



Nietzsche on the passions and self-cultivation: contra the Stoics and Spinoza

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Abstract

Although the literature on Nietzsche is now voluminous one area where there has surprisingly been very little research concerns Nietzsche on the passions. This essay aims to correct this neglect. My focus is on illuminating Nietzsche on the passions in relation to his primary teaching on self-cultivation. To illuminate his position, I focus attention on examining his relation to Stoic teaching on the passions. If for Nietzsche the Christian mind-set involves a disturbing pathological excess of feeling, the Stoic way of living results for him in a petrified of life devoid of movement and growth. After a consideration of his relation to Stoic teaching I then examine his relation to Spinoza on the emotions or affects. Whilst I acknowledge the affinities between the two thinkers and their criticisms of Stoic teaching, I maintain that it is an error to seek to construe Nietzsche and Spinoza as having an identical teaching on the passions. In the final section of the essay, I provide an appreciation of Nietzsche's recommendation that instead of demonising the passions in the manner of the Christian psyche and its legacy, or extirpating our passions as recommended by the Stoics, we need to learn how to transform them into joys or delights.

Keywords Passions · Emotions · Stoicism · Spinoza · Self-cultivation · Joy

1 Introduction

Although the literature on Nietzsche is now voluminous, one area where there has surprisingly been very little research concerns Nietzsche on the passions, and in spite of the fact that he has interesting things to say on a whole range of human

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emotions, including vanity, pride, sympathy, compassion, revenge, joy, love, and so on, as well as thought-provoking reflections on moods, on music and the emotions, and the role of emotions in human perception.¹ Although Nietzsche has a great deal to say about the passions in general and about a whole range of particular emotions, he does not present a discourse on the passions in any systematic manner. Nietzsche is not like Hume or Spinoza, both of whom dedicate key parts of their principal texts to a sustained treatment of the emotions or passions. Instead, his texts assume the form of maxims and aphorisms designed to entertain, provoke, and challenge the reader, and a good number of them open new avenues of research. This is very much the case with the significant number of aphorisms in his corpus that treat the passions or emotions. Nietzsche is convinced that almost all philosophy shows a lack of knowledge about human beings, which he finds revealed in “imprecise psychological analysis.”² He turns to Montaigne and the French moralists as sources of inspiration in an effort to correct what he sees as the lack of real knowledge and psychological analysis in German philosophy.³ Furthermore, he seeks a new conception of the figure of the sage in which this figure from ancient times, and who still has an important role to play in modern times, would no longer occupy himself solely with what is “amazing” and “divine,” but rather with “what is small weak human illogical defective,” and he does so because, he maintains, “we can become *wise* only through the most careful study of those very same things.”⁴ Although Nietzsche holds to the idea that the sage of modern times will give himself pleasure by *disturbing* the pleasure of human beings, he also wants readers of his aphorisms, with their astute psychological analyses, to derive a new and mature kind of pleasure from their tasting and assimilation.⁵ He foregrounds *honesty* (*Redlichkeit*) as the key intellectual virtue that needs to inform the new philosophical psychology he is calling for and that his aphorisms endeavour to put into practice.⁶ Indeed, he calls

¹ An exception is the work of the late Robert Solomon. He argues that Nietzsche attacks philosophy’s modern emphasis on epistemology and seeks to return philosophy to its true vocation as a doctrine of the passions. Solomon (2003: p. 63). However, Solomon’s appreciation of Nietzsche as a “passionate defender of the passionate life”—a thinker, he claims, who wanted to promote living with passion and who writes from the perspective of the passions and not from the supposedly objective perspective of reason and rationality, and who offers an *unrestrained* defence of them—requires a great deal of qualification since Nietzsche’s views on the passions are much more subtle and decidedly more complex than this. See also the recent study by Tuncel (2021).

² Nietzsche (2021: p. 362).

³ See especially Nietzsche (2013b: 214).

⁴ Nietzsche (2021: p. 368).

⁵ On this pleasure see especially Nietzsche (1997: aphorisms, 35–38). References to Nietzsche’s texts are to aphorism numbers, unless stated otherwise.

⁶ The final sketches of a notebook for the autumn of 1880 indicate that Nietzsche planned a work on *Redlichkeit*, in which he proposes to write of its history and its passion, “*Passio nova* oder Von der Leidenschaft der Redlichkeit.” Nietzsche (1988: 9, 6 [461]; see also 6 [457]–6 [459]). For one commentator the “art of intellectual integrity” or honesty is the basic method of Nietzsche’s thinking, Wurzer (1975: p. 236), and his “entire philosophy may be regarded as a *Bildung der Redlichkeit*,” Wurzer (1983: p. 259). Furthermore, *Redlichkeit* can be conceived as Nietzsche’s most open and dynamic concept (ibid.: p. 261). Another commentator argues that Nietzsche’s understanding of *Redlichkeit*, with its semantic overtones of frank speech, is “flavored both by his understanding of the flourishing of *parrhêsia* in the ancient world... and of its incarnation in the French classical moralists, above all in Montaigne.” Lane (2007: p. 7). What is essential to the Nietzschean conception and appreciation of *Redlichkeit* is an honest acknowl-

honesty “our youngest virtue,” a virtue that is still in the making and unaware of itself.⁷ This “honesty” is fully at work in his probing of human passions and emotions, as well as his insights into what they mean to human beings and the role they play in human life.

Nietzsche’s texts are not conventional philosophical ones. They take the form of aphorisms and mini-paragraphs, and they often assume a non-linear character with Nietzsche moving from topic to topic in intricate and arresting ways. When seeking to engage with him on the passions the aphoristic character of his writings, and the demands this form of writing places on us as readers, needs to be acknowledged. However, Nietzsche informs his readers that although he writes in fragments this should not be taken to indicate he has a merely fragmentary philosophy.⁸ This is pertinent with respect to developing an appreciation of his contribution to a philosophy of the passions or emotions. If we read him closely and carefully, we will find that a quite definite and coherent set of positions on the passions emerges in his texts. My view is that his thinking about the passions is best seen in the context of the primary teaching of self-cultivation we find in his writings. In his early Basel lectures on the future of educational institutions, as well as in *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874), Nietzsche identifies philosophy with *Bildung* or self-cultivation.⁹ Although Nietzsche has become quite a different thinker by the time of his middle writings (1878–1882)—the focus of the appreciation I develop in this essay—it is the case that a teaching on self-cultivation, involving the perfection of human beings, remains his principal concern and interest.

