

## Abhandlungen

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# Friedrich Nietzsche: Cheerful Thinker and Writer. A Contribution to the Debate on Nietzsche's Cheerfulness

**Abstract:** Cheerfulness or serenity (*Heiterkeit*) is one of the most important themes in Nietzsche's philosophy. Throughout his writings, from first to last, he can be found wrestling with conceptions of cheerfulness and promoting a cheerful mode of philosophizing. Despite the importance and recurrence of the theme of cheerfulness in Nietzsche's entire oeuvre, there have been relatively few studies specifically devoted to it. An important debate on cheerfulness has recently taken place in the literature on Nietzsche between Robert Pippin and Lanier Anderson and Rachel Cristy. Both sides of the debate have explored Nietzsche's practice of cheerfulness in direct relation to Montaigne. According to Pippin, Nietzsche never succeeds in writing with the kind of cheerfulness of Montaigne. In contrast, Anderson and Cristy have contended that both Nietzsche and Montaigne conceive of cheerfulness as a complex, non-naïve spiritual state or attitude that is to be cultivated through the practice of philosophy as a way of life. According to Anderson and Cristy, this is a deep form of love of life that both Nietzsche and Montaigne practice and perhaps achieve at least in part by and through writing. In this essay, we aim to contribute to this debate by offering a threefold argument. First, we argue that Nietzsche conceives of cheerfulness not only as a psychological ideal, as a desirable state or attitude of the spirit, but also as an aesthetic ideal, as a desirable quality or style of thinking and writing (sections 1–2). Second, we argue that, in addition to Montaigne, Ralph Waldo Emerson is an equally important but neglected influence on Nietzsche's conception and practice of cheerfulness (section 2). Third, by reconstructing Nietzsche's self-presentation as a cheerful thinker and writer in the 1886 prefaces and in *Ecce homo* (1888), we conclude that it is possible to argue that starting from his middle writings Nietzsche thinks and writes cheerfully in some of his works, including a number of his most significant texts (section 3).

**Keywords:** Cheerfulness, Style, Emerson, The Montaigne problem, Philosophy as a way of life, Skepticism

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It is quite an achievement to stay cheerful in the middle of a depressing business ... but what could be more important than cheerfulness? Nothing gets done without a dose of high spirits (TI, Preface).

## Introduction

Cheerfulness or serenity (*Heiterkeit*) is one of the most important themes in Nietzsche's philosophy. Throughout his writings, from first to last, he can be found wrestling with the conception of cheerfulness and promoting a cheerful mode of philosophizing. Already in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872), for which he entertained the title "*Griechische Heiterkeit*" (Nachlass 1870/71, 7[109], KSA 7.163), Nietzsche sets for himself the task of properly comprehending the "serious and significant concept of 'Greek serenity'" (BT 9).<sup>1</sup> In his view, scholars of his age have completely misunderstood the nature of cheerfulness in ancient Greek culture, mistaking it for an "unendangered ease and comfort" (BT 9).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, Nietzsche aims to show that the Greeks were cheerful "*out of profundity*" (GS, Preface 4), having courageously faced the dangers

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<sup>1</sup> We have used the following editions and translations of Nietzsche's texts: *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge 2005; *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge 2001; *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Ronald Speirs, Cambridge 1999; *Dawn*, trans. Brittain Smith, Stanford, CA 2011; *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Random House, 1974; *Human, All Too Human I*, trans. Gary Handwerk, Stanford, CA 1995; *Human, All Too Human II*, trans. Gary Handwerk, Stanford, CA 2013; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian Del Caro, Cambridge 2006; and *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard Gray, Stanford, CA 1995. Unless stated otherwise, we have used the translation of the posthumous fragments collected in the Stanford University Press edition of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: Unpublished Fragments from the Period of the Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray, Stanford, CA 1995; *Human, All Too Human II and Unpublished Fragments from the Period of Human, All Too Human II*, trans. Richard T. Gray, Stanford, CA 2013; *Unpublished Fragments from the Period of the Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Paul S. Loeb and David F. Tinsely, Stanford, CA 2019; and *Unpublished Fragments (Spring 1885–Spring 1886)*, trans. Adrian Del Caro, Stanford, CA 2020. We have checked the KSA in all cases of published and unpublished material; in several cases we have modified translations where we felt it was necessary to do so, and in cases in which an English translation was not available, we have translated the material ourselves.

<sup>2</sup> Conceived as "unendangered ease and comfort," cheerfulness is held by Nietzsche to be superficial and weak. In *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882–87), Nietzsche writes that "the eternal cheerfulness of the common people and of children" is due to "the poor power of the eye," which cannot see far enough, so failing to bring into focus threats, evils, and other reasons not to be cheerful (GS 53). Not only is the superficial cheerfulness of common people and of children short-sighted, but it also proves to be especially vulnerable. This kind of cheerfulness is sustained by a "[f]eeling of security, of comfort, of benevolence," which is in turn merely engendered by the temporary absence of danger, uneasiness, and evil. When danger is lurking, the feeling of security and, with it, superficial cheerfulness are open to attack and easily breakable. In this aphorism, superficial cheerfulness is

of “gazing into the inner, terrible depths of nature” (BT 9). In particular, as is well known, he finds this profound form of cheerfulness or serenity in Greek tragedy; that is, both in the tragic outlook on life he attributes to the Greeks and in tragedy as an artistic form. More specifically, Nietzsche observes, “an air of sovereign serenity pervades” works such as Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, evident in their clear, delightful aesthetic representation and transfiguration of suffering (BT 9). When properly comprehended Greek cheerfulness turns out to be the product of a culture “growing from the depths of a gloomy abyss, as a victory which the Hellenic will gains over suffering and the wisdom of suffering” (BT 17). Recovering such a serious concept of serenity is deemed significant for us moderns, both with respect to the task of creating a “new form of art” and to that of reviving a tragic culture in “a rising generation with [a] fearless gaze with heroic attraction to what is monstrous [*ungeheuer*]” (BT 18). As we shall see, much of what Nietzsche says about cheerfulness in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* with reference to tragedy will be reprised and further elaborated upon in his subsequent writings and beyond the specific context of Greek culture. From the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (1873–76) up to *Ecce homo* he returns again and again to the question of the nature and significance of cheerfulness – for individuals, cultures, and for philosophy – and starting from his middle writings he presents himself as a cheerful thinker and writer.

Despite the importance and recurrence of the theme of cheerfulness in Nietzsche’s entire oeuvre, there have been relatively few studies specifically devoted to it. An important debate on Nietzsche and cheerfulness has recently taken place in the secondary literature between Robert Pippin and Lanier Anderson and Rachel Cristy.<sup>3</sup> This debate has centered on two key questions: first, the nature and meaning of Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness; second, whether, or not, he is successful in philosophizing cheerfully – that is, in achieving a form of cheerfulness in his writings. Both sides of the debate have posed these questions in direct relation to Nietzsche’s praise of Montaigne’s cheerfulness and as we encounter it in SE 2.

Pippin has identified an actual “Montaigne problem” in Nietzsche’s philosophy<sup>4</sup>: “[h]ow, [Nietzsche] wants to know above all, did Montaigne manage to exhibit such a thoroughgoing skepticism and clarity about human frailty and failings without Pascal’s despair and eventual surrender [...]?”<sup>5</sup> As Pippin sees it, Nietzsche is not

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considered directly proportional to the dullness of the eye: “Hence the gloominess and grief – akin to a bad conscience – of the great thinkers,” who have better vision and awareness of the evils of life. Importantly, as we shall see, Nietzsche endorses neither superficial cheerfulness, which is short-sided and vulnerable, nor the melancholy of thinkers, which leads to despair and resignation.

3 Robert B. Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, Chicago 2010, especially 10–2, 49, and 121, and R. Lanier Anderson / Rachel Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness’? Philosophy as a Way of Life in Nietzsche and Montaigne,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 25 (2017), 1514–49.

4 Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 23.

5 Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 10.

looking for “an argument in Montaigne that could demonstrate or justify his overall stance toward the human world”;<sup>6</sup> rather, the cheerfulness at stake in the “Montaigne problem” is a pre-philosophical affective attunement or *Stimmung*.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, according to Pippin, “[f]or all his aspiration and admiration Nietzsche never succeeded in writing with the kind of ‘cheerfulness,’ *Heiterkeit*, and balance of Montaigne”<sup>8</sup>: “The fact that his prose sometimes lapsed into a shrieking intensity, the occasional hysteria, the drift into the maudlin and the sentimental, the hatred venting through some passages, do not at all evince a Montaigne-like peace of mind.”<sup>9</sup>

Anderson and Cristy have taken issue with Pippin, expressing the concern that his formulation of the “Montaigne problem” might encourage the idea that “the cheerfulness Montaigne had and Nietzsche lacked was simple and entirely *natural* – a fortunate side-effect of Montaigne’s happy psychological constitution.”<sup>10</sup> Anderson and Cristy argue that the cheerfulness valued by Nietzsche is a radically non-naïve, complex attitude, one involving truthfulness, the ability to see the problematic character of life, and it is, therefore, bound up with suffering, and even with sickness.<sup>11</sup> Starting from an interpretation of GS 343, entitled “*The meaning of our cheerfulness*,” they have contended that cheerfulness is an affective and intellectual response to the recognition of losses and catastrophes, such as the death of God.<sup>12</sup> According to Anderson and Cristy’s reading of Nietzsche, cheerfulness entails an amorous attachment to the world that amounts to a second nature produced by the deliberate practice of philosophy as a way of life and a mode of self-cultivation.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, they have attempted to resolve the “Montaigne problem” posed by Pippin by showing that a similar conception of cheerfulness can also be found in Montaigne.<sup>14</sup> While Pippin is convinced that Nietzsche fails to write with the cheerfulness attained by Montaigne, Anderson and Cristy argue that, “despite the irascible and even despairing tone that does sometimes characterizes Nietzsche’s writings, [...] it was (partly) through his writing that Nietzsche cultivated a cheerful attitude toward

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6 Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 11.

7 Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 11.

8 Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 121.

9 Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 11.

10 Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1515.

11 Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1515, 1519, and 1521–3.

12 Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1516–8.

13 Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1515. A simple, naïve cheerfulness, according to Anderson and Cristy, would be neither desirable nor possible for Nietzsche: “[i]f what is wanted is an unreflective affective attachment to the world and to life, then any deliberate effort to attain it through philosophy must be bound to fail. The very fact that Nietzsche is *trying so hard* to become cheerful undermines his efforts, because the detached, knowing posture involved in standing back to identify the desired attitude, and then determining how to cultivate it, extinguishes the very possibility of the naïve affective bond with life that we seek” (1515).

