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Become Who You Are: Education and Self-Cultivation in Nietzsche and Montaigne

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract:

This dissertation explores the literary, historical, and philosophical connections between Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* and Friedrich Nietzsche's works of the middle period. In two sections that focus on Nietzsche and Montaigne respectively, I explore the complementary elements of their thinking on education, the nature of individual experience and interpersonal dynamics, and the literary innovations they use to express and communicate these ideas. Each writer proposes an individualist approach to self-understanding and knowledge that nevertheless leaves space for productive educational and intellectual relationships in addition to the creation of a deeper and more authentic form of self. This study offers new ways of thinking about the relationship between Montaigne and Nietzsche's works and Montaigne's influence on Nietzsche's "joyous" way of thinking and living, as well as implications for pedagogy and educational dynamics in the contemporary classroom.

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Introduction:

Nietzsche, Montaigne and the Cultivation of the Individual

Among Nietzsche's intellectual peers and predecessors, Montaigne is a name not often invoked; that there is some relationship between the two is evident from Nietzsche's passing references to the 16th century essayist, but as I will argue here, the connection goes much deeper than a series of passing encounters and references. Together, Nietzsche and Montaigne offer complementary approaches to understanding the individual nature of the self, the cultivation and use of personal knowledge and the indirect aid and guidance others can provide. Analyzing the works of both of these writers together offers new ways of understanding how individuals can productively engage in self-cultivation, as well as the important educative role that others can play in catalyzing and guiding this pursuit.

While there is an immediately recognizable, though perhaps superficial affinity between Nietzsche's and Montaigne's shared experimental and joyful approach to living, in many ways the two do not form an obvious lineage, and their approaches to writing and thinking, the forms and contexts in which they consider and present ideas, are fairly divergent. All the same, if we are to believe Nietzsche himself, there is in fact a pliant, but somewhat obscured connective thread, integrated so thoroughly into Nietzsche's thinking as to be difficult to discern, that unites these two figures. While direct references to Montaigne are infrequent, and often quite fleeting, Nietzsche nevertheless signals this connection in rare but significant moments. A preliminary draft of section #282 from *Human, all too Human*, titled "*Song of lament*," reads: "Unfashionable: our time suffers from the absence of great moralists - Montaigne Plutarch are not read - the *vita contemplativa* generally not respected" (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 342). While much of Nietzsche's

direct commentary on other writers and thinkers invokes figures who *were* read during his time and who had to be contended with in order to join philosophical discourse - figures like Kant - there is also an *unzeitgemäße* undercurrent of inspiration that appears in more subtle, indirect ways as something that suffuses the entirety of Nietzsche's perspective and way of thinking. If readers of Nietzsche's works rarely encounter direct references to Montaigne, it is because Nietzsche has made Montaigne's ideas his own and integrated them and their implications into his own perspective - a form of engagement that Montaigne would surely have approved of and seen as confirmation of his thinking in the *Essays*. As Montaigne writes in the essay "*Of pedantry*," it is not enough to passively accept knowledge from someone else - in order to be valuable, the knowledge must be made "our own... What good does it do us to have our belly full of meat if it is not digested, if it is not transformed into us, if it does not make us bigger and stronger?" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 101). Nietzsche, for whom digestion was both a practical daily health concern and a potent metaphor for the literary-philosophical interpretation and appropriation of others' works reflects this same principle in his own words in the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morality*: "one thing above all is necessary in order to practice reading as an art... *rumination*" (Nietzsche, 2014, pp. 214-215). Montaigne's indirect influence on Nietzsche may be harder to discern and positively identify, but the similarities in their thinking on topics such as the individual value of knowledge, the nature of education and the importance of self-understanding show the ways in which Nietzsche has "digested" Montaigne's thinking and been "transformed" and strengthened by it.

If there is a thread that most strongly connects Nietzsche and Montaigne, it is their shared appreciation for the *vita contemplativa* - the contemplative life lived alongside their written works, without which those works could not have been written. For both Nietzsche and Montaigne, writing and ideas are most useful when they are grounded in, and work to the

benefit of, personal experience, and there is a reciprocal relationship between literature and experience and ideas and personal contemplation. For Nietzsche that often meant thinking and hiking, an activity that helped him formulate many of his central ideas, such as an encounter with an enormous boulder that acted as the catalyst for the idea of the eternal return: "I went through the woods to the lake of Silvaplana; I stopped near Surlei by a huge, pyramidal boulder. That is where this thought came to me" (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 123). For Montaigne, the personal library on his estate acted as a refuge in which he could spend time with himself and his thoughts unimpeded: "There I leaf through now one book, now another, without order and without plan, by disconnected fragments. One moment I muse, another moment I set down or dictate, walking back and forth, these fancies of mine that you see here" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 629). For each of these writers, ideas are not meant to remain abstract, and so long as they do they are in effect incomplete - they must be taken up and considered, tested, put to use by individuals on an experiential level to see what they produce not just for thinking but for living. The experimental and contemplative, introspective approach to thinking and living embraced by both Nietzsche and Montaigne provides useful insight into several questions, but it is particularly suited to the kind of self-reflection and self-scrutiny both writers encourage and engage in themselves. This emphasis on self-knowledge and self-creation drives an insistence on putting ideas that may otherwise remain abstract and generalizable into the particular experiential perspective to which each individual has sole access: that of their own self. Self-knowledge and self-cultivation are two sides of one coin, and the more intimately individuals come to know themselves without unmediated external interference or direction, the more they are capable of experimenting, evolving, and forging new ways of thinking from their own perspective.

