

Toward Personalism

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A. In 1713 a tinkerer in Leipzig named Jakob Leopold¹ advertised three machines he newly conceived for the creation of anamorphic pictures.² This project required making the image out of light and then making it again out of matter; projecting the image and then preserving it. For the first step, he provided a mirror to reflect an image distorted in the way desired by the artist of the anamorph. One device used a curved mirror, another device used a conical mirror, and the third used a cylindrical mirror. The second step was accomplished by a stylus that scratched the outlines of the image onto a thin brass plate or onto paper of suitable weight. Perhaps it was possible as well to ink the tip of the stylus. These two steps are the basic elements of most image-making: reflection of light and production on a physical substrate. Each has been achieved in innumerable forms.

¹b. Zwickau 1674, d. Leipzig 1727.

²Anamorphosis mechanica nova oder Beschreibung dreier neuer Maschinen mit welchen ... mancherley Bilder und Figuren können gezeichnet werden. (Leipzig, Zunckel, 1713). The only recorded copies are held by the Beinecke Library at Yale, the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, and the British Library. A copy appeared in the Getty Museum exhibit “Devices of Wonder” and is commented upon in the catalogue, ed. B. Stafford and F. Terpak, *Devices of Wonder* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001), p. 245 (fig. 84 and entry no. 164). The device is also described by Kirsti Andersen in *The Geometry of an Art. The History of the Mathematical Theory of Perspective from Alberti to Monge* (Berlin, Springer, 2006), p. 611.

Leopold linked these two steps by his mechanism for making a fixed image out of light. This mechanism was a flow of motion bearing the image. The image was translated into energy, the energy emitted the image; in between the source and the product the several separable steps of mechanism seemed inseparably laminated under the image that it was their purpose to bear. The inventor located a gearworks between reflection and inscription. A crank supplies physical energy from a human hand. This force transmits the image from the mirror to a chain of rods, and a mystery appears as this incarnation begins, for its visibility is as sudden and inexplicable as the laborer's hand in the published illustrative engravings, perched out of a cloud and unattached to a craftsman's body. The action of the rods was fixed but floating, so that their motion copied the image outline into air, for which a surface was substituted. This too was a sort of image, etched in air but invisible, as sound waves were until Chladni directed them into trays of sand, or just as the grooves on a phonographic record are versions of the shape of sound vibrations in the air. The path through air of Leopold's stylus was itself another copy of the image, already anamorphed.

This chain of rods terminated by a needle was part of a pantograph. The goal of the pantographer was to copy with as little motion of the human eye as possible. It was a kind of efficiency system, in which labor was saved, time shaved, action made repetitive, and attention minimized, as machinery most always had done, and finally persons would do once tuned with similar economy by Taylor's scientific management of time. Here the activity of image fabrication is shown to be no more profoundly human than any other labor from which people sought to increase the benefit, whether this benefit was mortal survival or the most bubbly ornament. A painter was the first known to have devised this species of duplication. He showed it to Christopher Scheiner in 1603, and Scheiner made it work so that he could copy onto paper the far away sights he saw through his telescope. Thus his eye and hand were co-ordinated while each was employed at a different instrument. Thereafter pantographs were largely used to copy text treated as image, with improvements by Christopher Wren, Erasmus Darwin, and Thomas Jefferson.³

³See Barbara Rhodes and William Streeter, *Before photocopying : the art & history of mechanical copying, 1780-1938* (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Books, 1999), pp. 16ff.

Leopold's idea of direct transmission was a novelty. The two principal descriptions of anamorphic devices in the seventeenth century, by Niceron and Maignan,⁴ both required the artist, or his assistant, to direct the inscription by manipulating a string or pulley at the end of which an attached bead marked enough points to allow construction of the figure by infill at a later moment. In their mechanisms the anamorphed image was relayed by the eye, observing it through a lens, to the mind and then to the hand. Leopold replaced neural judgment and decision by a mechanism of smoothly rotation and appearance. He provided a level of organized illusion on top of an atomized mechanical sequence. Whether it worked or not, or was ever built or not, is not our concern. It was as magical as television: look here and you will see what is over there. What is more: look here and you will see a version of what is over there that exists only inside the intervening object and would have remained as invisible as a dream were it not for the operation of this object. This is simultaneously magic and labor. The explanatory gap evacuated by creation of course remained, as it always was and has ever been.

This mechanized magic of the mirror was advertised by the manufacturer in three different forms. It is not clear whether the three different kinds of mirrors were offered because they produced three different morphing effects or because they had differing capacities to produce the same effect, but from the point of view of the reader of the pamphlet they must have been, in addition, like different colors or flavors. Automated reproduction had, as it were, reproduced itself. This means that magic was being normalized exactly as quickly as it was invented. The amazing becomes regular, as it must be when the necessity of efficient causation answers the necessities required by labor for tasks. We see these familiar patterns of consumption in Leopold's quite inconsequential invention.

In a sense this was ordinary to Leopold. Nine years later, Leopold issued a catalogue⁵ of more than two hundred machines for sale, including one that has escaped obscurity. It's a calculator, far and away the most expensive thing in the

⁴These are described by Lyle Massey in his *Picturing space, displacing bodies: anamorphosis in early modern theories of perspective* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), pp. 95-103. Jean-François Niceron's *Perspective Curieuse* was published in Paris in 1651, and Emmanuel Maignan's *Perspectiva horaria* was published in Rome in 1648.

⁵*Catalogus mancherley Machinen und Instrumenten : zum Feldmessen, Marckscheiden, Bu rgerlichen und Kriegs-Bau-Kunst, Geschütz und Feuerwerck Kunst, Erd-Beschreibung, Himmels-Lauff, Stern- und Sonnen-Uhren-Kunst, und dergleichen....* (Leipzig, Zunkel, 1720 and 1722).

catalogue, based on Leibniz's computer.⁶ In 1724 he published his synoptic *Thesaurus Machinarum Generale*⁷ to describe and picture the entire mechanical world of his age. Here he asks us to view technological progress as an ordinary part of human development, not a game or a toy but itself a machine made up of machines in use or being designed, each one adding previous parts to new parts or to other old parts in new ways, atoms upon atoms and geartooth into geartooth. Each step of mechanization not only made next steps materially or theoretically possible, it also made people more ready to use, plan, and rely upon machines. As mechanization graduated from complexity to complexity, it shaped an atomic view of reality that could be isolated from philosophical and theological questions. Many of course do not isolate the one part of thinking from another. It's a battle that has never stopped. But a working compromise on the ground of practicality was made, moving with the running forward edge of technology. It might have done so in antiquity; it certainly does so in modernity. Plateaux of knowledge contribute to historically visible leaps, but the accretive process beneath plateaux is always at work, even in technological and scientific labor that did not become famous.

Machines help us make sense of other machines. The more we have of them, the more we know about inventing and using them. Technology grows upon an epistemic base,⁸ and that base grows in consequence of the fruitful use of technology. This cycle of enlargement also illuminates a more interior reinforcement. In one of his reflections on Greek technology, Robert Brumbaugh wrote that mechanistic or atomistic materialism

has plausability only when there is already enough ingenious "mechanisms" known to a culture to make the suggested extension of mechanical principles to beings with complex behavior intuitively plausible.⁹

Resistance is worn away by familiarity, and what was novel becomes ordinary. Brumbaugh's idea also points to the minor key of gradual change: that since

⁶A picture of the machine itself will be found at <http://www.computer-museum.org/main/slide/026.shtml>. It is unclear whether the device is original or in reproduction.

⁷Leipzig, C. Zunkel, 1724.

⁸This useful phrase was devised by Joel Mokyr in his *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.)

⁹Robert Brumbaugh, *Ancient Greek Gadgets and Machines* (New York, Crowell, 1966), p. 132.

conceptual changes occur in persons, and not in machines, and if therefore these changes ought to be understood as integral in persons, and persons as not modular, they must then occur while old ideas are still held and, further, they do flourish in company with older, perhaps conflicting, views of the world governing the development of both ideas and machines. People use machines much as they do ideas, in this regard. They choose among them, keeping and changing and mixing, according to influences other than the most immediate, present, and simple. This is part of what we mean by the idea of personhood.

Whereas anamorphosis was magical and extraordinary in the Renaissance, it was familiar and integrated with quotidian technology by the Baroque; and whereas reproduction was miraculous for Scheiner and for the people who first used copybooks, it is remarkable today not because it is uncommon but because it has ripened into universal manipulability of text and image. Yet a foremost fact of human creativity is that the obsolescence of things does not equal the obsolescence of concepts. There is not enough time on the clock to tell how old ideas—deep beliefs, the profound unconscious, the motives of evolution—survive in us though we never cease to invent new ideas. Thus, in the ordinariness of Leopold's array of anamorphic devices, catalogued inside his utilitarian conspectus of technology, it is not so much a decay of the thrill of anamorphosis, or ossification of interest in it, that we see as it is signs of the permanence of the irregular in the kingdom of the regular. People then, as now, kept inward room for the conflict of contradicting impulses. It is part of the evolving compromise with rational empirical knowledge, that what is objectively considered distorted may lawfully be held to signify an inwardly defended reality.

We know many exceptions to the commands of monopunctual perspective: clouds hide birds in flight by their colored reflection of light as well as by occlusion; quantum nature has nothing of the order obvious to practical reason. It has been argued that from its beginning anamorphic art showed the instability in rationalistic perspective.¹⁰ It must then join the throng of schools, opinions, forces, and reactions that always clung to Cartesian rationalism. When our large ideas about reality seem obsolete it often is largely because interest has shifted to other ideas and for nothing more. Though regularized and unmagical, old ideas often have destiny ahead. They wait, destroyed yet triumphant. Hunger for the inexact feeds upon exactitude. This

¹⁰Massey, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21ff. *et pass.*

is the secret behind the fact that the reproduction of images expands the ways in which images are held sacred. Leopold's production of machines for the reproduction of images formed by irregular vision is a sign of the concurrent rejection and maintenance of non-rationalist concepts by their incorporation into the mainstream of empirical knowledge. Thus the runner-up in history survives, sometimes to bring ruin upon the victor.

The copied image includes both preservation and alteration of the original. It includes both the presence and the absence of the original. The more common and numerous our manufactures are, the weightier is our material world. And yet at the same moment this world is in a different regard less weighty because more manipulable. With all reproduction there is loss of the preciousness of the original and therefore of the fixed physicality of the original material thing. This is true of raw natural materials to which tubulated machines and digitizing processors give our hands, and finally our minds, ever more perfect plasticity. When we exchange sacredness for manipulability, everything from artistic images to mother nature grows weightless in the measure in which it is replicated. It is not merely that each object becomes less rare, in a process well-known to us all, but also that the physical world, in an action contrary to that of increased fabrication, itself rarifies, as its internal boundaries vaporize under the heat of the energy we apply to it. The more our industrial and creative production advances, the more we objectify the world not by means of its ponderousness, since the weight of the planet hardly changes whether its matter is raw or cooked, but by virtue of the growing clarity with which we make every thing into a carrier of our significations. As if our minds were presses, we incise our ideas onto every element. The atmosphere of matter is struck and rubbed until it is as smooth a mirror of our intentions for it as we possibly can make it.

This development started the first time man, striking a blow against nature, attempted to equal or better his chance for survival against fate. But upon passing a threshold of our power over imagery, a moment in the history of technology for which I have taken Leopold of Leipzig as an emblem, the relations of man and nature profoundly changed. In the consciousness of Western man this change was diffused in a phalanx of inquiries into nature under the chieftainship of rational empiricism. At this same period, George Berkeley, as I have tried to show, in some

weird way comprehending the far goalpoint of rational empiricism,, opened the way to a quite different path. This is like the system of corridors and stairways for the servants that snakes invisibly to the guests through the edifices of some great hotels. He completely dematerialized reality in theory and suggested a place, or a container, a regard or an attitude, by which Western consciousness might keep soul or spirit in an intelligible and active normative role amidst a world we are obliged correctly to understand as mechanism, visible and invisible, elementary and quantum, atomic and forceful.

