Nietzsche reception today

Pauline Johnson

> I want no 'believers'. I think I am too malicious to believe in myself; I never speak to masses. – I have a terrible fear that one day I shall be pronounced *holy*.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 1885

In 1952 Georg Lukács wrote one of the great denunciations of a major Western philosopher. *The Destruction of Reason* introduces Nietzsche as a vigorous campaigner in a bitter ideological war waged by the bourgeoisie against the historical ambitions of the European proletariat in the last decades of the nineteenth century.[1] Lukács describes Nietzsche as an astute witness to the cultural psyche and an uncanny diviner of the particular mix of needs experienced by the German intelligentsia throughout this turbulent period. Hungry for cultural rebirth yet fearful of social and political change, the nervous and confused intelligentsia discovered in Nietzsche's philosophy just the sort of mythologized images of a rebellious, creative spirituality it craved. As a receptacle for the malcontent consciousness and disappointed hopes of the intelligentsia, Nietzsche's philosophy functioned to drive this group further into a retreat from real historical processes, snapping any potential ties with the real bearers of cultural renewal – the European proletariat.

Lukács at this time refuses to be taken in by Nietzsche's explicit denials of the systematic character of his thinking. By building up a portrait of those elements which enabled this philosophy to perform a vital ideological role in the class struggles of its age, Lukács discovers its real coherence and system. His philosophy performed the social task of 'rescuing' and 'redeeming' the German intelligentsia. It offered:

> a road which avoided the need for any break, or indeed any serious conflict, with the bourgeoisie. It was a road whereby the pleasant moral feeling of being a rebel could be sustained and even intensified, whilst a 'more thorough', 'cosmic biological' revolution was enticingly projected in contrast to the 'superficial', 'external' social revolution.[2]

For the later Lukács, unsystematic Nietzsche is simply a disguise through which the organizing ideological significance of his work must be discerned.

In the deluge of recent literature on Nietzsche, Lukács's sweeping condemnation is generally passed over in silence or used to illustrate the inadequacy of a totalizing ideological reading of this supposedly open-ended and anti-systematic philosophy. Although it was written only some fifty years ago, the philosophy of history and the political commitments which inspire Lukács's Nietzsche critique speak to a contemporary audience as from a dead epoch. This denunciation posits a reader already convinced that the realization of humanity's telos is self-evidently identified with the socialist cause. In the wake of the collapse of Eastern-bloc socialism, and with the rise of new social movements, such a reader has become virtually extinct. To late-twentieth-century critics of modern society, the very radicalness of Nietzsche's attack on the key values of modernity is the essence of his appeal. In particular, Nietzsche's reflection on knowledge and power, with its fundamental premiss that reason is nothing more than a perverted and disguised will to power, has been embraced by a generation discontented with the fruits of Enlightenment. In the face of the intensified, multidimensional vision of modernity's 'iron cage', modern readers of Nietzsche have found a seeming ally in their suspicions regarding all humanist assertions of solidarity and all appeals to humanity's telos. Nietzsche's attack on the levelling image of equality harboured by the Christian bourgeois tradition has seemed to some radical critics of late modern society to voice their own crisis of faith. Foucault, for example, has described his own critique of the disciplinary society as 'quite simply Nietzschean' in motivation.

In Nietzsche's repudiation of the principle of equality and in his loathing of the 'herd', the committed communist Lukács discovers a backward-looking repudiation of the positive achievements of modernity. By contrast, contemporary interpreters have tended to seek in Nietzsche an advocate of their own deep misgivings about the levelling suppression of the different, the displaced, and those marginalized by the abstract liberal conception of equality. More than this, a number of contemporary interpreters have sought to brush Nietzsche's philosophy against the grain to discover in it the seeds of a new conception of social co-operation; one capable of sustaining, not suppressing, a commitment to the expression of positive difference.

The following article investigates the efforts of a range of recent interpretations concerned to establish Nietzsche's relevance to us. Against the totalizing character of Lukács's reading, these interpretations typically suppose themselves uninterested in the disclosure of the essential truth of Nietzsche's texts: theirs is an avowedly appropriative interest concerned to harness aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy to the clarification and elucidation of contemporary concerns and ideologies. Whilst recognition of an ongoing hermeneutical struggle between the texts and their modern interpreters is signalled through the invariably strategic character of these readings, many important lapses in the realization of their manifestly anti-totalizing intentions can be discovered in the work of this recent generation of Nietzsche interpreters.

