

# THE DISCOVERY OF THE WILL TO POWER

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We need not here examine, or even enumerate, all the phenomena that Nietzsche would explain, in the *Dawn*—and then in *The Gay Science*—as prompted by a will to power; for his psychology is of interest here primarily insofar as it clarifies the meaning of “power”—a word that is easily misconstrued. It will therefore be sufficient to list a few examples. There is, first, man’s desire to find scapegoats, the quest of the weak and the impotent to find somebody upon whom they can look down and to whom they may feel superior (*Dawn* 140); *Grosse Politik* (power politics) is prompted not only by the princes’ and potentates’ lust for power but also by a desire among “the lower strata of the nation” for a feeling of might (*Dawn* 189); dishonesty in business, arson committed by those who wish to collect insurance, counterfeiting, and stock market speculation may all be prompted by a lust for money which, in turn, is wanted because it gives a feeling of power: the craving is the same as that which inspired previous generations when they “burnt Jews, heretics, and good books, and destroyed entire higher cultures, as that of Peru and Mexico”:

The means of the craving for power have changed, but the same volcano is still glowing . . . and what one did formerly “for God’s sake” one does now for the sake of money . . . which now gives the highest feeling of power . . . (*Dawn* 204).

The next aphorism, which contains an extensive eulogy of the Jews, contains an attempt to explain their usury in past centuries as an effort to achieve a feeling of power through the one occupation left to them: “for our self-respect depends on our ability to repay in kind both the good and bad.” Even self-sacrifice may give an increased feeling of power, for one identifies oneself with a greater power, “be it a god or man,” and glories in his might (*Dawn* 145, 215).

Another type of behavior is explained in terms of the same

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paradox: if there should ever be a socialist state, it would enforce an unprecedented iron discipline—"they know themselves"—and the citizens would put up with their chains because "they are self-imposed, and the feeling of . . . this power is so young and charming to them that they would suffer anything for its sake" (Dawn 184).

Napoleon is introduced: he "was annoyed because he spoke badly"; he decided, however, "to speak even worse than he could speak," for he did not want to be the slave of his shortcomings: he wanted to have the power to determine his manner of speaking (Dawn 245).

Utilitarian behavior, such as kindness inspired either by the apprehension that unkindness would lead to an infraction of one's power or by the positive desire to inspire trust, is prompted by a will to power (Dawn 248). And happiness is now taken to be essentially a feeling of power: its usual expressions are "giving, deriding, destroying—all three with one common basic drive" (Dawn 356).

Suddenly it occurred to Nietzsche that the basic drive that prompted the development of Greek culture might well have been the will to power. He notes his conviction that the Greeks preferred power to anything "useful" and even to a good reputation (Dawn 360); and the second mention of the "will to power"—by that name—occurs in the notes of that period and insists that the ancient Greeks frankly admitted their will to power (x, 414). This sudden association of the will to power with the Greeks was one of the most decisive steps in the development of this conception into an all-embracing monism.

Nietzsche had previously considered the contest (*agon*) the most fruitful concept for any analysis of Greek culture. He had thought not only of the rivalry of the ancient dramatists who vied with each other for the highest prize, but also of the Olympic games and the Greek gymnasium (II, 376); of Plato's effort to outdo the Sophists and the poets by composing more beautiful myths, speeches, and dialogues than they had ever conceived (II, 377); and of the Socratic dialectic, which he understood as a spiritual contest (VII, 191; Dawn 544). Now it occurred to him that the contest itself was a manifestation of the will to power.

The will to power is thus not only the devil who diverts man from achieving culture, or a psychological urge that helps to explain diverse and complex types of human behavior: it is also envisaged as the basis of Greek culture, which Nietzsche then considered the acme of humanity. Instead of being associ-

ated primarily with neurotics who crave pity, with modern man's lust for money, with the burning of heretics and good books, with usury and counterfeiting, the will to power may now be envisaged as the basic drive of *all* human efforts. Philosophic discourse, the ancient tragedies and comedies, the Platonic dialogues, and the sculptures of the Periclean age are all understood in terms of the Greeks' will to outdo, excel, and overpower one another. Not only Athens and Sparta, and all the Greek city-states, but Aeschylus and Sophocles, Plato and Aristophanes, and all those who offered their speeches on love in the *Symposium* were competitors. Political and cultural achievements, art and philosophy are thus to be explained in terms of the will to power.