Consider a saucepan in which stock bubbles atop a stove. How is this possible? In one sense of the word “possible,” we say it is possible because of the conduction of energy through matter, as heat is brought to bear upon the liquid by means of the stove top. This sense is the sense circumscribed by causality in its traditional four forms. In another sense of the word, one will say: “This is how it is possible: that we here observe causality as actual. *This* is how it is possible: it is here, and here it is.” This is the simple observation of self-consciousness, repeated in a thousand forms by a thousand philosophers. Berkeley added his insistence that the presence of an observer was necessary for actual causality to the common and elementary self-conscious reflection. Yet this insistence raised within the discussion of the correct and incorrect features of the empirical method some of the oldest questions men have had as to the reason and necessity of their existence. It transformed the veridical inquiry into an existential inquiry. I say not merely that it was capable of doing this, but that this metamorphosis was worked out by Berkeley in his early writing, though it was not by his express desire since his intention was to direct the search for truth toward divinity rather than toward finitude.¹¹ Yet he saw that the materialist lock on certainty could always be picked. Just as we have replaced keys and bumping tumblers by electronic controls, so Berkeley believed that we would have to guarantee matter, which has ever since turned to foam and bubbles, by spirit. At the moment at which means for attaining certainty and truth were coming into our hands, the oldest questions of being took their place, or maintained their old place, not visible but nonetheless with increasing force over the decades and centuries of scientific and industrial development that followed.

¹¹My argument for my interpretation of Berkeley’s early work is in my essay “The Bishop Berkeley Endowment.” It is not published but is posted on porlockpensum.com.

Belief in the traditional functions of the soul of course continued amidst technological change. Among Western philosophers, Berkeley's direction of the answer to the problem of scepticism toward soul or spirit opened two paths: one toward what psychologism, especially in ethics, following Hume and Mill, and the other toward idealism, from Kant through the course of the great and small systems of post-Kantian idealism. In their hands the soul became spirit, in order to comprehend the universe. They created a different, new form of monopunctual perspective, custom-made to encompass all reality, whether for the sake of validating our scientific knowledge or for the sake of validating the history of all reality. In Western philosophical consciousness this soul, whether as the regulative soul of rational persons or as the world-spirit of Hegel served, through many permutations, to sustain the link between being and the good required for the normative work of the personal soul. As I have argued elsewhere,¹² this link was broken by Schopenhauer. He pictured all reality as a force creating its own existence, and its parts as struggling for their own survival. This picture exhumed the existential question out of the reliquary of idealism. This *other* direction from Berkeley's first arguments, consequent upon the role of the personhood, which he did not examine, led toward discovery of the philosophical possibilities in finitude and subjectivity, was extraordinarily fruitful in phenomenology, pragmatism, and process philosophy.

Thus the archetype of soul or spirit sprouted capillaries through which came views of the world by which Western philosophers tried to soothe the feeling that everything human was being placed upon the altar of Moloch by our own cleverness. We are obliged to confront the possibility that our intelligence works because, and only because, it is congruent with reality—that it correctly shapes the world upon the true mold of materiality. And yet the more powerfully our intelligence controlled physical reality, that part of it that escapes our control points back to the things heaped from our toes to our crowns like a victor's spoils, incanting upon them a reality for which we have no exact name. In English, we have no one word that corresponds solely and exactly to “single material thing,” since “thing” and “object” are very powerfully equivocal generalities. Once the spirit was seen as the rat-toothed maw of the forces of famished life, or seemed to return to blind nature from

¹²In my unpublished *Power and Compassion: The Ethics of Moral Force*, Section A, “Gyges's World.” A synopsis is posted on porlockpensum.com

which Western philosophical and spiritual traditionally attempted to rescue it, and once this corporeal reality grew oppressive as its ceaseless replicative enlargement made parts of life unwelcoming and unfamiliar, then the soul was no longer could be seen as locking up the sacrality of human life and history.

This brief history is one angle of approach to a development that has occupied philosophers and other thinkers of nearly every school and type. For example, a very roughly similar history presented by Veblen, Gideion, and Ellul; another version, by Tolkien; others, by Kierkegaard, Marx, Heidegger, Sartre, and many others. Furthermore, it sits within the history of our discovery and invention of knowledge and of the means for its storage, retrieval, and distribution—a history that includes Leupold’s gadgets—wherein our understanding of who we are and what we are follows the growth of neuroplasticity along with its expression in society, art, and thought.¹³ I have shaped this history around the soul in order to look at it, amidst this complexity, as the repository of our moral capacity. Believing that ethics, as the pursuit with rigorous honesty of the questions of what are the next right things to do is the philosophical endeavor of paramount pertinence, I wish to understand what true understanding we can *possibly* have of our own moral force apart from the neural, physical, social, and many other identities we comprise—that is to say, what the special, singular moral strength of *personhood* might be.¹⁴

B. Into the possibility of non-materialist philosophy given by Berkeley flowed the traditional moral and spiritual functions of the soul, like rainwater into an impluvium, from the hands of Kant and Hegel and their successors. Out of it flowed toward modernity the titanic tangle of Western thought, in Romanticism and after, toward liberation and revolution and toward reaction and tradition throughout all physical, biological, and human sciences. Against the idea of soul and spirit at the heart of much of this development Friedrich Nietzsche launched a decisive and sharp attack, directed at scientists, philosophers, and the general reader. He attacked the

¹³The relationship of neuroscience and the arts has been brilliantly explored by Barbara Stafford in her *Echo Objects* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007). One of the developments she traces of interest here is described by John Yolton in his *Realism and Appearances, an essay in Ontology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 43, where he concludes, in her words (p. 95), that eighteenth-century empiricism oversaw a “shift from the spatial presence of objects in the mind to their epistemic or cognitive presence.”

¹⁴Subseq essay

outer bastion of spirit dug out of matter by Berkeley and then erected by Kant and Hegel. This broad set of concepts that I refer to as soul and spirit specifically comprises the *unitary soul* as the home-base and headquarters in each sole natural person of the love of God and the good through reason, virtue, and conscience, safeguarded from the natural world by its divine spark; and the *universal spirit*, being soul as the active and rationally explanatory presence throughout all time and space of the unique, morally prescriptive, creative, and invisible divine.

A truly protean thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche the philosopher is a location of one of the most intricate crossroads in the history of Western thought. Its elements include the feelings of loss and repair in the long Romantic calamity of the sublime, the discovery of biological evolution, and the search for the unconscious and unknown unity of persons and of humankind.¹⁵ The ancient hope for ideal form and unity was supplied out of finitude, which is the subjective mind amidst the dynamic of time. This road is marked by many famous names, such as Hegel, Darwin, and Freud, but the importance of some of others has been recognized by historians only in the last couple of decades, such as Humbert de Superville's attempt to derive a universal visual language from cultures across the globe and Johann Frobel's invention of a method by which to explain the fundamental geometry of the world to children. In the endeavors of these less famous figures the clumsy, coarse nature of the idea of universality is sometimes more simply to be seen than in Hegel or Darwin. These were endeavors to see the deep structure of knowledge as simultaneously evident in both basic universal forms and in the manifold of history. Another intellectual endeavor toward the same end was made in a field of inquiry of which Nietzsche was undoubtedly aware but the impact of which has for the most part been recognized only recently: the creation of comparative and historical linguistics in the space of just a few decades before Nietzsche's maturity. Out of it came the idea of the Indo-European ancestor of Western languages, which by a ready step led to the publication of hundreds of books speculating on the ethnic and spiritual descent of the European peoples and their civilization.¹⁶ If Berkeley was

¹⁵Barbara Stafford, in her *Echo Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) pp. 26ff., describes a wide range of aspects of Romanticism in these terms, a theme she began in her earlier work on de Sumperville, Symbol and Myth (Cranberry, N.J.: University of Delaware Press, 1979). Norman Brosterman's *Inventing Kindergarten* (New York: Abrams, 1997) began the exploration of the importance of Frobel.

¹⁶See the fascinating study by Stefan Arvidsson, tr. Sonia Wichmann, *Aryan Idols* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

almost the last clergyman to be a great philosopher, Nietzsche was virtually the first philologist to be one.

The historical philologists of the period were historians who worked in a new field of investigation. They produced genealogical charts of the type familiar from the days of the *arbor consanguinitatis* as the visual model of relationships. Like a family tree, the Indo-European parent was placed at the top or the left-hand side, and its descendent ramified outward through millenia through a “garden of forks.” The basic structure is that of the family or bloodline that reproduces, differentiates, and, at least in this case, expands. The same structure is the model of the origin of species and the descent of man in evolution. Its explanatory power was enhanced by the descriptive practices of taxonomy in the eighteenth century and onward, charting both living beings and physical matter, such as crystals, and in the study of artifacts. Unity was supplied by variation, which librarians, collectors of precious objects, and biologists had learned to use in classification organized by similarities and differences. From Indo-European linguistics the listing of human societies in terms of the affiliation of their languages added deep substance to the older practice of personal and tribal genealogy, greatly expanded in the nineteenth century in attempts to map unified and comprehensive structures of cultural, moral, and spiritual relationships tied to those of tongue and of blood. It is important to remember the vast number of these inquiries, appearing as part of the front line not only of our knowledge of ourselves but of our knowledge of the physical and moral cosmos.

Their authors gave naturalistic descriptions, basing guesses about the life and migrations of Eurasian peoples upon an increasing body of empirical evidence. They varied of course in how well they used this evidence—how good their linguistic morphology was, or their skill in analyzing archaeological evidence, and their honesty in promoting their larger religious or political beliefs through science. These beliefs grew in number at least as fast the evidence multiplied til they themselves formed a genealogy of different schools of thought. What these sciences attempted to describe as fact was the group or tribal nature of culture and morality. Some sought the common ground of humankind in this, and others sought sharp bipolarities between what in the end they saw as their own and the other’s and finally as the good and the bad. In either case, they stressed the tribal nature of the

human being by means of empirical evidence. Scholars of the human sciences followed this pattern as the century progressed, including biologists, historians of religion, historians of society and culture, historians of art, recorders of primitive literature, text editors. Upon this basis idealized systems of ethical values were placed by means of what seemed to be likely reasoning from physical evidence. The expansion of empirical knowledge produced a result its ardent ancestor advocates, perched at an eager outlook for the destruction of superstition, had not always foreseen: that it can be extremely difficult to know what is truth and what is prejudice in an ever more complex environment of evidence and information. Short straight lines on a diagram of the history of dialects were not so much dried black ink as they were loud shouts of approval or hatred, the moving fronts of intellectual and political storms, and wires charged with causes and connections so thickly telegraphed from the past that one might feel overwhelmed by superior forces of identity, gathered from far places and ages onto the printed page in front of a reader's eyes, over which one had no control.

If we are so determined, it must seem that the parent, even Adam himself, is still in control of our character. And if not the single parent, then it was the social parent, the tribe, that made destiny. Now that we know something about genetic inheritance, we puzzle out similar questions. Thus in the nineteenth century, as the knowledge of societies, of history, of mathematical probability, of atomic structure, of invisible physical energies, of evolutionary heritage, of the unconscious, of the commonalities among far-flung societies, even of schools of artistic influence—the entire underlying regular but unimaginably complex structures behind all this—as this great cloud of reasoned guesses and good tries and wild speculations spread throughout European culture, the exact nature of the power of these kinds of causality was brought into question. As the kinds of causal forces multiplied, the ways in which they worked singly and co-ordinately also multiplied far faster than any firm and settled comprehension of them on our part could possibly be arrived at, as the continue to do to this day.

In Chapter 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, being barely more than 400 words (in German), Nietzsche suggests an idea of personhood with which to replace the traditional idea of soul along with the palatial modern version that the German idealists called spirit. He has two names for his idea, one at the beginning of this

chapter and the second at the end: first, “the pre-form of life”; and second, “the will to power.” This chapter is the only text in which he gives an argument for the will to power, and it is also the only place he mentions his of the preform of life.