The redemptive paradigm

A significant number of contemporary interpreters, including Steven Ascheim and Keith Ansell-Pearson, have pointed to the apparent lack of any organizing political and ideological agenda in Nietzsche's writings.[3] Such perspectives move to centre-stage Nietzsche's own well-known disavowal of all system-building aspirations. As he says in *Twilight of the Idols*: 'I mistrust all systematisers and avoid them.' The will to a system', Nietzsche adds, 'is a lack of integrity.'[4] Again, for the current generation of his interpreters, Nietzsche's aphoristic style is seen as a further manifestation of his antagonism to all systematic intentions. The temptation of modern philosophies to offer themselves as a 'home' to the restless modern spirit was the very last thing Nietzsche had in mind. His work was rather to bear witness to this endless quest. 'Considering that the multiplicity of inward states is exceptionally large in my case', Nietzsche wrote, 'I have many stylistic possibilities – the most multifarious art of style that has ever been at the disposal of one man.'[5]

These contemporary attempts to suggest the essentially anti-systematic character of Nietzsche's thought seek further evidence by appealing to the supposed extraordinarily diverse history of Nietzsche reception. Ascheim's study of the *Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1880–90* chronicles the remarkable variegated history of Nietzsche's reception in modern Germany. According to Ascheim, the ideological and political import of Nietzsche's works has flowed freely from the texts in response to the various rival interests and projects invested in them. Nietzsche's writings have been exploited in the name of an extraordinary array of seemingly mutually antagonistic political and ideological causes: anarchist, expressionist, futurist, nationalist, Nazi, religious, sexual libertarian, Volkish and Zionist. The congeniality of his writings to so many contradictory tendencies and interests reflects, as Ascheim sees it, a central property of Nietzsche's post-Hegelian thought and method: his rejection of systematizers and systems.[6]

The weight of direct textual evidence is supposed, then, to favour a reading which stresses the radical ideological openness of Nietzsche's writings. Ascheim concludes that, 'There should be no set portrait of the "authentic" Nietzsche, nor dogmatic certainty as to his original intent. Only a *Receptiongeschichte* sensitive to the open-ended, transformational nature of the Nietzsche legacy will be able to appreciate its rich complexity.'[7] There can be no serious argument with this suggestion that each historically significant reading constructs its own essential Nietzsche through the distinctive preoccupations, questions and interests it brings to bear. Yet recognition of the creative dimension essential to the process of interpreting all great philosophies needs to be grasped by each reading as the assumption of a peculiar burden: as the recognition of an obligation to seek clarification of the character of its own particular motivations and interests. The significance of the abandonment of the search for an essential, systematic Nietzsche has been understood in quite contrary terms in some of the recent Nietzsche literature. In these cases, rejection of the idea of 'essential' Nietzsche does not provoke a sensitivity to the creative aspect of the hermeneutical process but is, rather, understood in the light of a discovery of the apparent anti-systematic, open-ended character of his philosophy. Here the repudiation of 'essential' Nietzsche stumbles upon his 'truth': upon a vantage point from which all alternative, merely ideological, readings might be dissolved.

Several of Nietzsche's contemporary interpreters thus celebrate the open-ended and avowedly anti-systematic character of his texts as the discovery of the dominant commitment in Nietzsche, and see this as carrying an implicit radical pluralist potential. Paul Patton, for example, supposes a strong congruence between the anti-systematic character of Nietzsche's writings and the alleged radical pluralism of his politics. Once this essential Nietzsche is recognized, the contemporary reader can appreciate as mere 'masks' of an ill-judging 'coarseness and brutality' those formulations in his philosophy which might seem to contradict this idea of a democratizing Nietzsche.[8]

Again, Keith Ansell-Pearson chides as a misconstruction all 'moralistic' readings of Nietzsche's texts which overlook the contemporaneity of his supposed dominant commitment to the idea of human plurality and diversity. Ansell-Pearson is able to draw on a degree of textual support for his contention that, 'The overriding aim of Nietzsche's philosophy is to promote autonomy in his readers.'[9] These sorts of motivations are, he claims, very evident in a range of Nietzsche's explicit exhortations to his readers.

> Seduced by my kind and style,
> you follow and travel after me?
> Go after your own self faithfully –
> and thus you follow me – slowly! slowly![10]

Rather than interpreting this and other such remarks as an attempt to target a self-reflexive reader who might be equal to the task set before them by his philosophy, Ansell-Pearson finds in such statements evidence of Nietzsche's commitment to autonomy as a universal political ideal. Again we find reassuring confirmation of Nietzsche's essential cultural and political contemporaneity. This kind of redemptive reading is particularly evident amongst the range of contemporary feminist intepretations of Nietzsche.

Feminist readings

The current interest in Nietzsche's writings displayed by many feminist philosophers is not without historical precedent. Motifs borrowed from Nietzsche's works played a definitive, galvanizing role in strands of that avant-garde feminism which surfaced in *fin de siècle* Europe. This early feminism sensed an apparent sympathy between its own revolt against the 'gilt cage' of bourgeois domesticity and the dynamic counter-cultural project of perpetual self-revolution it discovered in Nietzsche. Conceiving themselves as victims of a social world sanctioned by an early Enlightenment commitment to order and to harmonious propriety, these radical feminists embraced Nietzsche's mocking critique of a deadening rationalism. Borne on the wave of an avant-garde spirit of vigorous individualism, Nietzscheanism, for this component of early-twentieth-century feminism, seemed to articulate its own buoyant mood of counter-cultural dissent and to join with it in exultant 'battle against the soullessness, the deadness, laziness and meanness of the philistine world'.[11]