14 Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1526.

the world as a whole.”<sup>15</sup> According to their hypothesis, Nietzsche practices this attitude and perhaps attains it, like Montaigne, by writing; and this can be seen in the “cheerful pleasure” Nietzsche clearly took from “expressions of Schopenhauerian wrath,” and more importantly in his “expressions of gratitude” even toward crises and disasters.<sup>16</sup>

In this essay, we wish to draw on and contribute to this debate, addressing both the question of Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness and the question as to whether he is successful in philosophizing cheerfully in his works. It seems to us that both sides of the debate have merit. Anderson and Cristy provide a compelling interpretation of the non-naïve, complex character of Nietzsche’s cheerfulness, conceived as an attitude toward the world and especially as we find it articulated in GS 343. We agree with them that, from *Die Geburt der Tragödie* onward, for Nietzsche true cheerfulness is deep and complex rather than superficial and simple: it entails tragic insight and profound suffering, as well as a variety of affective and intellectual attitudes, such as honesty, courage, and risk-taking. We are also in agreement with their interpretation of cheerfulness as a non-naïve attitude that can be practiced or cultivated. On the other hand, we think Pippin is right in identifying the problem of cheerfulness also as a problem of style, posing the question as to whether Nietzsche is successful in *writing* cheerfully. Here we wish to reformulate Pippin’s question in the light of Anderson and Cristy’s response: is showing, as Anderson and Cristy have done, the non-naïve character of Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness – as well as the cheerful spirit we encounter in Montaigne – sufficient to fully respond to the challenge posed by Pippin’s critical remark about Nietzsche’s prose? Leaving the comparison with Montaigne aside, we wish to ask, is Nietzsche successful in putting *his* deep and non-naïve conception of cheerfulness into practice in his writings? In other words, does Nietzsche “practice what he preaches” with respect to cheerfulness?

To begin answering these questions, let us introduce a distinction between two senses of cheerfulness that can be found in Nietzsche’s texts as well as in the debate: cheerfulness as a *psychological* ideal, a desirable state or attitude of the spirit, and cheerfulness as an *aesthetic* ideal, a desirable quality or style of thinking and writing. While Anderson and Cristy have lucidly explained the former as a deep affirmation and love of life stemming from the recognition of its problematic character,<sup>17</sup> we will pay special attention to Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness as a way a thinker and writer gives expression to their thoughts in their works, as a tone or color of their thinking and writing that can be appreciated by the reader and that might have an enduring effect upon them. Of course, these two senses of cheerfulness are closely connected:

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15 Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1536.

16 Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1536.

17 Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1519.

the cheerful spiritual state or attitude of the thinker may be reflected in and communicated through their writings: “To communicate [an inner] state, an inner tension of pathos, with signs, including the tempo of these signs – that is the meaning of every style” (EH, Books 4). Nonetheless, we maintain, they should be distinguished. This distinction is not trivial since, as we shall see, in his 1886 preface Nietzsche discloses that, in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I* and *II* (1878–80), he presents himself “as if cheerful,” when in fact he confesses he had not yet attained a genuine spiritual cheerfulness (HH II, Preface 5). In this sense, cheerfulness is not to be understood as the immediate reflection of an author’s state of mind in their writings, but, as Timothy Hampton has helpfully suggested, “can be a technique, a way of managing oneself and influencing others.”<sup>18</sup> As a technique, “cheerfulness has an aesthetic dimension to go along with its moral and psychological aspects.”<sup>19</sup> Not only is cheerfulness “a factor in writing,” then, but it is also a stylistic tone and effect that can be composed;<sup>20</sup> – indeed, reading and writing themselves may be construed as cheerful practices.<sup>21</sup>

The first two sections of this essay explore and seek to clarify what Nietzsche says about cheerfulness. Section 1 begins by providing a close reading of SE 2, one of the primary loci in the secondary literature on Nietzsche and cheerfulness. In the first part of this section, we will examine Nietzsche’s famous presentation of Schopenhauer and Montaigne in SE 2 as cheerful thinkers and writers, stressing the aesthetic dimension of his discussion of cheerfulness as a desirable quality of thinking and writing. In the second part of this section, we will follow the developments of Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness in his subsequent works, showing that, in different periods of his philosophy, he remains committed to a similar aesthetic ideal of cheerfulness as a way of expressing and communicating serious thoughts. In the third part, we will bring Nietzsche’s middle writings into focus. These writings are of particular interest to us because in them he first seeks to present himself as a cheerful thinker and writer. We will show that, in the middle texts, cheerfulness is closely bound up with a cold and sober mode of philosophizing. This connection, as we shall see, is important to a proper appreciation of Nietzsche’s identity as a cheerful philosopher.

Unlike Pippin and Anderson and Cristy, we will not directly deal with the “Montaigne problem.” We will delve neither into Montaigne’s cheerfulness nor into Nietzsche’s reception of it. Rather, section 2 argues that, in addition to Montaigne, Ralph Waldo Emerson is an equally important, yet heavily neglected, influence on Nietzsche’s conception and practice of cheerfulness. A comparison with Emerson will help us better understand and appreciate Nietzsche’s sense of cheerfulness as a quality of thinking and writing.

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<sup>18</sup> Timothy Hampton, *Cheerfulness*, Princeton, NJ 2022, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Hampton, *Cheerfulness*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Hampton, *Cheerfulness*, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Hampton, *Cheerfulness*, 16.

Section 3 directly addresses the question as to whether Nietzsche actually puts into practice a cheerful mode of philosophizing. On the one hand, we disagree with Pippin's conclusion that Nietzsche *never* succeeded in writing cheerfully; on the other hand, we think that Anderson and Cristy's well-founded speculations on just how Nietzsche practiced and achieved cheerfulness can be further finessed. Are wrath and gratitude the only indicators of Nietzsche's cheerfulness? Does he express wrath and gratitude in the same way in all his writings? How is wrath compatible with gratitude? Perhaps, both sides of the debate have offered all too general and unilateral answers. Can we say, for example, that Nietzsche fails to write cheerfully in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*? Or, can we say, that Nietzsche expresses and communicates cheerfulness in a work such as *Der Antichrist* (1888)?<sup>22</sup> We will endeavor to develop answers to these questions by reconstructing Nietzsche's largely overlooked self-presentation as a cheerful thinker and writer in the prefaces of 1886 and in *Ecce homo*. We will show that starting from *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* Nietzsche explicitly sets out to think and write in a cheerful style – even at times when he does not find himself in a particularly cheerful state of the mind. By drawing attention to the different senses in which Nietzsche characterizes *some* of his writings as cheerful, we offer a fresh approach to the question as to whether Nietzsche can be truly regarded as a cheerful thinker and writer.

## 1 Cheerfulness as a Quality of Thinking and Writing

### 1.1 Schopenhauer and Montaigne as Exemplars of Cheerfulness in *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*

In the third of the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (1874), Nietzsche famously praises Montaigne and Schopenhauer for their honesty and for their “genuinely cheering cheerfulness” (UO III, SE 2). As in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, he draws a distinction between “two very distinct kinds of cheerfulness,” contrasting the cheerfulness exemplified by Schopenhauer and Montaigne with the inauthentic cheerfulness of “mediocre writers and brusque thinkers,” such as the likes of David Friedrich Strauss. In continuity with *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, in *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* Nietzsche understands and appreciates true cheerfulness as something deep and complex. The cheerfulness of true thinkers, for Nietzsche, is constituted by the intellectual virtues of “courage” and “strength,”<sup>23</sup> and is enabled by the victory over “monsters [*Ungethümern*]” or troublesome subjects “as horrifying and serious as the problem of exist-

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<sup>22</sup> We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this question.

<sup>23</sup> On Nietzsche's construal of courage as an intellectual virtue, see Mark Alfano, *Nietzsche's Moral Psychology*, Cambridge 2019, 168–91.

ence”<sup>24</sup>: “For basically there is cheerfulness only where there is victory” (UO III, SE 2). As he plainly puts it, a true thinker such as Schopenhauer is “cheerful because his thought has conquered the most difficult things.”

Nietzsche deems the cheerfulness displayed by mediocre writers and brusque thinkers to be spurious because we find in their works no trace of a real intellectual victory and no evidence of a courageous confrontation with difficult matters. These authors, Nietzsche observes, are only “cheerleaders [*Heiterlinge*]”: they “do not even perceive [...] sufferings and monsters” or, worse, are unwilling to fight them (UO III, SE 2).<sup>25</sup> The shallow cheerfulness of cheerleaders is nothing more than mere satisfaction and contentment with fashionable opinions, and in contrast with the cheerfulness of true thinkers who “crave to know more” (UO I, DS 4) and who have the courage to fully commit themselves to the honesty and truthfulness demanded by the philosophical life (UO III, SE 1).<sup>26</sup>

Anderson and Cristy’s account of the non-naïve, complex meaning of Nietzsche’s cheerfulness provides a powerful interpretive tool for reading this passage. According to this reading, the cheerfulness Nietzsche attributes to Schopenhauer and Montaigne would be a spiritual attitude or state attained by the philosopher through the practice of philosophy as a way of life and through the cultivation of intellectual courage and strength. This is certainly a helpful interpretation, one which we wish to maintain and to further elaborate. However, in our view, in looking at SE 2 only through the interpretive lenses of philosophy as a way of life, one risks overlooking some essential features of Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness.

In SE 2, Nietzsche extols cheerfulness as an exemplary quality that Schopenhauer has in common with Montaigne in the wider context of his praising his educator “as a writer,” his “way of expressing himself,” and his “style.” In this context, we suggest, cheerfulness is first and foremost construed as a praiseworthy quality of writing, as a desirable mode of expression, and as a stylistic ideal. In Nietzsche, as is well known, style, the way one gives expression to one’s thoughts in writing, is not merely an embellishment of thinking. This is clearly spelled out, for example, in *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten* (1880): “Writing better, however, also means to think better” (HH II, WS 87). “Improving the style – that means improving the ideas and nothing less!” (HH II, WS 131). In addition, in SE 2 Nietzsche stresses that true, hard-earned cheerfulness needs to have a genuinely cheering effect upon the reader. This aspect of Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness has not received adequate attention in the recent debate. Cheerfulness is described as “genuinely cheering” or as a “cheerfulness that really cheers” because “[t]he true thinker always cheers and refreshes regardless of whether

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<sup>24</sup> More precisely, this is the problem as to whether human existence has any meaning at all, and in the course of his intellectual development Nietzsche consistently credits Schopenhauer with the honesty and courage to pose such a problem (see, for example, GS 357).

<sup>25</sup> See also UO III, SE 6.

<sup>26</sup> See also UO III, SE 4, and SE 8.



he gives expression to something serious or humorous” (UO III, SE 2). This cheering and reinvigorating effect is produced by the reader’s discernment that the true thinker shows himself to be victorious “amid all the monsters that he has conquered” (UO III, SE 2).<sup>27</sup> In this sense, not only is cheerfulness the personal experience of a thinker’s overcoming of a serious problem, it is also a way of expressing their thoughts in a way that is able to communicate an intellectual victory to the reader, so impacting the latter both mentally and affectively. It is precisely in these terms that Nietzsche describes “the physiological impression that Schopenhauer made on [him]” and his life-enhancing encounter with Montaigne (UO III, SE 2).<sup>28</sup>

In spite of the divergences in their appreciations of Nietzsche, both Anderson and Cristy and Pippin tend to identify cheerfulness with “the task of making [oneself] feel at home on this earth,” which is an attitude that Nietzsche attributes to Montaigne in SE 2.<sup>29</sup> However, if we pay closer attention to the text of SE 2 and to the context of the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* this identification may appear less obvious, and even problematic. What has been overlooked in the secondary literature is that in SE 2 Nietzsche openly states that he will not take his example from Montaigne: “I would take my example from him if I were set the task of making myself feel at home on this earth” (UO III, SE 2, our emphasis). Although Nietzsche rejoices in reading the *Essais* (1580–1595) and praises Montaigne – together with Schopenhauer – for his honesty and cheerfulness, he makes it clear that his primary task is not that of making himself feel at home on this earth or, in other words, of achieving peace of mind. That Nietzsche partly distances himself from Montaigne can be seen again in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (1876). While Montaigne is regarded as one of “the most noble representatives [of the] tranquillizing and comforting power,”<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche remains critical of intellectual activity that merely seeks to secure “a certain kind of peaceful happiness” (UO IV, WB 3).<sup>31</sup> Importantly, the target of Nietzsche’s criticism here is not directly Montaigne,

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27 Cf. HH II, WS 128.