This shared spirit of contemplation, self-inquiry and self-creation forms a strong connection between Montaigne's *Essays* and Nietzsche's writings, particularly his works of the

middle period such as the two volumes of *Human, all too Human* and *Dawn*, works that do not attract as much attention as earlier books like *The Birth of Tragedy* or later ones like *On the Genealogy of Morality*. These middle period works, however, offer a more optimistic Nietzsche than one finds in his later works, one who is curious, playfully experimental, and to some degree hopeful for the future - in short, a Nietzsche whose temperament and thinking have more in common with Montaigne than any of his later or earlier works. At the same time, they also represent a more mature Nietzsche than one encounters in his earliest works, a writer who has shed his youthful allegiances and inspirations and begun to find his own footing and perspective. They also contain some of his most biting and insightful aphorisms, a form inspired not by Montaigne himself, but by other writers in the tradition of French *moralistes* who are no longer “respected” as Nietzsche noted in section #282 of *Human, all too Human* cited above (in another preliminary draft of this section Nietzsche mentions his primary source of aphoristic inspiration, La Rochefoucauld, alongside Montaigne). What these aphorisms share with Montaigne, perhaps even more strongly than with a more direct stylistic source of inspiration like La Rochefoucauld, is a focus on inquiry that is as much psychological as it is philosophical, that seeks to gain a more intimate knowledge and experience of the self in its individuality, and in its complicated, but potentially productive relations with others, a line of inquiry that Nietzsche found lacking in his German predecessors and counterparts. As Brendan Donnellan writes, for Nietzsche, Montaigne is “an outstanding model of the aristocratic French moralistic culture, which Nietzsche often contrasts with the boorishness of the Germans in Montaigne's time, and with the backwardness of contemporary German attempts in the area of psychological investigation” (Donnellan, 1986, p. 1). The middle works in particular seem like a sprightly rejection of German “boorishness” in favor of an agile and deft French attitude toward the psychological dimensions of philosophical questions. In these works Nietzsche is often less

concerned with weighty metaphysical or theological questions and is more oriented toward a curious, experimental approach to personal and interpersonal relationships, social and spiritual questions that seek to understand the place of the individual in relation to others, as well as the chasms that separate them. Section #218 of *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, titled “*The machine as teacher*,” is illustrative of the kind of open-ended personal and interpersonal thinking characteristic of these middle period works:

Machines by themselves teach us how to have masses of people work together in processes where everyone has only a single thing to do: they provide the model for organizing political parties and waging war. They do not, on the other hand, teach us individual self-control: they turn many individuals into a single machine, and each individual into a tool for a single purpose. Their most common effect is to teach the utility of centralization. (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 249)

In this passage Nietzsche presents and considers a number of different configurations of individuals and their implications both for each individual and for the mass that they might form together. While a number of possibilities are outlined and the implications do present very different outcomes, there is no moment where Nietzsche specifically condemns or recommends one configuration over another. The possibilities are presented clearly, but Nietzsche does not say what conclusion ought to be drawn from them - it is left to the reader to make their own sense of what Nietzsche has presented. The passage has an overall tone that feels more experimental than didactic, laying out possibilities and different configurations for readers to experiment with, bringing to mind the double meaning of Montaigne’s *Essais* - both the literary form that he invented, and the *essai* (or its lesser-used English equivalent “assay”) as

experiment or test. Of course, given Nietzsche's otherwise clear inclinations toward the cultivation of "individual self-control" and his criticism of anything that reduces "many individuals into a single machine" it is not hard to assume that he would like his readers to use this information in the service of cultivating their individuality. However, even if the takeaway is to prioritize opportunities or experiences that allow for the cultivation of "individual self-control," understanding what happens in the opposite kind of conditions, the threat to individuality represented by military or government service, is just as important and educative as understanding more conducive conditions; both approaches help to outline the contours of the kind of individuality that Nietzsche's works encourage his readers to pursue. While Nietzsche's intentions are discernible, if not stated nakedly, the open-ended presentation of different ideas and their implications gives the reader a sense of agency in navigating these possibilities and forming an understanding of them through their own perspective, allowing them to engage in the same kind of experimental thinking modeled by both Nietzsche and Montaigne.

My hope in the chapters to follow is that I can highlight the distinct, and sometimes overlooked nature and attitude of these middle period works, and the way that reading them in tandem with a figure like Montaigne can help to show their value and purpose in exploring questions about education and teaching, self-cultivation and literary communication. These questions form the basis of the dissertation that follows, which seeks to show that together Nietzsche and Montaigne present a model for the pursuit of authentic self-understanding and the formation of a self defined by its individuality. Both writers are concerned with how individuals can pursue these goals, and how others can aid them in this pursuit as educators who, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, teach others how to teach themselves. Their thinking around the interpersonal aspects of self-cultivation opens up broader questions about teaching, pedagogy, and the nature of knowledge acquisition, and offers new ways of thinking about

contemporary educational practices. The creative, enigmatic, experimental literary techniques and approaches each author employs to communicate the ideas outlined above serve to unify the form and content of their works and force the reader to take a more active role in making their own meaning out of the ideas and questions and ideas they encounter. In addition to Montaigne and Nietzsche's own writings, I will employ a wide variety of scholarship to support this conception of their work and its implications, building on preliminary connections between Montaigne and Nietzsche to show how this particular pairing might open up a number of further questions for future scholarship, as well as a new way of understanding each of their respective works in light of the other.