Contemporary feminism has made rather different kinds of investments in Nietzsche. For the earlier romantic generation, it was the individualistic temper of Nietzsche's call for spiritual renewal and the symbolic, destructive character of his thrust against rigid bourgeois conformity which struck a sympathetic chord. More recent feminism has, by contrast, looked to Nietzsche to augment and philosophically refine its own struggles against a classical liberal conception of the subject and as a potential ally in its quest to build a new, non-exclusionary, image of social co-operation. In the very teeth, then, of Nietzsche's own tirades against feminism (seen by him as a child of a loathed liberal egalitarianism),[12] recent feminists have tried to recruit Nietzsche to their efforts to allow the claims of a marginalized feminine difference to be heard.

In Nietzsche's repudiation of the idea that behind all action there is to be found a constant, stable, fixed ego, Rosalyn Diprose, for example, finds pointed evidence of a 'positive mode of resistance to social domination and normalization' which is 'especially pertinent to the concerns of feminists and their attempts to struggle against essentialism'.[13] Here it is the relentlessness of his attack on a normative, liberal conception of the self, coupled with the fact that this assault appears to be conducted in the name of some more disparate, more radical, conception of autonomy, which appears attractive. The radicalness of Nietzsche's condemnation of the concept of reason has, in particular, appealed to those contemporary feminists who have identified the appeal to reason itself with the domination and domestication of all alterior forms of subjectivity.

For the most part, this redemptive feminist strategy has sought to marginalize or absorb the importance of Nietzsche's tirades against women in general and feminists in particular in the name of some supposedly more fundamental sympathies. Luce Irigaray's full-length study is most interesting in this respect.[14] It is, seemingly, precisely the frustrations encountered by a redemptive feminist reading of his philosophy which

inspires the musings of Irigaray's 'marine lover' of Friedrich Nietzsche. Irigaray's feminine self speaks as one seeking to cut herself loose from all imposed, normative conceptions of the self. And this new femininity-in-process sees a powerful ally in Nietzsche's attack on the will-to-power covertly expressed through the liberal humanist discourse on 'Man'. This explosive critique of a normalizing Christian conception of the self seemed to Irigaray to promise the road to an ethics of difference: the path to an intersubjectivity in which the circuit of *ressentiment* between master and slave, partners in domination and subordination, is replaced by mutual respect for difference and for the principle of human plurality. Irigaray initially welcomes the prospects of a union between the insights of a contemporary feminism already revelling in the newly discovered liberty of a subjectivity released from any negative construction of itself and the philosopher of unbound subjectivity – Friedrich Nietzsche. As the marine lover sees it,

> endless rapture awaits whoever trusts the sea. For as she rises and falls, so one's rapture swells and sinks. Whether the sea is rising or falling, nothing changes in the enchantment of living – moving about endlessly. And does it matter if the sea is pouring over the beaches or sinking back into its bed? Doesn't the one will the other, and the other the one? And isn't it the passage from one to the other that makes for eternal good fortune?[15]

In the end Irigaray's hopes are dashed. She is finally persuaded that Nietzsche cannot share her commitment to an ideal of social co-operation based on the principle of a reciprocity between asymmetrical others. Irigaray adopts the persona of the aggrieved lover chastising her suitor for his want of resolve in partnering her quest for a new way-of-being-together. 'And if your hour ends when mine begins, that gives me no pleasure. For I love to share whereas you want to keep everything to yourself.'[16] She eventually recognizes that Nietzsche cannot follow her in her desire for respectful communication between particular concrete others. In the end, Nietzsche's subjects make themselves autonomous agents through a process of self-assertion *against* the other. And the idea of eternal recurrence confers a quasi-metaphysical character on this agonistic construction of difference. David Krell points out that, according to Irigaray's reading of Nietzsche, 'The sacrifice he makes to the Idea [of eternal recurrence] is inscribed in this – that he preferred the Idea to an ever provisional openness to a female other.'[17] A mounting frustration at the anti-utopian psychology which seemingly typifies Nietzsche's so-called 'free spirit' becomes evident in the course of Irigaray's troubled, one-sided conversation with Nietzsche. Yet this frustration does not provoke a discussion of the particularity of her own feminist concerns and their distinct motivations. On the one hand, Irigaray unmistakably signals her hermeneutical struggles with Nietzsche; a sensitivity both expressed and defended by the ballad-epic character of her address. This literary contrivance highlights the non-identity between Irigaray's own perceived interests and the authorial persona, Nietzsche, that she constructs. Yet, although Nietzsche is always addressed by Irigaray as 'other', the genre norms of the ballad-romance typically tell a narrative, not of the movement to a greater self-consciousness, but of longing for release from painful estrangement from the loved

object. Irigaray gets swept up in this longing for reconciliation; a longing expressed by her as a lament for Nietzsche's estrangement from his own essential possibilities. The desired union could have been realized, had Nietzsche only proven himself adequate to those essential potentialities discovered by his marine lover.