28 While the genuinely cheering cheerfulness of true thinkers, such as Montaigne and Schopenhauer, cheers the reader, or at least Nietzsche as a reader, the inauthentic cheerfulness of mediocre writers “makes us miserable upon reading them”: “their cheerfulness provokes displeasure simply because it deceives, for it seeks to seduce one into believing that a victory has been won,” when this is not, in fact, the case (UO III, SE 2).

29 Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 10–1, and Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1530 and 1553. Pippin and Anderson and Cristy, of course, have attached very different meanings to the expression “feeling of being at home in this world”: Pippin largely understands it as a form of peace of mind that characterizes Montaigne’s mode of being-in-the-world; according to Anderson and Cristy, it is a complex, non-naïve affective attachment to life that can be cultivated by the philosopher through the practice of philosophy as a way of life and self-cultivation.

30 In a preparatory note for UO IV, WB 3, Nietzsche writes: “Montaigne represents one of these moments in which one returns to oneself in order to rest, to find calm, to take a breath” (Nachlass 1875, 11[38], KSA 8.229, our translation).

31 Cf. BGE 208.

but rather modern scholars. Keith Ansell-Pearson has noted that “[i]n fact, Nietzsche attacks the idea, which he associates with the interest in Montaigne, that the task of philosophy is to achieve personal serenity.”<sup>32</sup> In contrast to the indolence and quietism of the search for tranquility, it seems to Nietzsche, “the most important question in all of philosophy” is the transformation and improvement of our way of life, both as individuals and in terms of our collective modes of living (UO IV, WB 3).<sup>33</sup>

In light of this it is not obvious that in SE 2 cheerfulness is equivalent to the feeling of being at home in the world. While Nietzsche regards Schopenhauer’s and Montaigne’s cheerful mode of thinking and writing as exemplary, he seems keen to keep some distance from the Montaigne-inspired task of comforting and tranquillizing oneself. Furthermore, in both his middle and late writings, Nietzsche is expressly critical of the “feeling of being at home,” or at least of less noble expressions of this feeling than the one he finds in Montaigne.<sup>34</sup>

It merits stressing that in SE 2 cheerfulness is construed first and foremost as an aesthetic ideal, as a way of expressing and communicating serious thoughts in writing and with intellectual courage and strength. As Robert Miner has noted, Nietzsche, “finds in Montaigne a similar combination of seriousness and cheerfulness.”<sup>35</sup> It is in this aesthetic sense, we hold, that Nietzsche primarily regards Montaigne as an exemplar of cheerfulness. Indeed, Montaigne’s cheerfulness is associated with Schopenhauer’s, and if one thing is certain it is that Schopenhauer’s philosophy of the will to

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<sup>32</sup> Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche’s Search for Philosophy: On the Middle Writings*, London 2018, 44. As Warren Boutcher has reported, Montaigne was fashionably received as the thinker who withdraws from society: “[t]he Montaigne inferred from the *Essais* is the ‘late’ humanist reading and writing in his tower, serenely living out the decline of classical western civilization – the happy existentialist surviving without metaphysical support of any kind” (Warren Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne in Early Modern Europe*, Oxford 2017, vol. II, 378).

<sup>33</sup> See also UO III, SE 1, SE 3, and SE 8.

<sup>34</sup> Consider the following examples. In a posthumous fragment from the period of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II*, Nietzsche writes: “We become travelers, ‘wanderers,’ when we are nowhere at home [*heimisch*]” (Nachlass 1879, 40[20], KSA 8.582). Perhaps, free spirits and wanderers are only at home in their not feeling at home, “at home amid the mountains, woods, and solitude” (HH II, WS 638). In the 1886 preface of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I*, Nietzsche explains that the process of the “great liberation” of the spirit is set in motion by “a will and a wish awaken to depart at any cost for somewhere else [...]. ‘Better to die than to live here’ [...]: and this ‘here,’ this ‘feeling of being at home’ is all that up until now [the soul] had loved!” (HH I, Preface 3) And in book 5 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche commends his “secret wisdom and *gaya scienza*” to free spirits and good Europeans “who are homeless [*Heimatlosen*]” and feel compelled to “embark on the sea” like “[e]migrants”: “We children of the future, how could we be at home in this today? We feel disfavor for all ideas that might lead one to feel at home even in this fragile, broken time of transition” (GS 377). In these instances, Nietzsche disapproves of the feeling of being at home as an uncritical sense of satisfaction with or passive acceptance of present opinions and ways of life. In contrast, as we shall see, Nietzsche deems his mode of cheerfulness to be an essential aspect of thinking and “living dangerously” (GS 283).

<sup>35</sup> Robert Miner, *Nietzsche and Montaigne*, Cham 2017, 50. See also 43 and 48.

live does not contribute to making oneself feel at home in the world. Nietzsche's claim that Schopenhauer, the notoriously embittered pessimist, is a cheerful thinker and writer might seem at first surprising. Anderson and Cristy have commented on this in a footnote: "However surprising the claim, Nietzsche does have a point, if one has ears for Schopenhauer's *tone* as a writer. Despite the gloomy content of his pessimistic message, Schopenhauer regularly manages to puncture the pieties of optimistic claptrap with rhetoric sufficiently high-spirited to be a reliable source of mirth."<sup>36</sup> We think that precisely this sense of cheerfulness as a *tone* of thinking and writing merits a fuller appreciation with respect to Nietzsche too. We will aim to develop such an appreciation in what follows.

## 1.2 Cheerful Seriousness in Nietzsche's Subsequent Writings

While Nietzsche's opinion of Montaigne as a cheerful thinker and writer remains fairly constant,<sup>37</sup> in the course of his intellectual development he drastically changes his mind about Schopenhauer. In the middle writings, and more precisely in *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*, Nietzsche no longer regards Schopenhauer as an exemplar of cheerfulness; rather, he now holds that "Schopenhauer's philosophy remains the mirror image of an ardent and melancholy youth" (HH II, VM 271).<sup>38</sup> It may well be

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<sup>36</sup> Anderson / Cristy, "What Is 'The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness'?", 1541–2, n. 20. Nietzsche also draws attention to Schopenhauer's interesting "vehement ugliness" in D 481. Cf. GM III 6–7.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Nachlass 1885, 36[7], KSA 11.552. Importantly, though, Nietzsche also continues to distance himself from a possible appropriation of Montaigne. Indeed, Montaigne is once again ambiguously mentioned in BGE 208, in the context of Nietzsche's criticism of the "weak" skepticism of modern scholars. Lacking the courage and strength for No's and Yes's, Nietzsche observes, modern scholars find repose and consolation in skepticism, abstinence, suspension, indifference, detachment, etc., and to this end, they might make use of skeptical formulas, "perhaps by quoting Montaigne: 'what do I know?'" (BGE 208) As in WB 3, it is important to note, in BGE 208, Nietzsche is not directly attacking Montaigne but the appropriation of his skeptical motto by weak skeptics and scholars. It is clear that throughout his writings Nietzsche greatly admires Montaigne – his honesty, his cheerfulness, his courage, his skepticism, and his naturalism. See, especially, Brendan Donnellan, "Nietzsche and Montaigne," *Colloquia Germanica* 19/1 (1986), 1–20; Jessica Berry, "The Pyrrhonian Revival in Montaigne and Nietzsche," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65/3 (2004), 497–514; Jessica Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*, Oxford 2011, 78–88; and Miner, *Nietzsche and Montaigne*. However, WB 3 and BGE 208 show that Nietzsche also worries that Montaigne might be misappropriated and misused, especially with respect to his conception of philosophy as a way of life aimed at achieving peace of mind and through being seduced by his suspensive skeptical mode of investigation.

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, for Schopenhauer philosophy actually *begins* in a minor key: "undoubtedly it is the knowledge of death, and with it the consideration of the suffering and misery of life, that give the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanations of the world. If our life were without end and free from pain, it would possibly not occur to anyone to ask why the world exists, and why it does so in precisely this way, but everything would be taken purely as a matter of course" (Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, New York 1966, vol. II, 161).

that Nietzsche has Schopenhauer in mind when in *Morgenröthe* he challenges “[t]he slanderers of cheerfulness”: “People who have been deeply wounded by life are suspicious of all cheerfulness, as if it were childlike and childish” (D 329). Cheerfulness, according to these slanderers, is entirely misplaced, being either the result of a childlike and childish lack of awareness of the suffering inherent in life or the self-deception of a sufferer who “wants to gulp down one last minute of life’s intoxication.” For Nietzsche, these slanders on cheerfulness in fact reveal something about the slanderers themselves: “But this judgment on the cheerfulness of life is nothing other than its refraction through the sombre terrain of fatigue and disease.” In other words, denying the possibility of *all* kinds of cheerfulness “is not a substantiated judgment about the cheerful life,” but rather the expression of weakness and sickness of the spirit (D, “Notes”, 337). In brief, it is a judgment typically reached by melancholics. As is well known, between the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* and *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, Nietzsche’s philosophy undergoes a dramatic development, both in terms of its philosophical project and its style. He continues to value cheerfulness as a way of giving expression to and communicating serious thoughts in writings. Moreover, as he tells us in the 1886 prefaces and in *Ecce homo*, part of this development has to do with the *search* for such a cheerful mode of philosophizing.

While in *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* genuinely cheerful and cheering thinkers and writers such as Montaigne and Schopenhauer are contrasted with “cheerleaders,” in *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten* Nietzsche is now keen to draw a distinction between melancholy authors and serious ones: “Anyone who puts on paper what he *is suffering* will be a melancholy author: but a *serious* one, if he tells us what he *has suffered* and why he is now at rest amid joy” (HH II, WS 128). According to this distinction, melancholy authors are in the midst of their suffering – they have not yet overcome it. As a result, their thinking and writing is trapped in a state of agitation, and so takes the form of a melancholic or cheerless form of seriousness.<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche goes as far as to say that pessimistic thinkers and melancholy authors contribute to misanthropy by giving “all things the blackest and gloomiest colours, to increase the horror and to make us sense that things are more terrifying than they really are” (D 561). In response, “we have no way of preventing people from *darkening* us [...]. But we shall do what we have always done: whatever one casts into us, we take down into our depth – for we are deep, we do not forget – *and become bright again*” (GS 378).

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<sup>39</sup> The search after knowledge is in fact fraught with the potential danger of melancholy (see, for example, HH I 109; HH I 628; D 317; D 376; D 492; GS 53; and GS 368). On philosophical melancholy or, more precisely, on the melancholic mood that can be associated with philosophical activity see, for example, Richard Terry, “Philosophical Melancholy,” in Allan Ingram / Stuart Sim / Clark Lawlor / Richard Terry / John Baker / Leigh Wetherall Dickson (eds.), *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century*, Basingstoke 2011, 54–82: “Melancholy could be seen as a precondition for philosophical inspiration, or as an occupational hazard uniquely incident to philosophers” (81).

