

INTRODUCTION

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE DISCOVERED Ralph Waldo Emerson in the 1860s, as a schoolboy immersed in the committed scholarly environment of his boarding school, Schulpforta. Introduced to Emerson's essays by a friend, Carl von Gersdorff, Nietzsche became an immediate and, as it turned out, lifelong enthusiast of the American's work. Nietzsche quickly discovered his crucial philosophical affinity with Emerson: a dream of individual power set against what Emerson called conformity, the common or official beliefs that surround us. Both Emerson and Nietzsche insist on the individual's free, searching evaluation of culture. They assume as a starting point that both cultures and individuals are not-yet-achieved entities. For both these writers, the self can be startled into action, into the labor and joy of critical power, by its meeting with an unexplained impulse. This impulse, or sharp presence, is the self's desire to be transformed and to be fully created for the first time.

Among the other concerns Emerson and Nietzsche shared are the wish to be perfected and to be guided by the allure of the exemplary (Emerson's central or representative man, Nietzsche's *Übermensch*); the paradoxical connection between necessity, or fate, and freedom; the need to take the measure of the demystifying habits of a skeptical modernity, in order to pass beyond demystification; the role of mood, and more generally of the transitory and ephemeral, in our collective and individual lives; the importance of provocation as a means of instruction; the decisive potency of the oblique, unconscious, and random; the sense of life as an illusion, at once isolating the individual and interweaving him with the cosmos; and the importance of living both dangerously and cheerfully. Nietzsche's *Heiterkeit*, or joyousness, like Emerson's abrasive geniality, aims to transform tragedy into comedy, a goal that will occupy much of my attention in this book.

To speak more broadly, Emerson and Nietzsche are both, as Dilthey named them, philosophers of culture. They are critics of the unthoughtful busyness and philistinism that obstruct genuine thought. They detect a potential opposition between life-serving and merely

sterile or unuseful knowledge. Their vitalism, which emphasizes the development of an instinctive or spontaneous moral life rather than one imposed from without, bases itself on a spiritual sympathy between human and cosmic *viriditas*, or growth-force. This sympathy takes, in their work, an experimental or risky and, at the same time, a necessary form.¹

Both Emerson and Nietzsche challenge us to become who we are, to undertake the task of identity on our own. But in Nietzsche, unlike Emerson, identity remains (at times promisingly, at times maddeningly) subject to the other person who, we hope, might unlock the mystery of the self for us. This other person takes on different forms in Nietzsche's work: true reader, neighbor, father, sister, beloved, friend, and foster-father Wagner. The relation to the other involves Nietzsche in the problem of asceticism; Emerson, by contrast, remains a stranger to the ascetic impulse.

George Stack has addressed the resemblance between Nietzsche and Emerson in his *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity*. In this book, I follow in particular Stack's important remark that Nietzsche "inherited the problem of Fate" from Emerson.² But I depart from Stack's inclination to assimilate Emerson and Nietzsche instead of tracing the differences between them. For example, he sees Nietzsche's will to power as "a creative tendency towards form, expression, and life" analogous to Emerson's term "power."³ Surely this is partly right, but Nietzsche's understanding of the will to power also includes a reflection on the ascetic impulse, and the human perversity and self-destructiveness that asceticism entails. This Nietzschean meditation on the ascetic's dangerous allure remains foreign to Emerson.

Stack's comment that "Nietzsche expands, develops, and dramatizes insights that Emerson presents in an almost casual way" is representative of his sense that the two thinkers' "doctrines and themes" are "overlapping."⁴ In contrast to Stack's emphasis, I wish to outline a dynamic relation in which Nietzsche struggles with Emerson's influence and example in order to develop his own path.

In this book, I understand Nietzsche in part through Jacques Lacan's reading of Freud, because Lacan places fundamental emphasis on the self's subjection to the other. For Lacan, the self is a hermeneutic puzzle or labyrinth whose contours can only be discovered truly if we recognize the (impossible) demand we place on the other: that he reveal us to ourselves.

Lacan explores the fascination we feel for the other, as beloved or master, in dual terms. The other, Lacan explains, is both a figure that promises to unlock and explain the secrets of the self (the big Other) and an independent mystery that cannot be seen into, a *cynosure* for our sense of the obscurity of desire (the other as *objet petit a*, or object *a* as I will translate it in this book). (I supply a broad definition of the object *a* near the beginning of chapter 2.)

Emerson is not, as he has often been accused of being, tone-deaf to such entanglements. Rather, he is from the start free of the temptation to see the connection between self and other as Nietzsche does (and as Lacan will), as a mutually implicating puzzle or detective story. Emerson believes in a Gnostic self capable of communion with other selves. For him, illuminated moments of power or self-reliance authenticate us, even in our aloneness, with a clarity that shines through our meetings with others. Even when these encounters are warring ones, they still bear witness to a hermeneutic peace.

This is not to suggest that the Emersonian *pneuma* or spark offers itself as definitive, revolutionary liberation from a fallen state of things, as in authentic Gnosticism. Emerson asserts the innocence of the world against the accusations of its guilt and fallenness that the Gnostics share with normative Christianity—and with Schopenhauer.⁵ If an idea of fallenness can be ascribed to Emerson, the fall would be our characteristic habit of lapsing into inertia and unthinking, rather than our wickedness.

Yet the Christian (or Gnostic, or Schopenhauerian) accusation against life elicits a profoundly sympathetic response from us, as Nietzsche explains most fully in his *Genealogy of Morals*. This response is familiarly known as asceticism. Although Nietzsche shares Emerson's urge to redeem existence from the claims of *ressentiment* that it is inherently corrupt and defective, he understands these claims more fully than Emerson can. As a result, Nietzsche lives through, as Emerson does not, the ascetic impulse that takes pleasure in ruining existence. (In chapter 5 I associate the ascetic's morbid pleasure with Lacan's notion of drive as fundamentally oriented toward repetition, and therefore toward death.)

The question of asceticism bears on Nietzsche's fear of and his attraction to transformation, to becoming other, since the ascetic aims at resisting such otherness. Asceticism wants a purity of consummation, an overthrow of whatever otherness remains within the self. The

ascetic dreams of erasing the disturbing stimulus that confronts him in the form of other persons, and of personal history itself. But the ascetic also wants to be other, to be elsewhere (Nietzsche's definition of asceticism in the *Genealogy of Morals*). For Emerson, unlike Nietzsche, this otherness takes a stabilizing, harmonious form; it is an influx rather than an escape. In a passage selected by Harold Bloom to illustrate the essence of the Emersonian illumination, Emerson writes in his notebooks, "Were you ever instructed by a wise and eloquent man? Remember then, were not the words that made your blood run to your cheeks, that made you tremble or delighted you, — did they not sound to you as old as yourself? . . . It is God in you that responds to God without, or affirms his own words trembling on the lips of another."⁶ This passage, I suggest, sums up Emerson's view of the relation between self and other. In our strong moments, we have no need and no desire to defend the self against its impulse to identify with the other, for this impulse simply marks the basic, shared character of illumination: "It is God in you that responds to God without." (Emerson's worries about influence, about yielding too much to a powerful other, address a weak self, one captive to illusions of its insufficiency; that weakness, he argues, can be shed.) For Nietzsche, by contrast, the urge to identify, which is also a theatrical impulse to wear the mask, to speak through an assumed persona, threatens our balance, because it implies a serious escapism: a deeply creative, but also potentially dangerous, and even corrupt, wish to be other and elsewhere. Nietzschean individualism involves both experimental *Maskenfreiheit* (the freedom of the mask), a living out of variant possibilities for the self, and the necessary reaction against such freedom, the architectonic construction of a self that can be defended against fluidity.