Irigaray's study clearly seeks a reading strategy capable of capturing the distinctiveness of her interpretative relation to Nietzsche's texts. By contrast, several other redemptive readings refuse to recognize their own hermeneutic activity in their identification of an essential feminist Nietzsche. These interpretations acknowledge no real resistance to a feminist reading determined to save an essentially 'sympathetic' Nietzsche from the misapprehensions provoked by his apparently misogynistic utterances. The infamous remarks in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* come in for particular attention. 'Are you visiting women? Do not forget your whip', advises Zarathustra's elderly female companion.[18] According to Burgard, Tirrell and others, such statements should not be read as expressions of Nietzsche's own unreasoned, passionate contempt for women. For Tirrell, the whip is not a register of a coercive relationship between men and women.[19] It signals, rather, the 'pathos of distance' between the sexes.[20] This register of a necessary distance appears, she maintains, guided by a commitment to an essentially pluralistic image of interaction between the sexes. The whip is invoked as a rhetorical device which demands recognition of an unbridgeable gulf between the sexes. This affirmation of the hiatus between gendered cultures promises to sever the 'power of naming' through which patriarchal constraints have operated in modern societies.

Such an attempt to establish the relevance of Nietzsche's philosophy to a contemporary feminist agenda acknowledges only the terrain of Nietzsche's own presumed intentions as the appropriate grounds upon which to prosecute its arguments. Convinced of its own clairvoyant access to the essential motivations of Nietzsche's philosophy, this totalizing interpretation construes as mere rhetorical amplification those various formulations in his texts which might suggest an alternative account of the import of his views on the relations between the sexes.[21]

The critique of liberalism

The argument developed in Mark Warren's major study, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, illustrates further the main motivations for – and difficulties confronting – a redemptive reading of Nietzsche. Warren asks us to recognize that there are textual evidences for a 'gentle' and a 'bloody' Nietzsche. Warren's gentle, post-modern, Nietzsche is opposed to the repressive consequences of liberalism's reliance on a merely abstract conception of the subject to underpin its commitment to the principle of universal human rights.[22] Warren is persuaded that a shared critique of the repressive effect of this image of normative subjectivity is an important bridge between Nietzsche and post-modern interests. He formulates this shared perspective in the following terms: 'Because liberals put a metaphysical placeholder in the space of the individual, they failed to theorize this space. As a result they justified liberal forms of the state in terms of an historically conditioned effect mistaken for a universal essence.'[23]

'Bloody Nietzsche', by contrast, is the engaged political thinker, who gives to his doctrine of the will-to-power a distinctly essentializing and anti-egalitarian significance. The concept of will-to-power describes a quintessential human drive to self-production through mastery, exploitation and subjection of all otherness.[24] This trademark Nietzschean concept seems to be sharply at odds with the preoccupations of the 'gentle', 'post-modern' Nietzsche who seeks to repudiate all metaphysics in the name of a radical historicism. With a view to resolving this tension, Warren argues that the metaphysical overtones of the theory are to be jettisoned as belonging to Nietzsche's supposed inessential pre-modern political inclinations. The theory of the will-to-power can, then, be redescribed in historicizing terms as a rendering of that contingent, culturally produced drive whereby each modern individual feels called upon to produce a unique destiny and personality as an ongoing creative act. Nietzsche's concept of the will-to-power can thus be seen to provide the foundations upon which a positive alternative to a repudiated liberal-humanist formulation of the idea of universal rights might be built.[25]

It is not, however, clear that this attempt to redeem Nietzsche's will-to-power for a contemporary critique of liberalism finally succeeds in shaking off the 'bloody' aspects of a Nietzschean world-view identified by Warren. Its principled commitment to the idea of universal human rights, underpinned by the idea of a formal equality between abstractly conceived subjects, equips liberalism with a seeming critical standard against which appeals to the special priority of any particular need claim might be contested. By jettisoning the idea of formal equality between abstract subjects, Warren's construction of the principle of rights has no basis on which to contest a hierarchical

ranking of need claims. If our humanity is recognized by others as the achievement of the transformative force of our will, then it would seem that a contestation over conflicting need claims might appropriately appeal to differential rights scaled in accordance with our degree of 'achieved' humanity.

Up until now, we have looked at attempts to rescue Nietzsche's texts from a variety of political difficulties. But what of the hermeneutical struggle being waged by readings which stress the aesthetic as opposed to the moral-ideological impulses of Nietzsche's works?