Nietzsche did not immediately recognize all these implications. Only in *Zarathustra* is the will to power proclaimed as the basic force underlying *all* human activities; and it is interesting to note that in Zarathustra's initial proclamation the culture of Greece is explicitly referred to and explained in terms of the will to power.

The philosophical significance of this monistic conception may be anticipated even now, if only by citing the first paragraph of Nietzsche's early fragment, *Homer's Contest* (1872):

When one speaks of *humanity*, the idea is fundamental that this is something that *separates* and distinguishes man from nature. In reality, however, there is no such separation: "natural" qualities and those called properly "human" are indivisibly grown together. Man, in his highest and most noble capacities, is wholly nature and embodies its uncanny dual character. Those of his abilities which are awesome and considered inhuman are perhaps the fertile soil out of which alone all humanity . . . can grow (II, 369).

This fragment, in which Nietzsche had planned to develop the conception of the contest, was begun at about the time when *The Birth of Tragedy* was published. It has been shown how Nietzsche developed the notion of the "uncanny dual character" of nature in his *Meditations* and how this bifurcation threatened in the end to break his entire philosophy in two. The conception of the will to power points to a new emphasis on the continuity of nature and culture.

Nietzsche had not yet succeeded in establishing his thesis that the values of humanity were mere developments of our animal nature. The essay on *Homer's Contest* had remained a fragment, and the *Meditations* failed to prove this point. The psychological considerations that led Nietzsche to the concep-

tion of the will to power suggest the possibility of a new attempt to show how values can be generated out of nature. Before this account of the *Dawn* is concluded, however, two further points should be developed.

First, Nietzsche offers some more comments on the relation of power and the will to power.

One should distinguish well: whoever still wants to gain the consciousness of power will use any means. . . . He, however, who has it, has become very choosy and noble in his tastes (*Dawn* 348).

The point is that the will to power may be ruthless and a source of evildoing, while power itself does not corrupt but ennobles the mind. The powerful, as Nietzsche points out expressly, have no need to prove their might either to themselves or to others by oppressing or hurting others; if they do hurt others, they do so incidentally in the process of using their power creatively; they hurt others "without thinking of it." Only the weak man "*wishes* to hurt and to see the signs of suffering" (*Dawn* 371).

A good illustration of the manner in which a person who has power, in Nietzsche's sense, may hurt another person incidentally without the express wish of doing so, would be Goethe, whose loves Nietzsche probably had to learn by heart, like most other German students. Goethe—as German teachers like to point out—broke Friederike's heart by lavishing his love upon her and then not marrying her: here is one of the seeds of the Gretchen tragedy. Goethe, however, had no thought of seeing the poor girl suffer. Only the weak need to convince themselves and others of their might by inflicting hurt: the truly powerful are not concerned with others but act out of a fullness and an overflow.

Nietzsche, of course, does not say that the powerful *should* hurt others; he points out that *if* they hurt others they are not motivated by the wish to hurt. There is, however, an implication that impotence is dangerous for the human character: being oppressed and having to repress one's desires may lead to cruelty and the desire to hurt. Impotence may thus be a source of poison, and the possession of power may be a medicine: "*Medical Kit of the Soul: What is the strongest healing application?—Victory*" (*Dawn* 571). This is not a doctor's prescription, as it were, but an improvisation from a "medical kit" (*Feld-Apotheke*); it is a strong—"the strongest"—medicine, and thus it is dangerous and not to be prescribed generally.

The assumption is that the powerful and the impotent are both imbued with the will to power, and that extreme or prolonged oppression and frustration may easily pervert this drive and make the oppressed look for petty occasions to assert their will to power by being cruel to others.

The *second* and final consideration about the *Dawn* is this: we should ask expressly whether Nietzsche's conception of power has not been whitewashed. We should face the question whether Nietzsche did not, after all, have in mind political might. It so happens that the *Dawn* is quite unequivocal on this point. Three aphorisms will show quite definitely what Nietzsche had in mind.

