

Nietzsche and Epicurus

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Great politics and the unnoticed life

Nietzsche and Epicurus on the boundaries of cultivation

Peter S. Groff

After more than a century of neglect, Epicurus has in recent years come to be recognized for the profound influence he had on Nietzsche and the central, if ambivalent, place he holds in his thought.¹ Their affinities are many, but two points of intersection in particular deserve mention: a staunch naturalistic opposition to metaphysico-moralistic interpretations of the world² and an understanding of philosophy as a ‘way of life’ or ‘art of living.’³ As is sometimes pointed out, Epicurus looms largest in Nietzsche’s middle-period works, where select aspects of his thought and life are valorized and appropriated: his vitality, modesty, ‘heroic-idyllic’ mode of philosophizing, therapeutic technique of multiple explanations, embrace of a death-bound soul and rejection of an afterlife, preemptive critique of Christianity and anticipation of a modern scientific, de-deified world view.⁴ Here, however, I will focus on one aspect of Epicurus’ teachings that has received little attention: his controversial advice to ‘live unnoticed’ (*lathe biōsas*).⁵ Nietzsche was familiar with this credo and took it to heart, but it ultimately stood at odds with, and lost out to, his irresistible temptation to engage in great politics.⁶ The following discussion attempts to track and illuminate Nietzsche’s conflicted appreciation for the virtues of the unnoticed life.

A buried Epicurean teaching

As traditionally interpreted, the *lathe biōsas* doctrine counsels us to avoid the political life and opt, instead, for a quiet, sequestered life of contemplation and ethical perfectionism. Most of what we know about it comes to us through doxographies and later critics of Epicurus, but one can, nevertheless, find comparable sentiments scattered throughout his corpus.⁷ For instance, he repeatedly warns against the limits of attaining security through other people (*asphaleia ex anthrōpōn*) (PD VI, VII). He urges his adherents not to seek happiness in fame or honour and to shun the multitude (VC 64, 81; cf. PD VII). He contends that ‘the purest security is that which comes from

a quiet life and withdrawal from the many' (PD XIV).⁸ Elsewhere, he encourages his followers to 'free themselves from the prison of daily duties and politics' and avoid the political life (*mē politeuesthai*) (VC 58).⁹

Unsurprisingly, Epicurus' doctrine of the hidden life was wildly unpopular in its time and remains so even today. It ran against the grain of not only common opinion (which placed great emphasis on traditional civic values, as well as fame and honour) but also the views of most philosophers. Socrates himself eschewed political offices, but, nonetheless, provided an even greater public service through his zetetic activities in the marketplace – ultimately, at the cost of his life. Plato, envisioning the ideal coincidence of political power and wisdom in the wake of Socrates' death, placed philosophers at the very centre of the city as its rulers.¹⁰ For Aristotle, the human being is the *zōon politikon*: we require political association and genuine flourishing is impossible shorn of certain social advantages and perks.¹¹ The Stoics, despite their withdrawal into the 'inner citadel', acknowledged the duties we have to our communities as rational and virtuous beings, and so saw an ethical obligation to participate in politics. Even the outlandish Cynics, who despised conventional morality, remained dialectically bound up with the traditional values of the city they sought to overturn. In this respect, Epicurus' unapologetically apolitical stance is unique among the ancients. It represents such a striking divergence from the norm that it is sometimes explained away in historicist or psychologistic terms, for example, as a function of the political malaise following Alexander the Great (the retreat from the polis to the individual), or a shortcoming of his character (excessive gentleness, softness, etc.), or perhaps some pivotal traumatic episode that soured him on politics once and for all. But bearing in mind the comparably heretical status of Epicurus' other teachings within the tradition, there is no reason to assume his rejection of the political requires some ad hoc explanation. As Geert Roskam argues, it is a reasoned philosophical teaching proceeding from his fundamental commitment to pleasure as the highest good. Specifically, Roskam links it to three components of Epicurus' ethical thought: (1) his therapeutic attempt to cure the soul of painful irrational fears and vain desires, (2) his analysis of desire (and recognition that desires for fame, honour, power, influence, or even to contribute to the public good are neither natural nor necessary) and (3) his prudential calculus of pleasure (2007: 34–5).¹² Put simply, if one seeks tranquillity of the soul (*ataraxia*) and wishes to minimize mental anxiety, a private life off the radar is far preferable to a public, political one. But if the human being is for Epicurus not necessarily a political animal, we, nonetheless, require some degree of sociality to lead good lives. Hence Epicurus's garden: a small, relatively independent community of friends hidden away from the city and its empty distractions, engaged in revivifying philosophical therapy, cultivating themselves into godlike beings who pursue lives of quiet, simple, stable, tranquil pleasure in accordance with the 'deep-set boundary stone' of nature.¹³