Nietzsche and Montaigne share not just a concern with the self and its possibilities for experimentation and creation; they are also both occupied by questions of how self-knowledge is possible in the first place, and how, at least broadly speaking, individuals can learn to shape and cultivate themselves through introspective forms of inquiry. Because this activity is fundamentally personal and individual, it may seem at first to stand in opposition to the notion of teaching, training, or any kind of student-teacher, disciple-master, or mentor-individual relationship. However, as both Montaigne and Nietzsche show, with a careful approach to the dynamic of the relationship, it is still possible for others to affect and guide an individual's self-cultivation in indirect ways. Montaigne warns that we often "let ourselves lean so heavily on the arms of others that we annihilate our own powers," and while it is true that, by passively accepting knowledge from others, in the form of ostensibly objective facts, "we could be learned with other men's learning," "wisdom," which is active, productive, and personal, cannot be gained "except by our own wisdom" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 101). While individuals may still "lean on" others to some extent, it should only be so that they can find their own direction. If knowledge is perceived as alien to the individual and cannot be validated by their experience or

perspective, it can act as a threat to their individuality, however if it gives the individual something to consider on their own terms, it provides an opportunity for authentic growth. As Nietzsche writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the most valuable thing one can offer to others in their pursuit of self-understanding is not direct guidance but holding one's own efforts up as a model and example: "Physician, help yourself: thus you help your patient too. Let this be his best help that he may behold with his eyes the man who heals himself" (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 77). For both Nietzsche and Montaigne, if there is a role for others in relation to the individual's pursuit of self-understanding, it is an indirect one, acting as a guide and catalyst for personal revelations. That may take the form of ideas encountered in a written work that the reader can then take up and consider from their own perspective, or it may take place in a more formal interpersonal relationship in which the teacher acts as an example who can model certain ways of thinking that the individual can then make their own. It is still possible for others to act as a catalyst for personal, individualistic pursuits, and this can either occur as a direct in-person interaction, as is often the case in Montaigne's thinking about education and teaching, or something more indirect and less formally instructional, such as the purposefully incomplete and enigmatic nature of many of Nietzsche's ideas, an approach that forces the reader to do their own "ruminating" about the idea so that they can "digest" it and make it their own.

While Nietzsche and Montaigne both believe that *some* kind of learning (though not a personally valuable kind) is possible even in a machine-like classroom where facts are passively accepted by students and taken to be universally true, the kind of learning necessary for authentic self-understanding can only be achieved by way of an individualist approach: cultivating a personal sense of meaning and value in Nietzsche, one that is dependent upon a particular individual's perspective, and developing a personal sense of judgment in Montaigne,

which he likewise sees as an intuitive and incommensurably personal ability, one that each individual must cultivate for themselves.

For Montaigne, judgment is the most subjective and personal way of knowing and understanding; the judgment of which Montaigne speaks is not legal or theological judgment, but the capacity that each individual has to judge the things they encounter in life and decide their value and meaning on a personal level. No one else can make such judgments on behalf of another person, and each person's constellation of judgments will be unique and different. As Montaigne writes in "Of Democritus and Heraclitus":

Things in themselves may have their own weights and measures and qualities; but once inside, within us, [the soul] allots them their qualities as she sees fit. Death is frightful to Cicero, desirable to Cato, a matter of indifference to Socrates. Health, conscience, authority, knowledge, riches, beauty, and their opposites— all are stripped on entry and receive from the soul new clothing, and the coloring that she chooses— brown, green, bright, dark, bitter, sweet, deep, superficial— and which each individual soul chooses; for they have not agreed together on their styles, rules, and forms; each one is queen in her realm... Our good and ill depend on ourselves alone. (Montaigne, 1958, p. 220)

The kind of meaning and value one can identify by way of Montaignian judgment is very different from that which can be given to an individual from without, whether that means accepting the judgment of another individual in place of one's own or accepting communal forms of judgment that ostensibly apply to all but which fail to account for the specific details that make up each individual's unique identity and perspective. By cultivating this judgment through self-inquiry and close examination of one's interests, tendencies, proclivities and personal

history, individuals can navigate the world and engage with it in a way that is more personally meaningful and productive. Likewise, gaining a firmer understanding of the singularity of one's own perspective and the unique forms of judgment that emanate from it allows one to see that the same is true for every person; though human activity is often communal, and indeed benefits from communal action, there is also an intrinsic part of each individual that is fundamentally their own. While that individuality cannot be directly experienced by others, it can be recognized and honored in a way that could allow for more interpersonal understanding, empathy and respect for individual differences without, at the same time, needing to understand someone's perspective in the way they understand it themselves.

Like Montaigne, Nietzsche also believes that each individual's notion of "good and ill" is fundamentally unique and personal. For Nietzsche, the value of ideas, things and experiences must be weighed from the individual's personal perspective if they are to produce something personally meaningful. As he writes in section #196 of *Dawn*, titled "*Truth's most personal questions*," most forms of education do not address what is really valuable for each individual to learn: "'What is it that I actually *do*? And what is it that precisely *I* wish to accomplish thereby?'" - This is the question of truth that is not taught, and consequently not asked, by our current type of education; there is no time for it" (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 141). If the goal of education in Nietzsche's time, as well as in our own, is to train large numbers of students according to uniform sets of standards, with uniform curriculums and assignments, then taking the time to allow each individual student to explore what it is that motivates them and makes up the parameters of their identity and experience would result in disaster and a failure to meet standardized institutional goals. While there is a certain kind of "value" in producing such uniform subjects, it is not valuable to the individual, but instead to the herd, the institution, the state, or whatever else the individual is dissolved into: "the current folly sweeping over nations,

which, above all else, want to produce as much as possible and to be as rich as possible.” This kind of “value” does not speak to the particularities of the individual but instead erases them: “what vast sums of genuine *inner* value are being squandered on such a superficial external goal! Where is your inner value, however, when you no longer know what it means to breathe freely?” (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 153). It is this “*inner* value” that Nietzsche encourages his readers to pursue and use as an orienting principle to navigate life on their own terms, judging and evaluating from their own perspective rather than according to “a superficial external goal.”