The entire text of this chapter between the brief presentations of these two terms—roughly the middle two-thirds—is a tightly involuted pair of arguments for such a theory. These two arguments, which echo themes from throughout Nietzsche’s work, hold a powerful two-fold critique of the idealist endeavor to maintain a concept of the human being free and clean of materialism. This endeavor was profoundly fruitful in the history of human thought; nonetheless, the logic of its culmination in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche brought some of its limitations into clear view as in fact the skeptical and even nihilistic view of things that Berkeley feared and that the idealist project sought to defeat. In my view, Kierkegaard made a more profound and consistent re-evaluation of soul and personhood than Nietzsche, taking things in broad view. In this text, however, Nietzsche uses a powerful logic to attack an enemy very much like the one Kierkegaard attacked, but Nietzsche’s line of thought terms led in a direction that requires our critical notice.

This argument comes from metaphysics. It is, at a remove or two, concerned with the questions of unity, change, and causality. In order to pick the metaphysical critique of unitary soul and universal spirit out of this, I shall leave aside Nietzsche’s replacements for them, the pre-form of life and the will to power, and return to them in Section D. Because the concept of the will to in particular has an infinity of reverberations, I have elided it out of my quotations from this text in my exposition here of Nietzsche’s critical arguments. In the discussion in this section I’ll use the phrase “basal force (or energy) of human being (or endeavor or life): in place of “pre-form of life” and “will to power.”

The *first* step is Nietzsche’s conditional call for a *method* by which to conceive the human being. This comes from Nietzsche’s way of taking into account a basic problem in ethics, the difference between natural and moral things. Usually scholars see this as a problem for interpreting Nietzsche throughout his major moral works, and so it might be, but it was also a conflict of ideas that he saw and responded to. He was both persuaded by the method of natural science, as against

customary practices in the humanities, and repelled by its use in reduction of basal human being to natural facts. This tension comprises the objective problem for all discussion of human values, whether skeptical or fideistic and even whether traditional or revolutionary, for revolution too cannot be untroubled by the inadequacy of both rationalist and non-rationalist approaches. Rejecting both, Nietzsche started something new at their common point of weakness:

In the end not only is it permitted to make this experiment; the conscience of method demands it. Not to assume several kinds of causality until the experiment of making do with a single one has been pushed to its utmost limit (to the point of nonsense, if I may say so)—that is a moral of method which one may not shirk today—it follows “from its definition” as a mathematician would say.¹⁷

Natural facts do not exist without the intervention of our interpretive minds. We supply the causality and call it material. But the mental realm, too, the realm of our organizing ideas, also cannot be thought to exist without beings to do thinking. We think up ideas and call them real. This ideal reality has no greater force than material reality. For when we understand that we supply causal connection for things, we must also understand that we supply causal connection for ideas, by means of grouping things together. If matter then is another name for the activity of our minds, then ideas also are another name for the same thing. At the end of the daisy chain sits the little giant who loops its parts together. This was Berkeley’s method. Nietzsche projected it deeper into the vast swarms of ideas produced by the better understanding of knowledge that followed upon this. Schopenhauer discovered that idealism cannot be so pleased with its fecundity as to cease to notice its own subjectivity and pretend rationally to generate sciences and objectively to comprehend reality in its entirety. The subject, too, is just another name for something within ourselves. Nietzsche observed here that idealism cannot objectify the subject. Something else is methodically required, if we are not to fool ourselves.

Nietzsche had the idealist’s desire to find something beyond apparent causality, and he had the materialist’s suspicion of invisible causes. He exposes, as a

¹⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, tr. Walter Kaufmann, *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *Basic Writings of Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 1992), sec. 36

matter of conscience, both his ambition to find underlying cause and his suspicion of abstractions modeled on logical universals. He exposes a discontent that arises when one is driven to seek a basal force for personhood that hollowed-out causality cannot supply by fictitious claims of essence. The collector of spiritually treasured objects, such as great art or rare books or a *wunderkammer* of the beauties of nature, is a propagandist for his values; the moral values of a religion or of a society are just such propaganda for those who are the owners, like collectors, the controllers of those communities, unless a novel and careful analysis is undertaken. Without a causal force wholly conformable to all the organic processes of human life, whether social or intellectual or anything between, we bow our heads in piety to aggregates of phenomena. These are no explanation for life and justify no value. Pretty paper packages a pretty box, but we must have a method of unboxing all the wrapping.

His *second* step identifies the object upon which the “method of conscience” would work. Since all knowledge is of causes, Nietzsche names the *causality* it must seek. This deepens the first criticism, because the causality he wished to target is hidden. It does not sit in the middle of a bridge between the materialistic and the theological; it lies in the valley below, between the concepts of the individual and the group. Nietzsche picked up the track of a verge, or disjunction, between the causality exercised by sole natural persons and the causality exercised by persons in aggregate. The life of humans in groups—their aggregations as tribes, churches, or enterprises—is certainly as real a part of human life as the most strictly individual consciousness. Yet one is not wholly continuous with the other nor wholly explicable by the other. A fiction must intervene, for every aggregate is a made-up person, a *persona ficta*, whether it is an abstract idea or an ethnic tribe. It was a basic discovery of the idealist method by Berkeley that unless one takes up a penetrating method of subjectivity, then all organizations of concepts end as mechanically analyzable parts just as much as material things do. In this step, Nietzsche again pushes this method further than the system-builders of philosophical idealism. He subverts them with it. For the history of sole and aggregate persons is not that of balanced leverage and indifferent product. The joint between sole and aggregate persons, Nietzsche argues, is also a *disjoint* because corporate bodies have the power to make their perspective dominant over that of the whole. From this power they gain not merely their obvious domination of sole persons but their power to misdirect understanding from the whole which both sole and aggregate persons

comprise. The view from the aggregate, whether it is an ethnic tribe or the unseen spirit that unfolds itself in time, does violence to our understanding of the vital force actuating each human as a human person, both in sole and in corporate aspects of his or her existence. Individual persons push back, escape, or submit. Whether these operations are ordinary or extraordinary, they exhibit perpetual transgression by the subject of everything outside the subject. They have the character of a violently defended subjectivity. A life is consumed by taking on all that comes to it: who then, and what, is the consumer?

The supposed causality of universal spirit is this ongoing struggle writ large: a rationally intelligible system that is not the self-sufficient explanation of the basal energy of human endeavor. Unitary soul is this writ small: rationally divine or divinely rational, it stands within a larger, deeper causality.

The question in the end is whether we recognize the will as efficient, whether we believe in the causality of the will: if we do—and at bottom this faith is nothing more than our faith in causality itself...¹⁸

He stresses that this basal cause is efficient as a matter of force of diction. It is also, in other aspects, material, formal, and final, as much as it is efficient in the strict senses of these kinds of causality. But being so different, being a kind of creative and generative cause, Nietzsche has actually to think of basal causality along different lines than physical and metaphysical causality. For he denies I “the causality of the will.” This leaves our desires and drives as a class to be named the basal force of human life behind both the individual and the group.

Then Nietzsche proposes a radically different view of causality as an explanatory joint for what is disjoined:

In short, one has to risk the hypothesis whether will does not affect will wherever “effects” are recognized—and whether all mechanical occurrences are not, insofar as a force is active in them, will force, effects of will.¹⁹

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

The soul as the treasury of human values, whether it is the heart of a single person or a spirit that pervades the reality of all persons, is, correctly understood, merely the object of material, psychic, social, and historical drives. If it is rational, it merely is reason: a mechanism that works upon its parts according to logic, a heap of moving parts like a puppet in the hands of God or like a slave in the hands of a master who pretends to be God. In Nietzsche's view, idealist philosophy was no better a place to seek human values than the altar of Moloch. It *is* the altar of Moloch, just as much as pure mechanistic materialism is. It dispirits our will. This consequence—as resignation, apathy, and blindness, or conformity, self-sacrifice, and brutality—disables us as real persons in so far as it hides the real basal energy of human endeavor. This consequence of the disjuncture between the ways in which people in corporate bodies and people as sole natural persons affect the world is another part of what Nietzsche calls nihilism.²⁰ Therefore, true ethical identity is not found deposited in soul or spirit, or unfolded in these, or animated by them. It is, instead, our will: something that acts because of its own nature and not for any desire or intention. It just wills. Ceaselessly moving, ceaselessly productive, irrational, indefinite in form, it is always conserved and always expended as human endeavor, energy, and value.

The intricate movements of cognition against human value that Nietzsche confronts under the idea of universal spirit took place not only in the Prussian academies of the sciences but also in the daylight and night darkness outside their rusticated walls: upon the heads of the hundreds of millions around the world who sought identity, fulfillment, redemption, and autonomy in the ceaseless movements of his century: the displacement of populations from the country to the city, the invention of new religions, revolutions, the reaction of old authority—in wars, reification of the elements of nature, rationalization of industrial production, commodification of intellectual and spiritual resources, financial and personal oppression and liberation.²¹ Many of the great and small events in these fields were conceived as correctives to the problems people, society, and industry had themselves created, as well as to the old challenges to life. The nineteenth century was full of people in revolt against the nineteenth century.

²⁰On nihilism, v. Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 35-37, 45-48, and 82-85; and on Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, v. pp. 106-147.

²¹Hugh McLeod's *Religion and the People of Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) is a synoptic survey of the influential social movements around Nietzsche but rarely noticed by philosophers.

Nietzsche also drew opposition to a mechanistic view of life from a source he shared with Kant: Pietism. He hardly seems to have been a Pietist, but in fact one of the roots of the move away from the mechanistic model associated with the Enlightenment in France took root from Pietism in Germany outside of Berlin. This was the idea that mechanical causality could not explain spiritual life on account of the individuality of persons, indeterminate and unpredictable. The roots of this are generally Christian, but more specifically it stems from Leibniz's vision of a universe of individual entities that are in mechanical harmony with one another but yet are free and ultimately immaterial.²² This was developed by dozens of critical thinkers who took a different direction off of Leibniz from that taken by Wolff and other rationalists. Nietzsche rejected any such essentialist idea of the soul, but something of the Pietist grip on the spiritual progress of the individual person remained might have remained with him.

Were life truly mechanical, Nietzsche would say that he sought to give it a new energy. But it is not truly mechanical, and so his aim is to inject into discourse his discovery of the sort of energy our living matter has. Idealists agree that life is not material, but Nietzsche argued that the solution they offered, the immaterialist's world—the world of the divine spirit or of the rational soul—is not indeterminate, originating, and efficient. That world is as much a mechanical product as the materialist's world. It is the exterior of something that, being originary, actual, and efficient, is indeterminate with respect to the forms of life. It is free and creative. In an age of production and reproduction, it reserves the aboriginal power masked by the many products and their many copies, masked by the rationalizations of the industrial process, and masked by the forms of spiritual and social life within which production and reproduction prosper. Nor does Nietzsche find this basal power in the older view of the world as the book of signs, where the soul is the signifier of the transcendent normative reality of supreme being, distributed not by representation and production but by signs and meanings. Both the older enchanted world and the modern instrumental world refer to realms of causality rather different from that of which Nietzsche wants us to be aware. It is neither the unitary soul that abides with the inner meaning of creation nor the natural spirit that expresses itself through

²²Cf. H. Peter Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 103-110 and 214-215.

utilizing reality for the purposes of production.

Suppose, finally, we succeeded in explaining our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of *one* basic form of the will...; suppose all organic functions could be traced back to this will and power and one could also find in it the solution of the problem of procreation and nourishment—it is one problem—then one would have gained the right to determine *all* efficient force univocally.... The world (would then be) viewed from the inside, the world defined and determined according to its “intelligible character”²³

He does not seek an instrument or a meaning; he looks neither to atoms nor to signs. The basal human force is behind these worlds, if we think of them as prime forces; but it dissents from them, when we think of them as paths taken by Western philosophy.