Yet, once again, Emerson and Nietzsche share a common aspect, or view. The Nietzsche who urges experiment, the discovery of new possibilities for the self through impulsive action, owes a debt to Emerson, as does the Nietzsche who steps back and sees how these possibilities fit together within the greater, impersonal action of the will to power. For Emerson as for Nietzsche, the impersonal view from outside reduces to insignificance the differences we cannot stop feeling from the inside: between fate and freedom, between the compulsive and the creative. My argument is that Emerson in his Gnosticism integrates, as Nietzsche cannot, inside and outside, the perspective of the experimental self—dispersed and Dionysian in its nature, given to the-

atrical or musical play—and the perspective of the architectonic or Apollonian self, which can see and settle its place within a cosmos ruled by necessity.

NIETZSCHEAN PLURALISM AND JUSTICE

Those who are evil or unhappy and the exceptional human being, all these should also have their good right, their philosophy, their sunshine. What these people need is not confession, conjuring of souls, and forgiveness of sins; what is needful is a new justice. (GS #289)

In this passage from *The Gay Science*, which I will return to later in this introduction, Nietzsche calls for a “new justice” that would acknowledge the infinite variety of human individuals, each one a planetary entity swinging beyond the scope of our usual moral judgments. Nietzsche calls for an end to the morality that works by imposing our perspective, our own world’s terms, on another person’s radically different world.

Yet Nietzsche does not merely invoke a plurality of individual perspectives. He does not just ask us to recognize, as in the *Genealogy of Morals*, the alluring-yet-repulsive otherness of the blond beast or the Dostoyevskian criminal. He also argues for the separation and hierarchical positioning of perspectives. The new justice he demands is not merely a promiscuous recognition of difference. It means discernment, selection, a philosopher’s dividing of health from sickness, the future-directed from the past-obsessed, the living from the dead.

A persistent question for Nietzsche’s readers has been how to relate these two aspects: his impulse to explore and exploit otherness, to urge us to try on perspectives radically different from our own, and his drive to show that the other already inhabits us, asking to be judged or placed, as a proper part of the soul. The latter aspect is insistent in Nietzsche. Can one really become radically other to oneself? For Nietzsche, masculine and feminine, slave and master, decadent and ascendant life, secretly imply each other’s place at the heart of human identity. Even as we give ourselves over to experiment and play, we do not simply surrender to the freedom of the mask. Instead, we depend on a defining structure, the antipodes that wait to be discovered, from inside, by the philosopher-psychologist. And this structure, when seen

from outside by the philosopher-judge, can be understood as the work of the will to power.

One way of mapping the terrain of Nietzsche studies is to separate those commentators who describe a Nietzsche demanding new justice, a judgment that would overturn our customary moral valuations and engender an innovative and definitive way of seeing the world, from those who embrace a Nietzsche welcoming a plurality of worlds, each of them with its own health and happiness, its own moral sun. Broadly speaking, there are those who, like Heidegger, see Nietzsche as the purveyor of a new justice and therefore as the last metaphysician, announcing a Copernican revolution that wants to replace the old gods of reason, truth, or historical progress with the new one of will to power. Then there are those like Derrida who invoke an exfoliant and uncentered Nietzsche, the philosopher who not only welcomes difference, the variant perspectives that bring us to new worlds and new ways, but *lives through* difference, suffering these perspectives in his own person and writing. The two poles of Heidegger's and Derrida's Nietzsche suggest the division between Apollo and Dionysus, the sun-god who asserts judgment as the founding moment of a planned, built world, and the dark god of ecstasy who undergoes *sparagmos*, the tearing apart of all such structure.

Between these extremes, many interpretive paths beckon. In this book, I emphasize the polarity itself as it is enacted in Nietzsche's development: the division between an Apollonian or architectonic image of self and a Dionysian or musical one. (This dynamic, if we attend to it carefully, implies the limitation of either an exclusively Heideggerian or an exclusively Derridean reading of Nietzsche.) In the course of his writing career Nietzsche lives out the difference between Apollo and Dionysus, between a definitive and fortified self and one that gives itself over to the mask, to the role that occupies it at the moment. Nietzsche often describes this separation as that between the architect and the musician or actor, the self that builds and the self that plays.

Both the architectural and the theatrical mode, I argue, develop as responses to the fundamental Nietzschean problem of asceticism, the radical self-punishment that Nietzsche associates with the will to truth. The grounding involved in Nietzsche's architectural image, which as Heidegger writes "clears the way and decisively erects," implies a distinction between *Urtext* and interpretation, between nature and the ascetic project that works over this nature and transforms it—builds on

it, so to speak.⁷ But the theatrical metaphor involves no such discrimination of a primitive *Ur*-nature. For it, all the world's a stage—or a text, as it is for most of the French commentators in David Allison's influential anthology *The New Nietzsche* (1976). Although Jean Granier, for example, asserts that "Nietzsche himself can distinguish a text from its interpretations" and that Nietzsche's project of diagnosing his age relies on such a distinction, Granier goes on to write: "Since the interpreter and the act of interpretation are already the life of being, it is being that interprets itself within its own self-dissimulation . . . being *is* mask, it *is* phenomenon."⁸ In an account like Granier's (or Derrida's), then, the inevitable outcome of the theatrical or masking metaphor is the dissolution of the Nietzschean ambition for a critical, centered self, an ambition stated most clearly in "On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life": the striving for a sensibility grounded on a sense of historical location, as well as the fundamental law of its individual being. Granier, like Derrida, fails to emphasize that the surrender to play, to the endlessness of text, is dangerous for Nietzsche (as it is not for Emerson), and that he defends himself against the allure of the mask as often as he gives in to it.⁹

EMERSON AND NIETZSCHE VS. LIBERAL INDIVIDUALISM

I see Nietzschean individualism as a concept fractured by the division between play and ground, but all the more important because of this fracture: because it presents a more divided, and therefore more profound, sense of individualism than is present in contemporary liberal thought. Nietzsche's emphasis on the individual as contested or split derives from the thinking of Emerson, but Nietzsche sees the split as a wound in existence, which only asceticism confronts fully.

The more resilient Emerson does not suffer the Nietzschean strife between the architectonic and the musical/theatrical self, since he is not tempted by ascesis as Nietzsche is. A characteristically strong Emerson can write that, "when his mind is illuminated, when his heart is kind," a man "throws himself joyfully into the sublime order, and does, with knowledge, what the stones do by structure" (*E* 1076). This wholesome strength offers a reconciliation of impulse and poise, instinct and calculation, based on the Emersonian gospel of continuity between human work and the work of nature. According to Emerson in *The Conduct of Life*, "the art of the surgeon," like all our *tekhnai*, rests on

such sympathy. "In replacing the broken bone," it "contents itself with releasing the parts from false position; they fly into place by the action of the muscles. On this art of nature all our arts rely" (*E* 1008). By contrast, Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* suspects that there is an original brokenness or *sparagmos* in existence (which the ascetic exposes, in later Nietzsche). In the *Birth*, this brokenness can be healed or corrected only by the antithetical discipline of art, not by a natural completion like the one Emerson envisions.

The difference between the two forms of selfhood that are conflated in the *Gay Science* passage I have cited (*GS*#289), the one that wants a new justice reigning over a new world and the one that wills surrender to a multitude of worlds, bears on our contemporary situation, as does virtually everything in Nietzsche. The current ideology of multiculturalism may sound like Nietzsche when it insists on a plurality of worlds to be discovered, each to be respected and admired by the sophisticated academic (or politician, high-school teacher, etc.). But Nietzsche, like Emerson, sees an otherness within the self that the multiculturalist remains blind to. As Slavoj Žižek has recently pointed out, "Multiculturalism is a racism which empties its own position of all positive content": the multiculturalist is "the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) other particular cultures properly."¹⁰ Multiculturalist appreciation might more precisely be called a depreciation, since the "other" culture's otherness has been reduced to a commodity, rendered incapable of challenging the appreciator's own position. For the multiculturalist, consumption of a commodity, otherness, is the only possible activity. The otherness he procures for him- (or her-)self does not alter or shape his consciousness, but rather signals his own distance from culturally located identities.