The first of these three aphorisms may well be the most important one in the book and is entitled "*The Striving for Excellence*." The title suggests correctly that this aphorism marks the transition from the old conception of the contest to the new one of the will to power. The aphorism, moreover, constitutes one of Nietzsche's first sustained attempts to reduce practically all of human behavior to this single striving, in one uninterrupted analysis. He proceeds to do this in terms of a scale. At the bottom of the scale is the barbarian who tortures others; at the top, the ascetic who tortures himself.

. . . Even when he who strives for excellence . . . wanted to make a delightful . . . impression, he did not enjoy this success insofar as he thus delighted his neighbor but insofar as he *impressed* himself on the soul of another, changed its form and ruled [waltete] over it according to his will. The striving for excellence is the striving to overwhelm [*überwältigen*] one's neighbor, even if only very indirectly or only in one's own feelings or even dreams. There is a long line of degrees of this secretly desired overwhelming, and a complete list of these would almost amount to a history of culture from the first still grimace-like barbarism to the grimace of . . . overrefinement. . . . The striving for excellence brings with it *for the neighbor*—to name only a few steps of this long ladder: tortures, then blows, then terror, then anguished amazement, then wonder, then envy, then laughing, then ridicule, then derision, then scorn, then the dealing of blows, then the inflicting of tortures: here, at the end of the ladder, stands the ascetic and martyr . . . (*Dawn* 113).

The "history of culture" is thus to be explained in terms of man's will to overwhelm, outdo, excel, and overpower his neighbor. The barbarian does it by torturing his neighbor. In the light of Nietzsche's previous comments, he is essentially

weak, else he would not need to inflict hurt. Nietzsche speaks of this as a low degree of the striving for excellence because he wishes to express that, *quantitatively*, we find little power at the bottom of the scale. Toward the middle of the scale, we find what might be called the normal degree of power: one seeks to evoke envy and admiration; one even seeks to elevate one's neighbor and derives a sense of power from doing so; one gives him joy and gaiety and lets him laugh, saying to oneself, as it were: I have the power to impress and delight him.

If our interpretation of the quantitativeness of these degrees were correct, it would follow that Nietzsche believed the ascetic to have a greater feeling of power than almost any other man; and this is fully borne out by the aphorism:

Indeed, happiness—taken as the most alive feeling of power—has perhaps nowhere on earth been greater than in the souls of superstitious ascetics. This the Brahmins express in the story of the king Vishvamitra, who derived such strength from thousands of years of *penance exercises* that he undertook to build a new *heaven* (Dawn 113; cf. GM III 10).

So serious is Nietzsche about this point—that ascetic self-torture is the source of the greatest possible feeling of power—that he concludes with a vision of God to develop the point more fully.

Supposing that there were a God of love: what enjoyment for him to create *suffering* men and to suffer the . . . torture of looking upon them . . . What deliria of the divine ascetic are to be conjectured as he creates sin and sinners and eternal damnations and, beneath his heaven and throne, a tremendous site of eternal agony and of eternal sobbing and sighing! It is entirely impossible that the souls of Paul, of Dante, of Calvin . . . once penetrated the gruesome secrets of such voluptuousness of power . . . (Dawn 113).

With this grotesque vision, the whole scale might begin all over again, as Nietzsche actually suggests. At the bottom was the barbarian who tortured his neighbor, at the top the ascetic who tortured himself; now one might conceive of an ascetic's torture of his beloved neighbor as a new form of self-torture.

This aphorism is of momentous significance. Nietzsche comes close to a solution of the problem that his early theory of values had been unable to solve, but he does not realize

this and loses the key that might lead to the coveted answer. Nietzsche thinks of quantitative degrees of power as corresponding to various forms of behavior and of culture; and the saint—who was in his early philosophy, together with artist and philosopher, the most valuable human being—is considered the most powerful man. The barbarian, who is uncultured, is the least powerful. Power might thus be construed as the standard and measure of values. This would go well with Nietzsche's interpretation of health as the ability to overcome disease. For health he might substitute power. The artist's power consists in his ability to overcome disease and suffering. Here was at least a possible way of trying to cope with some of the problems of his early theory.

