

## Translating Nietzsche: The Case of Kaufmann

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ABSTRACT: No one has loomed larger in Nietzsche's English-language translation history (and interpretation history) than Walter Kaufmann. We owe much to him. It seems to me, however, that just as he needed surpassing as an interpreter, he also needs surpassing as a translator; for there is a good deal that is problematic about his Nietzsche translations, in a variety of respects—some of which has affected his interpretation in ways that I consider unfortunate. I identify and discuss a number of my specific concerns, drawing attention to some of the texts and aspects of Nietzsche's thought that tend to be perceived and understood (by English-speaking readers) in questionable ways to which Kaufmann's translation decisions have contributed. My larger intention is to use this "case" to underscore the need for English-speaking interpreters of Nietzsche to pay close and careful attention to what he actually says in his German texts.

The fate of Nietzsche's reception in the English-speaking world has been very significantly affected by his English-language translation history. No one has loomed larger in that history than Walter Kaufmann. Kaufmann also played a major role in Nietzsche's Anglophone interpretation history (particularly in North America). However, "Kaufmann as Nietzsche translator" is a topic that is deserving of attention in its own right—although admittedly, "in its own right" actually means "as it has influenced our picture of Nietzsche, and therefore our understanding of Nietzsche, and thus Nietzsche's interpretation history after all." In the course of my discussion I shall address a few points of Nietzsche interpretation in our part of the world that I believe have been significantly influenced in problematic ways by translational choices made or followed (and thereby endorsed) by Kaufmann.

I want to say at the outset that I owe much—personally, educationally, intellectually and professionally—to Kaufmann, and that all of us in the English-speaking world who care about Nietzsche (and about European philosophy from Hegel to Sartre more generally) are greatly indebted to him. No one else could have rehabilitated Nietzsche on this side of the English Channel after the Second World War as persuasively and successfully as he did, or could have made Nietzsche come alive in English translation during the

1950s and 1960s as vividly and engagingly as he did. I could elaborate on these points, but they are obvious, and so I will not dwell on them. I do, however, want them to be remembered, since much of what I will be saying will be critical.

On reflection, it seems to me that our debt to Kaufmann is more for what he began and made possible—and even provoked—than for what he actually accomplished and left as enduring contributions to the English-language Nietzsche corpus and literature. He needed surpassing as an interpreter of Nietzsche decades ago, even though he was an important one at a crucial juncture in our philosophical and intellectual history. He further needs surpassing as a Nietzsche translator—even though he was a very gifted one, who greatly raised the existing standard when he came on the scene and who also was adept at finding high-profile publishers for his translations who knew how to market them. My problems with his translations are many and diverse. My aim in airing them, however, is not merely to contribute critically as well as appreciatively to the assessment of Kaufmann’s Nietzsche-reception legacy in the English-speaking world. It is also, and more importantly, to spark debate about the matters they concern with respect to Nietzsche and his thought.

## I

I begin with something that is partly a translation issue and partly a “presentation” issue and that therefore is a Nietzsche interpretation and “reception” issue as well. Kaufmann’s presentation of Nietzsche in his enormously influential *Nietzsche* (first published in 1950) was geared very much to strategic considerations, relating to Nietzsche’s rehabilitation in the English-speaking world.<sup>1</sup> Kaufmann could well have titled the book “Nietzsche: Humanist, Pragmatist, Existentialist.” But he did not—even though that is more or less how he presented Nietzsche in the course of the book, linking him as closely as he could to the Enlightenment tradition, good old American pragmatism, and anti-Nazi French existentialism. Instead, as we all know, he entitled the book *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. And that is a title—or more precisely, a subtitle—about which I have very mixed feelings.

Kaufmann’s first subtitle characterization of Nietzsche—as “philosopher”—was not only appropriate but important, for the point certainly had to be made in 1950 and for decades thereafter (and still does, in some quarters) that Nietzsche deserves to be deemed a “philosopher,” and a great one at that, even if a very unconventional one. His second characterization of Nietzsche—as “psychologist”—was also both apt and significant. Nietzsche did think of himself as a “psychologist,” and there is much to be said for his kind of psychology even today as a supplement and complement to the kinds of psychology that now predominate, even if not as a substitute for them.

Kaufmann's third subtitle characterization of Nietzsche, however—as “Antichrist” (*an* Antichrist? *the* Antichrist?)—was and remains considerably more problematic, both translationally and interpretively, and strategically as well. Kaufmann shared Nietzsche's loathing of Christianity and was intent on highlighting Nietzsche's antipathy to it, as vividly as possible. Nietzsche of course did write a searing polemic against Christianity that he had entitled *Der Antichrist*. That book had already been translated and had become known—and indeed, notorious—under the English title *The Antichrist*, which is seemingly (to most English-speaking readers) the obvious way to render the German title. Kaufmann chose not only to use that English title himself, when he published his translation of it in his *Portable Nietzsche* a few years later, but also to apply it as a label directly to Nietzsche, right along with “philosopher” and “psychologist,” in the very subtitle of his post-Nazi-era reintroduction of Nietzsche to the English-speaking world. In Kaufmann's own “war” against Christianity, he just could not resist this rhetoric—even though he had to be aware that the idea of “the Antichrist” conjures up all sorts of horrendous images that are not exactly helpful in countering the all-too-common picture of Nietzsche as Diabolical Monster.

