be
found cluttering up the set. From this perspective, even a cow, well-lit, might be regarded as a
rival (although we shall come to more realistic and disturbing example of such “rivals”). Our
fourth hand holds the possibility that it might nevertheless be the actor’s delight in
responsibility, understood not as a burden but as an opportunity for magnificent gestures,
which leads this individual beyond the limits of personal isolation and into creative alliances
with others (even those of the opposite sex . . .).

The idea that egoistic irresponsibility and “healthy” self-responsibility represent, not simple
and discrete alternatives, but a range of competing and uneasily coexisting responses to
modern psychological and sociological conditions explains how responsibility becomes a
problem for the modern subject. This is hard to understand if the perfectly responsible hero
and the perfectly irresponsible actor are regarded as discrete and opposing types, since
responsibility poses no dilemma for either of these individuals. If the contradiction between
these approaches to responsibility is held together in a single individual, however, a sense of
crisis emerges: the subject is split between a “will to self-responsibility” and a sense that the
boundaries needed to define what counts as the self are lacking or constantly shifting. This is
the condition of “decadence” into which we moderns have no choice but to advance, step by
step. For Nietzsche, decadence is not only a state of suffering, however, but also a source of creative possibilities: “One is fruitful only at the cost of being rich in contradictions” (TI “Morality as Anti-Nature,” 3).

A careful reading of the successive passages of Twilight of the Idols, in which Nietzsche presents first the perspective of the self-responsible warrior-philosopher and then that of the irresponsible individual, supports the idea that these antagonistic and ambiguous personae are features of a single, divided consciousness. It also provides a striking illustration of Nietzsche’s self-proclaimed ability to spell questions of decadence “forward and backward,” looking now “from the perspective of the sick toward healthier concepts and values,” now from a perspective of self-assurance “down into the secret workings of decadence” (EH “Why I Am So Wise,” 1). In this instance, the authorial voice “steps” deliberately from a vantage point which looks toward the “healthier” concept of self-responsibility to one which allows the speaker to analyse the problem of modern irresponsibility with self-assurance, whilst acknowledging his own participation in the problem: “the fault lies not in [our institutions] but in us.” Nietzsche speaks now as a would-be “warrior” motivated by the “will to self-responsibility,” now as a member of the “herd,” who lives “very irresponsibly.”

At the end of the passage on freedom, in a sentence that prepares the shift from the “warrior” to the “herd” perspective, Nietzsche says he understands the word “freedom,” as “something one has and does not have, something one wants, something one conquers . . .” (TI “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 38). Although he attributes this understanding of freedom to aristocratic communities of the pattern of Rome and Venice, in this hinge passage within which Nietzsche “reverses perspectives” on responsibility, we can also glimpse the complexity of the divided modern subject, one who paradoxically “has and does not have,” who urgently desires and occasionally achieves, a sense of the self as responsible.
So far, personal irresponsibility has been discussed as a problem flowing from the decline of the institution of marriage. It might be observed that there is another institution in decline in modern Western society which presents an even more obvious structural reason for the emergence of new problems and challenges relating to personal responsibility, that is, the Christian Church. The weakening of its power has meant that in modernity, an individual’s moral stance, like his or her selection of a sexual partner, has increasingly come to be regarded as a matter of personal choice and responsibility - or irresponsibility, as the case may be. However, although the Church no longer commands the power it once wielded to direct the moral lives of individuals, in Nietzsche’s view our modern capacity to make moral “choices” is inexorably shaped by the psychological legacy of two centuries of Christianity. He analyses this legacy in the form of what he calls the “bad conscience.”

Like the secular modern consciousness which we have described to this point, the “bad conscience” that “modern man” has inherited from the Christian religious tradition is, as Nietzsche sees it, divided within and against itself. In the Genealogy of Morals, he suggests that this conscience originates in what we might describe as the difficult marriage of two distinct modes of evaluation: the active and the reactive. The active mode, as the name suggests, is an affirmative mode of evaluation which arises from a feeling of power and self-satisfaction. It begins with the idea of “good,” closely associated with the self, and only secondarily conceives of “bad” as a “pale, contrasting image in relation to its positive basic concept” (GM I.10). The reactive mode, on the other hand, arises where the desire for power and self-satisfaction is thwarted. The resulting feeling of resentment - or as Nietzsche calls it “ressentiment” - is expressed in the value judgement “evil,” directed precisely at the more powerful, those whose happy situation allows them to practise the active mode of evaluation. For the “man of ressentiment,” on the other hand, the value “good” is applied to the self merely as “an afterthought,” denoting the absence of evil (GM I.10).
At this point, the reader should note that (at least) two important issues relating to these modes of evaluation will be set aside for the purposes of the present discussion. In the highly schematic “history” presented in the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche suggests that the active mode of evaluation originated in a “noble” or “warrior caste,” which he associates with ancient Greek and Roman culture. The reactive mode he attributes to what he calls the “priestly caste,” which he identifies with the Jews, to whom he provocatively assigns responsibility for the ills of Christianity. This theory raises, first, the vexed question of Nietzsche’s relation to anti-Semitism and second, the problem of Nietzsche’s approach to history. Both of these topics and their significance for the understanding of Nietzsche’s approach to responsibility will be addressed directly in the course of this study. For the moment, however, I shall bracket questions concerning Nietzsche’s uses of prejudice and the past, in the diagnostic interest of sketching a purely psychological profile of modern conscience and its ailments. I shall also leave open the question of whether women and men are equally subject to “bad conscience,” while reproducing Nietzsche’s use of gendered language as it arises in this context.

symptom: depression, a sense of helplessness, self-destructive and masochistic behaviours

We have observed that the “bad conscience” is born of the problematic union of the active and reactive modes of evaluation. How do these opposing modes of evaluation come together? Nietzsche’s “first, provisional statement” of his “hypothesis concerning the origin of the ‘bad conscience’” suggests that it initially arises where an instinctively active individual suddenly finds himself constrained within a peaceful, well-regulated social environment which minimizes opportunities for individual violence (GM II.16). This situation represents the subjugation of one naturally “active” type by another; at this point, the “reactive” type is yet to emerge. The dominant group is described by Nietzsche as “the oldest ‘state’,” by which he means “a conqueror and master race” which “unhesitatingly lays its terrible claws upon a populace perhaps tremendously superior in numbers but still formless
and nomad” (GM II.17). This definition of the state suggests that the “bad conscience” emerges with the first forceful establishment of social order. On the other hand, the choice of the word “state” and the high level of regulation of “animal instincts” and “peace” this state is said to achieve is evocative, not so much of early forms of social organization, but rather of the conditions of modern Western liberal society. As we have indicated, questions concerning the historical content of Nietzsche’s work will be examined in detail later on; for the moment, we shall simply note Nietzsche’s own observation that the structures of what he calls “prehistory” are “present in all ages or may always reappear” (GM II.9).

The chief effect upon the “nomad” population of the “ineluctable disaster” which violently establishes the state (GM II.17), is to disvalue and “suspend” its “unconscious and infallible” animal drives. The people are consequently “reduced” to behaviour based on “thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect.” They must henceforth rely on “consciousness” which in Nietzsche’s assessment is “their weakest and most fallible organ.” (Once again, we note that the idea of highly conscious regulation of behaviour is suggestive of the conditions of modern life.) This produces symptoms of depression: feelings of “dreadful heaviness” and a sense of being “unable to cope with the simplest undertakings” (GM II.16).

It also leads to self-destructive behaviour. As Nietzsche puts it, all “instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward” (GM II.16). Restricted by societal constraints, the individual is forced to turn his aggressive, formative energies upon himself. Instead of venting his energies externally and supporting this aggressive activity with an evaluation which dismisses his victims as “bad,” the man of “bad conscience” makes a victim of himself: he dismisses his own well-being or happiness as pertaining to a “bad” or inconsequential part of himself. Here we see the active mode of evaluation applied internally, within “an animal soul turned against itself”: “[h]ostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in
destruction - all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: that is the origin of the
“bad conscience” (GM II.16).

While the active mode of evaluation turned against the self is a fundamental aspect of “bad
conscience,” it does not account for its full development. We have seen that the man of “bad
conscience” responds to the external oppression of a restrictive social order by creating the
“internal oppression” of self-victimization. This double layer of control means he will be
prey, not only to his own aggressive instincts, but also to powerful feelings of anger and
frustration. His sense of “ressentiment” is relatively unlikely to find its target in the powerful
forces of social order, however. In the context of modern society, these have become diffuse
and difficult to locate, let alone attack. Rather, the man of “bad conscience” will tend to
demonize the more immediate and vulnerable “enemy” within himself, that is to say his
“animal” lusts and instincts, experienced as an internal source of aggression.

This self-directed ressentiment does not halt or inhibit the practice of self-persecution,
however. On the contrary, the energy of ressentiment serves rather to intensify this activity,
while altering its “meaning.” The reactive mode of evaluation is now applied within the
divided self: its “animal” aspect is judged to be “evil” while self-imposed suffering is
interpreted, more weakly, as a sign of “goodness.” Here we see an explanation of the
perceived division between mind and body, and the devaluation of the body, which emerge in
sectors of Christian thinking, but also in modern philosophical “doctrine.” The idea that the
resentment of “bad conscience” is directly primarily back at the self rather than at external
sources of oppression can also be seen as a psychological explanation of the political apathy
frequently displayed by the modern individual.

*symptom: anxiety linked to feelings of guilt*
If the “bad conscience” is conceived as an internal struggle between the active and reactive modes of evaluation, Nietzsche’s illustrations of this struggle focus on its most extreme possible outcomes. He suggests that “bad conscience” reaches “its most gruesome pitch of severity and rigor” in a particularly self-flagellating form of Christian conscience, characterised by an extreme denial of the body and persecution of the individual will as sinful (GM II.22). In this case, it would seem that active mode of evaluation has effectively surrendered to the superior force of the reactive mode of evaluation and joined it in demeaning a self which is conceived at once as bad and evil, but whose goodness has faded into insignificance.

On the other hand, Nietzsche also provides a striking vision of “bad conscience” in which the active mode of evaluation appears decisively dominant, so that the accent remains on the “good” aspect of the self, even in its use of the reactive mode of evaluation:

This secret self-ravishment, this artists’ cruelty, this delight in imposing a form upon oneself as a hard, recalcitrant, suffering material and in burning a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a No into it, this uncanny, dreadfully joyous labor of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes itself suffer out of joy in making suffer - eventually this entire active “bad conscience” - you will have guessed it - as the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena, also brought to light an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps beauty itself. (GM II.18)

In particular, Nietzsche credits this version of “bad conscience” with the creation of “contradictory concepts such as selflessness, self-denial, self-sacrifice,” concepts which he says “suggest an ideal, a kind of beauty” (GM II.18).

Given that these “contradictory concepts” are central to Christian thought, it emerges that the reactive and active aspects of bad conscience are not best understood as discrete alternatives,
but rather as possibilities which are held together both in the complex culture of Christianity, and in the contradictory psychology of the man of “bad conscience.” This combination of contradictory elements recalls the ambivalent quality of the modern individual as we have already described him. At first glance, however, the tension at the heart of Christian culture appears quite different to that which exists between the modern lifestyle of irresponsible decadence and Nietzsche’s “will to self-responsibility.”

The incompatibility between these two visions of the modern individual seems difficult to resolve if we compare the egoistic, fast-living actor with the morbid, self-persecuting Christian or if we attempt to reconcile the “will to self-responsibility” with the “abundance of strange new beauty” produced by the active “bad conscience.” Taken as pure types, the decadent actor and the ascetic Christian seem to have little in common apart from their shared capacity to provoke Nietzsche’s censure. This is true even if Christian ritual can be said to involve more than a touch of theatricality. Similarly self-responsibility and the ideal and imaginative phenomena produced by “bad conscience” both elicit a certain admiration from Nietzsche, but otherwise seem like chalk and cheese. Just as these proverbial substances share a superficial likeness, the reflexive form of self-responsibility bears an obvious resemblance to that of concepts like self-denial and self-sacrifice. However insofar as it demands an independent, autonomous mode of life, a taste for self-responsibility will produce an antagonistic rejection - a metaphorical spitting out - of any more submissive, chalky mode of selflessness.

The conundrum begins to dissolve, however, if we consider that this may be the less productive set of comparisons to make. In discussing the secular life of liberal modernity, Nietzsche makes an active evaluation, appraising his own “conception of freedom” and the “self-responsibility” it involves, as “good,” and judging the irresponsible modern decadent, only secondarily, as “bad.” In the case of Christian culture, on the other hand, he makes a reactive evaluation. He judges the self-persecuting Christian as “evil” (“Oh this insane,
pathetic beast!” (GM II.22)), while less emphatically allowing that the “ideal” creations that arise from such practices of self-denial may be “good” (they “suggest” a “kind of beauty”). Keeping in mind the principle that the active “good” and the reactive “evil” are typically applied to the same object, this implies that the “will to self-responsibility” and the more extreme forms of Christian asceticism described by Nietzsche in fact refer to the same, or closely related phenomena. The decadent actor type, on the other hand, will be found lurking behind the production of ideal and imaginative phenomena attributed to active “bad conscience.”

The idea that the actor might be the source of ideal phenomena such as concepts of selflessness and self-denial is not difficult to countenance if one lifts such ideals out of their moral context and considers them from a sceptical or scientific perspective, simply as practices which involve suppressing or abandoning the self. The actor is selfless, not from virtue but from necessity: in many cases he has no substantial sense of self to maintain. Insofar as he does, he will frequently be tempted or obliged to deny this identity in the interests of the aesthetic and worldly success of his performance. To insist upon opposing such histrionic and paradoxically self-interested practices of “self-sacrifice” to their “moral,” Christian counterparts would be to revert to the Christian outlook which Nietzsche wishes to place in question. It would also be to assume that the “selfless” Christian is not himself one of those Nietzsche calls (in the teachings of “Zarathustra”) “unconscious actors.”

...there is much lying among the small people. Some of them will, but most of them are only willed. Some of them are genuine, but most of them are bad actors. There are unconscious actors among them and involuntary actors - the genuine are always rare, especially genuine actors.” (Z III “Of the Virtue that Makes Small,” 2)

We shall return to the idea of “unconscious” or “involuntary” acting as a phenomenon which might well account for certain aspects of the disorder of modern irresponsibility. For the
moment, however, let us simply note that the term “actor” covers a range of subjective possibilities in Nietzsche’s account - some blatantly irresponsible, others approaching a lucid awareness which might be said to form an essential aspect of responsibility. We shall see shortly that the term “Christian” performs a similarly capacious function in Nietzsche’s work.

The second pairing - of Nietzsche’s “will to self-responsibility” with the cruelly ascetic Christian - may initially seem harder to accept, given the energy of Nietzsche’s endorsement of one and denunciation of the other. It might be objected, for instance, that Nietzsche explicitly opposes the “will to self-responsibility” to the “contemptible sort of well-being” dreamed of by Christians etc. However the self-lacerating Christian of the *Genealogy of Morals* is not the same Christian who lines up with utilitarian philosophers - and women - to advocate a life of “happiness.” The man who *wills* “to find himself guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for” surely has no use for utilitarian ideas (GM II.22). On the contrary, the conditions of his life bear a striking resemblance to those which Nietzsche says produce freedom and the “will to self-responsibility.”

One would have to seek the highest type of free man where the greatest resistance is constantly being overcome: five steps from tyranny, near the threshold of the danger of servitude. This is true psychologically when one understand by ‘tyrants’ pitiless and dreadful instincts, to combat which demands the maximum of authority and discipline towards oneself [. . .] (TI “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” 38)

Nietzsche cites Julius Caesar as the finest type of such a psychology - hardly a figure one would normally associate with the ascetic Christian. However, to interpret one’s own instincts as dreadful tyrants which must be combated at all costs clearly assumes the divided and internally reactive perspective of “bad conscience.” This suggests that Nietzsche’s “conception of freedom” grows out of the conditions of “bad conscience,” which is to say out of ascetic practices of self-control. The example of Julius Caesar merely indicates that such asceticism is not exclusive to Christian culture. It thus forms one more piece of the puzzle
concerning the precise, or rather the imprecise historical location of the origins of “bad conscience.”

Nietzsche describes the “bad conscience” as an illness “but an illness as pregnancy is an illness.” (GM II.19) Our analysis reveals that it gives birth not only to the “ideal and imaginative phenomena” of Christian ideals, but also to Nietzsche’s antagonistic conception of freedom. Furthermore, the flourishing of these competitive siblings requires both a capacity for self-effacement and a certain dramatic flair on the part of the conscience which nurtures them. It is at once ascetic and actor in its service of contradictory ideals. The “bad conscience” thus displays a twice divided nature which parallels the four versions of “self-responsibility” discussed earlier. As an ascetic conscience turned towards the ideal of freedom, it is capable of manifesting a stoic and self-reliant will to self-responsibility; in its more familiar form as an ascetic conscience devoted to ideals of self-denial, it displays a cruel will to self-sacrifice; as an actor inspired by the heroic role of the self-responsible individual it becomes self-affirming to the point of megalomania; while as an actor focused on the goal of self-effacement, it is capable of communicating beauty - perhaps even “beauty itself.”

The correspondences between the four compass points which orient the possibilities of “bad conscience” and the four tendencies of the “will to self-responsibility” confirm the idea that this concept of responsibility is proper to the predominantly isolated individual of modernity, as is the experience of “bad conscience.” It also suggests a special role for this ideal, insofar as it reflects the divided quality of “bad conscience” back to itself. The variable nature of the goal of self-responsibility brings to light the illness, but also the beauty - the irresponsibility, but also the capacity for responsibility - that is characteristic of modern consciousness. In this respect, it can be seen as a spur to self-awareness, by which the individual of “bad conscience” might become aware of the extraordinary potential - as well as the limitations and dangers - of his or her own complex mode of evaluation.
Such lucid self-awareness might well help the “bad conscience” to manage its own suffering. Greater appreciation of the two modes of evaluation which meet in this conscience could lead to the development of techniques designed to promote the active mode of evaluation while restraining the reactive mode, or otherwise regulating the interaction of the two. In this way, one might succeed in constraining the experience of guilt, for example, while balancing the powerful creative potential of the “bad conscience” with qualities such as self-discipline and self-reliance. However, all such experimental measures would clearly remain within the framework of “bad conscience.” It should be noted that the capacity of the “bad conscience” to become aware of its own structures and (at least potentially) to manage its own tendencies arises in the movement between its different forms or activities. It is not located in any separable superstructure which might potentially master the “bad conscience” once and for all. In other words, the ideal of self-responsibility has no basis in any realm beyond the experience of “bad conscience.”

Consequently, the “will to self-responsibility” does not imply any attempt to change the political or social conditions of life which support the “bad conscience” from without. Importantly, the discussion of “bad conscience,” and of self-responsibility as a concept which reflects its structure and potential, has not significantly affected the earlier assessment of the modern individual as personally isolated. Even in its positive aspects, the ideal of self-responsibility tends to elucidate and affirm this state of solitude, rather than seeking to overcome it. It thus appears to offer little to the task of restoring an ethical dimension to personal relations in the wake of the decline of the institutions of marriage and the Christian church. In this respect, it leaves the broader problem of modern irresponsibility unchanged.

We have returned to our point of departure: there is still “nothing for it: one has to go forward, which is to say step by step further into décadence.” (TI, “Expeditio
tions of an Untimely Man,” 43)
In the preceding discussion of the institutional conditions underlying the disorder of modern irresponsibility, it was suggested that despite the absence or fragility of commitments in either the political or the personal spheres of life, the modern individual is typically a “social animal,” connected to others through communicative and cultural networks. At this level, at least, a form of responsibility other than the solitary ideal of “self-responsibility” might in principle be possible for the individual who participates in modern society. We shall turn now to consider how the problem of modern irresponsibility manifests at this collective level.

1.3 Social irresponsibility

Up until now, an emphasis on the isolation of the individual has led us to consider the problem of irresponsibility and its relation to modern consciousness primarily in terms of the individualized phenomenon of modern conscience. For Nietzsche, however, consciousness is primarily a shared product of social life. He believes that “consciousness does not really belong to man’s individual existence, but rather to his social or herd nature” (GS 354). Insofar as modern conditions have favoured the development of this social aspect of human existence, consciousness can also be said to have increased. Many commentators on modernity remark on the particularly “self-conscious” character of the age. An increase in social consciousness and self-consciousness might be seen as the basis for a corresponding increase in the sophistication of our practices of responsibility. However, rather than a basis for responsibility, Nietzsche sees the “growth of consciousness” as a danger: “anyone who lives among the most conscious Europeans even knows that it is a disease” (GS 354).

To explain how consciousness has become “a disease,” Nietzsche sketches a brief theoretical history of its origins. He suggests that consciousness develops “only under the pressure of the need for communication,” a need born of individual human vulnerability and dependency. The initial spur to consciousness is distress: the greater the sustained distress and dependency of a people, the greater will be the speed and subtlety of their means of communication. The
ultimate result is an excess of this “strength and art of communication” - an excess that is “squandered” by artists, orators, preachers, writers (GS 354).

Along with an excess of communication comes an excess of consciousness, since “consciousness is really only a net of communication between human beings.” As both verbal and non-verbal communication becomes more complex, so too does consciousness, including consciousness of the self. In Nietzsche’s view, it “was only as a social animal that man acquired self-consciousness - which he is still in the process of doing, more and more” (GS 354). With this development comes the possibility of the self-conscious, modern thought of the Cartesian cogito ergo sum. In Nietzsche’s analysis, however, this is a deceptive achievement; in becoming “self-conscious” we in fact become conscious, not of what is personal, unique and individual to each of us (our actions), but of what is “average.” Each thought that rises to consciousness is translated in the process into the language and the perspective of the social group. The “self” of self-consciousness is consequently a product of social utility, part of the “surface- and sign-world” that is the world of all consciousness. It is not excepted from the general rule that “whatever becomes conscious becomes by the same token shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, herd signal; all becoming conscious involves a great and thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization” (GS 354).

Against the Cartesian faith in consciousness, Nietzsche endorses the “incomparable insight” of Leibniz “that consciousness is merely an accident of experience and not its necessary and essential attribute; that, in other words, what we call consciousness constitutes only one state of our spiritual and psychic world (perhaps a pathological state) and not by any means the whole of it” (GS 357). Nietzsche goes further in arguing that the singular state of the psyche that is consciousness is largely superfluous. He suggests that “we could think, feel, will, and remember, and we could also ‘act’ in every sense of that word,” without the “mirror effect” of consciousness - and in fact for the most part do. “Man, like every living being, thinks
continually without knowing it; the thinking that rises to consciousness is only the smallest part of all this” (GS 354).

The idea that much of our mental activity is unconscious is less startling now than when Nietzsche proposed it, due to the work of Freud and other psychoanalytic theorists, as well as the discoveries of neurological and cognitive science. However, the view that we can also “act,” particularly in the sense of performing a role, without consciousness of doing so may still surprise. This hypothesis provides an important starting point for understanding the social basis of modern irresponsibility, since if the modern subject is typically an “unconscious actor,” performing roles of which he or she is unaware, problems related to responsibility would seem inevitable. In Nietzsche’s diagnosis, however, the problem with modern consciousness is not that it is insufficient to found responsible behaviour, but that it is excessive. It interferes with instinctive and “healthy” actions which “fundamentally” are “incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual,” that is, which are distorted when interpreted and adjusted according to the superficial and generalized forms of social roles (GS 354).

The work of Judith Butler on subjectivity articulates a similar sense of the oppressive effects of socially determined roles in modern life. As she puts it, “the contemporary fate of the subject” is to be a product of the “converging and interarticulation” of relations of power, in particular of the “reiterative power of discourse.”19 Butler takes a fairly Hobbesian view of the conditions under which the experience of subjectivity arises, arguing that the “performance” of the subject “is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the

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production.”\textsuperscript{20} However, she also suggests that in the process of reiteration of social norms that forms the subject, “gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions.”\textsuperscript{21} These instabilities create individual differences and even “deconstructive” possibilities in the way norms are instantiated. They also create the possibility of agency, understood as “a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power.”\textsuperscript{22}

This ambivalent assessment of subjectivity, seen at once as a form of oppression and the basis for individual agency, parallels Nietzsche’s assessment of the modern “excess” of consciousness. On the one hand, he considers it a “disease” that arises from an intensification of the corrupting, falsifying function of consciousness. On the other hand, he suggests that an “excess” of consciousness is the prerequisite for the “squandering” of communicative potential in the form of art, an activity which he regards as the source of some of the greatest achievements of human spirit and intellect. The notion that consciousness is the medium of both uncritical mass conformity and individual artistic creativity is also suggestively expressed in the example Butler selects to illustrate her theory of subjectivity as “performativity.” She chooses an artist, but one who self-consciously specializes in falsification, superficialities and generalization. Whilst any of a number of contemporary artists might comfortably fit this description, the figure that interests Butler is at once more generic and more ambiguous: the drag artist.

Butler’s interest in drag culture is based on its manipulation of what Nietzsche would call the “herd signals” of gender. She sees drag performers as subjects whose “hyperbolic citation” of gender norms makes visible the process by which all contemporary subjects are constituted as gendered. This involves the claim that all gender is like drag, or even that it \textit{is} drag, insofar as

\textsuperscript{20}Butler 95.
\textsuperscript{21}Butler 10.
\textsuperscript{22}Butler 15.
“hegemonic heterosexuality” is itself “a constant and repeated effort” to realise idealizations of gender roles which “can never be finally or fully achieved.”\textsuperscript{23} The implication is that “ordinary women” are no more capable of finally achieving the status of a “real woman” than is a drag queen. They, too, are performers who can never entirely efface the dissimulated difference between the actor and her role.

This view of gender presumes that it operates by virtue of an implicit faith in femininity as a kind of Platonic Idea of which individual human beings are more or less corrupt and inferior copies. Butler uses drag to expose the workings of this Platonic model as the machinations of shifting social power relations. However, she does not suggest that the insight into gender afforded by drag will lead to any overcoming of the constraints of this system. At most it “is a site of a certain ambivalence,”\textsuperscript{24} since the drag performer demonstrates his/her own subjection to gender norms in the same gesture by which s/he willfully embodies and parodies them: “In the drag ball productions of realness, we witness and produce the phantasmatic constitution of a subject, a subject who repeats and mimes the legitimating norms by which it itself has been degraded, a subject founded in the project of mastery that compels and disrupts its own repetitions.”\textsuperscript{25}

Insofar as drag may be taken as representative of the conventional production of gender, however, it might be said to reveal less about femininity than it does about the masculine subject, whose body has an oft-remarked tendency to disappear. After all, the audience knows very well that the drag queen is only “pretending” to be female, only “pretending” to have a (feminine) body. It is the masculine subject who “really,” marvelously, transcendentally, creates the effect of femininity. In asserting that drag artists make visible the process by which all subjects are constituted as gendered, Butler effectively suggests that behind every

\textsuperscript{23}Butler 125.  
\textsuperscript{24}Butler 125.  
\textsuperscript{25}Butler 131.
“performance” of femininity (or of masculinity) is a masculine actor, although this fact is carefully dissimulated in the naturalized performances of women.

From the perspective of Nietzsche’s theory of consciousness, on the other hand, drag appears neither as a celebration of the extraordinary powers of disembodied male subjectivity, nor as an exposé of the suffering of women who must constantly perform and inevitably fall short of the ideal of femininity. Rather, the achievement of the drag artist would be to demonstrate the superficiality of our social consciousness of gender. The images of femininity deployed by the drag artist, far from evoking an unattainable ideal might be well described in the terms Nietzsche uses with respect to the contents of consciousness: “shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, herd signal.” This aspect of drag is sometimes seen as misogynistic; from a Nietzschean perspective, it represents a critique not of women, but of the corrupt, false, superficial generalizations that are made about them in our socially-produced consciousness.

In this discussion of drag and what it reveals about gender roles, we meet another version of the multiple possibilities of “bad conscience”: an actor subject reproducing a model it can never finally achieve, except perhaps in moments of egoistic self-delusion; an ascetic subject willfully degrading itself in active application of the external constraints it encounters; an actor subject marvelously bringing an extravagant role to life; an ascetic subject exposing the weaknesses of the model imposed upon it and thereby expressing its own critical and self-responsible will. This version reveals the way in which “bad conscience” at once arises from the constraints and possibilities of consciousness, and represents a willful effort to engage with them. It also suggests that the structure of “bad conscience” is something that is equally part of feminine and masculine psychology in modernity, although specific experiences of “bad conscience” will vary with the social roles imposed upon or available to any given individual.
With the modern increase in consciousness, a correlative increase in the activity of “bad conscience” is to be expected. Accompanying both phenomena will be a rise in the incidence of the symptoms we have associated with the disorder of modern irresponsibility. Nietzsche’s critique of consciousness suggests that any amelioration of this condition will be achieved not by further increase or refinement of consciousness as such, but rather through resistance to or transformation of its corrupting influence. Insofar as “bad conscience” can be seen as a complex compound of instinct and consciousness, it is a potential site of such resistance.

Toward the end of the second essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche proposes an experiment designed precisely to facilitate this kind of resistance to the hegemony of consciousness. He advocates an attempt to deflect the “bad conscience” away from the “natural inclinations” of instinct by wedding it instead “to all the unnatural inclinations,” that is, to “all ideals hitherto, which are one and all hostile to life and ideals that slander the world” (GM II.24). It is its own creations - and its own consciousness - which this redirected “bad conscience” is to treat with hostility and suspicion and take pleasure in “ravishing” and reforming.

Nietzsche anticipates opposition to the idea of such an anti-moral - and, one might add, “anti-conscious” and therefore anti-social - experiment. It will be opposed, as he points out, by all idealists and “good men” - as well as by “the comfortable, the reconciled, the vain, the sentimental, the weary” - that is to say the gamut of “modern society” as Nietzsche sees it. It thus requires a “different kind of spirit” - one in opposition to the present age and capable of “a kind of sublime wickedness, an ultimate, supremely self-confident mischievousness in knowledge that goes with great health.” This spirit, who needs “conquest, adventure, danger, and even pain” is a figure we have met before; he is the “warrior” with the “will to self-responsibility” (GM II.24).
This brings us full circle - a vicious circle, some might say. We are returned to the “will to self-responsibility” which has been identified as a product and reflection of “bad conscience,” expressive of the full range of its possibilities, from vicious to flamboyant, self-destructive to extraordinarily creative. This suggests that to become a virtuoso in playing on this range is the most to which the modern individual of “bad conscience” can aspire - Nietzsche’s analysis and performance of the decadent modern condition achieves nothing more; it proposes no transcendent cure for the disorder of modern irresponsibility.

The skills Nietzsche brings to the task of investigating and living with “bad conscience,” should not be underestimated, however. His own remarkable performances of “bad conscience,” are not mere improvisations but the fruits of a long and methodical training: “methods, one must repeat ten times, are the essential, as well as being the most difficult, as well as being that which has habit and laziness against it longest” (AC 59). The methods Nietzsche considers so important are not merely techniques of self-therapy, but pre-requisites for an “erudite culture.” They include “all the scientific methods,” as well as “the great, the incomparable art of reading well.” With bitter regret, Nietzsche observes that all this is already in evidence among the ancient Greeks and Romans - “Not as brain training! [. . .] But as body, as gesture, as instinct - in a word, as reality” (AC 59). Modern conditions, on the other hand, pose grave difficulties for the ancient pursuit of philosophy as an “art of living.” In the next chapter, we shall consider what becomes of this art and its methods in Nietzsche’s hands, which is to say, in the practice of a modern philosopher who is also a “man of bad conscience,” - an ascetic capable of the “unspeakable amount of self-constraint” required for renewing ancient methods (AC 59), but also an actor.
The last chapter began and ended with tantalising remarks concerning Nietzsche’s methods and the form of responsibility - or irresponsibility - they embody. Early on, we noted the importance Nietzsche places on his capacity to “reverse perspectives,” thanks to personal experience of both “sickness” and “health.” However, we deferred discussion of the problems raised by the avowed inclusion of the irresponsible “perspective of the sick” in his work. Similarly, we concluded by quoting Nietzsche’s assertion that methods “are the essential, as well as being the most difficult,” but gave no further explanation of this portentous remark. In this chapter we shall address the “essential difficulties” of Nietzsche’s methods and the challenges they pose for his readers. We take as our starting point Nietzsche’s analysis of the “artistic” relation to the self which in his assessment characterizes late modern subjectivity. In our assessment, it also provides an important and problematic basis for Nietzsche’s own philosophical methodology. We shall argue, however, that a second, counterbalancing, element emerges from the close reading of Nietzsche’s work: that is, a distinctly philosophical “will to responsibility,” which reflects a genealogical link between ancient philosophical methods and those to be found in Nietzsche’s work.

Typical of the “democratic” individual, in Nietzsche’s view, is “a certain cocky faith”: “[t]he individual becomes convinced that he can do just about everything and can manage almost any role, and everybody experiments with himself, improvises, makes new experiments, enjoys his experiments; and all nature ceases and becomes art” (GS 356). Whilst Nietzsche is not noted for his endorsement of democratic values, the multiple perspectives or “roles” that compete within his texts imply that as a thinker, Nietzsche himself shares the “role faith” he observes in the Athenians of the Periclean age, as well as in the Americans and, to an
increasing extent, the Europeans of his own day. His own “experimental performances” - in the roles of physician, physiologist, historian, psychologist and so on - appear to demonstrate a firm conviction on Nietzsche’s part that he can “manage almost any role.” This “cocky faith” brings Nietzsche’s texts to life, but at the same time introduces irreducible ambiguity into the expression of his thought. Nietzsche’s “improvisations” are also “experimental” in the sense that he tends to flaunt the conventional responsibilities associated with the roles he adopts and adapts. An important example, and one which we shall examine in detail, is Nietzsche’s “performance” as an historical thinker, a tour de force which involves a highly original approach to the usual conventions of historical method.

Commentators have made widely divergent evaluations of Nietzsche’s experimental “role-playing.” At one end of the spectrum are those, such as Alexander Nehamas, who see in Nietzsche’s work an exemplary guide to “the art of living,” or what Nietzsche calls the “great and rare art” of “giving style” to one’s character (GS 290). On this view, Nietzsche’s performative “improvisations” indicate a creative philosophical path to “self-overcoming.” At the “darker” end are those who see the contradictory and unconventional aspects of the multiple roles Nietzsche “performs” within his texts as signs of the dangerous irrationality of his thought, an irrationality that was destined to develop into full-blown madness - both in

26For an optimistic view regarding the possibility of using Nietzsche’s work to support democratic pluralism, see Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche’s French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism* (New York: Routledge, 1990). William Connolly has arguably done more than any other contemporary political theorist to “turn the genealogist of resentment on his head by exploring democratic politics” (175) based upon a “reconstituted, radicalized liberalism” (174) as among the “diverse set of ethical and political possibilities” (140) that emerge from Nietzsche’s thought. See William Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).


28Richard Rorty similarly sees much of the value of Nietzsche’s thought for the late-modern liberal as lying in his theory and practice of artistic “self-overcoming,” which he suggests is best promoted as a “private” practice. Rorty writes of his own project: “The compromise advocated in this book amounts to saying: *Privatize* the Nietzschean-Sartrean-Foucauldian attempt at authenticity and purity, in order to prevent yourself slipping into a political attitude which will lead you to think that there is some social goal more important than avoiding cruelty.” Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 65.
Nietzsche’s personal history and on the “world stage” of twentieth century politics. The battle to defend Nietzsche’s work from any simple, hostile identification with his own madness or that of the Nazi movement has been fought and for the most part, long since won. The work of Pierre Klossowski, however, provides a sophisticated example of a reading of Nietzsche which, while appreciative of Nietzsche’s work, continues to locate “delirium” at the heart of his thought. In doing so, it provides a useful approach to the question of how the perspective of “decadence” enters into Nietzsche’s philosophical methods. Our own reading of Nietzsche will ultimately take a middle path between these extremes by acknowledging both the creative and dangerous aspects of Nietzsche’s methods, while insisting on the philosophical quality of the will that is expressed in his polyvalent “performances.”


2.1 The philosopher as actor

Nietzsche addresses the question of the relationship between “the philosopher” and the various roles he (or she) may choose or be obliged to play when he asks “Is there sufficient pride, daring, courage, self-confidence available today, sufficient will of the spirit, will to responsibility, freedom of will, for ‘the philosopher’ to be henceforth possible on earth?” (GM III.10). Nietzsche’s point here is not that the modern prevalence of irresponsibility makes this unlikely. On the contrary, in the passage from which this question is taken, he expresses a tentatively optimistic view of modernity as a “sunnier, warmer, brighter world” for the philosophical “spirit” which has until recently needed to “mask and cocoon” itself in the “previously established types of the contemplative man,” which is to say in the “gloomy caterpillar form” of the ascetic priest (GM III.10). Such concealment was necessary, Nietzsche suggests, to protect the contemplative man from “every kind of suspicion and resistance” - both external and internal. The appearance and feeling of spiritual power achieved by inventive practices of self-castigation gave philosophers the courage and the protection necessary to “overcome the gods and tradition in themselves, so as to be able to believe in their own innovations” (GM III.10). It allowed them to understand their own ways of thinking as responsible in spite of their conflict with societal forms of responsibility: “the ascetic ideal for a long time served the philosopher as a form in which to appear, as a precondition of existence - he had to represent it so as to be able to be a philosopher; he had to believe in it in order to be able to represent it” (GM III.10).

“Has all this really altered?” asks Nietzsche. The skeptical tone of the question implies that although the institutions may have changed, the philosopher’s need to adopt a “mask” or a “cocoon” in the form of “established types” has not. In modern times, science has replaced religion as the primary site in which knowledge and power meet. It is thus various forms of “the scientist” who now provide the most likely cover for the philosophical “spirit” (GM III.10). This hypothesis explains why Nietzsche finds it necessary or convenient to adopt the
“masks” of so many scientific types: psychologist, physiologist, physician, to name only a few of his most obvious “scientific” roles. But what lies behind or within such “masks”?

A dangerous butterfly

In discussing the possibility of a more transparent philosophical practice, Nietzsche uses a curious metaphor for the philosophical “spirit,” calling it a “many-colored and dangerous winged creature” (GM III.10). The spirit of philosophy in modernity, assuming that it is indeed possible, is depicted as a dangerous butterfly - at once threatening and fragile, powerful and seemingly inconsequential. Rather than the Hegelian owl that arrives only at dusk, Nietzsche’s words conjure a vision of philosophy as a delicate insect that alights upon life at the height of noon and whose tiny wing-beats can (if chaos theory is to be believed) start off a hurricane.

The idea of the spirit as a winged creature is not peculiar to Nietzsche and Hegel. Both philosophers are drawing on an ancient Greek metaphor, evident in Plato’s references to the “wings of the soul” upon which the philosophical spirit may ascend to the realm of the Ideas. The image of the winged soul is a consequence of Greek etymology: the Greek word “psyche” meaning spirit or soul is derived from the word for butterfly. In describing the philosophical spirit of modernity as a “winged creature” emerging from the cocoon or the “repulsive and gloomy caterpillar form” of the ascetic priest, Nietzsche implicitly suggests that the spirit of ancient Greek philosophical thought, having been masked and distorted by Christian practices, finds in modernity conditions which might enable it to emerge once more.32 The philosophical butterfly of modernity is not, however, identical to that which

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32 I say “implicitly” because the explicit example of ascetic priests given by Nietzsche here is the “ancient Brahmins.” He also argues that it is not until “the most modern times” that the philosopher has been able to emerge from the priestly form, thus effacing the philosophical culture of ancient Greece and passing over the priestly culture of Christianity without comment. These peculiarities may be added to examples already noted of the flagrant
graced ancient Greek discussions and depictions of the soul. In the process of its passage through incarnations of ugliness and obscurity, the butterfly has become “many-colored and dangerous,” where once it evoked purity and simplicity (although with Socrates it already possessed the gadfly’s ability to cause discomfit).