Although Nietzsche often employs the word *Affekten* for the most part he is using the German word for passion, *Leidenschaft*, stemming from the verb *leiden*, meaning to suffer. The word has several connotations worth taking note of. A “passion” takes hold of us and seeks to compel us to some action; it involves suffering precisely because it operates on the level of bodily and psychic feeling or affect; and this may also result in pain and hardship because of what one undergoes and must endure. Attached to a passion are feelings of pleasure and displeasure “so strong,” Nietzsche observes, “that they reduce the intellect to silence or to servitude,” and at this point where the heart replaces the head we speak of “passion” (*Leidenschaft*).¹⁰ Nietzsche acknowledges that passions are powerful forces of nature that exert their seductions on us. Once we have experienced a passion, he observes, it leaves within

Footnote 6 (continued)

edgement of the unpleasant and inconvenient aspects of reality or nature (ibid.: p. 41). My disagreement with Lane, which I cannot fully pursue here, centres on her claim that Nietzsche favours a Stoic stance over an Epicurean one since the former is more “honest,” being cognitively “non-consolatory and non-delusional”; the Epicurean, she argues, commits to a strategy of cognitive self-constriction to preserve tranquility (p. 27). However, in aphorism 375 of *The Gay Science*, from the added fifth part of the second edition of the text published in 1887, Nietzsche appeals to “an almost Epicurean bent for knowledge” that “will not easily let go of the questionable character of things; also an aversion to big moral words and gestures....”

⁷ Nietzsche (2011: 456; see also 2011: 56).

⁸ See Nietzsche (2013a: 128).

⁹ Nietzsche (2016: 13).

¹⁰ Nietzsche (1974: 3).

us an obscure longing for it and so, “It must in fact have provided a sort of pleasure to be scourged with its whip.”¹¹ Here Nietzsche’s psychological insight into the character of passion is typically trenchant: he is noticing how human beings prefer more intense displeasure to a feeble pleasure. Indeed, Nietzsche is keen to acknowledge that human beings strive for an emotion in itself, using other human beings only as a means and that is most clearly evident in the example of cruelty. Human beings derive a complex pleasure from what is tragic: “In the dramatic art in general, a human being wants emotions (*Emotionen*), e.g., of compassion, without having to help.” In the case of passionate peoples—he gives the examples of Greeks and Italians—we can observe a delight “in the art of passion (*Leidenschaft*), of emotion in itself (*Emotion an sich*); without it, they are bored.”¹²

In this essay my principal focus is on Nietzsche’s middle writings, and in these writings he is working, as we have just seen, with a quite specific conception of the passions and affects, involving letting ourselves go, not controlling ourselves, and giving free play to our wrath or our desires.¹³ He is, though, well aware that human passions have evolved and to the point where we can recognize that, “Every emotion (*Regung*) has become intellectual,” so that, for example, what a person feels in love involves a great deal of their reflections on, and expectations of, love, even including “all the metaphysics ever connected to it,” as well as the “neighboring moods” that ring along with it.¹⁴ Nietzsche is not, then, committed to positing a dramatic split between feelings and the intellect. As he writes: “Behind *hating* lies *fearing*, behind *loving* needing. Behind feeling and need lie experience (judging and memory). . . .”¹⁵

From the Stoics through to Kant the wisdom of philosophy with respect to the passions, albeit with some notable exceptions, has been a curious one: it has advocated a major curtailment of the passions, and even, as in the case of Stoic ethics, teaching their extirpation.¹⁶ Typically, and as we find in Kant, the attempt is made to oppose reason to the passions. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant acknowledges that an inclination that can be conquered only with difficulty or

¹¹ Nietzsche (1997: 606).

¹² Nietzsche (2021: 413).

¹³ Nietzsche (1997: 211).

¹⁴ Nietzsche (2021: 392).

¹⁵ Nietzsche (2021: 426).

¹⁶ Stoic teaching makes a distinction between “good affections” (*eupatheiai*) and “passions” (*pathe*), with the latter being construed as disordered affective states that do not participate in virtue. For further insight see Russell (2012: pp. 184–88). See also the study by Graver (2007). With regards to the “exceptions” I mention above, one might refer to thinkers such as Malebranche, Hume, and Rousseau. Hume is famous for his claim that reason acting on its own can make nothing matter: “Tis not contrary to Reason to prefer the destruction of the entire world to the scratching of my finger,” Hume (2007, 2.3.3). For Hume reason is the power we have to make discoveries about what is real, and so is to be immensely valued. His critical point though, when he reflects on the relation between reason and the passions, is to insist that reasoning alone can never give us a primary impulse to do anything or to make moral judgments. Reason enables us to discover what is true or false about reality, but it cannot provide us with any motivating desire to act. In itself reason is impotent. Malebranche takes the Stoics to task on the emotions in his extensive treatment of the passions in *The Search After Truth* (1997, book five, chapter two). Rousseau accords a crucial role to the passions in human education and holds that the “one who has lived most is not he who has counted the most years but he who has most felt life!” Rousseau (2010: p. 7).

not at all by reason is what we call “passion.” He adds: “To be subject to affects and passions is probably always an *illness of the mind*, because both affect and passion shut out the sovereignty of reason.”¹⁷ Furthermore, “...no human being wishes to have passion. For who wants to have himself put in chains when he can be free?”¹⁸

By contrast, Nietzsche attempts a much more nuanced appreciation of the passions. He is keen to contest the conception of reason as an independent entity and wishes to construe it instead as “a system of relation between various passions and desires,” and in which every passion possesses its quantum of reason.¹⁹ On the practical level Nietzsche is keen to draw attention to the need for human beings to educate themselves about the passions so that they can develop knowledge of them and practise a genuine wisdom of the passions, one in which reason does not serve to oppose the passions or be permitted to tyrannically rule over them. Rather, the function of reason is to help human agents moderate the passions and learn how to cultivate them in ways that are mature. We need reason, criticism, and science not in order to encourage us to dispense with the passions *tout court*, but rather to aid us so that we do not intoxicate ourselves with passion and so exist “beside ourselves.”²⁰ In terms of developing an appreciation of the rich economy of human life we discover that the affects are one and all useful, whether directly or indirectly, and considered in economic terms these forces of nature are both useful and the sources of much terrible fatality. There is a need for human agents, therefore, to be attentive to how affects and passions can make us “stupid,” but also how they provide us with valuable “fire.”²¹

It is especially in his middle writings that we find Nietzsche advising his readers that the art of the passions needs to be a delicate one. In contrast to Stoic teaching, which places the emphasis on minimising the effects of the passions, Nietzsche envisages a mastery of the passions in which each individual would, through the experiences of life and their corresponding reflection, learn anew and for themselves what it is, for example, to love, to be kind, and to hate.²² The mind set to be avoided is that of melancholics and philosophical blind-worms who can only speak of the dreadful character of the passions, and as a way of indicting the entire world.²³ What we find here in this disparagement of the passions is a neglect of two things that are now of supreme importance to free spirits who are committed to psychological observation.²⁴ First, an attention to the detail of things, including nuances and subtleties; and, second, the practice of honest self-observation. If we are now gripped by terror whenever we hear the word “passion” it is because we

¹⁷ Kant (2006: p. 149).