Part of the problem with the current enthusiasm for multicultural studies is its definition of identity as culturally located situation. In terms of the current debate, such identity politics, as Charles Altieri notes, is difficult to coordinate with the "ideals of heterogeneity" that twentieth-century art forms have handed down to us. When Altieri describes the work of those poetic heirs of Emerson, Frank O'Hara, and Robert Creeley, for example, he conveys the pliability of a mode that is hard to combine with multiculturalist assertions that identity must be based on one's firm place in a community or culture.¹¹ In fact, as Emerson and Nietzsche teach us, the individual's place is always open, yet

to be determined, and not to be limited by public definitions of the surrounding culture.

Nietzsche's idea of discovering new worlds differs from the multiculturalist's because he assumes that we become foreign to ourselves when we encounter the foreign: otherwise no true encounter can occur. The Western feminist who visits an Indian village to raise the consciousness of her oppressed sisters must prepare to have her own consciousness shaken. The oppressed may be divided just as the liberal crusader is, between (for example) an attachment to local customs and an attention to universal human rights, so that the strict multiculturalist division in which the other represents local custom, whereas "we" bear universality, is disturbed. Each new world we travel to has a local fascination for the traveler: its own law, its own health and happiness. For Nietzsche this means that these worlds tempt us, even as they may repel us, by the sheer brave fact of their existence. The cruelty of Renaissance Italy, the barbarous severity of the laws of Manu, the savagery of the blond beast: these cultural phenomena speak for themselves, and to see them at all we must enter into them, take imaginative part in them. In our strongest moods, Nietzsche suggests, we want such participation because we want to be shaken by an otherness that, if we fully or actually assumed it, would destroy us, and maybe others too. Nietzsche's architectonic image of self, in *The Gay Science* and elsewhere, aims to ward off such destruction, even as the dispersed self depicted in *Ecce Homo* and his last letters invites it.

The problem I have outlined with multiculturalism is also the problem with liberalism's idea of the individual. Nietzsche takes otherness seriously, in a way that liberal individualism generally does not, even though liberals often share the Nietzschean (and Emersonian) goal of becoming what one is, of owning the self. J. S. Mill expresses such an impulse to self-realization when he writes in "On Liberty" that "a person whose desires and impulses are his own — are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture — is said to have a character. One whose desires and impulses are not his own, has no character, no more than a steam-engine has a character."¹² According to Mill, our desires should be modified and developed by culture, not driven by that culture in mechanical, steam-engine fashion. Mill does not want culture to animate us by force, to flow through us like steam or electricity; rather, he wants culture to lead us along into proper selfhood — to educate us (*educere*, to draw

forth). Yet Mill's idea for the educating of the self by culture relies on the model of commodity exchange, in such a way that the commodities—interesting styles of selfhood—come to appear, like all commodities, expendable and even, from a certain perspective, useless. In the following passage, from a few pages earlier on in “On Liberty,” Mill fails to illuminate our assumption of power, the attaining of achieved selfhood, because he overestimates its ease. He sees the self as a consumer of intellectual goods, a discerning blank (Zizek's “privileged empty point of universality”):

That mankind are not infallible; that their truths, for the most part, are only half-truths; that unity of opinion, unless resulting from the fullest and freest comparison of opposite opinions, is not desirable, and diversity not an evil, but a good, until mankind are much more capable than at present of recognizing all sides of the truth, are principles applicable to all men's modes of action, not less than to their opinions. As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so it is that there should be different experiments of living; that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when any one thinks fit to try them. It is desirable, in short, that *in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself*.¹³

Like Milton foreseeing the building of a temple of truth in his *Areopagitica*, but more tenderly and evasively, Mill starts from the hope for what we have not yet achieved: a situation of cognitive unanimity in which “all sides of the truth” will be recognized through “fullest and freest comparison of opposite opinions.” The individualist's opposition to social norms, the expression of our current partiality and polemical inclinations, might eventually disappear, according to this model. Once become more perfect, we might piece together our partial views into a unified whole. Until that point, individualism is the very process of comparison among “different experiments of living,” a process whose point is to make itself obsolete, since eventually truth—so we hope—will appear as union rather than contention. But in Mill's model contention (unlike Milton's war) has already, in effect, disappeared, since he posits the individual as a fully formed and assured connoisseur of difference. “The worth of different modes of life

should be proved practically,” Mill writes, “when any one thinks fit to try them.” Here practical proof of worth means plausible exchange value in the eyes of normative society, a value that can only be estimated by a prospective buyer who is already an autonomous, fully established, neutral judge, rather than an individual in the process of formation. One “thinks fit to try” a mode of life, Mill implies, because one supposes it might prove useful or profitable.

Mill’s is an utterly different notion from Nietzsche’s and Emerson’s of how and why we give style to our character. For Mill, profit can only be assessed in terms of the eventual prospect of broad social acceptance. In Mill extremes must be policed, rather than fostered as in Emerson and Nietzsche: difference is desirable “short of injury of others.” But without injury difference becomes indifferent, a fact given away by Mill’s final sentence: “It is desirable in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself.” This indifference may at first appear puzzling, since Mill’s myth of concern esteems individuality only insofar as it contributes toward a normative wholeness, adding one more piece to the collective wisdom. The seeming contradiction in Mill’s passage can only be explained if we understand that a consumerist model has covertly triumphed over the myth of common concern. The larger and more various the safe area of individual preference that does not concern others—an area whose creation is central to capitalism—the less these preferences mean, and the less value they have for our collective lives. The authority that would stand behind the individual’s decisions and endow them with what Mill calls “character,” and what Emerson calls “self-reliance,” melts away when an antagonistic or socially contestatory inclination, an impulse to challenge the social order, is replaced by the consumer’s desire for satisfaction.

In Mill’s paragraph, then, what he calls “the worth of different modes of life” is subjected to consumerist appetite. This worth becomes “alternative” in the current marketing sense of the term, a “lifestyle” designation (for pop music, clothing, and so forth) that is designed to have the widest possible appeal to a college audience. Like Apple with its “Think Different” campaign featuring the Dalai Lama and other celebrities, the music and fashion industries target with the notion of the “alternative” the exact center of their traditional demographic, while flattering it for being outside the mainstream. Individualism within late capitalism invariably designates the most customary

form of otherness with the broadest possibility of acceptance, the injunction to “let U B U” (Reebok). Obviously, wearing Reeboks rather than, say, Nikes is truly a thing indifferent, and therefore a choice in which, according to Mill, individuality should assert itself. But late capitalism seems to have exhausted individual choice of its significance, often in aggressive fashion. By endowing the choice of buying Apple rather than another computer with the symbolic weight of the Dalai Lama’s resistance to Chinese domination (which is implicitly made analogous, in the ad, to the tyranny of Microsoft), Apple deprives a truly political event of its character by analogizing it to a consumer’s decision.¹⁴

At this point it becomes necessary to ask a hard question: if the consumerist reduction of individual choice is in fact a reduction, if we can recover a more powerful version of individualism from writers like Emerson and Nietzsche, what will that power free us for? Not merely, one would hope, for an enlarged concept of personal satisfaction, so that, for example, those who prefer the experience of the Mac to that of a PC will be able to realize their preference. Rather, the result of a fully argued individualism expands the realm of the political, pointing toward an outcome that can only be measured in terms of social event rather than private satisfaction. (I discuss this question further in chapter 1.)

It is important to realize that Mill’s assumptions in the passage I have quoted are also those of contemporary liberals. The consumerist character of individual choice as it appears in Mill may be rebuked, by liberals themselves, in order to assert a more firmly communal solidarity. But both these tendencies, the consumerist and the communal, dilute the actual risk and appeal of individual desire explored in writers like Nietzsche and Emerson—and Lacan.

