

The Soul of Nietzsche's
Beyond Good and Evil

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Introduction

Learning to Read Beyond Good and Evil

Why doesn't Nietzsche write like a philosopher? Why doesn't he set out his views clearly and give arguments for them? That he does not has led some readers to suppose that he is not a philosopher at all but only a poet, a guru, or a self-proclaimed wise man. Although this is hardly a crazy view, it is no longer a prominent one. The connections that can be drawn between Nietzsche and other figures in the history of philosophy – past and present – are just too numerous and interesting to deny that philosophy is the game he was attempting to play, the conversation he was attempting to enter. But then why doesn't he write like other philosophers? In particular, does he minimize argument in his writings to reject something that is essential to philosophy as traditionally understood and practiced?

For a time, the standard view seemed to be that he does, that the ways in which he writes express a rejection of the whole “truth project” of traditional philosophy. Interpreters operating under the influence of postmodernism took Nietzsche to be an early proponent of its attack on truth, its rejection of all truth claims as illusory. Nietzsche does not write “like a philosopher,” according to this account, precisely because he rejects a concern with truth, reason, and argument. He rejects the “logocentric” paradigm of philosophy that informs the work of those who do write “like philosophers.” But this postmodernist view of Nietzsche's philosophy is no longer dominant, having been successfully countered by “truth-friendly” accounts of Nietzsche. These find in his works a commitment to truth and, in his later works, a “uniform respect for science, truth, and the facts” (Clark 1990: 105).¹ But then why does he write so as to

¹ Among the books that have contributed to the overcoming of the postmodernist Nietzsche are Wilcox 1974, Schacht 1985, Clark 1990, Leiter 2002a, and Richardson 1996 and 2004.

suggest otherwise? What can defenders of the truth-friendly Nietzsche contribute to our understanding of why Nietzsche writes the way he does? These questions lie behind the present book. We do not address them directly, however, until the Conclusion. We think that answering the question as to why Nietzsche writes as he does requires more careful attention to *how* he writes than we find in the current literature. This attention is especially needed in the case of *Beyond Good and Evil* (*BGE*), the book with which we will be concerned here. There is a problem concerning this book, two problems really, that we believe can be solved only by paying closer attention to *how* it is written, by *learning* how to read it.

I. 1 THE PROBLEM

Of Nietzsche's thirteen books, *Beyond Good and Evil* (*BGE*) is plausibly considered the most important statement of his philosophy. Dealing with all of the important topics of his later philosophy, it is his most comprehensive book and makes the strongest impression of being intended as a major statement of that philosophy.² Many philosophers would choose *On the Genealogy of Morality* (*GM*) instead, on the grounds that it makes a more important contribution to philosophy. It certainly makes a more accessible contribution. Its form is more evident, making it much easier to determine its topic, claims, and arguments. Its content makes it seem to be an important and original book. But, on the back of the title page of *GM*, in the print manuscript submitted to his publisher, Nietzsche instructed that it be "appended" to *BGE* "as a clarification and supplement" (*KSA* 14: 377). It seems strange to accord the appendix more importance than the book it is meant to clarify and supplement. The solution might simply be to treat *GM* as a part of *BGE*, as Laurence

² *Twilight of the Idols* may be almost as comprehensive, but it reads like a summary and simplified statement, its relationship to *BGE* analogous to that of Kant's *Prolegomena* to the first *Critique* or Hume's *Enquiries* to the *Treatise*. Nietzsche himself enthused over *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*Z*), declaring that it "stands alone" not only in his own body of work but in the history of philosophy (*EH* III: Z 6). Yet he also said that *BGE* "says the same things" as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "but differently, very differently" (letter to Burckhardt, 2 September 1886) (*KSB* 7: 254), the difference presumably being that *Z* says it poetically, whereas *BGE* says it philosophically, or at least much more philosophically than *Z* does. And if two books say the same thing but one of them says it more philosophically, that one should surely be considered the more important work of philosophy, which is our concern here.

Lampert (2001) does. This would make *BGE* the book to which Nietzsche referred a young American journalist as his most “far-reaching and important.”³

But whether or not it includes *GM*, there are two major problems facing those who accept this judgment concerning *BGE*’s importance, especially if they also judge Nietzsche to be an important philosopher. The first concerns its form. The book itself (i.e., apart from *GM*) contains nine major parts (as well as a preface and concluding poem). Each part is titled and subdivided into consecutively numbered sections or “aphorisms” (the traditional term). These sections, which are usually untitled, vary in length from a sentence to a few pages. The problem is that little seems to hold these elements together. Rolf-Peter Horstmann’s (2002: xxii) description of the book captures the impression *BGE* often makes on readers: “*Beyond Good and Evil* . . . looks like a collection of impromptu remarks . . . numbered and loosely organized into topic-related groups. . . . The impression is of an apparently arbitrary compilation of notes which are . . . presented in an artful though idiosyncratic way.”⁴

No one who takes *Beyond Good and Evil* to be an important work of philosophy can remain content with this view of it. But although Walter Kaufmann warned us years ago against reading *Beyond Good and Evil* as a mere “collection of aphorisms for browsing,” it has evidently been difficult to resist the temptation. Interpreters tend to mine the book for whatever they can use for their own purposes, showing little concern with how to read the work as a whole. Alexander Nehamas’s striking characterization of the book as a work of “dazzling obscurity” is meant to suggest an explanation: *BGE*’s memorable lines – for example, “Christianity is Platonism for the people” – dazzle us with their brilliance, blinding us to the less striking surrounding material. This brilliance makes it easy to

³ Nietzsche’s actual claim was that *GM* and *BGE* counted as his “most far-reaching and important” books. This was in 1887, before he wrote his last five books. But none of these matches *BGE* as a candidate for Nietzsche’s *Hauptwerk*, as we argue specifically about *Twilight* in our previous note.

⁴ Note that *BGE*’s title does not really tell us what it is about, and its chapter titles often do not tell us what they are about either. In this sense, *BGE* differs substantially from Nietzsche’s other nine-part work, *Human, All Too Human* (*HA*). There the title does tell us what the book is about – as Nietzsche put it later: “Where you see ideal things, I see what is human, alas, all too human” (*EH* III: *HA*). And the titles of its parts inform us as to that part’s subject matter. So the second part of *HA* is about the moral sentiments, just as its title suggests. But *BGE*’s second part, “The Free Spirit,” is not about free spirits. If the title is appropriate, it must be because it is addressed to free spirits. But this does not help give us a sense of its unity.

overlook issues concerning how the book is organized and how its sections are interconnected. The upshot, according to Nehamas (1988: 46), is that “we still do not know how to read the book. We simply do not understand its structure, its narrative line. Indeed we do not even know whether it has a narrative line at all.”⁵

The second problem concerns *BGE*'s content, much of which seems both too crude and too badly supported to count as good philosophy. This includes, for instance, its derogatory comments about women (*BGE* 231–239), the English in general (*BGE* 252), and Darwin, Mill, and Spencer in particular (*BGE* 253). One might be inclined to dismiss these as peripheral to *BGE*'s main concern, especially if it were clearer what that concern is. But such dismissal is impossible in the case of its equally harsh criticism of democracy, which runs throughout the book. Of course, one might sympathize with the criticism. But sympathy is difficult to sustain when one recognizes that the critique is connected to a number of problematic elements. These include a dream of philosophers who will “create” or “legislate” values (*BGE* 213); a denigration of ordinary human beings, who are said to exist and to be allowed to exist only for service and the general utility (*BGE* 61); and a criticism of religions for preserving too many of those who should perish (*BGE* 62). If similar-sounding points can be found in other writings Nietzsche published, it is almost always in much milder form.⁶

This contrast is also true of *BGE*'s apparent assault on truth, which begins in the preface and continues at least throughout Part One and into Part Two. In no other published work do we find such strong denials of both the possibility of attaining truth and the value of doing so. But this seems to be the stuff of freshman relativism. It may now be accepted as obvious by postmodernists throughout the academy (though not as true, of course, once this concern is pushed). But philosophers typically reject such postmodernist skepticism about truth, judging the arguments taken to ground it to be both wrongheaded and superficial. Clark (1990) claims that Nietzsche himself came to share this judgment. According to her account, Nietzsche was the first to see through the postmodernist position

⁵ Nehamas goes on to offer an account of *BGE*'s structure, to which we will return.