Truly serious authors must be truly cheerful ones for Nietzsche; they have conquered their suffering, and, from a position of a hard-won joy, they seek to speak about serious matters with a genuinely cheering cheerfulness that is also able to invigorate the reader. In WS 86, he surprisingly<sup>40</sup> attributes to Xenophon's Socrates in *Memorabilia* such a "cheerful [or gay] [*fröhliche*] form of seriousness and a *playful wisdom*," which he considers "the best spiritual condition for humans" to advance ourselves morally and rationally.<sup>41</sup> Although Nietzsche becomes increasingly more suspicious about Socrates starting from *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*,<sup>42</sup> in his middle and late writings he himself continues to promote a "cheerful form of seriousness" as the proper attitude and tone of philosophy, and, as we shall see, he also tries to implement it in some of his works, such as *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1888), and *Ecce homo*. In particular, in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* Nietzsche attacks the "clumsy, gloomy" and stiff intellect of scholars who equate thinking well with "taking the matter *seriously*" (GS 327),<sup>43</sup> launching a campaign against the prejudice held by these all-too-serious scholars according to which, "where laughter and gaiety are found, thinking does not amount to anything" (GS 327). In *Jenseits von Gut und*

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**40** This might come as a surprise because in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche famously deems Socrates – or, more precisely, Socratism – to be responsible for the death of Greek tragedy and, with it, of the deep, tragic cheerfulness of the Greeks (see, especially, BT 19).

**41** While in the early and late writings Nietzsche tends to associate Socrates with Christianity and with the decadence of the Western form of life, in *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten* he clearly distinguishes Socrates from Christ, privileging the former over the latter. Nietzsche observes that in the future we might, "in seeking to advance ourselves morally and rationally, prefer to take in our hands the memorabilia of Socrates, rather than the Bible" (HH II, WS 86). Nietzsche's observation intriguingly echoes what Emerson says in his unpublished journals: "I do not see in [Jesus] cheerfulness: I do not see in him the love of Natural Science: I see in him no kindness for Art; I see in him nothing of Socrates, of Laplace, of Shakespeare. The perfect man should remind us of all great men. Do you ask me if I would rather resemble Jesus than any other man? If I should say Yes, I would suspect myself of superstition" (*Selected Journals 1820–1842*, ed. Lawrence Rosenwald, New York 2010, 424). For Emerson, as for Nietzsche, Christ is a figure that fundamentally lacks cheerfulness, especially when compared unfavorably with Socrates. Nietzsche seems to agree with Emerson that the life and words of Christ, at least as reported by the *New Testament*, are characterized by a cheerless form of seriousness and by an excessively solemn wisdom.

**42** In GS 340, Nietzsche renews his profound admiration for "the courage and wisdom of Socrates in everything he did, said – and did not say"; however, he severely criticizes the "dying Socrates." Nietzsche worries that Socrates' last words "'O Crito, *life is a disease*'" might be a sign of a deep pessimism: "Is it possible that a man like him, who had lived cheerfully and like a soldier in the sight of everyone, should have been a pessimist? He had merely kept a cheerful mien while concealing all his life long his ultimate judgment, his inmost feeling. Socrates, Socrates *suffered life!*" (GS 340; see also HH II, WS 322) Although even in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* Nietzsche continues to associate Socrates with cheerfulness, here he ends up with casting suspicion on the authenticity of his cheerful appearance.

**43** See also GS 177.

*Böse* (1886), Nietzsche tells us that *his* gay science serves as an antidote to the overly nationalistic, scholastic, obscure, and grave way of expression characteristic of the latest German style (BGE 293). He goes as far as to say that he would “rank philosophers according to the level of their laughter” (BGE 294).<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in *Ecce homo* Nietzsche construes playfulness “as a sign of greatness” and its “essential presupposition,” admitting that he does not know “any other way of handling great tasks than as *play*” (EH, Clever 10). The key insight in these aphorisms is that cheerfulness, in the forms of gaiety, laughter, and playfulness is not incompatible with serious matters and rigorous thinking; rather, a cheerful style of thinking and writing, for Nietzsche, is even required for adequately dealing with serious philosophical tasks.

### 1.3 Coldness and Cheerfulness in Nietzsche’s Middle Writings

Starting from his middle works Nietzsche sees cheerfulness as inextricably linked with scientific knowledge and with a cold and sober mode of thinking and writing. Commentators on Nietzsche and cheerfulness have primarily focused on SE 2 and GS 343, thus heavily neglecting what Nietzsche says about cheerfulness in his middle writings, especially in the two volumes of *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches* and in *Morgenröthe* (1881). His conception of cheerfulness in these writings is, in our view, of special importance given that, as we shall see in more depth in section 3, Nietzsche retrospectively discloses that he sought to practice and achieve a cheerful mode of philosophizing in these writings (HH II, Preface 5; EH, Wise 1). In contrast to the early works, in this period Nietzsche conceives of cheerfulness in close connection with what we may call the “coldness” of scientific knowing. In a posthumous fragment, Nietzsche expresses his hope that the pursuit of science will provide him with, “clarity, purity, serenity [*Heiterkeit*], neatness, sobriety” (Nachlass 1880, 7[182], KSA 9.354).

Starting with *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches*, and continuing throughout his subsequent middle writings, Nietzsche commits himself to a free-spirited mode of philosophizing aimed at tempering emotional excess and at cooling down a human mind prone to neurosis.<sup>45</sup> A sober style of writing, along with cold knowledge, is conducive to Nietzsche’s overriding aim in the texts of the middle period.<sup>46</sup> In particular, he sees coldness and sobriety as essential to the practice of free-spirited philosophy and so as to identify the human, all too human passions, errors, illusions, projections

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<sup>44</sup> On having a sense of humor as one of the Nietzschean virtues, and on the epistemic function of laughter in his writings, see Alfano, *Nietzsche’s Moral Philosophy*, 216–32.

<sup>45</sup> See, especially, HH I 244. On Nietzsche’s program starting from *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches* of cooling down the human mind, see Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche’s Search for Philosophy*, 17–45.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, HH I 195.

and needs inherent in religious and metaphysical explanations of the world (HH I 9); and to avoid and combat forms of conviction or fanaticism (HH I 629–37).

In VM 142, Nietzsche links cheerfulness with such a cold and sober mode of thinking and writing:

*Cold books.* The good thinker counts upon readers who are receptive to the happiness that lies in good thinking: so that a book appearing to be cold and sober can, when seen with the right eyes, seem to be played upon by the sunshine of spiritual cheerfulness [*geistigen Heiterkeit*] and a true source of comfort for the soul [*Seelentrost*] (HH II, VM 142).<sup>47</sup>

In German, the term “*Heiterkeit*” also means serenity, clarity, and limpidity, as in the senses of an unclouded sky and of an unclouded mind or expression in speaking or writing. Nietzsche is suggesting that a “spiritual cheerfulness” can be found in “cold and sober” books, in “good thinking” and writing. As in SE 2, cheerfulness is not only construed as a state of the soul achieved by the genuine thinker, but also as a quality of books and in relation to the reader. Good thinkers, Nietzsche stresses, express the happiness that lies in thinking well – by which is largely meant thinking coldly and soberly –, and they do this in their books and they hope to share experience of this with the reader. Cold and sober books, he goes on to say, are able not only to cool down the reader but also to cheer and refresh them, so allowing them to participate in the happiness of good thinking: good thinkers and readers take pleasure in and are reinvigorated by “bathing in ice-cold streams” (Nachlass 1881, 11[339], KSA 9.573).<sup>48</sup> It is in this sense that “the sunshine of spiritual cheerfulness” is able to serve as a “true source of comfort for the soul.” One might speculate that this cheering comfort is true or correct in that it is based on good thinking, in contrast with the false comfort offered by “the dogmas of religion and metaphysics” and by their “salutary, soothing, and beneficial [...] errors” (HH I 109). Importantly, the comfort Nietzsche is valuing here is more a stimulant to action and to change one’s life and being in the world; it is not at all an “unendangered ease and comfort” (BT 9).

In D 439, Nietzsche maintains that “[a]ll sensations of happiness have two things in common: *abundance* of feeling and *high-spiritedness* within it, such that one feels like a fish in water and leaps about in it.” And in D 440, he further develops the point by suggesting that the thinker “leaps into *his* water, thus he attains *his* serenity [*Heiterkeit*].” The cheerfulness attained by thinkers, then, is a kind of happiness, abundance of feeling, and high-spiritedness, being a free-spirited happiness that

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<sup>47</sup> A previous draft of HH II, VM 142 reads as follows: “to that extent a sunny gleam of joyfulness and the sweet scent of the high mountains lies upon the coldest of books” (HH II, “Notes”, 460, n. 181).

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, in Nachlass 1881, 11[339], KSA 9.573, free-spirited philosophy is defined by Nietzsche as “the religion of the freest, most serene and sublime – A lovely green valley between the golden ice and the pure sky” as a defense “against easy-believers and fanatics.”

they experience in their search for knowledge and seek to convey in their writings, at times even at the expense of the peacefulness of their actual practical life.<sup>49</sup> The “water” they swim in and navigate may in fact be not only cold but also boundless and so difficult to chart that it requires brave seafarers; indeed, it might be a completely open sea of the kind Nietzsche depicts in GS 343. In contrast to unendangered and comfortable forms of the feeling of being at home in the world, Nietzsche deems cheerfulness an essential aspect of thinking and “living dangerously” (GS 283). To be cheerful means to face the danger of what he calls “the happiness of Homer”: “to enjoy a strong bold, audacious soul, to go through life with a calm eye and firm step, always prepared to risk all – festively, impelled by the longing for undiscovered worlds and seas, people and gods” (GS 302). This risk-taking, to be practiced with an attitude of calmness and steadfastness, is a crucial component in Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness.

## 2 Emerson as an Exemplar of Cheerfulness

Pippin and Anderson and Cristy have focused on Montaigne as an exemplar of cheerfulness in Nietzsche’s philosophy. In this section we argue that Emerson is an equally important, yet largely overlooked, source and model of Nietzsche’s conception of a cheerful mode of thinking and writing. To develop this argument let us first return to *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*.

Although, and as we have seen, in SE 2 Schopenhauer and Montaigne are expressly regarded as exemplars of a “genuinely cheering cheerfulness,” we believe there are good reasons to think that in this passage Nietzsche is directly engaging with Emerson too, albeit implicitly. It is well known that Emerson is one of the most important philosophical influences on Nietzsche.<sup>50</sup> As Thomas Brobjer has noted, Nietzsche appears

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<sup>49</sup> This is perhaps best expressed in a famous letter Nietzsche sends to his sister Elisabeth as early as 1865: “Do we after all seek rest, peace, and pleasure in our inquiries? No, only truth – even if it be most abhorrent and ugly [...]. Here the ways of men part: if you wish to strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe; if you wish to be a devotee of truth, then inquire” (June 11, 1865, no. 469, KSB 2.60–1; trans. in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton, NJ 1974, 23–4). The opposition expressed by Nietzsche in his letter echoes a passage from Emerson’s essay *Intellect* (1841): “God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please – you can never have both. Between theses, as a pendulum, man oscillate. He in whom the love of repose predominates will accept the first creed, the first philosophy, the first political party he meets – most likely his father’s. He gets rest and commodity and reputation; but shuts the doors of truth. He in whom the love of truth predominates will keep himself aloof from all moorings, and afloat. He will abstain from dogmatism” (“Intellect,” in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, New York 2000, 271).