No amount of mechanism discourages the idealistic method in philosophy. The thickness of aggregated matter never can stop its hope of finding a natural normative basis. For even the most complex institutions, processes, and concepts are like pig iron compared to the human will.²⁴

For Nietzsche all associations and corporations of persons are gearworks secondary to something else. In part, his idea of basal human force is the common and simple intuition we have when we exercise our will against forces that drive it. Nietzsche directs us to a more pertinent question. Against such a common thing as the reification of human endeavor by incorporation into populations of various sizes, enduring and replicating in time and space in many ways, is our basal energy united around something of its own, around any more permanent self? Does it have and preserve a harmony with itself, apart from the forces it directs upon itself? Can it endure its own operations, or does our basal energy shatter itself against history? For the individuality of the basal volition Nietzsche has in mind here when he seeks one base for all force is neither numerical or formal identity nor an osseous inner substance. It has the metaphysics of annihilation that we noted in Berkeley, an

²³Nietzsche, *loc. cit.*

²⁴N. B.: Cornelius Castoriades, trans. Helen Arnold, *Figures of the Thinkable* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 109: “If institutions were made of iron, they would still be subject to alteration, but not self-alteration; rather, like iron, they would rust. If they were made of ratiocentric ideas, they would last forever.”

anxious look-out upon universal changeability.

The two step argument that Nietzsche makes in Chapter 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil* is an idealist argument. Like Berkeley and like Schopenhauer, seeing machines as abstractions and abstractions as machine-like little engines, he finds both inadequate to identifying the power of the knowing subject because they are a part, in some peculiar way, of the subject. They are not externally attached, as predicates are in the diagram of a sentence; both abstraction and mechanism are, in fact, merely ways of creating the illusion of modularity. They are re-divisible and manipulable units of classification. In this perspective, rationality and machinery alike are mere taxonomy. Anything more is delusory. Those who are duped by this then must smuggle the actual power, the actual causal activity, back into the noumenal center, which really is there all the time, an indivisible idiographic idea. Idealism does not separate a thing and its power. But once the subject, the human person, is identified with his or her power as a basal power, we are immediately at the door of the existential question. Berkeley identified this power as spirit and as God, Schopenhauer identified it as Will or Force of life; but Nietzsche here comes to identify it as the basal energy not of the universe or even of life but of the individual human. Because impersonal unity, being classificatory, always dissolves back into flux, it is common enough to replace it with volitional causality. But Nietzsche takes this rather further by replacing soul and spirit with volitional causality as well. But there is a reason he slips in individual volition where Schopenhauer had put the cosmic, which I shall try to make clear when I examine the specific terms of this basal energy. He has reached past soul and spirit to something else; and yet, at the end as at the beginning in Berkeley, the basis of our existence, its capability of surviving as human in a universe otherwise occupied by God or vital nature, is at stake.

If we could cut a fragile slice out of this basal self and put it onto a glass slide under a microscope, and then applied a stain to test whether it is corporeal or something other, the test would give us an indefinite color of response. But the more interesting test is to apply the stain that might tell us whether or not the force of personhood is ever in truth both solitary and mighty—whether its actual course will sustain the uncompounded personality that Western thought, including much of idealism, sought to express in ideas of soul and spirit that in the end revealed the

self-replicative box of gears within its chest. They fatten while we grow fainter and come to stand further under their giant material and conceptual manufactory. Material or non-material, they are not the whole but only part of what we are. Yet they command us to extend assurance of their own existence. Whatever they are made of and wherever they come from, they stand outside us, whose first and greatest institution was revolution. Subversion resides inside the monumentality of the Western intellectual, historical, social, and material image of itself, is itself the creative human force, distorted but extended, pliable but subsistent, always in revolt, its activity ceaselessly directed to itself, no matter how exact the course we try to set for it.

C. When Michel Foucault published his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History” in 1971,²⁵ the issue of the revolutionary energy that humankind institutes in time became a deadly crisis in thought. It became the subject of history itself and thereby the object of an attack far costlier to the prospects of constituting the human person in moral action through actions and events than Nietzsche’s evisceration of the causality of ideal spirit had been. Foucault took the argument to the most explosive territory on the battlefield: he aimed at the accumulated wealth of scholarly history and, by consequence, that image of our creative energy which we have designated as part of our innermost reason for being. His target was not only the sanctified icon, or not only an unseen deep structure, but the historical construction that Western society distributes forward into new parts of the present as it converts them into history. Although Foucault developed a theory of historiography in this essay, his proximate object was the repletive accumulation of territory by occidental reason. The historical wisdom of this approach also is universal. Yet inside of it is another question, nearly perfectly transmitted, about another kind of wisdom.

He has one long weeping intention: to research “the history of an error we

²⁵As “Nietzsche, la Genealogie, l’Histoire,” this essay was first published in the collection *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp. 145-172. It has appeared quite a number of times in English (the name of the translator is unknown to me) in print and on the Web. The most readily available text in print is J. Richardson and B. Leirer ed., *Nietzsche* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 341-360. For the convenience I have used as text references the number of the paragraph within the seven sections into which Foucault divided his essay. Thus 3.2 means the second paragraph of the third section.

call truth.”²⁶ Without a single further word he made the scope of his address as universal as the whole of truth but also as deep as the Western ideals of temporal meaning. The essay is a funeral from its formal exordium— not the first obsequies for Western morality, of course. But here Foucault, turning the subject from truth, or being, to history, turns it to the writing of history; and in doing this he has turned it to the entire face of human identity taken up in the objects of historical feeling. The bright hope of many philosophers in the previous two or three generations had been that an axial quantum attached to human action seemed to be protected by empirical discourse, working itself out of epigraphy, diplomatics, comparative sciences, and finally out of historicism, gleaming and newborn. We inspect, we compare, we make inquisition of evidence, and we invigilate ourselves. Foucault saw a false reign of soul, truth, and liberty shadowed in the scholarship of origins.

The origin lies at a place of irretrievable loss, the point where the truth of things corresponded to a truthful discourse, the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost.²⁷

Foucault wants to make the self’s final irreconcilable difference with itself visible in its contentions with other beings, from whom it cannot be made immune either by protective angels or by a secular community of mankind progressively worked out in the objects of historical knowledge.

Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination.²⁸

In place of unification by the logic of origins, Foucault gives us fissiparous history, the fissiparous body, and a fissiparous self. Closely following the argument for knowledge by differentiation in *The Order of Things*, truth is re-founded on fissiparity.

²⁶Foucault, *Op. cit.*, 2.6

²⁷*Loc. cit.*

²⁸*Ibid.*, 4.4; cf. *ibid.*, 4.5.

Fissiparity of the self follows from fissiparity of the knowledge upon which the identity of the self is built.

The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating of lost events.²⁹

This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.³⁰

Both unitary soul and universal spirit are inventions for the contingencies of pride and greed. The self as self-conscious truth and truth as an eternal form of the self are misrepresentations of human will. They bury the violence that our common bodily life engages. Any history complicit with this burial is part of the crime, to which Foucault proposed a history as a “curative science.”³¹ Fissiparity replaces as well “the distant ideality of origin.”³² Foucault thus identifies history as the story of a being for which knowledge is its fissiparous will to knowledge.

Once he has shown that historical truth is the object of this curative research, Foucault takes on something still broader and more dramatic:

The third use of history is the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge.... The historical analysis of this rancorous will to knowledge reveals that all knowledge rests upon injustice.... The will to knowledge... ceaselessly multiplies the risks, creates dangers in every area; it breaks down illusory defenses; it dissolves the unity of the subject; it releases those elements of itself that are devoted to its subversion and destruction.... risking the destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge.³³

He has targeted not only the comfort of having a soul and the marvelous goods we identify with it. The object here is something more insidious. Opposite fissiparous

²⁹*Ibid.*, 3.2.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 5.2.

³¹*Ibid.*, 5.5.

³²*Ibid.*, 2.7.

³³*Ibid.*, 7.4 and 7.5.

history Foucault placed the glorious *philosophia perennis*. For this glory, if it ever was glory, has been used up by the civilization it came from, turned hollow or deadly by turns, even as it remained a hope in the heart. It is of particular importance to note Foucault's insistence on the archive as the source of the history of discourse. The rooms of paper, vellum and leather boxes and binders stand in the imagination of man under the Western star, if not more widely, as the image of a whole tradition, however many quarrels it contains. Its continuity is the blazon on the image, striking and stuck deep within us. Through the last two centuries—since the start of the taxonomic and specifying *episteme* that Foucault identified— traditional European culture in all media has been priced, placed, and prized by the antiquarian trade, by social and domestic prestige, by scholarship, and by entertainment: industries that exploited “glorious *philosophia perennis*” because it actually is at least as fissiparous as it was glorious, at least as manipulable as it was foundational, and at least as fake as it was real. Thus it is not only the fields of endeavor in which its sense of depth and thickness are most evidently influential to which Foucault points. It is also to those activities in which its influence is barely or even wholly invisible: in the design and marketing of objects of knowledge, whether material or dematerialized—in state and community, in work and in religion, all varieties of marketing unstated beliefs by which an industrialized world binds people and products. These discourses focus their audience on the present, exciting such passions as desire or fear. The audience is induced to think of the present as the greatest or the most fearful of times. The object of their immediate attention is taken for a turning-point in their lives or in history. In this way we are induced to forget the thoughts or actions of forbearing times sufficiently so as to think that the meaning of history culminates in their present choices. Many people of course do not believe in the glory of the *philosophia perennis*, but most people take some unbought stake in it. It's become fairly easy, to a degree, to believe in a natural world indifferent to us, but few people are not shocked when they confront an understanding of their own history, and that of their fellows and kin, globally devoid of meaning, reconciliation, or redemption.

Foucault insists on the materialist basis of this point of view. This insistence is part of what led to his long study of practices relating to the body.

History is the concrete body of a development,... and only a metaphysician

would seek its soul in the distant ideality of origin.³⁴

This places determinate causality over any idea of freedom in a correct understanding of discourse. He plucks discourse out from under the shelter that history is expected to give it, as a way

...to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.³⁵

Natural finitude becomes a kind of infinity of detail, abundantly paid out by the bloodthirsty will to knowledge:

Nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men.³⁶

The basal force of human history that is positively evident acts in the only way a living thing can act. It desires always to dig into soil like animated roots, squirming, if plucked up from underground into sunlight, and aggressive, aiming for the food it must absorb only in the absence of light.

In this case, what keeps genealogy from becoming crude positivism? Why is it something other than coding the crash of atoms? Foucault devoted the fifty-page fugue of Chapter 10, “The Human Sciences,” the last chapter of *The Order of Things*, to this question.³⁷ By contrapuntal moves he distinguishes the history of discourse from biology, from economy, and from philology, from life, labor, and language—from any science whatsoever. He wants a history that takes in the whole being as that which gives us the basis of our life at a threshold of nature and culture. The rest, beyond the ridge between them traveled by genealogical history, is either science or it is imagination. In seeking the place of human understanding at this threshold Foucault not only sought a greater and prior understanding of all that wherein discourse is funded by life. Our entertainment is based in the end on the venomous resentments that fissure the archive, though they promote vigorous composition of

³⁴*Ibid.*, 2.7.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 3.3.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 5.2.

³⁷Michel Foucault, tr. (Anon.), *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 344-387.

beliefs about personhood. The most sacred images are not forgotten but are altered as they are carried in procession down the middle of the main street. The triumphal and universal claim of the genealogy of discourse extends over the hard ceremonious bigots building empire and industry down to the foamy monuments we each can make of our things, our world, and our selves.