¹⁸ Kant, (2006: p. 151). It is important to note that Kant acknowledges that reason plays a role in the *fostering* of passions, with passions presupposing “a maxim of the subject, namely, to act according to a purpose prescribed to him by his inclination” (p. 173).

¹⁹ Nietzsche (1988: 13, 11 [310]).

²⁰ Nietzsche (2011: 543).

²¹ Nietzsche (1990: 284).

²² Nietzsche (1997: 601).

²³ Nietzsche (2013b: 37).

²⁴ Nietzsche (1997: 35).

have allowed the passions to swell up into monstrosities. It is in this aphorism from *The Wanderer and His Shadow* that Nietzsche anticipates the essential lesson on the passions he will stage for his readers in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and that he directly opposes to the demonization of the passions: “We should not inflate our blunders into eternal fatalities; instead, we ought to work together honestly (*redlich*) at the task of altogether transforming the passions (*Leidenschaften*) of humanity into joys (*Freudenschaften*).”²⁵

Nietzsche is most keen to oppose a fanatical way of life in which the affects are lived in an unhealthy and immature way, and demonized. In *Dawn*, for example, he argues that Christianity has brought into the world a new and unlimited imperilment, creating new securities, enjoyments, recreations, and evaluations. Although we moderns may be in the process of emancipating ourselves from such an imperilment, we keep dragging into our existence, even into our noblest arts and philosophies, the old habits associated with these securities and evaluations.²⁶ Nietzsche holds that in wanting to return to the affects “in their utmost grandeur and strength”—for example, as *love* of God, *fear* of God, fanatical *faith* in God, and so on—Christianity represents a popular protest against philosophy, and he appeals to the ancient sages against it since they advocated the triumph of reason over the affects.²⁷ For Nietzsche, then, much depends on the attitude we adopt with respect to the passions, indeed, on how we name them, whether positively or disparagingly; he is keen to encourage us not to demonise the passions, but rather to cultivate and sublimate them. As he notes in *Dawn*, “The passions become evil and malicious whenever they are viewed evilly and maliciously.”²⁸

Nietzsche’s estimation of the ways in which the ancient Greeks approached the emotions or passions stands in sharp contrast with his valuation of Christianity’s approach to them. He esteems Greek antiquity on account of what he sees as its “moralistic broad-mindedness” and that in large part consists in having a keen sense for the “real,” that is, for what is typical and factual regarding everything human. The thinkers and writers of antiquity do not preach that we should strive for the complete annihilation of the passions; rather, according to Nietzsche, they “allowed for a moderate discharge of what was evil and questionable,” including the “regressively bestial” elements they identify at the base of Greek nature.²⁹ It is on account of having this sense for the “real” that Greek thinkers were able to become natural scientists, historians, geographers, and philosophers, and so genuine “masters” and “pioneers.” Nietzsche thus praises the ancient Greeks for their ability to grasp and appreciate the ambiguous character of many of our passions, e.g. envy or *Eris*. For the Greeks there was a good envy and a bad envy. The latter, he says, promotes wicked war and feuding, and is cruel. The former, however, expresses itself in

²⁵ Nietzsche (2013b: 37). See also Nietzsche (1969, “Of Joys and Passions”). For further insight into this discourse in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* see Ansell-Pearson (2019).

²⁶ Nietzsche (2011: 57).

²⁷ Nietzsche (2011: 580).

²⁸ Nietzsche (2011: 76).

²⁹ Nietzsche (2013a: 220).

healthy competitive ways, as in the case of the Greek *agon* (contest): we see this at play most obviously in sports men and women, but we can find it also in evidence wherever we see human beings goaded into doing things and striving for excellence. In his middle writings, such as *Human, all too Human*, Nietzsche remains committed to the fundamental insight he had advanced in his early essay, *Homer's Contest* (1872), namely, that even, "at the finest heights of his power," the human being is "all nature," so carrying within it nature's uncanny dual character: "His dreadful capabilities and those we count as inhuman are perhaps, indeed, fertile soil from which alone all humanity, in feelings, deeds and works, can grow forth."³⁰

Christianity, Nietzsche holds, has sought to transform the great passions and powers, such as Eros and Aphrodite, which are capable of positive idealization or spiritualization, into "infernal kobolds and phantoms of deceit," arousing in the conscience of the believer tremendous torments at the slightest sexual excitation.³¹ The result is to fill human beings with a feeling of dread at the sight of their natural animal conditions of existence, making necessary and regularly recurring sensations into a source of inner misery to the point where inner misery becomes a necessary and regularly recurring phenomenon in human beings. This may even be a misery we keep secret and is more deeply rooted than we care to admit (Nietzsche mentions in this regard Shakespeare's confession of Christian gloominess in the *Sonnets*). Christianity has contempt for the world and makes a new virtue of ignorance, namely "innocence," the most frequent result of which is the feeling of guilt and despair: "a virtue which leads to Heaven via the detour through Hell."³²

Nietzsche is keen to revalue sexual feelings by arguing that, like the feeling of sympathy and the practice of worship, a pleasure is transferred from one person to another based on giving oneself pleasure, and such a benevolent arrangement is all too rare in nature. Is this not a good reason for thus valuing such feelings? Instead, Christianity has enjoined to them the guilty conscience and demonized Eros. But as a result of this censorship the Church has only succeeded in making the erotic more interesting to people than all the saints and angels put together, and Nietzsche points out the comedic aspects of this: "to this very day, the effect of such secretiveness has been that the *love story* became the only real interest that *all* circles have in common—and to an excess inconceivable in antiquity, an excess that will, at a later date, elicit laughter."³³

Christianity is for Nietzsche a worrisome religion simply because it treats normal and necessary sensations as a source of inner misery and then seeks to make this misery the normal lot for every single human being. It has declared war on the passions, and for Nietzsche this is an extreme and unwise strategy to adopt with respect to what are admittedly sources of much human frustration and that do require the exertion of human control, including exercises in self-mastery and self-cultivation.