Finally, Nietzsche and Montaigne employ literary form and experimentation in order to communicate these ideas about the pursuit of individuality in a way that both presents the author as a non-authoritative authority figure, and that forces the reader, on a structural level, to do work of their own in order to gain something productive and personally valuable from the experience of reading the text. As Dorothea B. Heitsch writes, “Nietzsche's aphorisms describe tentative thinking, that is, assaying and weighing... The challenge, task, and seduction of exegesis extends to the reader, who continually discusses and interprets the text. Montaigne's essay develops a similar hermeneutics” (Heitsch, 1999, p. 428). Montaigne's *Essays* make this hermeneutic demand of the reader in both form and content, through essays that meander and jump around among topics not in an immediately recognizable, orderly way but according to the idiosyncratic logic of their author's trains of thought, whims and inclinations. The *Essays* move in all directions, but do not move toward a conclusive argument or claim; if they culminate in anything at all it is in a literary portrait of their author and the model his way of living and thinking represents for readers. While not explicitly describing his literary method, this passage from “Of the inconsistency of our actions” aptly characterizes Montaigne's essayistic form of self-expression:

Our ordinary practice is to follow the inclinations of our appetite, to the left, to the right, uphill and down, as the wind of circumstance carries us. We think of what we want only at the moment we want it, and we change like that animal which takes the color of the place you set it on. What we have just now planned, we presently change, and presently again we retrace our steps: nothing but oscillation and inconsistency. (Montaigne, 1958, p. 240)

If Montaigne's readers are meant to gain something valuable for themselves, for the cultivation of their own judgment in this pure "oscillation and inconsistency," it is not any of the particular topics or details around which Montaigne flits, but the flitting itself, the movement and unashamed joy in direct, fluid experience translated into literary form. Montaigne's peripatetic spirit is present not just in the content of his writing but also in the structure; the quote above describes the way that Montaigne both writes and thinks, and so the *Essays* provide a multi-level model to the reader that communicates both by showing and by telling.

Likewise, Nietzsche uses literary form and, even more so than Montaigne, a kaleidoscopic variety of literary styles to express, at least to some extent, the nature of his experiential self-understanding. While this individual authenticity cannot be communicated directly, Nietzsche is keenly aware of the ways it can at least be hinted at, and also of the ways that literary artifice can very easily replace the kind of personal subjectivity that the artifice is meant to communicate: "Anyone who has ever begun writing and feels within himself the passion of writing learns from almost everything that he does and experiences only what is communicable in writing. He no longer thinks of himself, but instead of the writer and his public; he wants insight, but not for his own use" (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 137). What Nietzsche wants is something between insight "for his own use" and communicability in writing; that is, he wants to

able to think “of himself” and “of the writer and his public,” finding ways to communicate something of his experiences that will give his readers a set of sporadic, but intense and catalyzing ideas while also not losing sight of the incommunicable experiential source of his thinking. This means that Nietzsche often writes in a way that feels incomplete, but purposefully so - the beguiling brevity of an aphorism has a greater spurring effect on the reader than a more straightforward and thorough presentation of the same ideas. He expounds this principle in section #199 of *Human, all too Human*, titled “*The incomplete as aesthetic stimulant*”:

“Something incomplete is often more effective than completeness... we need a stimulating incompleteness as an irrational element that dazzles the listener's imagination with the image of a sea, while concealing the opposite coast, that is, the limitedness of the object to be praised, as if it were in fog” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 136). The ideas one encounters in Nietzsche’s works are often full of potential; however, the potential is not something realized by reading the book. Instead it is something readers must realize within their own life experience. If Nietzsche were to present his ideas in a completed, fully comprehensible form, the reader would have no reason to navigate the “sea” and “fog” toward the “opposite coast” whose “limitedness” would then be defined by Nietzsche’s own limits, instead of the personal limits readers might discover within themselves through the open-ended ambiguity of Nietzsche’s writing. While Nietzsche is critical of the limited power and efficacy of linguistic communication, he still finds a way to communicate certain aspects of his personal experience in a way that is beneficial to the reader, that encourages them to pursue their own paths toward knowledge, while also avoiding the potentially misleading and illusory promises that language cannot actually deliver to experience.

Taken together, these complementary, but also distinctly personal accounts of self-knowledge, self-cultivation, literary experimentation and productive interpersonal, educational relationships offer new ways of understanding both Nietzsche and Montaigne and the

implications of their work. Montaigne's openness and commitment to a joyful and modest, sustainable way of living offers a counterpoint to Nietzschean *Sturm und Drang* and the often fraught solitude in which Nietzsche thought and wrote, opening up a wider scope of possibility for contentment and meaning in one's own life and for the ability to aid others in their own self-cultivation. Likewise, Nietzsche's more rigorous and direct engagement with the history and discourse of philosophy provides an intellectual heft and more developed level of detail and argumentation that is often missing in Montaigne's work. When such intellectual rigor is present it is more often through the invocation of quotes from other writers who Montaigne thought could better communicate the same ideas. One can imagine that Montaigne, were he alive after Nietzsche, may have even allowed Nietzsche to speak in his place, as he often does with philosophers from antiquity. If there is, ultimately, no singular perspective or way of thinking that can shed fundamentally more light on the questions that occupied Nietzsche and Montaigne, then looking at the two together offers a more expansive vision than either could provide on their own, representing two different paths that lead toward the same end goal: individuals who have come to know themselves in their individuality, who can not only shape and create their own selves, but who can also teach others to do the same.