Great politics and the Platonic philosopher-legislator

There is an obvious sense in which Nietzsche shares Epicurus' dismissive views on the political. He repeatedly distances himself from the interests of the state even in his

early writings: 'He who has the *furor philosophicus* within him', he writes, 'will already no longer have time for the *furor politicus* and will wisely refrain from reading the newspapers every day, let alone working for a political party' (SE 7:181).¹⁴ And he frequently reminds us of his disdain for the vulgar nationalism of Bismarck's *Reich*, pointing out that the growth of political and military power inevitably comes at the cost of cultural degeneration and 'spiritual flattening' (BGE 241; cf. TI, 'Germans' *passim*). In these respects, Nietzsche aptly describes himself as 'the last *antipolitical* German' (EH 'Wise' 3).¹⁵ Still, being *antipolitisch* is not the same as being *unpolitisch* – apolitical, indifferent to politics – an attitude that arguably aligns more closely with Epicurus' maxim. Put differently, the relevant choice for Nietzsche is not between politics or no politics, but between petty politics (*kleine Politik*) and great politics (*grosse Politik*). Politics becomes great when an actual 'revaluation of all values' is at stake, when it involves a cultural 'war of spirits' (*Geisterkrieg*) rather than merely a crude power conflict over legal systems, economic policies, material resources or national boundaries (EH 'Destiny' 1).¹⁶

'It is only with me', Nietzsche contends, 'that the earth knows *great politics*' (EH 'Destiny' 1). An immodest, self-mythologizing claim perhaps, since elsewhere he recognizes that initiating such world-transforming revaluations is the true task of the *philosopher*:

Genuine philosophers, however, are commanders and legislators [Befehlende und Gesetzgeber]: they say, 'thus it shall be!' They first determine the Whither and For What of humankind. ... With a creative hand they reach for the future and all that is and has been becomes a means for them, an instrument, a hammer. Their 'knowing' is creating, their creating is a legislation, their will to truth is – will to power. (BGE 211)

In the *Nachlass* drafts for this passage from 1884–85, Nietzsche points to Plato and Muhammad as paradigmatic examples of commanders and legislators, despite the residual self-deception under which they were labouring (KSA 11:26[407], 38[137]). Nietzsche sees these predecessors as involved in the same sort of transformative world-historical task that he himself is *qua* philosopher; they are simply less self-aware of the radically creative nature of their legislations. And, indeed, it seems appropriate for Nietzsche to place himself in the lineage of Plato, since the conception of philosophers as 'commanders and legislators' – even *prophets* in the manner of Zarathustra – is a fundamentally Platonic idea. Nietzsche's nomothetic great politics can thus be understood as a late-modern radicalization of Platonic political philosophy, aiming at the ideal coincidence of wisdom and political power epitomized by the philosopher-king.¹⁷ His new philosophical legislators, however, do not pretend to transmit some pre-existent, universal Good to us, nor are they trying simply to realign the human soul with the rational and moral order of things; rather, they are bringing into being a new table of goods according to which we might live, and in doing so are experimentally attempting to transform humanity. They must accordingly prepare 'great ventures and over-all attempts of discipline and cultivation' in order to determine the future of the human (BGE 203). This ambitious project of transfiguration is crystallized in the

dramatic image of Zarathustra attempting to produce his *Übermensch* from the ugly, uncarved stone of humanity (Z II 'Blessed' cf. BGE 62 and 225).

Concealment and the discreet therapeutic philosopher

Yet Platonic as this sounds, one can, nevertheless, find deeper Epicurean reservations in Nietzsche's thought. For the Nietzschean philosopher-lawgiver is a shadowy, unobtrusive, hidden figure who dwells far from the centres of conventional political power, shunning fame and the recognition of the masses. As Zarathustra says in his initial condemnation of the city: 'Around inventors of new values the world revolves – invisibly [*unsichtbar*] it revolves. Yet around play-actors the people and fame revolve: that is "the way of the world"' (Z I 'Flies'). This same line is repeated after he and his students have abandoned the city, with a small alteration: 'Not around the inventors of new noise', he says, 'but around the inventors of new values does the world revolve, *inaudibly* [*unhörbar*] it revolves' (Z II 'Great Events', cf. II 'Stillest Hour'). A powerful but confusing image: What would it mean for the world to revolve 'invisibly' or 'inaudibly' around something or someone? The suggestion seems to be that it is the inventors of new values who themselves remain invisible or inaudible to the world, even as they shape it. Certainly Nietzsche saw himself that way as he wandered anonymously throughout southern Europe, and despite his occasional frustrated desire for recognition, believed – in a residually Epicurean spirit – that it was probably for the best.¹⁸ Indeed, Nietzsche's early retirement from the academy in 1879 and the inconspicuous, nomadic regimen that shaped the next ten years of his life were prompted not only by chronic health issues but also by his growing Epicurean inclination to 'free [himself] from the prison of daily duties and politics' (VC 58) and become a genuine philosopher.¹⁹ It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that his withdrawal from that world left him literally stateless.²⁰

As mentioned earlier, it is in Nietzsche's middle-period works (1878–82) that one finds the richest trove of Epicurean insights, and the siren call of the sequestered life is no exception. In describing the 'prudence' of free spirits Nietzsche observes:

[They] will easily be content with, for example, a minor office or an income that just enables them to live; for they will organize their life in such a way that a great transformation of external circumstances, even an overturning of the political order, does not overturn their life with it. Upon all these things they expend as little energy as possible There is in [the free spirit's] way of living and thinking a *refined heroism* which disdains to offer itself to the veneration of the great masses, as his coarser brother does, and tends to go silently [*still*] through the world and out of the world. Whatever labyrinths he may stray through, among whatever rocks his stream may make its torturous way – if he emerges into the open air he will travel his road bright, light and almost soundlessly [*geräuschlos*] and let sunshine play down into his very depths. (HH 291)²¹