Foucault tried to shape a species of knowledge that, having risen away from the atomic reduction of fissiparity, fits a view of human life sufficiently congruous with nature as to be real and sufficiently incongruous with nature as to be human. Having dispensed with the glorious, Foucault still is in want of some type of truth other than the fissiparous. That some other truth must fit exactly in the open space between too tight and too loose an identification with nature. It must not be “the anticipatory power of meaning.” It must be as tangibly real as “the hazardous play of dominations.”³⁸ He wants no more falsehood, and he makes no compromise with it for the sake of truth. Except on this strange and special truth there can be, he believes, no valid way to claim the consciousness of humankind actually exists. Once again, as Berkeley saw, materialism commands us to deny something we fear to deny as much as we fear non-existence. What can philosophy do if reason leads us to what we cannot bear? What is it that Foucault really wants of history? Into what reality can some other truth enter? If all of this is just to say that people lie or err, it is hardly necessary to proceed beyond chronicle. If all of this is to say that people lie or err in groups, then sociology, both quantitative or slightly inebriated, will supply just so much tabulated information and guidance as we wish to avail ourselves of. If all of this is to say that the many excludes the possibility of the one, then this is metaphysics. It must answer as to why its author would not choose the continuity of infinitesimal difference, as Leibniz did, instead of discontinuity, for continuity is closer than to the history of organisms so far as we now understand it. If all of the vigor and penetration of Foucault’s essay is none of these, then it is a mood of righteous anger. But the entire story of the matter is not that of temperament satisfied within itself, stuffed down and silent.

The philosopher speaks this story for a reason. The story or the argument occurs in the conflict with naturalism over the most demanding and conclusive sphere in which persons must think, that of morality. Away with metaphysics went

³⁸Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” 4.1.

being or truth as the ground of the good. The moral argument is the actual heart of this essay: in it, as he was in his entire career, Foucault is a moral thinker. He demands that each self face itself in history and that history should face “the perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death,”³⁹ in continuation of martial, official, and personal brutality.

Foucault’s political realism about power in society and the affairs of human beings is hardly unprecedented. He collected many lines of research and traditions of thought into his focus, this sense of deception and venality in the conduct of society among them. So it must be asked, how and why it is that it led him to seek a new form for history, of virtually unprecedented scope, restless in a quest for some other truth, rather than to take up one line of compromise or another with nature? Why, for example, did he not pursue the politics of the man who wrote this:

But power, of some kind or other, will survive the shock in which manners and opinion perish; and it will find other and worse means for its support.... Wise men apply their remedies to vices, not to names,—to the causes of evil, which are permanent, not to the occasional organs by which they act, and the transitory modes in which they appear. Otherwise you will be wise historically, a fool in practice. Seldom have two ages the same fashion in their pretexts, & the same modes of mischief. Wickedness is a little more inventive. Whilst you are discussing the fashion, the fashion is gone by. The very same vice assumes a new body. The spirit transmigrates; and far from losing its principle of life by the change of its appearance, it is renovated in its new organs with the fresh vigor of a juvenile activity. It walks abroad, it continues its ravages, whilst you are gibbeting the carcass or demolishing the tomb. You are terrifying yourselves with ghosts and apparitions, whilst your house is the haunt of robbers. It is thus with all those who, attending only to the shell and husk of history, think they are waging war with intolerance, pride, and cruelty, whilst, under color of abhorring the ill principles of antiquated parties, they are authorizing and feeding the same odious vices in different faction, and perhaps in worse.⁴⁰

³⁹Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1.11.2

⁴⁰Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *The Works* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1904), 13.334, 419-20.

Like Burke, Foucault recognized that the conditions of persons, deeply determinate of emotions, words, and manners of living, inhibits their dissent at the point of the foundations of the world known to them. He shared a scepticism that follows on this, as to wisdom, intention, and capacity for good result, with several political and ethical traditions of which he was by no means a part. But the argument of this essay is no compromise with them.

What he has done instead is to follow out Nietzsche's program of putting history in the service of life. This is the vision in the second *Untimely Meditation*, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life."⁴¹ Nietzsche says that "oversaturation...with history" gives an age or a people a sense of the justness of their lives and their manner of living, self-satisfied that justice has pointed to them over the ages as its avatar.⁴² Part of the reason Foucault attacked the antiquarian heart of the monumental history is that it is used in many spheres of the present, down to the most trivial and immediate, in order to produce the sense of domination in persons and societies who rest themselves upon their fragment of it, whether conscious or unconsciously and whether morally or amorally. This enthronement to which tribes and nations are commonly inclined is usually accompanied by a belief in the objectivity of their morality. Thus the just and the good are united with one's tribe, one's culture, and one's history, the outside mass of everyone in the group. To say that "objectivity and justice have nothing to do with one another"⁴³ is a moral claim for justice, though it affirms the existence of neither, because it places the sphere of human obligation—those acts tied to being human—apart from the reality of treasured ideal or physical objects of knowledge.

Is life to dominate knowledge and science, or is knowledge to dominate life? There can be no doubt: life is the higher, the dominating force, for knowledge which annihilated life would have annihilated itself with it. Knowledge presupposes life and thus has in the preservation of life the same interest as any creature has in its own existence.⁴⁴

⁴¹In Friedrich Nietzsche, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. D. Breazeale, *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 57-124.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 121.

The power to survive is the material out of which we create moral and technological knowledge. The basal force on which Nietzsche founded the trans-valued moral self, more natural and pre-reflective than the monsters of unitary soul and universal spirit, is now less firm by a great step, or perhaps wholly subverted, in Foucault's turn of the cards. If the self is constituted entirely by power acting in and on the material world, it must writhe and metamorphose just as the natural world does. The remainder, after all mutability is subtracted, would be a moral point of view as to what is good and what is evil, not founded on the objects of historical knowledge, and distinct from moral recommendations to persons.

A similar search for a deeper borderland in historiography is found in early *annaliste* theory. Lucien Febvre, the co-founder of the *Annales d'Histoire Economique et Sociale*, in a conversation in 1926,⁴⁵ opposed this kind of history to territory and chronology, "the chimera of *dates-limite*." Between such vain dreams of human life

...there are placed epochs of indecision, of degradation, of dissolution. All neutral fields or abandoned rear-guards are turned into audacious avant-gardes.... To leave behind one of those named epochs of momentary equilibrium, with satisfying but temporary stability, where it seems that, for a brief moment, all things work in harmony, and to discover, instead, that which preceded and prepared it, and that which came from behind and little by little ruined the epoch: here is an inquiry which has in it nothing arbitrary..... Let us then take these (names for historical periods), having no intrinsic worth, as being just like the labels we used to read as children.⁴⁶

Febvre distinguished the movement of history from any limiting constituent, force, or actor. Confinement to periods and places is just a part of the problem. The whole problem is to embody a kind of causality that is actually human, that tells the whole story rather than any or some of its parts. He didn't primarily call for more parts, or other parts; he called for describing the moving front of conjunctures, where historical knowledge never can repose as if it were objectified. In this, as in

⁴⁵In *Bulletin du Centre Internationale de Synthèse* (Paris, 1926), no. 2, December 1926, pp. 22-31.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 25.

Nietzsche, we see the ethical demand of history specified by Foucault, that history is too complex, too grave, too deadly to be left to morality. It must include what is repressed or barely remembered, everything beneath the surface on its way to the top and everything from the past that resists redemption while fabricating the future.

Monumental history is just a monument to the self, a kind of gigantic celebrity, or entertainment star, seeming to be authoritative and permanent but in reality a prop to be moved as soon as the audience demands a change. Prop-handlers must be great historians. They know by their own muscular effort that what attracts attention, be it admiration or hatred, passes quickly. It is real while on the stage, soon it is silly or repulsive, and then it is not forgotten. In fact, it becomes locked into the story that continues to be told because it always pleases the audience, which feels grander if its own reflection is painted up to look like the heavenly firmament. This flattering retrospective is reproduced everywhere, in all the images, physical and spiritual, that we create and project. We have a vast machinery for doing so. It rose from the culture mobilized by the resources of erudition and industry accumulated when we sought to be freed from ignorance and from danger. Like the culture of celebrity, it became a substitute for other kinds of self-hood in the nineteenth century. Objectified and positive knowledge were given the guise of moral concerns. The proposition that science was the improvement of mankind was the object of uncountable lines of objection in the nineteenth century, and yet it became the core belief even among those objecting to it. When Nietzsche, among others, looked at the prevailing moral ideology of the nineteenth he saw it as positive and natural, rather than ideal and transcendent, and he argued that it distorts a natural moral knowledge.

The position he took, followed by Foucault, was the reverse: he described moral concerns as some kind of natural knowledge, rather than natural knowledge as a kind of moral ideal. This morality is natural enough not to be religion or metaphysics but nonetheless not quite the same as positive science. Like Captain Nemo in the Nautilus,⁴⁷ angry and restless, Foucault threw a light from inside a steel chamber upon the dark of the chewed up bathysphere terrain beneath the waves. Nemo was a moral observer and critic, not just an oceanographer or the autocrat of

⁴⁷With thanks to Roland Barthes, "The Nautilus and the Drunken Boat," in tr. Annette Lavers, *Mythologies* (New York: Noonday Press, 1988), pp. 65-67.

his submarine, which was built and supplied so as to give Nemo the capacity to exercise his position of moral observe—and, in Verne’s novel, finally, of savior. He required a separate place, safe from human turmoil. Foucault sought what was hidden by stories of origin. He had to seek it in a different atmosphere, like Nemo, in which the terrestrial buoyancy of truth, full of orderly constitutive rules, was absent.

The astonishing impact of Foucault’s essay is due to his efforts to accomplish in it the fullest separation of moral reflection from the objects of knowledge. History is not life. It is a thing, and so are its physical vestiges, its intellectual endowment, and even its spiritual heritage. Objects and events have no moral force unless and until they are resumed into the narrative shaped by a person’s convictions as to moral obligation. What we project out onto objects and events through our actions and intentions cannot become moral life, cannot gather moral force, and will not express moral force, if the moral facts do not safely pass back into the living, inward, private path of moral life. In distinguishing a person from a thing on an ethical basis, he succeeded in great measure. In doing this Foucault added new dimensions, of virtually infinite depth and color, to the complexity of historical knowledge. This was an advance in human knowledge founded on structuralist principles.⁴⁸

Foucault allowed was that historical knowledge must be purged equally of moral essentialism and of projection by subjective judgment. He meant this to define a point of view other than mechanism, naturalism, and intuitionism, although his result seems to retain something of vitalism. This points to the possibility of subjectively authorized moral judgment that is not hortatory, nor unmeaning, nor arbitrary, nor oppressive, not intuited, and not a puzzle. It must remain free of naturalism and moral intuitionism. That possibility is not the self or the subject as understood by scientific disciplines. It is not the unitary soul or the universal spirit. If it were, this framework would weaken, especially with the advances in neurobiology and evolutionary biology that we have seen in the last decades. But instead it remains strong because Foucault, seeking no answer, left it open. Perhaps he didn’t believe it could be filled, although it seems to me that he searched for it in his later work on *askesis*.

⁴⁸Foucault did not consider himself a “structuralist” or a “post-structuralist.”

For there was and is the great problem: if the inward moral life is, at last and at least, not reduced to something upon which morality is supervenient, how are we to judge good and bad correctly and truthfully? There is only one thing left for it to be: the moral actor, the consciousness that experiences the long span of moral obligation, the one who must choose the next right thing in the face of a dilemma of competing goods and evils. The name for this being who experiences and acts on whatever sliver of ground can be called moral is personhood.

Genealogical history, while it may be aimed at power, is not thereby aimed at personhood. If the role of power in history defines the object of knowledge, it does not define the whole objective of personhood. It says little more to say of persons that they are driven by will than to say that they are mobile or that they are mutable. If history serves life, then life must comprise something more real than history—not more real by way of being more truthful, but more real by way of being a more complete moral actor, self, or person. Foucault's stated target was a traditional ontology of truth, but in a sense, that battle being well over by his day, his target was a kind of morality, subtly re-conceived in a fundamental way, and his product was an adverse, more pure, tougher, ethical point of view. This ethics required stripping away illusions that built the self out of history, but nonetheless personhood remains, if history is to be human.