⁶ Likewise, the cutting comments about women that can be found in Nietzsche's other books (although, like the notorious comment about the whip, often not in Nietzsche's own voice) are no match for *BGE*'s extreme statement that a man of depth and benevolence “must think of woman as *Oriental*s do: he must think of woman as a possession, as property that can be locked, as something predestined for service and achieving her perfection in that” (*BGE* 238).

on truth after having proclaimed it himself in his early work. But he does not reject the postmodern position until *GM*, written after *BGE*. If Clark is correct, Nietzsche's later work can be saved from the charge that it remains committed to a problematic and superficial position on truth, but *BGE* cannot. This failure adds to the difficulty of counting *BGE* as the most important statement of Nietzsche's philosophy, much less as the work of an important philosopher.

And then there is the fact that the notorious doctrine of the will to power has such a central presence in the book, much more so than in any other. That he called attention to the importance of power relations in human life is certainly to Nietzsche's credit. But the doctrine put forward and defended in *BGE* is that life, human psychology, and perhaps even reality itself are fundamentally to be understood as will to power, and this claim has done little to enhance his reputation among philosophers. Nietzsche's reputation continues to grow among serious philosophers, but always in spite of the doctrine of the will to power, never because of it.⁷

I. 2 TWO STRATEGIES

One therefore comes to *BGE* with the reasonable expectation that it is Nietzsche's most important work, only to find what appears to be a loosely connected set of thoughts, many of which range from the puerile to the nonsensical. What are the defenders of the book's status to do? One option is to accept the book's apparent features as its actual ones but to argue that Nietzsche is putting them to an important philosophical *use*. This strategy is taken most influentially by Alexander Nehamas and more recently by Rolf-Peter Horstmann. Nehamas and Horstmann both explain the form of *BGE* and at least some of its problematic content in terms of its helpfulness for communicating a philosophical position that cannot be presented effectively using more traditional philosophical resources. This position is Nietzsche's notorious perspectivism. Although Nehamas and Horstmann interpret perspectivism somewhat differently, they both attempt to interpret it so that it does not entail the problematic postmodern thesis that all of our beliefs are illusory or false. They interpret it instead as the claim that truths are always "partial": claims can be true only *from* a particular perspective. Perspectivism consists not in

⁷ For instance, Daniel Dennett refers to Nietzsche's "huffing and puffing about power" (Dennett 1996: 465), and Philippa Foot questions Nietzsche's stature as a psychologist on the basis of this doctrine (Foot 1994: 12–13).

a denial that one's beliefs are true, according to Nehamas (1985: 33), "but only in the view that one's beliefs are not, and need not be, true for everyone." However, as Nehamas himself explains, this position is difficult to defend.

The problem is that "simply by virtue of being offered," any view "is inevitably offered in the conviction that it is true. But then, despite any assurances to the contrary, it is presented as a view which everyone must accept on account of its being true." Nehamas (1985: 131) concludes from this that "every effort to present a view, no matter how explicitly its interpretive nature is admitted, makes an inescapable dogmatic commitment," by which he means a commitment to the truth of the view "full stop." Accordingly, Nietzsche must count as a dogmatist or antiperspectivist anyone who puts forward a claim as true, or even puts forward the claim itself. So how can Nietzsche take a stand in favor of perspectivism and against dogmatism without turning his own position into a dogmatic one? Nehamas sees in *BGE* an "unprecedented solution" to this problem, for which traditional philosophical means – the presentation of views and argument – are unsuitable. If one tries to avoid dogmatism by simply *saying* "but this is only an interpretation," the reader is likely to disregard either the view (because you have implied that you can give no reason for others to accept it) or the qualification (if they are independently attracted to it). Either way, one fails to communicate the perspectival (or interpretive, as Nehamas uses these terms) nature of the views one is putting forward. The alternative is to largely avoid "describing, supporting, and articulating" one's views and to exemplify them instead. According to Nehamas (1988: 63), this is the "main reason why *Beyond Good and Evil*, like so many of Nietzsche's works, is so short on argument." Nietzsche embodies his views and attitudes toward life in the work itself (in the narrator he forces the reader to postulate), thereby offering them "for his audience's inspection," and "commending them, of course, simply in virtue of having chosen to offer them." However, by not arguing for them, he avoids implying that they are to be accepted by everyone. And *BGE*'s apparent lack of organization is just an absence of the strict logical connections between claims and ideas that we find in more traditional works of philosophy. But there are connections, Nehamas claims, precisely of the kind one finds in a good conversation, where one topic gives way to another not because it is logically connected but because of a looser kind of connection that reminds one of the participants of it. *BGE*'s form is therefore that of a monologue, which is perfectly suited to what Nehamas takes to be Nietzsche's project in *BGE*: that of presenting us

with a person, a philosophical character, whose views he himself merely presents for our examination but for which he does not argue.

This is an ingenious reading, and we agree with Nehamas that Nietzsche does find the traditional form of philosophical writing problematic. But in the end his account of *BGE* cannot claim to be a very plausible one (although we can show this only by providing the alternative account our book offers). It attempts to salvage *BGE*'s status by putting it in the service of a philosophical position; the problem is that the position itself is a problematic one. It just is not clear what sense can be given to the notion of a "partial truth," of a claim's being "true from a perspective." If this view immediately leads one into paradoxes of self-reference, as Nehamas admits, it just is not clear what reason Nietzsche would have had to accept it or therefore to try to present it for his readers' consideration. And, in fact, Nietzsche never says that truth is perspectival but only that knowledge is (e.g., *GMIII*: 12).⁸ At the very least, one wonders whether there is an alternative account of *BGE*'s philosophical importance.

Laurence Lampert has supplied such an account. Whereas Horstmann and Nehamas see in *BGE* a repudiation of the task and methods of traditional philosophy, Lampert (2001: 2) thinks that *BGE* aims to show that philosophy in this sense "is desirable and possible" – hence, "that there are plausible grounds for the mind's assent to a particular interpretation of the whole of things and plausible grounds for the mind's embrace of that interpretation as a teaching to live by." The book as a whole is "a coherent argument that never lets up: what is discovered about philosophy and religion, about what can be known and what might be believed, necessarily assigns to the philosopher a monumental task or responsibility with respect to morals and politics" (Lampert 2001: 7).

Lampert admits that one cannot read this "coherent argument" off of *BGE*'s surface: to the uninitiated reader, the book seems characterized by disunity, even randomness, and lack of argument.⁹ He explains the gulf

⁸ See Leiter 1994 and Clark 1998a for accounts of perspectivism as a claim about knowledge rather than as a claim about truth.