The mood and language of this passage are deeply Epicurean: consider the emphasis on prudence or caution (*Vorsicht*, a common German rendering of *phronēsis*, which is for Epicurus the root of all other virtues), the desideratum of minimizing interaction with, and dependency upon, the city, the strategy of creating stabilizing bulwarks against social and political disruption, the evocation of refined heroism,²² the avoidance of the masses, the ideal of going silently-soundlessly through and out of the world (*lathe biōsas, lathe apobiōsas*) and the themes of open air and sunlight.²³ But who is the ‘coarser brother’ of this Epicurean free spirit who seeks popular veneration – the meddling Socratic gadfly? The Platonic philosopher-ruler? The vain Peripatetic seeking recognition as a knower? More likely, it is either the theatrical Stoic- or Cynic-type, both of whom Nietzsche elsewhere compares unfavourably to the more discreet, nuanced, cultured and spiritualized Epicurean.²⁴

One finds reminders of this Epicurean prudence even in the post-Zarathustran works. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, he counsels his nascent free spirits in similar terms:

Take care, philosophers and friends, of knowledge, and beware of martyrdom! Of suffering ‘for the truth’s sake’ [that is, in the manner of Socrates, Spinoza, Giordano Bruno, etc]! ... Rather, go away. Flee into concealment [*Verborgene*]. And have your masks and your subtlety, that you may be mistaken for what you are not, or feared a little. And don’t forget the garden, the garden with golden trelliswork. And have people around you who are as a garden ... choose the *good* solitude, the free, playful, light solitude that gives you too the right to remain good in some sense. (BGE 25)

Apart from the obvious Epicurean tropes of withdrawal and concealment – earlier in the same book, he describes Epicurus as ‘hidden away [*versteckt sass*] in his little garden’ (BGE 7) – it should be noted that Nietzsche sometimes associates Epicurus with having an unknown or obscured identity: being mistaken for what one is not.²⁵ Even the emphasis on solitude here – an ascetic practice that looms large throughout Nietzsche’s corpus²⁶ – is construed in Epicurean terms: the ‘good’ and ‘light’ solitude is the garden, where one is not entirely alone and never lonely, because there are always healing friends and kindred spirits.²⁷

Sometimes this Epicurean withdrawal-concealment strategy is cast as a necessary prologue to more ambitious cultural or even political projects: a desire to be useful on a grander scale. In an aphorism entitled ‘*The buried*’ (*Die Vergrabenen*), he writes:

We withdraw [*zurückziehen*] into concealment: but not out of any kind of personal ill-humor, as though the political and social situation of the present day were not good enough for us, but because through our withdrawal we want to economize and assemble forces of which culture will *later* have great need We are accumulating capital and seeking to make it secure: but, as in times of great peril, to do that we have to *bury* it. (WS 229)

The predominant emphasis in the middle-period writings, however, is on a more modest task: cooperative therapy and pluralistic experiments in self-cultivation among a close circle of like-minded free spirits.²⁸ This is often juxtaposed with the imprudent desire (rooted in sympathy or pity) to eliminate danger and suffering from the lives of others. An aphorism in *Daybreak* concludes:

The question itself remains unanswered whether one is of *more use* to another by immediately leaping to his side and *helping* him – which can in any case be only superficial where it does not become a tyrannical seizing and transforming – or by *creating* something out of oneself that the other can behold with pleasure: a beautiful, restful, self-enclosed garden perhaps, with high walls against storms and the dust of the roadway but also a hospitable gate. (D 174)²⁹

Interestingly, the Platonic strategy of ‘tyrannical seizing and transforming’ is considered here, but quickly passed over in favour of a more voluntary, private Epicurean cultivation. A year later in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche returns to this idea and unpacks it more carefully. Observing the ways in which the causes and inner logic of a person’s suffering are generally inaccessible or incomprehensible to others – and thus why pity is an ineffective and even counterproductive response to suffering – he encourages philosophical therapists to prioritize their own self-discovery and cultivation and then, by extension, focus only on kindred souls who they can genuinely understand and help. The primary concern is never to lose ‘one’s own way’:

How is it possible to keep to one’s own way? Constantly, some clamor or other calls us aside; rarely does our eye behold anything that does not require us to drop our own preoccupation instantly to help. I know, there are a hundred decent and praiseworthy ways of losing *my own way*, and they are truly highly ‘moral’! Indeed, those who now preach the morality of pity even take the view that precisely this and only this is moral – to lose one’s *own way* in order to come to the assistance of a neighbor. I know just as certainly that I only need to expose myself to the sight of some genuine distress and I am lost. And if a suffering friend said to me, ‘Look, I am about to die; please promise to die with me’, I should promise it; and the sight of a small mountain tribe fighting for its liberty would persuade me to offer it my hand and my life. ... All such arousing of pity and calling for help is secretly seductive, for our ‘own way’ is too hard and demanding and too remote from the love and gratitude of others, and we do not really mind escaping from it ... while I shall keep silent [*verschweigen*, that is, hide, conceal, keep secret] about some points, I do not want to remain silent about my morality which says to me: Live in concealment [*Lebe im Verborgenen*, that is, live secretly, discreetly, in hiding or seclusion] so that you *can* live for yourself. Live in *ignorance* about what seems most important to your age. Between yourself and today lay the skin of at least three centuries. And the clamor of today, the noise of wars and revolutions should be a mere murmur for you. You will also wish to help – but only those whose distress you *understand* entirely because they share with you one suffering

and one hope – your friends – and only in the manner in which you help yourself.
(GS 338; cf. SE 1)