Part One: Nietzsche

Introduction to Part One: How One Becomes What One Is

Throughout his works, gaining significant momentum and focus in the middle period, Nietzsche repeatedly characterizes a particular relationship he wants to cultivate with his readers that seems paradoxical: while he has a strong desire to communicate the ideas he has developed and act as a kind of teacher, he does not want a reverent audience of mere *followers* or disciples who would accept these ideas passively and at face-value. He even goes as far as asserting that at a certain point his readers can best embrace his thinking and ultimately become his equals by leaving him behind in his role as teacher, instead looking toward themselves as their own most valuable resource for knowledge and self-understanding. This relationship defined by a source that is “forgotten” after the material has been taken up by its audience and appropriated in their own way is modeled in his discussion of “the best” performance of a piano piece in *Human, all too Human*: “The pianist who performs the work of a master will have played the best if he makes us forget the master and if it seems as if he is telling a story from his own life or is experiencing something right now” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 130). For Nietzsche, the best interpretation comes not from faithful adherence to source material or its author, but a deeply personal adaptation that makes the material one’s own through personal creative acts, resituating it in the “experiencing” of its interpreter and “his own life.” He wants his writing to be the starting point of and a catalyst for original thinking and new experiences, the development of radically personal perspectives and forms of knowledge, but he also makes clear that it should only ever serve as a starting point, and not as a final step or authoritative conclusion. What Nietzsche strives to teach his readers is not knowledge itself, but the path to knowledge. To act as an arbiter of knowledge or values would mislead his readers,

because to do so would undermine the real goal in disseminating his ideas, a goal that finds its endpoint in each individual reader and the personal sense of meaning and value they cultivate within themselves in response to his writing and thinking. While ideas and the experiences which are their source can, to a limited extent, be shared with others, the sense of personal meaning or value that the idea imperfectly expresses can only be understood through direct experience by particular individuals. What can be shared of this experience is always a kind of rough translation into thought and writing, limited by its need for mediation that decontextualizes it from its experiential origin and which changes its nature. As he writes in *The Gay Science*, “Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings – always darker, emptier, simpler” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 203). By the time “feelings” have evolved into “thoughts” and reach their final literary form they are only “shadows” of their experiential source, whose light can only illuminate the internal, experiential space of the individual. There is still a connection between thoughts, writing, and their experiential source, but it is only a tenuous and tenebrous one that needs to be reinterpreted back into experience in order to be felt, and not just thought. In this chapter I will examine how this approach to the personal cultivation and interpersonal communication of ideas and knowledge takes shape in the works comprising Nietzsche’s “middle period,” from the ephemeral and enigmatic aphorisms of *Human, all too Human* to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a book that explicitly follows a figure engaged in the same kind of endeavor Nietzsche had been consistently developing in the previous half-decade, searching for “followers” who will ultimately turn away from Nietzsche’s characterization of his way of thinking toward their own understanding, becoming his companions and equals, peers defined by a mutually held dedication to the pursuit of personal knowledge and personal values that are a product of the individual’s perspective on themselves and the way that perspective encounters other people and ideas.

Faced with the kind of paradoxical relationship to one's readers that Nietzsche nevertheless embraces, one might be tempted to despair at the impossibility of knowledge, learning, education and communication, given that any attempt to engage in these practices will in some way be inefficient compared to a more straightforward presentation, and futile or misleading at worst. And yet, for Nietzsche, such an impediment to guiding others toward knowledge and even (a personal sense of) truth is not a reason to become cloistered within oneself and give up on trying to develop and share ideas or act as a teacher to others. Instead, the incommunicability of the individual's personal knowledge and values that is grounded in the lived experience of an individual perspective is accounted for in a form of communication that only presents itself in an incomplete way. As Ruth Abbey writes, in *Human, all too Human* Nietzsche characterizes the free spirit as "someone who hovers over the concerns of others in a free and fearless way. He shares the joy of this state of detached engagement but, Nietzsche suspects, this might be all he has to offer others" (Abbey, 2022, p. 33). While it may not be possible to transmit or share the value or meaning of ideas as they are experienced by an individual without some inevitable loss of comprehension and coherence along the way, it is still possible to play a part in this process as a model and example. As Horst Hutter writes in *Shaping the Future*, by "becoming the artists of their own lives, the free spirits and philosophers of the future will provide patterns of living for future humans to follow" (Hutter, 2006, p. 38). Nietzsche can show others that it is possible to find joy and meaning that can be achieved in establishing one's own values as an organizing principle for personal understanding, even if he cannot lead others to experience the exact same meaning or value that has led him to his particular sense of realization and joy. Nietzsche can still serve as the source and teacher of "patterns of living" to be taken up and engaged with in the experience of each individual reader, not accepted at face value but as a catalyst and starting point, leading to a process that will be

completed in unpredictable and individually particular, personal ways by the individuals with whom these ideas are being shared. In *Human, all too Human*, Nietzsche imagines the perspective of an “old man” who “has drawn the happiest lot” contemplating his writings and their legacy, who “can say that every life-creating, invigorating, elevating, enlightening thought and feeling in him still lives on in his writings and that he himself now signifies only the gray ashes, while the fire has everywhere been saved and carried on” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 140). The important thing is not the originary ashes but the “fire,” the “patterns of living,” which are kept alive by generations of new readers whose flames each flicker in their own way. While this approach may seem to fall short in failing to offer a fleshed out system of thinking or definitive answers to existential or moral questions, Nietzsche’s conception of an eternally incomplete and at least partially irreconcilable shared epistemic world provides a valuable alternative for situating and understanding the nature of knowledge, meaning and values that can be grounded in and realized through individual experience and perspective

1.

Walking Away From It All

The period of time around the 1878 publication of *Human, all too Human* marks an important point in Nietzsche's life and career as a writer and in the development of his thinking. Given this study's focus on the importance of personal experience, beginning with an overview of some of the important events in Nietzsche's own life will provide helpful context to understand something of the experiential background that precipitated the shifts in his thinking and his movement away from ideas and figures who had played a more foundational role in his earlier work and life. The figures and life events that are often only obliquely alluded to in Nietzsche's writing are worth exploring through a biographical lens which can widen our understanding by adding another dimension to the accounts presented in his published works. While such a biographical approach should not be mistaken for one that brings us any closer to Nietzsche's own perspective and experience than we might find in his published works, it can provide insight into how and why he came to emphasize the importance of individual perspective and experience in the search for knowledge and meaning.