A reception-aesthetic approach

Amongst the several recent attempts to give an account of the aestheticist character of Nietzsche's texts, the best known is probably Alexander Nehamas's study *Life as Literature*.[26] Nehamas discovers two related dimensions to Nietzsche's aestheticizing view: first, the so-called pan-aesthetic world-view which insists on the primacy of an aesthetic understanding of the world on the model of the literary text; second, Nietzsche's insistence on an aesthetic rather than moral attitude towards the task of individual self-development. It is this principled contest between art and morality and its supposed consequences which Nehamas wants to chart and to present as grounds for an aesthetic reception of Nietzsche's work. Nehamas points out that, for Nietzsche, unlike his mentor Schopenhauer, the death of God means only the end of the *self*-justification of the world; it does not mean that the world can no longer be justified. The quest for justification and for self-justification is meat and drink to the people who inhabit Nietzsche's world. What mode of justification will they choose: moral or aesthetic? This, for Nietzsche, remains the vital question. Underpinning Nietzsche's vigorous attacks on the moral attitude, Nehamas discerns a determined effort to repel the will-to-power of the modern masses. The moral attitude seeks legitimacy for a particular will-to-power through the universalizing discourse of 'the rights of man'. It seeks to represent the envious, materialistic standpoint of the masses as the articulation of quintessentially human values. Through moral self-justification, the masses proclaim the tyranny of their own suffocating, egalitarian values as the end of tyranny, the end of prejudice:

> the Herd man of Europe today gives himself the appearance of being the only permissible kind of man and glorifies his attributes which make him tame, easy to get along with and useful to the herd, as if they were truly human virtues, namely public spirit, benevolence, industriousness, moderation modesty, indulgence and pity.[27]

Against the moral attitude, intended only to support the weak, Nietzsche, according to Nehamas, posits an aesthetic relation to the world; an attitude which enables the strong to live. In contrast to the response of the intimidated masses, strong, free spirits react to the news of the death of God as a welcome invitation to fashion a world for themselves.[28] Free spirits encounter the world as a text in relation to which they are paradoxically positioned as both reader/interpreter and author/creator. Unlike the moral attitude, the aesthetic attitude construes its interpretations not as revelations of universal truths but as creations which make the world livable for free spirits. The free spirit, an artist who fashions a world for his or her own purposes, does not express an aesthetic disdain for life. This is an attitude conducive to the promotion of a particular kind of life: the life of 'higher men' for whom the existence which seeks justification in the moral attitude holds no appeal.[29]

The motivation for Nehamas's interpretation is best understood as a special case of those earlier discussed redemptive investments in his texts. Both of these types of reading are interested in salvaging an alternative image of ideal social interaction from the ruins of Nietzsche's attack on the levelling image of social solidarity harboured by the moral perspective. Nehamas insists, however, that in Nietzsche only the amoralism of the aesthetic attitude seeks to supplant the hegemony of a levelling morality. Nietzsche does not, Nehamas points out, want to replace the Christian morality with a positive code of moral conduct of his own. It is, on this interpretation, pointless and misleading to seek in Nietzsche new substantive principles capable of guiding social co-operation in the modern world. Yet, whilst Nietzsche does not describe a positive morality, 'this does not mean that he remains totally silent on the question of how to act and live.'[30] Nietzsche's main objection to morality is its absolutism: the fact that it exhibits what he calls 'the worst of tastes the taste for the unconditional'. Against the absolutism of morality, Nietzsche, in Nehamas's interpretation, uses the expressive, communicative mode of the aesthetic to evoke the possibilities of a different, a better, way of being in the world. Nietzsche's texts are, Nehamas claims, like works of art themselves, 'beyond good and evil'. Their literary character upholds the aesthetic relation as the ground upon which norms of human interaction that defy the authoritarian solidarities of all moral codes can be formulated.

Nietzsche's works achieve, it seems, the perfect reconciliation between the preoccuptions of a Platonic aesthetic focused on the truth value of the art object

and the reception aesthetic continuation of an Aristotelian concern with art as a way of promoting emotions and forms of behaviour. The aesthetic character of the reception seen to be appropriate to Nietzsche's texts invokes an imaginative comprehension (not endorsement) of the world-disclosing acts of others. The aesthetic mode of the reception sets up a relationship between reader and the text which complements and reinforces that central 'truth' of Nietzsche's philosophy that calls upon a range of argumentative and rhetorical means to persuade us that the quest for all consensus is injurious to the health of the animal driven by the will-to-power.

Nehamas believes that, once seen through the prism of its purely aesthetic status, the world evoked by Nietzsche appears inspired by strongly pluralistic motivations. Yet, it is not in the end entirely plausible to posit the aesthetic status of Nietzsche's texts as the bearer of their ideological significance. The ideological significance attributed by Nehamas to the aesthetic mode of reception appropriate to Nietzsche's texts is actually underpinned by his prior assessment of the ideological content of the world represented by the philosopher Nietzsche. According to the reception aesthetic standpoint adopted by Nehamas, the unique otherness of the world self-consciously disclosed by the poet Nietzsche establishes the literary character of his work. This 'otherness' posited by Nehamas as characteristic of the modern reader's experience of the world evoked by Nietzsche is clearly meant, however, as an ideological judgement. The modern public, Nehamas supposes, encounters in Nietzsche a world organized according to imperatives and values which appear essentially alien. In spite of everything, it seems that Nehamas finds a core of essential value commitments promoted in Nietzsche's philosophy.