Nietzsche fails to see this and repudiates asceticism as a "grimace of overrefinement," i.e., a grotesque perversion. Both barbarian and ascetic are "grimaces," both are not representatives of true culture. The vision of the ascetic's torture of others—to make himself suffer—makes this clear.

Culture apparently is not the manifestation of the greatest power; it is somewhere along the middle of the scale. Nietzsche's repudiation of the barbarian, however, is clear, and political power was to his mind essentially a form of barbarism. This is expressly emphasized in the two aphorisms with which this account of the *Dawn* may be concluded.

*Victory over Strength.* . . . Still one lies on one's knees before strength—according to the ancient habit of slaves—and yet, when the degree of worthiness of being honored is to be determined, only the degree of reason in strength is decisive: one must measure how far strength has been overcome by something higher and now serves that as its tool and means! (*Dawn* 548).

The might of the German *Reich* does not impress Nietzsche. To bow before such strength is slavish. One might expect Nietzsche to base his repudiation on the assertion that only a weak nation finds it necessary to impress itself and others with barbarian brawn and armies, and that culture is a higher, i.e., a quantitatively greater, form of power. Instead Nietzsche refers to "the degree of reason in strength [*der Grad der Vernunft in der Kraft*]."

There is thus a strong suggestion of dualism: power appears almost as an evil principle, reason as the good. This repudiation of power as an evil principle becomes explicit in Nietzsche's denunciation of the German *Reich*. It is repudi-

ated not because brawn is a manifestation of small power, but because power is a demon.

*The Demon of Power.* Not need, nor desire—no, the love of power is the demon of man. One may give them everything—health, nourishment, quarters . . . —they remain unhappy . . . : for the demon . . . will be satisfied. One may take everything away from them and satisfy this demon: then they are almost happy. . . . Luther has already said this, and better than I, in these verses: "If they take from us body, goods, honor, child, and wife: let it go—the Reich must yet remain to us!" Yes! Yes! The "*Reich!*" (Dawn 262).

Luther, to be sure, had in mind the kingdom of God; Nietzsche, however, is *not* here considering Luther's words as an illustration of his own view that the Christian's sacrifice of body, goods, honor, child, and wife is really prompted by the desire for greater power in the kingdom of God beyond. Nietzsche is looking upon the German *Reich* of Bismarck, upon a nation thrilled by its love of power, upon a people willing to risk their bodies, their goods, and their children in war, a people who would "let go" even their "honor"—for the sake of the *Reich*. "Yes! Yes! The '*Reich!*'"

Nietzsche's position invites comparison with his repudiation of Rousseau in his third *Meditation*: his opposition is violent—but his right to that opposition is not quite clear. Perhaps the very passion of his repudiation was due in part to the fact that the *Reich* represented a position seemingly similar to his own and yet so completely opposed to his. Here was a frankly manifested will to power—but he did not mean that sort of power.

Thus Nietzsche seems to be relapsing into his early dualism. Instead of declaring that only the weak delight in brawn and that value can be measured in terms of the *quantitative* degree of power, Nietzsche introduces reason as his value standard. He speaks of power as the demon of man and proclaims that reason must control strength. There are two forces, one evil and the other good. The situation is reminiscent of Nietzsche's early philosophy. Still, the Dionysian forces of darkness are opposed to the sun god Apollo.

### III

The choice of Zarathustra as his great protagonist may have been suggested to Nietzsche by his own dualistic tendencies. Here was the founder of a great dualistic religion, the prophet

of light and darkness, Good and Evil, Ormazd and Ahriman.<sup>1</sup> Here was a religion that did not present its believers with an omnipotent and omniscient God: here was a world-view much like that which Nietzsche himself had developed in the *Meditations* when he pictured nature as purposive but inefficient and in need of man's aid. Zarathustra, too, had told man of a purpose in nature (Ormazd) that would be able to win out in its struggle—if man would aid it.