The spirit of modern philosophy may be “many-colored,” but as Nietzsche remarks in criticism of the “English fashion” of “gazing around haphazardly in the blue,” the most vital color for a “genealogist of morals” is not blue (nor any other color of the spectrum) but grey, “that is, what is documented, what can actually be confirmed and has actually existed” (GM Pref. 7). This indicates that the changeable hues of Nietzsche’s “dangerous butterfly” are due to the quality of the experiences and the modes of expression it touches upon rather than to any free flights of fancy - its movements stay close to the ground of actual existence, where this refers to the vivid complexity of lived experience, rather than to abstract conceptions of the real.

In Deleuze’s account of the development of different images (or geographies) of ancient philosophy, he suggests that the pre-Socratics “placed thought inside the caverns and life, in the deep” and so “philosophized with a hammer,” taking Empedocles’ lead sandal as an image to show that their philosophy was “of the earth, under the earth, and autochthonous.” 33 Opposed to this image are the “wings of the Platonic soul” for which philosophy is “always determined as an ascent and a conversion.” 34 For the Cynics and Stoics, however, the philosopher belongs neither in the depths nor in the heights, but is “the animal which is on a level with the surface - a tick or louse.” 35

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34Deleuze, Logic of Sense 127.
35Deleuze, Logic of Sense 133.
In the terms of this taxonomy of philosophical imagery, Nietzsche’s dangerous butterfly fits most easily in the third group, of surface-dwellers, where the Socratic “gadfly” would also belong. Such a classification of the Nietzschean philosophical spirit might appear to conflict with the fact that, like the pre-Socratics, Nietzsche claims to “philosophize with a hammer.” It should be kept in mind, however, that Nietzsche makes a relatively delicate use of this pre-Socratic philosophical instrument, reinterpreting it as a “tuning fork” with which to sound out hollow idols, a practice which of course involves touching their surfaces (TI Foreword). It is clear that the wings of Nietzsche’s butterfly are not designed to soar above the passions of ordinary life into a Platonic realm of Ideas, but nor are its fluttering movements to be confused with subterranean tremors. His philosophical butterfly, like its everyday counterparts, is a surface-dweller, which is to say that his writings hover close to the discursive surfaces that express and mould the consciousness which concerns him.

Deleuze does not classify the Nietzschean philosophical animal with the ticks and louses of ancient times, however. He gives greater weight to Nietzsche’s interest in the pre-Socratic tradition, arguing that “Nietzsche was able to rediscover depth only after conquering the surfaces. But he did not remain at the surface, for the surface struck him as that which is to be assessed from the renewed perspective of an eye peering out from the depths. Nietzsche takes little interest in what happened after Plato, maintaining that it was necessarily the continuation of a long decadence.” In referring to the perspective of “an eye peering out from the depths,” Deleuze is thinking of Empedoclean “eyes without a face” and the “impassible organless head” of Dionysus. However, the notion that Nietzsche is a thinker

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36 In this respect, Nietzsche follows Kant against Plato. Kant writes: “Misled by [. . .] a proof of the power of reason, the demand for the extension of knowledge recognises no limits. The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space. It was thus that Plato left the world of the senses” (A4-5, B8-9). The English translation used throughout this study is Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933). In references to this work, “A” refers to the first edition of 1781 and “B” to the second edition of 1787. I thank Paul Redding for drawing this passage to my attention.

37 Deleuze, Logic of Sense 129.

38 Deleuze, Logic of Sense 129.
who works in the depths is given a different resonance by Nietzsche’s self-description in *Daybreak* as a “solitary mole” and a “subterranean man,” one who “tunnels and mines and undermines” (D Pref. 1).

In contrast to Deleuze’s view, the reading of Nietzsche presented in this chapter will reveal a thinker who takes close interest in “what happened after Plato,” particularly with respect to Stoic thought and the development of decadence. As for Nietzsche’s mining and undermining activities, we shall see that like Deleuze’s Hercules, Nietzsche’s thought “always ascends or descends to the surface”\(^\text{39}\); his subterranean diggings are designed to bring hidden roots to light, rather than to create a home in the depths. As a mole, he is to be compared, not to a blind burrower (although science has established that moles can see quite well), but rather to a secret agent who operates from deep within the security defences of modernity.

This characterization of Nietzsche’s philosophical spirit explains why “decadent” as well as “healthy” perspectives “come to the surface” in his work, since both are active in modern life. But what distinguishes the philosopher’s display of decadence from the original? How may one distinguish a performance of decadence which is motivated by a philosophical “will to responsibility,” from the decadent performances of a modern “actor”? In the course of his analysis of Socrates, Nietzsche suggests that the most that philosophical methods ever achieve is to “alter the expression” of decadence: “It is self-deception on the part of philosophers and moralists to imagine that by making war on décadence they therewith elude décadence themselves. This is beyond their powers: what they select as an expedient, as a deliverance, is itself only another expression of décadence - they alter its expression, they do not abolish the thing itself” (TI “The problem of Socrates,” 11). Let us turn to Klossowski for an analysis of the way in which the movements of Nietzsche’s “dangerous butterfly” might be said to “alter the expression” of decadence in modernity.

\(^{39}\)Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* 132.
2.2 Axis of delirium: Klossowski’s reading of Nietzsche

Klossowski argues that the “interpretative delirium” or the multiplicity of conflicting perspectives that appear in Nietzsche’s work is evidence of “[t]he fact that his thought revolved around delirium as its axis.”40 This is not to dismiss Nietzsche’s work as “mad,” however; nor is it to grant the damning excuse of “extenuating circumstances,” as if the more perplexing aspects of Nietzsche’s texts could be bracketed off as unfortunate products of his periodic infirmity, subject to a claim of diminished responsibility on the part of the thinker. Rather, it is to acknowledge that if, as Klossowski affirms, contemporary history has already begun to fulfill Nietzsche’s predictions of a “convulsive” future, this is because the delirium he interrogated corresponded to a lived experience that is peculiarly modern.41

On this view, Nietzsche’s “experimental” or irresponsible approach to the roles he plays is a performativ expression of the cacophanous multiplicity of the “modern soul.” If his work displays, as Ricoeur puts it, “a perspectivism incapable of expressing itself without contradiction,”42 this is because it reflects the disorder of modern life, in which responsibilities linked to social roles are adopted and abandoned with “dramatic” and convenient rapidity. The “interpretative delirium” traced and invoked by Nietzsche’s texts is not merely a symptom of his own suffering, but an acute analysis and brilliant expression of the tensions of thought in an age of “actors.”

On Nietzsche’s analysis, once conversion to “role faith” has allowed individuals to treat themselves as ongoing experiments for long enough, the next development is that they “really” become actors: “whenever a human being begins to discover how he his playing a role and how he can be an actor, he becomes an actor” (GS 356). This “rather odd

40Klossowski xv.
41Writing as the Pentagon burns and the World Trade Center collapses in the wake of a terrorist attack, the idea of a link between delirium and the conditions of responsibility in modernity seems particularly compelling.
metamorphosis” brings worldly power in its wake: freed of the limitations that faithfulness to any particular role entails, “actors” are able to “become the real masters.” At the same time, the great institutions of society are eroded and finally rendered impossible. This is why, as we saw in the last chapter, Nietzsche regards socialist plans for a future “free society” as quixotic: although “for a long time people will still keep silent about it,” actors are not material for a society (GS 356).

The silence which shrouds the new forms of power that emerge when “actors” become “the real masters” provides an explanation for what Klossowski sees as the “conspiratorial” quality of Nietzsche’s work. In his view, Nietzsche’s investigations - into science, art, or contemporary and past political situations - had the aim not merely of analysing, but also of transforming these new forms of constraint. Nietzsche’s work aimed at “a liberatory conception of the forces that lay subjacent not only to his own condition, but also to the various situations he was living through in the context of his own epoch.”

In this respect, the apparent “delirium” of Nietzsche’s own thought represents a lucid response to the constraints it must confront. According to Klossowski, these are threefold, relating to language, modern institutional authority and the process of scientific experimentation. Language, insofar as it is based on the principle of identity he wishes to place in question, circumscribes Nietzsche’s thought from within. By controlling what can be recognised in accordance with the reality principle, institutional authorities (Klossowski singles out historians of philosophy and psychiatrists for special mention) circumscribe it from without. Finally, the methods of science operate from both sides, “displacing the boundaries... between the inside and the outside.” Up to a point, Nietzschean thought seems to yield to these constraints. Klossowski notes that particularly in making use of the

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44 Klossowski 32. 
45 Klossowski xviii.
conventions of historical writing, Nietzsche’s understanding seems to comply with the principle of reality: “insofar as he simply described reality historically, he analysed it in order to reconstruct it, and thus to communicate the results of his research to others.” Nietzsche also abided by the principle of identity “insofar as he defined himself as a teacher in relation to what he was teaching.” \(^\text{46}\)

Later in this chapter, questions concerning the way in which Nietzsche “described reality historically,” and “defined himself as a teacher,” as well as his ambiguous relationship to scientific method, will guide our analysis of Nietzschean method as it is represented in the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. For the moment, however, let us note that Klossowski’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s “performance style” implies that Nietzsche’s identity cannot be reduced either to the sum of the roles he plays, or to that of the modern “actor” who plays them. As a “conspiratorial” thinker, Nietzsche is not “faithful” to these roles, but nor can he simply be described as an “actor” - his “performance” is guided by an impulse which contradicts and exceeds the self-interest that drives the “real actor.”

Klossowski maintains that Nietzsche’s thought is motivated not only by his sense of the ailments of his epoch, but also by the desire to go “beyond his own self.” This desire then accounts for Nietzsche’s hermeneutic versatility, since on Klossowski’s reading the aim of self-overcoming remained constant throughout Nietzsche’s investigations, whether into science, art or political events, and it was this that led him to combine the terminologies proper to these discrete fields with increasing equivocation. “When borrowing from the various disciplines, he gave them his own emphases, and pursued a vision that escaped them - a vision which, because of its experimental character, lacked any ‘objective’ consideration.” \(^\text{47}\)

\(^{46}\)Klossowski xviii.
\(^{47}\)Klossowski 32
At this point, Klossowski’s reading appears to meet up with that of Nehamas, who sees Nietzsche as a teacher of the experimental art of self-overcoming or self-creation. However, in contrast to Nehamas, Klossowski does not present Nietzschean “self-overcoming” as a freely creative process, in spite of its lack of “objective” considerations. Instead, he argues that Nietzsche’s emotion (specifically that associated with the experience of “eternal return”) “initiated” him into the unique dimension of “an authenticity that can be formulated without any reference points, without any necessary verification.” This mysterious authenticity would then have “constrained Nietzsche to wander among so many theories, which would always be revised, surpassed and contradicted in his effort to persuade.”

In the process of exploring and expounding various theories, Nietzsche momentarily forgot this dimension of authenticity, says Klossowski, but it nevertheless continued to operate as a constraint on his thought.

At first glance, the idea that Nietzschean self-overcoming is constrained by the dimension of “authenticity” invites two equally dramatic interpretations. On the one hand, the authenticity involved might be understood to refer to “life and death” as the ultimate criteria of responsibility. This would make of Nietzsche not merely a philosopher, nor even a physician, but an ecstatically inspired prophet or preacher, writing not about life and death, as historians do, but on their behalf. On the other hand, the claim to “authenticity” might be suspected to function as a mask for madness - the constraint of a disorder which will ultimately entail the loss of reason. In this case, Nietzsche would be a false prophet, prey to his own emotions and a danger both to himself and to those who listen to him. Klossowski’s interpretation dances in a zone of ambiguity which stretches between these two alternatives. He sees the

48Klossowski 118.
49Lou Salomé saw in Nietzsche’s interpretation of the eternal return as a “shining apotheosis of life” an “uncanny mask” which concealed - or signaled - Nietzsche’s own intense psychological suffering. Nietzsche himself claimed that the greater part of humanity could not tolerate the thought of the eternal return: see Klossowski 96-98.
“authenticity” which constrains Nietzsche’s thought as a source of tragic insight, which foreshadows personal disintegration.⁵⁰

Klossowski’s Dionysian vision of Nietzsche’s teachings contrasts with what might loosely be called the Apollonian perspective presented by Nehamas, who takes a more serene and constructive view of Nietzschean “self-overcoming.” Before turning to this alternative, let us take a few moments to stroll across the common ground upon which Klossowski and Nehamas build their opposing interpretations—i.e., the idea that although Nietzsche makes extensive use of roles or “masks” in order to develop and communicate his ideas, the will which drives his work is not simply that of an “irresponsible” modern “actor,” but rather that of a teacher who, like Socrates, attempts to illuminate and overcome the present state of the “self.” In making this claim, both Klossowski and Nehamas rest on the authority of Nietzsche’s writings: in the next section we too shall test the (shifting) ground of a Nietzschean text in order to observe Nietzsche in the role of “teacher.”

2.3 Nietzsche as “teacher”

How did Nietzsche define “himself as a teacher in relation to what he was teaching”? Klossowski’s reading suggests that in Nietzsche’s work conventional methods of exposition are subordinated to a tragic form of philosophical prophecy, reflecting the dimension of “authenticity” with which Nietzsche’s thought is intimately engaged. This implies that Nietzsche “as teacher” might be seen as a modern counterpart of Socrates, insofar as the Ancient Greek philosopher was similarly guided by a mysterious “dimension of authenticity” in the form of a “demon” who directed him from time to time. Although he does not rely on this rather “shady” point of comparison, Nehamas similarly argues that “Socrates was the only one among Nietzsche’s ‘educators’ from whom he could never be sure he had

⁵⁰ In the doctrine of the eternal return, on Klossowski’s reading, Nietzsche presents a lucid teaching (“to will to be other than you are in order to become what you are”) which anticipates his own loss of individual identity and the lucidity it supports. I will present my own reading of Nietzsche’s teaching of the eternal return in Chapter 5.
 emancipated himself.”51 This is because, in Nehamas’ view, Nietzsche’s own teaching of an art of “self-fashioning” places him within the Socratic tradition of philosophy as an “art of living.”

Nietzsche’s own attitude toward Socrates is ambivalent, however - to the point of hostility, as Nehamas emphasizes. For example, Nietzsche sees the “auditory hallucinations which, as ‘Socrates’ demon’, have been interpreted in a religious sense” as one among many expressions of Socrates’ decadence: “Everything about him is exaggerated, buffo, caricature, everything is at the same time hidden, reserved, subterranean” (TI “The problem of Socrates,” 4).52 The tone Nietzsche uses here in discussing “Socrates’ demon” is archly - one might say, exaggeratedly - dismissive; in this it contrasts with the sincerity with which Klossowski presents the hypothesis of Nietzsche’s own “initiation” into a hidden “dimension of authenticity.” However, Nietzsche’s interpretation of “Socrates’ demon” as a sign that the philosopher has taken more than one step into décadence does not in itself conflict with Klossowski’s corresponding analysis of the emotional force driving Nietzsche’s thought as a “constraint” which manifests as “delirium.” Moreover, just as Klossowski holds that Nietzsche’s “initiation” into a “dimension of authenticity” leads ultimately to his own disintegration, Nietzsche also suggests that Socrates’ power was intimately linked to death. In Nietzsche’s view, Socrates exercised fascination because in his use of reason to master antagonistic instincts, “he seemed to be a physician, a saviour” (TI “The problem of Socrates,” 11). However, as his last words indicated, Socrates himself knew that “death alone is a physician here” (TI “The problem of Socrates,” 12).53

51Nehamas, *Art of Living* 154.
52See also HH 126 where Nietzsche suggests that “the daemon of Socrates [. . .] was perhaps an ear infection which, in accordance with the moralizing manner of thinking that dominated him, he only interpreted differently from how it would be interpreted now.” He continues: “It is not otherwise with the madness and ravings of the prophets and oracular priests; it is always the degree of knowledge, imagination, exertion, morality in the head and heart of the interpreters that has made so much of them.”
53In Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates’ dying words are recorded as: “Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt?” Asclepius is the god of medicine; the offering of a cock to him was traditionally made upon recovery from an illness.
The idea that Nietzsche, like Socrates, seems to be “a physician, a saviour” or a philosophical prophet (whether inspired or false), is based, at least in part, upon Nietzsche's use of the religious rhetoric of redemption, something which is well-illustrated in the later sections of Nietzsche’s essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” the second of three essays which make up his work *On the Genealogy of Morals*. At this point, we shall momentarily leave aside the work of Nietzsche’s commentators in order to examine how Nietzsche “defines himself as a teacher” in this text. This will allow us to assess the plausibility of the view of Nietzsche as a demonically or “authentically” inspired prophet, before considering Nehamas’ competing account of the Socratic element in Nietzsche’s thought.

Our choice of the essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” as the “platform” upon which to examine Nietzsche in the role of teacher is motivated not only by his use of quasi-prophetic language at the end of this piece, but also by its subject matter. In this essay, Nietzsche claims to tell the “long story of how responsibility originated,” and describes a fully-achieved form of responsibility, practiced by a figure he calls the “sovereign individual” (GM II.2). In the next chapter, we shall examine this concept of responsibility in detail. For the moment, however, Nietzsche’s essay will serve us as a stage upon which to observe his performances in a variety of roles. It should be noted that the role of “prophet” is only one among many that Nietzsche plays in the didactic interest of communicating the results of his “genealogical” inquiry into the origins of responsibility. Initially, he has recourse to a distinctly “scientific” range of personae, employing tools of analysis drawn from the disciplines of psychology and history in order to analyse the human capacity to make promises. At this stage, the tone of the essay is objective, secular and demystifying, even if the style is rather more poetic than is usual in analytic writing. However, as its argument unfolds, a gradual shift takes place. The secular history of law and punishment gives way to the sacred history of religious experience, a change in focus which presages a more dramatic shift in tone.
At first, Nietzsche continues in “scientific” mode, presenting the religious dimension of the “long story of how responsibility originated” in the form of an apparently anthropological study. In summary, his argument is that religious sentiment originates in a sense of indebtedness felt toward a tribe’s ancestors. Over time, this is exaggerated to become fear of the gods. Finally, with the advent of the Christian God, “as the maximum god attained so far” (GM II.20), the religious sentiment becomes a searing sense of guilt associated with an irredeemable debt - irredeemable except, that is, by God himself, who, in an extraordinary reversal of roles, sacrifices himself for the guilt of mankind. Far from relieving man’s sense of guilty indebtedness, however, the symbolic effect of the crucifixion is to establish the “immeasurability of punishment and guilt.” Nietzsche declares this to be a piece of “psychical cruelty” in which “there resides a madness of the will which is absolutely unexampled” (GM II.22).

By this stage, any semblance of the objectivity of scientific discourse has been abandoned and Nietzsche as preacher is in full flight: “Oh this insane, pathetic beast - man! What ideas he has, what unnaturalness, what paroxysms of nonsense, what bestiality of thought erupts as soon as he is prevented just a little from being a beast in deed!” (GM II.22). Having denounced the religion of Christ, Nietzsche then goes on to describe an “Antichrist and antinihilist” who “must come one day” to redeem reality from the “curse that the hitherto reigning ideal has laid upon it” (GM II.24). Stopping short of actually prophesying that this “redeeming man of great love and contempt” will come to relieve the suffering of “bad conscience,” Nietzsche interrupts himself to conclude the essay on an enigmatic note: “But what am I saying? Enough! Enough! At this point it behooves me only to be silent; or I shall usurp that to which only one younger, “heavier with future,” and stronger than I has a right - that to which only Zarathustra has a right, Zarathustra the godless” (GM II.25).
As this brief account shows, when he broaches the topic of specifically Christian religious concepts and practices, Nietzsche quickly abandons any semblance of scientific neutrality and instead mimics the rhetoric of the preachers and prophets whose teachings he analyses and criticizes: he denounces and proclaims, decries and exhorts, moralizes and prophesies, to the point where his text seems to demand that the reader judge it either as madness or inspired prophecy - or as a deliberately hyperbolic performance of the risks that Nietzsche realised his work (and the culture it reflects) takes.

The final sentence of the essay can be read as signaling a retreat from this “Klossowskian” position, however. Here, Nietzsche acknowledges that he has no right to make prophesies, except in the form of poetic parables: Zarathustra is his vehicle for such ideas. The fictional Zarathustra may be “godless,” but Nietzsche himself is still haunted by the shadow of God which lies within the secular, scientific consciousness he has inherited along with the Western cultural tradition. That is to say, he is still bound by the need to establish the plausibility of his statements by means of conscious, rational argument. His own “bad conscience” demands it. In recognizing this, Nietzsche maintains a “reasonable” distance from both prophecy and madness.

At the same time, as we shall see when we return to this essay in order to examine how Nietzsche “describes reality historically,” Nietzsche is passionate in his complaints about the effects of “reason,” or at least of modern “rationality” which he closely associates with the “illness” of “bad conscience.” In this respect, his work forcefully suggests a vision of modern scientific consciousness as a state of suffering which needs to be overcome. Insofar as Nietzsche himself shares in this consciousness, he desires to go “beyond his own self,” as Klossowski says. Does this also mean that he ultimately desires to go beyond reason or beyond life? Klossowski’s insistence on the connection between Nietzsche’s thought and his eventual collapse into madness would suggest that ultimately, the answer is yes. However, as was flagged earlier, Nehamas also sees the desire for self-overcoming as central to
Nietzsche’s philosophical project, but sees no connection between it and the loss of life or reason. Instead, he interprets Nietzschean self-overcoming as an affirmative, artistic form of self-creation.

2.4 The art of living: Nehamas’ reading of Nietzsche

Nehamas locates Nietzsche in a tradition stretching from Plato via Montaigne to Foucault which, in his view, involves the practice of philosophy as an individualist, aestheticist “art of living.” He argues that this style of philosophy rejects imitators, but offers a rich resource for followers who aspire to develop or discover their own methods of self-creation. Although it “forbids the direct imitation of models,” Nehamas suggests that the tradition is nevertheless inspired by a single, profoundly ambiguous model: “Socrates is the prototypical artist of living because, by leaving the process he followed absolutely indeterminate, he also presents its final product as nonbinding: a different procedure, with different materials, can create another life and still be part of his project.”

The radical indeterminacy ascribed here to the “art of living” raises the obvious question of how it can be taught or transmitted as a tradition. On this point, Nehamas observes that, like Socrates, Nietzsche is not a thinker who seeks students who will adopt his teachings as “truths” to be defended or qualified. A passage of the Gay Science on “Undesirable disciples” makes this colorfully clear:

What shall I do with these two young men! cried a disgruntled philosopher who had “corrupted” youth as Socrates had once done; they are unwelcome students. This one cannot say “No,” and that one says to everything “Half and half.” Supposing that they adopted my doctrine, the former would suffer too much, for my way of thinking requires a warlike soul, a desire to hurt, a delight in saying No, a hard skin; he would slowly die of open and internal wounds. And the other

54Nehamas, Art of Living 10.
55Nehamas, Art of Living 11.
one would make some personal compromise with every cause he represents and thus compromise it; such a disciple I wish my enemy. (GS 32)

Rather than evidence that Nietzsche’s way of doing philosophy is “absolutely indeterminate,” however, this passage might well be read to indicate that it is dangerously determinate. This is not a thought of lofty generalities which leaves every reader room to move safely about. Rather, it is bristling with sharply defined perspectives and evaluations which are not to be approached indiscriminately, or in a half-hearted manner. This suggests that those capable of learning from Nietzsche must first be prepared to do battle with the aggressive and contradictory propositions of his teachings and then select those that are compatible with their own health or stage of development. Nietzschean self-overcoming is not the same as self-abnegation or self-destruction, but nor is it the same as self-preservation. Followers of Nietzsche must also be ready to say No to their own prior habits and beliefs, not randomly, but in pursuit of an “objectivity” (Nietzsche’s scare-quotes) which involves knowing “how to employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge” (GM III.12).

These perspectives, affective interpretations and the methods which create and make use of them, although pluralistic, are not “absolutely indeterminate.” In relation to Nietzsche, I would reverse Nehamas’ analysis of the Socratic tradition. It is the “final product” of his teachings which remains “absolutely indeterminate”; the “processes” or methods followed and taught by Nietzsche, on the other hand, are not indeterminate, although they may be dangerous and are certainly to be regarded as “nonbinding” on subsequent thinkers, as the parable of the two students makes clear. Anyone who wishes to learn the philosophical “art of living” from Nietzsche must be prepared to experiment first-hand with the methods his work offers – in order to understand them, but also in order to test and affectively evaluate both the methods and oneself.
Nothing in this rules out the possibility of using reason as a method, or as a basis for evaluation – on the contrary, in the modern Western context this cannot be avoided. What it does require is that, like other methods, the various techniques gathered together under the banner of “reason” be assessed in experiential terms, that is, in terms of the ways of life they promote and depend upon. The image of Nietzsche as a prophet, whether genuine or fraudulent, creates a tendency to see “reason” as a single entity, opposed either to divine inspiration, or to madness. If, however, Nietzsche is regarded more moderately as a teacher of methods, who warns that students must take responsibility for their own evaluation and use of these methods, then reason can also be seen in a more nuanced manner, as a complex collection of commitments and principles that Nietzsche draws upon as well as exposing to the “dangerous butterfly’s” test of contemplative experience.

As Nietzsche says in Beyond Good and Evil, “One should not avoid one’s tests, although they are perhaps the most dangerous game one could play and are in the end tests which are taken before ourselves and before no other judge.” The purpose of such tests is “to see whether one is destined for independence and command” – which for Nietzsche also means, for responsibility and philosophy (BGE 41). This implies that Nietzsche’s reason for advocating the “overcoming” or “recreation” of the self is not merely to give vent to creative and formative energies, although it will involve this. Equally, if not more important is the desire to overcome impediments to a form of knowledge which is tied to a philosophical “will to responsibility.” Although this might be seen as the demanding and dangerous task which Nietzsche inherits from Socrates, this distinctly philosophical aspect of the Socratic/Nietzschean “art of living” is somewhat neglected in Nehamas’ discussion of the “products” of “self-creation.” What Nehamas’ account does capture, however, is the sense of Nietzschean philosophy as a living, moving practice, which revives the ancient Greek idea of philosophy as a way of life, albeit in a modern incarnation.
Nietzsche and the Stoic “art of living”

Although the earliest origins of the concept of philosophy as an “art of living” can be traced to the figure of Socrates, John Sellars points out that almost all the references in the ancient literature to “an art concerned with one’s way of life” derive from sources with Stoic connections.Sellars stresses that in the Socratic texts this image of philosophy “is only hinted at and is by no means developed into a fully-fledged concept.” Here we find an explanation for why Nehamas presents the “art of living” as radically indeterminate: because he takes Socrates as the “prototypical artist of living,” Nehamas describes this “art” in its embryonic form, when it was little more than a promising blur on the “ultra-sound” of the history of Western philosophy. Although Socrates might be credited with being the “father” of the concept of an art of living, it was “only later, in the hands of the Stoics” that this concept grew into a fully-formed philosophical practice.

Given this, if Nietzsche’s work is to be read as a continuation of the tradition of philosophy as a determinate “art of living,” it will be important to consider the relationship between his philosophical practice and that of the Stoics. Nietzsche’s attitude towards these philosophical predecessors alters markedly over the course of his productive life. Early in his career, while he is still under the influence of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche sees the Stoics as models of a living practice of philosophy that is regrettably lacking in his own day. He complains that “[n]o one dares venture to fulfil the philosophical law in himself, no one lives philosophically with that simple loyalty that constrained a man of antiquity to bear himself as a Stoic wherever he was, whatever he did, once he had affirmed his loyalty to the Stoa” (UM II.5).

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56John Sellars, The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy (Hants UK, 2003) 5. Sellars points out that the precise phrase “art of living” does not occur in the ancient literature. It is likely that Nehamas may have adopted it from Foucault, who suggests that in antiquity philosophy was often conceived as an “art of living.” See Michel Foucault, The Care of Self: The History of Sexuality 3, trans. R. Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988) 43-45.

57Sellars 54.

58Sellars 54.
In later work, however, Nietzsche abandons both his own intellectual loyalty to Schopenhauer and the Stoic ideal of “simple loyalty” to a “philosophical law.” By the time of the *Gay Science*, he has adopted a cynical view of his own youthful enthusiasm for Stoic ways: “Is our life really painful and burdensome enough to make it advantageous to exchange it for a Stoic way of life and petrification? We are not so badly off that we have to be as badly off as the Stoics” (GS 326). This is the period of Nietzsche’s thought which lends most support to Nehamas’ interpretation of the Nietzschean “art of living” as a freely artistic process of self-formation or self-appraisal. *The Gay Science* is liberally seasoned with remarks such as: “One thing is needful. - To ‘give style’ to one’s character - a great and rare art!” (GS 290); and “we want to be the poets of our life - first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters” (GS 299).

However, it is in this work also that Nietzsche begins to be troubled by the “problem of the actor” and its relation to the “dangerous concept of the ‘artist’” (GS 361). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche explicitly links this problem and its relation to philosophy to the Stoics. Here his attitude is the diametric opposite of his early nostalgia for Stoic ways: he addresses the Stoics as “you strange actors and self-deceivers!” accusing them of “self-tyranny” and a fraudulent claim to live “according to nature” when in truth, they “demand that nature should be nature ‘according to the Stoa.'” This is an attitude destined to survive the decline of ancient ways of living: “what formerly happened with the Stoics still happens today as soon as a philosophy begins to believe in itself. It always creates the world in its own image, it cannot do otherwise; philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to ‘creation of the world’, to *causa prima*” (BGE 9). Here, Nietzsche takes Stoicism as the ambiguous model for all philosophical practice, including, one must presume, his own. This suggests a relation of correspondence between Nietzsche and the Stoics which might be taken to support the view that he is engaged in an “art of living” of ancient origins. However, it also involves a vision of this “art” that departs significantly from Nehamas’ depiction.
The image of Stoicism as an art practiced by “strange actors and self-deceivers” also seems far removed from the “art of living” described by Epictetus when he writes: “Philosophy does not promise to secure anything external for man, otherwise it would be admitting something that lies beyond its proper subject matter. For just as wood is the material of the carpenter, bronze that of the statuary, so each individual’s own life is the material of the art of living.”

The idea that an individual’s life may be compared to the performance of an actor is present in Epictetus, but the “material” of this performance is nevertheless of a fixed nature:

“Remember that thou art an actor in a play, of such a kind as the teacher (author) may choose [. . .] this is your duty, to act well the part that is given to you; but to select the part, belongs to another.”

In contrast to the wood, bronze and pre-cast roles Epictetus sees around him, the modern conditions observed by Nietzsche present rather more dubious work materials:

“All of us are no longer material for a society; this is a truth for which the time has come” (GS 356). One might wonder, in light of Nietzsche’s assessment of the quality of individual lives in modernity, whether “all of us” are any longer “material” for the “art of living,” at least as this art was practiced in antiquity. If Nietzsche’s own philosophical practice represents a modern adaptation of this ancient tradition, then it is to be expected that, like the “multi-coloured and dangerous winged creature” of the Nietzschean philosophical spirit, the “art of living” will have undergone a dramatic metamorphosis since the days of Epictetus’ craftsmen.

The idea that the original Stoic version of the ancient philosophical “art of living” is a significant “genealogical” source of Nietzsche’s own philosophical method is, however, strongly supported by the fact that the works of the Stoic Epictetus were among the most heavily read and annotated in Nietzsche’s library. The fruits of this reading appear most

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59Epictetus, Discourses, 1.15, quoted in Sellars, 2003: 6, 56.
60Epictetus, The Encheiridion, or Manual, 17, in Discourses of Epictetus with the Encheiridion and Fragment, trans. George Long (London: George Bell and Sons, 1877) 386.
clearly in Nietzsche’s early theory of history, which involves the appropriation and adaptation of the structures of Stoic thought to modern conditions as Nietzsche understands them at this early stage in his work. Traces of this formative influence of Stoicism upon Nietzsche’s thought are also discernable in his mature work. In particular, I shall seek to show that the essentially Stoic structure of Nietzsche’s early theory of history persists, in “dangerous and multi-coloured” form, in Nietzsche’s later practice of “genealogy” in *On the Genealogy of Morals.*

Before we can meaningfully discuss what becomes of the Stoic “art of living” in its modern metamorphosis as Nietzschean “genealogy,” we must examine the more straightforward question of precisely how Stoic ideas are appropriated and adapted in Nietzsche’s essay “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life.” A reading of this essay will therefore be our starting point for examining both the metamorphosis of the Stoic “art of living” in the “cocoon” of Nietzsche’s thought, and the question of how Nietzsche “represented reality historically.”

**2.5 An untimely meditation upon history**

In the second of his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche identifies three “species” of history that can be of service to life: monumental, antiquarian and critical. Monumental history is the history of greatness that can inspire future acts of greatness. It is a productive use of the past, and as such involves varying amounts of artistic deception, since a considerable degree of interpretation is required if the past is to be described as “worthy of imitation, as imitable and possible for a second time.” (UM II.2) Antiquarian history is history that serves the community by piously preserving and making sense of the more mundane details of the past, thus promoting contentment and attachment to a culture. Nietzsche comments that “it is this which is today usually designated as the real sense of history.” Its danger is that it may

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degenerate into an undiscerning cult of the past, giving rise to “the repulsive spectacle of a blind rage for collecting” and paralysing or persecuting the man of action who wishes to follow the models of monumental history. (UM II.3) It is this possibility that calls for critical history, a power of judgment capable of condemning the past, burdened as it is with human violence and weakness. In spite of their differences, these three “species” of history complement and balance one another, since they correspond to three aspects of a single “living man”: “as a being who acts and strives, as a being who preserves and reveres, as a being who suffers and seeks deliverance.” (UM II.2)

In its structure - three distinct forms, which are united in what might be described as an “art of living” - Nietzsche’s theory of history strikingly resembles the threefold division of philosophical topoi made in the Stoic literature. Epictetus distinguishes three acts or functions of the soul - judgment, desire and inclination or impulsion to act. These correspond to three spiritual disciplines and to three types of philosophical discourse - logic, physics and ethics. However, just as Nietzsche traces the genesis of his three “species” of history to three aspects of “the living man,” Pierre Hadot emphasises that for the Stoic, philosophy itself was a living practice of wisdom that strictly speaking was not divisible into parts. Logic, physics and ethics are thus not parts of philosophy, but parts of the discourse relating to philosophy. Their basis in a unified living culture means that they are necessarily interrelated. For the Stoic, it is ultimately “the same force and the same reality that is at the same time creative Nature, Norm of conduct and Rule of discourse.”

In Stoic thought, the force of reality is known as Logos; in Nietzsche’s theory of history, on the other hand, reality is not represented by Logos but by “life alone, that dark, driving power that insatiably thirsts for itself” (UM II.3). In giving such priority to the power of “life,” Nietzsche seeks to counteract what he sees as the modern proliferation of an “indigestible”

form of history. In the modern era, Nietzsche argues, history has lost its natural relationship with life because of “the demand that history should be a science.” This is no mere academic event, but the source of a “spiritual occurrence” that has created the “chaotic inner world which modern man describes with curious pride as his uniquely characteristic inwardness” (UM II.4). Externally, the result is that the living culture of ancient times has been immobilized: burdened with “a huge quantity of indigestible stones of knowledge,” cultural sensibility “lies quietly within, like a snake that has swallowed rabbits whole and now lies in the sun and avoids all unnecessary movement” (UM II.4).63 This dramatic difference between the spiritual and cultural conditions of antiquity and modernity means that Nietzsche cannot simply apply the Stoic system to the topic of history. In anticipation of the theory of historiography expressed in the Genealogy of Morals, his appropriation of the Stoic “art of living” retains “a certain strict sequence of procedures,” but introduces more than a little fluidity in relation to “the meaning, the purpose, the expectation associated with the performance of such procedures” (GM II.13).

Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s three “species” of history do display certain points of correspondence with the three disciplines of Stoic philosophical discourse. Roughly speaking, the discipline of desire (physics) is taken over by monumental history, the discipline of action (ethics) becomes the domain of antiquarian history and the discipline of judgment (logic) is applied by critical history. The differences that emerge in the Nietzschean appropriation of the Stoic system, on the other hand, can be systematically explained in terms of the shift away from logic and towards “life.” Thus, in the Stoic system, the discipline of judgment, expressed in logic, dominates insofar as it provides the method which is used in the other two disciplines.

63It is likely that Nietzsche’s use of metaphors relating to digestion here is inspired by the importance Epictetus places on “philosophical digestion.” Sellars paraphrases Epictetus’ views as follows: “Too many of his students, [Epictetus] suggests, ‘throw up’ what they have heard before having given themselves an opportunity to digest it. They repeat philosophical ideas before they have assimilated them and thus they are unable to act in accordance with them, creating a disharmony between their actions and words. Such undigested principles are, for Epictetus, simply ‘vomit’”’ (Sellars 121). In Nietzsche’s view, such poor “digestion” has become the rule in modern scholarship.
of desire and action: as Hadot puts it, “[i]t is always a matter of examining and criticizing the judgments which I bring to bear, either on the events which happen to me, or on the actions which I want to undertake.”64 In Nietzsche’s theory of history, by contrast, the dominant force of “life” means that it is rather elements associated with the discipline of action which prevail.

The Stoic discipline of action, which deals with the regulation of active impulses, is structured by an emphasis on the norms (such as responsibility) which govern rational human action in community. For the Stoic, these norms are based on the basic principle of conservation, which provides an internal motive for action (as opposed to the external causation of events, to which the Stoic response is impassivity, in accordance with the discipline of desire). Stoic action is also guided by the principle of justice. Although justice is not emphasized in the discourses of Epictetus, it becomes so important in the Confessions of Marcus Aurelius that the aspiration to behave justly sometimes appears as the defining element in the Stoic discipline of action.65 It can be seen that various elements of the Stoic discipline of action feature prominently in each of Nietzsche’s three types of history: its focus upon internal motivation for human action corresponds to the purpose of monumental history; its conservative and normative elements characterize antiquarian history; and its emphasis on justice reappears in the practice of critical history. For Nietzsche, however, the immediate goal is not the Stoic one of bringing individual actions into harmony with the logic of rational human nature. Nietzsche’s aim is rather to free human action from the constraints of the modern scientific disciplines. In Nietzsche’s view, the need for such liberation is urgent: rather than enhancing life, the modern practice of science relentlessly produces “stones of knowledge” which immobilize all who attempt to digest them (UM II.4).

This reversal of aims also affects the relation between the Stoic disciplines of desire and judgement, on the one hand, and Nietzsche’s concepts of monumental and critical history on

65 Hadot, Inner Citadel 218.
the other. The Stoic practiced the discipline of desire in order to bring his desires into accord with Nature, understood through physics as an immense, inexorable, and imperturbable flux of events. In Hadot’s words, the result of this discipline “was to bring people inner serenity and peace of mind, since it consisted in the joyful consent to everything that happens to us through the agency of universal Nature and Reason.”66 Whilst the accent upon a joyful attitude is retained in Nietzsche’s idea of monumental history, the global affirmation of natural forces here becomes a highly selective affirmation of artistically enhanced human achievements. The ability to select that which warrants assent and reject that which does not was cultivated by the Stoic, not in artistic practice, but in the discipline of judgment, based on logic. In the judgment involved in Nietzsche’s critical history, on the other hand, we find not selective rejections, but rather global condemnation: “every past [. . . ] is worthy to be condemned - for that is the nature of human things: human violence and weakness have always played a mighty role in them” (UM II.3). Thus global affirmation of physics becomes selective affirmation of art, while selective rejection based in logic becomes global condemnation of past human action.