The conclusion to this passage ('live in concealment so that you can live for yourself') is an elegant summation of the *lathe biōsas* maxim, and more generally, of the kind of refined egoism that drew Nietzsche to Epicurus.³⁰

Even when the theme of philosophical *therapeia* is expressed in a more generous, expansive and inclusive mood, the Epicurean watchwords remain. In one such passage, Nietzsche speaks of the desire to 'give away one's spiritual house and possessions' in assisting those working on themselves. Such a therapist, he suggests,

is not merely not looking for fame: he would even like to escape gratitude, for gratitude is too importunate and lacks respect for solitude and silence [*Stillschweigen*]. What he seeks is to live nameless [*namenlos*] and lightly mocked at, too humble to awaken envy or hostility. ... To be like a little inn which rejects no one who is in need but which is afterwards forgotten or ridiculed! ... Forever in a kind of love and self-enjoyment! To be in possession of a dominion and at the same time concealed and renouncing! To lie continually in the sunshine and gentleness of grace, and yet to know that the paths that rise up to the sublime are close by – That would be a life! That would be a reason for a long life! (D 449)

The emphasis on (relative) solitude, namelessness, silence and concealment is obviously Epicurean, as is the indirect utility of refined egoism, the sunshine motif, the reference to the sublime and even the evocation of a long life.³¹ But in a *Nachlass* note from the same period (Autumn 1880), we find a link tethering this passage even more closely to Epicurus. There he offers a strikingly resonant portrait of the type sketched out above: those who are in possession of a dominion and at the same time concealed and renouncing. 'I found strength', he writes, 'in the very places one does not look for it, in simple, gentle and helpful human beings, without the slightest inclination to rule ... powerful natures *dominate*, that is a necessity, even if they do not move one finger. And when they bury themselves, in their lifetime, in a garden house [*Gartenhaus*]!' (KSA 9:6[206]).³² Once again, one feels the magnetism of the hidden Epicurus, and with it, Nietzsche's desire to play a similar role.

Beyond the garden

It is hardly surprising, then, that Nietzsche dreamt of founding a kind of modern Epicurean Garden. One finds anticipations of the idea in his pivotal 1876–77 trip to Sorrento, where he lived together with Malwida von Meysenbug, Paul Rée and his pupil Albert Brenner in a small friendship community for almost a year.³³ There Nietzsche and his friends spoke fervently of creating a 'monastery of free spirits' that they called the School of the Educators (D'Iorio 2016: 24–43). This project, which excited

Nietzsche greatly, never came to fruition, but the possibility of establishing his own Garden school stuck with him, and he would revisit the prospect at various junctures in letters to his amanuensis Peter Gast (KSB 5:826, 6:457, 7:651).³⁴ As we have seen, the image of the Garden figures prominently in his middle-period writings. Curiously, it reaches its fullest and most sustained expression in *Zarathustra*, when the prophet-legislator and his select group of co-creator disciple-friends retreat from the city to the 'Blessed Isles' (*glückseligen Inseln*) in order to cultivate and perfect themselves.³⁵ The locale's namesake seems intended to evoke the ancient Greek dream of the 'Isles of the Blessed' (*makarōn nēsoi*): an eschatological paradise located in the far Western streams of Okeanos where the elite few – originally heroes, later the righteous, in Platonic dialogues, philosophers – live eternally and happily.³⁶ This is surely right, but while some commentators have taken this as evoking Hesiod, Pindar or Plato, it is more likely a homage to Epicurus. For *Zarathustra's glückseligen Inseln* are essentially the *makarōn nēsoi* made concrete in the here and now, which is precisely how the Garden was originally presented (Frischer 1982: 38).³⁷ Moreover, in a letter to Gast from this period, Nietzsche disclosed that he had Epicurus specifically in mind when he invented the Blessed Isles (KSB 6:446).³⁸

Virtually all the speeches and actions of the Part Two of *Zarathustra* take place on the Garden-like Isles. However, by the time Nietzsche began work on Part Three of *Zarathustra*, he was already beginning to doubt the wisdom and efficacy of such tight-knit, sequestered friendship communities.³⁹ Despite its rich residual Epicurean imagery, *Zarathustra* signals a shift away from the modest privatized and pluralistic experiments in self-cultivation that characterized Nietzsche's middle-period writings, and a move towards the obsession with great politics that marked his later works.⁴⁰ The model of the philosopher-therapist is replaced by the philosopher-commander, now concerned with the legislation of new values and the consequent determination of the future of the human being. One might say that here Nietzsche grows weary of Epicurus and flees back into the arms of Plato.