Having broken with Wagner two years prior, in 1876, and only a year away from taking what would end up being a permanent leave of absence from his university duties in 1879, Nietzsche found himself unyoked from two powerful forces that had shaped the trajectory of his intellectual and professional development and the form of his daily activities and personal life. While Nietzsche was, from early in his career, something of an outsider in relation to academic institutions and practices, and saw them as unsuited to provide a home for the pursuit of genuinely free-spirited thinking, his definitive and final departure from academia allowed him to

explore his ideas and their production in new ways: he would be free of the teaching duties and, more importantly, scholarly discourse and culture that had previously surrounded him, and free geographically to come and go from the northern heaviness of Germany and Switzerland that he often found stultifying for both his physical and spiritual health. Instead he would be able to travel across the continent with the open and curious spirit of a “good European,” feeling at home even as he was often on the move and finding respite in the southern European and mediterranean climate that suited him physically and spiritually. As he put it in a June 1878 letter to Carl Fuchs, “The gist of it is that I now have the nerve to pursue wisdom itself and be a philosopher in my own right; previously I paid tribute to philosophers” (Fuss & Shapiro, 1971, p. 45). Likewise, the writing of *Human, all too Human* almost seemed to depend on Nietzsche’s liberation from the gravitational pull of Wagner and Wagnerism in order to come into existence. As Nietzsche wrote in July, 1878, referring to his time at Bayreuth in the summer of 1876, “After attending the first performances I fled into the mountains, and there, in a little village in the woods, I produced the first draft of [Human, all too Human].” Though he returned to Bayreuth after his flight of inspiration and solitude, it was with a renewed and changed spirit: “with enough inner composure to suffer the insufferable – silently, in front of everybody!” (Fuss & Shapiro, 1971, p. 46). If Nietzsche had previously seen himself as a part of Wagner’s world and the discourse around it he was now only so superficially. His disagreements with that world were external to its discourse and truths, and so could not be integrated back into it, but instead represented the widening chasm between the perspective and thinking of Wagner that he had previously adopted as his own, and what he was able to see through his own eyes after having “fled into the mountains” to find in solitude an opportunity to spend time with himself.

While he had long seen himself as existing a step apart from his fellow scholars and academics, until this point he had not been completely free from the notion that people and

ideas outside of himself were the primary source of knowledge. If Nietzsche himself was ever a follower and disciple, it was of Richard Wagner, and his break from this formerly significant figure in shaping his life and thinking seems to have allowed him instead to look out on life without the weight of being tied to the perspective and ideals or values of an external authority figure, a “master” whose perspective could be adopted by others and function as a universal organizing principle. In an unpublished fragment from 1878, Nietzsche notes that for him, Wagner was not just a person but an ideal, a supersensory image: “My picture of Wagner went beyond him, I had depicted an *ideal monster*” and he contrasts this with the “real Wagner” and “the real Bayreuth,” both of which he came to see as not representative of a supersensory ideal, but “like the bad, final impression of a copper etching on cheap paper. My need to see real humans and their motives was uncommonly stimulated by this shameful experience” (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 304). The shift from seeing Wagnerism as a new alternative to ideals and beliefs that he had otherwise already rejected to seeing Wagnerism as a merely human, individual force, is characterized by Heidegger as the shift from “incomplete” to “complete” nihilism:

incomplete nihilism indeed replaces the former values by others, but it always puts them in the old place, which is, as it were, preserved as the ideal region of the supersensory. Complete nihilism, however, must eliminate even the place of value itself, the supersensory as a realm; and it must accordingly alter and revalue values differently. (Heidegger, 2001, p. 169)

After the break with Wagner, Nietzsche could turn his back on any idea or figure who may have purported to occupy “the ideal region of the supersensory,” and instead see even Wagner and

his “motives” as the products of a “real human,” a mere individual like himself. If he subsequently needed to find a way to “revalue values differently,” he accomplished this shift by prioritizing the individual perspectives and “motives” that are unique to each individual. The figure of Wagner, who had increasingly found a place for himself as a towering and charismatic leader of numerous followers, forms the reverse image of the kind of relationship Nietzsche will search for with his own audience, by whom he does not want to be seen as an ideal but as a real human whose knowledge and values are a product of his perspective, and should not be adopted by others, who should in turn find *their* individual perspective and the knowledge and values it brings to light. Heidegger writes that for Nietzsche, “The essence of value is based on its being a viewpoint. Value means that which one has in mind [*ins Auge gefasst*]” and “as a viewpoint, value is always posited by a seeing and for a seeing” rather than by a supersensory ideal, as Wagner initially appeared to Nietzsche (Heidegger, 2001, p. 170). Instead, value is tied to a perspective, and Nietzsche comes to understand that each individual perspective must understand value from its own viewpoint, and no one can look to anyone else to “see” for them without sacrificing their individuality and the power of their point of view.

