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Nietzsche on Fatalism and “Free Will”

Robert C. Solomon

Nietzsche is often classified and taught along with the “Existentialists,” mainly because he is (like Kierkegaard) so adamantly an “individual” and an early advocate of “self-making.” But Nietzsche also subscribes to a number of harsh doctrines that might be described as “fatalism” and a kind of “biological determinism,” to name but two. Fatalism, strictly understood, means that nothing could be other than it is, and Nietzsche’s sharp sarcastic comments about “the improvers of mankind” make it quite clear that he does not think that people can change their (collective) nature. Moreover, his persistent emphasis on “instincts,” “drives,” and “physiology” suggests a form of determinism based on our biology. Each of us individually has a particular “nature” that (whether actualized or not) cannot be altered.

Like such existentialists as Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre, Nietzsche is a powerful defender of what one might call “the existential self,” the individual who “makes himself” by exploring and disciplining his particular talents and distinguishes himself from “the herd” and the conformist influences of other people. But Nietzsche also attacks the very concept of freedom and with it the existentialist idea that we are free and responsible to make of ourselves what we will. Furthermore, Nietzsche celebrates precisely those ancient concepts of “fate” and “destiny” that Sartre, in particular, rejects as exemplary of “bad faith.” The question then becomes whether Nietzsche’s many comments and occasional arguments in favor of “the love of fate” (*amor fati*) and against “free will” undermine any interpretation of his philosophy in existentialist and “self-making” terms.

I have argued elsewhere¹ that they do not and that Nietzsche might quite properly be included among the existentialists. What I want to do here is to argue in some detail that Nietzsche’s fatalism and Nietzsche’s “self-making” are ultimately two sides of the same coin and not at odds or contradictory. To what extent does Nietzsche embrace and to what extent does he dispense with notions of responsibility and, in particular, the responsibility for one’s character and “who one is.” After all, “What does your conscience say?—You shall become the person you are” (*Gay Science*, 270).

Nietzsche on Freedom and Fatalism

If one interprets what Nietzsche has to say about self-making along the lines of Kant and the infamous free-will problem, then the combination of fatalism and self-making surely will appear to be at odds. And if one interprets Nietzsche's conception of fatalism along the lines of the thesis of scientific "determinism," one will also find that there is little "wobble room" for the kind of self-making thesis that Nietzsche advocates. True, Nietzsche is an enthusiastic advocate of the scientific method (during some periods of his career, at least). But it does not follow that he is a determinist. Indeed, he has some incisive skeptical comments on the concept of causality (and hence determinism). Most important, however, are the differences between determinism and the scientific outlook, on the one hand, and fatalism and Nietzsche's concept of fate, on the other. In brief, fatalism is not determinism, and Nietzsche's acceptance of the former has almost nothing to do with the latter. It is rather a harking back to the ancient Greek notion of *moira*, or fate, and has little to do with modern scientific thinking.

Whatever else it may be, self-creation is not a human version of what Nietzsche thinks is impossible even for God, namely, creation *de nihilo*. We cannot act as a *causa sui*, "bootstrapping" our way into selfhood. Nor does it require or involve any break from natural laws, like Kant's noumenal subject, the target of many of Nietzsche's most ferocious attacks. Self-making, which is ultimately a kind of self-cultivation, is by no means independent or separable from one's native talents, one's "instincts," one's environment, the influence of other people and one's culture. It is not a matter of "making oneself" on a basis of absolute ontological freedom (as Sartre famously insists) but of "becoming who you are." This strongly suggests that self-making ("becoming") already embraces fatalism ("who you are"). Self-becoming does not involve "free will," but, nevertheless, Nietzsche, like Sartre, is a staunch believer in personal responsibility for what one becomes.

In my earlier study, I argued that I did not see any conflict (much less a "paradox") between Nietzsche's fatalistic and self-making themes but rather an excellent example of his "perspectivism." Fatalism and self-making represent two complementary perspectives on ourselves and on human life. On the one hand, there is our familiar view of ourselves as (more or less) autonomous beings, deliberating, making choices, acting on our desires, sometimes reflecting on and weighing our desires, sometimes conscientiously denying our desires (or refusing to be motivated by them). It is from this perspective that we normally hold people (and ourselves) responsible for their (our) actions and declare them (and ourselves) to be the "authors" of their (our) actions. On the other hand, we cannot but recognize that we are all "thrown into" our circumstances, born with (or without) certain talents and abilities to varying degrees and with or without dispositions to certain phys-

ical liabilities and limitations. We are all products ("victims" some would say) of our upbringing, our families, our culture. Even without bringing in such spooky words as "fatalism," we recognize in ourselves and in others the heavy baggage of our backgrounds and the fact that our choices and our so-called autonomy are both quite limited. We take up one or the other of these perspectives, often sequentially, even simultaneously, but I do not see this as a problem or a "paradox." It is rather just "the human condition." We see ourselves as both free and constrained, which is not quite (yet) to say "fated."³

One powerful argument in favor of Nietzsche's strong sense of responsibility, quite apart from any thesis regarding free will, is his heavy use of what I call the *blaming* perspective, according to which people are held accountable as the authors or agents of their actions. Of course, their actions can also be praised and they can be forgiven, but I think "blame" best captures the essence of this perspective, both as Nietzsche pursues it and, admittedly, as he sometimes exemplifies it as well. The blaming perspective presupposes a robust sense of agency. It thus tends to emphasize responsibility and be suspicious of excuses. To be sure, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche urges us both to get "beyond good and evil" (Essay I) and to get over our felt need to judge, to blame, and to punish (Book II).⁴ But it would be difficult to read virtually any of Nietzsche's writing without noticing the harsh denunciations that permeate his style. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to simply assume that the blaming perspective necessarily presumes the heavy metaphysical baggage of "subject," "Will," and "free will" that Nietzsche also so frequently criticizes. Responsibility and freedom are for him (in contrast to Sartre, notably) two separate issues.

Nietzsche professes disgust with the blaming perspective, but he nevertheless exemplifies it more than any other philosopher. He holds people responsible for what they do, but as exemplary of their "natures" and their virtues and not only because of their choices and decisions. Thus one can blame a person and ascribe responsibility without at the same time insisting on the truth of those metaphysical theses summarized under the heading of "free will" just as one can recognize that a person is bound by his or her "nature" without subscribing to the "hard" thesis of scientific determinism.

Fatalism, Determinism, Destiny

Nietzsche's "fatalism" should be distinguished from "determinism," although, as I shall argue, the two are interestingly connected. "Determinism," of course, has been interpreted in very sophisticated ways, depending on the causal or scientific paradigm. "Fatalism," by contrast, has been interpreted in a great many dismissive ways.⁵ Fatalism has been taken to be just the tautological

thesis “what will be, will be” (rendered more romantically by Doris Day *en Español* as “*Que Sera Sera*”).⁶ Literally interpreted, of course, this saves the thesis at the expense of rendering it trivial and utterly uninteresting. But this is not what it means. It is rather a note of resignation, acceptance of what will happen or has happened. Thus fatalism has been interpreted in terms of “God’s will” and “predestination,” though this is clearly not what Nietzsche meant by it. It is also worth noting that many Christian thinkers and theologians have sharply distinguished God’s will, grace, and providence from any sense of fate or fatalism, which they associate with paganism. And this, of course, is just what makes it so appealing to Nietzsche.