Nietzsche, however, repudiated his earlier dualism through the very mouth of his Zarathustra.<sup>2</sup> Apparently, Dionysus defeats Apollo; the demon of darkness overpowers the restraining forces of the sun god; and reason is no longer recognized as the supreme principle and standard of values. This interpretation, however, would be only partly correct. To be sure, the self-styled Dionysian dithyrambs of *Zarathustra* (EH-Z 7) symbolize Nietzsche's departure from the Apollonian articulateness of his aphoristic style. It is further true that the will to power is proclaimed the one and only basic force of the cosmos. It remains to be seen, however, whether the conception of the will to power that is now evolved is really the Dionysian in a new guise, or whether it is not perhaps just as much the heir of Apollo as it is that of Dionysus.

Nietzsche had faced the choice between a dualism (of reason and will to power) and a monism (of only the will to power). The dualism was suggested in Nietzsche's declaration that only the degree of reason in strength could be the standard of valuation. The monism was suggested in Nietzsche's idea that quantitative degrees of power might be the measure of value. If one takes the example of Nietzsche's repudiation of the *Reich*, one can trace the lines his objections would have to take, according to which view he would embrace: as a *dualist*, he would say that the *Reich* was powerful, but that there was too little rationality in its might; as a *monist*, he would assert that the brawn of the *Reich* was actually an expression of weakness. The basic conception of Nietzsche's final theory of values is thus clear even now:

<sup>1</sup> Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Zendavesta* (1851), had admittedly chosen the Persian title to give expression to his own dualistic conception of the day and night sides of the world.

<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche himself remarked that his Zarathustra proclaimed a view that was the opposite of the real Zarathustra's. Nietzsche added that he chose Zarathustra as his protagonist because he was the first one to commit "the error": therefore, he had to be the first one to repudiate it. (EH IV 3) It seems to have gone unnoticed, however, how close Nietzsche himself had come to the real Zarathustra's view.

qualitative differences between various modes of power are reducible to more basic quantitative differences; rationality is taken to be the mark of great power; and with this crucial "qualification," *the quantitative degree of power is the measure of value.*

First of all, however, we must consider Zarathustra's proclamation of the will to power. The small number of passages containing any overt reference to it permit great brevity of exposition, while the fact that this is the first work where the "will to power" is introduced, and that Nietzsche prized this book more highly than anything else he wrote, makes it desirable not to skip these few passages.

Nietzsche first speaks of the "will to power" in the chapter "On the Thousand and One Goals." The chapter begins with moral relativism. Different nations have—this is the meaning of the title—different goals and moral codes. All of these, however, have one thing in common: they are creations of the will to power.

Nietzsche's difference with those who would rationalize the valuations of their own society is apparent. Against them he urges moral relativism, and—lacking any revelation—he cannot *a priori* assert the superiority of the values of his own society; nor can he judge, or even compare, the values of different societies unless they have something in common. Against the relativists, however, Nietzsche urges that there is a common element that makes possible comparative judgments of value about the moral codes of various societies.

A table of virtues hangs over every people. Behold, it is the table of its overcomings; behold, it is the voice of its will to power. Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people; whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and . . . the rarest, the most difficult—that they call holy.<sup>3</sup>

The will to power is thus introduced as the will to overcome *oneself*. That this is no accident is certain. The will to power is not mentioned again until much later—and then at

<sup>3</sup> The definition of the holy seems to have been influenced by the final words of Spinoza's *Ethics*. "Overcoming" as a translation of *Überwindung*—and "self-overcoming" for *Selbstüberwindung*—is admittedly inadequate, but self-surpassing, self-transcendence, and self-conquest would be worse though each suggests something of the connotation of the German word. The significance of Nietzsche's conception will be considered at length in the text.

length—in the chapter “On Self-Overcoming.” After that, it is mentioned only once more in *Zarathustra*. The will to power is conceived of as the will to overcome oneself.

Nietzsche asserts that moral goodness consists in doing what is difficult. To do the easy is not “morally good.” He then proceeds as follows:

Whatever makes it [a people] rule and triumph and shine, to its neighbor's awe and envy: that is to it the high, the first, the measure, the meaning of all things.

It might seem that besides self-overcoming Nietzsche thinks of overcoming one's neighbor. In his discussion of “the striving for excellence” in the *Dawn*, Nietzsche presented a scale of degrees of excellence, and the striving to arouse one's neighbor's awe and envy was placed nearer the bottom of that scale than the striving to arouse his admiration or to show one's power by elevating him. Now, while there is a suggestion of a contest between nations, each is trying to overcome *itself* to such a degree that it arouses its neighbors' awe and envy. In Nietzsche's vision the globe becomes a Greek gymnasium where all nations vie with each other, each trying to overcome itself and thus to excel all others.