John Rawls provides a good example of the oscillation between individual consumption and communal responsibility in liberalism. Though Rawls underlines the idiosyncratic character of each person’s good, he also, in the interest of solidarity, optimistically emphasizes “the complementary nature of the good of individuals.” But such complementarity in fact seems reluctant to appear, which makes Rawls’s proposal on the subject appear utopian, even mildly Maoist: “There must be an agreed scheme of conduct in which the excellences and enjoyments of each are complementary to the good of all.”¹⁵ Richard Rorty, more pessimistically, celebrates the “private ironist” who makes his ideas safe by denying

their relevance to the realm of public responsibility, mere fictions for solitary delectation. Yet, often, Rorty's examples of private irony turn out to have wholesome social relevance (so that Nabokov, for example, instructs us about the damages inflicted by cruelty).¹⁶ Both Rawls and Rorty hesitate, as Mill does, between an insistence on the privacy of our preferences (their consumerist character) and an impulse to validate such preferences by suggesting that they contribute to social norms and to the education of the responsible individual.

This is no contradiction. The liberal thinker assumes that a wholesome society is a pacified one, in which the satisfied individual, by consuming ideas and experiences responsibly, provides an example for others. But the Nietzschean or Emersonian thinker argues that, in order to be responsible to the content of one's ideas, one must want to fight for them and against others, even to the extent of obliterating the line between private and public that liberalism cherishes.

Both Emerson and Nietzsche offer avenues to the combative individualism I describe. In a series of notes published posthumously in *The Will to Power* (WP #s 783–785), Nietzsche argues against the leveling pursuit of equal rights, associated with liberalism, in which the individual “instinctively posits himself as equal to all other individuals” (WP #784). Nietzsche argues for the recognition and retention of natural differences among humans, and—notoriously—even for an increased hierarchical consciousness of these differences. How can we, and why should we, follow Nietzsche in this direction, which insults our hard-won interest in human equality?

The liberal challenge to Nietzsche, as to Emerson, charges both with an unbecoming contempt for equality, and with a naturalizing of difference calculated to ensure privileges for the talented and to secure their quasi-aristocratic superiority. On this account, these two philosophers' supposed elitist disdain for liberalism's normative values implies a lack of care for impoverished or oppressed persons. This critique ought, I suggest, to look deeper into what kind of care might actually be needed, and wanted, by those we tend to treat with pitying, dehumanizing condescension. Emerson's and Nietzsche's resistance to charity has a useful counterintuitive impact, especially today. Alain Finkielkraut remarks that liberal solicitude, with its inclination toward pitying helpless victims, has today replaced ideology (which similarly substituted the masses for the individual) as the most common path of escape from what Arendt called “men in their infinite diversity”:

With ideology it was the progress of man that put an end to human beings in the plural; with solicitude, it is the species man and the anonymous tribulations of his representatives. In the age of ideology, we believed we knew everything; in the age of doing good, we want to know nothing. . . . There is just as much political conspiracy at work when we compare conflicts between men to natural cataclysms as there is when we liken the hope for universal freedom to a total march forward.¹⁷

Emerson and Nietzsche make a strong case against this aspect of liberal values, against the solicitude for the faceless, unfortunate ones that Finkelkraut criticizes. Liberalism wills a vision of the human condition as commonness in order to argue for certain rights shared by all humans: nourishment, housing, freedom from violence. But the importance of these rights does not help us to define what matters about individuals, who need to rely on them in order to survive but who cannot be made identical to, reduced to, this need. Emerson and Nietzsche interrogate the motives of the liberal benefactor, asking why he wants to assert the equivalence of persons rather than their distinction. Liberalism must always be more interested in the anonymous ones, the neighbors or strangers who share a basic humanness with us, than in the privileged person who matters immensely, the friend or beloved. The fact that this person's specialness cannot be translated into the terms provided by relatively crude social criteria like superior talent, goodness, or intelligence shows not that our preferences are unjustifiable, but only that they cannot be justified by using society's heavy normative scales of respectability or usefulness. Emerson and Nietzsche challenge liberalism by calling our true interest in other persons, whether neighbor, friend or stranger, a form of privilege: a decision to give them our attention, to make them creatures to be recognized and judged. In doing so, Emerson and Nietzsche defend a way of responding to the other that, they argue, offers her more respect than the liberal's automatic declaration of rights to food, shelter, and freedom from oppression, a declaration that remains indifferent to the actual identity of its addressee.

The contrast between a weak liberal sense of the individual and the strong individualism shared by Emerson and Nietzsche animates this entire book. I am not suggesting that liberalism's concern with the individual as an abstraction, a simple bearer of rights, ought to or can be

abandoned. Social justice often must rely on a shorthand that remains indifferent to the personal qualities of individuals. The liberal definition of citizenship raises such indifference to a near-absolute form, and for good reason: as a strong abstraction raised against the rival claims of ethnicity and gender, against the rites of all particular cultures. But in our era liberalism, by inflecting the common and human with the pathos of victimhood, has largely given up such salutary aloofness. The popularity of multiculturalism is another example of the loss of liberal aloofness.

In *Toward the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche hopes for a society that could apportion benefits and punishments while refraining from moral judgment, from solicitude as well as vengeance. Such a society would go the abstract liberal idea of citizenship one better by admitting that it cannot possibly know or possess the souls of its citizens. The troubling aspect of contemporary liberal thought is precisely that it does not refrain from such possessive moralizing. As Finkelkraut charges, the contemporary liberal seems determined to see the cases he attends to as pitiable, worthy of his superior concern. Such a defense of the dignity of the wretched remains deliberately blind to their real identity, and therefore actually robs them of dignity.

The alternative to pitying concern, the Pontius Pilate-like detachment Nietzsche advocates, may seem more than a touch too cold and incurious. It is important to remember, though, that Nietzsche inclines toward such detachment, not because he is indifferent to others, but because he needs an antidote to their too-strong presence within him. Nietzsche allows himself both to imagine other people with dangerously wholehearted interest and to aspire to the disinterest that separates and judges, and builds fairness.

In sum, the argument between liberalism and its polemical opponents remains both healthy and necessary. In an effort to show the full dimensions of the argument, I have chosen the two strongest antagonists to liberal pieties that I know, Emerson and Nietzsche.

EMERSON, NIETZSCHE, AND TRADITION

Nietzsche learned the risk and promise of transformation from Emerson, not from Schopenhauer, who is usually named as Nietzsche's major influence. Emerson and Schopenhauer are, in fact, Nietzsche's two crucial philosophical fathers, though students of Nietzsche have

usually granted Schopenhauer priority. My study aims to redress this imbalance. Emerson's championing of creativity and the poetic, I suggest, allows Nietzsche to affirm life against Schopenhauer's pessimism.

Despite the obvious connection between Emerson and Nietzsche, there have been few studies of their relationship.¹⁸ Over a series of years and a sequence of remarkable writings, Stanley Cavell and Harold Bloom have offered the most intriguing suggestions of a kinship between the two thinkers. Yet, though Bloom and Cavell are irreplaceable in a study like this one, and though I frequently rely on both these great critics, neither concerns himself with defining the pressing differences between Nietzsche and Emerson.

My goal is to understand how Nietzsche enlists Emerson in his development, yet also diverges from him. The difference is rooted in Emerson's ideal of human expressivity, in its contrast to Nietzsche's ideal of self-criticism. Nietzschean self-criticism, in works like *Untimely Meditations* and *The Gay Science*, adjoins his experience of asceticism, while yet refusing the ascetic's refined brutality and espousing, in place of ascetic over-intimacy, a distance and tact toward the suffering individual—especially when the individual in question is oneself.

For Emerson, expressivity is inherently critical. Our imaginations do not need to be reminded to stay properly suspicious, because we know all too well that worldly consequences will always spring an ironic trap on our imaginative overreaching. Nietzsche, by contrast, exposes a gap between imaginative enthusiasm and the energies of demystification. This difference stems from Nietzsche's consciousness of the vast pressure of history, a pressure that prompts our skeptical consciousness of how history continues to work through us, in contrast to Emerson's sense of the unpredictability, the potential newness, of both the situations we find ourselves in and the strategies we use to beat these situations. Emerson is no naive optimist; his skeptical side shows us that he senses the difficulties of practical, present-tense action. But only Nietzsche, with his focus on how the past grips the changed present, demonstrates a profound awareness of how this past can make us betray ourselves.