In its reorientation away from science and the past, and towards art and the future, Nietzsche’s theory of history, although it draws upon forms of ancient philosophical culture, is clearly oriented to what he sees as present needs. In terms of responsibility, we may say that his theory is designed to combat a modern “scientific” version of responsibility which is concerned to impose universal accountability for each and every past action, and to promote in its place a creative reinterpretation of the past which allows the individual to take responsibility for the future. As we shall see in the following chapter, the modern vision of responsibility which Nietzsche opposes in his essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience and the Like,’” corresponds closely to Locke’s theory of personal responsibility, while his notion of a creative “sovereign” practice of responsibility bears a genealogical resemblance to Kantian ethics.

66 Hadot, Inner Citadel 183.
In his *Untimely Meditation* on history, however, Nietzsche’s proposed treatment for modern ailments involves a philosophical “exercise” or experiment which is designed to allow modern individuals to “give themselves” a past preferable to the one in which they actually originate:

The best we can do is to confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first withers away. It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were a posteriori, a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate: always a dangerous attempt because it is so hard to know the limit to denial of the past and because second natures are usually weaker than first. (UM II.3)

This practical project might be compared to the philosophical or “spiritual” exercises which form an essential element of the “art of living,” particularly as it is represented in Stoic texts. Nietzsche’s “exercise” requires all three types of “living” history operating in

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67 Central to both the Socratic and Stoic conceptions of philosophy as an “art of living” is the role played by some form of training or exercise. For an analysis of such exercises as they appear in the *Handbook* of Epictetus, see Sellars Chapter 6. For a more general discussion of ancient “philosophical exercises” and recent debate about their significance, see Sellars Chapter 5. Martha Nussbaum has criticised the accounts of such exercises given by Hadot and Foucault on the grounds that both thinkers obscure the essential role of reason and rational argument in ancient philosophy. In response, Sellars agrees that Hadot’s focus on the importance of “spiritual exercises” leads him to neglect the role of Logos in ancient philosophy. In relation to Foucault’s analysis of techniques or technologies of the self, on the other hand, Sellars argues that these are best understood as arts of the self which require the practice of exercises such as those described by Hadot, but cannot simply be reduced to them. In this, Foucault’s analysis is compatible with the Stoic understanding of philosophy as an art comprised of two components, rational argument and practical exercise or training. (Sellars 115-118) My own reading of Nietzsche aims to defend the view that in his work also, practical philosophical “exercises” are accompanied and informed by rational theoretical argument, although the relationship between the two has undergone certain dramatic changes since the days of the Stoics. For Nussbaum’s criticism of Hadot and Foucault, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 5, 353-354. Hadot’s position is developed in Hadot,
conjunction: critical history to condemn the past (especially that which is closest to us), monumental history to create a “new” past that can guide future development, and antiquarian history to protect against the dangers of too violent a denial (whether judgmental or artistic) of the inherited past.

In recommending a “dangerous attempt” to replace a “hereditary nature” with a “second nature,” Nietzsche reveals that this advice and the theory of history which supports it, is not designed for the “actor” subjects of “really democratic” ages, for whom all nature has long ago ceased and become art, making them oblivious to any danger involved in exchanging one role for another. Rather, it is addressed to an earlier type of modern man: one for whom the role of an occupation “has actually become character; and art, nature” (GS 356). For this kind of “unconscious actor,” the ancient forms of the “art of living” practiced by the Stoics must be reinterpreted, but they remain recognisable.

When Nietzsche begins to conceive of modern subjectivity, and philosophical practice, in more radically performative terms, however, a more significant adaptation of the ancient “art of living” to modern conditions is also required. In Nietzsche’s eyes, the Stoics remain exemplary, but take on an altered role as models of philosophical practice. These loyal sages are revealed to be “strange actors and self-deceivers,” while Nietzsche’s own optimistic doctrine of “living history” gives way to an internal analysis of the “chaotic inner world” of modernity in the form of “bad conscience.” In the essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” Nietzsche provides a dramatic enactment of the potentially fatal cultural indigestion he merely diagnoses in his “untimely” essay on history. In place of a conventionally didactic exposition of the ideal interaction of monumental, antiquarian and critical history accompanied by somewhat vague instructions regarding an “exercise”

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designed to put this theoretical knowledge into practice, in the later text Nietzsche directly exposes his reader to a “living” demonstration of the pathologically codependent yet mutually antagonistic operations of modern psychology, scientific history and academic philosophy. This is an experimental mode of teaching which does not merely recommend, but demands the student’s recognition of his or her own involvement in the problem under analysis.

2.6 Nietzsche in the role of “historian”

In his untimely meditation “On the uses and disadvantages of history for life,” Nietzsche provides a theory on how history ought to be done. In his essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” on the other hand, he takes on the role of historian himself, with gusto and a large margin of “artistic” liberty. This essay thus provides ideal material with which to assess how Nietzsche “represented reality historically,” as well as to examine what becomes of his theory of history “in the service of life” when it is applied to the task of writing the “long story of how responsibility originated” (GM II.2). It also brings us back to the problem of the apparent “irresponsibility” of Nietzsche’s methods: as we shall see, in this text Nietzsche is more than careless with regard to the conventions which academic historians (as well as their counterparts in departments of psychology and philosophy) would see as serious matters of responsibility. In Nietzsche’s defence, we shall argue that his “bad conscience” in this respect is produced by the operation of a philosophical “will to responsibility” of ancient origins, applied with acute sensitivity to modern conditions.

In addressing the question of how guilt, bad conscience, “and the like” developed, Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of knowledge of the past, criticizes English psychologists for their lack of “historical instinct,” (GM II.4) and appears to remedy the deficiencies of their approach by providing an historical analysis of contractual relationships and practices of punishment as a basis for examining the psychological phenomenon of guilt. A closer reading reveals, however, that despite occasional references to actual historical practices (such as punishments used by the Germans up until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), Nietzsche
is chiefly concerned, not with history, but with what he calls “prehistory.” It is “the labor
performed by man upon himself during the greater part of the existence of the human race,
his entire prehistoric labor,” that interests him (GM II.2). It was during this “prehistory,”
according to Nietzsche, that the “primeval problem” of creating a memory in the human
animal was solved through practices of torture, sacrifice and punishment.

In analysing the way punishment has been linked to contractual relationships of debt,
Nietzsche appears to embark upon a more conventional historical study, but his subsequent
claims do not depend upon any data regarding specific times or places: “everywhere and from
early times one had exact evaluations, legal evaluations, of the individual limbs” (GM II.5);
“[b]uying and selling, together with their psychological appurtenances, are older even that the
beginnings of any kind of social forms of organization and alliances” (GM II.8). As
Nietzsche explicitly states, in this inquiry he is “[s]till retaining the criteria of prehistory.”
Moreover, “this prehistory is in any case present in all ages or may always reappear” (GM
II.9). This remarkably sweeping claim appears in parentheses, a small, startling punctuation
of the text which then surges on into a theory of the origins of law, punishment and the idea
of justice in communal life. In setting out this theory, although he continues to claim to speak
“[f]rom a historical point of view,” Nietzsche finds no need for even occasional historical
examples, though he does make one contemporary reference (to anarchists and anti-Semites
amongst whom he finds ressentiment flourishing) (GM II.11). At this stage, the genre of
writing corresponds to the style of historical fable used by philosophers such as Hobbes and
Rousseau to illustrate and justify their views of human nature and political organisation,
rather than to any more distinctively historical method.68

68This style of philosophical writing is of ancient origins and it should be observed that the
content of Nietzsche’s theory resembles the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher
Epicurus much more closely than those of either of these modern thinkers. We will not
consider Nietzsche’s relation to Epicurus until Chapter 5 where this issue will be addressed as
it arises in The Anti-Christ. However, it should be noted that many of the ideas Nietzsche
presents in the Genealogy of Morals resonate closely with Epicurean beliefs. See Geneviève
Rodis-Lewis, Épicure et son école (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1975) Ch.5 “Nature et société,”
especially the section entitled, “Généalogie de la morale: le droit,” 323–40. It is possible that
It appears then that Nietzsche, while superficially observing and appealing to the conventions of historical scholarship established by institutional authorities, is in fact merely masquerading as a historian, making use of history for philosophical purposes. In doing so, it must be admitted that he is participating in a well-respected tradition of political philosophy. However Nietzsche can hardly claim the protection of this venerable company, for in the central sections of the second essay (and thus of the Genealogy as a whole), he insists upon a “major point of historical method” which, as he acknowledges, “is in fundamental opposition to the now prevalent instinct and taste” (GM II.12). It is also in fundamental opposition to the principles of the relevant authorities, both historical and philosophical.

Nietzsche’s point is that the origin and the purpose of a thing are two entirely separate problems, not to be confounded. The mistake made by the psychologists he criticizes is to determine some “purpose” in a thing, a form or an institution, and then to “guilelessly place this purpose at the beginning as causa fiendi.” This enables them to write the history of its origin without, of course, needing to engage in much if any actual historical work. Although they are not the explicit target of these remarks, this also seems a cogent criticism of those philosophers who invent engaging histories of the human race, entirely based on their understanding of the “purpose” or “meaning” of human nature. Nietzsche is emphatic in his opposition to this approach. Against it, he defends what he describes as the most important proposition of “any kind” of historiography, this being that:

the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpretected to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by

the title of Nietzsche’s work, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, is a reference to Hermarque’s Epicurean “genealogy” of morals, extracted by the Neoplatonist Porphyry in his work *On the abstinence of living beings*. See Rodis-Lewis at 323, fn 2. (Rodis-Lewis makes no mention of Nietzsche here, but the similarities between her exposition of Epicurean philosophy and Nietzsche’s ideas are striking.)
some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous “meaning” and “purpose” are necessarily obscured or even obliterated. (GM II.12)

Because it entails the consequence that nothing can be known about a thing’s origins or history merely by analysing its present meaning or purpose, this proposition seems to take history out of the hands of both psychologists and philosophers and restore it to the historians. But what is the history that it gives back? A “continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations whose causes do not even have to be related to one another” (GM II.12). From the point of view of logic, form and meaning are linked here in a purely arbitrary fashion so that the study of history cannot reveal any logical progression or direction in events. Furthermore, especially in a late condition of culture, such as that of modern Europe, an object of historical inquiry (the particular example that interests Nietzsche is the concept of “punishment”) will typically have accumulated a complex synthesis of “meanings” due to the fact that a range of different powers have successively employed it for diverse purposes. The lack of any logical thread in this chaotic development means that any emergent unity will, Nietzsche emphasizes, be “totally *indefinable.*” He adds in parentheses that “only that which has no history is definable” (GM II.13). History thus works to undermine definitions, whether psychological or philosophical, if they touch upon historical objects. It is not to be expected that this insight will have much effect on those who create such definitions, however. No doubt they will respond to such attrition of their work simply by continuing to produce further ahistorical notions. And in the end - or at least in the middle, in the muddled middle of the present, - their work proves necessary to history after all, since if all historians ultimately do is chart a more or less violent succession of interpretations, they surely require ahistorical points of view as threads with which to weave their alogical histories.
The psychologists and the historians, although theoretically opposed and deaf to one another, thus emerge as a united front, complicit in one another’s projects. They form a block of authority which will condemn both Nietzsche’s masquerade as historian, and the attack he mounts, under this assumed identity, on what he sees as bad psychology, but which might equally be described as the philosophical fabrication of history. The lucidity of this attack makes retaliation from the relevant authorities predictable, so it is not surprising that having made his pronouncement on “historiography,” Nietzsche quickly makes a tactical retreat to the ambiguous and impregnable zone of “prehistory”: “If we consider those millennia before the history of man” (GM II.14). . . In “pre-historical” mode, Nietzsche then proceeds to set out his “own hypothesis concerning the origin of the ‘bad conscience’” (GM II.17), an hypothesis we discussed in some detail in the previous chapter.

At this point, we might ask how it is that Nietzsche can consider and form hypotheses about a “period” inaccessible to historians, especially since he claims to do so with historical instinct lacking in previous “genealogists of morals.” Is there method in this madness? What is the vantage point that allows him to employ the discourses of history and psychology against one another, while submitting to the established authority of neither discipline? The quick answer would be that he surveys these fields from the superior viewpoint of the philosopher, and that it is his knowledge of structures that transcend both history and psychology that enables him to exploit the dialectical relations between these more modest modes of inquiry. Yet on the one hand, his attitude toward these branches of knowledge is not merely dismissive: he also insists upon what he sees as valuable in their approaches, here particularly in regard to history. And on the other hand, we have argued that his principle of “historiography” cuts both ways - against the psychologists he criticizes, but equally against the tradition of political philosophy to which his own style of “prehistoric” seems to conform. In this respect, Nietzsche’s text reveals a conflict that prevents any satisfying Hegelian style resolution of the

69In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche accuses philosophers, rather than psychologists, of a “lack of historical sense” (TI “Reason in Philosophy,” 1). It seems this is an “idiosyncrasy” that is in his opinion shared by philosophers and psychologists.
dialectical tension between psychology and history by appeal to the “higher” level of philosophical consciousness. Rather, Nietzsche’s joint critique of psychological and historical method seems to produce an insight that cannot easily be absorbed by philosophical discourse. Insofar as Nietzsche himself speaks in the voice of a philosopher, this digestive difficulty is a feature of his own text. The appeal to “prehistory” is thus a sign of “indigestion” resulting from the simultaneous consumption of historical, psychological and philosophical knowledge. It is a kind of conceptual belch which Nietzsche, careless of the etiquette observed by more polite and less voracious thinkers, does little to conceal.

Foucault’s explanation of how Nietzsche can write a form of “history” that exceeds the conventional limits of the genre is that his “[h]istorical sense has more in common with medicine than philosophy.”\(^70\) In Nietzsche’s hands, history is distanced from the metaphysical ideas of philosophy and focused instead upon “the body.” “Effective” history is allied not with psychology, but with physiology in the task of becoming “a curative science.”\(^71\) Its methods are more destructive than restorative, however: “knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.”\(^72\) In particular, the “historical sense” cuts against the three Platonic modalities of history: “The first [use of the historical sense] is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge.”\(^73\)

This analysis markedly resembles Klossowski’s assessment of the constraints operating upon Nietzsche’s discourse. However, where Klossowski suggests that the way Nietzsche’s

\(^{71}\text{Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 156.}
\(^{72}\text{Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 154.}
\(^{73}\text{Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 160.}
writing engages with the principles of reality, identity and scientific method is ambiguous to
the point of delirium, Foucault depicts a much more straightforward relationship of
opposition between such principles and corresponding aspects of Nietzschean “historical
sense.” One might suppose that this difference arises from the fact that while Klossowski’s
observations apply to the whole of Nietzsche’s work, Foucault is here interested only in the
more circumscribed question of his use of history. However, Foucault sees in Nietzsche’s
“historical sense” the driving force of his thought in general. In his view, Nietzsche’s
genealogical method is a reversal of the genealogy of history. It is history “seized, dominated,
and turned against its birth,”\(^74\) to become a “concerted carnival”\(^75\) which is committed to the
dissipation of identity\(^76\) and “calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge.”\(^77\)

Our reading of Nietzsche’s essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” has led to a
somewhat different interpretation of genealogy, as a method which combines different
“species” of scientific discourse so as to reveal both their mutual dependency and their points
of antagonism. If the result can be described as a “concerted carnival” which dissipates
identity, this, like a particularly raucous Christmas Day dinner, is a family affair; there is no
need to introduce any supplementary elements or special perversions of family character in
order to provoke pandemonium. History, among its sibling discourses (notably psychology
and philosophy, but not limited to these), is sufficiently troublesome with all its family ties
intact, without being “seized, dominated, and turned against its birth.” Nor is history
necessarily to be singled out as the black sheep, since genealogy is as much a way of doing
philosophy or psychology as it is a way of doing history. Insofar as it resembles the practice
of medicine, if the chief malady of our times is “an illness as pregnancy is an illness,” then it
is to be hoped that genealogy will operate less as a violently “curative science” than as a
skilful form of philosophical midwifery.

\(^74\)Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 159.
\(^75\)Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 161.
\(^76\)Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 162.
\(^77\)Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 163.
The analysis of Nietzsche’s theory of history in relation to Stoic thought indicates the persistence of elements drawn from the ancient philosophical “art of living” in Nietzsche’s efforts to provide a therapy for the malady of modernity - albeit one that must work with present resources of knowledge, no matter how problematic. If, under the pervasive influence of the scientific method, the expansive and integrated disciplines of judgment (logic), desire (physics) and action (ethics) have been displaced by the inward-looking and divided disciplines of academic philosophy, psychology and history, then the treatment of the modern condition will require that the conflicts, as well as the surviving connections between these branches of knowledge be investigated with a view to revitalizing and reintegrating their discourses. From a scientific perspective, the confusion of different “roles” performed by Nietzsche in the second essay of On the Genealogy of Morals appears delirious, but as an attempt to combine philosophical with psychological and historical discourses in order to demonstrate and begin to overcome the alienation of these “voices,” it might be viewed as a remarkably skilful, if risky, experiment. The risk involved in this Nietzschean “philosophical exercise” flows from the fact that its final outcome, unlike the effects of the “exercises” practiced by students of the Stoic “art of living,” cannot be predicted. In this respect, the “experimental” method that emerges in Nietzsche’s “genealogical” work has more in common with modern scientific method than with more ancient forms of philosophical training: as a “therapy” it does not aspire to restore or cultivate a pre-established standard of “health,” whether this is defined in terms of Logos or “life”; instead, it seeks to expose and “overcome” the structures of modern consciousness in order to allow the “birth” of new forms of experience and knowledge.

If the “subject of knowledge” risks being “sacrificed” in the course of this philosophical experiment, I would argue that this is a consequence of the ascetic tendency toward “self-sacrifice” which characterises one aspect of “bad conscience.” However, the other three faces of “bad conscience” that were identified in the previous chapter are equally visible in the
performative “delirium” of Nietzsche’s essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like.” It involves an exuberantly creative performance of some of the key “roles” available to the contemporary “subject of knowledge”; a carelessly irresponsible approach to the conventions of scholarly work, especially with respect to history; and a rigorous, reflexive form of analysis applied to modern consciousness as it is manifest in the study of the human sciences. In this respect, this essay provides a “mischievous and knowledgeable” demonstration of the philosophical “exercise” Nietzsche proposes at its ambiguous “conclusion”: it shows how the destructive and creative energies of “bad conscience” can be wielded against its own ideals and used to analyse and alter its own experience. In so doing, it also reveals that the combative “will to self-responsibility” is an internal capacity of “bad conscience.”

From another perspective, the essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” provides a demonstration of the way in which Nietzsche teaches a version of the “art of living” which differs as much from ancient practices of this “art” as late modern European conditions of life and subjectivity differ from those experienced by the Stoics. Although the differences are marked, significant points of continuity between ancient Greek and modern subjectivity are also indicated by Nietzsche’s late evaluation of the Stoics as “strange actors,” as well as his claim that if late modern individuals are on the way to “really becoming actors” then they are replicating the enchanting and powerful ways of certain ancient Greeks. (GS 356) We have seen that Nietzsche’s articulation of such conceptual points of comparison is accompanied at the methodological level by the appropriation and transformation of the structures of Stoic thought within his own performative philosophical practice. If Nietzsche’s methods reflect the cocky “role faith” of the late modern democratic individual and the self-destructive “delirium” of contemporary culture, they also involve a modern version of the peculiarly philosophical “will to responsibility” that Nietzsche inherits from the original democrats of ancient Greece.
This completes our discussion of how Nietzsche “performs” in the roles of teacher and historical thinker. It does not, however, conclude our “genealogical” investigations into the sources of Nietzsche’s methods, which are not to be found exclusively in ancient Greek practices of philosophy. Nor does it mark the end our reading of Nietzsche’s essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience.’” In the next chapter, we shall return to this work in order to examine Nietzsche’s concept of “sovereign responsibility” and its relation to the modern experience of guilt (GM II.22).
III

Responsibility

In the previous chapter, we read the second of Nietzsche’s essays in *On the Genealogy of Morals* in order to examine the methods Nietzsche deploys in this text, and the modes of responsibility and irresponsibility that are implicit in his approach to philosophical methodology. We shall now focus more closely on the explicit concepts of responsibility and irresponsibility that Nietzsche presents here. The first and most striking of these is a consummate form of responsibility associated with a figure Nietzsche calls the “sovereign individual.”

Early in his essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” when describing the final outcome of the long development of human conscience, Nietzsche writes of the “proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of responsibility, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate [which has] penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct.” This instinctive practice of responsibility is the distinguishing mark of the “sovereign individual,” who calls it his conscience (GM II). Having outlined the qualities of this autonomous and supramoral form of conscience, Nietzsche then sets out to investigate the “long history and variety of forms behind it” (GM II.3). This quickly leads the “dangerous butterfly” of his philosophical spirit to alight upon a modern practice of responsibility as self-accountability. In the process, its “wings” are infused with the shades of a gloomy, black, unnervingly sad culture of guilt (GM II.22). Here we meet again with the “bad conscience,” in which awareness of responsibility and consciousness of power are not instinctively harmonized, but divided and set against one another.
Two problems arise immediately in interpreting this genealogical account of conscience and the form of responsibility attributed to its final form. The first concerns the status of the “sovereign individual” and his proud and instinctive awareness of responsibility. Is this figure intended to illustrate a present phenomenological reality, an evolutionary expectation or an ideal? Second, what is Nietzsche’s purpose in writing its genealogy? In linking the “sovereign” conscience to the guilt-ridden antecedent of “bad conscience,” which in turn is related to cruel practices of punishment, is it his intention to elevate or to undermine the authority of “sovereign” conscience and the practice of responsibility it represents?

Nietzsche’s account of his intentions

In 1885, two years before he wrote *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche began a summary of the motivations of his work to that date with the exclamation: “How long have I already sought to prove to myself the perfect innocence of becoming!” His first attempt to solve this problem was to decree: “Existence, as something similar to art, does not fall under the jurisdiction of morality; furthermore, morality itself belongs to the domain of phenomena.” This attitude corresponds to the approach taken at the beginning of the essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” where responsibility is described as a natural phenomenon which has evolved and become perfected (by scientific or aesthetic rather than moral standards) over the course of human history (or “prehistory”). Nietzsche’s next (mitigated) strategy to prove the innocence of becoming was to tell himself, “Every concept of guilt is objectively devoid of value, but subjectively, every life is necessarily unjust and alogical.” This might be said to be the maxim which guides Nietzsche’s “long story of the origins of responsibility,” in which the concept and feeling of guilt is shown to arise from “unjust and illogical” spectacles of pain and pleasure produced by means of punishment. Finally, Nietzsche says that he took upon himself “the negation of any aim, from the fact of experiencing the unknowability of

78 Quoted in Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* 14. The original text is from Nietzsche, *KSA* 11: 553, 36[10], June-July 1885. This reference applies to all quotes in the following paragraph.
any causal chain.” Here we find an explanation for the way Nietzsche’s essay concludes - or rather slides away - in doubts, strange hopes, hesitations and silence, evoking a mood which forms a stark contrast with the positive and authoritative tone with which he began.

The 1885 passage, by contrast, does not conclude in aimlessness. Nietzsche adds: “And why all this? Was it not in order to procure for myself the feeling of total irresponsibility? – to situate myself outside of all praise and blame, completely independent of yesterday and today, in order to pursue my own aim in my own manner?” This attitude might be compared to the carefree feeling that Nietzsche attributes to the Greeks who contrived to have their gods “justify man to a certain extent even in his wickedness.” However, Nietzsche’s “feeling of total irresponsibility” goes beyond the sense of innocence enjoyed by the Greeks, which was cultivated within the bounds of a strong ethical tradition: misdeeds could be justified by reference to the “guilt” of the gods, but only “to a certain extent” (GM II.23). In its “total” character, the feeling Nietzsche seeks corresponds more closely to the particular kind of responsibility practiced by his “sovereign individual,” a state which, as we shall see, involves precisely the complete independence “of yesterday and today” that Nietzsche says he craved.

The feeling (as opposed to the phenomenon, the concept or the aim) of sovereign responsibility is the feeling of total irresponsibility, where this means the sense that one is invulnerable to any form of accountability, and therefore uninhibited in making commitments (to one’s own goals, pursued in one’s own manner). It is the opposite of the feeling of what we have called “modern irresponsibility,” which is the sense that one is incapable of any form of responsibility and therefore unable to make any genuine commitments. The latter, depressed mood may be seen as a concomitant of the second and third efforts Nietzsche made to prove the “perfect innocence of becoming”: it flows from a vision of life as “unjust and alogical” and a sense that one’s ability to affect the future is negligible due to the “unknowability of any causal chain.”
This contrast raises the question of whether the consciousness of freedom and agency which Nietzsche describes as the feeling of “total irresponsibility” might be attained by means of a positive practice of “sovereign” responsibility. If so, this concept of responsibility might hold the key to addressing the ailment of “modern irresponsibility.” A more cynical alternative would be to interpret it as a fantasy which is symptomatic of a guilt-burdened state of consciousness, longing for a state of freedom it can never attain. A third, ambiguous possibility would be to see the “extraordinary privilege” of sovereign responsibility as “something one has and does not have, something one wants, something one conquers . . .” In assessing the value of “sovereign” responsibility, our first step will be to examine this idea more closely, with a view to supplementing Nietzsche’s account of his affective motivations with a discussion of his likely philosophical sources for this concept. As we shall see, Nietzsche’s “sovereign individual” displays a certain affinity with the Kantian moral subject. On the other hand, he also represents a striking inversion of Locke’s moral “person.”

3.1 Sovereign responsibility and Kantian ideals

Unlike the multifaceted concept of “self-responsibility,” the sense of responsibility which guides the actions of Nietzsche’s “sovereign individual” is singular and uncompromising. It is possible only for the “ripest fruit” of human history: an “emancipated individual,” who has achieved the “right to make promises,” a right which flows from the exercise of a will which is autonomous, supramoral, protracted and unbreakable. The sovereign individual promises “reluctantly, rarely, slowly” but once his word is given, his mastery over himself “and over fate” means that it can be relied upon, without fail. The possibility that he might misjudge the extent of his power and make a promise he cannot keep is excluded by the fact that his judgments do not depend merely upon a “weak organ” of consciousness; in his case consciousness of his own responsibility, freedom and power has “become instinct, the dominating instinct.” The penetration and transformation of consciousness into instinct creates the “conscience” of the sovereign individual. It simultaneously liberates him from dependence on the “herd signals” of communication and the consciousness they create,
leaving him in possession of his own “measure of value” and indifferent to any other (GM II.2).

A notable feature of this vision of a perfect practice of responsibility is that it is oriented entirely toward the future, in which promises will be fulfilled. The question of when or how to take responsibility for past events, such as broken promises, does not arise, since the “sovereign individual” never breaks a promise and is responsible only for his own autonomous actions. Although Nietzsche envisages that this independent individual may have “peers,” it appears that he is without parents or children: no one bears any responsibility for him, and he is free of responsibility for others. The solitude of the modern individual reappears in the case of the sovereign individual in the form of perfect autonomy and freedom. In this happy relation to solitude, the sovereign individual bears a close resemblance to the “free spirits” among whom Nietzsche counts himself and whom he describes (in *Beyond Good and Evil*) as “born, sworn, jealous friends of solitude, of our own deepest, most midnight, most midday solitude.” These friends of solitude are also described by Nietzsche as “inventive in schemata, sometimes proud of tables of categories, sometimes pedants, sometimes night owls of labour even in broad daylight” (BGE 44).

The connection Nietzsche draws here between himself, Kant and a mode of freedom born of solitude suggests an interpretation of the figure of the “sovereign individual” as a Nietzschean “supramoral” adaptation of Kant’s moral subject. Georg Simmel makes a parallel reading of Nietzsche’s thought of eternal return, interpreting it as a regulative idea of ethics based upon an altered version of Kant’s categorical imperative. In the present context, however, R. Kevin Hill’s recent reading of *On the Genealogy of Morals* is more directly to the point. Emphasizing Nietzsche’s debt to Kant, Hill claims that for both thinkers “the self-legislating individual, freed from the constraints of natural law, historical tradition, and transcendent

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79 We shall examine Simmel’s work in detail in Chapter 5, when we come to consider the vision of responsibility implicated in the idea of eternal return.
religion, is the height of human aspiration.”

This characterization of Nietzsche’s position provides an elegant explanation of the apparent “hermeneutic disorder” we discussed in the last chapter. In his antagonistic engagement with the conventions of scientific inquiry, historical writing and prophetic discourse, Nietzsche would be actively aspiring to overcome, in his own thought, the three constraints which Hill identifies as superseded by the sovereign or “self-legislating” individual.

This is not, however, Hill’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s technique in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. He describes the genealogical method as “concerned to undermine ahistorical and inflationary interpretations of mundane facts about human life,” thereby attacking the authority of the norms that such interpretations are designed to legitimate. Hill does not consider the risk that the sharp instrument of genealogy might eventually “slip” and do damage to the Kantian norms of autonomy and self-legislation embodied in the “larger than life” figure of the sovereign individual. Rather, he takes Nietzsche’s endorsement of this extraordinary individual at face value, and proposes that it is only the guilt-ridden voice of “bad conscience” which is targeted by Nietzsche’s critical energies. On this interpretation, Nietzsche’s project in the essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” is to separate the noble practices of autonomy and responsibility from the moralizing mechanisms of guilt and accountability with which they are still associated in Kant’s work. Although the “sovereign individual” is genealogically linked to the guilt-ridden “man of bad conscience,” Nietzsche’s “principle of historiography” allows him decisively to distinguish the *origin* from the *utility* of any form of conscience or consciousness. Thus he can denounce the antecedents of the “sovereign individual” while affirming the flawless dignity of this figure.

The idea that Nietzsche unambiguously endorses the essentially Kantian ideals embodied in the figure of the “sovereign individual” appears to conflict with Nehamas’ point, with which

81 Hill 205.
we agreed in the last chapter, that Nietzsche’s “art of living” is not directed toward any single way of life or absolute state of being.\textsuperscript{82} It also runs up against the fact that Nietzsche concludes his essay, not by encouraging his readers to aspire to “sovereign individuality” but by recommending an attempt to “wed the bad conscience to [. . .] all ideals hitherto” (GM II.24). If the figure of the “sovereign individual” is itself an ideal, as not only Hill’s interpretation but also its own unremittingly superior qualities suggest, then would it not count among the targets of this attempt to redirect the power of guilt? Hill avoids this conclusion by reading the phrase “all ideals hitherto” as referring exclusively to “slave values.”\textsuperscript{83} This allows him to construe Nietzsche’s project as designed to yoke the “self-rejecting disposition of the bad conscience [. . .] to the rejection of the slave moral ‘temptation’ to repudiate the pursuit of autonomy.”\textsuperscript{84} To assess the plausibility of this interpretation and decide whether Nietzsche sets up the “sovereign individual” as a model of autonomy to be followed or as an ideal vision of autonomy which he ultimately undermines, we need to clarify the relationship between the “bad conscience” and the “good” conscience of the “sovereign individual.”

In Nietzsche’s text, this relation is described in genealogical terms: the “sovereign individual” is the result of a long history which includes - and apparently surpasses - the earlier “man of bad conscience.” We have seen, however, that Nietzsche’s practice of history, or “prehistory,” is less concerned with providing an orderly account of the historical past, understood in any conventional sense, than with exposing present tensions engendered by a chaotic development. We have also identified “bad conscience” as the dominant form of

\textsuperscript{82}Nietzsche’s description of the “sovereign individual” as the “ripest fruit” of human history also invites the suspicion that this figure ought to be read in light of Nietzsche’s remarks in the essay “On the uses and disadvantages of history for life,” regarding the tendency of modern man to see himself as “Summit and target of the world process! Meaning and solution of all the riddles of evolution come to light in modern man, the ripest fruit of the tree of knowledge!” Nietzsche’s reaction to this “ecstatic feeling of pride” is to retort, “Overproud European of the nineteenth century, you are raving! Your knowledge does not perfect nature, it only destroys your own nature” (UM II.9).

\textsuperscript{83} Hill 221.

\textsuperscript{84} Hill 220.
consciousness in modernity, and a state in which Nietzsche himself participates. This suggests that the “genealogical” relations between “bad conscience” and “sovereign responsibility” are not shrouded in the mists of time, but correspond to relations between competing, yet interdependent practices and concepts of responsibility that characterize modern culture as Nietzsche observes and experiences it.

If Nietzsche’s “sovereign individual” can plausibly be interpreted as a selective affirmation of Kantian ideals, to which modern experience and philosophical conception of responsibility is it opposed? Since “sovereign” responsibility is exclusively concerned with future actions, we may expect that the form of responsibility it “transcends” will be focused with equal determination upon actions taken in the past. This expectation is confirmed by the fact that the question of responsibility for the past is examined by Nietzsche, not in relation to the ripe and late fruit of the “sovereign individual,” but rather in terms of the “unripe and sour” versions of human conscience that are said to precede it (GM II.3).

Going “back” still further, Nietzsche imagines a stage when “nothing whatever was to be seen of any such fruit, although everything in the tree was preparing for and growing toward it.” This slow growth was necessary to solve a preliminary problem: “How can one create a memory for the human animal? How can one impress something upon this partly obtuse, partly flighty mind, attuned only to the passing moment, in such a way that it will stay there?” (GM II.3). In depicting the “answer” to this question, Nietzsche abandons the gentle metaphor of organic growth to tell a distinctly human story of blood, torture, sacrifice and above all, punishment. As a cumulative result of systematic practices of cruelty, memory is born and the human animal becomes accountable for broken promises. Its mind is no longer completely absorbed in the present; past promises now return to haunt it. Eventually, the individual is held accountable for his or her actions not simply by external sources of discipline, but also by the more reliable, because self-imposed, mechanism of guilt.
The notion of responsibility as a form of self-imposed accountability based on the operation of memory corresponds strikingly to the theory of personal identity and responsibility presented by John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke does not consider the question of how the all-important capacity for memory develops, approaching it rather as the God-given basis of personal identity and responsibility. Nor does he explicitly address the problem of guilt. However, as we shall see, the extraordinary examples which pepper Locke’s text are disturbingly compatible with Nietzsche’s vision of the “history” of memory. This, in turn, suggests that the principle of personal responsibility described by Locke can be identified with the bitter practice of self-imposed accountability which in Nietzsche’s text is contrasted with the sweet fruit of fully-matured responsibility.

### 3.2 Locke’s theory of personal identity

*I am apt enough to think I have in treating of this subject made some suppositions that will look strange to some readers, and possibly they are so in themselves.*

Locke’s theory of personal identity is set out in a chapter of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* entitled “Of Identity and Diversity.”

This chapter was added to the second edition of this work, published in 1694. In part, it represents Locke’s response to objections made to his critique of the idea of a substantial soul (an idea which both Kant and Nietzsche also reject). More broadly, it can be read as an attempt to address anxieties concerning personal identity which arose from the conditions of life in seventeenth century Europe. The expansion and acceleration of the market economy during this era of imperialism and speculation gave rise to a new social mobility which shook the traditional foundations of identity. From this point in Western history, the individual is no longer a stable function of

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86 All quotations of Locke are taken from this chapter, unless otherwise indicated. From this point, the relevant section number only will be supplied in parenthesis after such quotations. E.g. “(s27)” indicates that the original text is to be found in s27 of Chapter XXVII, Book 2 of Locke’s *Essay*. 

his socio-economic milieu; like the goods of the market whose value can fluctuate rapidly, he is able and sometimes obliged to play a succession of social roles of variable “value.” This is the modern economic and social basis of the “democratic” form of subjectivity which Nietzsche describes as characterised by “role faith.”

In these circumstances, a gap opens up between the relatively stable physical identity of an individual and the potential diversity of his personal experiences or “roles.” Locke suggests there is no limit in principle to the flexibility of relations between physical and personal identity: he envisages the possibility, for example, that Socrates and the present Mayor of Quinborough might be the same person - a person who demonstrates a fairly remarkable socio-economic mobility, but also a temporal and spatial mobility worthy of science fiction (s19). Locke also discusses the inverse possibility of a body inhabited in turn by two persons, “the Day and the Night-man” (s23), an idea which for modern readers evokes the characters of horror stories like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde or the more recent notion of multiple personality disorder. Locke’s hypotheses might well, as he remarks himself, appear strange, but they explain the logic of the fantasies and nightmares on the subject of personal entity which continue to feed the culture of modernity. This logic is based in an idea which has been decisive for the conception of modern subjectivity: that the sole basis of personal identity is consciousness.

In Locke’s view, it is consciousness which determines the self for which a person is responsible: “Self is that conscious, thinking thing, (whatever Substance, made up of whether Spiritual, or Material, Simple, or Compounded, it matters not) which is sensible, or conscious of Pleasure and Pain, capable of Happiness or Misery, and so is concern’d for it self, as far as that consciousness extends” (s17). If this consciousness extends to the particles of a body which is “vitally united to this same thinking conscious self,” these particles make up a part of the self for which the person “sympathizes and is concerned.” But this sympathetic relationship of person and body is contingent and precarious: “Cut off a hand, and thereby
separate it from that consciousness,” and it is no longer a part of the self, “any more than the remotest part of matter” (s11). On the other hand (no pun intended), if a little finger were separated from the rest of the body and consciousness went along with it, in Locke’s view “‘tis evident the little Finger would be the Person, the same Person; and self then would have nothing to do with the rest of the Body” (s17). This example appears to take modern experimentation with the self to an unlikely extreme, but the image of a person whose body consists solely of a finger is reminiscent of those Zarathustra calls “inverse cripples”: “men who lack everything except one thing, of which they have too much - men who are no more than a great eye or a great mouth or a great belly or something else great” (Z II, “Of Redemption”).

The exclusive identification of the person with consciousness is not only the basis for potentially bizarre experiments in self-creation, however. For Locke, it is also the foundation of “all the Right and Justice of Reward and Punishment” (s18). He draws again on the example of the little Finger to demonstrate this point. Being the same self, the little Finger must admit responsibility for any actions taken by the person who was once “concerned for the whole Body.” However, if after the departure of the little Finger and its consciousness, the “rest of the Body” should continue to live, “and immediately from the separation of the little Finger have its own peculiar consciousness, whereof the little Finger knew nothing” the little Finger could not justly be held to account for any of this new person’s actions (s18).

Locke notes that the principle that personal responsibility is coextensive with consciousness is not always applied with precision in the administration of human laws, because it is difficult to prove a lack of consciousness. Thus the sober man risks being punished for acts of which he has no consciousness, which is to say no memory, these acts having been committed by the drunken man (s22). Divine justice, however, knows no such problems of proof: “But in the Great Day, wherein the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, it may be reasonable to think, no one shall be made to answer for what he knows nothing of; but shall receive his doom, his
conscience accusing or excusing him” (s22). For Locke, the conscience which accuses or excuses a man corresponds to his memory, which is the faculty by which a person appropriates acts to the self. A person is not responsible for an act of which he has no memory; conversely, Locke envisages that he may be “justly accountable for any Action was done a thousand Years since” if this action is now appropriated to him by his self-consciousness, that is to say, if he remembers having done it (s16).

As this example demonstrates, Locke’s strict reliance on memory as the basis for responsibility raises disturbing problems in cases of unreliable memory and forgetfulness. It is not obvious how memories persist when a person is not immediately conscious of them, especially given that for Locke consciousness bears only an accidental relation to the body. In relation to this problem, Étienne Balibar observes that the Lockean theory of responsibility assumes “two modes of being for ideas: not the possible and the real, but rather virtual existence and actual existence. Either ideas are present to me, like perceptions, or they are absent, not in the sense of having been annihilated, but in the sense of having been set aside in a temporal ‘place’ which links the past and the future in the very possibility of the present.” This understanding of memory is “strictly linked to a notion of appropriation of thought by itself.”