Fatalism, unlike determinism, is an ancient thesis (or set of theses). It is sometimes interpreted in terms of some sort of agency called “Fate” or, more atavistically, it is interpreted as the intervention of “the Fates,” assuring the relegation of fatalism to ancient mythology and now representing only a quaint bit of poetic license. Thus Daniel Dennett expresses the overriding current view about fatalism when he dismisses it as the “mystical and superstitious” thesis that “no agent can do anything about anything.”⁷ Fatalism has been given a metaphysical interpretation, for instance, in Mark Bernstein’s 1992 study, *Fatalism*,⁸ but Nietzsche’s fatalism is clearly not a metaphysical thesis. It rather harks back to his beloved pre-Socratic Greek tragedians. It is an *aesthetic* thesis, one that has more to do with literary narrative than with scientific truth. In this sense, fatalism has little to do with determinism. There need be no specifiable causal chain. There is only the notion of a necessary outcome and the narrative in which that necessity becomes evident. Thus Oedipus was “fated” to do what he did, whatever causal chain he pursued.

Determinism and fatalism would seem to make two quite different claims. The first insists that whatever happens can (in principle) be explained in terms of prior causes (events, states of affairs, inherent structures, plus the laws of nature). The second insists that whatever happens *must* happen, but there need be no effort to specify the causal etiology behind the modal “must,” although it would also be a mistake to interpret fatalism as *excluding* any such effort. To be sure, Oedipus’s behavior and its terrible outcome can be explained, step by step, as one event causing another. But that would surely miss the point of the narrative, which is that the outcome is fated but the path to the outcome is not. Thus it is important that we neither reduce fatalism to determinism nor oppose the two in such a way that determinism becomes the respectable scientific thesis while fatalism is relegated to ancient mythology and poetry. To insist that fatalism depends on the whims of the gods or frivolous fates or any other mysterious force is to render ridiculous (and in any case most un-Nietzschean) a sensible and defensible philosophical concept.

Sensible? Defensible? Nietzsche’s favorite “Pre-Socratic” philosopher, Heraclitus, presented such a sensible vision when he declared, “Character is fate” (*Fragments*, #104).⁹ This is a perfectly plausible and easily defensible

notion of fate. It is not in any way incompatible with a causal or scientific explanation, but it also entails the narrative structure that is essential to fatalism. So, too, Aristotle based his theory of tragedy on the notion of a “tragic flaw” or “*hamartia*” in the tragic hero’s character, and today the tragedy of Oedipus is still “explained” by appeal to his obstinacy, his refusal to listen either to Teiresias or his wife/mother, thus displaying his tyrannical arrogance.¹⁰ David Hume’s answer to the free-will problem, and later John Stuart Mill’s as well, was to say that an act is “free” if it “flows” from a person’s character.¹¹ One might object to the vagueness of “flow” here, but I would suggest that it suits the issue far better than “cause,” which too readily separates cause and effect, character and action. One might try to assimilate fatalism to determinism by restricting one’s focus on “fate” to dispositions both to behave in certain ways and to get oneself into certain kinds of situations. But this, I think, is only half of the picture. Fatalism, in contrast to determinism, begins at the end, that is, the outcome, and considers the outcome as in some sense necessary, given the nature of the person’s character, which in turn entails a protracted narrative that, all things considered, encompasses the whole of that person’s life, culture, and circumstances.

Determinism’s emphasis on causality introduces a distortion and a narrowing that neither the ancients nor Nietzsche would have countenanced. Nietzsche, of course, expresses multiple and often profound concerns about the status of causality and causal relations, especially in his late work, *Twilight of the Idols*. But even earlier, when he was fully within the orbit of science, for example, in his *Gay Science*,¹² he expresses deep doubts about the abuse and overuse of such concepts. Maudemarie Clark, John Richardson, Brian Leiter, Christoph Cox, and other commentators have written at considerable length about Nietzsche’s “naturalism” and his various attempts to reconcile science, his perspectivism, and his theory of interpretation, and I will not try to summarize or scrutinize these attempts here.¹³ But at the very minimum, what “Nietzsche’s naturalism” excludes is any reference to God, miracles, and supernatural explanations, and Leiter’s “essential natural facts about persons” rightly excludes any appeal to “God’s will” as well as to any notion of divine purpose or design operative in Greek mythology. What we need for Nietzsche, therefore, is a “naturalistic” conception of fate and fatalism.

One might argue that Nietzsche’s concept of fate is *teleological* in form rather than simply causal. True, Nietzsche harshly criticizes teleology as a mode of explanation, but what he utterly rejects is the idea of a God behind the scenes who imposes purpose or purposes on earthly events. In other words, he rejects *theological* teleology. But there are also the purposes that are evident in every living thing. Indeed, Nietzsche’s notion of “the Will to Power” would be unintelligible without teleology in this sense, as would all of his talk of “drives” and “instincts.” A drive is not just a physiological “push.” It

is also a push *toward* something, a goal that presumably will provide some sort of satisfaction.

Here as before, it is important not to make determinism and teleology into incompatible competitors as modes of explanation.¹⁴ Biology is full of examples in which teleology and determinism complement each other. To mention only the standard example: the heart pumps in order to circulate the blood throughout the body *and* the heart pumps because it is made of innervated muscle. Nietzsche, like Aristotle before him, is a biologist. He is always asking about the purpose and function of human attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. One might object that he is also a Darwinian, and that natural selection undermines purposiveness, but this is again a rejection of only the notion of some *external* purpose, or some purpose that rules the whole of evolution, not the rejection of purposes as such. (We might also note that when Nietzsche embraced Darwinism, it was before Darwinism had been definitively severed from teleological thinking.)

The teleology of fatalism is clearly captured in those places where Nietzsche dramatically speaks of “*destiny*,” a concept that was quite popular in the nineteenth century. (Consider the American imperialistic concept “Manifest Destiny.”) In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche considers his own life and career under the rubric, “Why I am a Destiny.” Destiny is not just a necessary outcome. It is an outcome that is necessary given some larger sense of purpose as well as the character, abilities, and circumstances of the person or a people. And it presupposes culture and history, a context in which destiny can play itself out. Thus it was Goethe’s destiny to be the first great German internationalist and it was Einstein’s destiny to turn the world of physics on its head. But one cannot imagine a Goethe without a European world in which literature was just becoming international and Germany was struggling for respect in the world, or Einstein in a world that was not ready to consider the implications of relativity and the possibilities of weapons of truly mass destruction. To be sure, one can restate these claims by analyzing how Goethe’s and Einstein’s respective genius *resulted* in their respective successes. But it is worth noting what is lost thereby. What gets lost is the purpose-driven *significance* of the narrative. One cannot understand destiny just by understanding how (causally) the outcome came about.