The divergence between Emerson and Nietzsche carries over into their heirs. In the American pragmatist line that derives from Emerson, Kenneth Burke is the great champion of revising and transforming situations. In Burke, as in Emerson, what obstructs transformation is an insistent conformist rigidity, the idolatry of common wisdom that

blocks the recognition that cultural and personal crises should be occasions for improvisational renewal. In both Emerson and his descendant Burke, there is little sense of the characteristic Nietzschean melancholy, the inescapable pain of a history that lives on within the self, not as mere unthinking custom but as the self's deepest and hardest identity—a sense that we find often in Freud and Mann, two of Nietzsche's truest inheritors. Reading Nietzsche, we confront ourselves at the midnight hour, the "loneliest loneliness" (GS#341): a time when decisions are epochal and irrevocable, and when we bitterly fight the hold of the past.

This serious difference between Emerson and Nietzsche on the question of the past hints at the possibility of a debate between two rival ways of developing the individual's powers. Nietzsche helps us understand the element of necessity in what Bloom calls strong misreading, the way we (often unconsciously) distort the past to suit our own ends.¹⁹ Emerson cannot account for this necessity as Nietzsche can. He lacks Nietzsche's interest in how repression works, in how we are mastered, despite ourselves, by influence. Yet there is a genuine hopefulness in Emerson that makes us rethink what we meant by necessity in the first place. Often, Emerson argues, our resignation to *Ananke* is a defensive inventing of only *supposedly* necessary limitation, a self-crippling that can be healed. Emerson's healing promise requires an embrace of necessity as rightness, a true part of us and our striving. Nietzsche similarly hopes for an *amor fati*, the capacity to see what is necessary as desirable. But Nietzsche recognizes much more clearly than Emerson the ascetic's desire to be elsewhere, which culminates in the nihilistic impression that the necessity of being here and now is an unbearable wound. *Amor fati*, a cherished possibility for both thinkers, is more accessible to Emerson than to Nietzsche.

Yet Nietzsche also remains akin to Emerson, gaining from him the advantage of the comic thinker.²⁰ As I have said, reading Emerson enabled Nietzsche to temper the influence of his other major precursor, Schopenhauer. Nietzsche overcame Schopenhauerian pessimism by diverging from Schopenhauer's sense of the ephemerality and real-world uselessness of the artistic perfection he treasured. On the effectiveness of art, Nietzsche follows Emerson rather than Schopenhauer; he affirms life by claiming the actual, realistic force of artistic imagination. Imagination, for both Emerson and Nietzsche, is visible in the form of a clever bias woven into the fabric of the world, and preceding the work

of any individual author. Seen rightly, the world is made of metaphor; and its figurative character gives the human individual a chance of freedom unimaginable in Schopenhauer's brutally solid, literal-minded reality.

PLAY, ASCETICISM, CRITIQUE

Nietzsche's Emersonian gestures begin very early on. In his youthful essay, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (written between 1873 and 1876), Nietzsche explores, only to reject, the image of Heraclitus as a Schopenhauerian sage, the weeping philosopher for whom all existence is a vain effort to expiate guilt. "Is not the entire world process now an act of punishment for *hubris*? The many the result of evil doing?" Nietzsche's answer to these questions is a decisive *no*: in Heraclitus "not *hubris* but the ever self-renewing impulse to play calls new worlds into being" (PTAG 60–62). For Heraclitus, as for Nietzsche, the world is a child at play, capricious yet lawful, and thoroughly innocent in its artistry. Tragic hubris marks the individual who vengefully resists the direction of existence. In response, existence, an everlasting game, renders hubristic self-assertion insignificant, rather than avenging hubris or punishing it as a sin. Each move, memorable as it may be, will be forgotten as the game rearranges itself and continues, erasing the past moment by moment. Later, when he developed a more compromised and complicated sense of historical action, Nietzsche abandoned as overly optimistic any such definitive picture of the overcoming of vengefulness; but his attraction to the Heraclitean game persisted.

It is Emerson who inflects Nietzsche's Heraclitean image of play in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Emerson draws from Heraclitus an emphasis on the creative, metamorphic aspect of the world, imaged as a vast game that both surpasses and guides the individual intentions of its players. But both Emerson and Nietzsche move beyond Heraclitus by introducing the human agent into the image of the game, as if agency could only truly be upheld in the context that most seems to defeat it, the cosmic roll of the dice and ever-shifting contest that no contestant can rule. "For though gamesters say, that the cards beat all the players," Emerson writes in "Nominalist and Realist," "though they were never so skilful, yet in the contest we are now considering, the players are also the game, and share the power of the cards" (E 583). You're not the player you think you are; instead, you're just a piece of

the game. But if you can get over the affront to your poor pride entailed by this revelation, you might find you have more power than before. Emerson finally makes this irony prove useful, which is to say that he turns our knowledge that the universe accomplishes its aims *despite* our paltry wills into our strong sense that the universe's aims are accomplished *through* us.²¹

Nietzsche stands with Emerson against Schopenhauer's insistence on the futility of human action. Both Emerson and Nietzsche describe the game's meaning as the way it shows itself in the thoughtful, surprisingly resilient stances of its actors, in comic moments rather than in monumental postures of tragic beauty, victory, and defeat. Yet the relentless Nietzschean drive toward truth does often take on a tragic form, based in the self-punishing character of the quest. For Schopenhauer, critical analysis plays a tragic role in a very different way: it proves, or produces, a tautology, capable of discovering only its own beautiful protest against the universal reign of the will.

Nietzsche's turn away from Schopenhauer and toward Emerson is, to be sure, not the whole story. As I have already noted, Nietzsche introduces a historical dimension into his thought that Emerson refuses. Emerson wants to establish what he calls in *Nature* "an original relation to the universe," a living present freed from the frozen, secondhand ideas that surround us every day in society (*E7*). The basic Emersonian aim is conversion experience, liberation from the prison of conformity. But, because he remains more interested in momentary inspiration and the choice fragment of experience than in a deliberate organization of one's life as truly personal and owned history, Emerson cannot measure the influence of the past, the conformity that has lived within and through us, on our present lives.

Nietzsche, by contrast, develops a model of ascetic perfectionism based on the individual's will to manage and transform his existence, an effort that means recognizing the real force of the historical nature that one already is, as well as the will to break through that nature into newness. Nietzsche, in other words, recognizes the internal force of the history that oppresses us, instead of suggesting, with Emerson, that historical constraints might melt away, overturned by the light of an original spirit. With his insistence on the need to violate conformity, an insistence that sees conformity's true strength in the toll the revolutionary project takes on the individual, Nietzsche generates a forceful criticism of social and historical practices. In formulating his model of

the critical stance, Nietzsche illuminates the cost of ascetic ideals—a cost that Emerson already suspected in shying away from them—as well as their promise. In Nietzsche, ascetic discipline must itself be disciplined. Nietzsche’s architectonic ideal offers a way of achieving a solidity or balance, of preventing asceticism from tearing the self to pieces. His musical/theatrical ideal, by contrast, surrenders to such dispersion and triumphs by doing away with the ascetic’s discipline of resistance.

Nietzsche gets from Emerson a powerful notion of the liberating possibilities of language and action. Yet his perspective, though leavened with its special forms of irony and comic surprise, continues to be shadowed by tragedy. The Nietzschean ascetic of *Toward the Genealogy of Morals* is a tragic hero. His intense pursuit of a critical stance, what Nietzsche calls the ascetic’s “will to truth,” dooms him to an exemplary, and sublimely impressive, overreaching. “This penchant and passion for what is true, real, non-apparent [Un-Scheinbaren], certain,” as Nietzsche puts it in *The Gay Science*, will not let him rest (GS#309).