⁹ Two of Nietzsche's letters suggest to Lampert that this cannot be the end of the story. One, to Georg Brandes (8 January 1888), (*KSB* 8: 228) comments on readers' failure to recognize that "they are dealing [in *BGE*] with a long logic of a completely determinate philosophical sensibility and *not* with some mishmash of a hundred varied paradoxes and heterodoxies"; a second, to Jacob Burckhardt (22 September 1886) (*KSB* 7: 254) tells us that *BGE* "says the same things as my Zarathustra but differently, very differently." It seems clear that no mere collection of aphorisms could express "a long logic of a completely determinate sensibility" (*KSB* 8: 228) or say differently what is said by the unified narrative of *Zarathustra*.

between this appearance and the reality of Nietzsche's text by claiming that *BGE* is written in view of the distinction between the "exoteric and the esoteric" (Lampert 2001: 4). This distinction does not come out of nowhere. Nietzsche himself tells us that it was recognized by philosophers, "among Indians as among Greeks, Persians and Moslems, in short wherever one believed in an order of rank and *not* in equality and equal rights" (*BGE* 30). Many readers may find it implausible that Nietzsche is not actually saying (is not committed to) what he seems so obviously to them to be saying in *BGE*. But given what he says about the distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric, it is more implausible that *BGE* is not written in view of that distinction – hence, that there are not quite different levels of access to the content of *BGE*. According to Lampert, the view of the text as random and disorganized is the exoteric view. Nietzsche writes in a way to encourage reading it this way because, "given the sway of the irrational, making a place for the rational in the midst of the irrational requires strategic finesse: it is a task for an artful writer who knows his audience and knows how to appeal to them" (Lampert 2001: 1). Lampert thus claims that the disorganized, exoteric text is precisely the one that will initially appeal to Nietzsche's readers. In contrast, the esoteric text is the "coherent argument that never lets up," which begins to appear to readers as they are educated by *BGE* itself.

1.3 OUR PROJECT

In this book, we offer support for Lampert's *general approach* to interpreting *BGE*. In particular, we provide evidence that *BGE* is deliberately written in view of the distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric. We also provide evidence that the problems concerning the form and the content of *BGE* can be solved by recognizing that the problematic material shows up as such only when the text is read exoterically. This material is not part of the esoteric text that appears as we begin to follow Nietzsche's plea to "*learn* to read [him] well" (*DP*: 5). But we do not argue for this approach in the way that Lampert does, and our claims about the *details* of *BGE*'s esoteric text differ very significantly from his.

Although mentioned by Nietzsche, esotericism has become part of contemporary intellectual culture by way of Leo Strauss and his followers. The main source of the differences between our approach and Lampert's is that the esotericism we find in *BGE* has little in common with the Straussian variety and was not discovered under Strauss's influence (or Lampert's for that matter). Lampert no longer counts himself a follower

of Strauss, attempting to distance both himself and Nietzsche from “noble lying” (2001: 4). In [Chapter 2](#), we argue that his interpretation nevertheless reads too much of Strauss into *BGE*. Our approach differs radically from the one we associate with followers of Strauss, which involves two related features that make it objectionable. First, their approach seems designed to appeal to an in crowd of those in the know at the expense of public disclosure of grounds for interpreting texts as they do. Second, the attitude toward contemporary analytic (Anglo-American) philosophy, including its work in the history of philosophy, borders on contempt. In contrast, we offer no special “method” or manual for cracking Nietzsche’s “code.” As far as we can tell, there is no such code, and the only “method” that we recommend – and attempt to practice – for appreciating the “esoteric Nietzsche” is that of trying to make the best sense of what he actually says in the most rigorous possible way. And we find analytic philosophers scorned by Straussians and modern philosophers ignored by them (especially Hume and Kant) particularly helpful for doing so.

We nevertheless agree with Lampert that it is necessary to distinguish an exoteric from an esoteric level on which *BGE* is written and can be read. We deny that the form and unity of the work, and therefore its philosophical content, can be adequately appreciated without recognizing that its surface meaning differs substantially from what Nietzsche actually argues in it. The latter is simply inaccessible to readers without a significant overcoming of their initial impressions. And so *BGE*’s status as Nietzsche’s masterpiece and a work of great philosophical depth depends on recognizing this distinction.

In particular, we contend that the book is written so as to make it natural and very plausible to read it in a way that we might characterize as crudely naturalistic. This reading supports naturalist and empiricist trends in philosophy at the expense of more traditional philosophical concerns, especially normative ones. The esoteric reading we defend grants that Nietzsche is a naturalist in an important sense. But it insists that he does not turn his back on the normative aspirations of traditional philosophy. In particular, contrary to Brian Leiter’s influential reading of Nietzsche as a naturalist, he does not claim that philosophy should follow the methods of the sciences. We explain this point in detail in [Chapter 5](#). Our point here is that *BGE* offers an account of philosophy that shows much more sympathy for traditional philosophy than many have supposed.

We attempt to demonstrate this largely through a detailed reading of the preface and first part of *BGE* (its first twenty-three sections or

aphorisms). We call the latter “*BGE One*” to distinguish it from its first section, *BGE 1*. It turned out to be impossible to give an account of the entire book once we found out how much there is in *BGE One*. This is perhaps as it should be. As Julian Young (2010: 411) writes, *BGE* is “really . . . two books of unequal size, one concerned with ‘theoretical philosophy,’ the other with ‘practical’ philosophy, ‘ethics’ in the very broadest sense of the word. The first is largely, but by no means exclusively, to be found in Part I, the second in the remaining eight parts.” This is exactly what we discovered as we worked on the book. *BGE One* offers a deeply connected set of variations on traditional philosophical themes, ones concerning the history and nature of philosophy, and the nature of the human soul and will. These provide the theoretical foundation for the book’s practical philosophy, which is found in the reflections on ethics, politics, and education, to which the rest of the book is devoted. We cannot show that in the present book, because we cannot deal with all of that material. But the Conclusion offers the beginning of our account by showing how Nietzsche’s understanding of the soul is the foundation of the educational project to which we think the rest of the book is dedicated. And Young is correct to note that the philosophical foundations of *BGE* are not found “exclusively” in its preface and *BGE One*. This is why we do not confine ourselves to these sections but also discuss in detail a few particularly relevant sections of *BGE* that are not contained in its first part (e.g., *BGE 36*). We do the same with several sections of two other works that Nietzsche wrote within the year of completing *BGE*, *On the Genealogy of Morality* and the second edition of *The Gay Science*. One could find in the preface and *BGE One* what we find there without consulting these sections, but we think that they make a substantial contribution to seeing what is there.

PART ONE

THE WILL TO TRUTH AND THE WILL TO VALUE

Part One consists of five chapters that set out the basic framework we propose for understanding the “narrative line” of *BGE* and how it could count as Nietzsche’s masterpiece.

Chapter 1 contains a detailed account of *BGE*’s preface, arguing that it shows the book to be much more like a philosophical treatise than is usually supposed. Readers are kept from appreciating this similarity because of the ways in which Nietzsche’s book differs from the typical philosophical treatise (other than the sheer brilliance of its writing). In particular, like Plato, Nietzsche is not interested in laying out the entire content for his best readers; to get at this content, they have to work it out for themselves. Accordingly, although the preface offers us a relatively straightforward narrative of the history of philosophy as a basis for understanding the aims of the book, it provides only the bare outlines of this story, and it papers over obvious holes in the narrative with references, images, and metaphors that it does not clarify. Our hypothesis is that *BGE* One is designed to fill in the bare outline of the story offered in its preface, if we know what to look for in it. And the best way to know what to look for is to recognize the gaps in our understanding of it and, particularly, of its metaphors.

The “magnificent tension of the spirit” is the most important such metaphor. Nietzsche uses it in *BGE*’s preface to characterize the current situation of philosophy at the time he is writing. By “spirit” (*der Geist*) he means “conscious thought,” especially of the philosophical variety. The suggestion is that the future Nietzsche envisions for philosophy (“beyond good and evil”) depends on the proper resolution of this tension. Nietzsche goes on to suggest that the Jesuits and the democratic Enlightenment have attempted to resolve it in the wrong way. To understand the concerns of *BGE*, therefore, it seems important to understand

the nature of this tension. Yet neither the preface nor the book itself appears to provide any relevant information.

We argue in [Chapter 1](#) that the key to understanding the metaphor is to recognize that the tension in question must be produced by a conflict between two different forces. This recognition prompts us to look in Nietzsche's book for two such forces. We find them in the will to truth and what we call "the will to value."