The notion of memories as the original form of “personal property” suggests that the temporal “place” in which ideas are held in virtual existence would be much like a bank account or perhaps a share portfolio of the mind. This metaphor makes it clearer why, for Locke, it is envisageable that a person might find himself accountable for an action committed a thousand years ago: in its virtual state, the value of a person’s accumulated property of good deeds, or the extent of his moral debt, is at the mercy of unpredictable fluctuations of the “memory market.” In this respect, the content of the self that is appropriated by consciousness is only

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nominally within the control of the person who takes responsibility for it. Within the
framework of Locke’s theory, the contents of memory are liable to fantastic variations, since
their stability is not underwritten by any secure link with the “objective” history of a body or
a community. Here we encounter, at the level of the individual, the phenomenon Nietzsche
describes in his untimely meditation upon history as an undiscerning “cult of the past” which
leads to the displacement of living culture by mere knowledge of culture. If the “indigestion”
of modern culture is caused by the demand that history should be a science, we might say that
the painful and absurd consequences of Locke’s theory of personal responsibility arise from
the demand that memory should serve the “sciences” of personal history and divine
accountability. Under the pressure of this demand, “living memory” is repressed in favour of
theoretical knowledge of memory, leading to all manner of “strange hypotheses.”

Locke’s willingness to admit the possibility of personal responsibility for an act committed a
thousand years ago, or to discuss in all apparent seriousness the personal responsibilities of
the Soul of a Prince which enters the body of a Cobler, “carrying with it the consciousness of
the Prince’s past Life” (s15), is arguably evidence of a sensibility shaped by the vagaries of
modern life. In this respect, his theory embraces and even hyperbolizes the insecurities of
personal identity in an era of credit, increasingly complex and speculative property relations,
and rapid social change. However, Locke also wishes to reconcile these conditions with a
secure sense of responsibility and justice. Since such security is challenged rather than
supported by the historical conditions of the day, Locke anchors the responsibility of
consciousness, not in the history of the changeable material conditions which support it, but
in the permanent anticipation of divine Judgement. Consciousness as personal memory is
given immediate, exclusive and unflinching responsibility for appropriating the evidence on
which this infallible judgement is to be based.

Although Locke’s theory of memory dates from the end of the seventeenth century and makes
no secret of the peculiar consequences it entails, it arguably expresses the conception of
memory which remains dominant in Western culture. Anthropologists tell us that the “extreme focus on the jural individual” in contemporary Western society “places an ever greater weight upon personal memory and accountability.”\(^88\) Michael Lambeck argues that memory in this context is conceived as “something that each of us ‘possesses’ and that validates our unique presence as an independent witness, whether as bystander, agent, or victim.”\(^89\) The “possession” of memory is simultaneously subjective and objective:

Memory is pluralized, thus rendered discrete, transactable, and even commodifiable. Memories are objects, not acts. Advertising brochures tells us that we can collect them on foreign beaches, produce them during candlelit dinners, and capture them on film, but when they are contested they appear more like unshreddable bureaucratic files. To the degree that memory is conceptualized as an act, it is a passive one, analogous to a video camera left running in a corner of a room, recording or re-viewing, but not shaping experience.\(^90\)

Modern technological capacity both reflects and enhances the idea of memories as objectified and strangely detemporalized products, a view which is required and validated by “authoritative discourses in psychiatry, law, and history.”\(^91\) However, while technology has advanced and the locus of authority has shifted from theological to scientific and anthropocentric discourses, on this account the role allocated to memory in practices of accountability has not significantly changed since Locke made his analysis of it.

Balibar describes this role when he observes that the Lockean memory “is entirely placed in the perspective of responsibility, which means that it does not relate to the past without

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\(^90\) Lambeck 238.

\(^91\) Lambeck 238.
constantly anticipating the future, or more precisely, without ‘coming’ in a certain sense *from the future:* which is a fundamental way of subjectively totalizing time, in the present of the consciousness.”

This is one way of excluding or overcoming the gregarious temporality of communal life in order to guarantee the self-possessed identity of the individual. The perspective of Nietzsche’s “sovereign” responsibility achieves the same end, but *reverses the means:* memory is here allocated an entirely contrary role to the one it plays in the Lockean consciousness and modern practices of accountability. We may say that the “memory of the will,” which gives the sovereign individual the right to make promises, does not relate to the future without constantly repressing the past, or more precisely, without “fleeing” in a certain sense *from the past.* To understand how and why this is the case we will need to examine Nietzsche’s theory of memory. This brings us back to the very beginning of Nietzsche’s essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like.”

### 3.3 Nietzsche’s genealogy of memory

‘I have done that,’ says my memory. ‘I cannot have done that’ - says my pride, and remains adamant. At last - memory yields. (BGE 68)

Nietzsche opens his essay with a description of “forgetting” as an active and positive faculty of repression, without which the “digestion” and “incorporation” of experiences would be impossible. In his view this makes it “immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no *present,* without forgetfulness” (GM II.1). The past must be repressed if it is not to overwhelm the individual and destroy the possibility of these positive sentiments. At this point, Nietzsche’s argument seems to imply that what is called for is not complete repression of the past, but rather a method for administering “controlled doses,” or digestible selections of the past - in the form of well-functioning personal memory or history, for instance. This would accord with his earlier approach to history in the *Untimely Meditations.* However, in the *Genealogy of Morals,* Nietzsche presents grounds for a more

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92 Balibar 87. (my translation)
sweeping exclusion of the past in the interests of positive affects in the present. In the course of his genealogy of consciousness it emerges that the disruptive and painful effects of the past are due not merely to its originally limitless quality, but because every abrogation of the "faculty of forgetting" by means of the opposing faculty of memory intrinsically involves the emotional mechanism of guilt.93

Nietzsche’s idea that memory necessarily involves guilt is not merely a consequence of his conviction that the proudest achievements of humanity have been bought at the price of immeasurable “blood and cruelty” (GM II.3), or as he puts it in his essay on history, that every past “is worthy to be condemned - for that is the nature of human things: human violence and weakness have always played a mighty role in them” (UM II.3). In Nietzsche’s view, memory involves guilt not only because the past includes many actions for which we might well feel guilty, if we remembered them, but rather because the feeling of guilt and personal obligation is embedded in every operation of memory, regardless of what in particular is remembered.

As we have seen, the primary “data” upon which Nietzsche’s account of religious history is based is his observation of a steady escalation, over the course of centuries, in the sense of guilty indebtedness in human societies. The same phenomenon forms the basis of his secular account of the origins and development of memory. Nietzsche argues that the human capacity to remember first emerged with the formation of contractual relations of creditor and debtor. The instruments of its creation were the practices of punishment used to enforce the terms of such contracts: through “a great deal of severity, cruelty and pain” a memory was “made for those who promised” (GM II.5). The logic that structures emergent memory is thus the idea of an equivalence between an injury suffered by a creditor, and pain inflicted on the debtor (GM 93

93In the healthy individual, the pain of guilt embedded in memory might in principle be “managed” by limiting its effects in the ways mentioned. Such methods will not be effective, however, for one who is weakened through sickness (or “decadence”). As Nietzsche testifies: “One cannot get rid of anything - everything hurts. Men and things obtrude too closely; experiences strike one too deeply; memory becomes a festering wound” (EH I.6).
II.4). Stated in terms of pleasure rather than pain, the equivalence is between the lost enjoyment of a good, and the substituted “enjoyment of violation”: “the pleasure of being allowed to vent [. . .] power freely upon one who is powerless,” that is, of disposing of the debtor as if he or she were a good (GM II.5).

When self-consciousness, or as Nietzsche calls it, “bad conscience” develops, the individual internalizes and “spiritualizes” this practice of punishment based on relations of debt. The memory which has grown from the scars of corporeal suffering becomes the active and vindictive agent of this operation: it is due to the positive faculty of memory that the individual comes to conceive of himself as his own possession, but one which must continually be sacrificed in payment of his moral debt. For the man of “bad conscience,” we might say that every memory represents the consciousness of a debt that can never be repaid and for which he punishes himself with guilt. This is the reason why consciousness of the past, if it is not repressed by the active faculty of forgetfulness, functions to destroy all possibility of happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride and the innocence of the present - although it may take a “voluptuous pleasure” in doing so (GM II.5). Beneath even the most apparently benign memory of the past, Nietzsche discerns the workings of ancient cruelty and modern self-persecution: “‘only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory’ – this is a main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth” (GM II.3).

It should be taken into account that this is a view of memory which, as Balibar puts it, is entirely placed in the perspective of responsibility, the perspective which informs both Locke and Nietzsche’s theories of memory. Despite the marked differences in style of presentation, until Nietzsche introduces the idea of the sovereign “memory of the will,” these two theories are strikingly compatible. For example, Locke defines the self in terms of consciousness of

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94As Deleuze puts it in the course of his account of Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment, “Hatred or revenge is hidden even in the most tender and most loving memories. The ruminants of memory disguise this hatred by a subtle operation which consists in reproaching themselves with everything with which, in fact, they reproach the being whose memory they pretend to cherish” (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 117).
pleasure and pain, noting that insofar as such experiences relate to the particles of a body, then those particles make up a part of the self, but as soon as any part of the body is separated from consciousness, this relation immediately ceases. The little finger which is severed from the rest of the body is only the most memorable of the body parts which are cheerfully chopped off in the course of Locke’s chapter on “Identity and Diversity.” Similarly, Nietzsche emphasizes that it is through experiences of pleasure and pain that a sense of the self and its obligations is established (“burned in” to memory). This consciousness of self is linked to possession of a body which, as in Locke’s theory, is distinguished by its susceptibility to dismemberment. In Locke’s text no explanation is given for why or how it is that parts of the body come to be cut off. Nietzsche, on the other hand, specifies that this is done to compensate debt: “everywhere and from early times one had exact evaluations, legal evaluations, of the individual limbs and parts of the body from this point of view, some of them going into horrible and minute detail” (GM II.5). Practices of punishment are revealed as the specific source of the pleasure and pain which connect consciousness to the body, thus accounting for Locke’s conception of it as a severable collection of “particles.”

In both Nietzsche’s and Locke’s accounts, this consciousness of pleasure and pain is then redoubled by the faculty of memory which appropriates such experiences as the basis for a self-imposed system of accountability. However, while Locke presents this function of memory as a guarantee of limited liability (no one will ultimately be held accountable for

95 One explanation for Locke’s predilection for the example of dismemberment and the cheerful tone with which he discusses the severing of limbs is that, like Nietzsche, Locke may well have been influenced by the Stoic tradition, in which the prospect of severed limbs and heads features prominently as a test of equanimity. Early in Epictetus’ Discourses, for instance, we find this rousing example: “I will put you in chains. Man, what are you talking about? Me in chains? You may fetter my leg, but my will not even Zeus himself can overpower. I will throw you into prison. My poor body, you mean. I will cut your head off. When then have I told you that my head alone cannot be cut off? These are the things which philosophers should meditate on, which they should write daily, in which they should exercise themselves” (Epictetus, Discourses, 1.1 (6)).

96 Consistent with this are modern psychological accounts of guilt which, following Freud, link it to a sense of the body as liable to castration. Gerhart Piers, for example, defines guilt in terms of an unconscious fear of mutilation (by contrast with shame which he associates with the unconscious fear of abandonment): Gerhart Piers & Milton B. Singer, Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytic and a Cultural Study (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1953) 24.
anything unknown to his own consciousness), Nietzsche discerns in it the source of “the immeasurability of punishment and guilt” which in his view dominates Christian culture (GM II.22). This is why Nietzsche is concerned to show that the memory which enters into self-imposed practices of accountability is not a primitive and inalterable capacity to retain impressions, but a cultivated faculty which owes its genesis to a long social history of punishment. Despite the difference between Locke and Nietzsche on this point, it may be remarked that Nietzsche’s view of memory as an agent of unfettered psychical cruelty is supported rather than contradicted by the extraordinary examples given by Locke, such as that of the person whose memory holds him accountable for an action committed one thousand years ago.

3.4 (Lockean) accountability vs. (Kantian) responsibility

The violence and absurdity of the examples Locke selects to explain his theory of personal responsibility correspond, in Nietzsche’s analysis, not to responsibility in its fully developed, sovereign form, but to its precursor and antagonist: accountability. In the first essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche equates the demand for accountability with the “absurd” demand that strength should not express itself as strength, which is to say “that it should *not* be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs.” This demand depends on the belief that behind such desires stands a “subject” who chooses to act upon them and could choose otherwise. In Nietzsche’s view this is a fundamental error, a “seduction of language”; in reality “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed - the deed is everything.” However, belief in a “subject” has its own effects: it gives “the submerged, darkly glowering emotions of vengefulness and hatred” the “right to make the bird of prey *accountable* for being a bird of prey,” while simultaneously encouraging the weak to deceive themselves about their weakness, to the point where they perversely interpret their own lack of power and vitality as something “willed, chosen, a *deed, a meritorious act*” (GM I.13).
At this point in Nietzsche’s argument, the idea of accountability appears to be chiefly an absurdity founded in error, which supports a rather pitiful practice of self-deception on the part of the “lambs” of the world - something which “birds of prey” can afford to view “a little ironically” while they continue to overcome, throw down, master and devour these pathetic creatures. However, it should be noted that it is not the meek and tender “lambs,” but the “darkly glowing emotions of vengefulness and hatred” which promote the idea of accountability and use it to attack the more powerful. These emotions have a power of their own which is not captured in the image of the lamb. It is the power of the type Nietzsche calls the “man of ressentiment.” This figure might be said to be a wolf in sheep’s clothing: “he understands how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble.” He is also “cleverer” than any noble “bird of prey” (GM I.10).

Practices of accountability might be described as traps the man of ressentiment sets for the childishly impulsive “noble” type, who is liable to fly recklessly into his carefully crafted nets. At this point of the story, the originally threatening image of the bird of prey takes on its own pathos: that of an endangered species. And indeed, Nietzsche states that in modernity the patient and clever culture of ressentiment has triumphed decisively over more “noble” forms of life (GM I.16).

Ressentiment has triumphed not only externally, but internally, as the argument of the second essay makes clear. It is thanks to the rise of “bad conscience” that mechanisms of accountability have come to dominate modern life. Self-imposed practices of accountability have produced a culture of actors and ascetics who conceive of responsibility primarily as a painful burden for which they seek compensation in experiences of pleasure. This is the culture that gives rise to what we have called “modern irresponsibility.” It is also the culture of Locke’s person, who is powerless before God (and the vicissitudes of memory and the market), but contrives to make of this subjection its own self-possessed and self-possessing deed: it takes pleasure in holding itself accountable to the system of credit and debt within
which it finds - or imagines - itself, no matter how cruel or absurd that system may be demonstrated to be.97

While Locke endorses this kind of individual “will to accountability” and identifies it with personal responsibility, Nietzsche describes it as tantamount to “conscience-vivisection and self-torture” (GM II.24). Responsibility, for Nietzsche, is defined in opposition to, rather than in terms of, accountability. It involves the will and power to resist any force which might attempt to impose its values on the self. The sovereign individual, as the proud bearer of the “extraordinary privilege” of responsibility, is a figure whose absolute autonomy places him beyond any system of accountability. This is to say that he is free both of the “morality of custom,” and of the guilt associated with the ordinary operations of memory. Like Mirabeau, of whom Nietzsche says admiringly that he “had no memory for insults and vile actions done him and was unable to forgive simply because he – forgot” (GM 10), the sovereign individual is untroubled by undesired impressions of past events. In his case, memory has evolved to become “a real memory of the will” which “involves no mere passive inability to rid oneself of an impression, no mere indigestion through a once-pledged word with which one cannot ‘have done,’ but an active desire not to rid oneself, a desire for the continuance of something desired once” (GM II.1).

I suggested earlier that the sovereign “memory of the will” does not relate to the future without constantly repressing the past, or fleeing from it. The motive for this “flight from the past” has now become clearer. Whereas Nietzsche tells us that the faculty of forgetfulness functions to repress or close off consciousness so that other psychic “organs” may peacefully

97This Nietzschean analysis of the logic of Locke’s theory resonates poignantly with certain biographical images we have of Locke: an English schoolboy who attended the “very severe schoole” of Westminster, where cruel floggings were standard practice, and a man of more than “naturall tenderness and delicacy of sence,” who suffered from periods of severe depression, but who also kept “with minute exactness, running accounts of all monies he received, spent, lent, or owed” (Peter H. Nidditch, Foreward, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, by John Locke (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1975) x-xii). The description of Westminster as “severe” is Locke’s; Sydenham, a contemporary of Locke’s, made the remark concerning Locke’s “tenderness.”
and efficiently “digest” experience, the faculty of the will, when fully developed, functions to repress or inhibit the activity of memory, so that memories may be peacefully and efficiently absorbed into its own autonomous projects. The will to exercise this kind of control over memory can be seen as an instance of will to power, but given Nietzsche’s analysis of the unrestrained effects of the faculty of memory, it can also be understood, less positively, as a will to avoid or deny feelings of guilt. In this respect, Nietzsche’s vision of “sovereign responsibility” (and the Kantian ideals upon which it is based) can be read as a reaction to the form of personal responsibility described by Locke. The strange possibilities which are encompassed by Locke’s theory seem destined ultimately to provoke an exasperated rejection of the idea of such responsibility and the practices of accountability which support it. Not only the conception of “sovereign responsibility,” but also the rise of “modern irresponsibility” might be explained in terms of just such a rejection, both flowing from a perception of personal responsibility as a form of “cruel and unusual” punishment.

Nietzsche’s text reflects this sensibility: in the “prehistory” of punishment to which he attributes the development of memory and responsibility, punishment never appears as a measured and justified tool of discipline. Rather, it is depicted as a horrifying practice of violence, exercised for the pleasure of domination. While Nietzsche has often been interpreted as condoning this kind of pleasure, or at least proposing that it ought to be accepted as a basic element of life, in this context it seems more plausible to interpret his remarks as evidence of a heightened sensitivity to and intolerance of punishment. The essay is dominated by a vivid evocation of the suffering of guilt and a sustained depiction of punishment as cruel and excessive, rather than any attempt at dispassionate historical analysis. This suggests that Nietzsche’s “prehistory” of punishment might reasonably be interpreted as an expression and exposure of the ressentiment felt by the “man of bad conscience” towards his own self-imposed but also culturally entrenched feelings of guilt. In this case the “sovereign individual” who is the final outcome of this “prehistory” would be an ideal projected by a suffering consciousness.
This analysis still leaves open the question of the value Nietzsche places on this ideal. Is it a goal to which those suffering “bad conscience” would do well to aspire, in the attempt to overcome this state? Or do the exaggerated features of the “sovereign individual” betray an intention, not to improve and endorse, but rather to caricature and undermine the Kantian ideals this figure evokes? Nietzsche’s ambiguous attitude toward Kant’s moral philosophy is more explicitly expressed in the earlier work of *The Gay Science*. Here, Nietzsche argues that the formulation of the categorical imperative led Kant “astray - back to ‘God,’ ‘soul,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘immortality,’ like a fox who loses his way and goes astray back into his cage. Yet it had been his strength and cleverness that had broken open the cage!” (GS 335). With admiration, Nietzsche recognises Kant as a “free spirit,” one who has shown a way out of the “cage” - or cocoon - of dogmatic theology and philosophy. However, he also claims that Kant’s moral philosophy ultimately represents a return to dogmatism; insofar as Kant casts his critical discoveries in morality in the form of ideals and imperatives, he makes new bars for himself and his readers - and they are not even really new. In Kant’s thought, Nietzsche sees “[f]undamentally the same old sun [that illuminates Christian belief], but shining through mist and scepticism; the idea [of the “real world” as presently unattainable] grown sublime, pale, northerly, Königsbergian” (TI “How the ‘Real World’ at last Became a Myth”).

As an adaptation of Kantian ideals, the sovereign individual might be interpreted as an effort on Nietzsche’s part to keep the fox out of the cage: the will of his sovereign individual is not only autonomous, but “supramoral,” subject not to the universal principle of the categorical imperative, but solely to the unique commitments embodied in its own promises. However, the unrelenting sense of responsibility which binds the sovereign will to its prior undertakings without exception immediately reintroduces an overarching ethical requirement which is reminiscent of the categorical imperative. In this respect, the conscience of the sovereign individual illustrates how easy it is for the proudly autonomous “self-legislator” to create constraints which return him to the moral confinement he had previously evaded.
Furthermore, Nietzsche describes the superiority of the sovereign individual, not merely in terms of his capacity to keep promises which might or might not be made, but by reference to the “proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of responsibility” which flows from the actual activity of making promises. Robert Pippin has pointed out that while contract theories of political obligation presuppose the moral premise that one ought to keep one’s promises, Kant’s political philosophy is based on the stronger premise that there is a moral duty to promise.\(^9\) Although Nietzsche avoids the language of duty, whether moral or political, the instinctual conscience of the sovereign individual appears to involve an active ethical commitment to exercise the “right to make promises.” This, too, supports Hill’s reading of this figure as emblematic of Kantian ideals.

However, if Nietzsche’s sovereign individual embodies essentially Kantian ideals (in all their foxy complexity), then just as Kant’s thought is lit by “fundamentally the same old sun [of Christian thought], but shining through mist and scepticism,” we should expect that close examination of the sovereign individual will reveal the familiar old man of bad conscience, glowering through the lovely veil of autonomous perfection that Nietzsche calls “sovereign” responsibility. This idea is confirmed by the way in which Nietzsche’s sovereign individual responds to others: “looking out upon others from himself, he honors or despises.” He honours those who, like himself, know themselves to be strong enough to maintain their promises, and despises “feeble windbags” and “liars” (GM II.2). The fact that the sovereign individual “despises,” rather than showing dispassionate tolerance of the weak and untrustworthy, whose chronic irresponsibility is a dire and inevitable result of their lack of power, suggests a certain surprising vulnerability or fragility in his character. This vulnerability as well as the pride the sovereign individual displays may be explained, however, in terms of the enormity of the task he has taken on in assuming the “right to make promises.” As Nietzsche puts it, between the expression of will which is a promise and the act

by which this will is discharged, “a world of strange new things, circumstances, even acts of will may be interposed” (GM II.1). In order to keep his promises, the sovereign individual must be master both of himself and of circumstances; he must maintain his will “in the face of accidents, even ‘in the face of fate’” (GM II.2).

There is no room here for retraction, revision or even reinterpretation of promises lodged in the “memory of the will.” Once made, a promise of the sovereign will exercises a tyrannical (or “categorical”) power over its maker as well as over anyone who comes in the way of its achievement. If a (hitherto) sovereign individual should fail to keep a promise, his own will would presumably subject him to the contempt reserved for “feeble windbags who promise without the right to do so.” This suggests that it is a fine line which divides the sovereign individual from his precursor, the man of bad conscience. Indeed, the sovereign individual’s heroic fidelity to his promises, extending even to the impossible or superhuman task of defying fate, vividly recalls the poignant commitment of Locke’s person to take responsibility for all and any contents of his consciousness, no matter how absurd.

If Nietzsche’s “sovereign individual” is identified, for better or worse, with the Kantian ideal of autonomy, then our analysis of the philosophical trajectory which leads Nietzsche to create this figure suggests a reading of the Kantian moral subject as a “mirror-image” reversal of the Lockean person. While Kant’s subject bears responsibility for self-legislating the moral law, the sole responsibility of Locke’s person is for marshalling the evidence upon which divine judgement is to be based. One might say that the Kantian subject “remembers” the law but forgets or ignores the past; the Lockean person “remembers” the past but remains ignorant of the law. This schematic analysis suggests that in spite - or rather, because - of their polar opposition, Kantian and Lockean conceptions of moral responsibility tacitly presuppose one another; alone, each is unworkable. Together, on the other hand, they are effective, but unbearable. The painful dimension of Locke’s concept of personal responsibility emerges, as we have seen, in the form of highly imaginative and disturbing “practical” examples. The
most common criticism of Kant’s theory, on the other hand, concerns its excessively rational formality. Although perfect in principle, his “categorical imperative” is generally found to be highly problematic, if not impossible to apply in practice. Any attempt to live up to the Kantian ideal is thus likely to exacerbate, rather than overcome, the sense of guilt which is more explicitly embedded in Locke’s understanding of responsibility.

3.5 Living with the guilt of “bad conscience”

Guilt. - Although the shrewdest judges of the witches and even the witches themselves were convinced of the guilt of witchery, this guilt nevertheless did not exist. This applies to all guilt. (GS 250)

[...] you surely know that all great modern artists suffer from a guilty conscience. (GS 366)

Nietzsche’s account of the “long story of the origins of responsibility” suggests that the modern experience of excessively guilt-laden accountability for the past leads to an equally extravagant affirmation of the powers of individual agency in the form of a version of responsibility focused exclusively on the future. Tied to this shift is a rejection of faith in the God whose judgement underpins Locke’s concept of personal responsibility and the culture of guilt and accountability it reflects. Can the displacement of practices of faith by those of autonomy and self-reliance achieve the goal of divesting modern man of his psychological burden of guilt? Nietzsche is tempted to think so: “there is no small probability that with the irresistible decline of faith in the Christian God there is now also a considerable decline in mankind’s feeling of guilt; indeed, the prospect cannot be dismissed that the complete and definitive victory of atheism might free mankind of this whole feeling of guilty indebtedness toward its origin, its causa prima” (GM II.20).

The prospect cannot be dismissed – but Nietzsche nevertheless proceeds to place it in serious doubt. The “moralization” of the concepts of “guilt” and “duty” and their entrenchment in the structure of bad conscience means that the “reality is, to a fearful degree, otherwise” (GM...
II.21). Feelings of guilt, like the shadows of God, are likely to darken consciousness long after the fire of faith has been extinguished. There is even the chance that such moral suffering may intensify, given that modern secular ideals of responsibility based on individual agency are arguably even further removed from the potential and actual behaviour of the individuals whose consciousness is shaped and tormented by them than were religious ideals, which at least allowed for the unmerited assistance of divine grace.

The superhuman individual consistently capable of Kantian or “sovereign” responsibility would be entirely free of guilt. But is the complete elimination of guilt necessary or desirable in creating a “healthy” practice of responsibility? Almost at the end of his essay, after having persuasively depicted guilt as a cruel and self-destructive emotion and railed against the “will of man [. . .] to infect and poison the fundamental ground of things with the problem of punishment and guilt” – a will which incidentally appears to be expressed in a highly developed form in Nietzsche’s own “long story of the origins of responsibility” – Nietzsche casually introduces a contrary evaluation of guilt. The ancient Greeks, he tells us, “used their gods precisely so as to ward off the ‘bad conscience,’ so as to be able to rejoice in their freedom of soul.” While the crucifixion of Christ represents God taking upon himself the punishment necessary to expiate the sins of humanity, the Greek gods “took upon themselves, not the punishment but, what is nobler, the guilt” (GM II.23).

Here we glimpse a model of responsibility which is completely different to both the Lockean or Kantian versions. Here, responsibility does not flow from the desire to defend or isolate the self, whether in anticipation of divine judgement, or in response to social practices of punishment and accountability. Rather it is based in a readiness to take responsibility for the actions of others. This does not involve the masochistic willingness to accept punishment that characterizes the “bad conscience.” To take on the guilt of others does not imply the lonely self-laceration that a sense of guilt for one’s own actions tends to produce. On the contrary, it suggests an expansive rather than defensive sense of self, based in relations of care and
generosity that defeat the logic of accountability. In separating guilt from personal identity, this model suggests that a “noble” sense of guilt can play a useful role in directing one to remember the past and its pain, not in order to bring the parties involved to account, but rather so that one may take responsibility for a shared future. This would be a practice of responsibility that has no need to suppress the past in the way the sovereign individual does, but does not “forget” the future or leave it in the hands of God in the manner of Locke’s person. It integrates consciousness of the past with a “memory of the will” by foregoing what the sovereign individual and the Lockean person hold in common: a rigid sense of self-possession. In doing so, it loosens the grip of the fiction that drives practices of accountability: that responsibility for an action belongs (exclusively) to a subject who lies behind that action. On the other hand, it retains the sense of agency which is the active element in both Lockean and “sovereign” responsibility.

Attractive as this conclusion may appear, it is not the point at which Nietzsche’s essay ends. In fact, he does not expand at all on the model of responsibility which corresponds to ancient Greek “irresponsibility.” Instead, he goes on to make some brief and disconsolate remarks regarding “this decaying, self-doubting present” (GM II.24). Modern humanity, on Nietzsche’s analysis, is in need of redemption “not only from the hitherto reigning ideal [of Christianity] but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism” (GM II.24). This implies that in contrast to the “healthy” irresponsibility of the ancient Greeks, modern “irresponsibility” is a form of sickness that flows not from a canny “use” of the gods, but from the loss of all forms of faith.

The prevalence of “modern irresponsibility” means that the project of overcoming the great nausea of nihilism by redirecting the energies of “bad conscience” against its own “unnatural inclinations” is a task for which we moderns are ill-suited: it calls for precisely the “great health” that we lack. Our only hope, therefore, is that another – a redeemer – might appear to take responsibility for us. This attitude bears a certain resemblance to the Greek “use of the
gods,” viewed from the perspective of the individual who escapes guilt for his misdeeds thanks to the expedient of a god who “nobly” accepts responsibility for them. However, rather than a familiar pantheon of gods who can be routinely relied upon to take responsibility for human misdeeds, Nietzsche’s “redeeming man of great love and contempt” is a mysterious figure who must be anxiously awaited. At this point, Nietzsche concludes neither by reaffirming his vision of a “sovereign individual,” nor by substituting an alternate ideal as the projected end of his “prehistory” of responsibility, but simply by recognising that, as a sufferer of modern irresponsibility, “it behooves [him] only to be silent” (GM II.25).

Active and reactive evaluations of responsibility and irresponsibility

At the end of Nietzsche’s “long story of the origins of responsibility,” we are left with four visions of responsibility and no clear indication of which is ultimately likely to prevail. As we have seen, the essay begins with the idea of sovereign responsibility, expressed in the autonomous making and keeping of promises. This is responsibility taken for the self and owed to the self. As such it involves a proud rejection of externally imposed standards of responsibility or accountability. In Nietzsche’s assessment of self-imposed accountability, we meet a second form of responsibility, which I have argued corresponds closely to the concept of personal responsibility developed by Locke. This is responsibility taken for the self and owed to the other. Nietzsche argues that it originates in cruel practices of punishment which are subsequently internalized in the form of the guilt which characterizes Christian ‘bad conscience.’ Nietzsche’s negative evaluation of accountability, especially in its internalized form, is even more energetic than his affirmation of sovereign responsibility. However, although the greater part of the essay is taken up in tracing the development and structure of this “negative” form of responsibility, its relation to “positive” sovereign responsibility is never explicitly clarified by Nietzsche.
Instead, the self-imposed suffering of the “bad conscience” is briefly contrasted with the blithe sense of irresponsibility displayed (according to Nietzsche) by the ancient Greeks. In the idea that the Greek gods “nobly” took upon themselves the guilt of errant humans, we glimpse a version of responsibility which might be described as the inversion of accountability: it is responsibility that is taken for the other, but owed only to the self (if to anyone). Nietzsche endorses the irresponsibility of the Greeks, but does not elaborate upon the divine practice of responsibility it entails. Instead, he goes on to give a brief sketch of modern irresponsibility as a form of illness. Unlike the Greek irresponsibility which was incidental and circumstantial, modern irresponsibility is portrayed by Nietzsche as a disorder which is so pervasive that modern man’s only hope lies in the anxiously awaited arrival of a “man of the future” who will have undergone such “absorption, immersion, penetration into reality” that he is able to “bring home the redemption of this reality” (GM II.24). This “Antichrist and antinihilist” might be said to practise a form of responsibility which is taken for the other and owed to the other – where this “other” refers to “reality” rather than any individual. It is related, not to any human source of discipline, but to the discipline of “fate.” In this sense, it is the inversion of the ideal of sovereign responsibility which sets the individual will over and against the forces of fate.

In this summary of Nietzsche’s multiple visions of responsibility, we see the same pattern of superimposed active and reactive evaluations that emerged in our analysis of Nietzsche’s “will to self-responsibility.” First, Nietzsche makes an active affirmation of sovereign responsibility, in contrast to which modern irresponsibility is eventually judged, relatively weakly, as “unhealthy.” In reactive mode, he then makes a virulently negative evaluation of the Christian form of self-accountability, which is compared – almost as an afterthought – with the “good” Greek practice of irresponsibility. Following the principle which says that the reactive mode of evaluation takes as its target the very same object which the active mode affirms, this means that from Nietzsche’s perspective, sovereign responsibility is intimately
linked to self-imposed accountability, while Greek and modern forms of irresponsibility, as well as the visions of divine responsibility they inspire, are also closely related.

On this reading, the “sovereign individual” is an ideal dreamt up by the “man of bad conscience.” However, this does not mean that the responsibility he practises is necessarily to be dismissed as the mere fantasy of an ailing consciousness. For in suggesting an affiliation between Greek and modern irresponsibility, Nietzsche also reminds us of the mixed potential of the “bad conscience.” Nietzsche describes “bad conscience” as an illness, but “an illness as pregnancy is an illness” (GM II.19). He also insists that the active bad conscience “as the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena, also brought to light an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps beauty itself” (GM II.18). The expression “beauty itself” here suggests a reference to Kant’s interpretation of beauty as the symbol of morality. If Kant’s moral philosophy is an expression of what Nietzsche calls active “bad conscience” then the regulative ideals he espouses are examples of the “strange new beauty” it brings to light. Nietzsche’s representation and adaptation of the ideal of autonomy in the figure of the “sovereign individual” would then signify a genuine affirmation of this value, which nevertheless does not lose sight of the genealogical fact that it is a fruit of the womb of “bad conscience” and can never finally be separated from the practices of self-accountability which characterize modern life. Nor can it be divorced from the various forms of irresponsibility, and responsibility taken for others, that make briefer appearances in Nietzsche’s genealogy of responsibility. In this respect, the method of genealogy operates to expose the real relations of interconnection and interdependence between experiences that remain immaculately discrete in their idealized forms.

This implies that the feeling of “total irresponsibility” represented by the experience of the “sovereign individual” is a close relation of the feeling of “total” guilt which dominates the consciousness of the “man of bad conscience” at his most self-destructive. If one wishes to avoid one extreme, one must also forgo the other. Black and white are not the only colours of
the emotional spectrum associated with irresponsibility and responsibility, although Nietzsche gives us only brief glimpses of more nuanced possibilities. This fact might be thought to reveal something about Nietzsche’s personal experience and practice of responsibility, but if so, it indicates a tendency which is common to other philosophers of modernity: in spite of wide divergences in other respects, Kant and Locke are even more “black and white” than Nietzsche in their approaches to responsibility. In the next chapter we shall suggest that the basis of such “all or nothing” approaches to responsibility is to be found in the peculiarly modern philosophical concept of “self-consciousness,” introduced by Locke and “purified” by Kant. By comparison, Nietzsche’s understanding of “consciousness” as “bad conscience” allows a far more inclusive approach to responsibility. In this, as we shall see, Nietzsche reveals a certain “genealogical” affinity with Descartes.
Self-consciousness

The analysis of the relations between Nietzsche’s “sovereign individual” and the guilt-ridden “man of bad conscience” carried out in the last chapter led us to the view that not only are these characters closely related, but that they represent aspects of a single, divided consciousness. Sovereign responsibility is both one possibility of the complex capacities of the “bad conscience” - in the sense that this conscience occasionally proves itself capable of making and keeping promises - and an ideal which betrays and feeds the sense of guilt which drives and torments it. This conclusion suggests that Lockean and Kantian concepts of personal responsibility, despite their stark contrasts, are ideas which arise from the experience and conception of the same solitary modern subject. Both affirm this solitude in the form of an ideal of individual autonomy, although they do so in different domains. Locke makes his person the autonomous witness of the unique set of actions by which he will be judged, leaving the law to God, while Kant makes the subject the autonomous legislator of the moral law, leaving to God (or “God”) all knowledge of “things in themselves.” In both cases, the communicative dimension of collective human life, in which both laws and actions are produced and interpreted in socially mediated forms, is effectively dismissed as largely if not wholly irrelevant to the philosophical analysis of responsibility. Instead, an unmediated form of “self-consciousness” is assumed as the foundation for autonomy and responsibility.

Locke is the first philosopher to use the term consciousness in relation to the identity of the self. However, the formative development of the modern concept of self-consciousness is

99There has been some debate over the originality of Locke’s use of the word consciousness. As Christopher Fox observes, the “received idea (passed down for decades by A. C. Fraser’s popular and now dated edition of the Essay) holds that the word consciousness in Locke is a
commonly taken to begin with Descartes. After examining Kant’s critique and purification of what he considers to be the muddied version of this concept to be found in Locke, we shall return to the Cartesian “source” to observe the methods which give rise, not to a single concept, but to a vivid sense of self-consciousness in his writings. As we shall see, the form of self-consciousness at play in Descartes’ work is a much broader and more turbulent phenomenon that the relatively narrow streams of thought on this topic we find in Locke and Kant. As such, it is capable of carrying a range of competing perspectives on responsibility. In this Descartes’ work resembles Nietzsche’s (or Nietzsche’s resembles Descartes). This similarity can be accounted for at the level of method: both thinkers reinterpret the ancient meditational tradition to modern ends, arguably giving rise to various forms of “bad conscience” in the process.

4.1 Locke, Kant and Nietzsche on self-consciousness

The concepts of self-consciousness to be found in Locke and Kant differ dramatically. However, they are equally incompatible with the Nietzschean sense of consciousness as a product of social interaction and communication. In Locke’s case, consciousness of self is understood as an immediate appropriation of one’s thoughts and actions, recorded in memory. Locke begins from the idea of the mind as comparable to “white Paper” upon which experience subsequently inscribes “Ideas.” His model of personal identity assumes that each individual’s consciousness resembles a separate sheet of paper upon which the experiences of that individual are exclusively recorded. For Locke, “self-consciousness” is the

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100 Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Bk 2, 1, s2.
immediate awareness of this unique object. Such awareness can support personal identity and responsibility precisely because it excludes the consciousness of others, thus ensuring that “I” will not be called upon to account for thoughts and actions which do not belong to “me.”

For Nietzsche, on the other hand, consciousness is always intermingled with the consciousness of others, since it arises from a shared and constantly evolving network of communication. As we have seen, Nietzsche denies the possibility of a “self-consciousness” that stands apart from this socially mediated (“herd”) consciousness; on the contrary, he believes that it “was only as a social animal that man acquired self-consciousness - which he is still in the process of doing, more and more” (GS 354). Even the secluded philosopher cannot escape this principle; in Nietzsche’s view a “certain basic scheme of possible philosophies” is determined by the “unconscious domination” of the grammar embedded in the language used by the philosopher. Nietzsche regards the development of language as a social and historical phenomenon, so the seductive influence of grammar “is in the last resort the spell of physiological value judgements and racial conditions. – So much by way of retort to Locke’s superficiality with regard to the origin of ideas” (BGE 20).

This argument accords with Nietzsche’s view that the notion of a discrete and accountable “subject” is a socially created and linguistically entrenched illusion. On the other hand, Nietzsche appears to endorse a Lockean idea of the self when he affirms the reality of actions which fundamentally “are altogether incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual” (GS 354). The difference is that for Nietzsche this individuality is immediately falsified when it is “translated” into consciousness. Despite Locke’s contrary position, the fantastic character of the examples he gives to illustrate his theory of personal identity would only seem to confirm Nietzsche’s idea that with consciousness comes the threat or the inevitability of falsification.
Nietzsche acknowledges that in such “falsification” lies the creative possibility of art. However he judges what he sees as the excessive growth of consciousness and self-consciousness in modern European culture to be a danger and a disease. Our reading of the essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” provides an explanation for why this should be so: for Nietzsche the “self-consciousness” which Locke interprets as the natural foundation of “all the Right and Justice of Reward and Punishment” (ID 18) is better understood as a cruel and culturally constructed vehicle of self-punishment. Through the lens of Lockean “self-consciousness” every action is translated into a potential or actual source of guilt.