Kaufmann availed himself of this branding opportunity even though he knew perfectly well that Nietzsche's actual target in the book is not Jesus and the values he is presented in the Gospels as espousing but rather the Christianity of St. Paul and his kindred spirits, and even though he also knew that, in German, the word “Christ” means “Christian” rather than (Jesus as) “the Christ” (which is “Christus” in German). It is true enough that Nietzsche was asking for trouble when he entitled the book *Der Antichrist*, despite the fact that the book is an anti-Christian polemic rather than a diatribe against Jesus as the Christ. Kaufmann was asking for trouble too, however, when he chose to represent Nietzsche in the very subtitle of his book as nothing less than “Antichrist,” rather than simply as “antichristian” (which he clearly and vehemently was). In American English the label “Antichrist” is certainly vivid—but the very vividness of a label is a problem if the label is not apt and helpful in advancing the cause of moving the understanding of Nietzsche beyond the level of crude and distorting caricatures. Nietzsche himself often could not resist vivid language that invited caricature and misunderstanding; but it is not a virtue of Kaufmann as interpreter and translator to share the same susceptibility to rhetorical temptation.

## II

Another, very different, sort of problem with Kaufmann as Nietzsche translator is a problem only because of the unique place Kaufmann occupied for so many years as the unquestioned leading translator and interpreter of Nietzsche in the English-speaking world. This is the problem of which of Nietzsche's

writings Kaufmann did and did *not* choose to translate, and of what that was taken (and, I believe, was meant by Kaufmann to be taken) to imply about which of Nietzsche's writings matter most and which ones do not matter all that much. His choices and statements with respect to Nietzsche's various writings had a quite significant—and unfortunate—effect on how Nietzsche came to be seen and understood, in North America in particular.

Consider, first, the writings Kaufmann chose to put together in his 1954 *Portable Nietzsche*, which was the Nietzsche “bible” for English-speaking readers for the next dozen years.<sup>2</sup> Its primary text was *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. To it, the only works Kaufmann added (apart from some brief excerpts) were three of Nietzsche's late polemics—against Christianity (*Der Antichrist*), against the moral-metaphysical tradition in Western philosophy (*Götzen-Dämmerung* [*Twilight of the Idols*]), and against Wagner (*Nietzsche contra Wagner*). The volume thus featured Nietzsche at his most didactic, vitriolic, and hyperbolic. Some of Nietzsche's other books were available at the time in translations by others; but Kaufmann's translations in this volume ran rhetorical circles around them and made them seem barely tolerable. These were the writings that gave my generation its initial sense of what Nietzsche was about.

Then, in 1966 and 1967, that changed. Kaufmann came out with an astonishing flurry of translations of other works of Nietzsche's, all of which were published—either separately or in pairs—in the Vintage paperbacks that became so ubiquitous and familiar: *The Birth of Tragedy* together with *The Case of Wagner*, *On the Genealogy of Morals* with *Ecce Homo*, and *Beyond Good and Evil*. They were also bound together in Kaufmann's 1968 Modern Library anthology, *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. These further translations did a great deal of good and opened the way to a more serious and fleshed-out understanding and appreciation of Nietzsche as at least a kind of philosopher.

But that was not all. In 1967, Kaufmann also published another Nietzsche translation—of excerpts from Nietzsche's notebook material (a vast and significant part of Nietzsche's *Nachlaß*) that had been selected, arranged, and published after Nietzsche's death under the title of *Der Wille zur Macht* (*The Will to Power*) by his friend Peter Gast and his sister Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche. (Gast was its primary compiler and editor, and so I attribute it to him, even though he was assisted—and in a sense legitimized—in this effort by “the sister,” as she is commonly called, who controlled Nietzsche's literary estate.) Subsequent printings of *The Portable Nietzsche* contained a bibliographical section with the heading “The Walter Kaufmann Translations” that opened with the following statement: “Nietzsche's most important writings are available in three volumes.” They are then listed: “*The Portable Nietzsche*, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, and *The Will to Power*” (691). In 1974, Kaufmann published his translation of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* as *The Gay Science*, but he never changed that statement about what “Nietzsche's most important writings” are in subsequent

printings of *The Portable Nietzsche*. And he never translated any of Nietzsche's other books—*Untimely Meditations*, the three installments of *Human, All Too Human*, and *Daybreak*.

This had consequences. Kaufmann was the definer of the Nietzsche canon. By never adding any of Nietzsche's books between *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (other than *The Gay Science*, some years later) to the series of what he himself had grandly dubbed "the Walter Kaufmann translations" and by his exclusion of these relatively early and middle-period books (including *The Gay Science*) from his pontifical-canonical listing of "Nietzsche's most important writings," Kaufmann made it clear that he considered the rest of Nietzsche's published works to be of lesser (and therefore relatively minor) significance, either intrinsically or even for the understanding of Nietzsche's thinking—and even to be of less "importance" than the notebook cullings assembled in *The Will to Power*. On the other hand, both in that sentence and on many other occasions, Kaufmann encouraged readers to accord the same high level of importance to the *Will to Power* collection as to the books contained in *The Portable Nietzsche* and the *Basic Writings* volume. That is quite remarkable—and also, in my opinion, quite unfortunate.

I do not fault Kaufmann for having decided to make the material in *The Will to Power* available to English-speaking readers. There certainly are those who would prefer that he had not done so, but I am not one of them. I do think, however, that he would have done a much greater service to English-speaking readers—and to the cause of Nietzsche studies in the Anglophone world—if he had translated at least some of these other works (*Human, All Too Human* in particular) and had done translations of them and *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* first. It also would have helped if he then had produced a different sort of edition and translation of the *Will to Power* material—a more "critical" edition of the same material, perhaps preserving its organization by general topic but giving greater care and visibility to the chronology of the notes and making much more evident the "notebook" character of the material. That would more truly have made his translation of *Der Wille zur Macht* a volume "edited by Walter Kaufmann" (as its cover proclaims it to be) rather than little more than a translation of the volume whose actual editors were Nietzsche's friend and sister that preserves the many appalling things that they did in their presentation of the notebook material.