BGE 1–4 begin to fill in the interpretive framework sketched by the preface. We argue in [Chapter 2](#) that Nietzsche, contrary to appearances and most interpretations, is neither attacking the will to truth nor denying the possibility of gaining truth in *BGE* One. When he appears to be doing so, he is instead *illustrating* what he *describes* in the preface: namely, the "magnificent tension" between the will to truth and the will to value. *BGE* One's main claim concerning the will to truth is that dogmatism was overcome only by the strengthening of the truth drive relative to the value drive – which means by the philosopher learning how to hold the value drive at bay. That said, in [Chapter 3](#) we argue that Nietzsche denies that the will to value should be eliminated from philosophy. To the contrary, a reading of *BGE* 5, 10, and 11 shows that the satisfaction of the will to value is crucial if a philosophy is to be successful.

In [Chapter 4](#) we turn to *BGE* 14–16 to elucidate what Nietzsche takes to be the result of the strengthening of the will to truth: namely, philosophers' adherence to empiricism and naturalism. These doctrines are the fruit of overcoming the dogmatism to which philosophers were originally led by the will to value. But this is not a completely unproblematic result, as we argue in [Chapter 5](#). Naturalism and empiricism cannot provide the complete picture of where Nietzsche thinks philosophy must go, for he insists that neither side of the "magnificent tension of the spirit" can be disabled, and these doctrines do not satisfy the will to value. He thus implies that both the will to value and the will to truth will be satisfied in the philosophy he is aiming at "beyond good and evil." How is this possible? In [Chapter 5](#) we use passages from *GSV*, written immediately after *BGE*, to argue that Nietzsche is led by the will to value to a modified version of the naturalism presented in [Chapter 1](#), a naturalism that is able to incorporate values into it. The naturalism to which the strengthening of the will to truth leads is not, in fact, true. The contribution of the will to value to philosophy is precisely to moderate the naturalism and empiricism with which the overcoming of dogmatism has left philosophy.

Setting the Stage

Nietzsche's Preface

That *BGE* is much more like a philosophical treatise than it appears to be is already suggested by the striking similarity between its preface and that of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is widely taken to be the greatest philosophical treatise in Nietzsche's native language. Nietzsche's preface certainly does not sound or read much like Kant's. It is shorter and livelier, and the writing is brilliant. Most of all, its tone differs from Kant's, which is utterly serious from beginning to end, whereas Nietzsche begins with a joke or jibe. And whereas Kant places before his preface an exceedingly reverent-sounding dedication to his patron, Nietzsche has no patron (but note *GM* I: 12), and his tone, at least at the beginning, is irreverent. Despite these and other stylistic differences, the content of Nietzsche's preface – what he is actually saying in it – is very similar to Kant's. Each author presents us with a story of the history of philosophy and situates his book as its rightful culmination. As we will see in [Chapter 3](#), Nietzsche positions himself as Kant's rightful heir later in the book. Nietzsche's story of the history of philosophy is not identical to but is rather a variation on Kant's: it involves three main themes, each of which is illuminated by comparison to Kantian ones.

1.1 FIRST THEME: DOGMATISM IN ITS LAST THROES

Nietzsche's preface begins famously: "Presupposing that truth is a female – what?" The dash followed by the "what?" suggests that Nietzsche's presupposition is intended to startle or jar.¹ As Burnham

¹ By omitting the dash and translating *wie* (a typical expression of surprise or puzzlement) as "what then?" Kaufmann's translation suppresses this suggestion and makes the line read much more smoothly, so that Nietzsche is asking us to consider the logical consequences

(2007: 2) rightly suggests, it is equivalent to a “double-take”: Nietzsche portrays himself as startled by the implication of what he has just said. Unfortunately, many interpreters seem so startled that they begin free-associating about women and/or truth and find it difficult to focus on what the implication is supposed to be. Presupposing truth to be a female has nothing to do with women and very little to do with truth. The implication that Nietzsche pretends to be startled by is that he now has a new way of viewing dogmatic philosophers and making fun of them, namely, as being inept and inexperienced when it comes to the female sex. After several lines of mocking dogmatists on the grounds that the “gruesome seriousness and clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have tended to approach truth so far have been inept and inapt means for capturing a female,” Nietzsche puts his point more literally:

What is certain is that she has not allowed herself to be captured – and today every kind of dogmatism is left standing dispirited and discouraged. If it is left standing at all. For there are scoffers who claim that it has fallen, that all dogmatism lies on the ground, even more, that dogmatism is in its last throes.
(*BGE P*)

If we assume for the moment that Nietzsche means by “dogmatism” what Kant did, it is then plausible to interpret *Beyond Good and Evil*’s first theme as a familiar one concerning the failure and debased situation of metaphysics, a theme that was not new when Kant stated it almost a century earlier with a related (though belabored) set of metaphors.

Kant begins his preface to the first (A) edition of the first *Critique* by characterizing metaphysics as the “battlefield of [the] endless controversies” to which reason is led because it is “burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the very nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every power of human reason.” This is followed by a (for Kant) poetic description of the hard times on which metaphysics has fallen, which is worth quoting at length.

of supposing truth to be, as Kaufmann translates it, “a woman.” The latter translation choice also helps to suppress the aspect of the line that would make it surprising or puzzling to readers, for the two words Kaufmann translates as “woman” in the passage, first *Weib*, and a little later, *Frauenzimmer* (which Hollingdale translates as “wench”) are at the very least less respectful terms than the usual term for “woman” (*die Frau*). His translation therefore tends to prettify the line too much, thereby encouraging readers to think of it in more romantic terms than it warrants. Yes, it obviously suggests something erotic, and perhaps it foreshadows the complex and subtle eroticism with which Nietzsche aims to endow philosophy in this book. At this point, and in itself, however, the line is more crude than erotic.

There was a time when metaphysics was called the queen of all the sciences, and if the will be taken for the deed, it deserved this title of honor, on account of the preeminent importance of its object. Now, in accordance with the fashion of the age, the queen proves despised on all counts; and the matron, outcast and forsaken, mourns like Hecuba: "Greatest of all by race and birth, I am now cast out, powerless" [Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13:508–510]. In the beginning, under the administration of the dogmatists, her rule was despotic. Yet because her legislation still retained traces of ancient barbarism, this rule gradually degenerated though internal wars into complete anarchy; and the skeptics, a kind of nomads who abhor all permanent cultivation of the soil, shattered civil unity from time to time. But since there were fortunately only a few of them, they could not prevent the dogmatists from continually attempting to rebuild, though never according to a plan unanimously accepted among themselves. Once in recent times it even seemed as though an end would be put to all these controversies, and the lawfulness of the competing claims would be completely decided, through a certain *physiology* of the human understanding (by the famous Locke); but it turned out that although the birth of the purported queen was traced to the rabble of common experience and her pretensions would have been rendered rightly suspicious, nevertheless she still asserted her claim because in fact this *genealogy* was attributed to her falsely; thus metaphysics fell back into the same old worm-eaten dogmatism, and thus the same position of contempt, out of which the science was to have been extricated. (A viii–x; emphasis in original).

Although Kant makes metaphysics the female, whereas Nietzsche's female is the truth metaphysicians seek, their metaphors are not significantly different, given that metaphysics is a body of (purported) metaphysical truths.

When he rewrote the preface for the second (B) edition, Kant largely discarded the metaphors and put his point directly: both logic and, much more recently, natural science have been "brought to the secure course of a science after groping about for many centuries" (B xii–xiv). In particular, natural science, "insofar as it is grounded on empirical principles," now carries with it the sense that it is on the right track, that progress has been and will continue to be made, that its methods can be relied on for gaining knowledge of nature. Or, as Nietzsche puts the same point in *BGE* 204, "science is flourishing today and has its good conscience written all over its face." Metaphysics in contrast, Kant continues, has so far been unable "to enter upon the secure course of a science."