The philosophical, rather than merely literary, side of Nietzsche's writing is apparent in the receptive relations set up by the texts. Nietzsche constantly searches for an audience capable of assenting to his central propositions. Zarathustra makes the point explicit: 'I do not speak to the masses.'[31] A disinterested participation in the world evoked by the work of art is not what Nietzsche is after. Nietzsche, as Nehamas admits, seeks a reader who might be galvanized by the text. He looks forward to that time 'when some select people will realize that they need not be bound by the same rules that govern the rest of the world. Perhaps these are the people for whom [he] is writing...'[32] The value commitments outlined in the texts demand our evaluation, and the evocation of the merely literary character of Nietzsche's world cannot ultimately shield a modern audience from this burden.

Foucault's Nietzsche: the historicization of life

Nehamas insists that in Nietzsche the aesthetic attitude is contrasted not with the principle of life but with a moral perspective on the world. This understanding of the world as a work of art appears as the 'higher' attitude: an attitude open only to free spirits able to dispense with the security of the dogmatic code. Nietzsche's clear interest in using his texts to mobilize a spiritually bifurcated humanity invests them with an intentionality which robs them of the disinterest essential to the aesthetic. For a number of other interpreters, however, the rivalry between the moral code and the aesthetic attitude described by Nietzsche remains the most fertile ground upon which we might begin to perceive an alternative to those coercive patterns of interaction which, they suppose, dominate all forms of modern intercourse. The later Foucault has, for example, sought to use a Nietzschean-style construction of an opposition between the aesthetic and the moral attitudes to outline not the shape of a spiritually bifurcated humanity but the contours of two distinct understandings of patterns of self-constitution retrievable in modern society.[33]

As Foucault sees it: 'The search for a form of morality acceptable to everybody, in the sense that everybody should submit to it, strikes me as catastrophic.'[34] In the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault turns his attention to 'technologies of the self' and draws a distinction between those processes of self-regulation geared to normalization and those ethical techniques aimed at living a beautiful life. In particular, he perceives the struggle between the aesthetic and the moral attitudes as a contest between two conflicting images of social interaction. In contrast to those technologies which provoke the self to constitute itself in accordance with a system of rules posited as universal, the aesthetic attitude, which enjoins a commitment to the elaboration of the beautiful life, proposes a mode of communicative interaction which refuses all oppressive solidarities. Foucault describes the aesthetic attitude as one which permits the self to treat the harmonious development of a unique personality as the telos of its own individual existence. 'Couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?', he asks. 'Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?... From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think

that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art.'[35]

Foucault clearly endorses a kind of pan-aestheticism which seeks not merely to articulate the specific character of the aesthetic attitude but to promote the aesthetic as an alternative to moral judgement: as the principle through which forms of existence are understood and justified. This Nietzschean-inspired pan-aestheticism contrives a contestation between the aesthetic judgement and the supposed repressive normativity of moral codes. To critics of this revival of a pan-aestheticism, it seems, however, that the universalization of the aesthetic principle, in which self-expression and self-development appear as the telos of all action, carries its own clear normativity. Richard Wolin points out here that the pan-aesthetic attitude finally confers normativity on all those instrumentalizing forms of interaction through which heroic individuality is able constantly to extend its own capacities and insist on its own uniqueness.[36]

Foucault's attempt to replace an old (moral) Enlightenment with a new (aesthetic) Enlightenment rationalization of the world seeks a democratization of Nietzsche's categories of the self. The aesthetic attitude is now posited as universally available to all those rebellious selves who respond to Foucault's call for a repudiation of the normalizing impositions of the moral code. This attempted appropriation of Nietzsche's pan-aestheticism suggests an important lapse in hermeneutical suspicion. The aristocratism of Nietzsche's distinction between the aesthetic and the moral attitudes will not be checked by this attempt to open the aesthetic to all with a distaste for the life regulated by the moral code. After all, as Nietzsche plainly saw, once freed from its specificity as a sphere, the aesthetic properly describes a quite particular type of subjectivity whose heroic self-assertion cannot, and (surely Foucault would want to add) ought not, insist on its normative status.

Rorty's Nietzsche: the poeticization of culture

Whereas Richard Wolin, Axel Honneth and others object to the specifically aesthetic character of Foucault's Nietzschean-inspired attempt to uncover an alternative to Enlightenment rationality,[37] Richard Rorty understands the problem of Nietzsche's aestheticism in rather different terms.[38] The challenge of the Critical Theory tradition to a Nietzschean pan-aestheticism does not, in his opinion, go far enough. For Rorty, the problem with Nietzschean pan-aestheticism is that it still clings to an old metaphysical inclination to seek eternal justification for contingent historio-cultural judgements about the desirability of given social arrangements.