While Nietzsche’s ideas about knowledge, values and interpersonal relationships have a number of historical and intellectual sources with whom he engaged through reading and in his own writing, Wagner occupies a unique place in Nietzsche’s life and development, having been both a source of philosophical and spiritual inspiration and a key figure in Nietzsche’s own social and personal life. If Nietzsche’s turning away from Schopenhauer, for example, a significant youthful influence, is less contentious and rancorous, it is only perhaps because Nietzsche never had a personal relationship with Schopenhauer, who died while Nietzsche was still a teenager, and only ever knew him through his writing. Wagner, on the other hand, as Nietzsche recounts in 1869 after his first overnight visit to the composer’s Tribschen villa, “makes all

conceivable wishes come true, and the world has not the slightest idea of the greatness of the man or the uniqueness of his personality” (Köhler & Taylor, 1998, p. 44). For Nietzsche, Wagner - not just the artistic and intellectual figure but the flesh and blood person - presented himself as a bridge toward both knowledge and experience that, without his aid, would be inaccessible. Nietzsche, who before long “was expected to put his name and his time totally at the disposal of the lord and lady of Tribschen,” (Köhler & Taylor, 1998, p. 62) may have seen Wagner as an incomparable genius, but the feeling was not at all mutual, and his relationship with Wagner was more characterized as that of a naive and servile acolyte to a magnetic, but also somewhat dismissive and manipulative master in Wagner. In an April 1873 letter to Wagner, Nietzsche describes the sense of awe he feels in his presence, as well as the gulf that exists between Nietzsche the lowly acolyte and Wagner the seemingly untouchable master: “every moment I am with you I meet something I’ve never thought of before and yearn to make mine. I fully realize, dearest Master, that such company can give you no pleasure; indeed it must be unbearable at times... I beg you, accept me as but a pupil... whose talent, for that matter, is very sluggish and by no means versatile” (Fuss & Shapiro, 1971, p. 28). While the power of Wagner’s music was a point held in common by the two, their relationship bears little resemblance to the kinds of intellectual relationships Nietzsche would later pursue and write about, and Nietzsche himself always had a lesser position in service of the “lord,” Wagner, who always had the final word and whose work and ideas formed the perspective of all involved. ““Great geniuses are unpredictable and their ways unfathomable to us common mortals,” wrote Nietzsche in his notebook: “they need slaves in order to preserve their ‘drone-like’ existence” (Köhler & Taylor, 1998, p. 64). But this mask of “great genius” was only that - and once Nietzsche began to pry and peer underneath it at the very real and very flawed human being it concealed, the spell began to lose its power. Much later, in his 1888 book *The Case of Wagner*,

Nietzsche describes Wagner as someone who is seen by those who revere him not as a person but as the embellishments and dramatic effects that surround and inflate him: “His seductive force increases tremendously, smoke clouds of incense surround him, the misunderstandings about him parade as ‘gospel’” (Nietzsche, 1967, pp. 164-65). This image of Wagner provides, again, a kind of indirect influence, setting Nietzsche up to rethink how he ought to present himself and make himself seen and what kind of relationship he, in turn, would have with his own “disciples” or, more accurately, as he would go on to refer to intellectual and spiritual peers in *Zarathustra*, companions.

If there is any sense of continuity leading from this enraptured encounter with Wagner to the elevation of individual understanding that characterizes Nietzsche’s middle and mature works, it is the fruits of a lesson learned: no matter how powerful a teacher or “master” may be, artistically, socially, politically or intellectually, there is no other person whose singular perspective can be adopted verbatim by other individuals and lead them to knowledge that would rival that which they could cultivate from their own perspective. Nietzsche may have desired to make the ideas he encountered through Wagner his own, but this desire seems to rest on the assumption that Wagner had some kind of privileged perspective acquired through his “genius,” an idea that Nietzsche would later repudiate in *Human, all too Human*. In section #164 he describes the “superstition” in the belief that certain

spirits are of superhuman origin and possess certain miraculous capabilities... We ascribe to them, in fact, an immediate vision into the essence of the world, through a hole in the cloak of appearance, as it were, and believe that they can communicate something definitive and decisive about the human race and the world by means of this miraculous prophetic vision. (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 125)

Such “definitive and decisive” knowledge of “the essence of the world” would presumably be definitive and decisive for all, not just for the genius who communicates it, but if the “genius” does not in fact have such a privileged vision, then all they are communicating is their own perspective which is no more inherently valuable than any other and which Nietzsche could not adopt as his own in an authentically personal way.

In an unpublished fragment from 1878 Nietzsche considers Wagner as if looking in two directions: backward toward what he had at one time hoped Wagner would be, and forward toward what he has learned no one can be: “Human beings who try in vain to make a *principle* out of *themselves* (like Wagner)” (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 299). If Wagner had tried to turn himself into a principle, then Nietzsche had in turn tried to follow him as servant to both the man and the ideal he represented, and in the end found the whole endeavor to be “in vain” - ultimately an impossibility and a dead end. In place of Wagner and Bayreuth Nietzsche would not be able to find a new absolute organizing principle in either books or another person, and instead turned toward discovery through the individuality of his personal perspective to be his own leader and teacher. In section #267 of *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, titled “*There are no educators*,” Nietzsche discusses the difference between “youths” who are educated by others and those who are self-educated: “the education of youths by other people is either an experiment performed upon someone who is still unknown and unknowable or else a fundamental leveling in order to make the new being, whatever it may be, conform to the ruling habits and customs.” This kind of education, which is essentially the inscribing of some impersonal idea onto an individual who acts as a blank slate, is in contrast to the pursuit of knowledge undertaken by “thinkers,” among whom Nietzsche counts himself, who “should only speak of self-education.” The thinker is “someone self-educated, who has experience,” and it is this experience that has

educated them, rather than the experiments or attempts at leveling individuality that others might seek to impose (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 262). The preceding section, #266, titled "*Impatient people*," likewise seems to express the shift that occurred in Nietzsche as he turned away from Wagner and others and toward himself. The impatient youth "takes on faith" the truth of someone else's knowledge "that already stands finished and is offered to him, as if it must anticipate the lines and colors of his picture." But this adoption of someone else's truth leads the youth to forget "what is most worth learning and knowing: himself; he remains a lifelong partisan" (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 261). In renouncing the "partisanship" of Wagnerism, Nietzsche was able to turn instead to the most important source of knowledge: himself.