So, too, Nietzsche’s destiny is unimaginable without understanding not only his tremendous talent but his character—including his occasional megalomania—and his culture, which was indeed at the cusp of a revaluation due to what Nietzsche famously called “the death of God.” One can explain, as many biographers and commentators have, why (causally) Nietzsche may have written such-and-such a work at such-and-such a time, given his previous works, his mind-set, and aspirations, and what was going on in his life (e.g., the break with Wagner, his disappointment with Lou, his various illnesses). But the strategy and tone of such accounts is rarely just by way of

"explanation." It is also by way of celebration of Nietzsche's astounding posthumous success and how he got there. It was Nietzsche's fate to be famous, and to be abused by his sister, and consequently to be enormously misunderstood. We can debate to what extent he may have brought this on himself and to what extent he was a victim, but in doing so we are largely debating the *significance* of Nietzsche's destiny, not its causal etiology.

With this in mind, I want to cast some doubt on what Brian Leiter identifies as Nietzsche's "causal essentialism," that is, the thesis that "there are essential natural facts about persons that significantly circumscribe the range of life trajectories that person can realize."¹⁵ This could be construed as a weak version of determinism ("circumscribing [a] range" rather than determining a specific outcome), but Leiter explicitly denies that Nietzsche endorses what he calls "classical fatalism" (which has to do with the significance of specific outcomes). This, I suggest, is contrary to Nietzsche's own intentions. It is to the ancients, and only rarely to contemporary (nineteenth century) science, that he appeals his fatalistic thesis, from his early *Birth of Tragedy* until his final *Ecce Homo*. "*Amor fati*" ("love of fate") hardly makes sense as a paean to causal essentialism.

Whatever Nietzsche's views on science and scientific determinism (and I do not think these are by any means either clear or consistent in the textual evidence), his "fatalism" consists almost entirely of his intimate and enthusiastic engagement with what Leiter calls "classical fatalism," where this must be understood as not only the fatalism of the ancients (Sophocles, Aeschylus, Heraclitus) but as a rich way of viewing our lives in which we are neither victims of chance and contingency nor Sartrean "captains of our fate."¹⁶ One might even say, alluding to one of Nietzsche's better-known bits of euphoria, that we are more like the oarsmen of our fate, capable of heroic self-movement but also swept along in an often cruel but glorious sea.

Nietzsche's Classical Fatalism

In ancient tragedy, a staggering variety of curses and wars was usually due to the intervention of gods and goddesses. Thus ancient fate and destiny are straightforwardly teleological, that is, they serve the (often petty and whimsical) purposes of the Olympians. In Christian "predestination," similarly, the outcome is determined by God according to his purposes, mysterious though they may be. But in the ancient world, fate was distinct from the gods, and the gods are often depicted as themselves constrained by fate (though not usually its victims). And though fate is clearly presented as necessity, it is by no means clear that it involves anything like agency or any person's (or divinity's) purpose. Only occasionally is fate personified as "the Fates," in

which case both agency and purpose can be presumed, but Nietzsche would obviously reject this, even as metaphor, as he would reject any “otherworldly” conception of fate. It is worth noting that in Christian thought fate and fatalism are pointedly opposed to free will, which is defended as the hallmark of the Christian worldview, certain famous paradoxes notwithstanding.¹⁷ Thus in defending fatalism, Nietzsche is by no means buying into Christianity, nor is he in any way compromising his naturalism. On the contrary, his embracing fatalism is just one more aspect of his rejection of Christianity and the otherworldly. Ancient fatalism is by no means to be equated with the purposive behavior of divine agency.

The greatest Western text on fate, Homer’s *Iliad*, makes many striking observations that surely influenced Nietzsche’s thinking on these matters. It is worth noting that for Homer, as for Nietzsche, there was no emphasis at all on the distinction between fate and fatalism. Homer speaks solely of fate. Belief in the Judeo-Christian God, by contrast, insofar as it involves any version of fatalism (for example, in the notions of “God’s will” and predestination), such belief is distinctively opposed to any notion of fate (that is, of any agency or ultimate significance of what happens apart from God). Fate, for Homer, cannot be gainsaid. Not even the gods—not Zeus himself—can countermand fate.¹⁸ So, too, Nietzsche suggests that our fate cannot be countermanded, and our only option is therefore to “love it.”

Achilles, grieving over the death of Patroclus, tells his men that he, like his friend, “are fated to redden the selfsame earth with our blood, / Right here in Troy, I will never return home” (18:350–51). Hector, at the beginning of the *Iliad*, has made a similar speech, to the effect that no one shall send him to Hades before his time, though, to be sure, he is fated like all the others (6:512–13). But fate, in both the *Iliad* and in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, does not make men do what they would not do. Rather, fate (like the gods) arranges circumstances such that what a man would “naturally” do determines the inevitable outcome, for example, when proud and hot-headed Oedipus encounters Laius on the narrow crossroad near the foot of Parnassus.

Nietzsche, in line with these ancient models, talks sometimes of fate (as in *amor fati*) but really refers only to fatalism. That is, he urges us to appreciate the necessity and significance of outcomes without reference to any mysterious agency. Here he clearly sides with Heraclitus and he might be argued to be equally opaque with regard to the extent to which character is agency and regarding how character and specific actions are related. One might say that, for Nietzsche, character *is* agency and thus embodies both freedom and necessity (a position associated with David Hume as well).¹⁹

Nevertheless, Nietzsche goes out of his way to avoid agency-talk even regarding intentional action. Thus his fairly frequent “quantum of energy” talk (e.g., GS 360), where the metaphor of a quantum that “discharges itself”

can be assimilated to the more commonsense picture of character as the underlying force that manifests itself in any number of actions (in which conscious purposes may be irrelevant or merely secondary). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes of that "granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision" (232), thus rendering even decisions as fatalistic and not clearly matters of agency. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, too, Nietzsche relishes talk of "physiology," thus lending his views to a kind of materialistic reductionism in which agency plays no role.²⁰ At the far extreme of Nietzsche's thinking, he comments in the *Nachlass* (and I always suspect the status of anything that is only in the *Nachlass*) that "everything has been directed along certain lines from the beginning" (458). This is indeed not only fatalism but a victimized way of thinking about the utter pervasiveness of fate.

But "directed" by whom? No gods or God, to be sure. Here Nietzsche has surely gone beyond his ancient mentors, suggesting not that *some* acts, events, or outcomes are necessary but rather that *all* are. I am tempted to simply dismiss this as one of Nietzsche's more outrageous and unsuccessful (and unpublished) thought experiments, except that it highlights in its extremity a sensibility that is evident throughout the mature Nietzsche, and its source is not hard to find. The sensibility is that there is some purposeless or, can I say, agent-less agency "behind" the conscious agency of our actions. For Schopenhauer, of course, this agentless agency was impersonal and irrational Will. For Nietzsche, this agentless agency is attributed to more scientifically respectable processes, notably "instinct," "drive," and other biological "agencies," much as Freud would do (with ego, id, and superego) nearly fifty years later in *his* later works. (I would not want to push this point, but I think that both Freud and Nietzsche would be horrified at the mechanization of these concepts in what is now sometimes called "psychic determinism" or, in Nietzsche, various deterministic revisions of his so-called "will to power").²¹

Nevertheless, I think that Nietzsche remains the optimistic animist against Schopenhauer's impersonal pessimism, even, if you like, to the point of struggling throughout his career to "look on the bright side of things." His attitude toward fate is no exception. Quite the contrary of adopting an even more impersonal determinism, Nietzsche enthusiastically accepts the ancient Homeric conception of fate that sees a personal, and if not benevolent then at least neither malevolent nor "indifferent" (as in Camus), determination of our possibilities and their outcomes. When he speaks of his own "destiny" (in *Ecce Homo*), whether ironic or not, he makes it clear just how enthusiastic he is in his "love of fate," not as an abstract philosophical thesis but as a very real and palpable way of thinking and feeling about one's own life.