<sup>50</sup> See, especially, Benedetta Zavatta, *Individuality and Beyond: Nietzsche Reads Emerson*, Oxford 2019, and David Mikics, *The Romance of Individualism in Emerson and Nietzsche*, Athens, OH 2003.



to have read Emerson's *Essays* (1841–44) especially intensively in 1874 in preparation for the third of the *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*.<sup>51</sup> This is evident, for instance, in the long quotation of a passage from Emerson's essay *Circles* (1841) that Nietzsche deploys to bring *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* to a close (section 8). Nietzsche's conception of cheerfulness in SE 2, as a victory in thinking and writing over horrifying and serious problems, clearly echoes a passage from *Circles* wherein Emerson discusses cheerfulness precisely in terms of overcoming, triumph, and conquest: "The great man is not convulsible or tormentable [...]. People say sometimes, 'See what I have overcome see how cheerful I am; see how completely I have triumphed over these black events.' Not if they still remind me of the black event. True conquest is the causing the calamity to fade and disappear ..."<sup>52</sup>

In addition, in SE 2 Nietzsche mentions in passing a Latin proverb saying "*Aliis laetus, sibi sapiens*" (cheerful with others, wise with oneself) which is also quoted by Emerson in *The Conduct of Life* (1860/76),<sup>53</sup> a book that Nietzsche had in his possession and read keenly from 1862 onward.<sup>54</sup> The literal translation of the Latin proverb quoted by Emerson and Nietzsche clearly highlights the other-directedness of the "genuinely cheering cheerfulness" extolled in *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*. As we have stressed, for Nietzsche, true cheerfulness is "genuinely cheering" in that it is able to also profoundly cheer the reader. This aspect of Nietzsche's conception of cheerfulness can be best understood and appreciated in comparison with Emerson. In *The American Scholar* (1837), Emerson writes: "The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances."<sup>55</sup> For Emerson, a thinker is great insofar as through their writings they "can alter [the reader's] state of mind [...]" and persuade men by the cheerful serenity of their carrying the matter."<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche goes as far as to say that:

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51 Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context*, Urbana, IL 2008, 118, n. 10, 208.

52 Emerson, "Circles," in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, New York 2000, 262.

53 The passage reads as follows: "And the best part of health is fine disposition. [...] [T]o make knowledge valuable, you must have the cheerfulness of wisdom. [...] The joy of the spirit indicates its strength. All healthy things are sweet-tempered. [...] And so of cheerfulness, or a good temper, the more it is spent, the more of it remains. [...] It is an old commendation of right behavior, '*Aliis laetus, sapiens sibi*,' which our English proverb translates, 'Be merry and wise'" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life*, Lanham, MD 2006, 131). This has been also noticed by Giuliano Campioni, "'Gaya scienza' und 'gai saber' in Nietzsches Philosophie," in Chiara Piazzesi / Giuliano Campioni / Patrick Wotling (eds.), *Lecture della Gaia Scienza / Lectures du Gai savoir*, Pisa 2010, 15–37: 21, and Anderson / Cristy, "What Is 'The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness'?", 1541, n. 19.

54 Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context*, 118–9.

55 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, New York 2000, 50.

56 Emerson, "The American Scholar", 54.

human beings can never experience anything better and more joyful [*Fröhlicheres*] than to be near one of those victorious people who, because they have thought the most profound things, cannot help but love what is most alive and, because they are wise, ultimately are disposed to what is beautiful. They truly speak [...]. They truly move and live (UO III, SE 2).<sup>57</sup>

Like Emerson, Nietzsche conceives of cheerfulness as a thinker's triumph over black events as well as their way of expressing and communicating deep, serious thoughts in a serene and energetic manner, one which seeks to enliven the reader and ultimately "cheer" them.

While in *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* the influence of Emerson on Nietzsche's discussion of cheerfulness remains implicit, we now wish to show that in the late writings Emerson is explicitly regarded as an exemplar of a cheerful thinker and writer. In *Götzen-Dämmerung*, Nietzsche writes in praise of Emerson over Thomas Carlyle. Of the two thinkers, he maintains, Emerson is the more "enlightened, more wide-ranging, more multifarious" and "above all happier;" he is a "man of taste" who "lives instinctively on pure ambrosia and leaves behind the indigestible in things" (TI, Skirmishes 13).<sup>58</sup> Nietzsche goes on to say that "Emerson has the sort of kind and witty cheerfulness that discourages any seriousness [...]. His spirit always finds reasons to be satisfied and even grateful." Emerson's sense of gratitude is so profound that he now and then verges on "cheerful [*heitere*] transcendence." A comparison with Emerson seems to provide promising evidence to support Anderson and Cristy's hypothesis that in part Nietzsche's cheerfulness might be found in expressions of gratitude.<sup>59</sup> Anderson and Cristy, however, do not attend to the inspiration Nietzsche draws from Emerson's appreciation of cheerfulness. We suggest that Emerson's cheerfulness inspired Nietzsche's cheerful mode of thinking and writing, perhaps most notably in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. As Nietzsche himself declares, an unexpected sense of gratitude permeates *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (GS, Preface 1). In the frontispiece of the first edition of the book, he famously used a passage from Emerson's essay on *History* (1841) as an epigraph, which not by chance expresses a

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57 Pierre Hadot has noticed another rather surprising fact about Nietzsche's characterization of the cheerful thinker here: "the figure of Schopenhauer is merged with [the] figure of Socrates-as-lover-of-life. In this extraordinary passage, Nietzsche has recourse to Hölderlin verses [in his poem *Socrates and Alkibiades*] in order to describe the sage's gaiety" (Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase, Oxford 1995, 167–8). In particular, Nietzsche reworks the following verses from Hölderlin's poem *Socrates and Alkibiades*: "He who has thought most deeply – Loves that which is the most alive" (167).

58 A similar consideration of Emerson and Carlyle, one that prefers the former over the latter, can be found in Borges, who notes: "Carlyle was a romantic writer, of plebeian virtues and vices; Emerson, a classical writer and a gentleman" (Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine and Eliot Weinberger, London 2000, 417).

59 Anderson / Cristy, "What Is 'The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness'?", 1536.

profound sense of gratitude: “To the poet and the sage all things are friendly and hallowed, all experiences profitable, all days holy, and all human beings divine.”<sup>60</sup>

At this point a critical reader might raise two objections. Here is the first: can Emerson’s cheerfulness, which, according to TI, Skirmishes 13, “discourages any seriousness,” be fruitfully brought together with Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness as a way of expressing and communicating serious thoughts? After all, as Stanley Cavell has pointed out, some critics might object that “Emersonian cheerfulness and hopefulness would simply express a childish ignorance of our real situation.”<sup>61</sup> In riposte to this objection, Cavell has noted that “[Emerson] is forever taken by his detractors, and not by them alone, to ignore the tragic facts of life. Whereas Emerson seems to take despair not as a recognition of life, not even a tragic recognition of it, but as a fear of life, an avoidance of it. I persist in thinking this is correct.”<sup>62</sup> We too think that this is correct. Indeed, like Nietzsche, Emerson is perfectly aware of the tragic facts of life: as he states in his essay *The Tragic* (1844), “no theory of life can have any right, which leaves out of account the values of vice, pain, disease, poverty, insecurity, disunion, fear, and death.”<sup>63</sup> With these thoughts about Emersonian cheerfulness in mind let us return to *Götzen-Dämmerung*.

In TI, Skirmishes 12–3, as we have seen, Nietzsche puts Carlyle and Emerson in dialogue with each other. This dialogue took place historically. Emerson and Carlyle had a life-long debate and correspondence between 1834 and 1872.<sup>64</sup> As Nietzsche reports, Carlyle was one of those critics who accused Emerson of superficiality: “Carlyle really loved Emerson but still said that ‘he doesn’t give us enough to chew

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**60** Ralph Waldo Emerson, “On History,” in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, New York 2000, 117. Cf. Nachlass 1881/82, 16[5], KSA 9.659. In particular, for Emerson the poet and poetry are linked with the gay science and a cheerful mode of thinking and writing. In his essay *Poetry and Imagination* (1872), an essay that Nietzsche seems to have been familiar with, Emerson explicitly says that “poetry is the *gai science*” (Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Poetry and Imagination,” in *Letters and Social Aims*, in *Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Cambridge, MA 2003, vol. VIII, 37). In *Shakespeare: Or, The Poet*, which was bound together with *The Conduct of Life* and *Goethe: Or, The Writer* in the German edition owned by Nietzsche, Emerson characterizes cheerfulness as a royal trait of the poet in their pursuit of beauty. True poets, for Emerson, have a “firm and cheerful temper” and, in creating beautiful works of art, they shed “the spirit of joy and hilarity” over the universe. And the “tone of Shakespeare” is regarded as “sovereign and cheerful”: “He touches nothing that does not borrow health and longevity for his festal style” (Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Shakespeare: Or, The Poet,” in *Representative Men*, in *Collected Works*, vol. IV, 123).

**61** Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, Chicago 1990, 130.

**62** Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 130.

**63** Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Uncollected Prose Writings*, ed. Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson, Cambridge, MA 2013, 334–5.

**64** *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, ed. Joseph Slater, New York 1964. See also Kenneth Marc Harris, *Carlyle and Emerson: Their Long Debate*, Cambridge, MA 2013.

on” (TI, Skirmishes 13). Nietzsche, however, is keen to defend Emerson against Carlyle’s accusation by saying that this “might in fact be true, but does not reflect badly on Emerson.” It is noteworthy that Nietzsche places the emphasis on “us”: that is to say, the fact that Emerson does not give *us* heavy thoughts to ruminate on is not necessarily a flaw; rather, it might be one of his virtues. The sense in which this might be regarded as virtuous or praiseworthy directly relates to Nietzsche’s and Emerson’s conception of cheerfulness as a triumph over black events.<sup>65</sup> Emerson’s cheerful mode of thinking and writing, Nietzsche implies, offers the reader *digested* problems that have been already confronted and overcome;<sup>66</sup> and, in doing so, it is able to genuinely cheer the reader.

With regard to the second possible objection that presents Emerson’s cheerfulness as a form of gratitude and satisfaction: does this not involve a cheerleader-like contentment with present opinions and ways of life? Is it perhaps for this reason that Nietzsche removes the Emerson epigraph in the second edition of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*? For Emerson, cheerfulness is not merely a passive acceptance of things as they are; rather, it is the only mood that enables an active and transformative response to tragedy: “But power dwells with cheerfulness; hope puts us in a working mood, whilst despair is no muse, and untunes the active powers. A man should make life and Nature happier to us, or he had better never been born.”<sup>67</sup> Like Emerson, Nietzsche believes that “nothing gets done without a dose of high spirits,” and that the courage and capacity “to stay cheerful in the middle of a depressing business” are needed for handling great philosophical tasks such as the “*revaluation of all values*” (TI, Preface). As we shall see in the conclusion of this essay, one of the reasons why the Emerson epigraph is removed in the second edition of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* might be that in 1887 Nietzsche no longer wishes to express and communicate cheerfulness as gratitude, but rather to think and write in the style of the strident polemic in an effort to combat the decadence and nihilism of his epoch.

Despite this, it is clear that Emerson remains for Nietzsche, like Montaigne, one of those genuinely cheering cheerful thinker and writers. In an unpublished draft of *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche writes: “Emerson, with his Essays, has been a good friend and someone who has cheered me up even in dark times: he possesses so much skepsis, so many ‘possibilities,’ that with him even virtue becomes witty [*geistreich*]” (KSA 14.476–7). Here Emerson seems to be associated with the experimental skepticism Nietzsche favors starting from his middle writings (e. g. GS 51): one that does not lapse

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Emerson, “Circles”, 262.

<sup>66</sup> In *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Nietzsche also identifies the bodily and spiritual constitution corresponding to such a cheerful mode of thinking and writing: “A strong and well-constituted human being digests his experiences (including deeds and misdeeds) as he digests his meals, even when he has hard lumps to swallow” (GM III 16).