³⁰ Nietzsche (2017a, 177); compare Nietzsche (1997: 235).

³¹ Nietzsche (2011: 76).

³² Nietzsche (2011: p. 321). For further insight into Nietzsche on Christianity and the affects see Ansell-Pearson and Bamford (2021, chapter three, pp. 71–93).

³³ Nietzsche (2011: 76).

However, in performing these tasks we should refrain from demonizing the passions by calling them evil and in which the mighty Eros, or life drive itself, is construed as the principal enemy. For Nietzsche we can learn valuable lessons from Greeks of antiquity in how to cultivate the passions in a healthier and more positive way than our Christian inheritance allows and has bred into us. In their art, and culture in general, the Greeks felt “the outflow and overflow of their own well-being... and who loved to see their perfection *one more time* outside themselves—their pleasure in themselves led them to art, but what leads these contemporaries of ours is: their annoyance with themselves.”³⁴

1.1 Nietzsche and Stoicism

Nietzsche’s relation to Stoicism is complex, and in his middle writings we find a mixed reception of Stoic teaching. There are places where he will appeal to Stoic ideas as invaluable principles of living; in other places he takes it to task for its teaching on the extirpation of the passions and its ideal of human invulnerability.³⁵

The nuanced and critical character of Nietzsche’s appraisal of Stoic teaching can easily be overlooked. One appreciation of Nietzsche that I wish to take issue with, since it so misleading, is that offered by Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum flatly claims that Nietzsche participates in a cult of Stoic strength and as a result we see in his writings the depiction of, “a fearful person, a person who is determined to seal himself off from risk, even at the cost of loss of love and value.”³⁶ Like the otherworldliness he abhors, the Stoicism he endorses is a form of self-protection, expressing “a fear of this world and its contingencies.”³⁷

A careful examination of Nietzsche’s texts shows that nothing could be further from the truth. Nussbaum seriously distorts the actual character of Nietzsche’s thinking. I shall provide two examples from the texts of the middle writings to demonstrate this. First, let us consider aphorism 343 from *Dawn* (1881). In this aphorism Nietzsche stresses that we need to experience dissatisfaction with ourselves and assume the risk of experimenting in life, freely taking the journey through our wastelands, quagmires, and icy glaciers. The ones who don’t take the risk of life will, “never make the journey around the world (that you yourselves are!), but will remain trapped within yourselves like a knot on the log you were born to, a mere happenstance.”³⁸ His commitment to the wisdom of taking risks in life and the need to experiment with modes of living could not be clearer. What this involves is made clear in the second aphorism I wish to select. This is aphorism 305 of *The*

³⁴ Nietzsche (2013a: 169).

³⁵ James I. Porter has recently argued that Roman Stoicism is a school of philosophy that ought to be conceived as challenging ideas of self-intactness and coherence, so revealing the model of human invulnerability to be too imprecise when applied to the Stoics. Nevertheless, it is this model, be it a Stoic one or otherwise, that Nietzsche is keen to show the limits of and for instructive reasons. See Porter (2020).

³⁶ Nussbaum (1994: 160).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Nietzsche (2011: 343).

Gay Science (1882), in which Nietzsche acknowledges that although the Stoic way of life—conceived in terms of building oneself up as a castle or inner citadel—may contain greatness in it, it comes at a high price: the price is one of closing oneself off to experience and from the instruction experiences afford, including not allowing the experience of “the beautiful fortuities” of one’s soul.³⁹

Admittedly, Nietzsche does in one aphorism in *Beyond Good and Evil* refer to himself and his fellow free spirits as “we last Stoics.” However, this appellation is specific to the texts of his late writings and the polemical positioning he assumes in them, and we can only make sense of this by developing an appreciation of what he is doing in these writings. The phrase “we last Stoics” captures an important aspect of Nietzsche’s conception of his task in his late writings, which is centred on a principal virtue that he appeals to in them and that he has already appealed to in middle period texts such as *Dawn*, and also *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, namely, integrity or honesty (*Redlichkeit*). He appeals to Stoicism in his late writings as an ethical practice in which the instinct of health defends itself against incipient decadence. It is what he calls a “brake-shoe morality” that is “stoical, hard, tyrannical.”⁴⁰ It denotes a union of a protracted will and knowledge that entails having “respect for oneself.”⁴¹ Self-control is required so as to prevent clumsiness and sloppiness with regards to the tasks that face the free spirit: “We free spirits must take care that our integrity does not become our vanity, our ostentatious adornment, our limit, our stupidity!”⁴²

Nietzsche never advocates a state of ataraxy as the state of wisdom human beings should strive for, and this is true in the case of both his middle and late writings.⁴³ On the contrary, the free spirit for Nietzsche endeavours to exist in a state of “eternal liveliness.”⁴⁴ It is, then, a peculiar and specific commitment to Stoicism that he has in late texts such as *Beyond Good and Evil*. Typically, his view of the Stoic type of person is a highly critical one. The Stoic for him is a person who prepares himself for the worst, training himself to swallow stones and worms, slivers of glass and scorpions without nausea. Nietzsche’s conception of fate is not the Stoic one which prepares one for “petrification”: “We are *not so badly off* that we have to be as badly off as Stoics.”⁴⁵ Stoicism enables one to conceal well what one lacks, donning a cloak of prudent silence, affability, and mildness, and this is the cloak of the idealist who, in reality, is an incurable self-despiser and deeply vain. Might the philosopher’s wisdom, including the so-called wisdom of the Stoic sage, be a screen behind which he hides from “spirit”?⁴⁶ By “spirit” here Nietzsche essentially means “life” and of the superior kind, namely, life lived at higher levels of subtlety, dexterity, complexity, and receptivity.

³⁹ Nietzsche (1974: 305).

⁴⁰ Nietzsche (1988: 13, 15 [29]).

⁴¹ Nietzsche (13, 11 [297]; see also 11 [375]).

⁴² Nietzsche (1990: 227).

⁴³ Nietzsche (1997b: essay three, Sect. 25).

⁴⁴ Nietzsche (2013a: 408).

⁴⁵ Nietzsche (1974: 326).

⁴⁶ Nietzsche (1974: 359).