### III

I now turn to Kaufmann's English-language title choices. Titles matter to the way books are viewed. Renderings of titles in translations of books matter in the same way—except that, in the latter case, post mortem, the choices made

are not those of the author. Some of Kaufmann's Nietzsche title translation decisions are completely unproblematic. No real choices needed to be made or were even possible, for example, in the cases of *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *The Will to Power*. Kaufmann is to be commended, in my opinion, for leaving *Ecce Homo* untranslated and in its original Latin, and also for opting for "spoke" (rather than the archaic and biblical-sounding alternative "spake" that is used in some translations) in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [*Also Sprach Zarathustra*]). And I cannot complain about his rendering of *Götzen-Dämmerung* as *Twilight of the Idols*, for *Twilight of the Gods* was already firmly established as the English version of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* and had to be echoed in English as in German to capture Nietzsche's evident intention. Moreover, there is no good way in English to capture the structure of the German titles in either case, in which there is no definite article and no possessive form.

I do have something of a problem with Kaufmann's translation of the subtitle of *Beyond Good and Evil*, because it has had an effect on the way in which that book is regarded. As Nietzsche's ideas for titles from the 1883-1886 notebooks make clear, the theme of a "philosophy of the future" (no doubt echoing Wagner's characterization of his own work as the beginning of a "music of the future" ["Zukunftsmusik"]) was an important one in the shaping of the project of *Beyond Good and Evil*. He chose the term "Vorspiel" ("prelude") to describe the relation of *Beyond Good and Evil* to this "philosophy of the future"—no doubt with Wagner's operatic example in mind. The conventional translation (by Kaufmann and virtually everyone else) of Nietzsche's German construction ("Vorspiel *einer* Philosophie der Zukunft" [emphasis added]) is "prelude *to*" the kind of "philosophy of the future" Nietzsche has in mind—rather than "*of*" it (which would be more apt as well as more literal). But the grammar of this translation (differing from that of the original) should not be allowed to obscure the fact that this book is clearly intended itself to *mark the beginning* of that new development rather than merely to envision and set the stage for it.

As Nietzsche the lover of music and erstwhile Wagnerian well knew, Wagner supplied many of his operas with "preludes." Indeed, almost every act of his later operas has its own "Vorspiel." These "preludes" are *parts of* the operas themselves, anticipating what is to come even as they herald and prepare the way for it, and often giving a kind of preview of it. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* had been Nietzsche's artistic counterpart and countercreation to Wagner's four-opera *Ring* cycle. *Beyond Good and Evil* was to be his countermove to Wagner's literary proclamation (accompanying his operatic initiation) of a *Zukunftsmusik*, with respect to the future direction and character of philosophy. But Nietzsche enjoyed the advantage over Wagner of being able to combine what he was preaching with its practice in the same work. Kaufmann's rendering of the subtitle makes it appear that Nietzsche thought of himself as having a John-the-Baptist-like relation to the "philosophy of the future" of which he

speaks, merely foretelling its coming and preparing the way for it. That might be true of the figure of Zarathustra in relation to the Übermensch he heralds, but it surely misrepresents Nietzsche's conception of his own relation to the kind of philosophy he is endeavoring to put into practice (in *Beyond Good and Evil* and subsequently) as well as to preach.

As I have already observed, Kaufmann's rendering of *Der Antichrist* as *The Antichrist*—rather than as *The Antichristian*, or at least as *The Antichrist(ian)*—is another and different sort of problem: it altogether fails to capture the “anti-Christian” (rather than Christ-antagonistic) meaning that is crucial to understanding the actual target and force of Nietzsche's German title. It thus invites and reinforces what might aptly be called the demonization of Nietzsche by seemingly proclaiming and affirming his association with that image of evil incarnate. Having already made these points, I shall not rehearse them again here, but they apply in the present context of titling issues as well.

#### IV

Another problematic case—though perhaps a less serious one—is that of Kaufmann's translation of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* as *On the Genealogy of Morals*. There are two problems here. The first is with his rendering of “Moral” as “morals.” It is importantly true that Nietzsche is interested in several different types of “Moralen” in this book, but it is also true that the type of “Moral” to which he is specifically referring in the title is the morality that he believed had come to be taken for granted in the modern Western (“European”) world. Kaufmann himself feels obliged to translate the term as “morality” in perhaps the single most important sentence on the subject in *Beyond Good and Evil*, to which *Zur Genealogie der Moral* is avowedly a kind of sequel or addendum: “Morality [Moral, with no article] in Europe today is herd animal morality—in other words, as we understand it, merely *one* type [Eine Art] of human morality [menschlicher Moral] beside which, before which, and after which many other types, above all *higher* moralities [höheren Moralen], are, or ought to be, possible” (*BGE* 202).<sup>3</sup>

This naturalistic moral pluralism may indeed be what Nietzsche is advocating in both books. It is evident, however, that “Moral” in the title of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* refers to what Kaufmann himself renders (in his translation of the passage just cited) as “morality in Europe today”—which Nietzsche goes on to say is commonly purported to be (in Kaufmann's own translation) “morality itself” (“die Moral selbst”). It seems clear, therefore, that “morality” (understood in the sense of “modern Western morality”) would have been a more appropriate rendering of “Moral” in the title of the book's translation (if not in every use of this term by Nietzsche in this book and elsewhere, such as his uses of the term

in this very passage in his references to “menschlicher Moral” and “höheren Moralen”). Kaufmann took liberties here—perhaps in an attempt to make the title anticipate where Nietzsche was going, or perhaps in an attempt to make him look a little less like a subverter of human decency as well as of Christian piety. He may well have been right in his surmise, but that nonetheless makes his translation of this part of the title tendentious and rather misleading.