A few sentences later, the Greeks are introduced as one of four historical illustrations; the others are, in that order, the Persians, the Jews, and the Germans:

“You shall always be the first and excel all others: your jealous soul shall love no one, unless it be the friend”—that made the soul of the Greek quiver: thus he walked the path of his greatness.

“To speak the truth and to handle bow and arrow well”—that seemed both dear and difficult to the people who gave me [*Zarathustra*] my name . . .

“To honor father and mother and to follow their will to the root of one's soul”—this was the tablet of [self-] overcoming that another people hung up over themselves and became powerful and eternal thereby.

“To practice loyalty and, for the sake of loyalty, to risk honor and blood even for evil and dangerous things”—with this teaching another people conquered themselves; and through this self-conquest they became pregnant and heavy with great hopes.

The greatness of Greece is interpreted in terms of the conception of the contest which, in turn, is now taken as reducible to a will to power. The Persians, like the Greeks, strove for both physical and moral power, here represented by truth-telling and arrow-shooting.

The Jews' honoring of father and mother, however, seems to be a striving for moral excellence only, not for physical power, yet of them alone Nietzsche says specifically that they became powerful. The Greeks had physical strength as well as "something higher" (Dawn 548), and so did the Persians. Moral force alone, however, is sufficient to make a people a power to be reckoned with.

Nietzsche's comment on the Germans of Bismarck's *Reich* is interesting when considered in this light. It is perhaps impossible today to read his words without considering them prophetic.

Of course, Nietzsche's theory of values cannot ultimately rely on any world-order to see to it that moral force prevails, while physical force—if not controlled by morality—must perish. Any such superficial interpretation of history as a morally edifying success story is far indeed from Nietzsche's mind. He might, however, speak of his German contemporaries as manifesting a fundamental weakness by showing little moral force, and he might consider their valuations as prompted by a lack of true power.

Nietzsche's problem is still the same as ever: he distinguishes between power and true power, as he had earlier distinguished between nature and true nature and the empirical and the true self. His difference with Rousseau was that Rousseau spoke of nature and Nietzsche of true nature; his repudiation of the *Reich* comes down to this, that the *Reich* glories in its strength, which, however, is not true power, as Nietzsche sees it. To escape this dilemma, he would now posit a quantitative scale and consider "true" power as simply *more* power than, for example, the relatively small might of which his German contemporaries liked to boast.

Nietzsche would thus offer a novel solution for his earlier problems. Instead of assuming two qualitatively different principles, such as strength and reason, he would reduce both to a single, more fundamental force: the will to power. And the distinction of brawn and brains he would explain in terms of a quantitative difference between degrees of power. The conception of the will to power as essentially self-overcoming suggests further that Nietzsche's thought still moves along dialectical lines, as it did when he defined health as the ability to overcome disease: apparently, he would now broaden his earlier dialectical definition in an attempt to arrive at a general standard of values.

It is, however, far from plain what exactly is meant by

"self-overcoming"; nor is it evident in what manner we could gauge quantitative degrees of power. These are problems which will require further analysis. Zarathustra's speech "On Self-Overcoming" does not offer any clear answers to these questions; rather, it introduces two further problems which may be considered briefly.

The first of these two new points does not seem puzzling at first glance. Nietzsche suggests that the pursuit of philosophy is prompted by the will to power. This is entirely consistent with his earlier view that artist, saint, and philosopher are the most truly *human* beings. He has since shown how the saint (ascetic) is one of the most powerful of men, and he would now add that the philosopher's excellence, too, corresponds to a similarly high position on the power scale. But Nietzsche raises a new and difficult question by suggesting that the will to truth is a function of the will to power.

"Will to truth" you call it . . . ? A will to the thinkability of all being: this I call your will. All being you want to *make* thinkable: for you doubt, with well-founded suspicion, whether it is thinkable. Yet it shall yield and bend for you. . . . Smooth it shall become and serve the spirit as its mirror and reflection. That is your entire will . . . a will to power—also when you speak of good and evil and valuations (Z II 12).