While it is difficult to give a full account of the reasons for this change, one detail merits mention: Nietzsche's increasing impatience and inability to abide the unperfectible human types produced by the blind impress of nature and millennia of uninformed self-experimentation.⁴¹ He can no longer passively observe the diminution of the human being with 'the mocking and aloof eyes of an Epicurean god' (BGE 62).⁴² In Nietzsche's first post-Zarathustran work, he writes:

Anyone ... who approached this almost deliberate degeneration and atrophy of the human being represented by the European Christian ... feeling the opposite kind of desire, not in an Epicurean spirit but rather with some divine hammer in his hand, would surely have to cry out in wrath, in pity, in horror: 'O you dolts, you presumptuous, pitying dolts, what have you done! Was that work for your hands? How you have bungled and botched my beautiful stone! What presumption!' (BGE 62; cf. Z II 'Blessed')

Here we see a surprising inversion. As mentioned earlier, Epicurus and Nietzsche are, each in his own way, philosophical naturalists. Epicurus' naturalism takes as its

measure the deep-set boundary stone of nature, avoiding the political sphere in favour of the private project of therapeutic self-cultivation. Nietzsche's ostensibly more radical and ambitious naturalism demands the creation of new values, ultimately requiring a decisive intervention in the grand politics of shaping the human future. From an Epicurean perspective, however, the desire to transfigure humanity (or à la Zarathustra, to 'redeem' the earth) is no more natural or necessary than amassing wealth, or earning public honours, or gaining power over one's fellow citizens, and to exchange peace of mind or equanimity of the soul for such conceits is a bad trade, indeed. For better or worse then, Epicurus will not be vulnerable to the pain and anxiety that Nietzsche experiences when he witnesses 'that gruesome dominion of nonsense and accident that has so far been called "history"' (BGE 203). Both Epicurus and Nietzsche are, of course, deeply anti-teleological thinkers who recognize no overarching intelligence, purpose or meaning at work in the various productions of nature. There is no one at the wheel, so to speak. The crux of their difference lies in this: Epicurus is content to leave natural history without a driver; Nietzsche ultimately is not. And it is this that finally tempts him away from the intimate boundaries of the unnoticed life towards the imprudent task of grand politics.

The hidden, helpful Life

To engage with Nietzsche's writings as though he offers a series of claims that might be simply true or false is to lose the power of philosophy as a way of life and, indeed, to overlook the importance of philosophers as interlocutors, educators and examples (SE 1:129–30, 3:136–7). It is tempting when observing Nietzsche's post-Zarathustran descent into grand politics to conclude that he somehow lost his way – that he should have stuck with his Epicurean experiments in private self-cultivation and not worried about redeeming humanity.⁴³ Yet what is the point of such criticisms? Nietzsche made the moves he made and there's no sense in pronouncing upon what he should have said or done. But that does not mean we have to give up what Nietzsche himself abandoned. Nietzsche took what he wanted from the Greeks in the construction of his own art of living (KSA 9:15[59]), and we, in turn, can take what we want from him. Some of it will be useful to us, some of it not. I believe that his middle-period experiments, when he was closest in spirit to Epicurus, are the ones we can profit from the most. Nietzsche is most helpful when he wants least to be noticed, when he is discreet and modest like the powerful philosopher-therapist hidden in the garden: 'In possession of a dominion', as he says, 'and at the same time concealed and renouncing' (D 449). This is the Nietzsche who is the genuinely transformative educator, who liberates and invigorates and augments the lives of his readers. George Eliot, that other great modern Epicurean, perhaps put it best when she observed that 'the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs' (Eliot 1972: 896).