For in it reason continually gets stuck, even when it claims a priori insight (as it pretends) into those laws confirmed by the commonest experience. In metaphysics we have to retrace our path countless times, because we find that it does not lead where we want to go, and it is so far from reaching unanimity

in the assertions of its adherents that it is rather a battlefield, and indeed one that appears to be especially determined for testing one's powers in mock combat; on this battlefield no combatant has ever gained the least bit of ground, nor has any been able to base any lasting possession on his victory. Hence there is no doubt that up to now the procedure of metaphysics has been a mere groping, and what is the worst, a groping among mere concepts. (B xiv–xv).

The situation of metaphysics as Kant presents it here is similar to the view of philosophy held by the “young natural scientists” Nietzsche cites in *BGE* 204, who see “nothing in philosophy but a series of refuted systems and a wasteful effort that ‘does nobody any good.’” And Kant's metaphors for describing this situation in his second-edition preface are in one respect now closer to Nietzsche's preface, insofar as his focus is no longer on the queen but on the inept combat among her suitors.

Once we recognize that Nietzsche is using “dogmatism” as Kant did, the first theme of his preface seems to be simply a more brilliantly stated variation on Kant's theme concerning the current situation of philosophy, namely, that its original hopes have gone unfulfilled because metaphysics, the highest of the philosophical disciplines, shows no signs of being able to reach its goal of gaining truth. The other main themes of Nietzsche's preface are also variations on Kant's – first, on Kant's diagnosis of what went wrong with metaphysics and, second, on his hopes for the future of philosophy. Before considering them, however, we will consider whether Nietzsche actually does use “dogmatism” in the same way Kant did, and offer a more careful account of the Kantian meaning of this term.

1.2 KANT AND SPIR ON DOGMATISM

It is usually assumed that Nietzsche includes among dogmatists a much larger group than pre-Kantian metaphysicians. According to Nehamas's influential discussion, a dogmatic commitment is simply a commitment to the truth of a view. Nehamas (1985: 33) appears to deny this: “Nietzsche's opposition to dogmatism does not consist in the paradoxical idea that it is wrong to think that one's beliefs are true, but only in the view that one's beliefs are not, and need not be, true for everyone.” Although this seems to entail that one can assert the truth of a belief without being a dogmatist if one avoids implying that it is true for everyone, the problem is that, as Nehamas later makes clear, it is impossible to avoid so implying.

[I]nterpretation, simply by virtue of being offered, is inevitably offered in the conviction that it is true. But then, despite any assurances to the contrary, it is

presented as a view which everyone must accept on account of its being true. [Therefore] every effort to present a view, no matter how explicitly its interpretive nature is admitted, makes an inescapable dogmatic commitment. The point is not that the faith in truth is not questioned enough but that a view cannot be questioned at all while it is being offered. Even a view that denies that there is such a thing as truth must be presented as true. (Nehamas 1985: 131)

According to Nehamas's reading, then, Nietzsche must count as a dogmatist anyone who puts forward a claim as true, or even puts forward the claim itself. Nehamas's reading of *BGE*, which we analyzed in the Introduction, is an attempt to show how Nietzsche can take a stand against dogmatism in this sense without being a dogmatist himself.

We argue that Nehamas misidentifies Nietzsche's "dogmatist." Because Nietzsche never defines the term or its cognates, we must decide their meaning on the basis of what makes most sense of the passages in which he uses them and of their meaning in Nietzsche's own historical context. Both textual and historical considerations tell against Nehamas's reading and suggest that Nietzsche does use the terms largely as Kant did.

Of the handful of relevant passages from his published work, *BGE*'s preface makes the most detailed claims about dogmatists and clearly provides the most substantial basis for determining how Nietzsche uses the term. But it presents the history of philosophy so far as the history of dogmatism and claims that "scoffers" now claim "that all dogmatism lies on the floor, more that all dogmatism is at its last gasp." This assertion makes little historical sense if we interpret dogmatism in Nehamas's terms, as merely a claim or commitment to the truth of a view. Nehamas's is a late twentieth-century concern (and possibly an ancient one), but it is implausible to see the history of philosophy in its terms or to suppose that Nietzsche did. And surely Nietzsche thinks it is something more specific than merely putting forward truths that have led to "such sublime and unconditional philosophers' edifices as the dogmatists have built so far." The obvious extra element that would lead to the building of "unconditional" philosophical systems is the assumption that truth can be won by a priori means, hence that it is neither conditioned nor challengeable by empirical evidence. The point of Nietzsche's opening jab at dogmatists as clumsy and failed lovers is that they have failed to win truth because they were clueless as to how to go about it – that their methods were faulty, not that there is something problematic about pursuing it. *Beyond Good and Evil*'s preface therefore makes more sense

if Nietzsche's dogmatist is a metaphysician, an a priori system builder in the pre-Kantian mode.²

A second reason for taking Nietzsche to be using "dogmatist" in the Kantian sense is that this is how the term was used by the contemporary philosophers whom Nietzsche was studying while he was writing *Beyond Good and Evil*. This group includes Afrikan Spir above all, but also Gustav Teichmüller and others. We deal with Spir and his relationship to Kant in some detail here because Spir exerted great influence on *Beyond Good and Evil* and his work is almost unknown among readers of the book. It is clear from his notebooks that Nietzsche was rereading and taking notes on Spir's *Denken und Wirklichkeit* while he was writing *Beyond Good and Evil* (Green 2002; Clark 2005), so much so that *BGE* might be read as a dialogue with Spir. Evidence for this suggestion can come only from an analysis of specific passages, but for now the point is to provide enough background on Spir and Kant to establish the sense of "dogmatist" that Nietzsche was likely to be taking for granted.

Here are the opening lines of Spir's two-volume work:

Since Kant the distinction between the dogmatic and the critical bent in philosophy has become familiar to all. The dogmatist wants to make decisions about the objects of cognition without first investigating the faculty of cognition itself and establishing its nature, laws, and limits. In contrast critical philosophy makes this latter investigation into the first and primary problem.

² We concede that there is one passage that does seem to support Nehamas's reading, and that it is the only other passage in *BGE* that mentions the dogmatist by name. In *BGE* 43, Nietzsche asks whether "these coming philosophers" are "new truths of 'truth.'" He answers: "That is probable enough, for all philosophers so far have loved their truths, but they will certainly not be dogmatists. It must offend their pride, also their taste, if their truth is supposed to be a truth for everyman – which has so far been the secret wish and hidden meaning of all dogmatic aspirations. 'My judgment is my judgment'; no one else is easily entitled to it – that is what such a philosopher of the future may perhaps say of himself." This passage does seem to support Nehamas's reading. However, given the weighty evidence we have for our Kantian reading of Nietzsche's use of "dogmatism," it seems incumbent on readers to seek an alternative interpretation of *BGE* 43. Here is our suggestion. As we argue in [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#), Nietzsche believes that philosophy is always guided by the will to value, so that what philosophers have called "truth" has usually been their values masquerading as truths. Dogmatists are those who have tried to defend their values as truths by appealing to the possibility of a priori knowledge. The upshot was that they argued in effect that everyone should accept their values. *BGE* 43 can be interpreted as fully in accord with our interpretation if we take its claim to be that philosophers of the future will not use the dogmatists' method for defending their values, namely, the appeal to the possibility of a priori knowledge, and that they will not share the dogmatists' aspiration to have their values accepted by everyone. But there is no reason to suppose that they depart from the dogmatists' aspiration by denying the objectivity of values.