<sup>67</sup> Emerson, *The Conduct of Life*, 138.

into the “inertia of despair,”<sup>68</sup> but permits, and even enables, daring experiments with new modes of thinking and living (Nachlass 1880, 6[356], KSA 9.287).<sup>69</sup>

Let us conclude this section with a brief consideration of the relationship between cheerfulness and skepticism in Nietzsche, a relationship that has been touched upon in the Pippin and Anderson and Cristy debate, as well as by other commentators. For Pippin, Nietzsche admires Montaigne’s capacity to be cheerful in spite of his “thoroughgoing skepticism;”<sup>70</sup> for Anderson and Cristy, instead, a form of doubt and suspicion, “prove integral to gay science and cheerfulness itself.”<sup>71</sup> Leaving aside Montaigne’s “light-hearted skepticism” (Nachlass 1885, 36[7], KSA 11.552), we wish to suggest that Emerson’s cheering skepsis can help us better understand in what specific sense for Nietzsche an experimental mode of skeptical investigation is interwoven with cheerfulness (KSA 14.476–7).

In her study on Nietzsche and the ancient skeptical tradition, Jessica Berry has offered an appreciation of Nietzsche’s cheerfulness in relation to Pyrrhonian *ataraxia* (absence of mental trouble or tranquility) and especially to Democritean *euthymia* (good spiritedness) – “[t]he more ‘cheerful’ ancestor of tranquillity.”<sup>72</sup> Berry tends to interpret Nietzsche’s cheerfulness as an ethical ideal, associating it with forms of peacefulness of the soul that can be found in the context of the Hellenistic traditions of philosophy as a way of life, which originate in Democritus’ ethics. In her Pyrrhonian reading of Nietzsche, cheerfulness is to be construed as the end-point of his skeptical inquiry. It seems to us that this reading fails to capture an essential aspect of the relationship between skepsis and cheerfulness in Nietzsche.

It is true that Nietzsche often uses the term “*Heiterkeit*” to denote forms of serenity, such as “Buddhist serenity” (A 21), and including Hellenistic conceptions of

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68 In his writings, Nietzsche does link some forms of skepticism with despair. See, especially, UO III, SE 3; but also D 46.

69 Nietzsche’s unpublished remark about Emerson’s cheering skepsis is attuned to the sense of skepticism Emerson develops in his writings. See, for example, Emerson, “Circles”, 254. Cf. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Montaigne: Or the Skeptic,” in *Representative Men*, in *Collected Works*, vol. IV.

70 Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 10.

71 Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1520–1.

72 Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*, 212. Even Jessica Berry, who is particularly keen to read Nietzsche as a Pyrrhonian skeptic, acknowledges that “Nietzsche would clearly not accept *ataraxia* as an ethical ideal (at least not on the received interpretation of the role the concept played for the Hellenistic philosophers)” (Jessica Berry, “Nietzsche and Democritus: The Origins of Ethical Eudaimonism,” in Paul Bishop (ed.), *Nietzsche and Antiquity*, Rochester, NY 2004, 98–113: 107). For this reason she has been keen to show that the Hellenistic notion of *ataraxia* has its origins in Democritean *euthymia*, conceived as a more robust and positive state of the soul that would be far more acceptable to Nietzsche. In addition, she has attempted to demonstrate that Democritus can be regarded as a proto-skeptic so as to specifically link Democritean *euthymia* with skepticism. See Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*, 142–73.

tranquility,<sup>73</sup> such as the “serenity of the Stoic” (D 251). However, it is clear that at different stages of his intellectual development Nietzsche engages with Hellenistic philosophies *strategically*, selecting and utilizing aspects of Epicureanism (GS 375), Stoicism position (BGE 227), Cynicism (EH, Books 3) and Pyrrhonism (HH II, WS 213). In fact, Nietzsche challenges in a quite fundamental way some of the key assumptions informing the ancient traditions of philosophy as a way of life. In *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, for example, Nietzsche sardonically criticizes typical conceptions of “living ‘wisely’ or ‘like a philosopher’,” especially when they are taken to mean no more than living “‘prudently and apart’” and are “a form of escape, a tricky way to make a good exit from a wicked game” (BGE 205). In contrast to these conceptions of philosophy as way of life – especially those aimed at forms “negative definitions of happiness” such as *ataraxia* (GS, Preface 2) – for Nietzsche “the true philosopher [...] lives ‘unphilosophically’ and ‘unwisely’ and above all imprudently and feels the burdensome duty of a handed of tests and temptations in life – he is continually risking himself, he plays that wicked game” (BGE 205).

Berry’s comparison with Democritean *euthymia* might prove helpful: good spiritedness in Democritus entails, among other things, a condition of fearlessness, which, as we have seen, is also one the essential and recurrent characteristics of Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness, both as a psychological and as an aesthetic ideal. However, her attempt to reconcile Nietzsche with Pyrrhonian skepticism is deeply misleading.<sup>74</sup> For Nietzsche, what ultimately inspired the Pyrrhonian skeptics is “a need for rest, a weariness” (Nachlass 1888, 15[58], KSA 13.446): Pyrrhonists sought an escapist, Buddhist-like peacefulness of the soul (Nachlass 1888, 14[191], KSA 13.378), always suspending judgment in their investigations<sup>75</sup> and prudently “[living] in the common way” (Nachlass 1888, 14[99], KSA 13.277).<sup>76</sup> Pyrrhonian skepticism, in our

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73 See, for example, Nachlass 1870/71, 8[13], KSA 7.224.

74 On the uses and disadvantages of comparing Nietzsche’s skepticism to Pyrrhonism, see Katrina Mitcheson, “Scepticism and Self-Transformation in Nietzsche: On the Uses and Disadvantages of a Comparison to Pyrrhonian Scepticism,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25/1 (2017), 63–83.

75 According to Mitcheson, “Scepticism and Self-Transformation in Nietzsche,” a comparison with Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment is not particularly useful for capturing Nietzsche’s commitment to self-transformation. Similarly, Anderson and Cristy have argued that Berry’s appreciation of Nietzsche’s cheerfulness “(in the form of skeptical *ataraxia*, or better, Democritean *euthymia*) [...] eliminate[s] any associated sense of philosophical self-making. On her picture, it would compromise the thoroughgoing suspension of judgment proper to the skeptical attitude if cheerfulness were something normatively endorsed, or even recommended, by the philosopher. Instead, the skeptic simply observes, as a descriptive claim about her life, that *ataraxia* tends to follow once skeptical practice has revealed equipollent arguments and provoked a suspension of judgment” (Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1534).

76 See also Nachlass 1888, 14[107], KSA 13.285. As Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford have noted, although free-spirited philosophy works against dogmatism and fanaticism like Pyrrhonian skepticism, “Nietzsche does not conceive the free spirit as a figure who simply acquiesces in the customs and traditions of his and her society, and as we find in the skepticism of both the ancient

view, can only be associated with a Nietzschean sense of cheerfulness at the cost of seriously distorting its complex character.

For Nietzsche, we suggest, cheerfulness meets *skepsis* in the mode of living dangerously and experimentally. From the *Die Geburt der Tragödie* onward, as we have seen, cheerfulness is construed not only as the courage to face dangers, but also as active risk-taking, namely, as the attraction toward dangers – the will to take up new dangerous challenges with calmness, indeed enjoying the opportunity to test and exercise one’s spiritual strength by responding to these challenges. The experimental *skepsis* Nietzsche values, in general and in Emerson in particular, is cheerful precisely because it does not merely suspend judgment but is willing to take the risk of tests and temptations, opening up and suggesting new possibilities in philosophical investigation and in life itself. This explains why, in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, Nietzsche is keen to take to task forms of “weak skepticism” and advocate in their place a form of “strong skepticism” (BGE 208–9).

### 3 Nietzsche’s Self-Presentation as a Cheerful Thinker and Writer

Thus far, we have explored what Nietzsche says about cheerfulness, especially as a quality of thinking and writing. In this section we address the question as to whether Nietzsche actually succeeds in practicing a cheerful mode of philosophizing. We have seen that, in *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*, Nietzsche distinguishes between melancholy authors and serious ones (HH II, WS 128). How can we position Nietzsche according to his own distinction? Should we regard him as more similar to a melancholy author in that “he puts on paper what he *is suffering*,” or as a serious and cheerful one who tells us “what he *has suffered* and why he is now at rest amid joy” (HH II, WS 128)? Does Nietzsche’s thinking and writing celebrate a complete victory over the monsters he is courageously fighting against? In *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche accepts that “[t]he slightest compulsion, a gloomy look, any harsh tone in the throat, all of these are all objections to a person and even more to his work ...” (EH, Clever 10). Is Nietzsche himself vulnerable to this objection? As Pippin has noted, sometimes Nietzsche’s prose seems to relapse into a compulsive, gloomy, and harsh tone.<sup>77</sup>

To begin answering these questions we wish to draw attention to Nietzsche’s retrospective self-presentation as a cheerful thinker and writer in the prefaces of 1886

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Pyrrhonists and Montaigne” (Keith Ansell-Pearson / Rebecca Bamford, *Nietzsche’s Dawn*, Hoboken, NJ 2021, 33). It is perhaps for this reason that Montaigne is mentioned in BGE 208 in the context of Nietzsche’s criticism of the weak skepticism of modern scholars.

<sup>77</sup> Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*, 11.

and in *Ecce homo*. In these texts, as we shall see, Nietzsche tells his readers the story of his intellectual and personal development, assessing his own writings in terms of cheerfulness. The way Nietzsche speaks of *his* cheerfulness, we suggest, can help us develop an interpretation of him as a cheerful thinker and writing that is more moderate, yet more precise, than the contrasting answers we find in the Pippin and Anderson and Cristy debate.

What is evident in Nietzsche's case is that it takes some time for him to arrive at a fully cheerful mode of thinking and writing. Although, as we have seen, cheerfulness is one of the central themes in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, he does not consider his first book as a cheerful one. In *Versuch einer Selbstkritik*, the 1886 preface written for the second edition of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, he introduces it as "a youthful work full of youthful courage and youthful melancholy" (BT, Attempt 2). Similarly, and in the same period, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* is characterized as a "melancholic-courageous [*schwermüthig-muthige*] book" (HH, Preface 2, translation modified). It is important to note, however, that both *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* are not described only as melancholic books, but also qualified as courageous. Although Nietzsche acknowledges that in these works he is not "at rest amid joy," he does not see himself as a merely "melancholy author" (HH II, WS 128). Indeed, and as we have seen, courage, is one of the intellectual virtues that are continually associated by him with cheerfulness. In Nietzsche's eyes, then, his intellectual endeavors in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* are not merely melancholic since they do not result in despair and resignation, but show at least the courage required by a cheerful mode of thinking and writing. Neither *Die Geburt der Tragödie* nor *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, though, are taken to be expressions of a genuinely cheering cheerfulness, in that a complete intellectual and affective mastery is not achieved in either text. In *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche says that in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* "[a]lmost every sentence is the manifestation of a victory" (EH, HH 1), but, as we shall see shortly, he believes he only fully succeeds in securing this victory – and in terms of true cheerfulness – in *Morgenröthe*.