Rorty's attempt to reclaim Nietzsche for contemporary political theory is in marked contrast to the approaches outlined above. Both the redemptive and the aestheticizing readings of Nietzsche seek, by divergent means, to extract a substantive vision from Nietzsche's philosophy adequate to a contemporary interest in evolving new images of social co-operation in a pluralistic modernity. Rorty, by contrast, would stress Nietzsche's role as midwife to our own historicizing understanding of the role of philosophy.[39] Nietzsche, the great nineteenth-century historicist, has been an inspiration for all attempts to put an end to the traditional but chimerical quest for absolute knowledge, for pure objectivity and an external perspective. Ironically enough, as Rorty sees it, for a late-twentieth-century public, the implications of this radically historicizing consciousness has lent itself to an expanded commitment to those precepts of classical liberalism which Nietzsche himself so despised.

Rorty embraces what he describes as 'the poeticization of culture' which has flowed from the collapse of metaphysics. The dominance of a historicizing perspective has ushered in a cultural revolution in twentieth-century life in which any attempt to disavow the contingent, produced character of all life orientations becomes increasingly difficult.[40] According to Rorty, the poeticization of culture needs to be grasped by each individual as an opportunity to create the telos of their own existence. Yet, the late-twentieth-century historicist must reject the Foucauldian option which seeks in Nietzsche's elaboration of the aesthetic principle an heir to the lost certainties of metaphysical 'truths'. The contemporary historicist looks, rather, to those values and ideals which the real flesh-and-blood men and women of modern democracies have conferred with an alleged normative essentiality. Coming to terms with the Nietzschean historicist revolution in philosophy means, then, a commitment to the role of contemporary philosopher as interpreter and advocate of that fragile primacy of the liberal values of universal justice and equality which has taken shape in the modern imaginary.

Rorty particularly insists here on the centrality of the idea of differentiation of the spheres to the ideals of liberalism.[41] He specifically affirms the primacy of a differentiation between the public and the private spheres. Rorty decisively rejects, then, Foucault's efforts to raise the norms of the aesthetic to the level of a general principle with the supposed capacity of

replacing the oppressive solidarities of the moral code. In his view, it is only by confining the aesthetic principle to the private sphere (a domain in which citizens can be as privatistic, 'irrationalist' and aestheticist as they please) that we can ensure that this attitude has a complementary, not competitive, relationship with a liberal democratic culture.[42]

But Rorty further wants to show that an aesthetic attitude can be recruited to extend and to radicalize an interpretation of the universalistic value commitments of a liberal democratic culture. Foucault rejects the solidarities of a liberal democratic culture which he supposes cluster around images of the normativity of particular kinds of subjectivities. Rorty, by contrast, thinks that the inclusiveness of these universalistic ideals can be constantly expanded by drawing upon that capacity for an imaginative understanding of the worlds inhabited by other selves which is fostered by the aesthetic attitude. In my utopia, says Rorty, human solidarity is to be achieved

> not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people. Such increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to marginalize people different from ourselves by thinking 'They do not feel as we would,' or 'There must always be suffering, so why not let them suffer.'[43]

Rorty appears particularly conscious of the hermeneutical processes at play in his relations with Nietzsche. His project to defend and radicalize a historically accrued liberal democratic culture always remains explicitly Rorty's own. This Nietzsche appropriation seeks to specify plausible terms on which the ideas of this great philosophical opponent of a liberal democratic culture can be conscripted into service; serving to clarify and to radicalize our own formulations of this, as Rorty sees it, momentous political and cultural achievement of modern times. By grasping the contingent historicity of our own horizons, we can appropriate sympathetic aspects of Nietzsche whilst maintaining our hermeneutical distance. We choose our Nietzsche in terms of our own projects and interests. Rorty, Agnes Heller points out, insists that 'We liberals ... should read Nietzsche as an author of self-realization and not as a public philosopher. We have to read Nietzsche from the standpoint of self-realization because it is only then we can like him.'[44] Yet this strategy, which insists that we encounter only the Nietzsche explicitly put there by us, has implications at odds with other fundamental motivations in Rorty's reading of Nietzsche. For, if you always read a work in the way that benefits you most, you can hardly hope to recover that experience of solidarity forged through 'increasing sensitivity to unfamiliar sorts of people' which lies at the heart of Rorty's own idea of utopia.

In the early 1950s Lukács came to Nietzsche's philosophy ready armed with his own prized ideological weapons. Far from approaching the texts as the terrain of a known enemy, Nietzsche reception today typically seeks to fashion reading strategies designed to yield a Nietzsche relevant to the egalitarian/pluralistic persuasions of the modern reader. Yet it seems that Lukács's Nietzsche, fierce opponent of the democratizing ambitions of the 'herd', will not finally allow himself to be completely denied. The contrived character of the range of strategies for reading Nietzsche available today is indicative not only of our particular hermeneutical difficulties (how can Nietzsche be understood by us?) but also reflects continuing ideological anxieties (how are we to counter the threat embedded in Nietzsche's texts?). We don't play any longer with the cast of Lukács's characters, but the ideological significance of the problem which Nietzsche presents for us today is still, I suggest, evident in the strategic character of our readings.