One must of course observe that dogmatism is actually met with only in those doctrines which attempt to go beyond the limits of experience. For it could never occur to either Kant or any other reasonable person to demand that one not begin empirical research until the doctrine of cognition received definitive confirmation. Otherwise we would still have no science, for the theory of cognition is very far from its definitive establishment and form. There is dogmatism only in metaphysics. (Spir 1877 I: 1)

Thus for Spir, and contrary to Nehamas's usage, affirming the truth of empirical claims does not make one a dogmatist. Dogmatism goes with metaphysics, with "doctrines that attempt to go beyond the limits of experience," and not with empirical science. Given the impact of Spir's work on *Beyond Good and Evil*, it would be very surprising if Nietzsche began the book by using "dogmatist" in a way that differed greatly from Spir's usage – at least not without some indication. And in view of the similarities between Nietzsche's preface and Kant's preface to the first *Critique*, it seems highly unlikely that he did so. Consider as further historical evidence Spir's comment about metaphysicians a few pages later:

I must confess that I take the metaphysical approach to philosophy to be a kind of mental illness, which is not to be set aside through arguments. For what can arguments accomplish with people who see quite well how in all branches of science real knowledge is gained and in spite of this believe in all seriousness that even an atom of knowledge could be won on the path trodden by metaphysicians? (Spir 1877 I: 4)

Given that Spir uses "dogmatist" and "metaphysician" interchangeably, this Nietzsche-like shot at metaphysicians, followed by a reference to the "fundamental groundlessness and unscientific character of metaphysical philosophizing," makes Spir an example of the "scoffers" portrayed in Nietzsche's preface who claim "that all dogmatism lies on the ground, even more, that all dogmatism is in its last throes." It is difficult to imagine what scoffers Nietzsche could have had in mind given Nehamas's interpretation.

To be accurate, however, it is necessary to make clear that Spir's usage, which we take Nietzsche to be following, does diverge slightly from Kant's, for Kant would deny that "dogmatist" and "metaphysician" have the same extension. Drawing a distinction between dogmatism and the use of dogmatic procedures in philosophy, Kant explains that his own philosophy rejects dogmatism but is not

opposed to the *dogmatic procedure* of reason in its pure cognition as science (for science must always be dogmatic, i.e., it must prove its conclusions strictly *a priori* from secure principles); it is opposed only to dogmatism, i.e., to the presumption of getting on solely with pure cognition from (philosophical) concepts according to principles, which reason has been using for a long time without first inquiring in what way and by what right it has obtained them. Dogmatism is therefore the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, without an *antecedent critique of its own capacity*. (B xxxv)

“Dogmatic” procedures are thus completely *a priori* methods as opposed to empirical ones. “Dogmatism” is Kant’s name for those philosophical systems that *uncritically* assume the capacity of pure reason – reason insofar as it operates without reliance on information gained from the senses – to gain substantive knowledge of reality. Dogmatists thus assume the possibility of knowing objects that lie beyond the limits of experience.

Kant believes that all of the great metaphysical systems proceeded on this assumption and that it is precisely the failure to question it that has prevented metaphysics from being put on the secure path of science. So dogmatism and metaphysics need not go together for Kant. Dogmatism is uncritical confidence in the ability of a reason to know objects *a priori*. Metaphysics is the body of purported *a priori* knowledge of objects. So if the question concerning the capacity of pure reason – that is, of dogmatic or *a priori* procedures – to yield truths about objects can be raised and answered *before* embarking on metaphysics itself, the possibility of a non-dogmatic or critical metaphysics could be established thereby.

This is exactly what Kant takes himself to have done. Kant’s central question concerning the *possibility* of synthetic judgments *a priori* is the question as to how dogmatic procedures can justify claims that are meant to provide us with substantive truths about objects. Our input from objects is by means of sense experience. How then can we justify claims about objects *a priori*, apart from any such input? Dogmatists are those who do not see the problem here and therefore offer no solution. And because they do not see the problem, they see no problem with claiming knowledge of objects that lie beyond experience, say, the existence of God.

Kant’s own solution to the problem involves his famous “Copernican turn”: we can know substantive truths about objects independently of any input from them because we can know *a priori* the necessary conditions under which something can be an object of experience for us. So substantive *a priori* knowledge of objects is possible, but at a certain cost, namely, that it tells us only what objects must be like to be possible objects of empirical knowledge. Contrary to what the dogmatists assumed, it

cannot tell us what things are like in themselves, apart from that experience, and it certainly cannot tell us anything about objects that lie beyond all experience. Kant's critical philosophy thus affirms the capacity of reason insofar as it proceeds dogmatically to justify substantive philosophical claims (e.g., every event has a cause), as long as these claims concern only appearances or possible objects of experience and not things in themselves. In thus affirming the possibility of proceeding dogmatically in philosophy without falling into dogmatism, it affirms the possibility of a critical or nondogmatic metaphysics.

Kant, then, understands dogmatic methods in opposition to empirical ones, whereas he understands dogmatism in contrast to critical philosophy. Returning now to Afrikan Spir's *Thought and Reality*, we find that, like Kant, Spir (I: 4) rejects dogmatism and embraces criticism, which he proclaims "the only correct and scientific" orientation in philosophy. Unlike Kant, however, Spir (I: 1–2) thinks that dogmatism and metaphysics go together, and he therefore takes "the distinction between the dogmatic and the critical bent in philosophy" to be equivalent to that between metaphysical and critical philosophy. This can only be because Spir rejects Kant's claim concerning the possibility of a critical metaphysics, which, as we will see, is precisely what he does.

The other relevant difference between Kant and Spir is that Spir classifies empiricists, those who "admit and recognize no source of knowledge other than experience," as critical philosophers because they too engage in a critique of pure reason, questioning the capacity of dogmatic methods to achieve substantive truth. Because empiricists conclude that dogmatic methods always fail, Kant excludes them from the circle of critical philosophers and calls them "skeptics." But this just shows which side Kant is on – the side of those who believe that dogmatic methods do yield substantive truths concerning objects, if only concerning objects of experience. It does not show that empiricism is without the very same characteristic that raises critical philosophy above dogmatism. Spir is actually on Kant's side against empiricism, insisting that there is a non-empirical source of knowledge. He can nevertheless reject the possibility of metaphysics, even of the critical variety, because even though he takes the a priori aspect to be necessary for any knowledge at all, he not only denies that it provides knowledge of objects that transcend experience (in agreement with Kant) but also insists that it actually falsifies empirical objects. There is reason to think that this unusual position is the main source of Nietzsche's falsification thesis, the claim that knowledge always

falsifies reality, which, as we discuss in [Chapter 2](#), plays a major role in *BGE* (Green 2002; Clark 2005).

Despite his disagreement with them, Spir has high praise for the British practitioners of empiricism “whose founding principles they have developed and defended with a carefulness, acuteness, and scientific seriousness that deserve the highest recognition.” Although it depends on mistaken presuppositions, he sees it as a doctrine that should attract many “conscientious and acute thinkers.” “Indeed, one may say that so long as the doctrine of the a priori elements and conditions of knowledge has not been established on a scientific basis, empiricism is actually the single correct presupposition” (Spir 1877 I: 7). As we argue in the next chapter, Nietzsche rejects both Kant’s attempt at a critical metaphysics and the basis for Spir’s claim to have established the “a priori elements and conditions of knowledge.” If he accepted the rest of Spir’s account of these issues, as we think he did, it appears he would be left with empiricism as the only serious alternative to dogmatism so far, the only truly “critical” philosophy.

We conclude, then, that Nietzsche almost certainly used “dogmatist” and “metaphysician” interchangeably. Of course, the terms have different meanings for him. One is a dogmatist in virtue of one’s attitude toward knowledge, a metaphysician in virtue of the claims one takes to be true. Yet the terms pick out the same group of philosophers. Further, as we have just suggested, it seems likely that Nietzsche’s contrast group for dogmatists is empiricists. Kant views the history of philosophy, as we have shown, as a struggle between dogmatists and skeptics or empiricists. As we look at the other themes of Nietzsche’s preface, we hope to make it plausible that Nietzsche saw the history of philosophy in the same way.