In the 1886 preface to the second volume of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, Nietzsche tells an interesting story about his search for a practice of cheerfulness between 1878 and 1880. While his early writings, such as *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (1876), reveal a "melancholy turn of phrase," Nietzsche discloses, in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, there "lies something of the almost cheerful and inquisitive coldness of the psychologist" dealing with "a multitude of painful things" (HH II, Preface 1). Importantly, the cheerfulness of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* is associated with cold philosophical and psychological investigation, as well as with a mode of handling suffering. In line with the preface to the first volume, Nietzsche deems the overall project of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* to be "almost cheerful," implying that true cheerfulness has not been fully achieved at this point in his intellectual development. He further complicates the picture:



It was at that time that I learned the art of *presenting* myself as if cheerful, objective, inquisitive, above all, healthy and malicious [...]. What perhaps constituted the attractiveness of these writings will nonetheless not escape a subtler eye and sympathy – that a sufferer and a renouncer speaks here as if were *not* a sufferer and a renouncer. Here balance, composure, even gratitude toward life *shall* be upheld (HH II, Preface 5).

The three books contained in *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches I* and *II* are said to be attractive because in them a sufferer and a renouncer speaks *as if* he were not a sufferer and a renouncer, presenting himself *as if* cheerful – when in fact he is not. The “as if” dimension is key here. Nietzsche affirms that what he learned at that time is not so much the art of *being* cheerful, but rather the art of *disguising* himself as a cheerful thinker and writer. But why does Nietzsche describe his disguised cheerfulness as attractive? Moreover, why should we find it attractive?

The above-mentioned passage might seem to be merely suggesting that a sufferer and a renouncer can be cheerful, though only in disguise: all that is left to them is to pretend to be cheerful when in fact they continue to suffer and renounce life in private. This would be cold comfort to readers of Nietzsche and offer a fairly uninteresting example of a philosophical life. As becomes evident in the remainder of the preface much more, though, is being suggested. In 1886, Nietzsche links his disguised cheerfulness to a wish to return to health: “Just as a doctor puts his sick patient into totally alien surroundings, [...] I forced myself, as doctor and patient in a single person, into a reversed, untested *climate of the soul*, and especially into a diverting wandering abroad, into the unknown, toward a curiosity about every sort of strangeness” (HH II, Preface 5). Presenting himself as if cheerful is a critical stage in the evolution of this developmental process. As the sick patient in the period of convalescence, Nietzsche goes on to say, he learned how to stretch his hands toward “new nourishment, a new sun, a new future,” both personally and philosophically:

a lot of cricket-happiness, cricket-cheerfulness [*Grillen-Munterkeit*],<sup>78</sup> a lot of quiet, light, subtler foolishness, hidden enthusiasm – all of this ultimately resulted in a great spiritual strengthening, an increasing pleasure and abundance of health. Life itself *rewards* us for stubborn will to life, for a long war such as I waged at that time against the pessimism of weariness with life (HH II, Preface 5).

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**78** The German term “*Munterkeit*” (liveliness) is closely associated with “*Heiterkeit*” and intercepts some of its meanings. Indeed, “*Munterkeit*” can be also translated as cheerfulness, brightness, or high spirits. In addition to HH II, Preface 5, Nietzsche employs the term “*Munterkeit*” only one other time in his published writings, in GS 381. Like “*Heiterkeit*,” “*Munterkeit*” is also used by Nietzsche to denote a style of thinking and writing: “The extraordinary vivaciousness [*Munterkeit*] of style, like [Machiavelli’s] *il principe* (quite apart from the seriousness of its task), the brevity strength, a kind of joy in the thronging of difficult thoughts ...” (Nachlass 1885, 34[102], KSA 11.454).

It is crucial that we grasp the point being articulated here. “Cricket-cheerfulness” or “made-up cheerfulness,” though disguised, is significant in that it signals a wish to return to health and might ultimately result, “in a great spiritual strengthening, an increasing pleasure and abundance of health.”<sup>79</sup> Or at least, this is what happened to Nietzsche in the course of his intellectual development. He explains how he practiced a form of cheerfulness by simulating and seeking to enact a cheerful mode of thinking and writing.<sup>80</sup>

But there is more. Nietzsche seems to believe that his lived experiences might even function as an example of how to cultivate genuine cheerfulness. In this sense, *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches I* and *II* are described as attractive by him: they teach “a lesson of health” and a “*disciplina voluntatis*” (HH II, Preface 2). In practicing and learning the art of presenting oneself as cheerful, in wanting even just a “made-up cheerfulness,” one exercises and strengthens one’s spirit and will to life; and true cheerfulness might come as a reward.<sup>81</sup> To put it simply: the lesson we can draw from Nietzsche’s experience is that by willfully enacting cheerfulness one might actually become cheerful.<sup>82</sup> We find this encapsulated in the motto “fake it until you make it.”

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<sup>79</sup> In *Morgenröthe*, Nietzsche observes that it is proper to noble spirits to affect constant cheerfulness: “Just as [a noble individual] knows how to preserve the appearance of ever-present, dignified physical strength, he also wishes, through constant serenity and civility even in distressing situations, to maintain the impression that his soul and his spirit are equal to all dangers and vagaries” (D 201). This is further explained in a preparatory note for D 201: it is proper to noble spirit “not to seem tired even when standing for hours, i. e., one affects constantly physical strength and a psychic feeling of power through constant serenity and civility” (D, “Notes”, 327).

<sup>80</sup> Although Anderson and Cristy do not focus on Nietzsche’s intriguing conception of “cricket-cheerfulness,” their interpretation can help explain what is going on in the preface to *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches II*. According to Anderson and Cristy, cheerfulness “is neither the natural response of immediate (pre-volitional, pre-deliberative) instinct, nor the reasoned conclusion of detached evaluative deliberation; rather, it can be achieved through practice or practical learning, namely, through self-training or habitual exercise of the spirit, resulting in the incorporation of a spiritual habit into a sort of second nature (Anderson / Cristy, “What is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1529 and 1532).

<sup>81</sup> See also GM, Preface 7.

<sup>82</sup> Nietzsche’s personal experience and recommendation with respect to willfully enacting cheerfulness is not entirely unusual in philosophy and psychology. For instance, in thinking about the practical applications of his psychological doctrines to mental well-being, William James writes: “Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not. Thus the sovereign voluntary path to cheerfulness, if our spontaneous cheerfulness be lost, is to sit up cheerfully, to look round cheerfully, and to act and speak as if cheerfulness were already there. If such conduct does not make you soon feel cheerful, nothing else on that occasion can” (William James, “The Gospel of Relaxation,” in *On Vital Reserves*, New York 1933, 45). While James here focuses on the experience of the feeling of cheerfulness on a specific occasion, Nietzsche by contrast is much more interested in the cultivation of a cheerful habitus of the spirit.

This lesson is thus valuable in that it suggests how to go about cultivating cheerfulness in actual practice.

The search for cheerfulness is construed by Nietzsche as an essential part of his struggle against “*Romantic pessimism*, that is, [against] the pessimism of those who renounce [...], have been overcome” (HH II, Preface 7) – the kind of pessimism that “destroys the spirit’s severity and mirth [*Lustigkeit*] and makes every sort of vague desire and fungal covetousness proliferate” (HH II, Preface 3). However, as in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche seeks to overcome any simplistic opposition between cheerfulness and tragedy, between a cheerful mode of thinking and writing and a specific kind of pessimism: “there is a will to the tragic and to pessimism that is as much the sign of severity as of strength of intellect (of taste, feeling, conscience). With this will in our breast, we do not fear the frightening and questionable aspect characteristic of all existence; we even seek it out” (HH II, Preface 7).<sup>83</sup> In searching for a cheerful mode of thinking and writing, Nietzsche triumphs over his youthful tendency toward romantic pessimism (HH II, Preface 2).<sup>84</sup> The practice of a “made-up” cheerfulness helps Nietzsche increase his intellectual courage and strength, and reclaim the right to pessimism – indeed, a cheerful pessimism, one distinguished not only by fearlessness but also by risk-taking in investigating “frightening and questionable” problems.

According to Nietzsche’s reconstruction in *Ecce homo*, he first achieves a perfect cheerfulness in *Morgenröthe*: “The perfect lightness and cheerfulness, even the exuberance of spirit that is reflected in this work, was accompanied not only by the deepest physiological weakness, but by an excess of painful feelings as well” (EH, Wise 1). *Morgenröthe* is presented as emerging from, and reflecting, a cheerful spirit, and that speaks of a cheerfulness that goes hand in hand with suffering and the acknowledgement of psychological weakness. This is an excellent example of Nietzsche’s deep conception of cheerfulness. In achieving cheerfulness “[i]n the middle of the torture,” he writes, he “had a dialectician’s clarity par excellence and could think with cold-blooded lucidity about things that, in healthier conditions, [he] was not enough of a mountain climber, not refined, not cold enough for” (EH, Wise 1). Here, Nietzsche once again associates his cheerfulness with coldness and having an unclouded mind.

In the preface to the second edition of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche writes that the last book of his middle writings

is nothing but a bit of merry-making after long privation and powerlessness, the rejoicing of strength that is returning, of a reawakened faith in a tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, of a sudden sense and anticipation of a future, of impending adventures, of seas that are open again, of goals that are permitted again, believed again (GS, Preface 1).

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<sup>83</sup> See also GS, Preface 4, and GS 375.

<sup>84</sup> See also GS, Preface 1, and GS 370.

*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* is presented as the expression of a full cheerfulness, even more perfect than the one reflected in *Morgenröthe*. While Nietzsche sees his new-found cheerfulness in *Morgenröthe* as inseparable from psychological weakness, the cheerfulness of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* is linked with “high spirits,” with an exuberance of joy, with a greater sense of possibility, with a feeling of power, and with an overall increase in spiritual strength. We should recall that spiritual strength is one of the fundamental characteristics, in addition to courage, that for Nietzsche distinguishes the true cheerfulness.<sup>85</sup> Nietzsche believes that in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* not only did he show the courage or fearlessness to face dangerous subjects; he had also built up the strength and power to overcome them.

Although the kind of “*Wissenschaft*” that Nietzsche seeks to promote in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* is technically “*fröhliche*” (gay or joyful), rather than “*heitere*” (cheerful), gaiety and joy are deeply and intimately connected to cheerfulness.<sup>86</sup> This connection is more explicitly drawn in the preface to *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887): “cheerfulness, in fact, or to put it into my parlance, that gay science – is a reward [for taking the problems of morality seriously]: a reward for a long, brave, diligent, subterranean seriousness for which, admittedly, not everyone is suited” (GM, Preface 7). In a preparatory note for GM, Preface, Nietzsche laments a misunderstanding of his cheerfulness in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, especially by all-too-serious scholars: the gaiety of his scientific investigation and his cheerful mode of thinking and writing are mistaken for a lack of rigor and profundity, whereas this book emerged from a “triumphant condition,” a victory over and gratitude toward the serious problems he had been grappling with in his previous writings (Nachlass 1885/86, 2[166], KSA 12.150). All of this suggests that Nietzsche sees *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* as his own version of the “cheerful form of seriousness” and “playful wisdom” that he had attributed to Socrates in WS 86, as well as of the genuinely cheering cheerfulness that he had attributed to Schopenhauer and Montaigne in SE 2.

The kind of cheerfulness that for Nietzsche pervades his *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* nevertheless remains different from previous conceptions and practices of cheerfulness, at least in some respects. In addition to courage and seriousness, it has four distinctive characteristics: (1) as we have just noted, a newly discovered spiritual strength; (2) an overflowing “gratitude” (GS, Preface 1), for which, as we saw in the previous section, Emerson might be an exemplar; (3) a “reawakened faith in a tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, of a sudden sense and anticipation of a future” (GS, Preface 1). This third new characteristic of Nietzsche’s cheerfulness perhaps finds its clearest expression in GS 343 where he discusses the way in which the catastrophic and potentially gloomy event of the death of God can be positively received by fearless and strong free spirits, “born guessers of riddles” animated by the passion of knowl-

<sup>85</sup> See UO III, SE 2; HH II, Preface 5; and TI, Preface.