Notes

- 1 While Nietzsche's relationship to Epicurus was sometimes acknowledged in passing, there were until recently few sustained discussions. Some noteworthy exceptions are Knight (1933) and Bornmann (1984).
- 2 On this affinity, see Caygill (2006), Groff (2014), and most notably, Ansell-Pearson's recent articles and chapters on Nietzsche and Epicurus.
- 3 Ansell-Pearson (2018: 1–46 and 135–50). On the recuperation of this ancient model of philosophy as way of life (*bios*) or art of living (*technē tou biou*), see, for example, Hadot (1995a).
- 4 On the centrality of Epicurus to Nietzsche's middle-period works, see Young (2010); Ansell-Pearson (2013); and Ansell-Pearson (2015d). On the continuing vitality of Epicurus' thought, see AOM 48 and WS 227; on his modest (quasi-ascetic) hedonism, see WS 192 and GS 45, as well as Roos (2000); on his greatness and heroic-idyllic mode of philosophizing, see WS 295 and WS 332, as well as Milkowski (1998) and Ansell-Pearson (2014b); on his higher cultural-spiritual status compared to other Hellenistic philosophers, see HH 275 and GS 306; on his multiple explanations (*pleonachos tropos*) technique, see WS 7 and GS 375, as well as Shearin, Wilson H. (2014); on his embrace of a death-bound soul and rejection of an afterlife, see D 72 and Z P: 6, as well as Rempel (2012); on his pre-emptive war on Christianity, see A 58 and KSA 13:16[15]; on his anticipation of a modern scientific, de-deified world view, see HH 68 and Groff 2014; for an Epicurean anticipation of the death of God, see WS 84. Nietzsche's later writings take an increasingly unsympathetic view of Epicurus, specifically his atomistic materialism (GS 109, 373, BGE 12, TI, 'Reason', 5), his hedonism (BGE 225), and his sickness and decadence (BT P4, GS P2 and 370, GM III.6 and 17, TI 'Morality', 3, A 30, KSA 11:25[95]).
- 5 Usener (2010), Fragment 551. For the most comprehensive discussion of the *lathe biōsas* teaching, see Roskam (2007). *Lathe* has been rendered variously as 'hidden', 'inconspicuously', 'in obscurity', 'unobtrusively', 'secretly', etc.
- 6 Nietzsche mentions the phrase *lathe biōsas* only twice explicitly in his writings. Both are *Nachlass* entries from the period of *The Birth of Tragedy* (late 1870) and have to do specifically with the political status of women in ancient Greece (KSA 7:7[31] and 7[221]). The passages liken this 'symbol of Epicurean world wisdom' to living in the dark or vegetating like a plant in close circles. However, one finds the idea scattered throughout Nietzsche's subsequent writings – especially in the middle-period works – where it is expressed indirectly via metaphors of silence, withdrawal, concealment, obscured identity and, of course, the Garden.
- 7 As Roskam points out, 'One of the sad consequences of the manuscript tradition of Epicurus' works is that the maxim *lathe biōsas* has in the end applied its own advice. For indeed, it nowhere appears in the extant writings of Epicurus, leading, as it were, to its own hidden life, far away from inquisitive or boring scholars' (33). Epicurus' lost *Peri Biōn* ostensibly provided a more detailed account of this doctrine; see Schofield (2000).
- 8 Note that all Epicurus translations are from *The Epicurus Reader* (2010) Fragment 187.
- 9 VS 58 and Diogenes Laertius X.119 (henceforth DL); see. DL X.10: 'So gentlemanly was [Epicurus] that he did not even participate in political life.'
- 10 *Republic* 473c–e and Bks VI–VII *passim*; see. *Laws* 712a, 713e. Plato also contrived to mould existing rulers into something resembling a philosopher-king, for example,

his ill-fated engagement with Dionysius II – which led Epicurus mockingly to describe his canonical antipode as ‘golden’ and his followers as ‘flatterers of Dionysius’ (*Dionysiokolakes*), that is, tyrants’ sycophants. See Plato, Seventh Letter 326a-b, 328a and DL X.8; cf. BGE 7. For a more nuanced view, however, see Carter (1986), which envisions Plato’s contemplative life as an outgrowth of a minority tradition of apolitical quietism (*apragmosynē*) in classical Greek life.

- 11 The *Nicomachean Ethics* X.6-8 famously sketches out an ideal of self-sufficient theoretical contemplation, but even this way of life arguably presupposes a degree of recognition and acknowledgement – an intellectual fame of sorts – from a community of expert knowers.
- 12 One might invert the primacy here, as for example, Arendt does, but the essential connection nonetheless remains: ‘Hedonism ... is but the most radical form of a non-political, totally private way of life, the true fulfillment of Epicurus’s *lathe biōsas kai mē politeuesthai*’ (Arendt 1958: 112–13).
- 13 Cf. DL 10.121b: ‘[The sage] will found a school, but not so as to draw a crowd.’ On the ‘deep-set boundary stone’ (*alte terminus haerens*), which indicates the necessary limitations of nature according to which we should think and live (and thus rules out vain fears and desires), see Lucretius 1992, I.77, cf. I.596; II.1087; III.787, 794, 990 and 1014.
- 14 I use Walter Kaufmann’s translations for Penguin/Vintage and R.J. Hollingdale’s translations for Cambridge University Press (with occasional emendations in favour of greater literalness), the single exception being Graham Parkes’ translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* for Oxford. Translations of passages from the notebooks or letters are my own. Cf. SE 6, 165, where he defends a conception of education ‘that makes one a solitary, that proposes goals that transcend money and money-making, that takes a long time’, characterizing it (affirmatively, in spite of popular opinion) as “refined egoism” and “immoral cultural Epicureanism”.
- 15 On this, see Bergmann (1987). I set aside here the deeper and more difficult question whether Nietzsche does have a political philosophy in any traditional sense, and if so, how it ought to be understood.
- 16 Nietzsche’s use of the expression *grosse Politik* is sparse and polysemic. Sometimes it’s loosely associated with any agent – princes, rulers or masses – spurred by the need for the feeling of power (D 189); sometimes it’s used ironically and in scare quotes to describe the shallow, petty, provincial power politics of the *Reich* (BGE 241, 254); sometimes it has to do with the ‘the struggle for the dominion of the world’, which at first may seem to indicate simply a more ambitious transnational European or world political power conflict (BGE 208). But it increasingly comes to signify an ambitious world-historical reevaluation of values, that is, in the *Genealogy*, where he describes the Judeo-Christian inversion of Noble morality as ‘the secret black art of a truly *grand* politics of revenge’ (GM I: 8). His final usage of it in *Ecce Homo* cements this sense, inasmuch as it has to do with a spiritual-cultural struggle for the future of the human (EH ‘Destiny’ 1). Drochon (2016) offers the most extensive discussion of this aspect of Nietzsche’s thought.
- 17 On Nietzsche as Platonic political philosopher, see Strauss (1983) and Strauss (2017); Rosen (1995); any of Laurence Lampert’s excellent books on Nietzsche, but especially Lampert (2004) and Lampert (2017); Hutter (2005); and Groff (2006).
- 18 See letters to Heinrich Köselitz, 26 August 1883 (KSB 6:457) and 10 December 1885 (KSB 7:651).