1.3 SECOND THEME: DIAGNOSIS OF DOGMATISM’S FAILURE

Nietzsche begins his second theme on a serious note, although his first statement of it seems relatively light: “Speaking seriously, there are good grounds for hoping that however solemn, decisive, and final-sounding its airs, all dogmatizing in philosophy was just a noble child-likeness and beginneritis [*Anfängerie*].” Nietzsche thus introduces his variation on Kant’s diagnosis of the failure of dogmatic metaphysics. Although both philosophers reject dogmatism, neither philosopher simply dismisses it. Both want its promise to be fulfilled, and in this sense Nietzsche differs from the “scoffers” like Spir. Both Kant and Nietzsche therefore stake the

future of philosophy on a diagnosis of dogmatism's failure. However, they offer very different diagnoses. Kant considers the dogmatist's arguments a necessary and necessarily unsuccessful attempt to answer questions that arise from the nature of reason itself, until a critique of pure reason is undertaken and "the point at which reason has misunderstood itself" is discovered (A xi–xii). Nietzsche only hints at his diagnosis in the preface, but what he says makes perfectly clear that he rejects Kant's. This is implied by his claim concerning just how *little* it took

to furnish the foundation-stone for such sublime and unconditional philosophical edifices as the dogmatists used to build – some popular superstition from time immemorial (like the soul-superstition which has not ceased to cause trouble even today as the subject- and ego-superstition), perhaps some play on words, a grammatical seduction, or an audacious generalization on the basis of very narrow, very personal, very human, all too human facts. (*BGE P*)

In contrast to Kant, then, Nietzsche would seem to think that the dogmatist's systems were based on bad arguments that have nothing to do with the nature of reason. We will see more about what he thinks of their arguments in [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#).

But there is a second side to Nietzsche's attitude toward dogmatism. Although he dismisses its arguments in much harsher terms than does Kant, his hope that dogmatic metaphysics was simply an early stage of philosophy is expressed in even stronger terms.

The dogmatists' philosophy was, let us hope, only a promise across the millennia: as astrology was in an earlier age when perhaps more work, money, acuteness, and patience was lavished in its service than for any real science so far: we owe the grand style of architecture in Asia and Egypt to astrology and its "super-terrestrial" claims. (*BGE P*; cf. *GS* 300)

This is a variation on Kant's suggested comparison of dogmatic metaphysics to alchemy. After claiming that he has resolved "to reason's full satisfaction" the questions that led to dogmatic metaphysics, Kant adds that "the answer to these questions has not turned out just as dogmatically enthusiastic lust for knowledge might have wished; for the latter could not be satisfied except through magical powers in which I am not expert" (A xiii).³ Kant's formulation can also be compared to an important theme of *Beyond Good and Evil*, which is at best hinted at in its preface: the importance of the personal and "desiring" or lustful aspects of human life and

³ The verb here is the same one Nietzsche uses to mock dogmatic philosophers as inexperienced about females.

thought, and the impossibility of the highest forms of either life or thought without them. His reference to “lust for knowledge” that could be satisfied only by magical powers suggests that he recognizes the admixture of this “lower” element in dogmatic philosophy and views it as precisely the element that cannot be satisfied by a suitably “disciplined” philosophy – only the impersonal aspect is deserving of esteem and satisfaction.⁴ For Kant, philosophers must give up what they originally wanted in order to obtain the satisfaction of which philosophy is capable.

Like Kant, Nietzsche suggests that the kind of knowledge desired by dogmatic metaphysics would be of a “superterrestrial” or nonnatural kind, in any case, one that is impossible for human beings. However, as our later chapters suggest, his diagnosis of why philosophy wanted that kind of knowledge is such that he will be able to claim that it can be satisfied. Desire must be refined, but its original object need not be given up. For the present, however, we can see only that even though his view of its initial upshot is more negative than Kant’s, Nietzsche presents the desire behind dogmatic philosophy in more positive terms than does Kant, as the inspiration for something great.

In order to inscribe themselves in the hearts of humanity with eternal demands, it seems that all great things must first wander the earth as monstrous and fear-inspiring caricatures [Hollingdale: “grotesques”]: dogmatic philosophy was such a caricature, the Vedanta doctrine in Asia, Platonism in Europe. (*BGEP*)

This restates Nietzsche’s second theme, both the positive and negative sides of his attitude toward dogmatism, in much stronger terms. Yes, there was something noble in dogmatism, and it was a necessary stage of philosophy, just as childhood is necessary for adulthood. Its solemn and dogmatic pretensions were, however, not just child’s play but a “monstrous and fear-inspiring caricature” of philosophy itself. It has nevertheless managed to inscribe “eternal demands” in the human heart. What are these demands? Nietzsche does not tell us in the preface – or for that matter, at least explicitly, anywhere in the book itself. But this is a crucial question to have in mind while reading *Beyond Good and Evil*. In any case, if these demands are eternal, they have not and cannot disappear. Of course, if they are really eternal, they could not have been “inscribed”

⁴ Consider, in this regard, the motto Kant added to the second edition: “Of our own person we will say nothing. But as to the subject matter with which we are concerned, we ask that men think of it not as an opinion but as a work; and consider it erected not for any sect of ours, or for our good pleasure, but as the foundation of human utility and dignity” (B ii).

in the human heart, by dogmatic philosophy or anyone else. So we must assume that Nietzsche is not using the term quite literally. At the very least, however, we can take his use of "eternal" in this context to indicate that he does not want these demands to disappear but thinks that any philosophy worth its heritage will fulfill or further them.

The preface does at least give us a direction in which to look for an understanding of these demands when it goes on to offer its only examples of dogmatic philosophical doctrines: "Plato's invention of the pure spirit and the good in itself," presumably, Plato's claims about the Form of the Good and about reason as an independent part of the soul suited to know the Form of the Good.⁵ We return to these doctrines in [Chapter 6](#) but note here simply that Nietzsche certainly does not need a wider sense of "dogmatism" than Kant's and Spir's to consider these Platonic doctrines instances of dogmatism.⁶

1.4 THIRD THEME: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE OF PHILOSOPHY

The positive or hopeful aspects of the second theme are given further specification as Nietzsche's preface moves into its third major theme. Now that the error of Platonism "is overcome, now that Europe is breathing freely again after this nightmare and can at least enjoy a healthier – sleep, we *whose task is wakefulness itself*, are the heirs of all that strength which has been fostered by the fight against this error." There is much to figure out about this: who "we" are, what our "task" is, how and by whom Platonism was fought and overcome, and how to understand the "strength" inherited from this fight. The preface provides little help with these

⁵ Note, however, that he does not exactly call Plato a dogmatist but merely calls his two inventions a "dogmatist's error." This implies that anyone who actually accepted "Plato's invention" as the truth would count as a dogmatist but seems to leave open the possibility that Plato himself did not. That possibility may seem closed off, however, by the question a few lines later: "How could the most beautiful growth of antiquity, Plato, contract such a disease?"