Nietzsche’s dilemma, his simultaneous attraction to passionate certainty and to cold, demystifying doubt, speaks to a contemporary crisis. A pervasive academic “hermeneutics of suspicion” (to use Paul Ricoeur’s phrase) suggests the dominion of the demystifiers, but also a disquiet with this dominion, a wish for “what is true, real, non-apparent, certain.” Arnoldian and liberal claims for the power of critical awareness to rebuild what has been demystified, to correct our moral consciousness and our sense of cultural value, may no longer be plausible. Critical thought is now known to be not just an exposé of ideologies but also an agent of corrosive skepticism, a dangerous force that just might disillusion us about *all* ideals.

Academics often seem to take a grim satisfaction in just this disillusionment, the cynic’s joy that (as Gianni Vattimo writes) “fac[es] up to the fact of the world as a totally administered system.”²² It is no surprise that Foucault is still the most influential figure for young and ambitious professors of humanities. Yet the contemporary academy remains attached to an ideal of human perfection and seems to be (somewhat covertly, to be sure) dissatisfied with its own habit of proving the power of disillusion, the constant triumphs of ideology and mere rhetorical force. Current academic perfectionism, of the sort perhaps best represented by Martha Nussbaum, recommends a discipline of virtue that is at once moral and political, a critical individual-

ism that can indulge in self-invention and yet also remain reflective and responsible about social values. I sympathize with these goals, but I ask for a more searching and hard-edged understanding of the perfectionist impulse, with its peculiar attachment to what Freud calls “moral masochism.” The severity of Nietzsche’s asceticism makes his perfectionism, in contrast to Nussbaum’s, a form of self-punishment rather than self-reward. The bitter, inquisitive eye Nietzsche turns on notions of social equality and fairness, I argue, is closely linked to his sense of the pervasiveness of moral masochism. Pervasive but not inescapable: the tragic view exemplified in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* (written after *The Gay Science*, but planned and meditated long before) must be answered by the comic mood of *The Gay Science*, which allows us to evade moral self-punishment through an architectonic building of selfhood. These two texts represent for me two halves of an argument essential to, but mostly overlooked in, contemporary debates about perfectionism and the self.

THE ARCHITECTONIC VS. THE MUSICAL SELF IN NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche, in the astonishing series of books he produced in the 1880s, engages the risk of moral masochism as contemporary criticism does not. In doing so, he shows current notions of perfectionism to be overly optimistic. Nietzsche finds himself at once allured and repelled by the tragic pathos of self-punishment. He survives as an exemplary thinker because he continues to strive for a path beyond the passion of self-ruin, a way to the fully mature comedy of his gay science: the perfect flowering of self-making, poised between shrewd self-suspicion and indulgent fantasizing. Specifically, Nietzsche’s use of an architectonic model of the self in *The Gay Science* allows him to propose a way of individual self-trust that is conscious of its precarious, constructed character, yet strives to locate itself firmly on this earth.

There is a connection between the careful balancing act of Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* and Emerson’s notion of refinement in his late *Conduct of Life*. Yet Nietzsche, unlike Emerson, remains dissatisfied with the ideal of a sure, sophisticated self, however agile its grounding. As Vattimo has emphasized, Nietzsche wills, as well, the present-tense life of a musical, Dionysian existence, an utter identification of being, knowing, and doing. The reign of the Dionysian mask is instantly,

instinctively effectual; its force lies in the mobility and subtlety of a playing that has transcended theater's fakery. The mask's music must finally prove more alluring to Nietzsche than the architectonic self, because it incarnates the self as difference, as Dionysus, instead of (as in the architectural model) esteeming the self for its will to discipline or master difference. In this respect *Ecce Homo* provides the inevitable explosion at the end of Nietzsche's development, the rule of the mask that overcomes any possibility of control.

Fragment 842 of Nietzsche's *Will to Power* (spring 1888) directly juxtaposes these two options, the architectonic and the musical. Nietzsche here identifies the grand style with an apotropaic architecture, a warding off of others:

It repels; such men of force [i.e., those who display the grand style] are no longer loved—a desert spreads around them, a silence, a fear as in the presence of some great sacrilege—All the arts know such aspirants to the grand style: why are they lacking in music? No musician has yet built as that architect did who created the Palazzo Pitti—Here lies a problem. Does music perhaps belong to that culture in which the domain of men of force of all kinds has ceased? Does the concept grand style ultimately stand in contradiction to the soul of music—to the 'woman' in our music?²³

The grand style of the conqueror is before all else defensive in Nietzsche, a repelling of the other (i.e., of the woman). But, in more relaxed versions of this ideal—in *The Gay Science's* portrait of the Genoese, for example (*GS*#291)—the grand style builds a home and a horizon for itself by striking a balance between a questing and an embattled posture. In *The Gay Science's* Genoa, what surrounds the architectonic self is not “a desert . . . a silence, a fear,” as in the 1888 fragment, but a rich and tempting vista, a foreign land to be discovered (see chapter 4). Such grandeur, whether it takes on a poised and fragile character, as in *The Gay Science*, or a sublime extremism, as in the Second Essay of the *Genealogy*, with its proud establishing of conscience, is always, to Nietzsche, fundamentally masculine. It stands in contrast to the feminine soul of music, which requires a surrender, a dissolution of self-defense, in order to captivate. For Nietzsche, the feminine represents the impossible assurance that needs no grand fortress and no blunt force in order to conquer. “Woman” triumphs in

her fluid, apparitional nature, which destroys the difference between yielding and holding back, between a solidly realized self and an elusive, playfully dishonest one.

Another passage from the *Nachlass* (WP#800) makes it clear that the grand style is for Nietzsche a form of masculine architecture. But in this note, from March-June 1888, unlike the one I quoted earlier, Nietzsche tries to reconcile a (feminine) musical intoxication, dispersed and Dionysian, with the erect, consolidated strength of the grand style:

The feeling of intoxication, in fact corresponding to an increase in strength; strongest in the mating season: new organs, new accomplishments, colors, forms; “becoming more beautiful” is a consequence of *enhanced* strength [die “Verschönerung” ist eine Folge der *erhöhten* Kraft]. Becoming more beautiful as the expression of a victorious will, of increased co-ordination, of a harmonizing of all the strong desires, of an infallibly perpendicular stress [eines unfehlbar perpendikulären Schwergewichts]. Logical and geometrical simplification is a consequence of enhancement of strength: conversely the apprehension of such a simplification again enhances the feeling of strength—High point of the development: the grand style.

Here the function of display, of exuberant and multicolored excitement, becomes an expression of “an infallibly perpendicular stress.” In this passage, Nietzsche unites the desire for the mask (Dionysian play) with a high architectural economy (Apollonian structure).

Usually, though, there is a split between these two modes in Nietzsche. *Ecce Homo*, at the end of Nietzsche’s career, portrays the transition from a severe architectonic isolation, a self who has built a refuge among ice and high mountains, to a musical self who, like both Dionysus and the Crucified, renders himself up to his admirers, who are also, in this all-too-real ritual theater, his tormenters. Nietzsche cannot recover from such perilous defenselessness. Here the feminine, again, woman in her difference from Nietzsche, threatens him. For Nietzsche the mystery of woman is that she can defend herself while surrendering herself; but Nietzsche himself cannot know this mystery, and therefore cannot make such a double movement. Nietzsche’s striving after an architecturally unified, forbidding, and guarded self, then, finds itself overturned by a musical conception of

the feminine entity that lives out difference, or plays with it, instead of mastering it.