Kaufmann’s rendering of the first part of the title is also problematic, but for different reasons. If the first part of the title were “über der Genealogie,” then “on the genealogy” would be quite right (emphasis added). But it is not. The most natural (and appropriate) way of rendering “zur Genealogie” would be “toward a genealogy” or “toward the genealogy.” Kaufmann’s claim in his editor’s introduction that “it is clear which meaning Nietzsche intended”—namely, “on the genealogy”—is problematic. He considered “toward a genealogy” to be too tentative. But it seems to me that “on the genealogy” makes Nietzsche sound more doctrinaire with respect to the nature and correctness of the accounts he proposes than I believe him to have been or than he needs to be for his purposes.

To elaborate briefly: in this book, as I read it, Nietzsche is not making definitive pronouncements on the genesis and development of modern-day morality, notwithstanding his having subtitled it “A Polemic.” (His “polemic” is directed against those who suppose “morality in Europe today” to be something absolute and timelessly true rather than—as he would have it—a human phenomenon that has developed in the course of human events.) He is envisioning, calling for and trying to contribute to the attainment of a knowledge of what he calls the “genealogy” of that morality and of associated values—“a kind of knowledge [eine solche Kenntniss] that has never yet existed or even been desired” (*GM P:6*).

It is *to* this reconception and new comprehension of these phenomena that he sees himself as contributing, and it is *toward* their attainment that he means to be moving, by way of the book’s preface and three essays—setting the stage for the further task and “*new requirement*” of a critique and reevaluation of “moral values” (“moralischen Werthe”) (*GM P:6*). So the translation of “zur Genealogie” as “toward a genealogy” (rather than as “on the genealogy”) not only would have been appropriate but would have been preferable, better conveying the pioneering as well as polemical spirit in which the preface shows Nietzsche to be proceeding.

## V

I shall mention one more title translation problem, of a somewhat different nature. I refer to Kaufmann’s decision to render *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* as *The Gay Science*. It is true that Nietzsche subsequently did use the Italian phrase

“la gaya scienza” as a kind of nickname for the book in references to it (e.g., in *Ecce Homo*) and that he used it as an actual subtitle to the book’s second edition, published five years after the first. But neither of these facts warrants the conclusion that the English cognates of the Italian words “gaya” and “scienza” are the most apt choices in our own era in the translation of Nietzsche’s original German title. It is true that “fröhlich” means something like “gay.” But it would be more natural to render “fröhlich” as “cheerful” or “joyful.” (Indeed, “gay” is not even listed as a possible English translation of it in any of my three German-English dictionaries.) Kaufmann rejected “joyful” because Thomas Common had used it in his earlier and rival translation, and he rejected “cheerful” because he wanted to reserve it to translate “heiter.” These are not the best of reasons. And Kaufmann’s choice of “gay” also has the history of the term in the last third of the twentieth century against it. He knew this but welcomed the opportunity to take a stand (however futile) against its abandonment to that history.

The same applies with respect to the history of the term “science” in the whole of the twentieth century. The term “Wissenschaft” has long been translated as “science,” and this is appropriate much of the time—especially when what an author is talking about is the natural sciences or even the social sciences. Kaufmann was quite right to insist that it should not be translated as “wisdom,” in this context or any other. For Nietzsche, however, as had long been the case in German (and as Kaufmann well knew), the term “Wissenschaft” had a considerably broader meaning and scope than “science” now does for us and meant something like methodologically refined and disciplined *cognitive inquiry of one sort or another*—of which the natural sciences were by no means to be considered paradigmatic.

Nietzsche clearly considered the kind of thing he does in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* to be a case in point and wanted it to be seen as such. It may be an unusual (or even new) sort of Wissenschaft, but *cognitive inquiry* is what it is—at least enough of the time to warrant the title. Yet it is not the sort of cognitive inquiry that goes on in the various natural sciences and their social-scientific kin. Or rather, it avowedly seeks to learn from and draw on such narrower sorts of cognitive inquiry as these, but goes beyond them or departs from them in various ways appropriate to its different sorts of interpretive issues and questions—without, however, abandoning its aspiration to the attainment of knowledge or comprehension with respect to them, and indeed precisely in an attempt to *surpass* such other types of cognitive inquiry in this very respect.

Nietzsche could and did convey that thought by means of his use of the term “Wissenschaft.” It is harder to capture that thought in a single word in English. “Wisdom” does not do the trick, but neither does “science.” Both are misleading renderings, even if in very different ways. Phrases such as “cognitive inquiry” or “pursuit of knowledge” don’t work very well in a title—and especially in one that also has to do something with “fröhlich.” Kaufmann also considered

“inquiry” and “knowledge” to be too bland. He wanted the title to be a kind of battle cry, in which Nietzsche would be seen in this book as directly challenging the pretension of “the sciences,” and so the more provocative it was, the better. It seems to me, however, that Kaufmann would have done Nietzsche and all of us better service as a translator if, instead of turning Nietzsche’s Italian subtitle “la gaya scienza” into its English cognate as the book’s title, he had made peace with contemporary usage and had done exactly what Nietzsche did with “la gaya scienza”—namely, used it in its Italian form as a *subtitle*—and had used for the main title some nondistracting and nonmisleading alternative rendering of the German title that is as faithful as possible to its letter and spirit: perhaps something like “joyful inquiry” or even “the joyful quest.”