Nietzsche's Watchword, "Become Who You Are"

Nietzsche may be unclear about the extent to which character is agency and how character and specific actions are related, but he is very clear about the fact that we, whatever we are "given" in our natures, are responsible for cultivating our character. Not that this is easy. Nietzsche tells us, "Giving style to one's character—a great art."²² But whether rare or commonplace, whether limited to a few "higher men" or something that we all do, cultivating one's character goes hand in hand with Nietzsche's conception of fatalism.

Nietzsche's watchword is "Become who you are." (Cf. the subtitle of *Ecce Homo*, "*Wie man wird, was man ist.*") This short phrase captures Nietzsche's position in a nonparadoxical way. One *is* insofar as one has predetermined and limited possibilities—one's talents, abilities, capacities, disabilities, limitations. A child at an early age (perhaps almost from birth) displays a real talent for music, for language, for spatial relations, for gymnastics, for dancing, for leadership. But it is perfectly obvious that these promising possibilities are no more than that, that they require development, encouragement, training, practice, and dedication.

One *becomes* what one is. And if one believes—as I think anyone not blinded by ideology or an empty "humanism" must believe—that we are all talented and limited in different ways (including what we might call our meta-talents, such as self-discipline, which have to do with our ability to foster our talents), then it more or less follows that we are free to develop our talents (free, that is, insofar as we have the talent). But we are not free regarding what talents we have and, therefore, what talents we might choose to develop. I say "more or less" here because of a number of pretty obvious qualifications: most people have more than one talent and are therefore free to choose among them, and the development of any talent can be thwarted by any number of external and internal factors, such as lack of opportunity, the absence of adequate role models or exemplars, a paucity of praise and encouragement or (worse) an excess of discouragement and even ridicule, or a debilitating mishap or accident.

What's more, the notion that talents are "given" and not chosen admits of other complications as well. We might say that one cannot simply choose to have a talent, but one does not always know whether or not one has a talent, and in most disciplines one can develop some approximation of talent even without having it. Internal blocks to development may consist of a clash of talents and an inability to choose among them. It may also consist of a refusal to recognize that one has a talent. But the most interesting difficulties in cultivating a talent are due to what I just called a "meta-talent," a talent for pursuing one's talent(s). What is self-deceptively called "writer's block" is a painfully familiar example.

As many literary aspirants will testify with a wince, writer's block and literary talent are by no means contraries. Indeed, they may even be positively correlated. But, of course, the real question is whether writer's block should be classified as a *block*, that is, as some psychic obstacle that is quite independent of agency or the will. Sometimes, writer's block seems to be sheer inability to put together a true and interesting sentence or the embarrassing absence of anything to say. But sometimes, it may be the obstinate unwillingness to shift one's work habits, to read and gather more information instead of stupidly staring at a blank piece of paper or a computer screen, or a refusal to abandon one's current dysfunctional project or switch projects in favor of something that might better engage one's abilities. As a meta-talent, the ability to pursue one's talents despite obstacles might also be seen either as a given or not. So even if one's writing talent is given and cannot simply be chosen, there is the question to what extent one's meta-talents are one's own responsibility.

There is some question whether the invocation of meta-talents (like Harry Frankfurt's "second-order desires") leads to an infinite regress.²³ That is, if we have talents that govern the exercise and development of our "first order" talents (whether or not these are chosen or simply discovered), does that not imply that we might (must) have higher-order talents governing the exercise and development of our meta-talents, and this in turn implies still higher-level talents for governing our meta-meta-talents, and so on to infinity. I confess that this metaphysical conundrum has never tormented me. Aristotle passed the problem on to generations of Christian philosophers who utilized it to "prove" the existence of God. (An overly sophisticated theory is that Aristotle just did not have an adequate mathematical conception of infinity.) Nevertheless, when philosophers became obsessed with the notion of justification and such metaphors as "grounding," "foundations," and "securing," the anathema of infinite regress became comprehensible.²⁴

But in cases such as this one, the limit to regression is not logical or conceptual but simply human all-too-human. We are capable of only so much recursion or level-hopping. There are, indeed, instances of meta-meta-talents; indeed, self-discipline may well provide such an example. We do sometimes resolve not only to develop a talent but to "work on" our ability to develop our talents, for instance, by subjecting ourselves to other disciplines. (Some martial arts present themselves in exactly this way, as do some modes of meditation.) But there is a limit to how far "above" ourselves we can or are willing to go, not least because of the confusion of "levels" that inevitably arises in any real-life (as opposed to merely formal) attempt to provide such a "theory of types." For all practical purposes, it is enough to insist that in addition to our desires and talents we have meta-desires and meta-talents, desires and talents concerning how and how well we put our desires and talents into action.

Nevertheless, it should not be thought that getting one's desires and talents in line with one's meta-desires and meta-talents is always or even usually a matter of mere self-discipline. The desperate attempts of an addict or an alcoholic to overcome his or her accursed fate is an extreme illustration only in that it obviously involves physiological as well as psychological dependency (although Nietzsche would probably not acknowledge the distinction). Clinical as well as more low-grade depression presents a similarly painful picture. But whether the problem is addiction or depression or simple "writer's block," what we should avoid is that singularly insensitive response; "Get over it," and this, I think, is what motivates Nietzsche's continuing campaign against "the improvers of mankind" and, on a more individual level, against being "judgmental" ("you *ought* to be such and such"). Nevertheless, I think Nietzsche does make such judgments—often—and insensitivity seems not to be a concern. But what is insensitive, as so often in Nietzsche, may also be good, solid advice ("tough love" in the current vernacular). These contradictory currents pervade Nietzsche's writings from *Human All Too Human* to *Ecce Homo*, the contempt of the scold, on the one hand, and a "let it be" stoicism, on the other. It is the latter, and I think some of the better parts of Nietzsche, that constitutes his fatalism.

It is this contradiction, too, that underscores Nietzsche's existentialism. His sharp critical tone is not just an expression of contempt. It is also, throughout his works, an attempt both to jar us into that sort of self-recognition that tells us to "get over it" (whether "it" is the death of God, the pervasiveness of "slave" or "herd" morality, the philosophical traps of metaphysics, or our propensities to pity) and an understanding that what we can "get over" is itself a matter that may be wholly beyond our control and thus a matter of fate rather than personal choice or weakness. But, of course, choice and weakness may both be construed as causes or as outcomes, and highlighting choices (as the existentialists do) or pointing out weaknesses (as Nietzsche does) are but two different goads to one and the same goal, "becoming who you are" and "giving style to your character." We can "become who we are" only with some help and guidance, and Nietzsche is rightly recognized as among the very best existential guides we have found. But this is in no way at odds with his also being one of the most powerful promoters of fatalism.

What Is Self-Making? (Does It Require "Free Will"?)