Let me now indicate how Nietzsche's assessment of Stoic teaching on the emotions mutates as he develops and refines his philosophical position during his middle writings. On the Stoic account emotions are cognitive, that is, they are evaluative judgements, and judgements of worth, where the objects being valued are external goods that lie beyond our control. Emotions or passions are not, then, to be considered as mere impulses or simple feelings (except on the level of what the Stoics call "proto-passions"). Nietzsche has a similar view when he claims that "feelings" are the products of judgements and beliefs. In short, emotions as beliefs or judgements typically take the form of false cognitions. As he puts it in *Dawn*:

"Trust your feelings!" But feelings are nothing final or original – behind feelings there stand judgements and evaluations which we inherit in the form of feelings.⁴⁷

If emotions are evaluative judgements, or the necessary effects of such judgements, then the elimination of them also dissolves the emotion. Nietzsche can be seen, therefore, to be adopting the Stoic view that every external event is a matter of indifference and so cannot be inherently good or bad. It is we ourselves who give external events their value by applying to them evaluative predicates and when we do this we bind our *eudaimonia* to things over which we have very little control. Implicit in Nietzsche's account of this Stoic doctrine is the idea that assenting to things is within our control, that is, whether we apply these value predicates to things is a matter of election or choice. In and of themselves external events have no intrinsic value and are indifferent unless we assent to such value judgements.

Nietzsche is keen to utilize these insights to counsel his readers in the art of living. When we suffer a terrible misfortune, such as the death of a loved one, we need to recall how we viewed such an experience when we saw someone else bear the same adversity. That is, he is recommending that we see and judge our own experiences as we see and judge such experiences when they happen to others since this enables us to see events in an objective fashion, that is, without the exaggeration and excess of what is the ego-standpoint. By seeing things in this manner, we may eventually free ourselves from the negative emotions of passions, such as anger or grief. To a large extent the aim is to cultivate the stance of *ataraxia* or imperturbability, and to attain this by refusing evaluative judgements and identifications.

Any attachment to Stoic doctrine Nietzsche has does not last and a reevaluation of Stoicism gets underway in *The Gay Science*. The key critical insight he now develops is the following: Stoic therapy seeks to minimise suffering and pain as much as is possible, but it does so at the cost of removing the possibility of the experience of joy. Nietzsche, then, comes to reject the Stoic identification of full human flourishing with the attainment of freedom from emotional turmoil and disturbance.⁴⁸ So, while Nietzsche praises the Stoic Epictetus in *Dawn* for what he sees as his non-fanatical way of living, a significant reevaluation of Stoicism takes place in his

⁴⁷ Nietzsche (2011: 35).

⁴⁸ For further helpful insight see Ure (2009). For additional insight into Nietzsche's relation to Stoicism, focused on matters of suffering and the love of fate, see Mollison (2019).

thinking with *The Gay Science*.⁴⁹ His mature position is succinctly articulated in aphorism 12 of *The Gay Science*:

Pleasure and displeasure are so intertwined that whoever wants as much as possible of one must also have as much as possible of the other – that whoever wants to learn to “jubilate up to the heavens” must also be prepared for “depression unto death.”⁵⁰

Nietzsche draws attention to the value of displeasure and pain because on his reckoning their experience ultimately afford access to “subtle pleasures and joys that have been rarely relished yet.”⁵¹ In a note from the autumn of 1881 it is clear that Nietzsche regards Stoicism as a flight from embodied human existence, one that results in an extremely austere, virtually non-human ethical way of living. Let me cite at some length this highly revealing reflection:

...Its basic motifs are *paralysis* and *coldness*, hence a form of anaesthesia. The principal aim of Stoic edification is to eliminate any *inclination to excitement*, continually to lessen the number of things that might offer enticement, to awaken distaste for and to belittle the value of most things that offer stimulation, to hate excitement as an enemy; indeed, to hate the passions themselves as if they were a form of disease or something entirely unworthy; for they are the hallmarks of every despicable and painful manifestation of suffering. *In summa: turning oneself into stone* as a weapon against suffering and in the future conferring all worthy names of divine-like virtues upon a state...the loss of feeling reached is the result of the *pressure of a tourniquet*. I am very antipathetic to this line of thinking. It undervalues the value of *pain* (it is as useful and necessary as pleasure), the value of stimulation and suffering. It is finally compelled to say: everything that happens is acceptable to me; nothing is to be different. There are *no needs over which it triumphs* because it has killed the passion for needs. All of this is expressed in religious terms as a complete acceptance of God’s actions....⁵²

Nietzsche suggests that for those with whom fate (*das Schicksal*) solicits improvisations—such as those that live in violent ages and depend on sudden and mercurial people—then Stoicism is probably advisable; but for those who can foresee that fate permits them to spin a long thread they do well to make Epicurean arrangements: “That is what all those have always done whose work is of the spirit.”⁵³ Overall, then, Nietzsche is not in favour of a radical cure in response to our complex affective conditions of existence—for example, the cure of a Stoic extirpation of the passions—since the result is a diminishment of our existence to a state of petrification.

⁴⁹ See Nietzsche (2011: 546).

⁵⁰ Nietzsche (1974: 12).

⁵¹ Nietzsche (1974: 12).

⁵² Nietzsche (1988, 9, 15 [55]: pp. 652–3).

⁵³ Nietzsche (1974: 306).

Nietzsche construes the person with an overflowing spirit so full of vital life that it can open itself up to the world and regard increased capacities for being affected as the marks of a healthy, life-affirming mode of existence. He attacks, for example, preachers of morality, as well as theologians, for painting a too dramatic portrait of the human condition in which the human animal is portrayed in fatally sick terms and the only cure for its malaise is a radical and final one: the pain and misfortune of existence are painted in a far too exaggerated manner. Instead, Nietzsche favours the capacities individuals have for overcoming and conquering their pains and misfortunes, pouring sweetness on their bitterness, and finding remedies in their bravery and sublimity: all of this can give rise to new forms of strength. He writes:

What fantasies about the “inner” misery of evil people moral preachers have invented! What *lies* they have told us about the unhappiness of passionate people! “Lies” is really the proper word here: for they knew very well of the over-rich happiness of this kind of human being, but they kept a deadly silence about it because it refuted their theory according to which all happiness begins only after the annihilation of passion and the silencing of the will. Finally, regarding the prescription of all these physicians of the soul and their praise of a hard, radical cure, it should be permitted to ask: Is our life really painful and burdensome enough to make it advantageous to exchange it for a Stoic way of life and petrification?⁵⁴