“Joyful” works well enough and has the virtue of being a standard rendering of “fröhlich.” In fact, Kaufmann himself uses “joyful” (rather than “gay,” and much more appropriately) to translate “froh” in the important contemporaneous passage in the preface to *Genealogy* in which Nietzsche refers to his “frohe Zuversichtlichkeit” (which Kaufmann renders as “joyful assurance”) that his earlier ideas on the origins of our modern-day morality sprang from a “fundamental will of knowledge” (*GMP*:2). “Inquiry” may be bland, but it doesn’t buy trouble. And with “la gaya scienza” as a featured subtitle, the full title would have been lively enough. It would have been better still, however, for Kaufmann to have done as he did—and as everyone else does—in the case of *Ecce Homo* (and as perhaps should have been done with *Der Antichrist*): leave “Wissenschaft” untranslated, and call the book in English translation *The Joyful Wissenschaft*.

But Kaufmann did none of these things. He was a very combative person, with a good many hot buttons, and “gay” and “science” just happened to be two of them. He opted for *The Gay Science* as his title of choice not just to echo “la gaya scienza” but also out of a kind of edgy stubbornness (very characteristic of him), which in this instance took the form of an unwillingness to concede either of these words to their histories—and thereby to those by whom they have been appropriated. It is a problematic choice, made for problematic reasons. For better or worse, however, it would appear to have become the canonical rendering of the book’s title in English and seems here to stay.

## VI

Now to the translations themselves. Several things combine to make Kaufmann’s Nietzsche translations truly admirable and even rather wonderful. One is that Kaufmann, like Nietzsche, could really *write* and uses the English language very well—amazingly well, in fact, for someone for whom it was a second language. Another is that he had a good feeling for Nietzsche’s style and a knack for capturing it. The result is that, in his translations, he makes Nietzsche come alive

for the English-speaking reader, in a way that seems to me to be generally quite faithful to and reflective of the spirit and thrust of Nietzsche's own writing and thinking. In this respect, Kaufmann had no equal up to and during his own time, and probably has had no real rival since then.

What is less admirable, however, and less wonderful, is that Kaufmann takes liberties in what he does with Nietzsche's German texts, often choosing renderings that are questionable—sometimes with unfortunate consequences for the way Nietzsche comes across and is understood. It is quite possible that this is owing in part to Kaufmann's having translated so much material in such relatively brief periods of time: he may simply not have given as much thought to his many translation choices as might have been desirable. He also seems very frequently to have been motivated more by considerations of rhetorical effectiveness in English than by careful faithfulness to Nietzsche's texts (even where the resources of the English language and considerations of comprehensibility and style make greater faithfulness to them possible). At times, however, he goes further than that—to the point of engaging in some tendentious shading and even some covert bowdlerizing.

A few examples will have to suffice. First, let us consider Kaufmann's translation of the famous *BGE* 36, in which Nietzsche makes more of an effort than he does anywhere else in his published writings to suggest a kind of possible argument for the idea that what goes on in life and the world generally—"the world viewed from the inside," as he puts it—is to be conceived in terms of "'will to power' and nothing else" ("Wille zur Macht' und nichts ausserdem"). Much depends on how this section is construed. For that very reason much—for translation-dependent English-speaking readers—depends on the fine points of its translation. Kaufmann's translation is the one most of us grew up with, and its wording has become so familiar that many of us tend to assimilate our reading of other translations—and even our reading of the German text—to it.

It begins: "Gesetzt, daß nichts Anderes als real 'gegeben' ist als unsre Welt der Begierden und Leidenschaften [. . .]." Kaufmann renders this as "Suppose nothing else were 'given' as real except our world of desires and passions [. . .]." But "gesetzt, daß" means something stronger than "suppose." And Nietzsche writes "is 'given'" ("gegeben' *ist*"), not "were 'given'" (that would be "gegeben' *wäre*"). I understand Nietzsche to be saying something like "Let it be supposed that nothing other than our world of desires and passions is 'given' as real [. . .]."

Nietzsche uses "gesetzt" repeatedly in this section, setting out further conditions of his thought experiment, or hypothesis, or tentative case for his hypothesis. In one of them he writes, "Let it be supposed, finally, that it were to be possible [Gesetzt endlich, dass es gelänge] to explain our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of *one* basic form of willing [Einer Grundform des Willens]—namely of the will to power, wie es mein Satz ist [. . .]." Kaufmann's rendering of this last phrase as "as *my* proposition has it" is not as

direct as Nietzsche's phrase itself, which is better rendered as "as I assert" (or, more literally, "as is *my* proposition"). In that phrase, Nietzsche momentarily steps out of his hypothetical mode of speech, and expresses himself directly. (The emphasis is his.)

Then, having set the stage in this manner, Nietzsche proceeds to the following: "so hätte man damit sich das Recht verschafft alle wirkende Kraft eindeutig zu bestimmen als: Wille zur Macht." Kaufmann renders this as "Then one would have gained the right to determine *all* efficient force univocally as—*will to power*." But the phrase "so hätte man damit sich das Recht verschafft"—literally, "then one would thereby have earned oneself the right"—has the force of "then one *would thereby be* entitled," and not just "*would have* gained the right." The phrase "wirkende Kraft" means "active force"; rendering it as "efficient force" is not wrong, but it is less clear. The word "bestimmen" can and often does mean "determine," but in this context it more specifically means "characterize." The word "damit" ("therewith" or "thereby") is omitted. And the force of "eindeutig" is blunted by translating it as "univocally"; in this context it clearly means "unequivocally" or "unambiguously." In short, what Nietzsche is saying here is this: "then one would thereby be entitled to characterize [or "be justified in characterizing"] all active force unequivocally as: *will to power*."