If he'd taken up metaphysics instead of history, he would have produced yet another critique of being. But it was a different part of truth that he re-conceived when he took up history rather than metaphysics. His subject in this essay was not the ontology of truth, but its morality; it was the good, more than it was the real. Were it only a matter of reality, Foucault need not have labored to distinguish his point of view from empirical analysis, nor would he likely have proceeded in his later work to look at the ways in which a person can act upon himself or herself, apart from action upon others in history. Like Nietzsche, he draws upon the empiricist tradition of accuracy and also upon the empiricist illusion of avoiding normativity, combining these against the opposing combination of naturalism and metaphysics.⁴⁹ The latter combination gives to human action the character of

⁴⁹This is close to Jürgen Habermas's reading of Foucault, *q.v.* J. Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," in ed. Michael Kelly, *Critique and Power. Recasting the Foucault/Habermas*

necessity, from origin to present circumstances. Foucault for his part was more a random-ist than a determinist: not only need not things have become what they are, but they need not stay the same in the future.

Foucault was correct to ensure the true separation of the objects of historical knowledge from morality. He teases everything out of them and limits their congruence with life in no way. But on the other side of this separation, something of that which holds apart morality and history also connects them. The self that stands between them has an additional capacity: that of intensely, repeatedly making moral examination of the rich world that is archived by genealogical history. This capacity for examination comes from the capacity for decision and action—in other words, from the same self that stretches into history, toward or away from other persons, the self that marks and copies itself in thought and action. Persons join with others and separate from others; they perform innumerable acts like these by which they bring the objects of knowledge into their lives; pulling these objects into themselves involves filling out the self with a moral dimension wider than that of power alone. Nietzsche swerved past this other part of moral life. In telling the story of this in the next section we can see where its necessity lies and where ordering moral life by power alone falls short. The solution to the conflict in Foucault between the evident moral commitment necessary to the idea of genealogical history and the immovable boulder of his commitment to some kind of empiricism lies in looking again at the rest of section 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

He did in the end hold on to a moral judgment: his disgust at the suffering caused by the struggle for domination. Whatever the source of this judgment, its presence in the discourse is not consistent with the theory. In this regard, the theory is incomplete, for the same reason he did not envisage in this essay a concept of moral personhood separate from the natural self or the embodied subject: because he ordered all human action under a single moral order. That single moral order excludes some element necessary for the concept of moral personhood. The source of this trouble—the inconsistency and the related limitation of constructive concept—may be understood by looking at Nietzsche’s idea of the “pre-form of life.”

Debate (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1994), pp. 93-98; and in the same anthology Richard Bernstein’s “Foucault: Critique as a Philosophic Ethos,” pp. 218ff.

D. Nietzsche gives two solutions to question of identifying the basal human force. The one that ends Section 36 is the phrase “will to power.” A great range of interpretations of this phrase has arisen in the different discourses of his other works, such as *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and the collection of unfinished notes edited by another hand and posthumously published as *Will to Power*. There is also an important collection of different readings of this term in the present text. A major part of these readings is the question of whether Nietzsche requires for this concept, or believes in, the causality of the will. The other solution, “the pre-form of life,” comes in the first passage of the Section, about a third into it. In this sense, this first passage comprises both the question and the answer. Far less attention has been paid to pre-form of life than to will to power, yet they both occupy the same place in this text as affirmative answers to one and the same problem. One difference between them is that Nietzsche introduces the will to power after discussing the “causality of the will,” so that causality necessarily holds a bigger place in its interpretation that it does in that of the pre-form. The bigger difference is that Nietzsche never explicitly returned to “the pre-form of life” in *Beyond Good and Evil* or anywhere else. In this way it might be thought to be subsidiary to the will to power or less important that it in understanding Nietzsche. This is reasonable, and it might be true as to an historically accurate reading of Nietzsche. But I think the term has an independent significance for the movements in the ideas of personhood and history that I have been tracing and thereby as a powerful concept. In this I shall follow the direction in Nietzsche I explained in Section B of the present essay, following the concept of a basal energy of human life in an individual, distinct from the many exogenous determinations of society to which we are subject.

I have some hope that this might help in the discussion of what a more globally accurate reading of Nietzsche on this matter might be; but as I am not convinced there is an internally consistent reading of Nietzsche to be made on the whole of his work, or even on *Beyond Good and Evil* alone, I won't go into much more detail into the schools of opinion on this.

Here is the text:

Suppose nothing else were "given" as real except our world of desires and

passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other "reality" besides the reality of our drives—for thinking is merely a relations of these drives to each other; is it not permitted to make the experiment and to ask the question whether this "given" would not be sufficient for also understanding on the basis of this kind of thing the so-called mechanistic (or "material") world? I, mean, not as a deception, as "mere appearance," an "idea" (in the sense of Berkeley and Schopenhauer) but as holding the same rank of reality as our affect—as a more primitive form of the world of affects in which everything still lies contained in a powerful unity before it undergoes ramifications and developments in the organic process (and, as is only fair, also becomes tenderer and weaker)—as a kind of instinctive life in which all organic functions are still synthetically intertwined along with self-regulation, assimilation, nourishment, excretion, and metabolism—as a pre-form of life.

As I wrote above, Nietzsche is searching for something neither entirely natural nor entirely non-natural—something that confirms the human being as comprising both natural processes and processes using capacities, or directed at possibilities, in ways distinctive of humankind.

His first step—

Suppose nothing else were "given" as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other "reality" besides the reality of our drives—for thinking is merely a relations of these drives to each other;....

—is to affirm the subjective and finitude of the basal human energy. Our drives constitutes concrete given reality. By thoughts he means any concept of one or more passion, desire, or drive, including universals or abstractions in a general sense. A thought is something other than a single drive, passion, or desire because it links these givens to one another. This is an idealist move, fundamental to the move toward subjectivity. Berkeley said

...the reason why ideas are formed into machines, that is artificial and regular combinations, is the same with that for combining letters into words.... By

this means abundance of information is conveyed unto us.⁵⁰

Nietzsche does not here further clarify the way in which thoughts relate non-thoughts. Are thoughts links or rods atomically different from the things they lie between? Or is his approach more fully phenomenalist, holding that both relator and related are one reality? In any case, thinking is part of the natural world but affects thinkers as to the ways in which they respond to the rest of the natural world. What this affect is, is one of the questions the pre-form of life will partially answer—as to whether it is determinate or free, and, more broadly, what kind of causality this relation might be. But since Nietzsche phenomenally integrates thoughts with the given and real world of our desire, passions, of drives, this metaphysical issue is not his critical concern. It is secondary. His chief object is the relation of basal human energy to the surrounding world from the point of view of the subject. If we cannot objectify the subject by means of thought, we cannot explain it by ordinary causality; but, on the other hand, thinking is not an escape-hatch to an answer, and is not the answer, because the incorporeal things it has been supposed to illuminate, such as unitary soul or universal spirit, do not free us. There are no essences that will free us. There is actually and only the arrangements of our passions, desires, and drives.

Whose passions, drives, and desires?

...is it not permitted to make the experiment and to ask the question whether this "given" would not be sufficient for also understanding on the basis of this kind of thing the so-called mechanistic (or "material") world? I, mean, not as a deception, as "mere appearance," an "idea" (in the sense of Berkeley and Schopenhauer) but as holding the same rank of reality as our affect—....

First of all, these things are not "deceptions" or "mere desires." In this they are like the mechanistic or material world, which also is not an illusion. But if by these affects Nietzsche meant something wholly naturalistic, as natural as the material world, seen by the noonday eye, he need not have asked this question. He need not have searched for a method of inquiry or for a different kind of causality. He'd need barely to have written the book or would have written a softer book. The world of

⁵⁰George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge* 65.

our affects would have been let to slip loosely through his fingers into the sand on the ground. Yet that world won't softly sift out. How do we get into it without leaving the natural cosmos? He answers by detailing our understanding of the mechanistic world as our affects. They are given together, but they must be distinguished if there is any point to his discussion. The distinction lies in the identity of that entity to whom the affects are given: a question commentators seem to miss. If this entity were mechanistic in nature, it would be part of an aggregate that co-operates to create or give the affects to itself. It could not have a point of view on the aggregate. But the entity is tinged by affects; the affects are entitative. They serve to give us the mechanical world. They are law-givers, and they are not products of mechanical laws. They are not boxes of virtues, sins, and judgments; nor are they a history that machine-like reason unfolds out of itself. Affects are not held by any *persona ficta* but by real individuals. They are not persons pure of the world around them, but nonetheless they live in a reality that at some level differs from the aggregate forces around it.

Nietzsche is careful to place the reality of our affects uniquely with respect to the material world. They belong together, and neither is falsehood where the other is truth. Berkeley unveiled them as either non-material; Schopenhauer, as material illusion. Nietzsche believes these two conclusions rest on an error made by philosophical idealism, designated by its entire arc from Berkeley to Schopenhauer. He points to its beginning with the one and its conclusion with the other, but he disposes of the giants in-between by a much longer game. He mentions these two because their ideas are fraught for him. At this core discourse he's not thinking of Kant or Hegel because, like Kierkegaard he is in large measure dispensing with them. In between Berkeley and Schopenhauer, buried in the foundation they shared, Nietzsche sought to think the powerful originating impulse of idealism back into life. This was the path of his singular idealism: he must grab hold of the subjective turn in order to keep it away from destructive transcendent visions, and he must also vivify its highest development in order to choke materialism for the sake of human life.

And how, finally, is this difference to be described in its companionship with the material world? For it cannot be described as soul or spirit since these are themselves deceits as to the material world, intended to control passions, drives, and

desires and thus are aimed at life itself, which requires the material world and yet takes it as given with its own subjective and individual feelings.

...affect—as a more primitive form of the world of affects in which everything still lies contained in a powerful unity before it undergoes ramifications and developments in the organic process (and, as is only fair, also becomes tenderer and weaker)—as a kind of instinctive life in which all organic functions are still synthetically intertwined along with self-regulation, assimilation, nourishment, excretion, and metabolism—as a pre-form of life.

If we look at the idea here of a basal energy as a pre-form of life, we can see that it is a basal causality but that it is not troubled by having to ascribe causal efficacy to the will. But this is not because Nietzsche saw the self as self-reflective or self-regulating. Instead, his concept in this passage is that of something larger than the individual self but which the self contains. It formed the self, stamped itself upon each human being, who then has his or her own way in life. Thus, the will as the business end of the self is secondary: it is the pre-form of willing that gives to the human being its different constitutive presence. One may leave aside the problems as to whether this was cosmic or merely universally everywhere in reality. One should also leave aside the problem of free will. This is something different from either the above or the below, and it differs from ordinary causality in its four familiar forms because it is something they each are a part of. The relation of the pre-form to that which it forms is that of a die to what is cast in it, or that of the matrix that shapes material within itself or incises itself into the material. These metaphors inadequately describe life. Life reproduces and regenerates, and it is conative. Generative causality is unique to life and requires all of life to be given for the creation of each life. Nietzsche thinks, furthermore, the pre-form of life as it yields our human life is something more.

The position that natural causality as normally understood does not yield a complete story line, that there is something divergent in it, no less real in every sense, and no less natural as well, is entirely an idealist position. The rejection of the story line of progress by both Nietzsche and Foucault is formed in part by empiricism but has a different pigment, derived from the refusal to impute uniformity. This refusal, in favor of differentiation, is asserted despite the movement

by gradual change that we everywhere observe in nature. It says, in effect, that heredity is a metaphor, that even the largest verifiably environment of determinants stops in some sense at a line behind which stands humankind. Parents transmit life by ordinary causality, but life creates itself after each birth by a different force. Machinery, whether material or social, does not do our work for us, nor does it relieve us of responsibility. We are shaped by nature but its singular causality does not provide for some other force in us. It seems that Nietzsche named this force the will to power. Whatever else it is, it is the generative, replicative, and differentiating force within the human being. It is one thing, in that it is in order from before each individual life, and it is all things in that it extends through our affects to all of nature, and

Nietzsche does not seem to have believed that each individual human has a place in front of that line on account of this force. In this respect, Nietzsche's concept here is not a theory of personhood or is an unsuccessful one. In his struggle to link man and nature and to hold them apart, Nietzsche sought something like the universal subterranean structure sought by many of his contemporaries whom I mentioned at the beginning of this essay. And yet he marked off his effort from theirs. What is this critical difference? How, for example, does Nietzsche's pre-form of life or his will to power differ from the general concept in Thoreau's mind when he observed

The hardest material obeys the same law with the most fluid. Trees are but rivers of sap and woody fibre flowing from the atmosphere and emptying into the earth by their trunks, as their roots flow upward to the surface. And in the heavens there are rivers of stars and milky ways. There are rivers of rock on the surface and rivers of ore in the bowels of the earth. And thoughts flow and circulate, and seasons lapse as tributaries of the current year....