I do not think that one can read Nietzsche at any phase of his career without being swamped with the impression that, as my students would put it, "he tells us how to really live!" Of course, my students are also stymied by the question, "What is Nietzsche telling us about how to live?" as are we more

seasoned commentators. But the seeming lack of specificity in Nietzsche’s proposals (ignoring, that is, the many bits of very detailed advice he gives us about all sorts of things) does not mean that his is not first and foremost an existential, one might even say moralistic, philosophy. Whether or not he (or his alter ego, Zarathustra) ever “tells us what to do,” it seems overwhelmingly clear to me that his whole mission, his tone, his sense of urgency and indignation, is based on the idea that we should be shocked into self-scrutiny and self-transformation, both individual and collective.

To be sure, such provocation is often mixed with prophecy, bold and often caustic declarations about how things really are or how they will or must be. And the whole sermon is undergirded by a ferocious sense of fatalistic resignation and biological determinism that accepts each of us as defined and limited by our individual (and human) natures. But I reject the idea that some form of fatalism *as opposed to self-making* is the “dominant theme” of Nietzsche’s philosophy.²⁵ Nietzsche’s fatalism is both a goad and a challenge to become who we are, to discover, explore, and develop our talents, to scrutinize ourselves and suffer through the agonies and humiliations of “going under,” to realize our “destinies” through courage, intelligence, hard work, and discipline. In short, Nietzsche tells us to “create ourselves” and with that “invent new values,” but always *in accordance with* our inborn abilities and limitations.

The notion of self-making or “self-creation” admits of many variations. At one extreme, there is the Kantian (some would say Sartrian) “bootstrapping” version that would have it that we create ourselves *de nihilo*, by sheer will or decision. We act as an original cause for which there are no prior determining causes, presuming that “there are in the world causes through freedom” (Kant, CPR B 472). Regarding any such detached and metaphysically suspect sense of self-making, it is clear that Nietzsche has no tolerance for it. But I see no evidence that even the most gung-ho advocates of Nietzschean self-creation, for example, Alexander Nehamas and Richard Rorty, entertain any such position. At the other extreme, there are those hard determinist interpretations, to the effect that all that is meant by “self-making” is the development or “unfolding” of the self, a position that is at least suggested by Brian Leiter’s contraposition of fatalism (as causal essentialism) and “self-creation” (which is thus contrasted with naturalistic self-making).

According to hard determinist interpretations, there is no possibility of any meaningful conception of agency, much less of free will. Just as an acorn grows into an oak, albeit within the determining network of life-supporting factors in the environment (water, weather, soil quality, surrounding flora, marauding fauna), a person’s character manifests itself in actions, subject to the action-determining factors of the environment. Of course, to make sense of such a position, some of these factors will have to be conventional rather than causal, that is, determining what a bit of behavior “counts as” rather

than what effectively brings it about. But self-making thus means just the development of the self, nothing more.

The Kantian conception of the noumenal self is too extravagant, and the determinist account of self-making too stingy, to capture either the conceptual complexity of self-making or the richness of Nietzsche's proposals. I think a large part of the problem is due to the fact that the self-making issue is too often conflated with the notorious free-will problem. The purported analyses of self-making tend to track one or another of the "determinist-compatible-libertarian" resolutions of the free-will problem and this leads to the entire issue getting sucked into the black hole of the very metaphysics Nietzsche so clearly denounces. I do not think that Nietzsche has anything to say about *that* problem. Indeed, I do not believe that Nietzsche pays much attention to any of the "big issues" around which contemporary philosophy has come to narrowly define its existence.

When one expresses dismay or disdain about the intractable issues in philosophy, one is very likely to be drawn into their gravitational sphere. For example, Hegel dismisses both skepticism and metaphysics as misleading philosophical concerns, but consequently he has been burdened with both the reputation as a dogmatist (that is, someone who refuses to accept the viability of skepticism) and as a metaphysician. Nietzsche attacks metaphysics more vehemently than Hegel, and he too has paid the price, for instance, by being branded by Martin Heidegger as "the last of the metaphysicians." But rejecting a philosophical issue is not to take a stand on it, although advocates of one position or another may be all too anxious to interpret the rejection this way.

A case in point: Nietzsche on "truth." To be sure, Nietzsche strives to tell the truth (often the awful truth). He prides himself on his truthfulness. But Nietzsche could not care less about what philosophers call "the problem of truth" except insofar as it works as a vehicle to slip in doctrines (e.g., the existence of God and another, better, truer world) that Nietzsche rejects. To be sure, in his attempt to ridicule the philosophical problem (but not, certainly, the importance of truthfulness), Nietzsche makes some wild pronouncements ("truth is error" and such). But to take these scattered pronouncements as pegs from which to hang a reconstructed theory is to leap far beyond not only the text but Nietzsche's concerns. The situation is even more desperate when the issue is Nietzsche's defense of the "Will to Power," given that the published works—as opposed to his often careless casual notes—provide woefully few pegs.²⁶

So, too, Nietzsche on "free will." In his nomadic (though hardly "free-spirited") life and in his wildly unrestrained works, no one is more appreciative of freedom than Nietzsche. But for the philosophical debates surrounding "free will" and the uses to which this very technical notion has been put, Nietzsche has nothing but contempt. To confuse this with some thesis to the

effect that Nietzsche "rejects freedom" would be absurd. Nietzsche surely accepts the commonsense vision, summarized in Goethe's simple but elegant phrase, of "freedom within limitations." And there clearly are, as even Dan Dennett suggests, notions of freedom that are well "worth wanting."²⁷ The metaphysical paradoxes surrounding the "*causa sui*" are not among them. I think that Nietzsche might even accept something like the Kantian thesis, which I think lies at the heart of Sartre's theory too, that "every being who cannot act except under the idea of freedom is by this alone—from a practical point of view—really free" (GMM, 100). Nietzsche would add, to be sure, that this is "only an interpretation," perhaps therefore a "fiction" as well, but it is from such a "practical point of view" that Nietzsche's account must be understood, and "fiction" is by no means always a term of abuse in Nietzsche, as we all know.

Advocates of a single or "absolute" truth in philosophy have always objected to this "two standpoint" formulation of Kant's "antinomy," impatiently demanding, "*Which is it, freedom or determinism?!*" But any advocate of perspectivism, and I think Kant in his fashion was one, will find no fault with such a pluralistic view. Sometimes—for instance, when we take ourselves to the doctor—we view ourselves under the rubric "physiological system in distress." But most of the time, when we are deliberating and deciding what to do, in particular, we take our bodies for granted as "instruments" and "we act under the idea of freedom." To do so is in no way to reject the truth of determinism.²⁸ All of this gets terribly confused when the determinism in question involves such social and psychological issues as one's upbringing and "influences" or such issues as victimization, but the supposed paradox or contradiction, *determinism or free will?* seems not to be either a paradox or a contradiction at all, just one more manifestation of the phenomenologically curious fact that we are not just objects in nature but are conscious of ourselves and our many roles in nature and in society.