The Nietzschean motif of a sublime, sacrificial self must, finally, be balanced against Emerson's skepticism. Emerson doubts the wish for the grandeur of transcendence as he doubts all great names and causes. In rough ease, he stands aloof from the committed, trying pursuit of an ideal, the quest that is basic to Nietzsche's demand for a higher, purer, more sacred possibility for our lives. Even in his many praises of focused, concentrated will, Emerson stops short of encouraging complete belief in one's central project. According to Emerson, we must see our aim for the nothing it is. By testing the notion of commitment that the world demands of us, Emerson illuminates a realm of thought and action more basic than, and prior to, Nietzsche's self-critical asceticism. The very ironies that compensation, the iron law, deploys against us also favor us in ways we could not have anticipated. And the only way to draw on this favor is to practice an Emersonian receptivity fundamentally alien to Nietzsche's architectonic style, which demands a censoring of outside voices, a living to oneself, that Emerson could never endorse. To be sure, Emerson prizes nomadic and stringently retired ways of existence, a life of "abandonment" and lonely self-support. But these disciplined strayings from the path of society are, for Emerson, ways of keeping the self open to the vagrant possibilities of the alien meanings that might meet us. For Nietzsche, by contrast, all meanings present artful, pointed foils to what we thought we knew, so that the truly alien never appears, never *can* appear, as it does in Emerson.²⁴

The pragmatist insight Emerson sponsors in American thought attains an undeniable strength by dissolving a false sublimity, by insisting that what we actually do, and how we do it, precedes the glorified and heroic images of action to which we devote ourselves. But Nietzsche, unlike Emerson, can help us more truly estimate the pain, and the usefulness, of our heroic commitments.

Emerson and Nietzsche remain two rival options for contemporary thought, options whose respective appeal hinges largely on whether we embrace, at the basis of our efforts at self-making, Nietzsche's emphasis on the split between a guarded, architecturally founded self and an ecstatic, playful one, or Emerson's Gnostic unity, which champions a self that is at once assured and open, called into original being, as if inevitably, by situation. Nietzsche in his most Emersonian book, *The Gay*

Science, suggests more than once that comedy enfolds tragedy, just as the figure of woman surrounds the masculine quest of the philosopher; that the freedom of masks is a more pervasive or infectious truth than the building of self. But this victory of the mask proves to be a catastrophe in Nietzsche's own life and career, in which the drive to enactment finally wins out over cold judgment, even as Nietzsche fantasizes about uniting the two and making judgment instinctive. The unmoved judge, secure in his pathos of distance, remains an idealized figure for Nietzsche, a wished-for role that he cannot play. It is not for nothing that he named Pontius Pilate his favorite character in the Gospels, though he was most attracted to Jesus, that divine, Dostoyevskian idiot.

NIETZSCHE'S NEW JUSTICE

"Those who are evil or unhappy and the exceptional human being," Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*, "all these should also have their good right, their philosophy, their sunshine":

What these people need is not confession, conjuring of souls, and forgiveness of sins; what is needful is a new justice! And a new watchword. And new philosophers. The moral earth, too, is round. The moral earth, too, has its antipodes. The antipodes, too, have the right to exist. There is yet another world to be discovered—and more than one. Embark, philosophers! (*GS* #289)

Characteristically, Nietzsche here places himself as the opponent of Christendom's practices of "confession, conjuring of souls, and forgiveness of sins"—the Christian attack on the individual which, he argues, is shared by liberal and socialist reformers. Instead of a redemption of humanity that would absolve it of its differences and convert it to a universal realm of freedom or goodness, Nietzsche calls for an exploration and acceptance of individuals as worlds unto themselves, however repugnant or miserable some of these worlds may seem to us. At first glance, then, Nietzsche seems at this moment in *The Gay Science* to forecast the generous pluralism of the contemporary academy, with its devotion to the self-constituting validity of local practices and (to invoke a contemporary shibboleth) cultures. (For Nietzsche in this passage, individuals in all their peculiarity would make up the defining units of culture.) Yet *The Gay Science* passage, by combining an

image of voyage and discovery with the need for judgment, for a “new justice,” passes beyond such pluralism. The moral earth’s roundness means that it is not limited as we thought it was. We won’t fall off the edge if we go too far, as we were afraid might happen. The earth will support us because its very radical differences prove to be integrated in an unexpected but entirely consistent way. It is in his quest for such consistency that Nietzsche’s Zarathustra asks for a loyalty to the earth. As Leo Strauss points out, he wants to descend from his isolation, from his independence, unlike the Socrates of the *Republic*.²⁵ And this descent means his desire for a recovery of a truth to nature that will transcend the poetic uses of the mask, the mere force exploited by creative revision and experiment (which is visible in the contemporary academy’s weak pluralism).

The new justice asks, among other things, for an acceptance of the subtleties of our acting as somehow implied in our deepest nature, an acceptance that may require unprecedented tact. Don’t act like a saint, especially if you are one, says Nietzsche (as Strauss put it in his lectures on *Zarathustra*): an injunction that not only pushes urbanity to a new extreme, but asserts a divine reluctance that should and could become natural, and that looks mannered only to our currently weak eyesight.

Nietzsche’s ambition to temper the destructiveness of the ascetic will to truth, the extreme rigor of the saint (whether religious or *wissenschaftlich*), makes him turn to the poet. Nietzsche wants to raise poetry beyond mere evasion of the ascetic’s cold, hard truth, to show how it is, instead, a necessary mediation of that truth. Being poetic, in Nietzsche as in Emerson, means representing, giving words, to what both demands and resists representation.

It may seem, though, that the aim of the poetic is to soften this resistance, to manage desire by invoking its objects in safely mediated form, as representation rather than actuality. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche runs the risk of praising poetry for its therapeutic power, for being a compliant source of consolation. Freud’s designation of us as creatures of wish, along with his descriptions of how our wishing may fail by remaining merely consolatory, helps to illuminate Nietzsche’s early reliance on the power of the poetic to fulfill or complete our desires—and his later critical reflection on this fulfillment. In Freud, as in Emerson and Nietzsche, the human impulse to wish-fulfillment combines in odd ways with the urge to experiment, to newness, to re-

maintaining unsettled and stubbornly unsatisfied. In his book *Terrors and Experts*, the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips writes,

In so far as psychoanalysis merely traffics in new proprieties, in fresh forms of respectability, it betrays something of its radical legacy as a conversation in which people cannot help but experiment with themselves. When psychoanalysis loses its unusual capacity to both comfort and unsettle—and its modern sense that you can't have one without the other—it becomes either a form of compulsory radicalism or a new way to learn an old obedience. It was, after all, to the subtleties of compliance that Freud addressed himself. If psychoanalysis is not the means to a personal style, it merely hypnotizes people with a vocabulary.²⁶

Like Freud, Emerson and Nietzsche address themselves to the “subtleties of compliance,” to the conformity that generates “fresh forms of respectability.” The latter phrase is an adequate summary of much current ethical theory, which is, however, at times neither fresh nor subtle. Emerson and Nietzsche have something in common with psychoanalysis at its best, as Phillips describes it: they try to shake us free from the hypnotic vocabularies of propriety and responsibility that animate our thoughts on the self and its place in the world. But the vocabulary of self-making, of achieving “a personal style,” as Phillips puts it, may also turn out to be a conformism, implying the narcissistic self-regard that sells better than anything else these days. Seeing the self as a work of art, as Rorty and Alexander Nehamas do, risks turning personal identity into a kind of consumer good.²⁷ The actual career of individualism in Emerson and Nietzsche is altogether more dangerous, and more interesting.

NIETZSCHE WITH (AND EMERSON WITHOUT) LACAN

Charles Altieri comes close to the true sense of Emersonian individualism when he writes of two Americans, Frank O'Hara and Robert Creeley, whose poetry “becomes actual habitation. . . . And its test of value becomes the mobility and intensity immediately made available to the poet, without relying on any of the abstract versions of those values or even on any of the formulated social ideals that establish the markets in which cultural capital is traded.”²⁸ “Every touch should thrill,” as Emerson writes in “The Poet” (*E* 448). In Altieri's eloquent

anticonsumerist vision the poet, experimenter *par excellence*, becomes the apostle of a Gnostic light embodied in literary style and easily recovered against the fallen world of the commodity, a self-communion offered, with a touching immediacy, at once to reader and author.