- 19 On the turn in Nietzsche's life from disenchanted university professor to nomadic philosopher, see D'Iorio (2016). His middle-period works – especially *Human, All Too Human* – are strewn with warnings against the petty, obsessive *vita activa* of modern life; see, for example, HH 283.
- 20 As D'Iorio points out, due to an unusual combination of circumstances, Nietzsche was by this time no longer a citizen of any country – an appropriate status for a self-proclaimed 'good European' (2016: 9).
- 21 As Nietzsche makes clear in his 1886 preface to *Human, All Too Human*, 'such "free spirits" do not and did not exist'. Nietzsche invented them as a kind of life-preserving illusion at the time – a 'hermit's shadow play', he calls it – but even his late period works are predicated on the possibility that 'such free spirits could *someday* exist'.
- 22 Cf. SE 6, p. 165 and WS 295. On Nietzsche's appropriation of Epicurus' 'refined egoism' as a kind of naturalistic care of the self, see Ansell-Pearson (2013); on Epicurus's exemplification of the 'heroic-idyllic mode of philosophizing', see note 4.
- 23 Nietzsche often associates Epicurus with sunlight (specifically a clear, bright exterior light); see, for example, WS 295, 332 and GS 45. Cf. implicitly Epicurean passages where Nietzsche describes his own predilections, for example, D 553.
- 24 Cf. GS 306, which purports to compare the Stoic and the Epicurean as types. The passage has an inescapably autobiographical or even confessional tone: 'The Epicurean selects the situation, the persons, and even the events that suit his extremely irritable, intellectual constitution; he gives up all others, which means almost everything, because they would be too strong and heavy for him to digest ... the Epicurean would rather dispense with [the Stoic's theatrical cultivation to insensitivity], having his "garden"! For those with whom fate attempts improvisations – those who live in violent ages and depend on sudden and mercurial people – Stoicism may, indeed, be advisable. But anyone who foresees more or less that fate permits him to spin a long thread does well to make Epicurean arrangements. That is what all those have always done whose work is of the spirit.' Cf. HH 275, where the Epicurean type is favoured over the crude and unreceptive Cynic. For a comparative discussion of Nietzsche's understanding of Epicureanism, Stoicism and Skepticism, see Bertino (2007).
- 25 On Epicurus' mistaken identity, see WS 227, GS 45 and BGE 7; cf. Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, 3 August 1883 (KSB 6:446).
- 26 Despite Nietzsche's well-known critique of ascetic ideals, he was attentive to the transformative value of ascetic practices, appropriated them himself and recognized them clearly in Epicurus' philosophy. See, for example, KSA 9:3[53]: 'One thinks of asceticism as something superhuman, forgetting that an asceticism belonged to every ancient morality, even to Epicureanism.' Cf. GM III.7-8, where Nietzsche's emphasis on the merely hygienic meaning of ascetic ideals for philosophers is cast in deeply Epicurean terms. On solitude as an ascetic strategy in Nietzsche, see Hutter (2005: 47–74).
- 27 As D'Iorio points out (2016: 16), the original projected title for *Human, All Too Human* was 'The Light Life' (*Das leichte Leben*). The initial sketches from 1876 are again strikingly Epicurean in spirit, describing an 'art of living' (*Lebenskunst*) that aims not at lightening life (i.e., making it easy for us), and certainly not at making it even harder (so as to offer afterwards some supreme soteriological solution), but, rather, helping us 'to take life lightly', like the gods, standing before the truth in vivid rapture. See KSA 8:16[7], 17[74] and 17[85].
- 28 On this theme, see Parkes (1994); Abbey (2000); Ure (2008); and again, Ansell-Pearson's extensive recent work on Nietzsche and Epicurus.