Why did Kaufmann translate this crucial passage as he did? In my opinion, it is because he was attempting to soften its force. He would have preferred that Nietzsche had restricted his use of the idea of "will to power" to the domain of human psychology. He lamented Nietzsche's temptation to extend it further, into the interpretation of life and the world more generally. He may have been right to lament that temptation; but in my view he was all too tempted himself to shade his translation of passages such as this one in a way calculated to downplay the extent to which Nietzsche was prepared to commit himself in print to the interpretation of life and the world in terms of his conception of "will to power." I take Kaufmann's translation of *BGE* 36 to be a significant (but by no means unique) case in point. And I consider his readiness to do this sort of thing to compromise his Nietzsche translations and diminish the confidence one may have in them.

## VII

Let me now turn to another kind of case. In *GM* II:12 Nietzsche writes, against those for whom "life itself" is to be "defined as a more and more efficient inner adaptation to external conditions": "Damit ist aber das Wesen des Lebens verkannt, sein Wille zur Macht; damit ist der principielle Vorrang übersehn, den die spontanen, angreifenden, übergreifenden, neu-auslegenden, neu-richtenden und gestaltenden Kräfte haben [. . .]." Kaufman translates this as "Thus the

essence of life, its *will to power*, is ignored; one overlooks the essential priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and new directions”

This rendering leaves much to be desired and is unfortunate in a number of respects. “Das Wesen” can mean “the essence”; but particularly in the vocabulary of someone like Nietzsche, it is far better rendered as “the very nature” (or “reality”) in such a context, for it is the very nature or reality of life that Nietzsche is talking about. “Verkannt” means “unrecognized” or “missed” rather than “ignored.” “Der prinzipielle Vorrang” is better rendered not as “the essential priority” but rather as “the primary [“principal” or “basic”] precedence” or “primacy,” since “prinzipielle” does not mean “essential” and since “essential” is too suggestive (misleadingly) of “essences.”

Moreover, probably for the sake of making the English flow smoothly, Kaufmann provides a translation of the important last phrase that changes its meaning by changing its structure, which is a string of adjectives all modifying the term “Kräfte” (“forces”). He also makes a number of questionable but crucial translation decisions, with no warnings to the reader. In his translation the list divides the adjectives into some that indicate the *character* of the forces life involves and others (two of the most important ones) that are recast as (very problematic) descriptions of *what the forces do*. He thus has Nietzsche describing the forces as “spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces” and then saying that what these forces do is to “give new interpretations and directions.” But what Nietzsche actually does is simply to describe the forces as “spontanen, angreifenden, übergreifenden, neu-auslegenden, neu-richtenden und gestaltenden”—that is, “spontaneous, assertive, expansive, rearranging, redirecting and formative.”

This is no small matter. In particular, by rendering “neu-auslegenden” as “giving new interpretations” here (and variants of “auslegen” similarly elsewhere), Kaufmann contributed to and sanctioned the confused reading of Nietzsche that has long surrounded the use of the language of “interpretation” in such contexts. The word “auslegen” is commonly translated as “interpret” and treated as a virtual synonym of “interpretieren,” but it literally means “lay out” (“aus-legen”). Nietzsche’s use of the creatively artificial variant “neu-auslegenden” in this unusual context conceivably could be intended to pick up on either rendering. It seems to me that it is most plausibly construed here more in the literal sense than in the figurative and derivative sense, as having the more literal meaning of “newly laying out” or “laying out anew,” and that it is the simple root meaning of “auslegen” as “laying out” or “arranging” on which Nietzsche is drawing in employing the term and its variants in this and other such contexts. He does sometimes use “interpretieren” in such contexts as well; but that, I suggest, is a kind of “back formation” by way of their near interchangeability in contemporary usage with “auslegen.” “Auslegen” (rather than “interpretieren”) is predominant

in this context, and its root meaning of “laying out” or “arranging” is the key to Nietzsche’s great broadening of its meaning and scope.

Nietzsche now is commonly thought—thanks in part to Kaufmann’s decision simply to render the term “auslegen” (and its variants) as “interpret” (and its variants), without comment—to be advancing the strange thesis that all “laying out” or arranging (auslegen) that goes on in the world is to be construed on the model of “interpreting” in some rather strong familiar human sense of the word. But this seems to me to have the matter precisely backward. It is one thing to say that, in human life, “what construes” and “interprets” and “values” is ultimately something like what Nietzsche calls “our affects.” But it is quite another to take him—and translationally to represent him—as maintaining that anything and everything that happens in the world of power relations involves a version of the kind of thing *we* call “interpreting”—even if that does happen to be a standard translation of “auslegen.” The important point I take him actually to be making is that “interpreting” as we engage in it, even in the most refined of our intellectual activities, is fundamentally a kind of “laying out” akin to and derivative of the sort of arranging that goes on up and down the line throughout all of life and the world.

This of course is a matter of interpretive dispute. My present complaint about Kaufmann is that this is one of a number of important instances in which he made a translation decision without so much as a footnoted caveat to his English-speaking readers. And this was no mere inconsequential word choice. It was a decision that made a particular problematic reading and understanding of Nietzsche on a very important matter all too likely among those who got their Nietzsche through his translations, or through other translations in which the same choice was made that he thereby was ratifying—or prompting.

## VIII

Another major example of a problem with Kaufmann’s manner of translating Nietzsche, ironically, is the virtual inverse of my first one, expressed with reference to the example of his softening of Nietzsche’s language with respect to his “will to power” hypothesis in *BGE* 36. It is, in brief, that he also often translates Nietzsche in a way that makes him out to be more doctrinaire and dogmatic than he actually is. This too is a part of Kaufmann’s Nietzsche translation legacy that has long afflicted his interpretation in the English-language literature and that continues to do so to this day. Kaufmann rightly *describes* Nietzsche as a philosopher of “experiments,” but he *translates* him in ways that make him come across as a philosopher of *doctrines*. And this impression is reinforced both by his choice of texts in his “bible” for Nietzsche students (his *Portable Nietzsche*), in which preaching and polemics are predominant, and by the prominence he

gave to the *Will to Power* volume, consisting of material from the *Nachlaß* in which Nietzsche understandably enough shoots from the hip and seldom bothers to qualify the thoughts he is entertaining.