Symptomatic of a perceived threat in his philosophy to currently valued ideas, the contrived strategies elaborated by a new generation of his interpreters typically seek to produce a Nietzsche we can live with. These strategic readings recognize, at least implicitly, that we cannot live with a Nietzsche untamed. How much of Nietzsche's world can be dissolved in the solution of our own contemporary value-ideas? This appears to be the criterion by which many of the current round of interpreters want their achievements assessed. I suggest, however, that we should ask rather more of them. We need, that is, to understand why Nietzsche manifestly still provokes ideological unease in a modern readership. This sense of a 'horizonal clash', typically disavowed by strategies designed to 'deal' with Nietzsche, presents itself to us as an opportunity, not merely for that moment of imaginative solidarity with worlds inhabited by others, described by Rorty, but for that equally vital process of self-clarification which attends a knowing refusal of worlds that extend such an invitation.

Notes

1. Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer, Merlin Press, 1980 (first published by Luchterhand Verlag, Berlin, 1962).
2. Ibid., p. 317.
3. Steven E. Ascheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1992; and Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.
4. See Ascheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy*, p. 8.
5. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Why I Write Such Excellent Books', *Ecce Homo*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 74.
6. Ascheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy*, ch. 1. Of course, whether this multitude of interpretations are derivable from Nietzsche's style is open to question. There exists a vast variety of interpretations of systematic thinkers from Plato to Marx.
7. Ibid., p. 4.
8. Paul Patton, 'Introduction' to *Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory*, Routledge, London, 1993.
9. Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche*, p. 21.
10. Nietzsche, 'Joke Cunning and Revenge', trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Gay Science*, Vintage Books, New York, 1974, p. 43.
11. Ernst Blass, 'The Old Cafe des Westens', in Paul Raabe, ed., *The Era of German Expressionism*, Calder & Boyars, London, 1974, p. 29.
12. These sorts of views are explicit at many points in the texts. See, for example, 'Why I Write Such Excellent Books'.
13. Rosalyn Diprose, 'Nietzsche Ethics and Sexual Difference', *Radical Philosophy* 52, 1989, pp. 27–33.
14. Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991.
15. Ibid., p. 13.
16. Ibid., p. 19.
17. David Farrell Krell, 'To The Orange Grove at the Edge of the Sea: Remarks on Luce Irigaray's *Amante Marine*', in Peter J. Burgard, ed., *Nietzsche and the Feminine*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville and London, 1994, pp. 158–85, 193.
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p. 93.
19. Peter J. Bugard, 'Introduction: Figures of Excess', and Lynne Tirrell 'Sexual Dualism and Women's Self-Creation: On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Reading Nietzsche for Feminists', both in Burgard, ed., *Nietzsche and the Feminine*, pp. 1–32 and pp. 135–58.
20. Tirrell 'Sexual Dualism', p. 172.
21. We need not look too far to find numerous remarks in Nietzsche's texts which this kind of redemptive feminist reading finds necessary to 'explain away' as mere rhetorical amplification. Remarks in *Beyond Good and Evil* telling us that woman's 'great art is the lie, her highest concern is mere appearance and beauty', and, in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, that 'everything about a woman has one solution: that is pregnancy', add to the impression of the dogmatism of a reading which stresses the feminist character of Nietzsche's essential intentions.
22. Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1988, p. 215.
23. Ibid., pp. 125ff.
24. Ibid., p. 74.
25. Ibid.
26. Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1985.
27. Friedrich Nietzsché, 'On the Natural History of Morals', in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 102–3.
28. Nehamas, *Nietzsche*, p. 95.
29. Ibid., p. 71.
30. Ibid., p. 223.
31. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 258.
32. Nehamas, *Nietzsche*, p. 225.
33. See Michel Foucault, *Care of the Self*, Random House, New York, 1986; and Michel Foucault 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1984.
34. Michel Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom' (an interview translated by J.D. Gauthier), in James Bernauer and David Rasmussen, eds, *The Final Foucault*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1991, pp. 1–21.
35. Foucault, 'On The Genealogy of Ethics', pp. 348–51. See also Andrew Thacker, 'Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence', *Radical Philosophy* 63, Spring 1993, pp. 13–22.
36. Richard Wolin, 'Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism', *Telos* 67, Spring 1986, pp. 71–87. See also Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. Kenneth Baynes, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1991, part II.
37. Honneth *The Critique of Power*, 1991, part II.
38. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1989.
39. Ibid., pp. 20ff.
40. Ibid., ch. 3, 'The Contingency of a Liberal Community'.
41. Ibid., p. xvi.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Agnes Heller, 'The Ironies Beyond Philosophy', *Thesis Eleven* 28, 1991, pp. 105–13, 110.