In the "long story of how responsibility originated" as told by Nietzsche, the problem of guilt and the version of “self-consciousness” which feeds it promise to disappear with the evolutionary emergence of the “sovereign individual.” If this figure is interpreted as the embodiment of Kantian ideals, the practical likelihood that this promise will ever be kept is thrown open to doubt. Leaving aside this issue for the moment, however, let us consider what becomes of self-consciousness when Lockean responsibility is superceded by the Kantian version of autonomy illustrated by the “sovereign individual.” In this extraordinary figure, Nietzsche tells us, consciousness of responsibility, freedom and “power over oneself and over fate” has “penetrated to the profoundest depths” and become the “dominating instinct” of “conscience” (GM II.2). At the same time, the “involuntary” form of memory involved in Lockean self-consciousness has been transformed into a “real memory of the will,” allowing the sovereign individual to “stand security for his own future” and freeing him from all undesired consciousness of the past. (GM II.1) This suggests that in the person of the “sovereign individual” the social “disease” of guilt has given way to an active and authentic form of self-consciousness that is immune to falsification because it does not depend on consciousness, but in some sense transcends it.
This superior version of “self-consciousness” predictably resembles the way in which Kant uses the term. For Kant, self-consciousness is not consciousness of a self conceived as an object or an aggregate of objects. Rather, it refers to the “unity of consciousness” which is necessary for the conception of any object. This unity is the “subject of the categories,” the categories being a priori concepts of the understanding which condition the very possibility of experience. It is a mistake to suppose that the subject which underlies the categories can be intuited as an object, since it is “only unity in thought, by which alone no object is given.” Consequently this subject cannot be known. Its “pure self-consciousness” must however be presupposed in thinking the categories (B421-422).

The “pure self-consciousness” of the subject is evident in what Kant calls the “original synthetic unity of apperception.” This unity may be deduced from the premise: it “must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations” (B 131). Kant argues for this premise on the grounds that its denial would imply possibilities he considers contradictory: either “something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all” or “my representations” would not (all) be mine. “As my representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such) they must conform to the condition under which alone they can stand together in one universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not all without exception belong to me” (B 132).

In this proposition, we see the common ground which Kant shares with Locke. The key notion of “appropriation of thought by itself” that Balibar identifies in Locke’s work on personal identity is equally evident in Kant’s theory of apperception. For both philosophers, the identity of the thinker rests upon the activity of self-possession. For Kant, however, this activity does not correspond to the operation of consciousness as memory. He remarks that were this so, “I should have as many-coloured and diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious to myself” (B 134). The “self” of Kant’s “pure self-consciousness” is a much more elegant entity: it consists solely in an “act of spontaneity” which belongs not to
sensibility but to “pure apperception”: “it is that self-consciousness which, while generating
the representation ‘I think’ (a representation which must be capable of accompanying all other
representations, and which in all consciousness is one and the same), cannot itself be
accompanied by any further representation” (B 132).

This is the “objective” or “transcendental” unity of self-consciousness. It may be contrasted
with the merely subjective unity of consciousness for which the self is an empirical object,
determined by “inner sense” (B 139). From the Kantian perspective, Locke confuses these
distinct forms of self-consciousness, granting to empirical self-awareness or self-
identification an objective status to which it is not entitled. He fails to recognise that “the
empirical consciousness, which accompanies different representations, is in itself diverse and
without relation to the identity of the subject” (B 133). In Kant’s view, Locke went wrong
early in the piece: “meeting with pure concepts of the understanding in experience, [he]
deduced them also from experience, and yet proceeded so inconsequentially that he attempted
with their aid to obtain knowledge which far transcends all limits of experience” (B 127).

Knowledge of self-consciousness in its objective unity is an example of knowledge which lies
beyond the limits of experience. How then does Kant come to know about it? In arguing for
this form of “self-consciousness,” Kant appears to commit the error that he charges to Locke,
that is he deduces from the experience of thinking a universal claim about its structure (the
premise that all my representations must belong to me), and from this starting point proceeds
to lay claim to knowledge which far transcends the limits of the evidence upon which it is
supposedly based.¹⁰¹ In attributing “pure self-consciousness” to the subject of the categories

¹⁰¹ This objection is expressed slightly differently by Pierre Keller (who goes on to defend
Kant’s claims regarding transcendental self-consciousness from this objection): “The only
kind of subject that we seem to be acquainted with in any sense is a subject that we can
experience, an empirical subject, and so the notion of a non-empirical subject that we could
become conscious of seems to be based on an illegitimate abstraction from actual experience”
(Pierre Keller, Kant and the Demands of Self-Consciousness (Cambridge: Cambridge
Kant also appears to transgress his own clearly stated position that this subject cannot be known.\footnote{Robert B. Pippin discusses this problem in his \textit{Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations}, Chapter 2, “Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind,” at 48-51. My own analysis of Kant’s theory of the spontaneity of “self-consciousness” is generally indebted to Pippin’s work in this chapter.}

Kant denies, however, that the role he accords to the “I think” is drawn from experience. In proposing that it must be possible for the “I think” to accompany all my representations, “we have not taken as our basis any experience; the inference is merely from the concept of the relation which all thought has to the ‘I’ as the common subject in which it inheres” (A 349-50). Experience gives us not “the least trace of intuition, distinguishing the ‘I’ from other objects of intuition,” although “we can indeed perceive that this representation is invariably present in all thought” (A 349-50). On this basis, Kant distinguishes consciousness of myself in the “synthetic original unity of apperception” from knowledge of myself: “I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am” (B 157). This is to say that I am conscious “only of the spontaneity” of the act of determining my existence, expressed in the proposition “I think” (fn B 158). Consciousness of this spontaneity is not, strictly speaking, an empirical “experience.” It is “an affair of the understanding alone” (B 134) and “cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility” (B 132).

This is not true, however, of the empirical proposition “I think,” which involves more than just the spontaneity of self-consciousness. “The ‘I think’ expresses an indeterminate empirical intuition, \textit{i.e.} perception (and thus shows that sensation, which as such belongs to sensibility, lies at the basis of this existential proposition)” (fn B 422). Nevertheless, Kant insists that the “I” in this proposition is not empirical; it is purely intellectual “because belonging to thought in general.” What is given to “thought in general” is given “not as appearance, nor as thing in itself (\textit{noumenon}), but as something which actually exists.” Thus Kant argues, against Descartes, that my existence cannot be \textit{inferred} from the proposition “I think.” Rather, it is (in
every case) identical with it (fn B 422-23). This is because for Kant, “I exist as an intelligence which is conscious solely of its power of combination” (B 158-59).

The sensible basis of the “I think” is due to the fact that the pure power of combination is “given” to thought only in its application. Thus “the thoroughgoing identity of self-consciousness cannot be thought” without the “necessity of a synthesis of the manifold given in intuition” (B 135). As we have seen, this is the necessity of an “owner” of all the “many-coloured and diverse” representations generated in empirical experience - an ‘I’ with the “power of combination” by which this manifold is united in a single consciousness. This concept of the “I” implies (although Kant does not explicitly draw this implication) that there must also be a law that securely establishes my responsibility for the representations that “one and all belong to me.” To forestall the kind of delirious mind and body swapping experiments we find in Locke, this law must be a priori. “Synthetic unity of the manifold of intuitions, as generated a priori, is thus the ground of the identity of apperception itself, which precedes a priori all my determinate thought” (B 134).

On this reading, the purely intellectual “I” can be conceived as an a priori principle of self-possession which according to Kant is spontaneously applied each time “I think.” In each instance, the proposition “I think” involves both the a priori “law” of apperception and temporal consciousness of some empirical intuition to which the law is applied. Only in the operation of the law do I become conscious of it, but the law itself nevertheless does not depend upon consciousness. “Without some empirical representation to supply the material for thought, the actus, ‘I think’, would not, indeed, take place; but the empirical is only the condition of the application, or of the employment, of the pure intellectual faculty” (fn B 423).

This interpretation of Kant’s spontaneity of thought in terms of the application of an a priori “law of self-possession” accords with Robert Pippin’s idea that the synthetic unity of
apperception involves more than “the general anti-Humean point that representations, in order to be my representations, must be regarded as [paraphrasing Patricia Kitcher’s argument] ‘belonging to a contentually interconnected system of mental states, an I that thinks.’”¹⁰³ In Pippin’s view, the “spontaneity” ascribed by Kant to pure apperception adds to this picture the possibility of epistemic claims which relate representations to objects. Epistemic claims about objects are possible, as Pippin points out, only under the presupposition of the existence of a subject who can “take up the contents of intuition and the mental states that can be said to be produced by such intuitions, and make such a claim.”¹⁰⁴ To be able to do so, the subject must in some sense stand beyond the causal “system of mental states” it combines.

Pierre Keller takes this train of thought one step further in arguing that “the very notion of a representational content that has any cognitive relevance is parasitic on our ability to form an impersonal consciousness of self.”¹⁰⁵ The kind of subject that can make epistemic claims is also, on this view, necessarily capable of representing itself impersonally, or interpersonally:

“When each of us refers to him- or herself by means of the expression “I,” each of us refers to him- or herself in a way that could, in principle, apply to any one of us. This is the basic, minimal, idea that Kant tries to express with his notion of transcendental self-consciousness.”¹⁰⁶

The “spontaneity” of self-consciousness, on Keller’s reading, refers to the capacity to choose to be bound by normative principles in making judgments. These norms are based on a commitment to truth which implies the obligation to offer reasons for judgments – reasons which could, in principle, be offered or accepted by any “I.” Spontaneous self-consciousness, on this interpretation, is the basis for rational judgment. Self-conscious beings “are rational

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¹⁰⁴ Pippin 48.
¹⁰⁵ Keller 3.
¹⁰⁶ Keller 3.
because they can assume responsibility for their own representations. It is this capacity to take responsibility that is the basis for their possession of full-fledged beliefs.”

Keller’s interpretation of spontaneous self-consciousness suggests a link between Kant’s theory of apperception and his moral theory: the capacity to choose to be bound by norms of rational judgment would appear to provide an essential foundation for the capacity to choose to be bound by norms of moral judgment, as schematized in the formula of the categorical imperative. This idea is supported by Kant’s own discussions of “spontaneity.” Karl Ameriks notes that in Kant’s earliest work, “spontaneity” refers only to “governance by rational principles, [which] is said to be the characteristic feature of persons and to be compatible with a thoroughly deterministic world.” Eventually, however, Kant “decided that ‘spontaneity’ should be understood to refer primarily to an absolute and noumenal moral freedom that is only ‘practically’ establishable.”

For his part, Pippin criticizes what appears to be Kant’s own final view that the spontaneity of apperception has not merely epistemic, but also moral significance. Pippin sees no legitimate reason to identify the spontaneity of apperception, as a condition for the possibility of knowledge, with ethical self-consciousness, as a condition for free moral action. He suggests that “it is quite possible that any action relevant to ethical judgment might be, say, ‘caused by sensual impulses,’ and yet that the spontaneity of the epistemic subject is a necessary condition for knowing that it be so.”

On this point, I would suggest that Pippin overlooks the extent to which the spontaneity of Kant’s epistemic subject is based on the moral concepts of self-possession and responsibility. As a principle which ensures that my representations (including representations of the good)

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107 Keller 8.
109 Pippin 53.
“all without exception belong to me,” and which indubitably guarantees my existence in the form of the intelligence which combines these representations, spontaneous self-consciousness is, I would argue, a necessary condition of the independent and autonomous moral subjectivity of Kant’s moral philosophy. It lays a foundation for the seamless ideal of responsibility that is illustrated in Nietzsche’s figure of the “sovereign individual.” This is a form of responsibility that is founded not on the “many-coloured and diverse” contents of empirical consciousness, but upon spontaneous awareness of the “power of combination” which is the “I” - not as it appears, nor as it is in itself, but as it exists, serene master of the manifold of intuitions.

In the last chapter, I argued that Nietzsche’s attitude toward the Kantian form of responsibility represented by the sovereign individual, like his relationship to Kant more generally, is ambivalent. The differences in Nietzsche’s and Kant’s treatment of “self-consciousness” provide another angle from which to contemplate Nietzsche’s distance from Kant in relation to “sovereign” responsibility. We have seen that Kant deduces the original unity of apperception from the premise that it “must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations.” He argues for this premise on the grounds that its denial would imply either that “something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all” or that “my representations” would not (all) be mine. In Kant’s view, both of these implications are evidently self-contradictory and therefore to be excluded.

For Nietzsche, on the other hand, it is perfectly correct to say that “my representations” are not all mine. In his view, the representations of consciousness “belong” not to my individual existence, but to my “social or herd nature” (GS 354). Furthermore, the activity of thinking is not necessarily linked to consciousness: “Man, like every living being, thinks continually without knowing it; the thinking that rises to consciousness is only the smallest part of all this” (GS 354). Even if it must be possible for the “I think” to accompany every instance of consciousness, it does not follow for Nietzsche either that “I” am responsible for
“combining” these experiences, or that the activity of thought, which from the necessarily limited perspective of consciousness might well appear to be “spontaneous,” can be defined in terms of self-consciousness. As Nietzsche observes, “a thought comes when ‘it’ wants, not when ‘I’ want; so that it is a falsification of the facts to say: the subject ‘I’ is the condition of the predicate ‘think’. It thinks: but that this ‘it’ is precisely that famous old ‘I’ is, to put it mildly, only an assumption, an assertion, above all not an ‘immediate certainty’” (BGE 17).

In their efforts to refute the idea of a substantial soul, both Kant and Locke erase the difference between the existence of the “self” or the “I” and the activity of self-consciousness. In different ways, both philosophers turn to self-consciousness as a means to ward off the idea that, in the absence of the “soul,” the locus of individual agency and responsibility might be revealed to be a changeable quantity, with no securely fixed boundaries. In Locke, self-consciousness serves to define the “self” in terms of an a posteriori unity of consciousness, whereas in Kant it operates to define the “I” as the a priori unity of consciousness. In both cases, however, “I am” and “I am self-conscious” (or “I think”) become interchangeable. Thus Kant explicitly rejects the argument of the Cartesian cogito insofar as it implies that self-conscious thought necessarily rests upon a (potentially wider) platform of existence, which Descartes reifies in the idea of a “res cogitans.” The existence of Kant’s “I” is strictly limited to the spontaneity of the “I think,” in which “I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am” (B 157). Locke places a similar limit on personal identity, which for him is exhaustively defined by the scope of self-consciousness: I am (responsible for) what I am conscious of being, nothing more or less. In both cases, such limitation supports a concept of the responsible subject as a discrete and consciously self-possessed unity.

For Nietzsche on the other hand, as for Descartes, self-consciousness and individual existence are linked, but do not simply coincide. Nietzsche’s vision of the relationship between the two is, however, significantly more complex than that articulated in the neat formula of the
Cartesian *cogito*. In the context of his discussion of consciousness in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche defines our existence in terms of actions which “are altogether incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual” (GS 354). When these actions are represented in consciousness, however, he argues that they are necessarily translated into the perspective of the social group. In Nietzsche’s view, the subtlety of self-consciousness is a function of social utility. *This* is why it is so apt to serve as a basis for moral accountability – and *not* because it reflects or constitutes the authentic existence of the self or the autonomous spontaneity of the “I”.

From a Nietzschean perspective, both Locke’s and Kant’s theories of self-consciousness can be seen as products of “the desire for ‘freedom of will’” expressed in a “metaphysical superlative sense,” that is “the desire to bear the whole and sole responsibility for one’s actions and to absolve God, world, ancestors, chance, society from responsibility for them” (BGE 21). Nietzsche’s critical distance from such “sovereign” ambitions and his remarks concerning the linguistic basis of “that little changling, the ‘subject’” (GM I 13) do not imply a complete rejection of the concept of personal responsibility, however. Although he is dismissive of efforts “to pull oneself into existence out of the swamp of nothingness by one’s own hair,” explaining them by reference to the vanity of the type who “will at no price give up his ‘responsibility’, his belief in *himself*, the personal right to *his* deserts,” Nietzsche is equally critical of the opposite type who “will not be responsible for anything, to blame for anything, and out of an inner self-contempt wants to be able to shift off his responsibility for himself somewhere else” (BGE 21).

While Nietzsche’s critique of consciousness as a social product undermines the status given to self-consciousness not only by Locke, but also by Kant, it does so not simply by “shifting off’ responsibility for the self onto the anonymous social forces that find expression in the structures of grammar, but rather in the name of a practice of “self-responsibility” which is linked to the “incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual” actions which are
distorted by, but nevertheless support and enter into self-consciousness. In this respect Nietzsche claims awareness of form of individual existence – as ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’ - which transcends the social chatter of consciousness and its illusions. As we asked earlier of Kant, how is it possible to know about an activity which by definition lies beyond the reach of consciousness? The work of Paul Ricoeur suggests an answer in Nietzsche’s case, one which may be related to Nietzsche’s own pronouncement, quoted a couple of times earlier - but on his own authority worth repeating more than once - that “methods, one must repeat ten times, are the essential” (AC 59).

4.2 Nietzsche, Descartes, and the method of meditation

Ricoeur’s reading of Nietzsche as a “master of suspicion”

Ricoeur famously sees Nietzsche, along with Freud and Marx, as a “master of suspicion,” one of the “great destroyers” who revisit the problem of Cartesian doubt, in order “to carry it to the very heart of the Cartesian stronghold.” These radical heirs to Descartes dare to doubt not only the contents of consciousness, but also consciousness itself. The method of doubt, even in this reflexive form, does not lead to barren scepticism, however. On Ricoeur’s reading, “Descartes triumphed over the doubt as to things by the evidence of consciousness,” while each of the masters of suspicion triumphs over the doubt as to consciousness by inventing an art of interpreting, “a mediate science of meaning, irreducible to the immediate consciousness of meaning.” Each draws a benefit from “the ascesis required by a reductive and destructive interpretation: confrontation with bare reality.”

This suggests that Nietzsche’s awareness of “bare reality,” in the form of “incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual” actions, is informed by a method which derives

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110 Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* 33.
111 Ricoeur 33.
112 Ricoeur 34.
113 Ricoeur 35.
and extrapolates from the method of doubt employed by Descartes in his Meditations. If this is correct, then Nietzschean genealogy would be a prodigal child of Cartesian meditation, designed to facilitate a form of “self-consciousness” distinct from both the Lockean and Kantian versions.

In spite of the popularity of the phrase “masters of suspicion,” the idea that the genealogy of genealogy leads us to the Cartesian Meditations may itself provoke a certain measure of “doubt.” An immediate objection which might be made to Ricoeur’s argument is that (at least on Nietzsche’s reading) Descartes did not so much “triumph over doubt” by appeal to the “evidence of consciousness,” as elect to lay down the incisive tool of doubt at a crucial moment, in order to found his philosophical system on the bedrock of divine authority. It was God, not the evidence of consciousness, that Descartes finally refused to doubt - and it is subsequently Nietzsche’s doubt (to put it mildly) concerning God which motivates him to criticize Descartes. This criticism appears notably in The Birth of Tragedy where Nietzsche associates Descartes with Euripides and the advent of “aesthetic Socratism,” that is to say, the idea that “to be beautiful everything must be conscious” (BT 12). Nietzsche suggests that the transparency of the knowledge to which both Euripides and Descartes lay claim ultimately depends not simply upon “consciousness” but on an appeal to divine authority: just as Euripides introduces his works by prologues in which “a person who could be trusted” - often a deity - “guarantees” the plot of the tragedy to the public, Descartes invokes the veracity of God as ultimate guarantor of the evidence of the senses (BT 2).

However, Ricoeur’s contracted summary of the Cartesian project brings out a crucial point: Descartes’ appeal to God effectively makes consciousness the final source of human knowledge. God is not an accessible source of knowledge for Descartes; divine authority is merely a guarantee of the veracity of the source, which is consciousness. In this way, Descartes manages to reduce God to a kind of shadow which slides into consciousness, making it mysteriously opaque to doubt or to any other mode of investigation. As Nietzsche
says, “God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. - And we - we still have to vanquish his shadow, too” (GS 108). The work of Locke and Kant on “self-consciousness” might be given as examples of “caves” in which the shadow of God continues to appear. And Nietzsche? - Nietzsche too has to grapple with such long shadows as they appear in the very structures of language: his own thought is not so sunlit as to be devoid of divine darkness.

In our reading of the final passages of Nietzsche’s essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” we observed that while the fictional Zarathustra may be “godless,” Nietzsche himself is still haunted by the shadow of God which lies within the secular, scientific consciousness he has inherited along with the Western cultural tradition. This supports the idea that in writing his genealogy of conscience, Nietzsche is bound to engage with the Cartesian method that articulates and helps to shape the modern consciousness in which Nietzsche cannot help but participate. However, a second objection to the idea that Nietzsche’s method of genealogy is itself “genealogically” related to Cartesian method arises from Ricoeur’s own analysis of the relationship between Descartes and the “masters of suspicion.” In presenting the idea of a “school of suspicion,” Ricoeur makes of it a school for scandal - a school that scandalises by taking “the most radically contrary stance to the phenomenology of the sacred and to any hermeneutics understood as the recollection of meaning and as the reminiscence of being.”\textsuperscript{114} In this respect, he presents the modern “masters” less as creative inheritors of the Cartesian legacy than as its violent opponents. However in the course of his study of Freud, Ricoeur finds it necessary to revise this view, a revision which has frequently been overlooked in subsequent discussions of the notion of a “hermeneutics of suspicion.” Ricoeur writes:

\begin{quote}
In my introductory presentation of Freud, I regarded him, along with Marx and Nietzsche, as one of the representatives of reductive and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{114}Ricoeur 35.
demystifying hermeneutics [...] opposed to a nonreductive and restorative hermeneutics [...]. The whole movement of this book [Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation] consists in a gradual readjusting of that initial position and of the panoramic view of the battlefield governing it. In the end it may seem that in this indecisive combat Freud is nowhere because he is everywhere.115

This “readjustment” implies another: rather than supposing that Nietzsche, along with Freud and Marx, is bent upon the destruction of the “Cartesian stronghold,” energetically laying siege to the authority of self-consciousness and the various modes of responsibility it supports, it would seem that Nietzsche, too, is “nowhere because he is everywhere” in relation to the philosophical “fortress” of Cartesian consciousness. While sporadically opening fire upon it from an apparent distance, he simultaneously occupies it more gently (or decadently) from within.

A genealogy of genealogy

The seed of our “suspicion” that Nietzschean genealogy might be intimately related to Cartesian meditation was the observation that both Nietzsche and Descartes draw a distinction between self-consciousness and the existence of the “I” which is elided in different ways in Locke’s and Kant’s theories. This distinction has direct methodological implications (or it arises from a specific methodological basis, depending on which comes first, the method or the distinction). Rather than simply being able to rely on consciousness as in some sense identical with existence, one is obliged to investigate the relationship between the two. What sort of method is appropriate to such investigation? Descartes makes no secret of “the custom, the act, the ‘drama,’” which, as Nietzsche would say, “endures” in his work while “the meaning, the purpose, the expectation associated with the performance of such procedures” changes: it is the method of meditation.

115Ricoeur 60.
Descartes does, however, feel the need to defend his choice of method:

I rightly demand special attention on the part of my readers and have purposely chosen a style of writing which I considered most suitable for this aim. [..] I think it quite fair to ignore altogether and despise as of no weight the criticisms of people who are unwilling to meditate with me and instead persist in holding their preconceived views. I know how difficult it is for anyone - even someone who gives it his full attention and who is really seriously trying to discover the truth - to keep before his mind the whole compass of my Meditations and at the same time grasp each part, both of which must, in my opinion, be achieved if the full point of my work is to be comprehended. (AT VII, 158-159)\textsuperscript{116}

Nietzsche introduces The Genealogy of Morals with similarly defensive remarks:

If this book is incomprehensible to anyone and jars on his ears, the fault, it seems to me, is not necessarily mine. It is clear enough, assuming, as I do assume, that one has first read my earlier writings and has not spared some trouble in doing so: for they are, indeed, not easy to penetrate. [..] To be sure, one thing is necessary above all if one is to practice reading as an art [..], something that has been unlearned most thoroughly nowadays - and therefore it will be some time before my writings are ‘readable’ - something for which one has almost to be a cow and in any case not a ‘modern man’: rumination. (GM P: 8)

The similarity of Descartes’ and Nietzsche’s defences and demands, and the warnings they issue about the effort required to comprehend their work, rests on more than a common tendency toward philosophical arrogance. This kind of instruction is rendered necessary by the ambition of these works, which do not seek merely to add to the existing wealth of philosophical knowledge. Rather, they lead the reader who is ready and willing to submit to

their discipline toward a new relation between consciousness and existence, an altered form
of subjectivity. Michel Foucault claims that “the extraordinary thing in Descartes’ texts is that
he succeeded in substituting a [non-ascetic] subject as founder of practices of knowledge for a
subject constituted through practices of the self,” a change which “makes possible the
institutionalization of modern science.”117 Read in this way, Descartes’ work paves the way
for the developments we see in Locke and Kant, where the subject is identified with self-
consciousness as an invariable basis for knowledge and responsibility. In Descartes’ work,
however, as Kant’s critique of the cogito makes clear, the transition between the two forms of
subject is still visible; consciousness and existence have not yet merged, so that the self as
existence (or in Nietzsche’s term, action) can still be discerned “behind” the emergent self-
conscious “I.” In Nietzsche’s work, the possibility of “movement” in the relationship between
self-consciousness and existence is also envisaged, although the direction of transformation is
reversed. This does not imply that Nietzsche seeks to revive pre-modern practices of the self,
however. Rather, his “genealogical” researches aim to reveal the disavowed practices of self
which support the supposedly “non-ascetic subject” of modern science. Recognition of these
practices is a vital step in the larger project of “self-overcoming” which Nietzsche hopes
might eventually take us beyond the modern subject and its “bad conscience.”

This account of the revolutionary ambitions (and achievements) of Descartes and Nietzsche
explains why both philosophers demand that one undertake the reading of their works as one
might undertake a spiritual training, understanding that each stage of the work is meaningless
in isolation and can have its proper effect only as part of a sustained and cumulative course of
development. It is necessary to take time to ponder, to meditate, even to sleep on the strange
hypotheses and experiments proposed by these philosophers. Such work can only proceed
slowly, since it involves not merely making additions or adjustments to a preexisting store of

117Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” in The Essential Works of Michel
Hurley et al. (London: Allen Lane, 1997) 278-79.
knowledge, but aims to allow the reader to break down old habits of thought and replace them with new understandings and practices of what it is “to know” or “to be conscious.” Such possibilities cannot simply be described by the author; they would not be understood. The reader must be led to discover them through a series of reflective exercises: hence Descartes’ selection of the meditational form as his philosophical vehicle. As Amélie Oksenberg Rorty observes, the meditational tradition, which she traces to Stoic origins, “is reflexive as well as reflective: the author transforms himself by following a staged reflection, a self-reform through self-examination.”

His example is to be followed by the reader, who may achieve similar self-transformation only by patiently making his or her own way along the path indicated by the text.

In hindsight, it appears that Descartes’ appropriation of the meditational form was designed to effect, or reflect, a transformation of the self that was to have revolutionary practical consequences. Descartes himself is equivocal about such possibilities, however. As Rorty puts it, on this topic he “speaks with forked tongue.” On the one hand, he claims that his method of doubt is a purely intellectual exercise that need not give rise to changes of a practical, moral or political nature. On the other, he also speaks of philosophy as a tree whose branches are medicine, morality and mechanics: “the fruits of his philosophy are, it seems, in action and in practical life.” A practical and transformative orientation seems implicit in the meditational genre in which he chooses to write, but Descartes’ ambiguity on this point in fact reflects an ancient debate within the meditational tradition. Rorty points out that the Stoics were divided among, and in most cases, within themselves about “whether meditational reflection could transform sensations and passions, practical and political life, or

118Rorty 2.
119Rorty 9.
120Rorty 9.
whether everything would - and should - be left unchanged save that it is understood anew.”

In Descartes’ case, however, there were pressing political motivations and not merely philosophical reasons for equivocation on this point. One of the most famous images of Descartes derives from his own remark, made in an early notebook, comparing himself to an actor or a “masked man” (larvatus): “Actors, taught not to let any embarrassment show on their faces, put on a mask. I will do the same. So far, I have been a spectator in this theatre which is the world, but I am now about to mount the stage, and I come forward masked” (AT X 213). We may reasonably suppose that it was Descartes’ awareness of the transformative potential of his thought and the threat this posed to established interests that lay behind his desire for a prudent degree of self-effacement. However, merely in choosing to write in the meditational form, Descartes had effectively indicated the unorthodox character of his philosophical project.

_A brief history of philosophy and meditation_

By the time of Descartes, philosophy and the practice of meditation had decisively parted company in Christian culture. In early Christianity, this was not yet the case. Pierre Hadot tells us that the monastic movements, in particular, adopted and transmitted many of the meditational practices of ancient philosophy, at the same time portraying Christianity itself as “complete philosophy.” However, during the Middle Ages, Christian spiritual practices based on ancient meditational techniques came to be sharply distinguished from philosophy. Meditation was seen as a spiritual aid with no particular philosophical value, while

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121 Rorty 3.
122 As Stephen Gaukroger says, it is “easily forgotten just how controversial, reviled, and celebrated a figure Descartes was, not only in his own lifetime, but for the next 150 years or so.” Stephen Gaukroger, _Descartes: An Intellectual Biography_ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 3.
philosophy was pressed into the service of theology as an *ancilla theologiae* whose role was to provide theology with the “conceptual, logical, physical and metaphysical materials it needed.” Consequently, philosophy, now understood as a purely abstract and theoretical activity, was sharply demarcated both from theology and from spiritual practices such as meditation. Philosophical speculation was carried out not in the Church or among the parishioners, but in the university created by the medieval church, where Scholasticism made of philosophy a highly specialized discipline, accessible only to experts.

It was against this background that Descartes wrote his *Meditations*. They can thus be seen as a bold effort to reclaim meditational practices for philosophy, and to reclaim philosophy for thinkers beyond the academy. Descartes’ most obvious point of contact with the surviving Christian meditational tradition would have been via the writings of luminaries of the Catholic Church such as Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Many commentators have discerned anticipations of the Cartesian argument of the *cogito* in the work of these thinkers, especially that of Saint Augustine. To suggest that Descartes simply swipes a key argument from Augustine is misleading, however; what he inherits from, or holds in common with both Augustine and Aquinas is a meditational method which works between consciousness and existence to produce and support arguments such as that of the *cogito*.

Scholarship suggests that the meditational forms of writing and thought practiced by thinkers such as Augustine and Aquinas, and subsequently Descartes, were in many ways continuous with the practices of the ancient Greek philosophers who preceded them. There are two competing (but not incompatible) explanations for this. On the one hand, Hadot argues that

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124 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 270.
125 For example, Jaako Hintikka comments that Descartes’ “contemporaries were not slow to point out that Descartes’ principle had been strikingly anticipated by St. Augustine,” an idea that is still popular today, although “Descartes could have found the principle in St. Thomas Aquinas as well as in St. Augustine.” Jaako Hintikka, “Cogito, Ergo Sum: Inference or Performance?” in *Meta-Meditations: Studies in Descartes*, ed. Alexander Sesonske & Noel Fleming (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co, 1965) 50-51.
“since the first centuries of the church’s existence, Christian spirituality has been the heir of ancient philosophy and its spiritual exercises” so it is likely that ancient meditational methodologies were preserved within the Christian tradition. This tradition boasts a long heritage of meditational texts stretching back through the Middle Ages, evidence that the exercises they describe and direct had been sustained as part of monastic life. Alternatively, the resemblance between ancient and late medieval meditational forms may be attributed to the renaissance of rhetorical studies that took place in the sixteenth century. This is the explanation given by Paul Rabbow for the close resemblances he observes between the *Exercitia spiritualia* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and the spiritual exercises of the ancient Stoics and Epicureans. Hadot disputes the idea that these resemblances are a matter of rhetoric, arguing that this idea is contradicted by the fully philosophical nature of the exercises (both ancient and Christian). However, the rhetorical devices employed by the Christian saints are an aspect of their work that would no doubt have struck Descartes, reading such texts as a philosopher, rather than as a member of a monastic order. At its entry into the tradition of modern philosophy that Descartes was to found, meditation was available in the form of a literary genre, a specific set of techniques of writing and reading that could be lifted out of the monastic context, as it had previously been lifted out of the context of the ancient philosophical schools, “and again reinterpreted to new ends” (GM II.12).

*The significance of meditational rhetoric in Descartes*

Because the Cartesian meditations represent a novel use of meditational writing, their interpretation poses a problem that echoes the difference of approach taken by Rabbow and Hadot to the *Exercitia spiritualia*. Contemporary readers of the Cartesian *Meditations* tend to assume that the distinctive form in which this text is written amounts to no more than a clever rhetorical appropriation of the meditational genre, the effects of which bear little or no

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126 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 127.
127 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 127.
relation to the experiences of medieval monks or Stoic Greeks, and which are in any case of only secondary importance compared with the logical arguments to be found in Descartes’ text. Jaako Hintikka’s analysis of the cogito reveals that this approach to the Meditations strikes certain difficulties of interpretation, however. Hintikka observes that although Descartes sometimes presents the cogito as if it were simply a logical inference, it also operates in a “performatory” manner in his work, expressing the self-verifiability of the sentence “I exist.” Separating these functions of the cogito is no easy task, since Descartes does not distinguish clearly whether any “particular instance of the cogito argument is for him an inference or a performance.” On Hintikka’s reading, the “two types of interpretation merge into each other in his writings in a confusing manner.”

Such confusion arguably flows from the attempt to read the Meditations without taking into account the fact that they are meditations, although it can also be attributed to the presence of competing forms of meditation operating within the Cartesian text. Against the presumption of a merely rhetorical use of the meditational form by Descartes, Rorty’s methodological analysis of the Meditations shows, as we shall see, that Cartesian meditation is intimately linked to its antecedents. The affective potential of this form of writing may explain why this work has been so influential, arguably lending it a formative power out of all proportion to the value of the logical arguments it presents. However, this should not be taken to imply that the Cartesian meditations were written in order to provoke, in those few “who desire to meditate seriously,” an experience of self and truth, which while it may be imbued with modern meaning, remains formally and existentially comparable to that of earlier meditators. I shall argue that Rorty’s analysis lays the basis for interpreting the Cartesian Meditations neither as the reduction of a living practice to mere rhetoric, nor as the endurance of meditational procedures relatively unchanged, although taken over and directed to new ends, but rather as the astonishing emergence of something “new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic,

128Hintikka 70.
contradictory, and pregnant with a future.” Something undoubtedly bad from a Nietzschean perspective, but also excessively interesting.

Our first step will be to take a closer look at how the traditional meditational form reappears in Descartes’ text, and how it has been interpreted. Drawing on analyses of Christian meditational literature, Rorty suggests that Descartes combines elements of traditional ascensional and penitential meditational modes with an “analytic-architectonic” mode of his own. The analytic-architectonic mode corresponds to the most obvious and distinctive technique employed in the Meditations. Rorty describes it as “a mode of analytic reconstruction, a logical analysis that begins by testing complex beliefs and dissolving them into their basic constitutive elements.” Once the analysis has reached a structural foundation impervious to doubt, “the method becomes reconstructive and architectonic: the world is reconstructed from that point.”

Descartes relies on self-certifying reflection as the cornerstone of this system: his philosophical house is built on the introspective principle of the cogito, ergo sum. However Rorty argues that for its part, the mode of analysis Descartes employs “could not have stood on its own, validating itself: it rests on the practices of ascensional and penitential meditations and on the presuppositions embedded in the actual exercise of such meditations.”

As a basis for Cartesian “architecture,” these meditational practices form quite a complex foundation. In categorising the considerable variety of Stoic and Christian meditational styles

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129 Rorty 7.
130 The metaphor of the house is taken from Descartes’ Discourse on the Method of rightly conducting one’s reason and seeking the truth in the sciences, Part III (AT VI 22), where Descartes speaks of the need for a complete “rebuilding of the house” of knowledge. The original French version of the argument that has come to be known as “the Cogito” also appeared in this text, as je pense donc je suis. The same argument appears in less epigrammatic form in the Meditations, where Descartes asserts that “I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind” (AT VII 25). (In all references to Descartes, “AT” refers to the standard edition, Œuvres de Descartes, 12 vols, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, rev. ed. (Paris: Vrin/CNRS, 1964-1976).)
131 Rorty 8.
into two broad groups, Rorty points to the role adopted by the author of the meditational text as a chief distinguishing feature. In ascensional meditations, the author typically leads by example, acting as guide rather than director, encouraging the meditator to discover a truth which is understood to lie within him or herself. The way leading to this truth is relatively smooth, since falsity is regarded in this tradition as a product of confusion, rather than illicit assertion. Illumination can thus be achieved through clarification alone, without any effort dedicated to destroying previous belief. The idea that ultimately all minds are as one in relation to the truth, means, as Rorty observes, that in the style of writing used to record and lead an ascensional meditation, “the distinctions between reader and author, between the order of self-discovery and that of guidance, need not be rigidly enforced.”

The author of a penitential meditation text, on the other hand, does not merely lead by example, but actively manipulates the meditator’s catharsis. This is necessary because the meditator is understood to be not merely confused, but positively attached to false ideas. To develop awareness of this “fallen” state and break resistance to change, the penitent must first be brought to a state of despair. As Rorty puts it, this requires that the teacher be “not just slightly further along the same path as the reader: he stands in a different place altogether, staging and directing as well as guiding.” Meditational texts of this type are characterised by parables and images that carry a double meaning, since the director-author’s understanding is radically different from that of the meditator. There are frequently not only two, but three distinct “voices” in such works: that of the author-teacher, giving advice to the spiritual director; that of the director-authority, giving commands to the penitent; and that of the penitent, engaged in inner dialogue while undergoing the ritual exercises, sensory deprivations and trials selected by the director.

132 Rorty 5.
133 Rorty 5.
In Rorty’s view, Descartes makes use of both ascensional and penitential techniques, as well as the dominant “analytic-architectonic” method. The ascensional mode importantly offers support for Descartes’ claim that reflection upon the logical order of clear and distinct ideas rationally entails the belief that such ideas truthfully represent the ontological order that causes them. Ascensional meditation bridges the gap between reflective introspection and scientific investigation, making them, in Descartes’ hands, one and the same enterprise. The attraction of the penitential mode for Descartes is the stress it places on the activity of the will in rejecting error, and the means it provides to strengthen this activity. Detached from the institutional structure of the Church, penitential meditation somewhat ironically provides Descartes with a powerful weapon against authoritarian and dogmatic thought, since it privileges the autonomy of the will as the condition for self-improvement and transformation.

Finally, the mode of analytic reconstruction can be seen as a constructive means to fill the vacuum left by the exclusion of the Church as a source of authority. It locates or constructs structural elements of knowledge, rather than effecting ascension or catharsis, thus guarding against the extremes of ecstasy or despair associated with these processes. Although capable of ontological knowledge and autonomous in its activity, the Cartesian will is neither divine, nor abandoned to nihilistic solipsism. It is instead a finite force within the world, operating to produce and reproduce the system of scientific knowledge which represents the world. Descartes’ meditative project, like Stoic and Christian meditation before it, is not simply a solitary examination of conscience or consciousness; it is an activity supported by a community of meditators, working within a common tradition. As Rorty points out, Descartes’ Meditations comprises more than the six days of formal meditation. In the first edition of the work, Descartes also included six critical texts by fellow scholars along with his replies to them, with a seventh objection and reply added for the second edition. This can be seen as an implicit recognition of the communal aspect of meditation, which traditionally involves not only the meditator and his or her god, but also a social institution within which individuals come together in the mutual desire to seek the truth.
Meditation is a pursuit which somewhat paradoxically requires both solitude, and the support of a community which can protect and nurture the meditator’s work. This tension between the solitary and communal aspects of meditation is reflected in heightened form in Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*. In this text, Descartes initially presents his own scientific quest as solitary, and lists numerous disadvantages of communal work, which he sees as dominated by passion and the competitive desire for personal or social advancement. Resort to written communication of one’s discoveries is no solution to such problems; on the contrary, publication exposes one to involvement in the kinds of fruitless controversies carried on by “mediocre minds”: “not content with knowing everything which is intelligibly explained in their author’s writings, they wish in addition to find there the solution to many problems about which he says nothing and about which perhaps he never thought” (AT VI 70). In the “obscurity of the distinctions and principles they use” such commentators “resemble a blind man who, in order to fight without disadvantage against someone who can see, lures him into the depths of a very dark cellar” (AT VI 70-71). The irony of course, is that this argument appears in a published work and is expressed by means of such a beautifully emotive image. Under these circumstances, it comes as no surprise to find that a few paragraphs later Descartes reverses his position, declaring that a communal dimension to his project is necessary after all. More damage would be done by silence than by publication, and he is “becoming more and more aware of the delay which [his] project of self-instruction is suffering because of the need for innumerable observations which [he] cannot possibly make without the help of others” (AT VI 75).