<sup>86</sup> See Anderson / Cristy, “What Is ‘The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness?’”, 1541, n. 11.

edge, who are “posted between today and tomorrow, stretched between today and tomorrow.” Cheerfulness here is closely connected not only with “gratitude” but also with “premonitions” and “expectation” (GS 343). Anderson and Cristy’s otherwise excellent reading of GS 343 overlooks the fundamental temporality, indeed future-directedness, of the meaning of Nietzsche’s conception and practice of cheerfulness in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. Although Nietzsche considers false hope or wishful thinking “the worst of evils because it lengthens agony” (HH I 72), it is undeniable that a strong faith in the future informs the last part of his middle period, at least starting from *Morgenröthe*.<sup>87</sup> And it seems to us that an important part of Nietzsche’s cheerful mode of thinking and writing in *Morgenröthe* and *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* consists precisely in the expression and communication of an existential and philosophical hope for new possibilities of thinking and living.

(4) Nietzsche observes that from the abysses of pessimism, from severe sickness and from the loss of trust in life, “one returns *newborn*, with a more delicate taste for joy, with a tenderer tongue for all good things, with merrier sense, with a second dangerous innocence in joy, more child-like and yet a hundred times subtler than one has ever been before” (GS, Preface 4). To achieve this return, he goes on to say, we modern free spirits might need the cheerfulness of art (GS, Preface 4)<sup>88</sup> in addition to the cheerfulness of cold and sober knowledge. For the will to truth at any price, “we are too experienced, too serious, too merry, too burned, too *profound*;” we need to return once again to the ancient Greeks: “What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface,” to be “superficial – *out of profundity*” (GS, Preface 4).

*Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–85), along with *Morgenröthe* and *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* completes for Nietzsche a series of genuinely cheerful writings. In a letter to Franz Overbeck of 1883, in relation to the publication of the first three parts of *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes: “the fact that in this year I have thought up and written my brightest and most cheerful things, many miles above me and my misery: this is in fact one of the most astonishing and most difficult things to explain that I know” (August 14, 1883, no. 451, KSB 6.428). In another letter from 1883, dated September 3, Nietzsche informs Heinrich Köselitz that the third part of *Zarathustra* requires a gloomy pessimism – deeper than that of Schopenhauer and Giacomo Leopardi: “In

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<sup>87</sup> See, for example, D 575. In contrast, when Nietzsche thinks and writes about the future in *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches*, his mood and tone are never those of cheerfulness and hope. See, for example, HH I 37; HH I 38; HH I 109; and HH I 248. In *Der Antichrist*, Nietzsche returns to the critique of hope he had presented in *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches*. Here Nietzsche remains deeply critical of false hope, especially of the “hope for the beyond [...] that cannot be refuted by any reality;” however, he also recognizes that “[s]trong hope is a much greater stimulus to life than any piece of individual happiness that actually falls our way” (A 23). The faith in the future informing Nietzsche’s cheerfulness in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* may be construed as a mode of hope that contains the anticipation of superior, enhanced life to come.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. GS 85.

order, however, to be able to write this part, what I shall need, in the first place, is profoundly Heavenly cheerfulness for I shall succeed with the pathos of the highest kind, only if I treat it as play. (In the end everything becomes bright)” (no. 461, KSB 6.445). In *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche also attempts to explain the psychological type of Zarathustra by quoting GS 382, the penultimate aphorism in the fifth book of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, which is thematically linked to GS 343. In this passage, Nietzsche affirms that a new, great health, which is “stronger,” “bolder” and “more cheerful,” is the psychological presupposition of the type Zarathustra (EH, Z 2; GS 382). Here, cheerfulness is construed as a quality of the psychological condition of great health presupposed by the philosopher, not only as the aftereffect of philosophy.<sup>89</sup> Importantly, for Nietzsche, this cheerful health is not merely a fixed psycho-physical constitution; rather, it is “a health that one doesn’t only have, but also acquires continually and must acquire because one gives it up again and again, and must give it up ...” in one’s philosophical hazards (EH, Z 2). This precariousness seems to be an important aspect of Nietzsche’s relentless search for cheerfulness, indeed for ever new modes of cheerful thinking and writing.

Moreover, Nietzsche specifies that his words in *Zarathustra* “are not the words of some fanatic, nothing is being ‘preached’ [t]here, nobody is demanding that you believe: drop after drop, word after word falls from an infinite fullness of light and depth of happiness, – the tempo of this speech is tender and slow” (EH, Preface 4). In this passage, Nietzsche is keen to deploy the moods and styles associated with cheerfulness as a way of guarding against his words and teaching being taken up in a fanatical fashion.

In *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche also describes the tone of *Götzen-Dämmerung* as both “cheerful and fateful” (EH, TI 1). This is perhaps a further refinement of the cheerful form of seriousness that is of such importance to Nietzsche’s conception of philosophical style. In particular, the cheerful fatefulness of *Götzen-Dämmerung* has to do with the capacity to overthrow, in thinking and writing, old idols or truths. Indeed, the preface of *Götzen-Dämmerung* is largely devoted to the theme of cheerfulness, which is understood as a “proof of an excess of strength” that involves the capacity to recover and to return stronger from the serious, heavy, and at times depressing business of sounding out and overthrowing idols (TI, Preface). Here Nietzsche admits that the greatness and difficulty of the task of the revaluation of all values “forces him to keep running out into the sunlight to shake off a seriousness that has become heavy, all too heavy.” Moreover, this work for him “is above all a recuperation a sunspot, a little light adventure into a psychologist’s idle hours.”<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Similarly, in BGE 269, cheerfulness is construed as a necessary component in the arsenal of philosophers, playing a crucial role in their philosophical and psychological investigations.

<sup>90</sup> See also TI, Morality as Anti-Nature 4.

Finally, Nietzsche declares that “nobody who saw me [during the composition of *Ecce homo*] would have noticed a single trace of tension, but rather an overflowing freshness and cheerfulness” (EH, Clever 10). Indeed, he considers *Ecce homo* too to be an exercise in cheerfulness, one that is linked both with Zarathustra’s non-fanatical mode of expression and with the capacity to overthrow idols that we have just seen at work in *Götzen-Dämmerung*. Nietzsche declares that perhaps the whole purpose of his *Ecce homo* is to articulate in a “cheerful [*heitren*] and affable way” the opposition between being a satyr and a saint (EH, Preface 2). Nietzsche says that, if anything, he is “the opposite of the type of person who has been traditionally admired as virtuous” (the saint); he “would rather be a satyr,” a comically hideous spirit. What is certain is that, in articulating this opposition, Nietzsche is eager to distance himself from the saint, from their taking idols, as well as themselves, too seriously, from their dogmatism and fanaticism, and from their solemn tone. Nietzsche states clearly that in his philosophy he will not try to set up new idols; his style is more about “[k]nocking over idols,” including himself as an idol (EH, Preface 2).

## Conclusion

Why, one might ask, should we take at face value Nietzsche’s testimony about his own cheerfulness? Nietzsche’s presentation of himself, especially in *Ecce homo*, frequently assumes an exaggerated form and tone and aspects of it can be taken with a pinch of salt. Moreover, as we have seen, he openly declares that in the two volumes of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* he presented himself “as if cheerful” when in fact he was not (HH II, Preface 5). How can we be sure that his self-presentation as a cheerful thinker and writer is not just another of Nietzsche’s masks? After all, he himself acknowledges the existence of “cheerful human beings” who make use of cheerfulness precisely in order *not* to be understood (BGE 270). Could it not be therefore that he is merely continuing to present himself “as if cheerful?” Questions such as these might lead some readers to deem Nietzsche at best a *would-be* cheerful thinker and writer.

Nietzsche is not merely creating an idol of himself – a false image without substance, one that needs to be unquestioningly worshipped. In contrast, what strikes us about the way he speaks of his own cheerfulness is his frankness and “finger for nuances” (EH, Wise 1). As we have seen, Nietzsche tells us that some of his works, such as *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I*, are not particularly cheerful; and that they are informed by a more melancholic, though courageous, mode of thinking and writing. He spells out the works in which he believes he had philosophized cheerfully, specifying in each case the sense of his practice of cheerfulness. From his self-presentation as a cheerful thinker and writer we suggest we can learn three important things. (1) Nietzsche holds that in certain phases of his personal and intellectual development, and starting from his middle writings, he

practices cheerful modes of thinking and writing. (2) Although he is confident that at times he does philosophize cheerfully, Nietzsche does not have the general presumption that he always does so, or that he does so in the same way in all his works. (3) Indeed, he acknowledges that his works are not all equally cheerful, and that his search for a cheerful mode of thinking and writing contains subtly different senses and meanings.

The image Nietzsche creates of himself as a cheerful thinker and writer provides us with a helpful interpretive strategy for constructively responding to the question raised in the Pippin and Anderson and Cristy debate: does Nietzsche write cheerfully? Does he achieve a form of cheerfulness in or through his works? In the first place, we should resist wanting to find all too general and simplistic responses, polarized between “Nietzsche never succeeds in writing cheerfully” and “he is always or generally successful in achieving cheerfulness even in the highest moments of melancholy and wrath.” These questions should be asked with reference to specific phases of Nietzsche’s philosophy and, more narrowly, to specific texts. Indeed, in *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche famously says about himself that he has “an extraordinary number of inner states” and, accordingly, “a lot of stylistic possibilities” too, indeed “the most multifarious art of style that anyone has ever had at his disposal” (EH, Books 4). Cheerfulness, we suggest, is to be understood as *one* of the inner states and stylistic possibilities displayed by Nietzsche in *some* of his works.

According to the account Nietzsche gives of his own development, while in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I* and especially in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II* he presents himself “as if cheerful” even if he is not, in *Morgenröthe* he believes he succeeds in achieving a perfect cheerfulness, which he then further cultivates in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, and *Ecce homo*. In his story, it is important to note, Nietzsche does not mention *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, *Der Antichrist* and other late writings as cheerful works. Although in some of these works, such as in GM, Preface 7, he still highly values cheerfulness, Nietzsche seems to imply that his style of thinking and writing is not that of cheerfulness. Indeed, in many of his late works, such as *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Nietzsche’s style is that of the strident polemic. His principal aim in these works, it seems, is not to cheer the reader, but rather to communicate to them a sense of alarm motivated by the need to confront and combat what he sees as an impending era of nihilism and decadence.

If we are not convinced of the reliability of Nietzsche’s self-presentation as a cheerful thinker and writer, can we still regard some of his works as cheerful on the basis of the conception of cheerfulness that we have highlighted in this essay? We have seen that Nietzsche conceives of cheerfulness not only as one of his inner states, but also as one of the styles of thinking and writing at his disposal. We have also seen that cheerfulness as an aesthetic ideal is, for Nietzsche, a way of expressing and communicating serious and indeed grave problems. The result is a philosophical practice that involves intellectual strength and courage, risk-taking, calmness, steadfastness,



sobriety and coldness, exuberance, liveliness, high-spirits, playfulness, laughter, gratitude, hope, and adopting a tender and slow tempo in opposition to fanatical harshness and rashness. Ultimately, the question as to whether Nietzsche really succeeds in thinking and writing cheerfully in some of his most significant works cannot be resolved in any absolute terms since it is ultimately relative to the reader. And, as we know, Nietzsche did not have the presumption, nor the intention, of wishing to, or being able to, cheer any and every reader of his writings.

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