"Free will" (construed as some sort of metaphysical or ontological claim) is not necessary for freedom; neither is it necessary for self-making. All that we need is a robust concept of *agency*. But agency is by no means a simple concept, and the literature on this subject has become as technically complex as the literature on free will. Indeed, for obvious reasons, the two tend to overlap and mutually refer to each other. But I would suggest that here, as so often in philosophy, there is no single concept of agency, and the concepts of agency employed depend on a number of different contrasts, for example, between something being imposed and something being chosen, between an action being coerced and an action "freely" (that is, noncoercively) done, between behavior that is habitual or "automatic" and behavior that is the result of deliberation. As an abstraction, I am not sure that "agency" means much of anything, except as a general contrast with, say, the natural processes described in physics, physiology, and chemistry or the "behavior" of a

computer. Nietzsche writes, “Do we really want to permit existence to be degraded for us like this—reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator?”²⁹

Nevertheless, there is an entire range of *autogenous* processes that might be thought of as “self-creating” without invoking anything whatever akin to “free will.” For instance, the Nobel Laureate Ilya Prigogine has long argued that even physical systems may be self-organizing and self-sustaining. There is an obvious sense in which a great many biological processes are self-creating. But, of course, physics and biology leave no room for talking about a self and so there is no warrant for talking about agency.³⁰ Agency requires the actions of a self (and self, I think, the notion of agency). Thus people create themselves through their actions, many of which may not be the products of deliberation or any conscious volition. Indeed, it is with something of a shock that most of us wake up, some late morning well into life, and realize what we have made of ourselves. The process of “making” has been filled with intentional actions, to be sure, but there may well have been no intention to become what one has become. Alternatively, “one should be careful what one wishes for,” for the shock may be precisely that one *has* become what one intended, and now the haunting question is why one ever would have wanted that in the first place!

What, then, is self-making? Self-making is the gradual manifestation of character and talent through its cultivation and development. There need not be any “bootstrapping” or mysterious acts of will; nor need there be any problematic commitment to one or another kind of “subject.” We should insist again that there is an “imminent teleology” in Nietzsche’s ethics, however he may rail against misplaced teleology in the natural sciences or ill-considered purposive explanations in the social sciences (not to mention his rejection of the more or less theological teleology defended by Kant and Hegel in cosmology). It is on the basis of one’s nature that one has talents, virtues, abilities, and purpose in life. One might also argue that one’s ability to cultivate his or her character or develop his or her talents is itself subject to abilities and talents with which one is either blessed or not. But what is not in question is the need to cultivate one’s character and develop one’s talents and take some responsibility in doing this.

Nietzsche on “Free Will”

The question of agency might be (cautiously) separated into two aspects, first, the global sense of self-making briefly described above—how one becomes what(who) one is in both Nietzsche’s and Sartre’s sense and, second, what it is to be responsible for a particular action. (It should be assumed that this brief formulation includes “acts of omission” as well as responsi-

bility for events and states of affairs that one’s actions—or inaction—bring about.) One way of dealing with Nietzsche’s concept of self-making is to insist that it is the overall sense of self-cultivation that concerns him, not responsibility for particular actions. This neutralizes the supposed antagonism with fatalism just because it is obvious, as indicated above, that one creates oneself through his or her actions *whether or not these actions are knowingly so directed*, indeed, whether or not these actions are even fully intentional.

A person does not take a drink *in order to* become an alcoholic, but becoming an alcoholic may be the end result and, at some point, one might well say (rather unsympathetically) that he has “made himself” what he is. Indeed, his drinking itself may soon become incontinent, against not only his better judgment but even, in an obvious sense, against his will. Nevertheless, he has created himself, made himself into what he is.

But although Nietzsche (unlike Sartre) says relatively little about responsibility for particular actions, I think that it is important to insist that he does suppose a robust sense of agency and thus responsibility with regard to particular actions. Again, there are a number of important contrasts involved here, and the alcoholic in the preceding paragraph, for example, may be said to be responsible or not responsible for taking a single drink depending on which contrast we have in mind. The idea of “compulsion” that seemed clear to Aristotle but not to Freud is surely a key ingredient in the matter.³¹

Nietzsche, in particular, seems to suggest that all of our behavior is to a certain extent compelled, compelled, that is, not so much by external forces (what Aristotle had in mind) or by forces from the unconscious (what Freud had in mind) but by one’s nature and what he misleadingly calls our “instincts.” Thus the birds of prey in *Genealogy I* cannot help but act like birds of prey, and lambs cannot help but act like lambs. Thus a strong person cannot but be strong, and a weak person cannot but be weak, and the particular actions they perform are thus “compelled” by their natures. Nevertheless, they are responsible for these actions. And it does not much matter whether they deliberate over them (as Nietzsche suggests the slaves often do even if the masters usually do not) or even whether they are fully conscious of what they are doing (which, Nietzsche assures us, the masters are if only out of a thoughtless transparency and the slaves are not, having “forgotten” the real reasons for their behavior).

Acting out of one’s nature may by itself be ample warrant for ascribing responsibility. The distinction alluded to earlier, formulated by Harry Frankfurt, helps make this clear.³² Frankfurt calls a “free action” simply one in which one acts according to his or her desires. If we take it (as Frankfurt does) that free action implies responsibility, then a person who acts in accordance with his or her desires is responsible for that action. This eliminates compulsive actions and (with some fine-tuning) coercive actions, but it includes many

“thoughtless” acts and, with some further argument, unintended acts (so long as the outcome is in accordance with one’s desires).

But the story does not stop there. Frankfurt distinguishes a “wanton” from a full-blooded person, where a wanton acts *thoughtlessly* on his or her desires. But a full-blooded person is not a wanton. He or she also has “second-order desires,” “desires about acting in accordance with one’s desires.” Our alcoholic may crave a drink but nevertheless desperately want to resist that temptation. A person who acts not only in accordance with his or her (first-order) desires but also in accordance with his or her second-order desires acts not only freely but has “free will,” according to Frankfurt. This set of distinctions is important in reading Nietzsche for at least two reasons.

First, Nietzsche is often read (on the basis of seemingly clear textual passages) as an “instinctualist,” urging us to act “out of instinct” instead of with reflection and deliberation. In the first essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche suggests that the “masters” act like this and it is one aspect of their virtue. Elsewhere, he suggests that the virtues more generally are much more matters of instinct than they are of calculation or reflection. (In *Ecce Homo*, he confesses that he is “an atheist by instinct.”) But if acting on instinct is taken to mean acting thoughtlessly or without further motivation or (in Frankfurt’s language) without second-order desires, then this is a crude and highly misleading interpretation of Nietzsche.

Even if Nietzsche (like Kierkegaard) harshly criticizes action that is strangled and eviscerated with an excess of deliberation and reflection, he surely urges us to act in accordance not only with our natures (that is, with our first-order desires born of that nature) but with second-order, “higher” goals and aspirations. That is to say, Nietzsche tells us to follow our instincts and not get distracted by impersonal theories (especially *moral* theories) *but not to the exclusion of higher-order desires and reflection*. We may not be free to change our natures, according to Nietzsche, but that does not mean that we are limited to thoughtlessly acting on their most immediate (and often stupidest) manifestations.