The problematic translation tendency I have in mind can be seen most vividly in Kaufmann's decision to translate Nietzsche's term "Lehre" most often as "doctrine." This German word *can* mean "doctrine," but it also can mean "theory," and it further can mean "teaching." Its verb form, "lehren," is one of Zarathustra's favorite words—as, perhaps most famously, when he proclaims, in the prologue, "Ich lehre euch den Übermensch" ("I teach you the overman"). The idea of the Übermensch is one of the things that Nietzsche has Zarathustra "teach" and that he discusses in his own voice as well. The idea of the "eternal recurrence" is another. And the idea of "the will to power" as the key to understanding ourselves, and perhaps also life and the world more generally, is a third.

These obviously are important ideas for Nietzsche—ideas that he takes very seriously and wants us to take very seriously, too. He sometimes uses the noun "Lehre" to refer to them, as well as using the verb "lehren" to refer to what he or Zarathustra does with them. But does any of this mean that it is appropriate and accurate to refer to them as *doctrines* of Nietzsche's and to translate "Lehre" as "doctrine" when he uses it? That is what Kaufmann does—not invariably but frequently enough that it has come almost to be taken for granted that these ideas have the status of "doctrines" for Nietzsche. This seems to me to be not just highly problematic but simply wrong—even though I do take Nietzsche to have been convinced of the tenability, plausibility, and soundness of his interpretation of life and the world in terms of the fundamental disposition he calls "will to power."

There are good textual reasons, in my opinion, for taking this interpretation to have the status for Nietzsche of a "theory" to which he subscribed, pertaining to the fundamental character of our human psychological reality at least and perhaps of biological and even cosmological reality as well. That is the way I would translate "Lehre" in this context. In the case of the Übermensch (for example, as "the meaning of the earth"), on the other hand, I would consider "teaching" to be the appropriate rendering, in view of the different status of this idea, as an image intended to help reorient our thinking about what we might best do with our human reality and possibility. I would treat the case of the "eternal recurrence" in more or less the same way—as a "Lehre" in the sense of a useful "teaching" (or teaching device) primarily employed to reorient and then test our fundamental disposition toward life rather than to convey something purported to be literally true about it, while recognizing that Nietzsche occasionally toyed (in a few notebook notes) with the *further* possibility of taking it seriously as a cosmological *theory* as well.

In none of the three cases, however, do I consider it appropriate to speak of a "doctrine" as that term is generally to be understood in English-language usage.

Zarathustra may be a teacher and may even be something of a preacher—but he is not doctrinaire. And the same is true of Nietzsche himself, only more so. Nietzsche never even comes close—certainly not in print—to proclaiming the ideas of the *Übermensch* and the “eternal recurrence” in a doctrinaire way, as having a literal truth that is beyond dispute. And while he does refer to his “will to power” interpretation of life and the world as “mein Satz” (“my proposition”) and (via Zarathustra) as “mein Wort” (“my word”) on the matter (Z:II “Self-Overcoming”), it clearly has the status of a hypothesis or theory for him, which he embraces and advances tentatively rather than dogmatically. He actually uses the term “Theorie” to refer to and characterize the status of his “will to power” idea on a number of occasions (e.g., *BGE* 259; *GM* II:12). I therefore take “theory” to be the appropriate rendering of “Lehre” in this context—particularly with Nietzsche’s abhorrence of dogmatism in mind, of which he makes such a point on many occasions (notably the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*).

I find it difficult to understand why Kaufmann did not do so as well. The fact of the matter, however, is that he opted for “doctrine.” So, for example, in *BGE* 23, in which Nietzsche is talking about his kind of “psychology,” he writes: “Dieselbe als Morphologie und Entwicklungslehre des Willens zur Macht zu fassen, wie ich sie fasse [. . .].” Kaufmann translates this as “To understand it as morphology and *the doctrine of the development of the will to power*, as I do.” But it would seem both more natural and more appropriate to render “Entwicklungslehre des Willens zur Macht” either as “developmental theory of the will to power” or as “theory of the development of the will to power.” Nietzsche is talking about a type of *inquiry*, after all, as “theory of knowledge” is a type of inquiry. There is no good reason to translate “-lehre” in “Entwicklungslehre” as “doctrine.” There is not even any good reason to characterize Nietzsche’s idea that what “psychology” ought to make the focus of inquiry is the fundamental disposition he calls “will to power,” morphologically and developmentally considered, as a “doctrine” he is proclaiming. He does characterize psychology as a cognitive enterprise that he conceives (grasps, understands) in this way (“wie ich sie fasse”), but that is hardly a doctrinal pronouncement.

When one stops to think about it, Nietzsche is hardly the sort of philosopher whose philosophical thinking can be considered to consist of or to revolve around a set of “doctrines.” Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, perhaps—but surely not the militantly antidogmatic Nietzsche! He would be appalled at the very idea of being so understood. Yet that has happened. It has happened under the influence of Heidegger, in Germany, and under the influence of Deleuze, in France. And it has happened in North America as well—at least partly under the influence of Kaufmann’s way of translating him in this crucial case. He made it seem so natural and unproblematic to talk of his “doctrines” that I myself have found it all too easy to slip into that way of speaking about some of his central ideas. I now see this as an unfortunate bad habit he encouraged that I and we all need to guard against and attempt to overcome.