I was impressed as it were by the intelligence of the brook, which for ages in the wildest regions, before science is born, knows so well the level of the ground and through whatever woods or other obstacles finds its way. Who shall distinguish between the law by which a brook finds its river, the instinct by which a bird performs its migrations, and the knowledge by which a man

steers his ship round the globe?⁵¹

Or, for the matter, from Aristotle's search for a primary cause of life behind all physical causation?

we claim we know each thing when we think we know its primary cause...⁵²

The difference is not so simple as to be supplied by the suggestion of evolution. If it were, why would Nietzsche's idea not have been more like the ideas of the early Herbert Spencer? Why would not he have pursued the even cruder reduction of morality to strength and survival found in many dim lights of his day? Or, to look in another direction, why should we not identify these concepts of Nietzsche with Marx's conviction that the necessary and actual material course of human activity is an historical process revealing the most natural and fulfilling way to live and that this process will require mankind as a whole to pursue confirmation of itself as a species-being?

It was the *pre*-form of life that Nietzsche contemplates here, not the form of life itself. He looked for something that would be able to sustain the speciation of the will to life down to its "more tender" ramifications in the selves and consciences of countless individual humans. For this purpose he needed to endow individuals with a potential of propulsive power that, knowingly or not, separates them from the mass actions of nature, even though it and they are parts of that active mass. If the pre-form of life and its will to power are the lens through which we understand the rest of the life around us, we must then look upon the collective life of mankind as mechanistic or "material." I believe Nietzsche identified the mass with mechanical life. This is the quick key to his dispute with the "English philosopher." His target might have been Adam Smith, taking Smith's idea of mutual benefit as the actions of a mechanically co-ordinated efficient society. Or it might have been John Stuart Mill, whose utilitarianism ballooned the idea of mutual benefit into the co-option of individual liberty into the narrative of material progress and enrichment. It might have been these or others.

⁵¹H. D. Thoreau, *Journals*, 17 May 1854

⁵²Aristotle, tr. D. Ross, *Metaphysics* 5.5 983a 25-26; cf. *Physics* 2.3 194 b 20).

I'd like to suggest another philosopher. I put his name forward more as a highly fitting example of what Nietzsche opposed in this matter than as a historical contact. This is William Kingdon Clifford. He was a brilliant physicist and philosopher, well-known to English intellectuals of his own day and in the succeeding generation. He made his mark as a moral philosopher by several essays, posthumously published in two volumes of his papers on science and philosophy edited by Leslie Stephen and Frederick Pollock, in 1879,⁵³ seven years before Nietzsche wrote *Beyond Good and Evil*. The most spectacular of these essays is "On the Scientific Basis of Morals,"⁵⁴ followed by five other essays on ethics. Clifford regarded all morality as derived from approbation or condemnation by the society around each person. He identified the moral agent as "the tribal self" and did so more thoroughly, and logically, than perhaps anyone before him had done. Explicitly based on "some remarks of Mr. Darwin's (*Descent of Man*, part I., ch. 3)," he understood the tribe to be an organic self-conception of society by which it endeavored to insure its survival, from which it followed that those societies with the most powerful such conception, as a motive and become habitual, predominate by natural selection.⁵⁵

Self, then, in the ethical sense, is a conception in the mind of the individual which serves as a peg on which remote desires are hung and by which they become immediate. The individual is itself such a peg for the hanging of remote desires which affect the individual only. The tribal self is a conception in the mind of the individual which serves as a peg on which those remote desires are hung which were implanted in him by the need of a tribe as a tribe.⁵⁶

Those tribes that survive instill a piety toward their needs which we now call ethics:

...a man may as a rule and constantly being actuated by piety, do good things for the tribe; and in that case the tribal self will say, I like *you*.... Self-judgment in the name of the tribe is called Conscience.⁵⁷

⁵³*Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1879).

⁵⁴W. K. Clifford, "On the Scientific Basis of Morals," in *Op. cit.*, 2.106.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

And, behold, here we find that natural selection employs efficient causality, because if morality is indeed part of life's machinery it cannot exist unless we assume the efficacy of certain special means of influencing character....⁵⁸

The outcome of the underlying and universal force of life as understood by the most advanced science of the day is therefore that

Ethics is a matter of the tribe or the community, and therefore there are no "self-regarding virtues".... For although the moral sense is intuitive, it must for the future be directed by our conscious discovery of the tribal purpose which it serves.⁵⁹

This would have been pretty grim reading for Nietzsche. Nothing else sums up the equivalence of organic nature, physical mechanism, and moral conformity. As a coat-hook serves a coat, so here man serves morality. For Nietzsche, if such concepts comprise moral value, then moral values ought to be trans-valued.

In a material cosmos, the only place to ground morality is man; and in the physics of society, the only place to ground value is in the single human being. Later, Nietzsche seemed to hold that only some types of human can achieve value separate from that of the physical and social aspects of the natural world. In such a cosmos, in order to conceive of true ethical value, the physical energy itself as manifested in the living human being has to be formed in the individual rather than either in the mass or in a history of the mass which is not told in such a frame. Because of the constriction of this concept of the self to its physical organic ground, Nietzsche had to pare away all ordinary causality in order to reveal a special causality at once generative as an organism is and yet at the same time detached from the heritage insuring domination in the course of reproduction and survival. Are those who wrote history actually right? Is Clifford in fact right to say that whatever still is, is right and whatever has passed away was wrong? Right and wrong cannot be attached to the current state of things except as the ideology of those dominating it.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁵⁹W. K. Clifford, "Right and Wrong: The Scientific Ground of Their Distinction," in *Op. cit.*, p. 172.

Therefore, these concepts form morality if and only if they are ordered by the true basal human causal energy, power, not in the face it turns toward the mass of mankind but in the face it turn toward each single self. This is not the face of soul or spirit. It is the face of nature. This face is individuating. It is formed by a mold that is not other-directed, though it is shapes the self-direction of all human selves.

Is this concept naturalistic or supernaturalistic? It is an attempt to find a way between these alternatives. One may pull a soft wool cap might over a hard steel helmet, or one may put the steel helmet over the wool cap: the head beneath is warmed and protected, protected and warmed all the same.

Nietzsche in this passage attempted to solve the naturalistic conundrum and to replace it with moral agency. It is the moral agency of human selves that was intended, and it is as this that it must be judged. To explain the basal energy of life in terms that were not reductive to physical nature, or even to organic nature, he had to find a moral order in the force of human life. To do this, he had to take on history. He was preceded in this by Ranke, but Nietzsche had concluded that the traditional structures of personhood had to suffer a more radical extirpation. He started upon it, and Foucault took this to the limit. But once one identifies the basal cause of human existence as power, one unleashes a propulsive force from each person against each and all who attempt to hold power. The solo human moral agent is thereby propelled away from oppression and also from mutual benefit, because it operates as the *manus longus* of dominative power. Finally, power solely remains. This itself, not soul nor spirit, is the person. This concept is the source of the picture of human identity as comprising one sole moral order. It dissolves the self.

- E.** Observe a point of behavior that George Lichtenberg described:
 People do not like to take ticket No. 1 in a lottery. Take it, reason cries aloud, it can win the 12,000 talers just as well as any other; don't take it for the world, *je ne sais quoi* whispers, it has never been known for such small numbers to appear beside big winnings—and as a result we don't take it.⁶⁰

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The ticket-buyer's connection to a group of people is his ownership of one of many mechanically replicated lottery tickets, each varying principally by serial number. With respect to the group, each ticket-holder differs from every other one in the company by a single, or in any case tiny, increment in the number printed on the ticket. Any human act seen from the point of view of probability points the actor in company with a great mass of other actors, since we judge the probability of human acts upon the number of human wills that we can observe. Not only that, but even when we reckon the probability of natural events we are participants in them. Our desires motivate our reckoning; the satisfaction of them results in confidence or distrust as to the resultant statement of probability, an aspect of which therefore is neither verifiable nor ever contradicted by further experience of events.⁶¹ Though each of our gamblers stand in a spot barely different from that of his or her fellows, they all influence the rest by the memories and hopes they bring to the sales window. Each one calculates his plan for winning in terms of the position of all the other players. Each one is paradigmatic and syntagmatic, oneiric and blind, the cause of everything and the victim of everything. This one goes by the superstitions of the heated crowd as to lottery numbers; that one, by cold lonely reason. How cunning such a person is: thinking when to act, when to move, where to look in and where to look away, how to stand within his society and apart from it! In this little bet on life, we must become cunning, because of our fears and our needs.

Yet it is not this indeterminacy that constitutes any moral point of view on human action. The natural might be indeterminate, and perhaps atoms swerve from the straight lines in which they otherwise fall so as to create waves of wind and water and life itself, as the Epicureans thought; or perhaps others are more correct to seed the determinate laws of nature in the operation of everything; yet others, too, might be right to call God's will the necessitating force of all things. But neither does implacability of natural force either inside us or in the world we face constitute a moral point of view. No one moment of decision makes moral life. It's like the lottery: every person takes a stake over and over again in a constantly changing context. The will is constantly driving, blowing aside anything that might be called autonomy. Yet it is not the decision, autonomous or heteronomous, that comprises personhood. Personality shapes how we understand everything. It includes all the influences that shape it. But we can understand not as discrete acts, atomized first

⁶¹Polanyi 20ff

ontologically and they scientifically by their causes. If our subjective view shape our understanding of things, then the one constant we hold at each step, in each choice, and for each understanding defines personhood as something more than all the discrete actions in life. Philosophers of ethics rarely look at the growth or moral reasoning. Mostly they analyze reasons as if time never or just barely passed. But that one constant vibrate to the re-ordering of the world around it at every moment, under the command of all the actions of other and events in the world. This constant exists not simply in one or in every act of decision. It exists in the infinite processes around each decision: in calling out moral claims and hearing them, or not, in the long experience obligation, in reflection and subsequent moments of decision, and then in the promises of future action that we call moral values that often succeed upon actions. Thus the reality of a unitary soul or universal spirit, and the issues of the self involved therein, need not define moral life. The moral point of view is personal, and personhood is moral. It is to be viewed in terms of its archive, of the memories and reflection required by each of us at each moment. This is not to say that moral goodness must be judged only from the perspective of one's whole life: but we do require everything we have gotten up to the moment, and we shall need all that is past each time the future comes at us.

People like to stand in the middle of the greater flow of others. Like the buyer of the lottery ticket, we prefer to stand in the great river, though we may be as inward as can be within it. Moral phenomena are in both foreground and background, swirling forward and backward. Personhood is both indexic and deixic. These are the directions in which we are connected to the 12,000 others in the lottery and to the rest of mankind. This connection indicates that something is at work in the middle of the crowd, where each person stands, beside his or her own drives and determinates. It is a relation other than that of power, a connection based on the consequences of each action we take and on the power of the memories within ourselves. This must order our moral life quite as much as power, it is called compassion.⁶² The choice of compassion or power in everything we do, amidst the infinite complexities within and without ourselves, makes moral personhood. The flow of people and of time encompasses us as a force greater than ourselves. This must be the object of ethical thought: the position I am in as I contemplate over and over again who I am in this crowd, where one survives and yet the others do, that the

⁶²Subseq essay; P+C

others persist and yet I do too, in ever deepening relationship. Over and over again each of us chooses an attitude or an action toward the others; then once the lottery is drawn, it is merely an event that has passed equally over us all, leaving us again, each and all, facing the next and greater event.