Second, and more directly to the point in question, one might well say that Nietzsche believes in, even insists upon, our “free will,” so long as this does not imply some suspicious notion of the subject, as in both Kant and Lutheran Christianity more generally. And though this will cause trouble only for the terminally literal, “free will” in Frankfurt’s sense need not imply any particular view of the subject (apart from the capacity to have and act on higher-order desires) or any mysterious faculty called “the Will.”³³

Following Frankfurt, we can interpret Nietzsche as holding that we are free and responsible (that is, we have what Frankfurt but not Nietzsche calls “free will”) insofar as we act not only in accordance with our desires, “instincts,” and character but in accordance with our higher-order desires (also derived from our character, if they are to be “our” desires). To be free

and responsible, it is not necessary to deliberate or even to make a decision.³⁴ It is enough to act in accordance with one's highest aspirations.

Nietzsche on Responsibility

Nietzsche does not often use the term "responsibility" (*Verantwortung*), and when he does it is more often critically than with exultation. But I do not think that it is at all a misreading or a bad interpretation of Nietzsche that places the existentialist thesis of "responsibility for self" at the very heart of his philosophical mission. Nietzsche actually discusses responsibility at some length in at least two places, where, as usual, he is both sarcastic and critical of the concept's history and its abuses without saying much about its positive value.³⁵ Nevertheless, it is hard not to see that, as so often, Nietzsche's scorn is mixed with tremendous respect.

In *Genealogy*, it receives its best-known and most protracted treatment: "Precisely this is the long history of the origins of *responsibility*. As we have already grasped, the task of breeding an animal that is permitted to promise includes, as condition and preparation, the more specific task of first making man to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and accordingly predictable."³⁶ Responsibility is cited as a "privilege," as a hallmark of individual "freedom" and "sovereignty," awakening "trust, fear and reverence." Its "proud knowledge . . . has sunk into his lowest depth and become instinct," what the "sovereign human being calls his *conscience*."³⁷

The sneer quotes surrounding such terms as "freedom" and "sovereignty" should be interpreted with some care. Insofar as they point to or presume a Kantian notion of self, they are, to be sure, intended sarcastically. But insofar as they indicate precisely the self-mastery that Nietzsche advocates, they should be treated with appropriate respect. The mixed description of people as "necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and accordingly predictable" suggests very different images and analyses.

What does "necessary" mean in this context? Is this an allusion to Kant's deontology? "Uniform," "like among like," and "regular" are, of course, intended as insults, but how else would one "breed" animals who can trust one another, and would Nietzsche suggest that trust and reverence (let's put aside fear) are untoward sentiments in any social setting? Are masterly types thereby unpredictable? And does predictability necessarily point to slavish attitudes? I would think, to the contrary, that one of the dangers in dealing with the weak and resentful is their unpredictability, the likelihood that they will act precisely contrary to their own self-interest out of spite. (Consider Dostoyevsky's "underground" man.)

The use of the phrase "sunk into his lowest depth" referring to instinct is,

of course, curious in several ways, not least the fact that it is unusual (in biology, at least) to speak of *acquiring* an instinct. As an essential aspect of one's nature, an instinct is precisely what is not acquired. But in what sense are the instincts "low"? This is not Nietzsche's usual way of speaking about them. Assuming that one is talking about the species and not individual acquisition, Nietzsche seems torn between chastizing responsibility as "unnatural" (a familiar complaint with him) and criticizing it for *becoming* natural, an odd set of complaints, even given his Lamarckism.

I think that the whole paragraph, which turns on the odd phrase "permitted to promise," should be read as a much more neutral piece of anthropology, on the one hand, and as a barbed bit of admiration and wonder, on the other. Isn't it remarkable, Nietzsche is telling us, that human beings have so mastered their sense of themselves that they can commit themselves into the future and take responsibility for what they have done in the past? What higher praise could be offered, and what could be more necessary in the breeding of the "future philosophers" and even *Übermensch* that Nietzsche so breathlessly anticipates? Does it make sense to suppose that the *Übermensch* would not be "permitted to promise," or that he would be in some unusual sense free to break his promises? (On the other hand, "Neither Manu nor Plato nor Confucius nor the Jewish and Christian teachers have ever doubted their right to lie.")³⁸ But even a broken promise presupposes responsibility.

The other passage that deals with responsibility in some depth is the "Four Great Errors" section of *Twilight of the Idols*, from "the error of a false causality" to "the error of freewill."³⁹ In Section 7, Nietzsche suggests that the psychology of "making responsible" can be traced to the compulsion to look for "responsibilities" with an eye to the "instinct of wanting to judge and punish."⁴⁰ So, too, the notion of freedom: "the origin of every act had to be considered as lying within the consciousness."⁴¹ And here Nietzsche trots out once again his inconsistent and incontinent campaign against judgment, guilt, and punishment: "Christianity is a metaphysics of the hangman."⁴²

But notice that there is an enormous difference between the notion of responsibility discussed in *Genealogy* and the one discussed under the rubric of the "error of free will." The first does not presume any particular notion of the subject (though, as I suggested, Nietzsche sometimes alludes to Kantian notions). Indeed, to point out that a responsible being is "necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and accordingly predictable" and acting out of acquired "instinct" is precisely to avoid any need for a conscious subject.

The *Twilight* version, however, is all about a particular notion of self, and one can quite clearly reject that notion of self without rejecting, in the first sense, Nietzsche's notion of responsibility. Moreover, the "author" of an action need by no means act out of free will. The Chinese sense of responsibility, for example, utterly ignores motivation and choice and looks only to character and consequences.⁴³ And one wonders how Nietzsche's argument

in *Twilight* jives with one of his most pungent aphorisms; “‘I have done that,’ says my memory. ‘I cannot have done that’—says my pride, and remains adamant. At last—memory yields”).⁴⁴

So what does “responsibility” mean for Nietzsche? One might be instrumental in cultivating one’s character only in the more or less trivial sense that it is one’s own character that is being cultivated, as one might say that the acorn is instrumental in its development into a tree. But even this trivial account has the virtue of distinguishing self-generation and growth from external shaping and molding, and some such distinction is undoubtedly at stake here. Insofar as one develops one’s talent for, say, playing the piano only because one has been threatened and coerced into doing so, one might be said not to have taken responsibility for developing one’s talent at all. Insofar as one has developed one’s talent for playing the piano only because one has been bribed and rewarded—Alasdair MacIntyre’s example of an “external” as opposed to “internal” reward system for a practice—we hesitate to talk about responsibility at all.

But it does not follow that an “internalist” account of taking responsibility needs to include anything like an act of will or a special “subject” or any willful overcoming of counter-inclinations or any other specific obstacles. It need not involve deliberation or “practical reasoning.” It means, in classical terms, that one’s wishes, intentions, aspirations, and actions are all in harmony, that the trajectory of one’s development is in tune with one’s talents and the practices or institutions that sustain them. All of this might well be accompanied by those “feelings of delight of [one’s] successful executive instruments” that Nietzsche suggests (in *Beyond Good and Evil* 19) might easily be confused for a volition or an act of will. But to say that responsibility may thus be severed from the Kantian notion of Will is not for a moment to say that it must also be distinguished from agency and responsibility in this larger and more ordinary sense.

Conclusion: Is Nietzsche an Existentialist?