It may seem to make the will to power more attractive that one can exert it by being a philosopher, without harming anyone; nor does Nietzsche's thought lack plausibility. Even as Alexander and Napoleon went out to conquer the world with their armed might, Aristotle and Hegel tried to subdue the entire cosmos, without cavalry and cannon, by sheer force of mind. This is not just Zarathustra's poetic proclamation but one of Nietzsche's characteristic declarations about the will to power. "Philosophy is this tyrannic urge itself, the most spiritual will to power" (BGE 9).

This conception, however, which—at first glance—seems to fit Nietzsche's philosophy so well by placing the philosopher at the pinnacle of the power scale, may yet be dangerous. By including truth within the confines of this theory of the will to power, he has perhaps called in a Trojan Horse that threatens his entire philosophy with ruin.

What Nietzsche intended was presumably a polemic against the view that had found eloquent expression in Hegel's famous declaration: "The initially hidden and precluded essence of the universe has no strength to resist the courage of

knowledge."<sup>4</sup> These words, in which Hegel had meant to deny the doctrine of the thing-in-itself by claiming that the triumph of knowledge was complete and that no surd could escape its omnipotent grasp seemed to Nietzsche to be proof of "Hegel's Gothic heaven-storming" (xvi, 82). Nietzsche insinuates that the world is *not* knowable. This may seem modest and unproblematic enough, yet Nietzsche's statement of his position invites criticism.

He looked upon himself as an experimental philosopher who wished to break with a tradition of "unlimited ambition." For the delusion of the metaphysicians that they might be able "to solve all with one stroke, with one word" and thus become "'unriddlers of the universe,'" Nietzsche proposed to substitute "the small single questions and experiments" (Dawn 547). Now one can hardly help inquiring whether his vision of the will to power is still an attempt to answer "small single questions" with an "experiment"—or an effort "to solve all with one stroke, with one word" and to unriddle the universe with a phrase. Nietzsche himself does not answer this or other criticisms as explicitly as one might wish; but it may be permissible to venture a reply which he might perhaps have offered in his defense. His own conception of the will to power is not "metaphysical" in that sense of the word which contemporary positivists would attach to it: it is not a mere phrase but, unlike Schopenhauer's "will," essentially an empirical concept, arrived at by an induction. The aphoristic works which preceded *Zarathustra* had sought to answer small single questions in an open-minded essentially unsystematic spirit. Now the time for a more comprehensive inference had come.

Another criticism is apparently more serious. Nietzsche asserts that any attempt to understand the universe is prompted by man's will to power. If so, it would seem that his own conception of the will to power must be admitted by him to be a creation of his will to power. Is not Nietzsche therefore in the predicament of Epimenides, the Cretan? If his assertion is correct, it is a fiction.

Nietzsche was not at his best with problems of this kind: he never worked out an entirely satisfactory theory of knowledge, and most of the relevant material remained in his notebooks and did not find its way into a more coherent presentation in his published works. Yet it seems necessary here

<sup>4</sup> *Geschichte der Philosophie*, I, 22.

to meet this criticism in the best possible way—for if Nietzsche's philosophy were shown at this point to be self-refuting and absurd, it might seem futile to consider it further.

First of all, Nietzsche's view is not as different from Kant's as it is from Hegel's: Kant, too, would have denied that the world "has no strength to resist the courage of knowledge." Thus Kant set himself the task of discovering those necessary forms of the human mind to which all phenomena—i.e., all that appears to the human mind—must necessarily conform and be subject. While phenomenal experience might be a vast fabrication of the human mind, this "fiction" must be considered necessary: it follows iron-clad rules and is not "subjective" in the sense that it would leave the individual any leeway. Our mind, says Kant, is so definitively constituted along the lines developed in his theory of knowledge that synthetic *a priori* judgments about all human experience, past, present, and future, are possible. While Kant's theory does not start out on the assumption that there is a God, he abstracts from the divine existence only histrionically, without really doubting it. Hence he is not driven to the conclusion that the human mind, including the faculty of reason, is a freak—and that the faith in God which, as he claims, is an inevitable postulate of practical reason, is perhaps merely due to a certain queerness of our constitution. Only the Darwinian doctrine of evolution lent any great impetus to such conclusions; but Kant's position came singularly close to them. As has been pointed out in a previous chapter, however, Kant did not think of the human reason as a naturalistic datum that might be studied scientifically; he still believed in a whole rational order—and the phrase so often used by him, "not only man but all rational beings," with its traditional suggestion that man shares reason with God and the angels, shows clearly how far Kant was from considering reason a mere peculiarity of *Homo sapiens*.