⁶ Nietzsche tells us several things about Plato's "invention." First, it is the "the worse, the most durable, and most dangerous of all errors." Second, it involved "standing truth on her head and denying perspective itself, the basic condition of all life." Third, it has now been overcome. But these points raise more questions than they answer. One might think they show Nehamas to be correct to take perspectivism, the affirmation of perspective, as Nietzsche's alternative to dogmatism. We would grant that but point out that the preface leaves completely open how to interpret perspectivism: for instance, as a doctrine concerning the nature of truth and value, as Nehamas and Horstmann interpret it, or as an epistemological doctrine, as we will take it.

matters. And then there is the pause, represented by the dash, between “healthier” and “sleep.” What is it designed to do? First, the dash suggests that what comes after it is not what we might have expected. We might, for instance, have expected that the fight against dogmatism would make possible a healthier life. This fits with Nietzsche’s view of the connection between dogmatism and the ascetic ideal, to which we return in later chapters. Second, it seems to be a joking reference to Kant’s famous claim about Hume awakening him from his “dogmatic slumber,” to which Nietzsche alludes more directly in *BGE* 209. Putting the two together, we have the suggestion that it is not enough for philosophy to get over dogmatism; it must overcome both its dogmatism and its *slumber*. What this involves is developed in terms of a new set of metaphors:

But the fight against Plato or, to speak more clearly and “for the people,” the fight against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia – for Christianity is Platonism for “the people” – has created in Europe a magnificent tension of the spirit the like of which had never yet existed on earth: with so tense a bow we can now shoot for the most distant goals. (*BGE P*)

Here Nietzsche presents the task of those “whose task is wakefulness itself” as that of using the tension created by the fight against Platonism. He evidently thinks that the future of philosophy depends on maintaining the tension in question until it can be productive (until the arrow can be shot). But what exactly is this “magnificent tension of the spirit”? Nietzsche’s preface does nothing to explain it. As we have said, this is one of those metaphors that we are expected to figure out for ourselves, on the basis of what Nietzsche tells us in the rest of the book. According to our hypothesis, Nietzsche’s book is designed to give us what we need to fill in the gaps left by the preface, but only *if we know what we are looking for*. To recognize the “magnificent tension of the spirit” when we meet it in the book, we must have an idea of what we are looking for. Nehamas and Horstmann do not even mention this “magnificent tension.” Lampert does mention it, repeatedly in fact, and also mentions various sources for the image of the tense bow; yet he leaves the idea extremely vague. Further, he overlooks the most helpful source for understanding why Nietzsche employs the image of the tense bow, which is Plato’s *Republic*, where Socrates uses it in a crucial argument to establish that there are different parts of the soul.

As we argue in [Chapter 6](#), Plato’s theory of the soul is central to what Nietzsche is up to in *Beyond Good and Evil*. But even in the preface, as we have seen, he tells us that “Plato’s invention of the pure spirit and the

good as such” is a “dogmatist’s error” and the “worst, most durable, and most dangerous of all errors.” So when he identifies the fight against dogmatism with the “fight against Plato” in the passage quoted earlier, he is referring in particular to the fight against Plato’s “dogmatist’s error.” Part of this error (and the most important one, because the other part depends on it) is precisely the theory of the soul that gives reason an independent and ruling role in it, thus conceiving of it as “the pure spirit.” Nietzsche begins to offer an alternative vision of the parts of the soul in the middle section of *BGE* One. For present purposes, however, the most important point is Socrates’ observation that “it is wrong to say of the archer that his hands at the same time push the bow away and draw it towards him. We ought to say that one hand pushes it away and the other draws it towards him” (*Republic* 439b–c). This gives us an image of what is required for a tense bow – namely, two different forces moving in opposite directions. It is helpful to think of Nietzsche’s “magnificent tension of the spirit” as likewise the product of opposing tendencies of different parts or aspects of the philosopher’s soul, the part that pushes dogmatism away and the part that draws it back toward the philosopher.⁷ This does not get us very far toward understanding the nature of the tension, however, because we still know very little about the two opposing forces that produce it. What is it in the philosopher that pushes dogmatism away? And what is it that pulls it back? Presumably the latter has to do with the “eternal demands” that dogmatism has inscribed in the human heart. We have not been given any idea of what these are. But at least we know that this is what we should be looking for in the work itself.

As the preface moves to its conclusion, tension is briefly developed regarding the tension itself, which is evidently not an unmitigated good.

The European feels this tension as a state of distress, to be sure; and there have already been two grand attempts to relax the bow, once by means of Jesuitism, the second time by means of the democratic Enlightenment – which, with the help of freedom of the press and newspaper reading might in fact bring it about that the spirit no longer so easily felt itself as a “need.” (*BGE* P)

⁷ Perhaps the preface is designed to exhibit something of this tension precisely by repeatedly pushing dogmatism away as, for instance, a “monstrous and frightening caricature” or as involving “the worst, most durable, and most dangerous of all errors,” and then pulling it back as something that has inscribed itself “in the hearts of humanity with eternal demands” and to which we should not be “ungrateful.”

The suggestion here is that the democratic Enlightenment and Jesuitism each tried to collapse the tension of the bow by doing away with one of the directions or forces creating it. This makes sense of Nietzsche's suggestion that the victory against dogmatism may simply leave philosophers with a healthier "sleep." Nietzsche's objection is presumably not to collapsing the tension between the two forces, as long as the arrow is actually shot, but only to keeping the arrow from being shot by disabling the bow, that is, by undermining one of the movements necessary for the tension. This suggests that to understand the "magnificent tension of the spirit," we must locate two forces, each of which is such that it is plausible to think of either the democratic Enlightenment or Jesuitism as working against it.

Despite the possibility of such opposition, the preface ends on a strong and hopeful note:

But we who are neither Jesuits nor democrats, nor even sufficiently German, we *good Europeans* and free, *very* free spirits – we have it still, the whole need of the spirit and the whole tension of its bow! And perhaps also the arrow, the task, and who knows, the goal.

By making clear that the tense bow belongs to the spirit or mind (*Geist*), this ending emphasizes that it is the spirit – by which Nietzsche elsewhere clearly means thought or consciousness – that embodies the "magnificent tension" to which he calls our attention, a tension that is generated, we have suggested, by two opposing forces. It also gives us a crucial characterization of the "we" who exemplify that tension of the spirit: "we *good Europeans* and free, *very* free, spirits." We have good reason to think that Nietzsche identifies the philosophy of his middle-period works with that of the "free spirit."⁸ For the back cover of the first edition of *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche wrote the following advertisement: "With this book we arrive at the conclusion of a series of writings by FRIEDRICK NIETZSCHE whose common goal is to erect *a new image and ideal of the free spirit*." He then listed the books belonging to the series: *Human, All-Too-Human* and its various additions, *Daybreak*, and *The Gay Science* (Schaberg 1995: 85–86). Read in light of this, the suggestion at the end of the preface is that it is the philosophy of Nietzsche's own middle-period works that

⁸ As well as that of the Good European, which it seems unlikely Nietzsche is using in a specifically political sense (i.e., having to do with hopes for the political unification of Europe). A good European in a nonpolitical sense would be one who is devoted to the Enlightenment values that made Europe "Europe." Think of the dedication of the first volume of *HA* to the memory of Voltaire.

exemplifies the “magnificent tension” that he hopes will generate the future of philosophy.

To sum up, the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* sounds three major and interconnected themes concerning the past, present, and future of philosophy. The history of philosophy is the story of dogmatism and the struggle against it by those skeptical of its claim to know reality by a priori means. Dogmatism is now in its last throes, and its most important dogmas have been overcome, namely, “Plato’s invention of the pure spirit and the good as such.” We may nevertheless entertain hope for the future of philosophy if we can understand why dogmatism failed and what the current situation of philosophy is. That situation is that the fight against Plato has resulted in “a magnificent tension of the spirit,” which is embodied in the philosophy of “we good Europeans and free, very free spirits” and which makes it possible “to shoot for the most distant goals.” The future of philosophy evidently depends on refusing to collapse this tension, on preserving and perhaps enhancing it so that it can be productive.

Now all of this raises more questions than it answers. But at least it lets us know what we should be looking for in the text. To understand Nietzsche’s aspirations for the future of philosophy, three questions stand out as particularly important. First, what is his diagnosis of the failure of dogmatic philosophy or metaphysics? Second, what are the “eternal demands” planted in the human soul by dogmatic metaphysics? Third, and the main focus of our attention, what exactly is the “magnificent tension of the spirit” that characterizes the present situation of philosophy and is the key to its future? Although Nietzsche never gives us a direct answer to any of these questions, we argue that he gives us the resources to figure out his answers in *BGE* One, which he then fills out in the rest of the book.