As Aurelia Armstrong notes, Nietzsche’s objection to the Stoics is a quite specific one. He does not object to its therapy on the grounds that it works to deaden painful affects since he recognizes that this can often be a useful strategy when dealing with a suffering that becomes unbearable or a passion that becomes extremely debilitating, such as fear. Sometimes the preservation of one’s life, and one’s strength, requires that one acts something like a Stoic. The mistake, and indeed folly, in the Stoic conception of life is to turn a potentially useful strategy for dealing with debilitating passions into the principal ideal of human flourishing: “It is the Stoic ideal of virtue as freedom from passion and the interpretation and evaluation of existence that undergirds this ideal that Nietzsche calls into question.”⁵⁵

Let me return to aphorism 305 from *The Gay Science* and that I alluded to in my criticism of Nussbaum on Nietzsche at the start of this section. In it, Nietzsche appears to be making critical reference to Stoic teaching with its model of the virtuous human being as an inner citadel or fortress, and what he says serves as a cogent rebuff to Nussbaum and her cavalier depiction as a thick-skinned modern Stoic. We would be wise both with respect to cultivating our appreciation of Nietzsche and cultivating our own lives to heed his counsel:

No longer may he entrust himself to any instinct or free wingbeat; he stands in a fixed position with a gesture that wards off, armed against himself, with sharp and mistrustful eyes – the eternal guardian of his castle, since he has

⁵⁴ Nietzsche (1974: 326).

⁵⁵ Armstrong (2013: 14).

turned himself into a castle. Of course, he can achieve *greatness* this way. But he has certainly become insufferable for others, difficult for himself, and impoverished and cut off from the most beautiful fortuities of his soul. And also from all further *instruction*. For one must be able to lose oneself occasionally if one wants to learn something from things different from oneself.⁵⁶

1.2 Nietzsche and Spinoza on the passions

Several studies of Spinoza's relation to the Stoics have been published in recent years and that have sought to helpfully probe the extent to which he is close to them, and so can be considered an early modern Stoic.⁵⁷ Aurelia Armstrong has questioned the extent to which Spinoza can fairly be treated as a Stoic and she draws some useful comparisons with Nietzsche, with both thinkers depicted as being, in some important respects, contra the Stoics. I wish to consider her appreciation and suggest she errs in seeking to bring Nietzsche too close to Spinoza. Although not an actual Stoic in his ethics Spinoza, for Nietzsche, is too close to their negative teaching on the passions and affects. Although Nietzsche felt he had found a precursor in Spinoza as his writings continue to develop, he expresses a more and more critical stance towards him and his ethics.⁵⁸

Certainly, we can identify in both thinkers an instructive "therapeutic naturalism," as I shall call it. Such a naturalism rules out any cosmic exceptionalism on the part of the human animal by translating it back into nature, and by insisting that there is no kingdom within a kingdom.⁵⁹ The knowledge given to us by this naturalism has far-reaching implications since it is a teaching that works against the menace of religious enthusiasm and moral fanaticism and, in so doing, it renews humanity's fidelity to the earth as the site of its existential flourishing. This naturalism is at the same time a genuinely therapeutic practice of philosophy, centred as it is on the identification of real causes, as opposed to imaginary ones, that then serves to free the mind from fear, superstition, and moral and religious phantasms and that serves to make possible the genuinely free human being. As Nietzsche puts it in *Dawn*, we need to stop turning natural causes and consequences into sinners and executioners.⁶⁰

Armstrong argues that Spinoza is one of the first to challenge the Stoic conception of nature and the goals of philosophical therapy. The basis of the affinity with Nietzsche resides in their shared commitment to a principle of naturalistic

⁵⁶ Nietzsche (1974: 305).

⁵⁷ See, for example, De Brabander (2007) and Miller (2015).

⁵⁸ In a letter to Franz Overbeck, postmarked July 30, 1881, Nietzsche refers to Spinoza as his precursor and enumerates the points of doctrine he shares with him, including the denial of free will, of a moral world order, and of evil, and also mentions the task of "making knowledge the most *powerful affect*" (die Erkenntniß zum *mächtigsten Affekt* zu Machen. Nietzsche (1981, Band 6: p. 111).

⁵⁹ Nietzsche's desire to translate the human being back into nature is designed to work against attempts to project the human animal as something higher than nature, including "conceited and enthusiastic interpretations"; it is, then, and above all, an attempt to undermine "unconscious human vanity." See Nietzsche (1990: 230).

⁶⁰ Nietzsche (2011: 33).

immanence: the human being is fully immanent within the order of nature. As Spinoza makes clear in his *Ethics* the human being has to be understood as fully implicated in the common order of nature, and this means that the human being cannot be treated as if it was a kingdom within a kingdom who “disturbs” rather than “follows” nature’s order; in short, and conceived as a finite mode, the human being is subject to the same causal laws and processes as everything else that exists in nature.⁶¹ We might ask, however, where is this to depart from the Stoics—are they not too thinkers of an immanent order of nature? We know what it is to be free for the Stoics: it is to live in accordance with nature and achieve cosmic harmony. In the Stoic world view nature or fate is something ordered rationally, providential, and divine. To live in accordance with nature is, therefore, to actively accept what is ordained by fate as necessary and as the will of God or Zeus. What is the prime obstacle to our goal of living in agreement with nature and so fulfilling this goal? It is the passions, conceived as excessive impulses and emotions to seek or to avoid something. As Armstrong puts it, “To be in the grip of a passion is to accord excessive value to things that make no contribution to our virtue.”⁶² We are in need, then, of therapeutic strategies designed to free us from the influence of the passions, and for the Stoics one strategy available to us is to affirm the power of voluntary, rational assent, and another is to affirm divine providential determinism.

When we affirm the power of assent as the source of our freedom (from the passions) we accord the soul, but not the body, the power to transcend its determination by the external world; indeed, the body is associated with that which is external, alien, and superfluous to the self. The problem with this strategy is that it puts us at war with ourselves and assumes a rigid boundary between self and world, reifying a mental self to ensure the attainment of psychological self-sufficiency. However, if we are to be sincere in our affirmation of immanence, we need to recognize that there can be no total liberation from external determination, including from the passions.