For Nietzsche, no such communion is possible. *Ecce Homo* shows the final trajectory of *Maskenfreiheit* as a captivation by the mask or persona, and an imprisonment by the demands of cultural capital, of public, declared performance: demands that Emerson, like Altieri's Creeley and O'Hara, is able to evade. Nietzsche's self-alienation as he works through his images of personal identity in *Ecce Homo* proves the Burckhardian "self as a work of art" to be a cold pastoral indeed.

Nietzsche's bondage is, I suggest in later chapters, tied to the dominion of the Lacanian object *a*, the secret ingredient in personal identity that makes all the difference, and must remain hidden. When publicly exposed the object *a* spoils one's identity altogether, revealing itself as a nothing, inexplicable and trivial. Yet Nietzsche remains compelled toward such exposure. Emerson's apparent freedom from Nietzsche's attraction to shameful or triumphant publicity, like his easy overcoming of the Nietzschean strife between foundation and play, bears witness to the superior performative strength of Emersonian practice. Yet that very strength may lead Emerson to underestimate the difficulty of being located in one's life, and in the life that surrounds one: a difficulty that Nietzsche attends to profoundly in his effort to formulate a critical project for the self (see my discussion of *Untimely Meditations* in chapter 3).

THE PLAN OF THIS BOOK

In the first chapter I offer a reading of Emerson's "Experience," with frequent reference to other Emerson essays, that ends in an invocation of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. I explore the ways in which Emerson makes his texts available to radically distinct inclinations, encouraging a breadth of interpretive choice that puts into action the Emersonian model of liberation. There is a critical tradition of charging Emerson with the visionary's self-involvement, with an imaginative narcissism that refuses social commitments. Indeed, Emersonian vision, at its ecstatic, impatient height, is avowedly solipsistic, the gospel of a divine child who devours all he sees. But by recognizing how the social world both resists and thrives on the individual's prophetic sight, Emerson

urges his solipsistic sublime into conversation with the common-sense realism that mocks and deflates it.

Individualist interpretation takes on a radical form in Emerson, one that circumvents the tragic persistence of the past in favor of our present desires to reimagine the world. Nietzsche, by contrast, embraces tragedy. Chapters 2 and 3 examine Nietzsche's development in the 1870s of an individualist sense of history based on a tragic mode. In his early *Birth of Tragedy*, the subject of chapter 2, Nietzsche figures tragedy as a phenomenon of cosmic scale, the weaving and unweaving of life and death, generation and decay. By the time of *Untimely Meditations*, however, just three years later, Nietzsche reinterprets tragedy as an individualist genre centered on the effort to carry on in writing, but also to contest, the memory of particular persons and events. With this movement to the level of the individual, the tragic sense becomes a source of critical power. Nietzsche's thought that poetry's proper role is the defense of the particular shape of history, its memorable events and actors, has its roots in Plato's *Symposium*, as well as in Emerson. Chapter 3 concludes with a study of Nietzsche's early versions of the architectonic self: the image of the builder of thought as cosmic judge in Nietzsche's final *Untimely Meditation*, "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," and in another work of the mid-1870s, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*.

In chapter 4 I investigate two central Nietzschean works of the 1880s, *Daybreak* and *The Gay Science*, in terms of their use of theatricality, particularly in relation to themes of love and sexual relationship, and with reference to Emerson's reliance on the theatrical. *The Gay Science* avoids the disastrous consequences of the *Genealogy's* masochistic asceticism by espousing a carefully composed self that thrives on acting out, as if on stage, its distance from moral ideals. But this distancing, and the theatrical model it entails, means that the self becomes disturbingly isolated from the world Nietzsche set out to explore—even to conquer—with the critical ideal he invoked in his "Use and Disadvantage of History for Life." (Nietzsche's self-alienation will culminate in *Ecce Homo*, in which theatrical distance becomes Dionysian uncontrol, in place of *The Gay Science's* Apollonian composure.)

In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche meditates on the weakness of monumental history, already explored in "The Use and Disadvantage of History for Life." Monumental history founds a heroic grandeur that will inevitably devolve into blurry conformity, the vague fetishizing of greatness.

But the antidote offered in “History for Life” to the weakness of the monumental, the critical history that measures the present self against the influence of the past, is largely abandoned in *Daybreak* and its successor, *The Gay Science*. In these works, Nietzsche relies, in place of the critical, on a version of Emersonian refinement, though Nietzsche will confront a frustration foreign to Emerson: the encounter with the object *a*, a secretive core of identity that refinement both courts and stumbles over.

Chapter 5, after an excursus on Emerson’s “Fate,” studies *Toward the Genealogy of Morals*, focusing on how it concludes in a severe, self-frustrating irony. The attempt to liberate human possibility through a strenuous antagonism to priestly morality results in a new (but just as costly) morality, that of the ascetic philosopher Nietzsche. Chapter 5 goes on to encounter the destiny of the Nietzschean self that answers ascetic self-punishment with an outrageous playing out of roles, the musical, exploding self of *Ecce Homo* that presages Nietzsche’s final madness.

EMERSON AND NIETZSCHE TODAY

Nietzsche resembles Emerson in that both have become, in today’s academic climate, texts subject to judgment: are they acceptable or dangerous? (Lacan offers a more primitive version of such a shibboleth, dividing academics between those who see him as a demented charlatan with mystagogic habits and those who detect hints of highest truth in the slightest gesture of the master.) Is it risky even to think about Nietzsche? Are fervent readers of Nietzsche like myself guilty by association (of elitism, misogyny, proto-fascist worship of “honor” and heroism), and are we to respond to this imputation of guilt by describing a warm-hearted, quasi-liberal Nietzsche? On occasion I have encountered students who defend themselves against the reading of Nietzsche and Emerson by worrying that these texts might be “dangerous,” all the while going to great lengths to make these writers say what they expressly do not say, so they then can be revealed as selfish idolaters of power. (A common impulse is to turn both Nietzsche and Emerson into members of the Carlylean hero-cult both despised; see *Daybreak* #298, and Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” for their arguments against the worship of heroes.)

Such caricatures are not dangerous, of course, but rather the re-

verse: they enable the student to enjoy his politically correct symptom in undisturbed fashion by prohibiting access to the text itself. By insisting that Nietzsche is somehow responsible for European fascism and Emerson for imperial American self-aggrandizement, one keeps a sharp lookout only for those places in their writings where they take the risk of not defending themselves against readers who might devour and use them, not for new thinking, but for previously rehearsed ideological gestures.

We can police texts in this way only by refusing to think for ourselves, in our scared concern to think for—on behalf of, instead of—the texts we read. On the other hand, it is a mistake to make Emerson and Nietzsche acceptable to a tolerant liberalism, as Walter Kaufmann did in the case of Nietzsche, by downplaying their charged, inflammatory moments. Such a reading implicitly wishes that these thinkers had expressed themselves in a more measured, accessible way, one that would support us in what we already wanted to believe, whereas their actual effort is to outrage our security. Perhaps more than any other writers, Nietzsche and Emerson want to deny us the self-possession of being confirmed by the ego ideal, the big Other. To avoid their extreme, intransigent, or seemingly intolerable moments means, then, to fly to the protection of the big Other, to resort to non-thinking respectability.

THE QUESTION OF ASCETICISM

This book risks implying that, because Nietzsche is more twisted or pressured than Emerson, he is more worthy. But Emerson is not without his own twists, among them the idea that the Nietzschean wish for mastery leaves something out. Emerson suggests that, released from the forced, secretive inwardness of the ascetic impulse, we can yield to life's wildness in a way that conserves a healthier sort of inward "pudency" (*E* 483)—we can surrender without giving ourselves away. Finally, the difference between these two thinkers increases the strength of our understanding, even if, weighted ourselves by history and attitude, we cannot always choose freely between them.