So, is Nietzsche an existentialist? Does he share with Kierkegaard and Sartre the idea that one is responsible for what one becomes? I think so. As Sartre says in that much-quoted 1971 interview (in *New Left Review*), “The idea I have never ceased to develop is in the end that a man can always make something out of what is made of him.”⁴⁵ So, too, I think, for Nietzsche. We can take him seriously in his critique of “free will” without compromising our insistence on responsibility. Nietzsche writes, “What alone can our teaching be?—That no one *gives* a human being his qualities”—neither God, nor soci-

ety, nor his parents or ancestors, nor he himself.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, we *have* those qualities, and it is our responsibility how we develop and what we do with them.

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1. Robert C. Solomon, “Nietzsche as Existentialist: The Practical Paradoxes of Self-Making,” a response to Brian Leiter, “The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche,” in C. Janaway, ed., *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche’s Educator* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 217–57. To be published in *International Studies in Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (2002).

2. Leiter, “The Paradox of Fatalism,” 217.

3. I thus liken Nietzsche’s so-called paradox to Kant’s third and most famous antinomy (B 480), which has the *appearance* of two contradictory claims but which turn out to be the expressions of two different “standpoints.” This is quite independent of such Kantian notions as “Will as a kind of causality” or “thinking of oneself as free” or “as members of the intelligible [or supersensible] world.”

4. At the beginning of *Gay Science*, Book Four, Nietzsche celebrates *amor fati* and declares, “I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. *Looking away* shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer” (*Gay Science* §276), Nietzsche often resolves not to be so “judgmental,” but we can probably agree that he does not succeed in this. He emerges from his writings as one of the most judgmental of philosophers—one would not go wrong in calling him “moralistic” in his tone. Some commentators will object to calling Nietzsche a “moralist,” reminding us that he preferred to describe himself as an “immoralist” and that his objections are less often moral objections than they are aesthetic objections (“Socrates was ugly,” “Goethe was beautiful”) or diagnostic, even physiological (“Carlyle was dyspeptic”). And, of course, many of Nietzsche’s objections have the unmistakable tone of mockery (“Oh, you Stoics . . .”).

5. Dan Dennett ridicules fatalism as the “mystical and superstitious” thesis that “no agent can do anything about anything” (123) whose only virtue is “the power to create creepy effects in literature” (104). *Elbow Room* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984).

6. In Alfred Hitchcock’s second version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956).

7. Dennett, *Elbow Room*, 123.

8. Mark Bernstein, *Fatalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

9. In Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, an edition of the fragments with translation and commentary, ed. Charles H. Kahn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

10. See Cecil M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 10; Cedric H. Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951); Marjorie Barstow, “Oedipus Rex as the Ideal Tragic Hero for Aristotle,” *Classical Weekly* 6, no. 1 (5 October 1912); and Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

11. David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, 8th ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1874).

12. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, #112.

13. Brian Leiter, “One Health. One Earth. One Sun: Nietzsche’s Respect for Natural Science,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 October 1998, 30–31; Maudemarie Clark, “Nietzsche on the Soul” (unpublished manuscript, Chapel Hill Colloquium, 2000); Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

14. I would even go so far as to call Nietzsche a “biological determinist.” That is, he thinks that our natures are set by our biology and not subject to change. His most dramatic illustration

of this pervasive thesis is in the first Essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where he compares "slaves and masters" to lambs and great birds of prey, commenting explicitly on how futile it would be for either to wish it were like the other.

15. Leiter, "The Paradox of Fatalism," 225.

16. The line is actually from William Henley's "Invictus," but this has terminally tarnished its use by mass-murderer Timothy McVeigh, who quoted it immediately before his execution in June 2001.

17. See Lisa Raphals, "Fatalism, Fate, and Stratagem in China and Greece," in Steven Shankman and Stephen W. Durrant, eds., *Thinking Through Comparisons* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 2002).

18. Nevertheless, Zeus, at least, seems to have ample "elbow room" with regard to fate. For instance, there is a remarkable passage where Zeus is contemplating saving Sarpedon, one of his favorite sons, despite the fact that "Fate has it that Sarpedon, whom I love more / Than any man, is to be killed by Patroclus" (16:470–96, p. 318). (All translations from the *Iliad* have been quoted from the recent Hackett translation by Stanley Lombardo [Hackett, 1997]). Hera warns Zeus against contravening fate and he backs down. Thus the extent to which he is "bound" by fate—as opposed to the clear "binding" of mere mortals—is left ambiguous.

19. Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 400ff.

20. Leiter has argued at least the first half of this thesis in his *TLS* essay, "One Health, One Earth, One Sun," note 13 above.

21. See, for example, John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

22. *Gay Science*.

23. Harry Frankfurt defines free action as action in accordance with our higher-level reflective desires. It is not the higher-level reflective desire not to have the desire in question but rather the desire not to act on that desire. (See Patricia Greenspan, "Impulse and Self-Reflection: Frankfurtian Responsibility Versus Free Will," *Journal of Ethics* 3, no. 4 [1999]: 325–40.) Consider, for instance, criminal aggressive impulses. Thus one might distinguish free action from free will. Nor is such freedom a matter of "could have done otherwise." Frankfurt: "for reasons of one's own," an alcoholic takes a second and a third drink for the pleasurable effects, though as a matter of fact he would have been caused to do so in any case by his disease. So acting in accordance with one's own desires apart from the question whether he "could have done otherwise."

24. Not all philosophy is justification, and in the existentialists in particular the quest for justification is typically turned on its head. ("An act is grounded because I choose it, not because of a principle, which is justified by some further principle, etc.")

25. Leiter, "The Paradox of Fatalism," 225.

26. Maudemarie Clark, "Nietzsche on the Soul," and Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*.

27. The subtitle of Dennett's book, *Elbow Room*, is *Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting*.

28. I have elsewhere argued that Sartre sustains a full-blooded determinism in his philosophy, untouched by his adamant insistence that we must, even ontologically, consider consciousness as free and free from causation.

29. *Gay Science* 373, quoted in Leiter, "The Paradox of Fatalism," 257.

30. There is a sense in which this might be challenged, though not, I think, at any risk to the thesis I am advancing here. Lewis Thomas suggests that even the most primitive living things (e.g., slime molds) have a sense of self in that they "recognize" others of their kind (in effect, their own offspring) and avoid others (other slime molds with a different genetic composition). Lewis Thomas, *Lives of a Cell* (New York: Viking, 1974).

31. Aristotle, NE III. See Sigmund Freud on "obsessional neuroses," for instance, in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, Standard Edition (London: Hogarth, 1953).

32. Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge, 1988), 23.

33. See, for example, Patricia Greenspan, "Impulse and Self-Reflection," note 23 above.
34. Frankfurt and Greenspan both have some clever arguments against the need to invoke either decisions or the possibility of "acting otherwise" in the analysis of freedom.
35. *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), Essay II, para. 2; *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), "Four Great Errors," sections 3–7.
36. *Genealogy* II, 2.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Twilight of the Idols*, "The 'Improvers' of Mankind," sect. 5.
39. *Twilight of the Idols*, "Four Great Errors," sections 3–7.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. See, for example, Ronald De Sousa and Jingsong Ma, "Social Constraint and Women's Emotions in Pre-Modern Chinese Literature," in *Proceedings of the International Society for Research on Emotions*, 2000.
44. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 68.
45. Reprinted in Solomon, ed., *Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 513.
46. *Twilight of the Idols*, "Four Great Errors," 8.

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