For Spinoza, the Stoics go too far in supposing that the affects depend entirely upon our will and that it is possible for us to command them absolutely. Spinoza argues that experiences cries out against this view, and the suggestion is that our strict integration in nature means that we are necessarily acted upon by external forces and so we are unavoidably subject to passions. The problem with the Stoic conception of the world is that it elevates the virtuous soul above nature, granting the soul, but not the body, the power to transcend determination. The result is to produce a negative evaluation of our capacity to be affected. When viewed in this way, “Stoic ethics reveals itself to be motivated by the desire to escape vulnerability and pain... as a denial of the fundamental character of life as productive struggle and growth.”⁶³

According to Armstrong, both Spinoza and Nietzsche are focused in their ethical thinking on the maximization of power or activity. She thus suggests that an

⁶¹ Spinoza (1992, book three, preface).

⁶² Armstrong (2013: 11).

⁶³ Armstrong (2013: 20).

ethics focused on power-enhancement, rather than on the achievement of a fully realized freedom—conceived as psychological independence from external forces—opens the possibility of a more positive assessment of the passions. This is because it allows for a distinction to be made between what promotes our power and what diminishes it, which is a distinction between joyful passions and sad passions. As natural beings and finite modes we must understand that we are neither completely active nor completely passive. Armstrong puts it as follows: “What Spinoza denies is that our powers of acting and thinking could ever be unconditioned, and therefore that an individual could ever be the originating or sole cause of any activity.” We need other people to realize the powers of our self. This means that if we are to persist and thrive, we must augment our powers through co-operative and mutually empowering interactions with external things. We cannot, therefore, lead active and autonomous lives simply through exercising the power of the mind over the body and negating the external forces that impinge upon us. The wisdom of the Stoic reification of the mind needs to be questioned and ultimately rejected.

In Spinoza the ideal goal of liberation is one of freedom from the passions, but this is not an option available to us as human beings conceived as finite modes. One might suggest, therefore, that what he is offering is the next best thing, namely, on the one hand, cultivating joyful passions over sad ones, and on the other hand, becoming a rational agent of virtue and to the extent that in your conduct you only manifest active affects.⁶⁴ In Nietzsche, by contrast, we encounter a much more affirmative philosophy of the passions centred on the recognition of the need for us to discharge them in culturally healthy ways, to conquer them as sources of real felt joy, and, therefore, to recognize them as playing an essential role in our efforts at self-cultivation. Nietzsche does not want us to aspire to attaining a state of beatitude, at least not as a permanent state and not as the highest state we can attain, and hence his critical remark that he finds Spinoza’s “intellectual love of God”—which signals we have attained the state of beatitude—as “bloodless.”⁶⁵ Nietzsche values our vulnerability and openness to experience, and this for him necessarily entails enduring and profiting from experiences of pain and from the full range of our emotions. One thus wonders whether the criticism of Stoicism he advances in aphorism 12 of *The Gay Science*, along with its maxim that “the virtuous human is the happiest human,” which is, he says, a “casuistic subtlety for the subtle,” would equally apply in his eyes to Spinoza’s ethics. With regards to pain Nietzsche thinks we simply cannot do without it as an essential element in human life and its perfection: “There is as much wisdom in pain as there is in pleasure: both belong among the factors that contribute the most to the preservation of the species. If pain did not, it would have perished long ago; that it hurts is no argument against it but its essence.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ For further helpful insight into the affects in Spinoza, including the “active” ones, see Nadler (2020: pp. 24–28). Nadler defines Spinozist virtue as involving the cultivation of “the strength of one’s rational ideas so that they are affectively more powerful than the passions on a consistent basis” (p. 105).

⁶⁵ Nietzsche (1974: 372).

⁶⁶ Nietzsche (1974: 318).

Nietzsche consistently opposes an ethics of “comfortableness” (*Behaglichkeit*), and this explains his great worry over an ethics of *Mitleid* since, he contends, it amounts to a “religion of comfortableness.”⁶⁷

In addition, Nietzsche is keen to critically attend to what he calls “Morality as Timidity” and the problems he sees emerging from adherence to such a “morality.” Perhaps his most trenchant insight into this morality centres on his claim that the recipes philosophical therapy comes up with to counter our passions—be it the therapy of the Stoics or the therapy of Spinoza—generalize where generalization is unadvisable and even unwise. We are not dealing here, he contends, either with “science” or even with “wisdom,” but rather with prudence mingled with “stupidity”: “whether it be that indifference and statuesque coldness towards the passionate folly of the affects (*Affekte*) which the Stoics advised and applied; or that no-more laughing and no-more weeping of Spinoza, that destruction of the affects (*Affekte*) through analysis and vivisection which he advocated so naively...”⁶⁸ Even if we concede that Nietzsche does not do justice to Spinoza on the affects or passions in this aphorism, it nevertheless remains the case that he is a very different thinker to Spinoza, for example, he is a much more historical thinker than Spinoza ever was, a thinker attuned to the historical and cultural evolution of human passions. Spinoza famously held to the view that the study of human actions and appetites can be approached “as if it were an investigation into lines, planes, or bodies.”⁶⁹ By contrast, Nietzsche approaches human passions with the aid of what he called “historical philosophizing.”⁷⁰ With this mode of philosophizing at his disposal he is able to show that human passions are mutable and, furthermore, can be appealed to in more elevated and sublimated forms to develop a significant transformation of the human animal, and in the direction of its further cultivation and perfection. Thus, for example, in *Dawn* he argues that to date it is human pride that has impeded the new understanding and knowledge of morality, and that to now remove this brake we can appeal to *more* pride, even a *new* pride.⁷¹ This explains why in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche is able to declare that within our warring depths we can find a “concealed *heroism*,” but “certainly nothing divine that eternally rests in itself, as Spinoza supposed.”⁷² For Nietzsche, vigorous thinking does not strive for understanding or knowledge that is, “conciliatory, just, and good” and that stands opposed to the drives (*Triebe*); rather, our understanding (*intelligere*), “is actually nothing but a *certain behavior of the drives toward one another*... Only now does the truth dawn on us that by far the greatest part of our spirit’s activity remains unconscious and unfelt.”⁷³

Two points are worth now stressing. The first point to note is that as a thinker Nietzsche is wedded to “the passion of knowledge” (*Leidenschaft der Erkenntnis*). This is a “passion” that the true thinker is prepared to risk health and honor for⁷⁴;

⁶⁷ Nietzsche (1974: 318 and 338).

⁶⁸ Nietzsche (1990: 198). Translation modified.

⁶⁹ Spinoza (1992, Part III: Preface).

⁷⁰ See Nietzsche (1997: 2).

⁷¹ Nietzsche (2011: 32).

⁷² Nietzsche (1974: 333).

⁷³ Nietzsche (1974: 333). Translation modified.