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Descartes’ marked ambivalence regarding the communal aspect of his meditative project reveals a significant difference between the type of community which typically supported ancient Greek and medieval Christian practices of meditation and that to which Descartes so tentatively appeals. Rather than a cohesive group bound by common philosophical convictions or religious faith, Descartes’ “community” is a changeable conglomeration of unreliable individuals. However, the competition and division that Descartes sees as inherent to communal work is reflected in – and arguably nurtured by - the way in which different meditational techniques “compete” within his own work. Rorty observes that the Meditations can be read either as an ascensional meditation, a penitential meditation or an analytic investigation, the three modes of reading yielding different interpretations of the text. She also remarks that while each of the modes seems to dominate at different stages, there is no clear hierarchical or developmental order between them, so that they sometimes pull in different directions and “their subterraneal connections and relations remain unclear.”¹³⁷ Rorty considers this a problem, since “the various readings subtly undermine one another.”¹³⁸

This stylistic inconsistency may be explained by reference to the fact that Descartes’ use of the meditational tradition does not merely involve transmitting or transposing a rich variety of meditational techniques; it also constitutes a veritable meditation upon meditation. In replacing the authority structure of the Church by that of scientific knowledge, Descartes replaces a hierarchical social body which is content to cultivate the meditational tradition for its own purposes, with a much looser and more democratic association of minds which insists upon the importance of questioning and analysing meditational techniques, even as it makes use of them. Consequently, the analytic mode does not stand in an equal relation to the ascensional and penitential meditational modes in Descartes’ text, but rather plays an ambiguous double role.

¹³⁷Rorty 17.
¹³⁸Rorty 18.
This ambiguity is reflected in Rorty’s analysis by the fact that she shifts between describing the analytic mode as “investigation” and “meditation.” Especially in its architectonic function, the analytic-architectonic mode can be considered a meditational form like the others, creating an intellectual authority structure in which the individual will revealed and enhanced by penitential meditation can safely and effectively aspire to the ontological truth that is the goal of ascensional meditation. In its more purely analytic function, however, the analytic-architectonic mode does not merely complement and contest, but, as Rorty suggests, “subtly undermines” the more traditional meditational modes. While it may “rest” on the practices of ascensional and penitential meditation, these modes of meditation are not allowed simply to “rest” upon the practice of analysis, for the scientific mind has a peculiar desire to do away with the body that supports it, which here means to dissect and investigate meditational practices, draining them of life in the process.

4.3 Foucault’s reading of the Meditations

This crucial ambiguity in Descartes’ *Meditations* is brought out in Foucault’s reading of the work. On the one hand, he emphasises the importance of recognising the heritage of a living practice of meditation in Descartes’ writings, arguing that Derrida misreads Descartes because he does not pay sufficient attention to discursive elements that indicate “what happens in the meditation, at the level of the *events* that follow one another.” According to Foucault these are events in which the meditating subject takes an active role and “is ceaselessly altered by his own movement; his discourse provokes effects within which he is caught; it exposes him to risks, makes him pass through trials or temptations, produces states in him, and confers on him a status or qualifications he did not hold at the initial moment.”

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140 Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” 406.
This suggests that Descartes’ text corresponds to a typical traditional experience of meditation.

On the other hand, Foucault also identifies a very different pedagogic mode at work in the Meditations, which he calls “pure demonstration.” In this mode, the subject of the discourse “is not implicated in the demonstration - he remains, in relation to it, fixed, invariable and as if neutralized." Here we glimpse the precursor of the self-conscious subjects of Locke and Kant. The Meditations thus require a “double reading.” They are at once “a set of propositions forming a system” and “a set of modifications forming an exercise.” The reader must, it seems, be prepared to juggle two apparently incompatible roles: that of the neutral thinker critically examining a logical system, and that of the actively-engaged and vulnerable meditator, undergoing a process of transformation. If it were simply a matter of following Descartes as he shifts from one mode to the other and back again, this might merely risk giving rise to some confusing moments. However, Foucault asserts that within the Meditations there exist “sorts of ‘chiasmas,’” where the “demonstrative and ascetic schemas” intersect.

Foucault remains undisturbed in the face of this chiasmatic confusion and the schizophrenic subject (or state of “bad conscience”) it seems to conjure up. To understand his lack of concern, it is necessary to probe a little more deeply the significance he accords to the meditational elements of Descartes’ work. As was mentioned earlier, for Foucault, “the extraordinary thing in Descartes’ texts is that he succeeded in substituting a subject as founder of practices of knowledge for a subject constituted through practices of the self.” By this Foucault means that in the Greek philosophical schools, as in the Christian communities that inherited their practices of meditation, it was believed that in order to gain access to the truth,

141 Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” 405.
142 Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” 406.
143 Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” 406.
144 Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics” 278.
it was essential for a subject to carry out practices of moral or spiritual purification and transformation; it was not considered possible to be immoral and know the truth. Thus the subject of knowledge was necessarily constituted through what Foucault calls “practices of the self,” or “ascesis.” Descartes challenged the “more or less obscure” link between asceticism and truth that had consequently existed in Western culture up to the sixteenth century by asserting, in Foucault’s paraphrase, that “To accede to truth, it suffices that I be any subject that can see what is evident.” The standard of evidence, or indeed self-evidence, was set against that of morality or purity. The result, according to Foucault, is that after Descartes, “we have a nonascetic subject of knowledge,” a change which “makes possible the institutionalization of modern science.”

This suggests that when Foucault insists that in reading Descartes one must pay special attention to the “ascetic schema” of the text, this is not because he thinks the text is intended to facilitate an ascetic experience of meditation. Rather it is because the peculiar value of the Cartesian meditations is that it gives the reader an opportunity to analyse such experience and reject its constraints: the triumph of the scientific subject of knowledge over the discipline of traditional meditation would be the real “event” that takes place in this “meditation.” This idea is supported by the fact that in interpreting the Meditations Foucault attentively watches Descartes meditating; he does not appear to take up any invitation to meditate himself. Furthermore, he reads Descartes’ meditation as a highly controlled demonstration of meditation, rather than a record of dramatic spiritual risk-taking and transformation. Where Derrida embellishes his account of Descartes’ “evil genius” with a series of expressions describing a vivid experience of panic, for instance, Foucault accuses him of erasing “from Descartes’s texts themselves everything showing that the episode of the evil genius is a

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voluntary, controled exercise, mastered and carried out from start to finish by a meditating subject who never lets himself be surprised.”\textsuperscript{146}

But is a meditating subject who never lets himself be surprised a genuine meditating subject? He appears rather to be one who “is not implicated in the demonstration - he remains, in relation to it, fixed, invariable and as if neutralized.”\textsuperscript{147} This suggests that in spite of appearances, the subject of demonstrative discourse remains in control throughout the Meditations. If this is the case, the “chiasmas” where the “demonstrative and ascetic schemas” in Descartes’ text intersect create no special difficulty for the reader, since the outcome of their confrontation is never truly in doubt. On this interpretation, Descartes’ meditation would not be a traditional meditation at all, but a skilfully staged “mock” meditation, an experiment that is rigged in advance to discredit the “ascetic” subject of knowledge who, in the confrontation of the demonstrative and ascetic schemas of knowledge, is knocked down like a straw man. If Derrida misreads Descartes, it would not be because he neglects the meditational elements in Descartes’ style, but because he takes them too literally - or in too literary a manner. He reads the Meditations as if they were a traditional meditational text, and gets carried away with his own meditational responses of panic, for instance, failing to notice that the dressing-gown clad subject of the Meditations in fact sets a remarkably unruffled example.

Yet this seems a perverse reading of Foucault and Descartes, who both emphasise the need to take the title of the Meditations seriously. The idea of Derrida suffering a evil demon-inspired panic attack, hyperventilating over his copy of the Meditations, is also a little difficult to envisage. Nevertheless, it is arguable that in his own writing practices, Derrida aligns himself much more closely with the authors of traditional meditational texts than does Foucault; he exploits the techniques found particularly in the Christian versions of such texts to disorient,

\textsuperscript{146}Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” 414.
\textsuperscript{147}Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” 405.
frustrate, surprise, excite and in other ways emotionally affect the reader, whereas Foucault’s style is much more neutral, presenting arguments and evidence in a demonstrative, scientific manner.

However, Foucault’s complaint is not that Derrida lacks sophistication in his appreciation or application of the techniques of meditational writing. Let us return to his claim that in reading Descartes, Derrida disregards the extra-textual question of “what happens in the meditation, at the level of the events that follow one another.”148 This is not an isolated oversight, in Foucault’s view, but the product of a system already evident in the work of Descartes’ classical interpreters. This system involves “the reduction of discursive practices to textual traces; the elision of the events produced therein and the retention only of marks for a reading.” It is a pedagogy that teaches the pupil that:

there is nothing outside the text, but that in it, in its gaps, its blanks and its silences, there reigns the reserve of the origin; that it is unnecessary to search elsewhere, but that here, not in the words, certainly, but in the words under erasure, in their grid, the “sense of being” is said. A pedagogy that gives conversely to the master’s voice the limitless sovereignty that allows it to restate the text indefinitely.149

At the heart of Foucault’s objection to Derrida is the question of the relation between meaning and origin already encountered in Nietzsche. In Nietzschean terms, one might say that in Foucault’s view, Derrida conflates his own “interpretation and adaptation” of Descartes’ text, with the origin of the work. He places this origin “under erasure” within the text, identifying it with the purpose to which his own sovereign “will to power” puts it, and thus denies the history of this work. He does not respect the distinction between the present “utility” of the Cartesian meditations within his own broader philosophical project and tradition, and “that in it which is relatively enduring, the custom, the act, the “drama,” a certain strict sequence of

148Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” 405.
149Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” 416.
Foucault, on the other hand, being of a more historical turn of mind, considers it essential to identify the “custom” that endures in, or in his view, adjacent to this text. He seeks the origin of the work outside the text itself, in the experimental experience of meditation which he believes informs Descartes’ work.

One might observe that if Derrida places the origin of meaning “under erasure” within the text, Foucault appears to assert an equally problematic access to “the origin” when he claims to know “what happens in the meditation, at the level of the events that follow one another.” To appeal to extratextual experience as the origin of the text’s meaning seems to be just another way of locating an origin which requires a “sovereign master” to reveal its content. The difference between Derrida’s reading and Foucault’s would not be that one claims sovereignty with regard to the origin of meaning while the other does not, but simply that they call upon different traditions to do so: Derrida draws upon the techniques of meditational writing to lend force to his interpretation, while Foucault appeals to the authority of experimental scientific method. Given that both styles of writing appear in Descartes’ text, each approach is plausible as a means of “becoming master” of the Cartesian meditations. The confrontation between Foucault and Derrida thus contributes to the “evolution” of the Meditations, not, certainly by way of a “logical progressus by the shortest route and with the smallest expenditure of force - but a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subduing, plus the resistances they encounter, the attempts at transformation for the purpose of defense and reaction, and the results of successful counteractions” (GM II.11).

There is, however, another level to Foucault’s criticism of Derrida’s reading methods, which appeals not to an origin of meaning either within or outside the text, but to the structure of the text itself. Although Foucault opposes himself to a tradition which ignores “discursive practices” and reduces the text simply to “marks for a reading,” the detail of his attack on Derrida’s interpretation involves arguing that it fails to attend to the “marks” that Descartes’
text presents “for a reading.” Foucault shows that Derrida neglects or overlooks a whole system of textual differences within the *Meditations* - between words, images, paragraphs. Is this merely a tactical move on Foucault’s part - beating Derrida at his own game, before rejecting that game? This seems unlikely, given the way Foucault relies upon this textual analysis to support his own interpretation of Descartes.

On my reading of Foucault reading Derrida reading Descartes, the Cartesian text, taken precisely as “marks for a reading,” is what we all hold in common; it is the “strict sequence of procedures” that remains relatively enduring (taking into account the effects of translation) while the “meaning” of these procedures succumbs to a succession of interpretative powers. What makes their conflictual engagement possible is a mutual understanding that in the case of Descartes’ *Meditations*, to “meditate seriously” is to read seriously, paying close attention to the words of this particular piece of writing, and to the precise experiences they evoke and invoke. The meditational form demands an especially attentive and disciplined mode of reading, since it aims not merely to impart information, but also to teach the reader something about how to read. The reader must be prepared to submit to the discipline of the text, but also to attend to the peculiarities of his or her own methods of interpretation, in the interest of revealing and transforming this aspect of the self. In this sense, it may be argued that both Foucault and Derrida can be counted among “those few who desire to meditate seriously” with Descartes, since each of their interpretations of the *Meditations* is revelatory of the assumptions and prejudices they bring to the activities of reading and writing.150

The question remains, however, of what kind of transformation - of practices of meditation, or of interpretation - is effected by Descartes’ text. As Rorty says, it would be “pretty” to be able to say that the work of the Cartesian meditations is to transform the ascensional meditational

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150 Readers familiar with the exchange between Derrida and Foucault will know that I have managed to discuss their debate without mentioning its main point of contention, which is the way in which philosophical thought excludes, or includes madness.
mode, by use of the penitential mode, into the analytic mode of scientific inquiry - or in Foucault’s terms, to transform the ascetic subject of morality, by cunning use of its own practices of self, into the nonascetic subject of knowledge. However, the details, as well as the logic of the text resist such a neat resolution. For the nonascetic subject cannot be created once and for all, rendering the meditational practices of self-formation from which he arose redundant. The phoenix must continually be reborn from the flames: the analytic method requires the traditional meditational practices that underlie it, invoked in order to be turned repeatedly, flagrantly against one other so that the sovereign individual of scientific knowledge may arise.

It may be objected that the practice of meditation is not turned against itself in the Cartesian meditations, but rather that the analytic mode of inquiry is, ultimately, turned against the practice of meditation in this text, thus justifying the tradition that reads the *Meditations* solely for its demonstrative arguments. However, it should be observed that the destructive potential of the analytic method is not foreign to the tradition of meditation. It is an integral part, particularly of penitential practice, in which the penitent develops the “capacity to disassociate from, and even to deny, beliefs that may persist even after the meditator realises their falsity.”\(^{151}\) Meditation can involve taking an analytic distance in relation to one’s own consciousness, in the interests of self-examination and self-reform. In traditional practice this takes place under the guidance of a teacher operating within a communal structure of authority. In the Cartesian meditations, however, the use of analysis is not limited in this way. Finding the authority of the Church of his day too rigid to allow the expression of autonomous will required for any genuine meditation, Descartes was forced to double as both teacher and meditator, creating his own architecture of rational authority as he went, and using the meditator’s tool of analysis to do so. In the absence of an established community of authority, nothing is sacred, so analysis can be applied to anything and everything, including

\(^{151}\)Rorty 6.
the practice of meditation. Thus we find in Descartes’ text a form of meditation which centrally includes analysis and transformation not only of the self, but also of meditational practice and experience. This produces a dramatically split subject, at once detached and engaged, playing the double role of authority figure and penitent within the emergent institution of modern science.

4.4 A Nietzschean reading of the Cartesian Meditations

At this point, as Nietzsche would say, I can no longer avoid giving a first, provisional statement of my own hypothesis concerning the Cartesian subject and its relation to Nietzsche’s genealogical account of “bad conscience.” My contention is that when Nietzsche speaks of “a break, a leap, a compulsion” that creates a radically new form of consciousness, voluntarily at odds with itself, he is describing the peculiar reflexive turn enacted in the Cartesian meditations. As Nietzsche says of his own hypothesis concerning the origins of bad conscience, this idea may initially “sound rather strange,” since Nietzsche makes no explicit connection of this type, and indeed speaks of the bad conscience as arising with the first establishment of peaceful society, which may be supposed to have occurred well before the time of Descartes. However, it is clear that in Nietzsche’s view, the Ancient Greeks did not suffer from “bad conscience.” Furthermore, Nietzsche writes a lengthy “prehistory” of the “bad conscience” which includes reference to corporeal punishments which in Germany were “still employed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries” (GM II.3). He also closely associates the “bad conscience” with Christianity, arguing that it is under the conditions of a certain virulent form of this religion that the “illness” of bad conscience “has reached its most terrible and most sublime height” (GM II.19).

These clues allow us to date, not the earliest, but perhaps the most interesting emergence of “bad conscience,” to the early modern period, when the institution of the Roman Catholic Church had (in the view I am attributing to Nietzsche) become “an oppressive and remorseless machine” that had expelled “a tremendous quantity of freedom” from the world
Descartes’ *Meditations* can be read as a reaction to the restrictions placed on intellectual activity by the church of his day - not a reaction of protest or attack, but an expression of the instinct for intellectual freedom “pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself” (GM II.17). It would then be no accident, or mere stylistic choice, that led Descartes to write in the meditational form: powerless to change the institution of scholastic science and church authority from without, Descartes had no choice but to turn his transformative energies inward to create a new form of subjectivity as the basis of an alternative institution of knowledge.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche suggests that modernity is well on the way to taking its place among “the maddest and most interesting ages of history [. . .] when the ‘actors,’ *all* kinds of actors, become the real masters” (GS 356). Many have commented on the theatrical aspects of Descartes’ *Meditations*. Should Descartes then be seen as a “master actor” of modernity? Does the Cartesian “bad conscience” consist in “performing” the meditational practices of the Christian Church, apparently submitting voluntarily to its “mode of evaluation,” but in fact constantly maintaining an actor’s analytic distance from his role? In this case Foucault would be correct in his perception that Descartes’ meditation is a highly controlled, staged exercise. This interpretation, while not unfounded, disregards the crucial ambiguity which Descartes’ appropriation of meditational methods introduces at the inception of Cartesian subjectivity. To identify the Cartesian subject with Nietzsche’s “bad conscience” does not, however, entail seeing Descartes simply as a “master actor,” for as we have seen, the subjectivity of the actor is only one aspect of the complex phenomenon of “bad conscience.”

If the Cartesian subject is an actor, it is also a meditating conscience which aspires to “self-responsibility” and is genealogically related to the Christian conscience and its ascetic

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practices of self-denial. However, it is a form of that conscience become active in a way that takes it beyond its initial reactive form. Although it still denies the self, and particularly the body, in a way that reveals its lineage, the “active bad conscience,” is focused not on itself, but on the beauty of the ideals it pursues, contradictory ideals of “selflessness, self-denial, self-sacrifice.” The subject of the Meditations is a particularly strong example of this conscience, since in Descartes’ work we see these ideals emerge in a form pure enough to found a new culture. Christian self-denial is transformed into scientific neutrality, an ideal whose beauty will inspire the development of a new institution of knowledge.

Modern science as an ally of the ascetic ideal

Foucault suggests that after Descartes, “we have a non-ascetic subject of knowledge.” Does this mean that since the Meditations modern science, as a “genuine philosophy of reality,” has gone on to conquer and overcome the ascetic ideal? Nietzsche thinks not. In his analysis, in spite of their apparent antagonism, scientific thought and the ascetic ideal are “necessarily allies,” since they rest on a common foundation: “the same overestimation of truth.” Science in fact advances the development of the ascetic ideal by fighting “not the ideal itself, but only its exteriors.” Thanks to its scientific opponents the ascetic ideal has become “stronger, which is to say, more elusive, more spiritual, more captious, as science remorselessly detached and broke off wall upon wall, external additions that had coarsened its appearance.” Modern science “is the best ally the ascetic ideal has at present, and precisely because it is the most unconscious, involuntary, hidden, and subterranean ally!” (GM III.25). In rare cases, those in which science today “still inspires passion, love, ardor, and suffering at all, it is not the opposite of the ascetic ideal but rather the latest and noblest form of it” (GM III.23).

153 Foucault “On the Genealogy of Ethics” 279.
As an example of the scientific purification of the ascetic ideal, we might cite the development which leads from the Cartesian *cogito*, interpreted as evidence of a substantial soul, first to Locke’s understanding of self-consciousness as the sole basis of personal identity, and then to Kant’s concept of “spontaneous” self-consciousness. Although God disappears in the Kantian version, who could deny that with Kant, self-consciousness becomes “more elusive, more spiritual,” while naïve reliance on the evidence of consciousness, buttressed by the traditional notion of God as our Immortal Judge, is broken off like a rough wall that had come to obscure the purity and beauty of the ideal it was constructed to protect? From this perspective, Kant’s idea that in the spontaneity of self-consciousness, “I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am” (B 157), strikingly recalls God’s enigmatic reply to Moses in Exodus 3:14: “I am that I am.”

Nietzsche concludes his discussion of the relations between the ascetic ideal and modern science in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* with a passage in which Kantian philosophy is associated with scientific thought and both are identified as allies of the ascetic ideal:

All science, natural as well as *unnatural* – which is what I call the self-critique of knowledge – has at present the object of dissuading man from his former respect for himself, as if this had been nothing but a piece of bizarre conceit. One might even say that its own pride, its own austere form of stoical ataraxy, consists in sustaining this hard-won self-contempt of man as his ultimate and most serious claim to self-respect (and quite rightly, indeed: for he that despises is always one who “has not forgotten how to respect” . . .) Is this really to *work against* the ascetic ideal? Does one still seriously believe (as theologians imagined for a while) that Kant’s *victory* over the dogmatic concepts of theology (“God,” “soul,” “freedom,” “immortality”) damaged that ideal? (GM III.25)
The “hard-won self-contempt” that Nietzsche provocatively associates with the advance of science suggestively recalls the attitude of contempt displayed by the “sovereign individual,” proud bearer of the “extraordinary privilege of responsibility.” The sovereign individual’s contempt is, of course, reserved for those who promise without the right to do so. However, anyone who takes on this form of responsibility as an ideal will, as was argued earlier, be led to direct such contempt back at the self upon the slightest failure to live up to this ideal. If the “sovereign individual” is interpreted as an image of the supposedly “non-ascetic subject of knowledge,” then Nietzsche’s genealogy of this figure demonstrates the fragility of the modern scientific sense of superiority and how deeply embedded the ascetic ideal is in modern practices of memory. In working backwards from the scientific ideal of a non-ascetic subject of knowledge to reveal the layers of asceticism and guilt which make such a vision possible, Nietzsche’s essay on “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” might be said to retrace the development which takes place in the Cartesian meditations, but in reverse.

While the Cartesian meditations begin in a relatively traditional meditational style which gradually gives way to the increasing dominance of the analytic mode, the second essay of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* proceeds in the opposite direction. It begins in the analytic mode of scientific discourse and then exploits the pre-existing divisions within that discourse in order to bring its authority into question. By the end of the essay, the style has shifted, without any clear break, from analytic to meditational mode, ending with an impassioned invocation of redemption, followed by enigmatic silence. If Descartes’ use of meditational writing engenders suspicion that he may merely be exploiting it as a rhetorical device, Nietzsche’s deployment of the conventions of scientific (particularly historical) writing provokes similar doubts. However, a careful reading of their texts shows that each thinker maintains a living tension between the different discourses they draw upon, reducing neither meditational, nor analytic writing to the cynical performance of an empty form. Each of their texts both describes and expresses the complex, divided conscience of a thinker “voluntarily at odds with himself,” seeking to walk a tight-rope between the religious and scientific
discourses that in modernity have moved so far apart. One might say that Descartes and Nietzsche are dancing across this tight-rope in opposite directions, because, living at different “ends” of the modern era, the institution that has both formed and sought to restrict the autonomy of their thought is not the same. While Descartes pays allegiance to the Church even as he uses demonstrative argument to challenge its teachings, Nietzsche admires the “nobility” of scientific ideals, even as he meditates upon the contradictions of the conscience which produces them.

This brings us to the question of what kind of transformation is effected or attempted by Nietzsche’s use of the meditational form. In the next chapter I shall argue that Nietzschean meditation centrally involves the contemplation and transformation of modern passions. The discussion of scientific method in terms of the cultivation of contempt is just one example of this; the emotive quality of Nietzsche’s own writing is another. One might say that not only modern science but also Nietzsche’s thought aspires to the status of “the latest and noblest form of the ascetic ideal” – a form which is powerfully communicated in Nietzsche’s teaching of the eternal return. Set alongside Nietzsche’s teachings on irresponsibility, “self-responsibility,” “sovereign responsibility,” and guilt, the passionate experience of responsibility evoked in the teaching of the eternal return might be said to represent, not merely yet another of the shifting surfaces upon which the “multi-coloured” butterfly of Nietzschean philosophy alights, but what Deleuze and Guattari would call “the line of flight”154 of this lovely and dangerous “winged creature.”

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154 For Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the phrase “line of flight,” see Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) esp. at 9: “Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities.”
Taking up Nietzsche's metaphor for the spirit of philosophy in modernity, I suggested earlier that his own writings record the movements of a "dangerous butterfly" which alights delicately and with precision upon the "many-coloured" surfaces of the modern soul. This way of doing philosophy does not limit itself to logic, but takes its bearings from "life," in all its affective force and variety. This is not to say that Nietzsche's thought opposes or excludes logical analysis; rather, it is to suggest that, like the Cartesian *Meditations*, his work combines such analysis with a contemplative and transformative form of thought. In this respect, Nietzsche too draws upon the techniques of meditational writing, while more overtly challenging the pious ends to which such methods have traditionally been put within the Christian tradition.

Among such pious ends, contemplation of and personal participation in the passion of Christ is a central theme of Christian meditation. In this chapter, we will consider the place that Nietzsche accords to passion in his own form of philosophical meditation and the issues of responsibility - or irresponsibility - this passion entails. This will lead us to examine the ways in which meditational forms of former centuries reappear in the movements of the "dangerous and multi-coloured winged creature" of Nietzschean philosophy, and to consider its relations with the dark passions of misogyny and anti-Semitism. Finally, we will conclude with a reading of Nietzsche's teaching of "eternal return" as a meditation upon passion and responsibility in modernity.
5.1 Descartes and Nietzsche: two very passionate and dark creatures (compared to fish)

We have observed that Descartes appropriates the affective and transformative potential of the meditational form primarily in order to provoke the emergence of a new form of thought, a mode of analytic inquiry that is often understood to transcend or suppress the embodied experience of passion. Nietzsche, on the other hand, takes the more traditional view that contemplative work necessarily involves both thinking and feeling, while challenging conservative or religious expectations about the outcome of such work: "We who think and feel at the same time are those who really continually fashion something that had not been there before: the whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations" (GS 301).

Nietzsche's explicit acknowledgement of the role of feeling in contemplation might be read as a response to the legacy of Descartes' preference for activities of the mind belonging exclusively on the "non-corporeal" side of the pineal gland. If Descartes succeeded in turning the passion of the meditational form against itself in order to give rise to a purely intellectual form of subjectivity - Foucault's "non-ascetic subject of knowledge" - then Nietzsche's work operates in the opposite direction, by exposing the passionate genealogies of supposedly "pure" forms of thought, and by making new philosophical uses of the passions with which meditational forms traditionally work.

On the other hand, Nietzsche's description of "we who think and feel at the same time" might equally be read to include Descartes among the "contemplatives" who according to Nietzsche typically overlook or underestimate their own passionate and creative powers, taking themselves for dispassionate observers when in fact they are the "poets" who create the world they see (GS 301). Furthermore, an interest in the passions, along with the use of meditational as well as analytic methods of inquiry in posing and pursuing questions about this fundamental aspect of human experience, are elements of his thought which Nietzsche might
well be said to have inherited from Descartes. A number of scholars, including Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, Annette Baier, Geneviève Rodis-Lewis and Susan James, have recently drawn attention to the significance of Descartes' work on the passions, thereby challenging the commonly-held view that Descartes' thought is gripped by a thoroughgoing dualism with respect to body and mind.

The passionate problem of responsibility

James argues that the latter, dominant interpretation of Descartes owes its contemporary tenacity to the twentieth century preoccupation with philosophy as a scientific and secular form of enquiry distinct from psychology. She suggests that this preoccupation has led to neglect of the centrality of the passions in the work not only of Descartes, but of seventeenth century philosophers in general: "Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Pascal, Malebranche, and Spinoza are all, in different ways, profoundly interested in the passions, which play a major part in shaping both the philosophical problems they address and the solutions they propose."

A significant set of problems addressed by seventeenth century philosophers concerns the development of individual identity, a topic which, as James remarks, thinkers of this period were able to "confront with subtlety and insight" thanks to their conception of passions as states which straddle body and mind. As Locke's work demonstrates, to examine the problem of personal identity via such a conception of the passions leads quite naturally to the topic of responsibility. This is because questions of responsibility, like passions, "straddle

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159 James 14.
160 James 16.
body and mind." They do not arise from the exercise of reason alone, but as Nietzsche might have said, only from thinking and feeling at the same time.

If seventeenth-century work on the passions has been widely neglected or rejected as extraneous to twentieth-century analytic philosophy, the concepts of "consciousness" and "self-consciousness" first introduced by Locke in the course of his study of personal identity and responsibility have, by contrast, received abundant attention and development. For Locke, as we have seen, the "self-consciousness" which defines the "person" belongs "only to intelligent Agents capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery" (ID 26); it is the defining attribute of agents who are capable both of thinking and feeling, and are therefore passionately concerned with responsibility. More recent thinkers, however, have developed the concepts of "consciousness" and "self-consciousness" in directions that tend to divorce them from their initial association with responsibility and passion, tinged as these topics now are with theological and psychological or "psychologistic" associations.

The result is that in the work of analytic philosophers, "self-consciousness" commonly comes to be attributed simply to "intelligent Agents capable of a Law," capable, that is, of cognition, whose feelings, if they have any, are of questionable relevance. To a point, one can nevertheless trace the philosophical development of ideas or assumptions about responsibility by "translating" what is said about "self-consciousness" into the language of responsibility, as we have attempted to do in relation to Kant. Already with Kant, however, development of the concept of self-consciousness has done away with responsibility as a problem involving the passions. Once the self-conscious "I" becomes independent of any specific contents of consciousness, duty replaces feeling as the appropriate motivation for moral acts. Passion is simply to be avoided. The perfect model of responsibility associated with Kant's "spontaneous
self-consciousness" is open to "passionate" objections only if one interprets such self-consciousness, subversively, as a questionable ideal rather than a transcendental necessity.\textsuperscript{161}

To study Nietzsche, as we have seen, is to undergo an apprenticeship in the art or craft of such subversive interpretation. To "realists" who "feel well-armed against passion and fantasies and [. . .] hint that the world really is the way it appears to [them, as] if reality stood unveiled before [them] only," Nietzsche retorts, "are not even you still very passionate and dark creatures compared to fish, and still far too similar to an artist in love? You are still burdened with those estimates of things that have their origin in the passion and loves of former centuries" (GS 57). The concept of "self-consciousness" might be given as an example of an "estimate of things" in which old-fashioned passion lurks, and which is only naively to be taken for an account of bare reality. To bring the passions underlying such philosophical concepts to light is a large part of the task Nietzsche sets himself in writing the genealogy of morals. This project reintroduces passion as a topic of philosophical interest, but it does so in a distinctly critical manner: within the parameters of Nietzschean genealogy, investigation of the passion of "bad conscience" serves most obviously to undermine the ahistorical pretensions of those who would deny all resemblance to "an artist in love." We have considered the results of this critical analysis at some length.

\textsuperscript{161}This should not be taken to imply that either Kant’s work or European thought after the seventeenth century represents a philosophical waste-land in regard to the topic of passion. On the contrary, late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century thinkers such as Fichte and Schelling developed Kantian philosophy in “passionate” (and meditative) directions, work which took place “in an atmosphere filled with an intense interest in the nature of feeling characteristic of the early romantic movement,” as Paul Redding puts it (Paul Redding, The Logic of Affect (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999) 105). Fichte’s work is particularly relevant here insofar as he critiques Kant’s “transcendental unity of apperception” by reference to a version of Cartesian self-certainty which is experienced as feeling. This leads him to reject the Kantian formula “Thoughts without contents are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind,” in favour of “Intuition sees, but is empty; feeling relates to reality, but is blind” (J. G. Fichte, Science of Knowledge, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 278). See Redding Ch.5 “The Unsayable Self-Feeling Body: Feeling, Representation, and Reality in Fichte’s Transcendental Idealism,” for an illuminating discussion of this aspect of Fichte. A comparison of Fichte’s views on the feeling of agency with those implicit in Nietzsche’s work would be of great interest, but lies beyond the scope of this study.
We shall now turn to the more positive and creative aspects of Nietzsche's engagement with the passion which on his account suffuses even the most apparently objective philosophical concepts. What is Nietzsche's own approach to the philosophical significance of passion and its relation to responsibility? The answer, or rather, answers to this question are complex. They lead us back to questions relating to Nietzsche's own responsibilities as a thinker which were left hanging in our first chapter. For example, does Nietzsche's attempt to place feeling on an equal footing with thinking in his contemplative methods lead him to allow the unthinking passions of misogyny and anti-Semitism to mar his work? If Descartes is often read as a philosopher who privileges thought at the expense of feeling, Nietzsche can be caricatured as a writer who all too often appears to give vent to thoughtless passion. We shall consider this criticism of Nietzsche via our own critical analysis of Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche's work, in particular his idea that the value of "irresponsibility" is Nietzsche's "most noble and beautiful secret."162

5.2 Grand passion and Nietzschean meditation

Nietzsche asserts that grand passion is "the ground and force" of every great intellect. Even "more enlightened, more despotic" than the thinker himself, such passion "takes his whole intellect into its service [. . .]. Grand passion uses and uses up convictions, it does not submit to them - it knows itself sovereign" (AC 54). This view appears to subordinate reason to passion in a provocative reversal of the more common philosophical subordination of passion to reason. If "realists" and analytic philosophers purport to think (almost) without feeling, "grand passion" appears to involve feeling (almost) without thinking. In either case the problem of responsibility, which depends upon thinking and feeling at the same time, does not arise. "Grand passion," like "pure reason" would appear to lift the philosopher above "all too human" questions of responsibility into a realm of divine irresponsibility.

Deleuze reads Nietzsche in this mode when he suggests that irresponsibility is his "most noble and beautiful secret." This is the conclusion of an argument that begins with the assertion that "[i]l n'y a pas de misogynie nietzschéene" - there is no Nietzschean misogyny - since the goddess Ariadne is Nietzsche's first secret, his first feminine power. There is a second feminine power present in Nietzsche's work, however: an infernal, negative, moralising force, represented by the figures of the mother and the sister. This is the "pious interpretation of existence." It works to accuse us, to make us responsible. Responsibility here is the common fruit of feminine ressentiment which says, "it's your fault," and masculine bad conscience which says, "it's my fault." Against the effects of this poisoned fruit, Nietzsche "takes on the tasks of providing a new ideal, a new interpretation and another way of thinking." He aims to affirm the positive value of irresponsibility - not in a responsible manner, naturally, but rather in the form of a beautiful secret.

164 My translation. Hugh Tomlinson translates Deleuze’s sentence “Il n’y pas de misogynie nietzschéenne,” as: “This is not Nietzschean misogyny.” (Deleuze, trans. Tomlinson 20) On this interpretation, the statement refers to the immediately preceding quote from the *Birth of Tragedy*: “‘in original sin, curiosity, mendacious deception, susceptibility to seduction, lust - in short a series of pre-eminently feminine affects was considered the origin of evil... Thus the Aryans understand sacrilege as something masculine; while the Semites understand sin as feminine’ (BT 9 p.71)” (Deleuze, trans. Tomlinson 20). In declaring: “This is not Nietzschean misogyny” Deleuze would be defending Nietzsche from the implicit criticism that his analysis of the Semitic concept of sin is itself misogynistic, perhaps because it accepts or asserts the view that the affects listed are indeed “feminine.” It seems beside the point, however, to state that this analysis of Semitic culture does not amount to “Nietzschean misogyny,” since Nietzsche’s target here is Semitic culture, not women or femininity. It is therefore the charge of antisemitism, rather than that of misogyny, from which Deleuze might have been expected to defend Nietzsche at this point. Instead, he contrasts the association of femininity with sin that Nietzsche attributes to Semitic culture with the (purported) absence of misogyny in Nietzsche’s own work. I would argue that rather than defending Nietzsche from implied or presumed criticism here, Deleuze is simply continuing to expound his interpretation of Nietzsche’s own argument: Nietzsche’s view is that Semitic culture associates feminine affects with the origin of evil, with the effect of devaluing both femininity and irresponsibility; Nietzsche’s own perspective, on the other hand, is free from misogyny since it “secretly” expresses the “first feminine power” of Ariadne, in which femininity and irresponsibility are mutually affirmed. On this reading, the more literal translation of Deleuze’s remark is the correct one: “There is no Nietzschean misogyny.” (A second argument to support this translation could be based on the fact that there are more precise and natural ways in French to express the meaning that Tomlinson attributes here to Deleuze. For example: “Il n’y a pas là de misogynie nietzschéenne,” or “Il ne s’agit pas là de misogynie nietzschéenne.”)
165 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 21.
If we follow the thread of this labyrinthine argument it leads to the "good news" that passages in Nietzsche which might otherwise be mistaken for expressions of ressentiment and contempt (whether directed against women or Jews, Christians, liberals etc) are really riddles in the style of koans; guessed correctly, they initiate the reader into the "secret" and beautiful experience of irresponsibility. Strictly speaking, this experience cannot be described in language which defines irresponsibility in opposition to responsibility, and feminine in contrast to masculine. It is secret not because it is hidden, but because it lies beyond the domain of institutions which produce and are produced by conceptual distinctions and oppositions. As Deleuze describes it, this "secret" belongs to the lover of Dionysus, a god who represents life in all its passionate flux.

Penitential meditation

This interpretation of Nietzsche gives him the status which is typically assumed by the author of a penitential meditation text. As Rorty puts it, such a teacher is "not just slightly further along the same path as the reader: he stands in a different place altogether, staging and directing as well as guiding."\(^{166}\) Certainly, Nietzsche's writings display many of the features of penitential meditation texts: they are rich in parables and images that carry multiple layers of meaning. They are also written in several "voices," which correspond suggestively with those of the traditional meditational text: as "author-teacher," Nietzsche appears in the role of the distant (hyperborean, yet-to-be-born) philosopher who is resigned to being misunderstood by the mass of contemporary readers; as "director-authority" he appears in the more proximate guise of the physician/historian/psychologist/etc who attempts to diagnose and treat the malaise of contemporary culture; finally, as "penitent" he confesses himself to be "one of us," a modern decadent, engaged in a ritual form of philosophical self-examination.

\(^{166}\)Rorty, “The structure of Descartes’ Meditations” 5.
In many respects, Nietzsche's excoriating assessments of modern, liberal democratic society would appear to serve the traditional penitential aim of humbling the reader by bringing him or her to a state of despair. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that Nietzsche's self-appraisal does not generally correspond to the traditional perspective of the "penitent."

Rather, he offers a frequently flamboyant model of self-affirmation. The extravagances of Nietzsche's self-assessment in *Ecce Homo*, where he explains why he is "so wise," "so clever," the writer of "such good books" and finally, why he is "a destiny" may be compared with the intensity of the "self-contempt of man" which he believes has been progressively brought about by science (GM III.25) and institutionalised Christianity. In view of such successful cultivation of self-contempt, the state of modern culture as Nietzsche sees it calls, not for new forms of penitence, but rather for an "anti-penitential" form of meditation.