Nietzsche, coming after Darwin, felt impelled "to substitute for the Kantian question: 'how are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?' another question: 'Why is the belief in such judgments *necessary*?' " And he even questioned that this belief was "necessary" in the sense of being required by the make-up of the human mind; instead he suggested "that for the sake of the survival of beings like ourselves such judgments must be *believed* to be true, though they might, of course, be *false* judgments for all that" (BGE 11).

More important: Nietzsche, who questioned the existence

of God "existentially"—with all his heart and soul—could not anchor his own conception of the will to power in any divine ground. That, however, did not prevent him from conceiving of the will to power as a universal feature of the human constitution, whose fictions must be considered necessary (for man) because they are not subjective: they leave no leeway for individual differences between one man's thinking and another's. Nietzsche's Epimenidean predicament then appears in a new light. His theory of the will to power might be the one and only interpretation of human behavior of which we are capable when we consider the evidence and think about it as clearly as we can. Not only Nietzsche but mankind would then be in the position of the Cretan, and the dilemma—however ridiculous it might seem to the angel Gabriel—would be inescapable for us. This reply to an obvious and dangerous criticism is, of course, not to be found in Nietzsche's writings in this form, but the interpretation offered here is by no means superimposed upon him. It finds ample support in his writings and furnishes at least part of the necessary background for his occasional assertions that there "really" is no will, or that the will is "really" a fiction.

There is yet one final point about the will to power made in the chapter "On Self-Overcoming." Nietzsche claims that it is not only the basic urge of man but nothing less than the fundamental drive of all living beings: "Wherever I found the living, there I found the will to power."

"Only where there is life, there is also will: not will to life but . . . will to power. There is much that life esteems more highly than life itself; but out of the esteeming itself speaks the will to power." Thus life taught me. . . .

Even this extreme generalization, the bold statement that all living beings are imbued with a will to power, is evidently offered in an empirical spirit. One may criticize Nietzsche for having performed an induction that is unconvincing; one may argue that he misconstrued his evidence or depended on insufficient data; one may scrutinize the terms "will" and "power" and inquire whether Nietzsche's view depends on certain ambiguities of these two words—one will yet have to admit that Nietzsche based his theory on empirical data and not on any dialectical ratiocination about Schopenhauer's metaphysics, as is so often supposed erroneously. The conclusion "Thus life taught me" is probably intended to stress that Nietzsche's insight is based on experience.

Of course, up to this point only some of Nietzsche's psychological evidence has been submitted; but if one wants to consider, the data he adduced from the rest of nature, one must turn to his later writings. There one will find much further evidence as well as the still more extreme hypothesis that the will to power is the basic force of the entire universe. If all this should seem to contradict the view of the will to power developed in reply to the Epimenidean criticism, it may be suggested that the constitution of the human mind might conceivably require it to interpret not only human behavior but the entire cosmos in terms of the will to power. The most obvious objection at this point is, no doubt, that it seems empirically untrue that our minds are so constituted that, when we consider phenomena and think as carefully and cogently as we can, we are driven to assume that the will to power is the basic principle of the universe. This criticism seems not only relevant but, in the end, unanswerable. To evaluate this criticism and Nietzsche's position properly, it seems necessary, however, to accord a more systematic treatment to his final philosophy. By putting a number of questions to Nietzsche it will be possible to elicit the meaning of his later views better than could be done by proceeding further, book by book. For with *Zarathustra*, the discovery of the will to power as well as Nietzsche's philosophic "development" is completed; the gap between his early and late work has been bridged; and we may now ask whether the difficulties that arose in the context of his youthful dualism can be resolved through his monistic philosophy of power.