## IX

Finally, there are cases in which Kaufmann translates Nietzsche in a manner that simply misrepresents or edits what he is saying and (what is worse) that appears to do so deliberately. I will give a single example, too extreme to be dismissed as a mere exercise of translational license and too glaring to be accidental. In the famous and important section of *Beyond Good and Evil* in which Nietzsche is talking about the “task” of “translating man back into nature” (BGE 230), he writes “unter solcher schmeichlerischen Farbe und Übermalung der schreckliche Grundtext homo natura wieder heraus erkannt werden muss.” Kaufmann’s translation of this passage reads “under such flattering colors and make-up as well, the basic text of *homo natura* must again be recognized.”

What is objectionable about this translation? It should be obvious: Kaufmann quite clearly decided to suppress Nietzsche’s characterization of “the basic text of *homo natura*” as “schrecklich”—that is, “terrible.” He no doubt was afraid that, if Nietzsche’s English-speaking readers knew that he thought of this “basic text” of our primordial “natural” nature in that way, they would be too likely to suppose that he was endorsing that “terribleness” and its unleashing. That of course would be a great misinterpretation of Nietzsche; but even if Kaufmann’s worry is well taken, that still would be no excuse for bowdlerizing Nietzsche’s text in that fashion. The way to deal with such a worry is to address it in a footnote, rather than to pretend that Nietzsche said no such thing. I find this misrepresentation of Nietzsche’s text particularly appalling and distressing because this is an important passage, Kaufmann’s rendering of which I have often quoted over the years, trusting that his renderings of Nietzsche’s texts could be relied on.

There may be few cases in Kaufmann’s Nietzsche translations that are as egregious as this one, but as I am continuing to discover, there are many cases in which he departs from fidelity to the German texts in ways that seem interpretively suspect and stylistically unnecessary. There are so many, in fact, that I have come to a sad conclusion: Kaufmann’s translations cannot be assumed to be reliable—particularly when they suggest interpretive claims with respect to Nietzsche’s views that depend upon the precise wording (and translational rendering) of particular passages from his texts.

The moral of this story, however, is not simply that *Kaufmann’s* translations should not be assumed to be trustworthy, when pursuing and arguing matters of Nietzsche interpretation and scholarship. I have found the same caution to be warranted in the case of Hollingdale’s translations as well. My counsel now would be that confidence should not be assumed to be warranted where any particular rendering is at issue in the case of *any* translator. The real moral of the story is that there simply is no substitute for checking the German, whenever anything of interpretive importance is at issue, in one’s study of

Nietzsche's texts as well as in one's citations from them. Even in the case of one's favorite translator, one's policy should be (in a once-famous phrase) to "trust but verify."

I would have no exceptions made to this rule—even where my own renderings of Nietzsche's words are concerned. Translations are no more (even in the best case) than conveniences, to enable those who need them to have access they otherwise would not have to the writings of those like Nietzsche whose thought matters but who wrote in another language. "The case of Kaufmann" has helped me to become convinced that, to realize this end, and also to cultivate our own textual awareness of what Nietzsche actually wrote as well as that of our readers, we who write about Nietzsche should make a practice of citing his texts in German, along with whatever English translations of them that we may use, a great deal more often than most of us have tended to do.

To be sure, editors often will resist this, and many of our readers will have no idea what to make of the German. They may even find its citation distracting and annoying. But some readers will appreciate and be able to make use of it—and this practice may have the effect of allowing more to come to be able to do so. In any event, to whatever extent it proves to be feasible, the citation of the German text as well as its rendering in English will make it easy for anyone who wishes and is able to do so to see how Nietzsche puts what one is talking about and citing; and this practice may also have the long-term effect of motivating more readers to acquire that ability.

## X

I have called attention to a number of problematic and worrisome features and consequences of Kaufmann's Nietzsche translations that are a part of his legacy, along with the great contributions to Nietzsche's English-language translation and reception that he also made. In Kaufmann as in Nietzsche himself, there is much that is admirable—and yet also much that is all-too-human and that needs to be "overcome." The latter undoubtedly is true of the rest of us as well, and few of us have done enough that is sufficiently admirable to compensate for and vindicate the rest. Nietzsche, in my opinion, was one of that few—and I would say that Kaufmann as his reinterpreter and translator was as well, warts and all. But it also is important now and then to pay attention to what is problematic in both of them, if we are to be worthy successors of either of them. That is what I have tried to do here—in a spirit that both of them shared and prized. I offer these remarks, therefore, not only as a critique but also in tribute.

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## NOTES

1. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950). It was subsequently published as a Meridian book (in paperback) by the World Publishing Company in 1956; the fourth edition was published by Princeton University Press in 1974.

2. *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Viking, 1954). Other Walter Kaufmann editions and translations of Nietzsche's writings cited or referred to in this essay include *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Vintage, 1966); *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*; *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Vintage, 1966); *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage, 1966); *Twilight of the Idols*, translated with R. J. Hollingdale, in *The Portable Nietzsche*; *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*; *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*; *The Will to Power*, translated with R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967).

3. It should be noted that, in this instance, Nietzsche employs the device of capitalizing a word—"Eine"—that would not ordinarily be capitalized to indicate emphasis rather than doing so by using extra spacing in Sperrung type (emphasis added by author). His text reads: "also nur, wie wir die Dinge verstehen, Eine Art von menschlicher Moral [ . . . ]." It should perhaps also be noted that Kaufmann takes the liberty of translating Nietzsche's simple "also" as "in other words" rather than simply as "thus" (as it usually is translated) and of translating "wie wir die Dinge verstehn" simply as "as we understand it," making him appear to be referring specifically to "herd animal morality" rather than saying "as we understand these things"—by which I take him to mean "as we understand the matter" under consideration, which is the plural character of "human moralities."