Accordingly, Nietzsche seizes hold of the traditional form and reinterprets it to new ends: he combats self-contempt with self-honour and despair with exultation: "Revaluation of all values: that is my formula for an act of supreme self-examination on the part of humanity, become flesh and genius in me" (EH "Why I Am a Destiny," 1).

*Ascensional meditation*

This is not Nietzsche's only method for restoring or creating self-respect in man. Elsewhere, he speaks of the task of learning to love oneself in terms that resemble not the dramatic and manipulative techniques of penitential meditation, but rather the slow but smooth progress of ascensional meditation. In the *Gay Science*, for instance, Nietzsche lists good will, patience, fainmindedness and "gentleness with what is strange" as the prerequisites for learning to love anything: "gradually, it sheds its veil and turns out to be a new and indescribable beauty. That is its thanks for our hospitality. Even those who love themselves will have learned it in this way; for there is no other way" (GS 334). According to Nietzsche's Zarathustra, to learn to love oneself is, in its turn, the only way to overcome the "Spirit of Gravity" and "become light and a bird [. . .]. And truly, to learn to love oneself is no commandment for today or for
tomorrow. Rather is this art the finest, subtlest, ultimate, and most patient of all" (Z III, "Of the Spirit of Gravity"). The patience required to learn the art of loving resembles that involved in the art of reading; Nietzsche's emphasis on the importance of lengthy periods of "rumination" in order to "digest" his ideas provides another example of a meditative element in the ascensional style within his thought.

If ascensional meditation indicates the way to learn the arts of loving and reading, and "anti-penitential" meditational techniques aim to encourage creative self-affirmation, then the analytic meditational form provides Nietzsche with the means to pursue a third, more conventionally philosophical, impulse in his thought. Comparisons between Nietzsche and otherworldly figures such as Dionysus and Ariadne arguably meet their limit in Nietzsche's passion for knowledge which competes with the more artistic and "redemptive" elements in his thought.

**Analytic-creative meditation**

For Nietzsche, it is a requirement of honesty to make one's own experience "a matter of conscience for knowledge" (GS 319). In this, he claims to distinguish himself from "all founders of religions and their kind," who in his view turn a blind eye to the evidence of their own experiences. "But we, we others who thirst after reason, are determined to scrutinize our experiences as severely as a scientific experiment - hour after hour, day after day. We ourselves wish to be our experiments and guinea pigs" (GS 319). Here we meet the analytic form of meditation which Nietzsche inherits from Descartes, although Nietzsche claims to exercise this method with a more rigorous “good will to transcend intoxication” (GS 57) than his predecessor. While Nietzsche remarks disdainfully that there “are still harmless self-observers who believe ‘immediate certainties’ exist, for example ‘I think,’” his own practice of self-scrutiny leads him not only to analyse the “series of rash assertions” contained in the
proposition “I think,” but even to question the desire for truth which drives such analytic inquiry (BGE 16).\[^{167}\]

In Nietzsche, as in Descartes, the destructive power of the analytic method is accompanied by creative energy. Analysis is deployed, not only to do structural damage to the edifices of prejudice, but also in order to create fresh perspectives. However, one could not call such creativity "architectonic" in the case of the philosopher who writes: “I would not build a house for myself, and I count it part of my good fortune that I do not own a house. But if I had to, then I should build it as some of the Romans did - right into the sea. I should not mind sharing a few secrets with this beautiful monster” (GS 240). Nietzsche's sea is a realm of creative play, the dangerous and passionate play of "waves" to whom he says:

> Carry on as you like, roaring with overweening pleasure and malice - or dive again, pouring your emeralds down into the deepest depths, and throw your infinite white mane of foam and spray over them:
> Everything suits me, for everything suits you so well, and I am so well-disposed toward you for everything; how could I think of betraying you? For - mark my word! - I know you and your secret, I know your kind! You and I - are we not of one kind? - You and I - do we not have one secret? (GS 310)

We shall come back to this “secret.” For the moment, however, let us recall that Nietzsche describes himself as one of those who "think and feel at the same time." Passionate creativity and thoughtful contemplation are intertwined in his practice of philosophy, so that poetic allusions to the "secrets" of waves lap - or crash - against a shore of firmly grounded analytic observation in his work: "It is a profound and fundamental good fortune that scientific

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\[^{167}\]For discussion of the “problem of self-reference” raised by Nietzsche’s interrogation of the desire for truth, see Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 3. As Béatrice Han remarks, Nietzsche’s criticism of truth is one of the most commonly treated themes of his philosophy. For a concise overview of the discussion, as well as Han’s own argument that in his practice of philosophy Nietzsche seeks to revive a pre-Socratic ‘magisterial’ understanding of truth, see Béatrice Han, “Nietzsche and the ‘Masters of Truth’: the pre-Socrates and Christ,” *Nietzsche and the Divine*, ed. John Lippet and Jim Urpeth (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000) 115-136.
discoveries stand up under examination and furnish the basis, again and again, for further discoveries" (GS 46). This is the case even in the "whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations" which in Nietzsche's view is continually created by contemplative endeavours (GS 301). His own rigorous self-analysis has yielded a body of psychological theory and observation of the passions, the acuteness of which is frequently acknowledged even by Nietzsche's detractors, although they would deny it the status of "philosophy."

*A case study: the "psychology of the redeemer,"

*or, skating with Nietzsche

Für Tänzer

Glattes Eis

Ein Paradies

Für den, der gut zu tanzen weiss.¹⁶⁸

A representative example of Nietzsche's somewhat idiosyncratic expertise in the domain of experimental psychology is provided in *The Anti-Christ*, where Nietzsche addresses the "problem of the psychology of the redeemer" (AC 28). This particular study serves not only to demonstrate Nietzsche's capacity for analytic analysis, but also provides a good example of the way in which different modes of meditational writing combine and conflict in his work. As Rorty points out in the case of Descartes' use of meditational techniques, the various modes tend to "compete," or pull in different directions, so that readings based on the assumption that the philosopher is writing in one mode or another "subtly undermine one

¹⁶⁸GS “Joke, Cunning and Revenge” 13. Walter Kaufmann makes this translation: “For Dancers / Smooth ice / is paradise / for those who dance with expertise.”
another." Negotiating such slippery textual surfaces, as we shall see, requires not only the expertise of the psychologist, but also that of the "dancer."

\[i. \text{Penitential/Analytic meditation}\]

In assuming the unlikely role of psychologist to the redeemer, Nietzsche, in accordance with the democratic spirit of modern scientific inquiry, eschews any attitude of humble devotion, or even respect, toward Jesus as the incarnation of the divine. He describes Jesus' teachings as a "return to childishness in the spiritual domain" (AC 32) and attributes his complete lack of resistance to his enemies to a decadent and instinctive "hatred of reality: consequence of an extreme capacity for suffering and irritation" (AC 30). Nietzsche makes this analysis whilst acknowledging that his "psychology of the redeemer" is hampered by the lack of accurate and insightful textual accounts of Jesus' life: "One has to regret that no Dostoevsky lived in the neighbourhood of this most interesting décadent; I mean someone who could feel the thrilling fascination of such a combination of the sublime, the sick and the childish" (AC 31).

Nevertheless, he feels able to identify with precision the physiological basis of this extraordinary combination: "We recognise a condition of morbid susceptibility of the sense of touch which makes it shrink back in horror from every contact, every grasping of a firm object." (AC 29) The result is that all resisting is felt as "an unbearable displeasure" while "blessedness (pleasure) is felt only in no longer resisting":

\[169\] Rorty, “The structure of Descartes’ Meditations” 18.
\[170\] The “expertise” it demands of the reader provides one explanation for why, as Gary Shapiro puts it, even “those writers who have good things to say about Nietzsche do not have good things to say about his penultimate book, The Antichrist” (Gary Shapiro, Nietzschean Narratives (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1989) 124). Its hostile reception is largely attributable to the book’s highly passionate tone. In contrast to the “well-established opinion about its place in the Nietzsche canon” (125), Shapiro suggests “that we read the admittedly feverish imagery [. . .], which becomes more and more pronounced as one reaches the end of the book, as intrinsic to the strategies and economy of the text rather than as symptoms of a loss of control” (139). The reading presented here follows Shapiro’s approach, but points to “strategies” or methods which supplement those identified in his reading of Nietzsche’s text.
These are the two physiological realities upon which, out of which the doctrine of redemption has grown. I call it a sublime further evolution of hedonism on a thoroughly morbid basis. Closest related to it, even if with a considerable addition of Greek vitality and nervous energy, is Epicureanism, the redemption doctrine of the ancient world. Epicurus a typical décadent: first recognised as such by me. (AC 30)

One might imagine peals of mischievous laughter echoing behind the pronouncements of this "scientific" psychologist, whose earnestness allows him to make the most outrageous remarks about the Son of God and his entourage: that "strange and sick world to which the Gospels introduce us - a world like that of a Russian novel, in which refuse of society, neurosis and 'childlike' idiocy seem to make a rendezvous" (AC 31). The suspicion arises that Nietzsche's own perspective cannot simply be reduced to that of this supremely arrogant and articulate (not to mention well-read) psychologist, but that the philosopher "stands in a different place altogether, staging and directing as well as guiding" a "performance" with penitential implications for (at least some of) his readers. On this interpretation, it is difficult to decide whether Nietzsche's primary target is the Christian whose devout sensibility will be wounded by his "scientific" reading of the Gospels, or the scientific "realist" whose confidence in his own techniques of analysis is exaggerated so as to border on the ridiculous in this context. When Nietzsche calls the French theologian Renan, "buffoon in psychologicis" (AC 29), one may suppose that he is conscious of playing the same role (more deliberately and extravagantly) himself.

Such buffoonery does not exclude the serious expression of a "passion for knowledge," or the sincere employment of the analytic mode of meditation, however. In Ecce Homo, Nietzsche declares: "I do not want to be a holy man; sooner even a buffoon.- Perhaps I am a buffoon.- Yet in spite of that - or rather not in spite of it, because so far nobody has been more mendacious than holy men - the truth speaks out of me" (EH "Why I Am a Destiny," 1). In this case, the truth that "speaks out of" Nietzsche's "buffoonery" concerns the analysis, not so
much of the psychology of the historical Jesus, but of a significant aspect of Nietzsche's own psychological "type": the aspect which allows him to claim experience in matters of decadence. Here, he ascribes the characteristics of the typical décadent to Epicurus - or rather to a version of Epicurus which he is the first to recognise. Elsewhere, Nietzsche declares, "I am proud of the fact that I experience the character of Epicurus quite differently from perhaps everybody else." He perceives in the life and teachings of this philosopher "[s]uch happiness [as] could be invented only by a man who was suffering continually" (GS 45). The fact that on his own account, Nietzsche is alone in recognising this form of Epicureanism strongly suggests a personal basis for such a vision. In this case, it would be the self-directed observation of analytic meditation - the severe scrutiny of his own experience - that allows Nietzsche not only to "recognise" the sublimated suffering of the decadent Epicurus, but also to extrapolate from this insight to creatively construct his own closely-related "psychology of the type of the redeemer."

ii. Creative/Ascensional meditation

To justify this approach and its rejection of more conventional accounts of the figure of Jesus, Nietzsche claims that Christians have systematically misrepresented the "type of the redeemer." He finds evidence of such distortion in the contradiction which "yawns," in traditional accounts of Jesus, "between the mountain, lake and field preacher, whose appearance strikes one as that of a Buddha on a soil very little like that of India, and the aggressive fanatic, the mortal enemy of theologian and priest" (AC 31). While the latter image is drawn in the image of Christian sectarians, according to Nietzsche, the first strikes him as a more authentic representation of the redeemer. Nietzsche suggests that Jesus could, "with some freedom of expression," be called a "free spirit" who "cares nothing for what is

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171See fn 37 to GS 45 for an argument by Walter Kaufmann on this point. Kaufmann supports the idea that Nietzsche felt a personal affinity with Epicurus by reference to passages in his correspondence with Peter Gast.
fixed": "the experience 'life' in the only form he knows it is opposed to any kind of word, formula, law, faith, dogma" (AC 32).

In the case of the true follower of this "free spirit," it "is not a 'belief' which distinguishes the Christian: the Christian acts, he is distinguished by a different mode of acting." This is affirmation through passivity. "Neither by words nor in his heart does he resist the man who does him evil." This "different mode of acting" is equally a different mode of feeling. Through this practice "one feels 'divine', 'blessed', 'evangelic', at all times a 'child of God'." It is not through guilt or punishment that such feeling is attained, but through a complete absence of resistance. "Not to defend oneself, not to grow angry, not to make responsible. . . . But not to resist even the evil man - to love him" (AC 35). For one who lives in this way, blessedness "is not promised, it is not tied to any conditions: it is the only reality - the rest is signs for speaking of it . . ." (AC 33). This is why Nietzsche describes the evangelical Jesus as a displaced Buddha: of the two "décadence" religions, "Buddhism makes no promises but keeps them, Christianity makes a thousand promises but keeps none" (AC 42).

Nietzsche's emphatic opposition to the culture of guilt and punishment he attributes to institutionalised Christianity, as well as those passages in which he advocates the cultivation of amor fati and expresses the desire to become a "Yes-sayer" whose only negation will be to look away (GS 276), suggest a second identification between Nietzsche and the figure of the redeemer he describes: a "free spirit" who is misrepresented as an "aggressive fanatic, the mortal enemy of theologian and priest." If "there is no Nietzschean misogyny," because Ariadne is Nietzsche's "first secret, the first feminine power," one might say that there is no Nietzschean antisemitism, because the "free spirit" of Jesus is another of Nietzsche's secrets, his first Semitic power. This idea provides a second explanation for the playful, mocking spirit of Nietzsche's psychological exegesis of the Gospels: his reading would involve an affirmation of the "positive sense" of irresponsibility, the knowledge of the Jesus who sees "the pure folly of the fact that anything of this kind exists," where "anything of this kind"
includes "all religion, all divine worship, all history, all natural science, all experience of the world, all acquirements, all politics, all psychology, all books, all art" (AC 32).

_A crack in the ice_

The tension between the operation in Nietzsche's thought of "responsible" analytic and penitential meditational modes of meditation on the one hand, and that of "irresponsible" creative and ascensional modes on the other emerges clearly at this point. Insofar as Nietzsche's "psychology of the redeemer" might be read as a creative fiction designed to lead the reader, in the manner of an ascensional meditation, toward a "free" and blessed state of "irresponsibility," it reveals the analytic and penitential, "psychological" aspect of this work to be "pure folly." On the other hand, if the critical aspect of Nietzsche's "psychology" is taken seriously, it in turn undermines the idea of such "blessedness" as a symptom of decadence, a hallucination provoked by an urgent desire to retreat from the demands of any form of struggle or responsibility.

This sense of contradiction creates the temptation to simply skate away from this "crack in the ice" of Nietzsche's thought by choosing between the image of Nietzsche as an irresponsible and affirmative "free spirit" or as a responsible and critical philosopher. In terms of affective orientation, this would involve deciding whether Nietzsche is a creator who privileges pleasurable, affirmative feelings at the expense or to the exclusion of critical thought, or on the contrary whether he is an analytic thinker who makes painful demands upon himself and his readers in the unflinching pursuit of critical knowledge.

Nietzsche's own account of contemplative work and the "higher human beings" who carry it out confounds this opposition, however. He insists that analysis and creativity, thought and feeling, are always combined in the work of such individuals. As a consequence, the "higher human being" experiences an ever increasing range of "different pleasures and displeasures,"
becoming "at the same time happier and unhappier" (GS 301). There are risks associated with this development - one becomes "ever more refined in pain and ultimately too refined" (GS 302) - but Nietzsche opposes all those who seek to restrict this development of thought and feeling, whether through "responsible" practices of self-discipline, or by following a mystical path to "redemption."
Two ways of turning on the spot: self-control and redemption

Those who advocate moralities of self-control, says Nietzsche, afflict man "with a peculiar disease; namely a constant irritability in the face of all natural stirrings and inclinations."

No longer may he entrust himself to any instinct or free wingbeat; he stands in a fixed position with a gesture that wards off, armed against himself, with sharp and mistrustful eyes - the eternal guardian of his castle, since he has turned himself into a castle. Of course, he can achieve greatness this way. But he has certainly become insufferable for others, difficult for himself, and impoverished and cut off from the most beautiful fortuities of his soul. Also from further instruction. For one must be able to lose oneself occasionally if one wants to learn something from things different from oneself. (GS 305)

Here we meet a figure who resembles the Kantian "sovereign individual" whose perfect self-mastery means that he never breaks a promise. This "guardian of his castle," which is to say "guardian of himself," also bears a certain resemblance to the "warrior" with the "will to self-responsibility." The potential for greatness and responsibility of such types is still acknowledged here, but such qualities no longer command unreserved approval, since they are attained only at the price of foregoing the "free wingbeat" of the "most beautiful fortuities" of the soul, and of closing off the possibility of learning from the other. The contemptuous "kicks" that the "sovereign individual" reserves for the less responsible here appear "insufferable," the fierce affirmation of self implied in the warrior's "will to self-responsibility" is redescribed as a barrier to learning, and the proud aspiration to achieve mastery over oneself and over circumstances is associated with a "peculiar disease," typified by the symptom of "constant irritability" which suggests a close etiological relation to the disorder we have named "modern irresponsibility."
Nietzsche's "psychology of the redeemer" suggests that once this state of irritability reaches a certain pathological level, it provokes the impulse to seek redemption in a state of blissful "irresponsibility." As we have seen, Nietzsche himself invokes the coming of a "redeeming man" at the end of the "long story" of punishment and suffering he tells in his essay on "'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and the Like." He also appears to draw upon his own experience as the basis for the "psychology of the redeemer" he presents in *The Anti-Christ.* These might be taken as indications of a redemptive impulse within Nietzsche's own thought. In the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, on the other hand, Nietzsche makes it clear that he places limited value on the state of redemption and the meditative or ascetic methods associated with it. Here, he argues that attainment of a state of blessedness merely signifies a victory in the "grand struggle against the feeling of displeasure." The ability of "sportsmen of 'sanctity'" (such as St Theresa) to free themselves from "profound physiological depression" is, according to Nietzsche, real and impressive enough, but he remains skeptical of the mystical significance commonly claimed for such experiences.

The supreme state, *redemption* itself, total hypnotization and repose at last achieved, is always accounted the mystery as such for whose expression even the supreme symbols are inadequate, as entry and return into the ground of things, as liberation from all illusion, as "knowledge," as "truth," as "being," as release from all purpose, all desire, all action, as a state beyond even good and evil. (GM III.17)

In spite of his own aspirations to go "beyond good and evil" and his respect for the idea that redemption is not "attainable through virtue" - a principle he regards as "the finest piece of realism in the three great religions" of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity - Nietzsche cannot take seriously what he calls "the high valuation placed on deep sleep by these people, so weary of life that they are too weary even to dream" (GM III.17).

In this, Nietzsche displays his affinity with Descartes, who has the energy not only to dream but also to doubt and analyse both his dreaming and waking states. For all his criticism of the
herd nature of consciousness, Nietzsche is not prepared simply to abandon conscious thought in favour of the profound "irresponsibility" of the unconscious or pure feeling. This does not prevent him from sinking into deep sleep when he is weary enough, of course - Nietzsche recognises that religious accounts of redemptive experience merely express "the same appraisal as that of the clear, cool, Hellenically cool, but suffering Epicurus" who, like all sufferers, was bound to accord a positive value to the absence of suffering and "to experience it as the positive as such" (GM III.17). A decadent, Epicurean perspective enters into Nietzsche's work, but it cannot be said to dominate or "exhaust" his methods. If this is correct, then the choice between interpreting Nietzsche as either a joyful "free spirit" or a Stoically suffering philosopher is a false one, and the "crack in the ice" through which one may view the intermingling of these competing currents in his thought cannot be avoided.

5.3 Into treacherous waters: Nietzschean misogyny and anti-Semitism

Once the gamut of Nietzschean passions is admitted, the secret of "irresponsibility" can no longer be used to conjure away appearances of misogyny and other forms of conceptual violence in Nietzsche's writings. Nor can such disturbing passages be dismissed by the opposite tactic of supposing that their "true meaning" relates to a superior philosophical "will to responsibility." Insofar as my own reading has to this point tended to take the second tack in negotiating the waves of Nietzschean waters, I have been inclined simply to look away from instances of the "infernal feminine" which at least remain visible in Deleuze's analysis. For Deleuze, there is no Nietzschean misogyny, but the appearance of it is strikingly evident. Inversely, my own recognition of a decadent streak in Nietzsche's thought, which would include the real possibility of Nietzschean misogyny, has so far been only weakly illustrated, chiefly by reference to Nietzsche's self-proclaimed inclusion within the category of the apparently gender-neutral, decadent modern actor type. There is Nietzschean misogyny, but it is barely noticeable.
Deleuze has his own way of masking difficult aspects of Nietzsche, however, for the force that Deleuze calls the "second feminine power" and identifies with the reproachful and accusing figures of the mother and sister is not primarily so represented in Nietzsche's texts. In Nietzsche, this "negative and moralising" force appears most obviously in the form of what might be dubbed Nietzsche's "second Semitic power," represented by the Jewish priest. In the first essay of On the Genealogy of Morals, where Nietzsche sets out the distinction between “noble” and “slave” moralities, practiced by the “noble man” and the “man of ressentiment,” respectively, women are notable only for their complete absence from the discussion. Here, Nietzsche attributes the cultivation of a moralising mode of evaluation to “the Jews, that priestly people, who in opposing their enemies and conquerors were ultimately satisfied with nothing less than a radical revaluation of their enemies’ values, that is to say, an act of the most spiritual revenge” (GM I.7). This “radical revaluation” of values was discussed in Chapter One, in the course of our analysis of the structure of “bad conscience.” It consists in the shift from a mode of evaluation based on the opposition of “good and bad” to one based on the different contrast between “evil and good.” According to Nietzsche, these two modes of evaluation have been “engaged in a fearful struggle on earth for thousands of years.” He symbolizes this struggle in the slogan “Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome,” noting that for the present "Rome has been defeated beyond all doubt" (GM I.16).

Why Deleuze conceals Nietzsche's questionable concept of "Judea" beneath the "mask" of the "second feminine power" is a matter for conjecture, since he appears to be as ready to deny

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172 Alan D. Schrift comments on how rarely the question of what it means to read Nietzsche “as a Jew” is raised, in contrast to the frequency with which the issue of reading Nietzsche “as a woman” is addressed in recent readings of Nietzsche by feminists. This is in spite of the abundance of significant Jewish interpreters of Nietzsche: Walter Kaufmann, Arthur Danto, Sarah Kofman, Jacques Derrida, Bernd Magnus, Alexander Nehamas, and Gary Shapiro, to name only a few. Schrift does not hazard any guesses as to why Nietzsche’s Jewish interpreters tend to pass over the question of Nietzsche and the Jews in relative silence. Even in his own case, he simply notes that until his encounter with what he describes as Sarah Kofman’s “miraculous” and rigorous engagement with this question, he had similarly chosen and been able to avoid it, although in retrospect he realises that the “very personal question” of “reading Nietzsche as a Jew” had “perhaps indeed” haunted him for a long time. Schrift, “Kofman, Nietzsche, and the Jews” 207-8; 217-18. For Kofman’s defence of Nietzsche
Nietzschean anti-Semitism as he is to deny Nietzschean misogyny. He maintains that "Nietzsche's supposedly anti-Semitic texts are in fact texts on the original priestly type," and considers that the connection Nietzsche draws between Judaism and this "type" gives the Jewish people a privileged place in Nietzsche's thought: "Nothing is more striking than Nietzsche's admiration for the Kings of Israel and the Old Testament. The Jewish problem is the same as the problem of the constitution of the priest in this world of Israel: this is the true typological problem. [. . .] The type of the priest - there is no other problem for Nietzsche."

*The type of the priest*

How does the problematic type of the priest arise? In Nietzsche's words: "One will have divined already how easily the priestly mode of valuation can branch off from the knightly-aristocratic and then develop into its opposite." The priestly type has noble origins and aspirations to power, but lacks the natural strength and "flourishing, abundant, even overflowing health" of the noble type. Frustrated by the limitations imposed by his own relatively "poor health," he accumulates *ressentiment* toward the more happily constituted, and cultivates a powerful and patient desire for revenge. "As is well known, the priests are the most evil enemies - but why? Because they are the most impotent" (GM I.7). Ultimately, however, this characteristic "impotence" is deceptive. Working within the constraints of weakness means that priestly type is bound eventually to become "cleverer" than any noble type (GM I.10). When this happens, priestly "impotence" is transformed into a pervasive and dangerous form of power:

- with the priests *everything* becomes more dangerous, not only cures and remedies, but also arrogance, revenge, acuteness, profligacy, love, lust to rule, virtue, disease - but it is only fair to add that it was on the soil of

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173 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* x.
174 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 127.
this essentially dangerous form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became an interesting animal, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire depth and become evil - and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts! (GM I.6)

Here we see the same ambivalence that appeared in Nietzsche's account of the development of "consciousness," which he also explains as a product of the distress born of impotence. Just as the communication which gives rise to consciousness creates the positive possibility of art, the activities of the priestly type produce intellectual finesse and a fascinating depth of soul.

On the other hand, the "corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization" that occurs in "all becoming conscious" (GS 354) is matched by the duplicitous, manipulative, "evil" aspect of priestly endeavours.

In terms of responsibility, we may say that the "problem" of the priestly type is the problem of those who are prevented from taking responsibility for or upon themselves, and who consequently cultivate the parasitic power which comes from cleverly inculcating an oppressive sense of responsibility or "bad conscience" in others. We diagnosed the first, "passive" part of this problem at the beginning of our study as the disorder of "modern irresponsibility." Here, as we noted earlier, "Nietzsche's only problem" appears most directly in the type of the modern actor who lives "very fast, very irresponsibly." The latter, "active" aspect of the problem, on the other hand, is vividly represented in the figures corresponding to the "second feminine power" identified by Deleuze.

At first glance, a contradiction may appear to "yawn" between these different "characters": the decadent modern actor, who suffers from over-developed consciousness as from a disease, seems to have little in common either with the controlling figures of the Nietzschean mother and sister, or with the type of the Judaic priest. On closer examination, however, a striking family resemblance emerges: in Nietzsche, do not women and Jews, as well as modern
individuals, "have to be first of all and above all else actresses [and actors]?" (GS 361).

Nietzsche describes the Jews as "the counterparts of décadents: they have been compelled to act as décadents to the point of illusion" (AC 24). But how is it possible to distinguish between the original décadent and the compelled and compelling performance of an actor of décadence? One must remember that behind the actor's mask lies another - the "original" décadent is already an actor.

We have so far considered the irresponsible modern actor as a suffering victim of modern circumstances, one who may well desire responsibility but is ill-equipped or given no opportunity to assume it. The problem of the priestly type reveals a darker and more potent side to the irresponsibility of the modern actor, however. When combined with "cleverness," decadence can give rise to a "feminine" power of persecution and dangerous seduction, capable of enchanting and overcoming all the world, as Nietzsche puts it in discussing the vanquishing of Rome by the "Graeculus histrio." He warns that modern men are "even now pretty far along the same road" trodden by this "little Greek actor" (GS 356). The reader will notice that here it is a Greek figure, rather than "Judea" who is given responsibility for the decline of "Rome." This is not merely yet another instance of the idiosyncratic quality of Nietzschean "historical instinct"; it points to a defining characteristic of actor types: their "true identity" can never finally be determined. The "truth" behind the actor's performance is always elusive: real need merges with the artful appearance of suffering, impotence feeds the most dangerous and creative form of power. This ambiguity means that the power of the actor is dangerous for everyone: for those accused of having caused the suffering depicted; for those whose passion is exploited or dismissed as a mere "performance" (genuine suffering may be less convincing - and certainly less beautiful - than a skilful recreation of it); and even for the actor him or herself - whether they are "unconscious," "involuntary," or "genuine," actors can come to suffer from the constraints of the roles they perform.\(^5\)

\(^{175}\)These are the different types of actors observed by Zarathustra among the people who have been “made small” by their practice of “virtue” (Z III “Of the Virtue than Makes Small,” 2).
The problem of the actor

"The problem of the actor has troubled me for the longest time," says Nietzsche, and goes on to wonder whether "it is not only from this angle that one can get at the dangerous concept of the 'artist'" (GS 361). Closely connected to both is the "irresponsibility" which Deleuze finds affirmed in Nietzsche's work and the "secret" of Nietzschean creativity. As we have seen, the positive value accorded by Deleuze to Nietzschean "irresponsibility" implies that Nietzschean misogyny is no more than a form of "falsity with a good conscience," a performance which at once conceals and reveals a "beautiful secret," thereby retracing the behaviour Nietzsche attributes to women, who "have to be first of all and above all else actresses," and to Jews, a people whose condition might be seen, he says, "virtually as a world-historical arrangement for the production of actors"(GS 361). To identify Nietzsche's own artistry with that of the women and Jews he describes does not solve the Nietzschean "problem of the actor," however; on the contrary, it explains why he should be so troubled by it. It also suggests that this "problem of the actor" is intimately linked to the problems of Nietzschean misogyny and anti-Semitism.

Yirmiyahu Yovel argues that Nietzsche employs anti-Semitic stereotypes in order to arouse anti-Semitic passions, only to turn this emotional energy back against the anti-Semites themselves.\textsuperscript{176} This claim is supported by the fact that many of Nietzsche's most virulently

anti-Semitic passages concern the responsibility of the Jews for the rise of Christianity\textsuperscript{177}: in such passages, anti-Semitic feeling in the reader is thus encouraged to "bite" the Christian "hand" that feeds it. In this respect, Nietzsche might be said to play the role of a secret agent, merely feigning anti-Semitism, in order to fulfil the "secret" and "noble" mission of attacking anti-Semitic Christianity from within. As the "mole" behind the role, Nietzsche would, like the master of a penitential meditation, be serenely removed from the passionate hatred his work expresses and provokes.

However, Yovel suggests that Nietzsche manipulates anti-Semitic passions "not for the sake of his readers only but also, to some degree, as a lever to override his own remaining prejudices." In this project of "self-overcoming," it is not "the good liberal will which drives the process, but the anti-Semitic passion itself, or the affective relation to figures who bear and project this passion."\textsuperscript{178} In such a process, there is always room to doubt whether such passion has been successfully transformed or not. As Yovel puts it, Nietzsche is "playing with fire": the anti-Semitic passion he expresses and attempts to manipulate may prove more powerful than his cleverly ironic or penitential efforts to harness and overcome it.\textsuperscript{179}

Schrift makes a similar point, pointing to \textit{The Anti-Christ} as a text in which "Nietzsche uses the Christian disdain for the Jews as a weapon against Christianity itself, showing that what is most Christian can be genealogically traced back to Jewish roots."\textsuperscript{180} This rhetorical tactic leaves room to question the sincerity of the positive descriptions of Jews that appear in this text, since Nietzsche's primary intention here is "to insult Christians rather than affirm Jews."\textsuperscript{181} To Schrift's mind, this opportunistic "use" of the Jews suggests a subtle or latent

\textsuperscript{177}See, e.g. GM I.8 where Nietzsche describes Jesus and his “gospel of love” as “a seduction and bypath” to Jewish values and the instrument of Israel’s “sublime vengefulness.” The idea that Christian values grew upon Jewish “soil” is revisited in AC 24 - 27.

\textsuperscript{178}Yovel, \textit{Dark Riddle} 179-180.

\textsuperscript{179}Yovel, \textit{Dark Riddle} 179.

\textsuperscript{180}Schrift, “Kofman, Nietzsche, and the Jews” 214.

\textsuperscript{181}Schrift, “Kofman, Nietzsche, and the Jews” 214.
form of anti-Semitism operating behind even Nietzsche's most glowing endorsements of Jewish culture.

Is such mistrust warranted? The suspicion that Nietzsche's creative "performances" may ultimately operate to legitimise anti-Semitic tendencies both in his readership and in his own thought is a particular instance of the troubling "problem of the actor": it is impossible to decide with certainty whether an actor transcends or identifies with the passions evoked in his or her own performance. The problem is compounded by the fact that, like waves, such passions are constantly building and breaking in the relation between the actor and his or her audience. From the perspective of the "intellectual conscience" which leads Nietzsche to account "the desire for certainty as his inmost craving and deepest distress" (GS 2), his own identity as an actor type poses an insoluble problem, as it does for anyone who wishes to decide once and for all whether "there is Nietzschean misogyny" or "there is Nietzschean anti-Semitism." It is certain that there are appearances of both in Nietzsche's work. However, the ultimate significance of such ambiguous performances is a "secret" that Nietzsche never betrays - how could he? For this "secret" relates not only to a noble and beautiful form of "irresponsibility," but also to what Nietzsche calls "the secret work of the instinct of decadence" (EH "Why I Am So Wise," 1) which produces every kind of actor, even the most genuine or artistic.

As is well known, interpretation of Nietzsche's misogynistic and anti-Semitic "performances" has been extraordinarily varied. Feminists\(^\text{182}\) and Jews\(^\text{183}\) as well as misogynists\(^\text{184}\) and anti-

Semites\(^{185}\) have found inspiration and confirmation of their own passionate commitments in Nietzsche's work. In this respect, his protean skill as an "actor" provides a striking illustration of the fact that responsibility for the effect of any performance is shared between actor and audience, just as responsibility for the results of a philosophical meditation rest not simply with the philosopher who guides this meditation, but crucially upon those who take up the challenge of ruminating and sleeping upon his ideas, which may be transformed beyond recognition in the course of energetic and in the best cases, lucid dreams. To make this point is not to absolve or deprive Nietzsche of all responsibility for the effects of his "performances"; nor does he simply regard the passions of his readers as their own concern. Rather, as one who "thinks and feels at the same time," Nietzsche actively seeks to influence both the understanding and experience of passion and responsibility. Nowhere is this more evident than in his teaching of the "eternal return."

### 5.4 The eternal return of passion

Press of Virginia, 1994). The latter collection includes a bibliography of work which addresses the question of Nietzsche and the feminine, listing works by Christine Battersby, Debra B. Berghoffen, Roslyn Diprose, Mary Ann Doane, Jean Graybeal, Alice Jardine, Kelly Oliver, Ofelia Schutte, Linda Singer and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others.\(^{183}\) See fn 16, above, for a very selective list of significant Jewish interpreters of Nietzsche. Yovel points out that “it is a historical fact that [Nietzsche] exercised a strong fascination on some of the greatest names in modern Jewish letters, especially among those engaged in the movements of Jewish Enlightenment, nationalism, and Zionism. Suffice it to mention names like Max Nordau, Hillel Zeitlin, Yosef Haim Brenner, Micha Yosef Berdytczevski, the young Martin Buber, David Frischmann, the young Haim Weizmann, and Vladimir Zabotinski, to name but a few, to realize not only the importance but also the diversity of Nietzsche’s reception among modern Jewish writers and activists.” This list includes only those who set out to revive Jewish life in some way; if it were extended to include Jewish intellectuals in general, it would “be doubled or even tripled in size and would also include such names as Freud and Stefan Zweig.” (Yovel, *Dark Riddle*\(^{183}\)).

\(^{184}\) For an account of how Nietzsche’s thought was deployed to serve the sexual reputation of narcissism and misogyny cultivated by male artists in the Surrealist movement, see Robert James Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995).

\(^{185}\) Stephen E. Aschheim lists Franz Haiser, Ernst Wachler, Alfred Schuler, Ludwig Klages and Alfred Baumler as among “those many anti-Semites and Nazis who were wholeheartedly Nietzschean.” He also notes, however, that Nietzsche’s positive comments about Jews, particularly as compared to Germans, led many anti-Semites from the time of the Second Reich either to reject Nietzsche entirely or to appropriate his ideas in a selective fashion. See Aschheim 72-73.
This brings us to the most significant of the experimental "exercises" which appear in Nietzsche's work, and the one which works most directly with the passions and potential of the self-conscious actor. Like the experimental method employed in the second essay of On the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche's teaching of the eternal return reflects the Stoic influence upon his thought. As a doctrine, he suggests that the idea of "the unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of all things [...] might in the end have been taught already by Heraclitus." What is certain is that "the Stoas has traces of it, and the Stoics inherited almost all of their principle notions from Heraclitus" (EH "The Birth of Tragedy," 3). In Nietzsche's work, as we might expect, such Stoic "traces" give rise to a distinctly modern form of this ancient doctrine.

In Nietzsche's earliest explicit formulation of the idea of the "eternal return," what "returns" is not the eternal order of Logos, but individual passion: he conjures up a "demon" who would "steal after you into your loneliest loneliness" to predict the repetitious return of "every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small and great in your life" (GS 341). Read in light of Nietzsche's views on the decline of societal responsibility and the corresponding rise of the modern actor type, the message of this "demon" appears designed to confront the isolated, impulsive modern individual, whose actions are driven by "accidents of feeling, passion and the moment" with a dramatic vision of his or her own existence. In this vision, "your life" has little if anything to do with contributions made to the "return" of venerable societal institutions, now and for the benefit of future generations. Rather, it is made up of personal experiences of pain and pleasure, moments of reflection, thoughts and sighs.

Nietzsche suggests that the idea of having to relive such (normally) fleeting experiences again and again to eternity will provoke a form of passionate transformation:
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. (GS 341)

At first glance, this passage appears to present two discrete and exhaustive responses to the challenge of the eternal return: despair, or exultation. This has led commentators to interpret this version of the eternal return as a kind of litmus test that serves to distinguish the übermensch from the herd: the herd type will be crushed by the thought of having to live a mediocre or decidedly miserable life over and over again, whereas the "overman" will be capable of an exhilarated affirmation of his or her entire existence. Richard Schacht, for instance, describes both this version and that which appears in Zarathustra as "a test, and more generally, as a touchstone of strength and affirmativeness." He argues that Nietzsche saw in the thought of the eternal return not only a way to select the overman from the herd, but also a means of "stimulating [an enhanced form of life], and reorienting it evaluatively - almost in the manner of a 'regulative' idea." In this respect, Nietzsche presents the teaching as "a challenge." For those who are uncertain of their own status, "aspirational readers" who recognise herd elements in their own characters but who hope to overcome them, the story of the demon thus provides an opportunity for such self-overcoming. It is to be read as a fable with a moral: choose to live in such a way that you might respond to such a demon with joy, in tremendous affirmation of each and every detail of your life.

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187 Schacht 261.
188 Schacht 259.
189 In a variation on this theme, Alexander Nehamas insists that “it is absolutely crucial to note that Nietzsche considers only two reactions to the demon’s question [. . .]: total despair and complete exhilaration.” He argues that what Nietzsche “is interested in is the attitude one must have toward oneself in order to react with joy and not despair to the possibility the demon raises, to the thought that one’s life will occur, the very same in every single detail, again and again and again for all eternity.” Nehamas notes that the same interpretation of this passage is made by Ivan Soll. Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985) 151; Ivan Soll, “Reflections on Recurrence,” *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert C. Solomon (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1973) 343-57.
Simmel's Kantian interpretation of the eternal return

This style of interpretation sees in the eternal return an ethical challenge of similar proportions to that represented by the figure of the sovereign individual. Just as the sovereign individual can be seen as a Nietzschean adaptation of Kantian ideals, on this reading the ethical principle expressed in the idea of the eternal return might be understood as a Nietzschean version (or inversion) of Kant's categorical imperative. Georg Simmel explicitly defends this view when he argues that Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return is best appreciated, not as a cosmological theory, but as regulative ideal of ethics: "we should live in such a way that we would will to live that way forever, as if there was an eternal recurrence."\(^{190}\) He sees this principle as analogous to Kant's categorical imperative, with the difference that while Kant asks us to imagine our action repeated by a universe of others, Nietzsche proposes the thought of our action repeated infinitely by the self. Kant's moral imagination locates the individual actor in the "one-alongside-the-other of society," while Nietzsche locks the individual into the "infinite-one-after-the-other of the same person."\(^{191}\)

For Simmel, this corresponds to a shift away from concern with the consequences of action, encouraged by Kant's formulation, to an emphasis on the "immediately manifest being of a subject"\(^ {192}\) as an "end-in-itself."\(^ {193}\) In this way, Nietzsche transports one of Kant's basic themes "into a new dimension."\(^ {194}\) Simmel is troubled neither by the egocentric obsession suggested by infinite repetition of the self, nor by the evocation of a state of "loneliest loneliness" in which the vision of this repetition occurs. On the contrary, he suggests that by

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\(^{190}\)Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, trans. Helmut Loiskandl, Deena Weinstein and Michael Weinstein (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986) 175. In the passage from which this quote is taken, Simmel argues that the ideas of the eternal recurrence and of the overman are compatible versions of “a functional ideal indicating the human form that is superior to the present real one.” (*ibid.*)

\(^{191}\)Simmel 171.