⁷⁴ Nietzsche (1974: 3).

with the arrival of this “new passion” we encounter a situation where knowledge is transformed into a passion, “that does not shrink from any sacrifice” and that is akin to an unrequited love where we exist as unhappy lovers and readily accept this as our fate⁷⁵; and, finally, this passion represents a “search for knowledge” that wants, “to rule and possess, and you with it!”⁷⁶ The second point to note is that for Nietzsche the task is not simply one of replacing sad passions with joyful passions, but rather one of practising self-cultivation and self-perfection in such a way that we learn how to transform living with our passions into an ongoing and renewable joyful practice.

1.3 Transforming the passions into joys

Nietzsche does not advocate a simple-minded, unsublimated discharge of our powerful emotions; rather, he speaks of the need to “gild” and to “sing” the passions.⁷⁷ We can do this well through forms of culture: music, drama, and sport for example. As I noted at the beginning of this essay, for Nietzsche the mind set we need to avoid is those whom he calls melancholics and philosophical blind-worms who speak only of the dreadful character of the passions and as a way of indicting the entire world. We need to effect a transformation in which we view our passions as sources of delight and joy, and we can do this when we consider their mastery in terms of our efforts at self-cultivation and self-perfection. That the task of becoming a master of oneself, a task centred on mastering the passions, is one of Nietzsche’s chief concerns as an educator is clear when we take cognizance of the following aphorism from *The Wanderer and His Shadow*:

A person who does not want to become master of his temper, of his jaundice and vengefulness, of his sensual pleasures, and who attempts to become master somewhere else, is as dumb as the farmer who lays out his field beside a mountain torrent without protecting himself against it.⁷⁸

Nietzsche speaks of becoming a master of one’s passions in terms of our becoming “spiritually joyful, luminous and honest (*aufrichtigen*).”⁷⁹ He makes it clear, however, that he regards our overcoming of the passions as a means and not an end in itself: the aim is to overcome them to attain possession of the most fertile ground.⁸⁰

Nietzsche is combatting two things in his reflections on the passions and how best to cultivate them: first, he is combatting the presumption that there is a *single* moral-making morality,⁸¹ and, second, he is combatting any morality that teaches

⁷⁵ Nietzsche (2011: 429).

⁷⁶ Nietzsche (1974: 283).

⁷⁷ For insight into how a notion of sublimation works in the context of Nietzsche’s thinking about the passions see Ansell-Pearson (2019). For insight into Nietzsche as a thinker of sublimation in general see Gemes (2009) and Swenson (2014).

⁷⁸ Nietzsche (2013b: 65).

⁷⁹ Nietzsche (2013b: 88).

⁸⁰ Nietzsche (2013b: 53).

⁸¹ Nietzsche (2011: 164).

renunciation as the chief task and goal of our ethical work upon ourselves. With regards to the first point, we would be wise to take stock of Nietzsche's advice that we refrain from assuming that what is "higher" and "lower" in morality is to be measured by some moral yardstick: "for there is no absolute morality. So take your rule from somewhere else—and now beware!"⁸² What he means by this is that no morality or ethical practice should presume to have a monopoly over us, and we should not, therefore, permit a single morality to assume dominance in human life; when we think about morality in this way we only impoverish ourselves.

Even free-spirited natures need to beware of the dangers of basing their lives on a too meagre foundation of desire. If they renounce the joys that fellowship, sensual pleasures, the arts, and even everyday conveniences bring with them, they run the risk of reaching boredom with life and, in the process, making this rather than wisdom their neighbour.⁸³ Indeed, what the free spirit needs is an education in needs, one in which "essential needs" are satisfied as much as possible, even if imperfectly, whilst allowing needs to proliferate, especially superfluous ones, only trains such a spirit in unfreedom.⁸⁴

With respect to a moral code that advocates strict renunciation as the way to self-contentment and self-mastery, Nietzsche makes his opposition clear in *The Gay Science* when he announces that he abhors "all those moralities which say: 'Do not do this! Renounce! Overcome yourself!'"⁸⁵ The morality he prefers is one that goads us to do something and to do it again, from morning until evening time, but with the encouragement that we are to do it well, and as well as we alone can do it. Only by doing things for ourselves, he is suggesting, can we do something well and learn what this might mean for our own development without "hatred or aversion."⁸⁶ In short, we should aim to live without negative virtues when it comes to cultivating our passions. Moralists who command human beings to, above all, gain control of themselves in some severe fashion, and with an austere teaching, only succeed in afflicting us with the disease of "constant irritability in the face of all natural stirrings and inclinations."⁸⁷

⁸² Nietzsche (2011: 139).

⁸³ Nietzsche (2013a: 337; see also 2013a: 369).

⁸⁴ Nietzsche (2013b: 318).

⁸⁵ Nietzsche (1974: 304).

⁸⁶ Nietzsche (1974: 304).

⁸⁷ Nietzsche (1974: 305).

2 Conclusion

Nietzsche's primary teaching, evident in both early writings such as *Schopenhauer as Educator* and in the texts that make up his middle period, is a teaching on self-cultivation. It is such a teaching that for him provides human beings with the motivation to want to cultivate and sublimate their passions. Nietzsche laments the fact, for example, that, and as he sees the situation, poets are no longer teachers. Here he means "poets" (*Dichter*) in the wider sense of artists and writers who are both composers of reality and seers of the future. As he puts it in one of his texts from the middle period: "However strange it may seem to our age: there were once poets and artists whose souls were beyond the passions, with their convulsions and raptures, and who therefore took pleasure in purer materials, worthier human beings, more delicate combinations and solutions."⁸⁸ Today, Nietzsche reflects, all the talk is on unchaining the will, anarchically liberating life, and smashing things. In previous ages, however, the artist was conceived as a tamer of the will, a transformer of animals, and a creator and sculptor of human beings. Whereas the ancient Greeks saw the poet as a teacher of adults, as someone who himself "became a good poem or a beautiful creation," today we are presented with art that is the reflection, even celebration, of little more than "a cave of desires, ruinously overgrown with flowers, prickly plants and poisonous weeds," so presenting the thinker with an object for melancholy reflection simply because the "most noble and most precious now grow up already in ruins..." Although I cannot explore the topic in this essay, Nietzsche's ultimate concern, arising from his thinking about the passions and his teaching on self-cultivation, is with the cultivation of "beautiful human beings" and with knowing whether such humans are possible, "in the midst of our modern world."⁸⁹

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⁸⁸ Nietzsche (2013a: 172).

⁸⁹ Nietzsche (2013a: 99).

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