Suppose that you and I rent an apartment together. The apartment has a black front door, in a green hallway. One evening we come home and see this printed notice taped to the door: "This is the color red that your door will be painted in tomorrow." The sheet of paper on which these words are put is colored a hue of red, evenly and entirely. This sign refers to an event expected or promised to take place on the following day. The only event relevant in this matter that has so far occurred is the posting of the sign. Some renters might so dislike the promised color, or any new color on the door, that they will feel the apartment is no longer their home, or they might be moved to feel this because of the assertion of the landlord's ownership rights that the posting of the sign makes, as it has a kind of command effect. But speaking plainly, and not to cause make paradoxes, the door is now the same door that we closed in the morning and will be the same after it will have painted tomorrow, and the apartment is the same apartment, equally home, in the same respects. The red notice refers to itself, as well: the paper-dye part of it exemplifies something mentioned by the letterpress-ink part of it. There is as yet no opportunity or reason to match the red hue of the notice to the red hue the painter will apply to the door. Although the notice is a fact in the real world and refers to the real world, by itself it has the slightest impact on the world. It is a discrete action that would be identical to what it would be if it had been randomly produced or produced by natural forces entirely devoid of meaning or even intentionality. It would be a proposition, but not a moral situation.

Our reading of this notice may result in beliefs, reasons, desires, and motives with respect to the matter of announcing the planned action, including the act of having chosen the color, or of actually painting the door. We might believe it is a good color or belief that the landlord is up to a trick, we might have reason to believe these things, or the desire to believe them or to want a different color or for the door to be left alone, and we can be motivated to talk the matter over with friends and neighbors or to take such actions as remonstrating with the landlord or thanking him or her for the bright fresh coat of paint that greets our friends and ourselves

when we enter our home. These affects are influenced by many earlier events in our lives. Their causes can be so wholly exogenous to the event that we respond to it in a way that seems to others dramatically outsized. Yet these four classes of affects are specifications of our responses to the notice. They give us in formal terms little more than the principle of sufficient reason gives us for what will happen when we respond to the notice. Even if everything about our responses could be understood in evolutionary terms—if the principle of natural selection fully explained our neural and social functions in encountering the notice and acting in the world consequent to this encounter—we should have a well-wrought causality, more or less observable, but not a moral situation.

Why would neither the proposition nor the causal explanation amount to what I call a moral situation? There are some obvious factors: the ways in which we have made the apartment into a home, the psychic significance of the doorway, and the importance of location and neighborhood, work and society in human affairs. These can be reducible to propositional logic or to neurochemistry and evolutionary biology. Yet, reducible or not, they differ from these explanations in that as they accumulate in our memories each brings with it the possibility of having chosen something different from what we would do if we had no choice other than the basal conative power drive of human beings. With each replication of ourselves into the next minute, hour, or day, we can incline that our self-reproduction along the lines of another force. That force comes from the accumulation of other such possibilities in the lives of all those connected with our apartment-life in our society and world. The weight of all these is set off because there is a basal human energy other than power. Each of our acts, and many of our thoughts, have the power to increase or decrease the joy and suffering in others. This makes them moral acts, whether they are claims or responses to claims; and it is the reflection and understanding possible from the long experience of these that increases the moral point of view—the collection of memories and hopes that are personhood. We are not entirely governed by the objects around us, no matter how deeply we invest them with our feelings. Each can and must exist transported into our inward life, where they remain as narratives connected to all other narratives, as the ambiguity of words connect thoughts and as the fungibility of money connects commerce.

The red-paper notice is like the lottery ticket: it puts us into the middle of the

world not because it is an object, or because our door is an object, and not because it is differentiable from another object by either mere serial number or by our profound feelings of home, but because each of us conducts an enduring operation of virtually infinite complexity called personality. The reducibility of this operation to such causality as beliefs, reasons, desires, and motives, or to neurochemical or evolutionary causality, cannot cancel out a concept of personhood independent of them except upon the one condition: that one accepts that existence is a predicate—that providing sufficient reason for the existence or non-existence of something fully explains it; in other words, by accepting pre-Kantian metaphysics. In the case of such essences as unitary soul or universal spirit, this works perfectly well: one goes to battle on the pre-Kantian field and emerges victorious.

But moral phenomena are rather more complicated than any concept meant to stabilize or to de-stabilize them in ethics. As moral actors we are archivists of everything. We hold this archive as the ideal constitution of our inward world, from which anything that is absent is as good as nothing and before which our existence is always at stake in the continuous motion of growing more finely aware of the world. This was the core of Berkeley's idealism. Kant and deontological or rules ethicists mislaid it in order more securely to ground existence and our moral presence. The psychologist philosophers and consequentialist or results ethicists mislaid it when they took the inward world to be the object of empirical observation. Nietzsche, and then Foucault, brought both these generic lines of idealism to an end, by mistakenly thinking that metaphysics matters more than morality. But Schopenhauer had found it in his way, and Kierkegaard more coherently and profoundly than others. Husserl and James in their way found it in their ways too.

Suppose that one day someone found in one place—in a library or an archive—three vellum scraps. On one were the words “When in the course of human events”; on another were the words “to eat out our stance”; and on the third were the words (our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.” Suppose further that the best authorities upon the best evidence stated that these three texts were in the same scribal hand, in the similar ink, and on similar vellum as the engrossed Declaration of Independence in the National Archives—that, in short, there were no reason not to believe that these were fragments of another copy of the Declaration engrossed just like the complete copy, under the same authority and for the same purpose.

Would this prove with certainty that the fragmentary copy had the same text as the complete copy? Clearly not. Would this prove with certainty that another complete manuscript copy of this sort was made or ever existed? Clearly not. The conclusions of experts as to the authenticity of these fragments cannot possibly prove the existence of anything other than these three objects. The existence of three objects described as the evidence warrants is a *prima facie* truth. Of course it suggests the existence of another copy, but nothing proves exact reproduction except complete instances. What the fragments do show is that there was something like a copy that we know next to nothing about. They are testimonia of a secret. Full replication, on the other hand, requires an outward world in which to exist. Within any process of replication there is a process of speciation, by differences that might seem tiny to an observer, incorporating the weight of the influences upon the time and place of the first and every instant of its development. This growth confirms conflicts, it preserve irregularities. It creates anamorphosis in the inner world of those who make the object, however strong the intention of reproduction and however accurate and complete the visible result. Whatever is not outwardly known merely seems to be weightless and invisible but in reality is a finite destiny. Material objects are merely its messenger. They give us fragments, like the scraps of vellum, or like single sentences out of a lifelong journal.

Seldom are our pasts and our futures monopunctually intelligible. The next day in our lives differs from the present day not seldom but virtually always, virtually always gives more to us than we had, leaving us closer to being virtually infinitely complicated. Life is replication, even as each person replicates himself or herself in each next minute and day. Nietzsche thought there was no self, only this will which we pretend to ourselves is reasonable, desirable, motivating, or necessary to believe. Yet seldom is our will for one thing alone. Its motion is in a kind of self-generation we can call personhood. This expresses the fact that though we wish to continue, as a virtual copy, we wish also to make a mark. We display ourselves—to ourselves or to anyone else—as our primary cognitive act, and with this exposure to the changing and determining world we also defend ourselves, trying to mold the next moment of personhood. Sometimes we want to be just the same as the prior, sometimes we want it radically different, and most of the time we want a mixture we hardly understand and over which we have but little control. And yet with experience in balancing the two forces, power and compassion, that fuel moral life and thereby the

experience of personhood, we express or generate further versions of ourselves that each is a tad inwardly fuller. Seldom is each new experience of life not weightier in our experience than the one before and at the same time thereby slightly dematerialized, abstracted as memory and uniquely lived as fear, hurt, hope, and the promise of being good. We misunderstand moral life when we see it as anything more elemental than its whole course in our consciousness.

Even in machinery something of the past meant to be discarded will survive when it makes reproductions, and similarly something of the future meant to be kept stable will change. The changes abstract the matter that was there before: it receives it and yet it acts upon it too. There is the anamorphosis each person makes as in moral experience. And, like the holder of the lottery ticket, we stand amidst everything human, in the middle of that crowd, reflecting it but also incising alteration upon it and upon ourselves. The force at work is not single and fissiparous. It is dual and agonistic. It is in our living for ourselves and for other persons, for both of which ends we each bear an inward life, sole and personal, in thoughtful or thoughtless, dominant or submissive, cunning or naive relation to all the rest of humankind and nature.

The sequence of spiritual thought through Nietzsche and Foucault reveals the failure of the search for a monopunctual structural unity for humankind, as both these men were well aware. The dream of de Sumperville and Froebel among many others, that the unified principles of natural sciences shall be forwarded, like a trunk in drayage, to a destination of the best, highest conception of mankind, never adequated formal unity to human moral life. Our life is at too frequent risk, and our lives are too fragile, to be sustained upon forms. Kant tried this project of sustenance by means of a heroic effort meant to sustain both life and doubt, upon the form of reason. Yet it is a shadow, like the rules of grammar that are what is left of language after everything that language refers to has been subtracted. We do not meaningfully operate these without concern for the references of words, because these references are ultimately ourselves. Taxonomy is efficacious because it expresses our concerns about our lives. Thus, if someone suddenly dies of a mysterious disease, we must count it as important whether we say the cause of death was witchcraft, that we shall prove by dunking in water a person accused of the exercised thereof, or whether we say the cause of death was anaphylactic shock, by

recognition of which fact, upon our having proven it, we shall endeavor to know who is mortally sensitive to the allergens that killed the man and to protect such person from exposure to them.

Therefore, Nietzsche was right in thinking will to have no causality; yet neither have objects causality except in a bounded, though internally vast, sense. Even if there is no intentionality in neural activity, as some now believe, sentences nonetheless come out of our minds and hearts. To change from the words soul and spirit to person is not a trick. The trick, rather, is to think that objects matter at all except in so far as we remember, hope, think, feel, and act in furtherance of the joy and relief of the suffering of others and of ourselves. This is the magician's trick of indirection. Automata do not play chess, nor do pigs and horses speak our language, nor do fleas jump the trapeze. We need no more than this revelation to recognize the spot that we may name personhood. This fundamental category is a moral one, more the business of ethics, and even of philosophy, than metaphysics.

The position of personhood as the basis for normative ethics is in fact a legitimate, valid position of "heads I win, tail you lose" for normativity towards those who deny it. For in this case we have a moral philosophy that on the one hand is observant of actual facts—the facts human happiness and suffering—and that on the other hand is set entirely within the inward reflection upon experience, from claim, through obligation, to decision. This happy position is available to both rules and results ethics, and to virtue ethics, as well as globally to moral normativity, once anyone recognizes the consequence of the further fact, utterly necessary yet generally ignored, of the incalculability of the consequences of our actions. This fact is our clue to solving misunderstandings of moral phenomena, for it shows that something always must remain unformalized in understanding ourselves. Our moral life, which we cannot avoid, is understandable in this way, through something that itself is not entirely understandable in formal terms, the virtually infinite complexity of the human person.

Although I have written about the incalculability of consequences, the inevitability of moral dilemmas, and the specific forcefulness of moral life in such a way as to shape a theory I call moral force ethics, I felt that it was necessary to understand these ideas more deeply. I therefore turned to the source spring of

subjectivity, in the idealism of George Berkeley, and also to the end to which that came as regards the necessity of moral obligation, in Nietzsche and his line of thought developed by Foucault into one of the most penetrating strikes in modern thought. This leaves, as I say, another field still open for ethics, that of personhood and personality. I have written before, as well, of the difficulty of personalism as a movement in the history of philosophy. It has once again begun to receive thoughtful attention, but for me the historical reconstruction is not as important as are two tasks for a personalist ethics that are evident from the discussion in this essay. The first is the question of the moral order which we oppose to power. I have identified this, briefly here and at length elsewhere, as compassion. But it is necessary to know what compassion is. What matters is that the existence of an oppositional ordering force generate dilemmas in the face of facts that we must address, whether we have souls or wills or what have you or not. This then is the second question: what is personhood, what does it mean to say that it “virtually infinitely complex,” and how does such personality shape our moral lives. I shall consider these questions in the next two essays.