- 29 Cf. BGE 25, where one's friends are the garden in a 'good solitude'; here one becomes the healing, inspiring garden for other like-minded spirits. See also D 194, which similarly contends that instead of offering moral prescriptions for everyone, one should focus on helping limited circles or even lone individuals cultivate themselves. This more modest, conservative, selective approach to transfiguration can be seen in other passages from *Daybreak*, for example, D 534, where he emphasizes 'small doses' rather than great revolutions, or D 462, where he advocates 'slow cures' of the soul, focusing again on the overlooked 'little' things (cf. WS 5–6, 16; D 435, 553). On this theme, see Ansell-Pearson (2015b) and D'Iorio (2016: 86–8).
- 30 A beautiful aphorism from *Daybreak* entitled '*Do not perish unnoticed*' (435) would at first seem to suggest an explicit repudiation of Epicurus' teaching, insofar as his counsel to live unnoticed was often understood as entailing that we should die unnoticed (*lathe apobiōsas*). However, D 435 has more to do with the ways in which we gradually get ground down to nothing by the seemingly small, everyday, repetitive details of our lives about which we are inadequately cognizant. In this sense it should be understood against the background of passages like WS 5–6 and 16 – Epicurean passages which emphasize the importance of attending to the 'nearest' (*nächsten*), 'smallest and most everyday things', for example, diet, housing, clothing, nutrition, place, climate, recreation, etc. (cf. D 553, and EH, 'Clever', 10). In the notebooks we find an outline for several potential chapters, scribbled down when Nietzsche was writing *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (June–July 1879), which suggest the Epicurean dimension of such concerns and link them with the *lathe biōsas* doctrine. The first outline, entitled '*Doctrine of the Nearest Things*', reads as follows: '*Division of the day, goal of the day (periods). Food. Company. Nature. Solitude. Sleep. Earning of Bread. Education (of one's own and others'). Utilization of mood and wealth. Health. Withdrawal from politics [Zurückgezogenheit von der Politik]*' (KSA 8:40[16]).
- 31 On the Epicurean compatibility between self-realization and helping select others, see D 174 and GS 338, as well as Ansell-Pearson (2015a); on sunshine as an Epicurean symbol, see again WS 295, 332 and GS 45; on Epicurus and the sublime, see WS 295; on the association of Epicureanism and a long life, see GS 306.
- 32 On Epicurus' 'powerful nature', see Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, 1 July 1883 (KSB 6:428); cf. Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, 22 January 1879 (KSB 5:799). On the image of being 'buried' and 'concealed' in an Epicurean sense, see WS 229; cf. D 449 and BGE 25.
- 33 Not coincidentally, this is also when he began work on his first middle-period book (*Human, All Too Human*) and decided to free himself from academia (D'Iorio 2016: 1–5).
- 34 See, for example, Letters to Heinrich Köselitz, 26 March 1879, 26 August 1883 and 10 December 1885.
- 35 See Z II 'Child with the Mirror', 'Blessed', but also Z II *passim*, III 'Wanderer', 'Vision and the Riddle':1, 'Blissfulness Against One's Will' and IV 'Cry of Need', 'Welcome'. For a nuanced and illuminating reading of Z II 'Blessed', see Bishop (2017).
- 36 The Isles of the Blessed begin as a conception of the afterlife (in opposition to Hades; later merged with Elysium), but in some versions become merely a place where life is easiest and best for mortals on earth. See Olshausen (2006), as well as Inwood (2006).
- 37 For an interpretation of the Blessed Isles as a modern Epicurean garden, see Groff (2018).
- 38 Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, 2 August 1883. Strangely, Epicurus himself is cast here as a 'negative argument' due to the supposed indiscriminate permeability of his original

Garden. It should be noted as well that the Blessed Isles were modelled on Ischia, a volcanic island located in the Gulf of Naples, which had fascinated and inspired Nietzsche during his time in Sorrento (Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, 16 August 1883 [KSB 6:452]). Sadly, the island was partially destroyed by an earthquake in July 1883. This event dealt a symbolic but painful blow to Nietzsche's Epicurean hopes and is reflected in various drafts for Part Three and Part Four and of *Zarathustra*, which envision the death and sinking of the Blessed Isles (KSA 10:15[17], 17[54], 20[8], 2[4] and 11:29[23]; cf. Z IV 'Cry of Need'). See D'Iorio (2016: 79–88) for discussion.

- 39 Zarathustra leaves the Blessed Islands at the end of Part Two for a variety of reasons that might be categorized into two groups. On the one hand, his departure can be seen as an attempt to overcome his prophetic loneliness in the midst of community, weariness with gift-giving, and softening in the absence of struggle (Z II 'Night-Song', II 'Stillest Hour', III 'Return Home', KSA 10:16[89]); on the other, it can be understood as a sacrifice of personal happiness for his world-historical work, that is, his attempt to perfect himself, articulate and embrace the doctrine of the eternal recurrence, reshape the future of the human and redeem the earth (Z III 'Blissfulness Against One's Will', cf. the previous limitations of his teaching exposed in Z II 'Soothsayer', 'Redemption').
- 40 For a rich reading of the Epicurean elements of Nietzsche's thought in *Zarathustra*, see Vincenzo (1994).
- 41 See, for example, Zarathustra's notion of the 'last human' (Z P, 5) and his nausea at the prospect of the eternal recurrence of the 'small human being' (Z III 'Convalescent').
- 42 On the unconcern of the Epicurean gods, who serve as models for human life, see D 150 and GS 277; compare the famous shipwreck observer motif in Lucretius II.552–64. On Nietzsche's use of the distant, unconcerned Epicurean gods as a half-way house between Abrahamic monotheism and Nietzsche's new Dionysian religion of the earth, see Groff, (forthcoming).
- 43 In this respect, the sentiment contained in Nietzsche's final letter is doubly poignant: 'In the end, I would much rather have been a Basel professor than God; but I did not dare to push my private egoism so far as to avoid the creation of the world for its sake' (Letter to Jacob Burckhardt, 6 January 1889, KSB 8:1256).