\(^{192}\)Simmel 171.

\(^{193}\)Simmel 165.

\(^{194}\)Simmel 171.
treated the self in isolation from others and their interests, Nietzsche makes "personalism into an objective ideal." This ideal, which demands "unbending severity" toward oneself and others, "posits itself beyond the opposition of hedonism and moralism, and thereby subsumes the Kantian morality under itself."  

While hedonism asks, "What can I get from this world?" and moralism asks, "What can I do for this world?" what Simmel calls Nietzsche's "personalism" goes beyond this alternative to ask, "What can I be in this world?" and seeks to answer it with an objective ideal of nobility, based in evolutionary progress. This ideal, says Simmel, is "indivisibly linked to an essential and necessary mood of responsibility."  However, it is founded not upon a sense of responsibility to others or to an external law, but on the discipline of "self-responsibility." It is this sense of responsibility which is for Simmel the "ultimate theme" of the teaching of the eternal return, and the most important reason for its portrayal of the individual as isolated from and essentially unconcerned with others.

Simmel sees the ideal of "self-responsibility" as an attempt on Nietzsche's part to overcome the old morality of mores. "For Nietzsche, social morality is merely the residue of the old teleology that has fundamentally been overcome: though man is no longer the meaning of the world, he is still retained as the meaning of others." By avoiding any reference to the experience of others, the thought of the eternal return recognises the uniqueness of the individual, and does away with the residual tendency to judge self and other in terms of a single standard - a strategy which Nietzsche associates with the man of ressentiment who wishes to bring everyone down to his own miserable level, as well as with modern liberal institutions which undermine societal responsibility. This does not mean, however, that the objective quality of Kantian ethics is lost, for, as in the case of the categorical imperative, the

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195 Simmel 168.
196 Simmel 169.
197 Simmel 169.
198 Simmel 170.
199 Simmel 163.
repetition involved in the idea of the eternal return serves the goal of "getting beyond the accidentality" that colours the representation of actions "in their only-now and only-here." It thus reveals the "inner value of an action, or that for which we are responsible."\textsuperscript{200}

This is an absolute responsibility, removed from the accidents of "time and number, where and how often," and entirely unconcerned with consequences.\textsuperscript{201} In this it resembles what Weber describes as the "absolute ethic of the gospel," which, like causality in science, "is not a cab, which one can have stopped at one's pleasure; it is all or nothing."\textsuperscript{202} It is an ethic that brooks no compromise - otherwise it makes no sense. Weber calls this an "ethic of ultimate ends" and contrasts it with an "ethic of responsibility" which requires that one "give an account of the foreseeable results of one's action."\textsuperscript{203} In Weber's analysis, the ethic of responsibility involves taking into account the average deficiencies of people, whereas the ethic of ultimate ends requires responsibility only for ensuring that "the flame of pure intentions is not quelled," thanks to acts of only exemplary value.\textsuperscript{204}

Up to this point, our account of Simmel's argument would suggest that he views the ethic of the eternal return as an "ethic of ultimate ends" which focuses on intention and the purely exemplary value of actions, regardless of their worldly consequences. However, Simmel also argues that with respect to the person who acts, Nietzsche has replaced a final ethical goal with an evolutionary process that contains diverse goals and values: instead of positing one absolute level, ethical significance is accorded to any level that supersedes the actual one. "Self-responsibility" then refers at once to an absolute standard of responsibility - determined by the "inner value" of each action, - and also to an evolving standard of the self - which provides content for the ideal of "nobility." The difficulty of reconciling or even relating these

\textsuperscript{200}Simmel 172.
\textsuperscript{201}Simmel 172.
\textsuperscript{203}Weber 120.
\textsuperscript{204}Weber 121.
two standards leads Simmel to conclude that "[t]he metaphysical tones that resonate beauty and morality are clearly missing here. [ . . .] As a consequence of its lack of relation to the transcendental, the content of the idea of nobility, though not its bearers, is deprived of genuine depth." One might say that Nietzsche teaches an ethic of ultimate ends that lacks an ultimate end - a version (or inversion) of the "absolute ethic of the gospel" that appears after the "death of god."

The usual problem for an ethic of ultimate ends is not (naturally) the lack of an ultimate end, but the lack of absolute means - or perfect actions - by which the end may be achieved. In Weber's words, the "proponent of an ethic of absolute ends cannot stand up under the ethical irrationality of the world." Because the world does not (yet) correspond to the elevated standards of such ethical systems, the pursuit of ultimate ends must inevitably employ means that are less than pure. However, since an ethic of ultimate ends makes no concessions to "average deficiencies," it can provide no guidance for compromise. Thus, any resort to the principle that the end justifies the means threatens to open a floodgate to violence. From this ethical perspective, the individual who takes up any degree of power and force as means contracts with diabolical powers in a world that is governed by demons. As Weber puts it: "Anyone who fails to see this is, indeed, a political infant."

Nietzsche's choice of a demon as the first mouthpiece of the idea of the eternal return is a detail left undiscussed by Simmel. It does not sit easily with his vision of the eternal return as an idea that is intended as a straightforward guide to ethical action. However, if the idea of the eternal return is approached, not as a formula to be followed in order to act ethically, but as material for a profound meditation on the meaning of responsibility, then it suggests that Nietzsche is no political or ethical infant. On the contrary, he paints a vivid picture of the paradoxes facing those who aspire to attain ultimate ends by temporal means. His demon

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205 Simmel 179
206 Weber 122.
207 Weber 123.
governs a world of absolute compromise. He offers the ultimate end of eternal life, but at the heaviest possible price: the means employed to attain this end must paradoxically be relived "without end." In this vision, no method of justification which would redeem the means by reference to the end, no absolution of the temporal in the eternal, is permitted. One might say that "everything is permitted" by the demon, except that. This contradicts Simmel's view that the eternal return takes us beyond the accidents of "time and number, where and how often," and into a realm of eternal essences. Rather than erasing the "only-here and only-now" of temporal experience, it lends infinite weight to the unique and fleeting quality of each moment. One might say that it makes an institution of accidentality, reflecting in acute form the way in which "accidents of feeling, passion and the moment" have come to determine the social fabric of modern life, as Nietzsche sees it.

The demon's prediction that "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" also undermines the view that responsibility is limited to "actions" as opposed to passively received elements of experience. As Genevieve Lloyd points out, the idea of the eternal return involves a "dramatic extension of the idea of 'taking responsibility' to things that lie outside the power of the human will to affect the course of events." It imposes strict liability for every detail of one's experience, leaving no scope for discrimination between what is intended or unintended, actively willed or passively suffered by the agent. Indeed, in the context of this vision, activity and passivity become difficult to distinguish. On the one hand, the idea of the endless and unvarying repetition of one's life experience seems to introduce a disturbing element of passivity into any particular action or

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208 Yovel makes a similar point when he remarks that what is repeated in the eternal return “is not only the content of every moment but its very momentariness. Immanence is here identified with the present, with what exists now as merely transitory; and in wishing it to recur time and again I equally wish it to pass away: or rather, I recognize and accept the mode of being in which transience is the rule.” Yirmiyahu Yovel, “Nietzsche and Spinoza: amor fati and amor dei,” in Yirmiyahu Yovel, ed., Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986) 183-203 at 198.

decision. This aspect of the eternal return recalls the sensibility of the Lockean person, for whom actions raise questions of responsibility only once they have become memories, passively received and recorded on the "blank sheet" of the mind. On the other hand, the eternal return also seems to create an excessive responsibility for every "passive" experience of pain or pleasure. In this respect, it evokes rather the spontaneous activity of the "I" which in Kant's view must accompany every representation of consciousness.210

Simmel's response to the agony that arises from the juxtaposition of these competing visions of responsibility is to point out that "logically," the thought of the eternal return makes no difference. This is because repetition of phenomena has no importance without the possibility of a synthesis of successive repetitions. A persisting consciousness is required to remember and be altered by the effect of repetitions, if they are to have any effect. However, the doctrine of the eternal return implies that there can be no such persisting consciousness (or at least that it cannot be mine). Since the repetition is absolute, my experience will return entirely unaltered. This means that in reality, "I" do not return; rather a phenomenon which is qualitatively (though clearly not numerically) identical with me recurs. Why should this matter to me? According to Simmel, it should not: the appropriate emotional response to the idea of the eternal return understood as a theory of reality, is indifference.

210 It also evokes the work of Emmanuel Levinas on responsibility. See, in particular, Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than being, or, Beyond essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1981). In this work, Levinas associates the “infinite passion of responsibility” (113) with a “passivity beneath all passivity” (101) which lies “beyond or on the hither side of consciousness.” (103) The complexity of Levinas’ thought means that any detailed comparison of his philosophy of responsibility with Nietzschean images of responsibility is well beyond the scope of this study. Such a comparison would, however, be of great interest. Here we can only briefly evoke the resonances between Nietzsche’s teaching of the eternal return and the responsibility Levinas describes when he writes that: “Responsibility in obsession is a responsibility of the ego for what the ego has not wished, that is, for the others. This anarchy in the recurrence to oneself is beyond the normal play of action and passion in which the identity of a being is maintained, in which it is. It is on the hither side of the limits of identity. This passivity undergone in proximity by the force of an alterity in me is the passivity of a recurrence to oneself which is not the alienation of an identity betrayed. What can it be but a substitution of me for the others?” (114).
Arthur Danto, who interprets Nietzsche's idea of eternal return as a cosmological hypothesis, similarly argues that it implies an attitude of indifference toward past or future recurrences of the "self." He links this indifference to the disregard of consequences which Simmel identifies as a feature of Nietzsche's ethics: “It does not matter that we pass away and return and pass away again. What counts is what we eternally do, the joy in overcoming, whatever our task may be, and the meaning we give to our lives. And all this for the sake of the thing itself, not for any consequences: for it leads to what it has led to and always will.”

In response to such views, Nehamas observes that indifference to the idea of the eternal return is not a response evinced, evoked or even considered by Nietzsche. Simmel acknowledges that on this point, his interpretation differs from Nietzsche's, since Nietzsche speaks of the idea of the eternal return with "deep emotion and devotion." The only explanation he can give for this is that Nietzsche has simply made a mistake in drawing out the logical consequences of his idea. Misled by an imprecise concept of the ego, Nietzsche imagines a resurrection of the previous ego where his theory dictates only a recapitulation of the same phenomena. Once this is recognised, the idea of an eternal return as a cosmological theory loses its impact, according to Simmel. The "eternal recurrence only has import for someone who watches, reflects on, and unites the many returns in his consciousness; it is nothing as an external reality." He concludes that the teaching is of interest only if it is recognised as a regulative idea of ethics that instructs us to behave as if it were true.

A notable feature of Simmel's interpretation is that it does away with the passion which is such a striking aspect of Nietzsche's account of the thought of the eternal return. If the idea is

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212 Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* 152.
213 Simmel 173.
214 Simmel 174.
215 Simmel 174.
accepted as a theory of cosmology, Simmel suggests that the appropriate response is indifference. If it is rejected as a theory of cosmology and adopted as a regulative idea of ethics instead, this indifference is reinforced: the idea functions to cultivate an attitude of indifference towards one's own temporal experience, but by denying the eternal recurrence the status of a cosmological theory, one is simultaneously able to maintain a measure of indifference toward the idea itself. Pursuing Simmel's train of thought, if the eternal recurrence is "nothing as an external reality," to act as if the eternal recurrence were real is to act as if external reality is nothing - and hence to show perfect indifference to the consequences of one's actions. Here we meet an attitude which borders on the blissful "knowledge" that all worldly phenomena (including misogyny, for example) are "pure folly."

Simmel does not go so far as to assert that external reality truly is nothing, however; on the contrary, with the idea of "inner value" he lends it an absolute status. The effect of the "regulative" ideal of the eternal recurrence is then to allow a sober recognition of the absolute nature of reality by loosening the grip of categories such as "time and number, where and how often" on our thinking. It is not so much external as "internal" reality that is shown to be "nothing" or to be worth nothing. From this perspective, passion in general appears as a strange kind of error, attributable to "imprecise logical conceptualization."

*The passion of the eternal return*

In his own account of the likely effects of the thought of the eternal return, on the other hand, Nietzsche speaks of almost nothing but passion:

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.' If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, 'Do you desire this once more and innumerable
times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? (GS 341)

We noted at the outset that, at first glance, this passage appears to present two distinct possible responses to the vision of an eternal return: on the one hand, active, joyful affirmation of one's whole life experience; on the other, passive submission to despair at the thought of eternally reliving the more miserable moments of one's existence. A closer reading, however, reveals a dynamic oscillation between subtly shifting extremes of emotion. The structure of the passage does not suggest a division between two types of person, but rather a violent movement in the feelings of a single person, one who initially succumbs to feelings of intense aversion and equally intense craving as the thought "gains possession" of him or her, and then, as the pendulum swing of passion repeats itself, begins to take possession of the thought, first as an ethical test of "the greatest weight" and then as the possibility of a fervent affirmation of life.

We observed a similar "identity of opposites" in our reading of the successive passages in *Twilight of the Idols* in which Nietzsche describes the warrior with the "will to self-responsibility" and the modern actor who lives very irresponsibly. In that instance, it was Nietzsche's own identity which encompassed both these personae and the contradictory ideas of freedom and responsibility associated with them. Here, the reader is addressed as an individual who is alternately oppressed and uplifted by the idea of the eternal return - who "has and does not have" the ability to take pleasure in this thought as an idea of freedom and responsibility - and whose fluctuating emotional responses to the demon's vision must, according to the logic of this thought, themselves be repeated to eternity.

To suppose that the passions provoked by the idea of the eternal return do not themselves recur, but that one or the other of these responses defines a fixed vantage point, either
desirable or undesirable, from which one might "view" the eternal operation of a cosmological "return" is, as Simmel's argument shows, conceptually incoherent. Such an interpretation also conflicts, as Nehamas points out, with Nietzsche's rejection of the idea of the substantial self.\textsuperscript{216} We saw earlier that in Nietzsche's view, the idea of a "being" that lies behind "doing," or a "doer" behind the "deed," is a fiction which supports practices of accountability fuelled by ressentiment. The reality of the emotional effects of this fiction, on the other hand, is clearly presupposed in Nietzsche's account of the passionate responses provoked by his "demon." This demon addresses an interlocuter whose sense of self has already been well-formed by exposure to practices of discipline, whether suffered in pain or inflicted with voluptuous pleasure upon others or more likely, upon the "self." The passions which erupt in response to the demon's words are not written on a "blank page"; nor do they spring from the "transcendental unity" of pure intellect. Rather, they flow from the specific historical conditions of modern Western subjectivity as Nietzsche understands them.

The dramatic play of conflicting emotions evoked in "your" response to the idea of the eternal return recalls the contradictions Nietzsche perceives in Christianity, a religion which he describes as the product of "the profoundest and sublimest hatred," which grew into "a new love, the profoundest and sublimest kind of love." Nietzsche writes that this love, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, was a "seduction and a bypath" to Israel's goal of revenge (GM I.8).

Consequently, in the Christian faith, the "cry of love, the cry of the most nostalgic rapture, of redemption though love," is inseparable from the idea of God "as God the Judge, as God the Hangman, as the beyond, as eternity, as torment without end, as hell, as the immeasurability of punishment and guilt" (GM II.22). In the thought of the eternal return, God drops out of this picture; it is rather the individual who is called upon to judge his or her life. The likely outcomes have barely changed, however: the crushing anticipation of torment without end, or the rapture of redemption, this time through self-love. Nietzsche's atheistic "morality play" suggests that the emotional heritage of several millennia has not simply fallen away with the

\textsuperscript{216}See Nehamas, \textit{Nietzsche: Life as Literature} 154.
"death of God." On the contrary, the mere idea of a philosophical "demon" is sufficient to call up passions which have their forgotten origins in the beliefs and practices of former centuries.

Erich Auerbach casts a precise shaft of light upon the emotional heritage of Jewish culture in his analysis of the way reality is represented in the books of the Old Testament. He remarks that in contrast to the minimal development of the “wholly expressed, orderly” emotional ardor of Homeric heroes,217 the great figures of the Old Testament are “fraught with their own biographical past.”218

The reader clearly feels how the extent of the pendulum’s swing [of emotional and historical experience] is connected with the intensity of the personal history – precisely the most extreme circumstances, in which we are immeasurably forsaken and in despair, or immeasurably joyous and exalted, give us, if we survive them, a personal stamp which is recognized as the product of a rich existence, a rich development.219

This effect is only intensified in the style of the New Testament, in which the “to and fro of the pendulum” of inner experience becomes even more evident and agitated as the theme of transformation and renewal becomes more prominent and universal in scope.220

We may say that it is into this world, crevassed by “depths of time, fate, and consciousness,”221 that the butterfly of the philosophical spirit emerges as the cocoon of Christianity begins to break open. Its delicate attention alights, not on the vivid and transparent emotional experience of the Greek nobility which once complemented and fed its own lucidity, but upon “entangled and stratified,”222 multi-coloured and dangerous - but also

218 Auerbach 17
219 Auerbach 18.
220 Auerbach 42.
221 Auerbach 12.
222 Auerbach 12.
undeniably interesting - human relations. This is the treacherous but fertile ground in which Nietzsche "sows" the words of his "demon."
Philosophical demons

If Descartes' "evil demon" represents the threat of an unconscious loss of all responsibility for one's "own" experience, Nietzsche's demon might be said to pose the opposite danger: the suddenly acquired consciousness of responsibility for every experience, no matter how "unutterably small or great," in one's life. The impact of this idea may be compared to the "dreadful heaviness" suffered by the first men to find themselves "finally enclosed within the walls of society and peace," deprived of their "regulating, unconscious and infallible drives," and "reduced to 'consciousness,' their weakest and most fallible organ!" (GM II.16). These, of course, are the unhappy human beings in whom "bad conscience" originates, creating a state of suffering which we have identified with Locke's account of consciousness and the personal responsibility it supports.

Consciousness does not always remain so weak, however. Like the priestly type, it becomes subtle and clever, and finds ways to take revenge on more naturally healthy instincts. This intensifies the suffering of "bad conscience," but it also makes it actively creative, bringing "to light an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation" (GM II.18). Thus the idea of the eternal return evokes not only a sense of the "greatest weight" but also the possibility of a tremendous affirmation by which an individual consciousness might affirm sovereignty over all contents of its experience. In this respect, as Simmel's reading suggests, Nietzsche's

Descartes’ famous “evil demon” makes his appearance on the first “day” of the Meditations: “I will suppose [. . . that] some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgement. I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things. I shall stubbornly and firmly persist in this meditation [. . .] But this is an arduous undertaking, and a kind of laziness brings me back to normal life. I am like a prisoner who is enjoying an imaginary freedom while asleep; as he begins to suspect that he is asleep, he dreads being woken up [. . .] (AT 22-23) Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 79.
teaching of the eternal return brings to mind both the "weighty" regulative ethical ideal of the "categorical imperative" and Kant's "spontaneous" self-consciousness.

If the interconnected and competing versions of self-consciousness and responsibility theorized by Locke and Kant are regarded as the pre-existing philosophical material upon which the idea of the eternal return plays, then Nietzsche's teaching does not provide "emotional" grounds for choosing one above the other. Rather, it implies that the "pendulum's swing" of passion which underlies and accompanies these concepts cannot be stopped at either extreme of its movement. The only possibility of more than momentary stillness lies at the very centre of the arc, at the mid-point between despair and exultation, where one might comfortably fall asleep. However, as we have seen, Nietzsche is not an advocate of the value of "deep sleep."

In any case, the momentum which sustains such passion and the ideas of responsibility with which it is inextricably intertwined is not merely a recent phenomenon, to be halted at the will of a modern philosopher. As Nietzsche's polemical account of the origins of Christianity suggests, and Auerbach's more moderate scholarship confirms, modern philosophical accounts of self-consciousness and responsibility are only a late and pale reflection of "a rich existence, a rich development" which precedes them by many centuries. We modern individuals are heirs to the dangerous wealth accumulated in the course of this long history, riches which include a plethora of contradictory ideas and impulses concerning responsibility and irresponsibility. Nietzsche's teaching of the eternal return encourages us to meditate upon the question of what we shall do with this inheritance - or what it shall do with us - but it does not provide a way to escape fate or responsibility by electing to stop at the exhilarating high-point of the pendulum swing of passion. Rather, it demands that one consciously and creatively attend to every moment, whether pleasurable or painful, of this living movement. This calls for the courage of a grand passion for knowledge and a relentless "will to responsibility."
At the close of the previous chapter, I suggested that, like those rare cases in which science today "still inspires passion, love, ardor, and suffering." Nietzsche's teaching of the eternal return represents a "late and noble" form of the ascetic ideal (GM III.23). In my reading, the thought of the eternal return represents a subtle, "spiritual" form of asceticism: it inspires a form of discipline imposed by the force of one's own imagination and consciousness. This internal and self-imposed discipline is possible because the idea of the return of "every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh" creates a dramatic internal distance between "you" and your thoughts and feelings, so that your passions take on the character of a performance, while "you" play the double role of actor and audience, at once creating and contemplating, thinking and feeling. Insofar as this theatrical and meditative quality of the idea reflects the internalization and sophistication of "acting" as a dominant and pervasive mode of modern life, it is what characterizes the thought of the eternal return as a "late" form of asceticism.

The "nobility" of the thought of the eternal return might appear to be placed in question, however, by this very theatricality, especially if one takes into account the quality of the passionate "performances" it is designed to provoke: "Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus?" Here Nietzsche seems to ask: "In response to the idea of the eternal return, would you not behave like a bad actor, or an ascetic who takes perverse pleasure in aggravating his or her own distress?" The opposite response of pleasure in the demon's message is initially depicted in equally theatrical terms: "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.'" In other words, "Are you given to extravagant flights of rhetoric, or are you genuinely capable of an ecstatically affirmative form of asceticism?" In these possibilities we encounter yet another "return" of the four faces of "bad conscience": "bad" actor, "evil" ascetic, "good" actor, "Good" ascetic. But where, one might wonder, is the nobility in the eternal return of "bad conscience"?
Let us recall that for Nietzsche, the "noble" mode of evaluation is one that begins with a simple, uncritical affirmation of the self as "Good." In the case of the modern individual, to affirm the self in this way requires accepting and loving every aspect of "bad conscience" as necessary, as fate. To affirm only the creative and self-reliant possibilities of this form of consciousness while judging its potential for deceptive manipulation and self-imposed suffering as "evil," is not to overcome, but precisely to perpetuate the mechanisms of "bad conscience" that one would like to avoid. We saw earlier that Nietzsche proposes an experiment which would attack the ideals of "bad conscience" with its own persecuting energies, just as he attacks the ideals of Christianity with its own anti-Semitic rhetoric. The teaching of the eternal return employs the reverse tactic: it includes a determination to live with "bad conscience" by "nobly" accepting and affirming it, loving it like a difficult child, or a strange piece of music.

This is what happens to us in music: First one has to learn to hear a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate it and delimit it as a separate life. Then it requires some exertion and good will to tolerate it in spite of its strangeness, to be patient with its appearance and expression, and kindhearted about its oddity. Finally there comes a moment when we are used to it, when we wait for it, when we sense that we should miss it if it were missing; and now it continues to compel and enchant us relentlessly until we have become its humble and enraptured lovers who desire nothing better from the world than it and only it. (GS 334)

The ripeness of such a love, directed toward oneself and one's own consciousness, is the "noble" element in the teaching of the eternal return. Here it implies such good will toward the experience of "bad conscience" that one might desire nothing better from life than "bad conscience" and only "bad conscience." In this sense, Simmel and others are correct in giving special weight to the fourth "swing" of Nietzsche's passionate pendulum and the fervent craving it expresses for the idea of the eternal return as an "ultimate eternal confirmation and
"noble" affirmation, this attitude does not involve any form of imperative, or regulative ideal that might prompt one to attempt to change one's way of life, in order to live more ethically. Rather, it simply embraces that life in all its strange, expressive, odd and enchanting variety.

Having indicated the ascetic, late and noble features of Nietzsche's teaching of the eternal return, it remains to be explained in what sense this teaching presents an ideal. To this point, I have developed my own reading of the eternal return in opposition to Simmel's interpretation of it as a regulative ideal of ethics, based on Kant's "categorical imperative." In the manner of Nietzsche's nobleman, however, I have chosen in Simmel (as earlier in Deleuze) an enemy "in whom there is nothing to despise and very much to honor!" (GM I.11). The moment has come to show appropriate respect for the insights of this enemy.

As in the case of Nietzsche's "sovereign individual," the view that shades of a Kantian ideal colour the Nietzschean image of the eternal return is difficult to resist. What we have rejected is the notion that this ideal appears in the "craving" or aspiration to achieve a spontaneous affirmation of one's whole life. Although this image may be suggestively compared with Kant's theory of the spontaneity of self-consciousness, for Kant this form of self-consciousness is not an ideal, but a transcendental condition of thought; its relation to the ideal of the categorical imperative remains problematic and undeveloped in his thought. If the latter ideal can be said to appear clearly, however altered, in Nietzsche's thought of the eternal return, it is not, therefore, in the notion of an all-encompassing moment of affirmation.

A distinctly Kantian resonance is, however, evoked by the contrasting idea, which also provides the title of Nietzsche's passage ("The greatest weight") : "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" (GS 341). It is in his investigation of this question, and its relation to the Kantian ideal, that Simmel's analysis is most illuminating. What his discussion brings to light is the "weightiness" or solidity of the eternal return, read as an ideal of self-responsibility. Although Simmel considers that the "earthly and empirical nature"224 of this

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224 Simmel 178.
ideal excludes the "metaphysical tones that resonate beauty and morality," he does not identify it with the image of teeth-gnashing histrionics that Nietzsche presents as the initial response to the idea of the eternal return. Consequently, he is not concerned to reject Nietzsche's "greatest weight" or the ideal of responsibility it implies in favour of a more attractive, because pleasurable, experience of self-affirmation.

In avoiding one extreme, however, Simmel swings fearlessly to the other: flying open-eyed in the face of Nietzsche's own clearly-expressed feelings, he resolutely denies all passionate implications of the thought of the eternal return. One might admire the sang froid of this early trapeze artist of Nietzsche interpretation; our own reading, however, aims to stay closer to the surface of the original text. Nietzsche clearly envisages that the pressure of "self-responsibility" is likely to be felt as a burden, and at times, an unbearable one. In this respect, Nietzsche's ideal of responsibility cannot simply be dissociated from the passionately felt suffering depicted in the first response to the thought of the eternal return. Nor, however, can it be reduced to the "bad acting" or self-destructive asceticism we have identified with this image.

Nietzsche condemns the guilty pursuit of suffering for its own sake, but he is equally contemptuous of those who would avoid suffering altogether. As we have seen, Nietzsche is a sardonic critic of utilitarian schemes to maximise happiness; Simmel remarks that he "continually stresses that life becomes more disciplined and severe the more it ascends." Thus the "great weight" of self-responsibility, and the discomfort and even danger this burden may pose, does not constitute an argument against this ideal, from Nietzsche's perspective. On the contrary, his "philosopher" is one who, in the face of "a world of 'modern ideas'," would be compelled to "determine value and rank according to how much and how many things one could endure and take upon oneself, how far one could extend one's responsibility" (BGE

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225Simmel 179.
226Simmel 169.
In making a "weighty" ideal of self-responsibility his standard, such a philosopher would, in his or her own manner, be following the example of earlier philosophers who "have found their task, their hard, unwanted, unavoidable task, but finally the greatness of their task, in being the bad conscience of their age" (BGE 212).

If the noble impulse of *amor fati* leads Nietzsche to end his evocation of the eternal return with an affirmation which would embrace every aspect of "bad conscience," the penultimate vision of this teaching as "the greatest weight" presents an ideal in which Nietzsche fulfils the philosophical task of being the "bad conscience" of the modern age. The "late and noble" ascetic ideal of the eternal return turns the rapidly fluctuating passions of the modern actor type back upon him- or herself. It does so in order to provoke a "will to responsibility" which must, in the context of the modern age, be seen as an ideal of "the greatest weight." However, it also balances this potentially crushing ideal with a teaching which indicates how to become "light and a bird," or at least "light and a butterfly," by learning how to alight with fearless grace - although not without danger - upon even the most somber aspects of "bad conscience."

While Locke's theory of responsibility is concerned only with past actions as they are represented in consciousness as memory, and Kantian responsibility concerns only future actions as they are represented in consciousness as thought, the meditation upon responsibility contained in Nietzsche's teaching of the eternal return looks simultaneously forward and backward and works directly with the passions that link consciousness to the "infinitely individual" actions which underlie it. Looking forward "from the perspective of the sick toward *healthier* concepts and values," it presents an ideal which requires the cultivation of a strong and courageous will; looking back "from the fullness and self-assurance of a *rich* life," it promotes an attitude of joyful acceptance, even of the "secret work of the instinct of decadence" (EH "Why I Am So Wise," 1). Finally, in the heightened consciousness it creates of the present moment in which these two orientations meet, Nietzsche's vision provides a
powerful acknowledgement of the passion which is the inevitable, if frequently disavowed, concomitant of every form of responsibility.
Conclusion

“Bad Conscience”: an ongoing drama

At the end of our exploration of Nietzsche’s engagement with the problem of responsibility in modernity, the teaching of the eternal return has brought us inexorably back to our point of departure: “bad conscience.” The idea that the question of responsibility in modernity is inextricably bound up with a reflexive form of consciousness is not unique to Nietzsche; on the contrary, it is common ground among modern philosophers that self-consciousness is the fundamental basis for responsibility as it is practised by the modern individual. In contrast to thinkers such as Locke and Kant, however, Nietzsche does not conceive of self-consciousness as a blank page upon which one’s experiences are eternally recorded, or as a transcendental principle of self-possession. In his more earth-bound view, all consciousness is a social phenomenon which reflects historical conditions; in the modern age, it takes a particularly painful, if promising turn. By the time modern philosophers feel the need to define it, self-consciousness has become an illness, but an illness as pregnancy is an illness.

Nietzsche’s evaluation of self-consciousness in the form of the “bad conscience” is complex. He is acutely aware of the potential for suffering it creates, but this sense of danger serves not to dim, but rather to heighten his appreciation of its interest and potential: the drama of “bad conscience” is “a spectacle too subtle, too marvelous, too paradoxical to be played senselessly unobserved on some ludicrous planet!” (GM II.16). The intrigues of this spectacle are numerous and varied. As we have seen, the experiences associated with Nietzschean “bad conscience” are not limited to the self-inflicted punishment of guilt, or the vague unhappiness that a rapid diagnosis of this illness suggests. Instead, they encompass all the reflexive capacities of an embodied and socially-located form of self-consciousness: from self-creation
to self-destruction, via self-delusion and self-reliance. Since, on Nietzsche’s analysis, it is only as a “social animal” that the human being acquires self-consciousness, the effects of the reflexive energies of “bad conscience” also inevitably extend beyond the “self” which is their primary focus. Its creative powers give rise to ideals and imaginative phenomena that exist, like consciousness itself, in the shared domain of communication. Likewise, its destructive potential is played out not only within the individual psyche, but in the realms of politics and society. The lonely passions of the atomistic individual of modern Western society are not merely “private property”; they are social forces.

In spite of so much colour and dangerous movement, compared with concepts like the “overman” and the “will to power,” the spectacle of “bad conscience” has not attracted a particularly appreciative audience on what might well be described today as the “planet” of Nietzsche criticism. When it is discussed, the “bad conscience” is most often treated as if it were an “evil conscience,” a characterisation which transforms it into an effigy and obscures its marvelous potential. More “noble-minded” readers, on the other hand, have tended simply to look impatiently away from the spectacle of “bad conscience” as it appears in Nietzsche’s work, for when “the noble mode of evaluation blunders and sins against reality, it does so in respect to the sphere with which it is not sufficiently familiar, against a real knowledge of which it has inflexibly guarded itself” (GM I.10). In terms of Nietzsche scholarship, the noble reluctance to look too closely at “bad conscience” results in readings that either bracket or deny, not only the concept, but also the “live” performance of “bad conscience” in Nietzsche’s work.

What kind of spirit does it take to appreciate the drama of “bad conscience,” and Nietzsche’s performance of it in particular? Nietzsche himself suggests that “divine spectators” are needed to “do justice” to the spectacle of “bad conscience” (GM II.16); the demands he places on readers of his own work are almost as high. In the absence of gods or supermen, however, Nietzsche’s remarks on the possibility of “the philosopher” in modernity indicate that the
individual who is capable of resisting (if not overcoming) the powerful impulses to demonize or to ignore “bad conscience,” is one who is driven by a “will to responsibility” and who understands the essential importance of methods.

There is no standpoint available to the “all too human” philosopher which permits a god’s eye view of “bad conscience.” There are, however, methodological resources developed over the course of a long, reflective tradition which promise a more modest measure of insight into the structure of self-consciousness. In the methods of the ancient Greeks for whom philosophy is an “art of living,” Nietzsche finds a starting point for his own reflexive exploration of contemporary self-consciousness. Although self-consciousness might be described as a “prehistorical” human capacity which is no doubt “present in all ages or may always reappear,” the peculiar form of “bad conscience” that appears in Nietzsche’s work is not timeless, but reflects the specific conditions of life in Western modernity. Thus Stoic methods are not simply reproduced in Nietzsche’s work, but are reinterpreted in a manner that reflects both the heritage of Christianity and the influence of modern scientific practice. The Nietzschean method which emerges is one which combines the democratic “role faith” of the actor with the “axis of delirium” of modern life in order to conduct what might be described as an experiment in the alchemy of self-consciousness. Among the results is the exposure of the structure of responsibility as it is conceived and practiced in modernity.

This structure, as it emerges in Nietzsche’s work, consists of two closely related yet antagonistic models of individual responsibility. The first (in order of historical appearance) is a model of personal accountability which makes the individual responsible exclusively for the past. The second is a model of responsibility as autonomous agency which makes the individual responsible exclusively for the future. Both are based upon a concept of the individual as a discrete, self-possessed and self-conscious entity. The incommensurable differences between the two models arise because they rely on different concepts of self-consciousness, each of which is claimed to be definitive: the two modern philosophers who
most clearly articulate these competing versions of responsibility each assume the
superhuman capacity to give an objective account of self-consciousness.

The philosophical “bad conscience” which inevitably accompanies such claims to divine
certainty is betrayed in Locke’s work, as he readily acknowledges, by the appearance of
“strange” – although undeniably entertaining - suppositions. In the less ingenuous case of
Kant, it results in the philosophical equivalent of magic tricks, which allow him to conjure up
“spontaneous” awareness of an “I” which lies beyond the limits of experience. Nietzsche
perceives a “voluptuous” or decadent quality in the pleasure to be taken in these extraordinary
performances of “bad conscience”: he draws attention to the fact that Locke’s imaginary
severed body parts reflect a history in which countless real bodies have been mutilated in the
name of accountability, and observes that in mere mortals the other-worldly beauty of Kantian
ideals is likely to incite feelings of guilt and despair as well as of pride and contempt.

The passionate dimension of self-consciousness, which appears only symptomatically in the
writings of Locke and Kant, is more deliberately harnessed in the work of their great
precursor in the field of modern reflections on consciousness, Descartes. On the other hand,
the tendency to suppress the experiential variety of self-consciousness in favour of a singular,
conceptually unified definition can also be traced to the Cartesian “discovery” of the cogito.
The methods used by Descartes to lead his readers to the cogito have their origins in the same
tradition that Nietzsche draws upon in seeking philosophical means to work within the
constraints of “bad conscience.” These are the methods of meditation used by Stoics and
Christians in order to bring individual consciousness into harmony with a natural or divine
order. In Descartes’ hands, as later in Nietzsche’s, they are reinterpreted to new and
experimental ends.

With Descartes, philosophical meditation gives rise to an apparently “non-ascetic” and
autonomous subject of knowledge. With such independence come a heightened form of self-
consciousness and a heavy burden of individual responsibility. This suggests that it is in
Descartes’ reworking of the meditational tradition that self-consciousness as “bad conscience”
first emerges from the cocoon of Christian culture and unfolds its wings in modern
philosophical form. Scholars of Descartes might object on his behalf that such an hypothesis
involves luring him into the depths of a very dark cellar indeed, but Descartes’ self-conscious
use of masks, and explicit attention to method, indicate that the philosopher himself was well
aware of the reflexive problems of “bad conscience.”

In Nietzsche’s work, the dangerous and multi-coloured butterfly of the philosophical spirit
(which can never be definitively distinguished from other species of “bad conscience”) continues in essentially the same modern “line of flight” upon which it embarks in the
Cartesian Meditations, although it might be said to alight with greater precision and
persistence upon surfaces from which Descartes’ attention tends to flutter artfully away. This
is not to suggest that Nietzsche simply inverts Cartesian methods by privileging the body, for
instance, instead of the mind. Rather, Nietzsche’s contemplations on “bad conscience” draw
attention to the passions which precede and exceed such binary distinctions in every
experience of self-consciousness, including that of the energetic subject of the Cartesian
Meditations. In the philosophical form of self-consciousness cultivated in Nietzschean
meditations, the thoughts of the mind and the feelings of the body can be clearly seen – and
felt – to merge and re-emerge within the ceaseless experience of passion, like waves in the
sea.

For the reader of Nietzsche, to engage with the problem of responsibility in modernity is to
investigate the secrets of such waves through persistent and self-conscious investigation. Such
secrets cannot be learnt from a distance: they unveil themselves neither to those who would
soar with the birds, nor to slow-blooded philosophical fish. Approached with a tenacious “will
to responsibility,” however, Nietzsche’s teachings indicate how to surf the passionate waves
of “bad conscience.” His methods provide creative and skilful means to view this “subtle,
marvelous and paradoxical spectacle,” although they make no promises that one will remain
“upright” in the process. Nietzsche teaches by example that to fall and rise, and fall and rise again, in a performance that is also, of necessity, an experiment, is finally the only way to practise responsibility in an age of “bad conscience.”

No ideal can offer a definitive solution to the problem of responsibility in modernity. Even the doctrine of *amor fati* does not offer a cure for the illness of “bad conscience”; on the contrary, it encourages us to accept it as a condition of modern life. This is not cause for despair, however - or if it is, it is equally cause for exhilaration. To willingly embrace “bad conscience” is not to succumb to the great nausea of nihilism, or to abandon ourselves despondently to the disorder of “modern irresponsibility.” Instead, it is to recognise both the danger and the colourful variety of modern ideals and practices of responsibility, and to accept the challenge of negotiating their slippery surfaces. For once Nietzschean “bad conscience” is embraced in all its odd variety, it rewards such attentive acceptance, not by doing away with the demands of responsibility, but rather by revealing an abundance of strange new responsibility and passion - and perhaps responsibility itself. - After all, what would be “responsible” if the contradiction had not first become conscious of itself, if the irresponsible had not first said to itself: “I am irresponsible”?
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