If Nietzsche was, in some sense, a victim of Wagner's strong spiritual and intellectual gravitational pull, then he redeems that experience by inventing a philosophical and personal, spiritual antidote to Wagnerism and finally an intellectual and spiritual path forward that is built out of his personal experience and individual perspective. There remains space within this new path for the influence of others, but as "friends" who can be seen in equal standing, not masters. As he writes in section #180 in *Human, all too Human*, an aphorism titled "*Collective spirit*," friends are even necessary for the "good writer": "A good writer contains not only his own spirit, but the spirit of his friends besides" (Nietzsche, 1995, p.132). Wagner's spirit, so intimately intertwined with his own vision and its manifestation in his works, can no longer serve a directly productive role in Nietzsche's works moving forward. What Nietzsche has learned from, and even gained from Wagner, is something more indirect - the lesson he takes away from his relationship with Wagner is not the one Wagner may have wanted to impart. Nietzsche still has a kind of respect for the influential power that someone like Wagner represents and the lessons he has learned from this encounter; if he appears in Nietzsche's writing as a "friend" it is as a *former* friend, but in an indirect way the spirit of this "friend" still appears in Nietzsche's thinking.

Gilles Deleuze writes about the difference between the “man of *ressentiment*” who is characterized by “his disgusting malevolence, his capacity for disparagement. Nothing can resist it. He does not even respect his friends or even his enemies. He does not even respect misfortune or its causes,” and the “aristocrat” whose “respect for the causes of misfortune goes together with an ability to take his own misfortunes seriously” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 117).

Nietzsche clearly takes the “misfortune” of his relationship with Wagner “seriously,” seeing it, as he describes it in the 1878 unpublished fragment, as a “shameful experience” that nevertheless “stimulated” him. Whether he considers Wagner as the one-time friend, or as the friend become enemy, in either case his attitude toward him is not one of unresolved *ressentiment*. In this sense his writings in the period after his break with Wagner could be seen to contain even something of Wagner’s spirit, but as a (former) friend, someone he can consider as an equal, not as a master or ideal.

The second significant historical factor that gives useful context to Nietzsche’s middle period turn to the pursuit of knowledge developed from an individual perspective is his departure from the University of Basel in 1879, a year after the publication of *Human, all too Human*, and along with it from academic and teaching duties and the institutional culture around them. For Nietzsche, no matter the depth of its engagement and intellectual seriousness, there was a fundamental difference between what could be learned or taught in an academic setting or through scholarship and scholastic discourse, and what one might pursue on their own as an individual and “free spirit,” regardless of how similar the two endeavors may appear superficially. As Horst Hutter writes, “it is hard to see how he could have honestly lived as a professor of philosophy given his views on university philosophers in the Germany of his time,” in particular because his colleagues “were never philosophers for themselves, but were employees of the state” (Hutter, 2006, pp. 58-9). For Nietzsche, state education, due to its scale

and the forces dictating its aims, was not able to endow the individual with the perspective and knowledge that a more personal approach could provide. The role of the university as mouthpiece for the state meant that its purpose and goals would always be geared toward the impersonal and institutional, the state that affects the lives of individuals but does not necessarily take individual concerns into account. Martine Beland provides a useful historical context as well as an account of Nietzsche's attitude toward the state-sponsored academic practices of his time:

The German empire of the mid-nineteenth century was undergoing a vast and rapid industrial development. The sudden diversification and augmentation of material needs and the number and preciseness of theoretical and technical skills necessary for production were such that Germany needed to train more professionals to fill an increasingly specialized and diversified workforce. Nietzsche saw that since they were tied to production imperatives, professions narrowed their pedagogical aims to specific competencies... In other words, they have already decided what is of value within an individual person. Academic specialization therefore targets certain abilities and maximizes their development in young people, to the detriment of other abilities that are now deemed useless. (Beland, 2024, pp. 82-3)

Nietzsche ultimately felt that such focus and specialization, tied to purposes that effaced the individual and their needs, amounted more to a tool to control the populace than one that could lead to something like personal liberation or genuinely new and personal perspectives on knowledge. "The schools," writes Nietzsche in section #320 of *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*, are one of the "means at hand" employed by "the governments of great states... for keeping the

people dependent upon them, in fear and obedience,” a “*paltry* sustenance” that attaches the individual “ever more closely to the aims of the government” (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 123).

Ultimately the purpose of this kind of education is to create subjects who exist in service of the state, shepherded away from any notion of individuality and instead stamped with an official seal of approval in a mold that promises a comfortable life as a consolation prize, but one that bears little resemblance to the daring experimentation and continual sense of becoming characteristic of the Nietzschean free spirit:

Finally, the state attaches to all those hundreds upon hundreds of official and commercial posts that it controls the obligation of letting oneself be educated and validated by the state schools if one ever wants to enter through these gates: respect from society, bread for oneself, possibility of a family, protection from above, the shared feeling of a common education – all of this forms a net of hopes into which every young man runs. (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 124)

If most young men ran toward such a “net of hopes,” Nietzsche seemed to want to run away from it, despite having in some sense been caught in such a net with his successful academic career and ascendancy to the chair of Classical Philology at the University of Basel at age 24. But it is easy to see how that kind of life trajectory would not appeal to Nietzsche, how such an understanding would “lead Nietzsche to depict the university graduate as a cog in an industrial system rather than an agent in a cultural movement” and conclude that such a system can only exist to “exploit persons for the benefit of a cold and lifeless abstraction” (Beland, 2024, p. 83). For Nietzsche, the kind of cultural movement that could act as a counterforce to becoming a “cog in an industrial system” is one that would emanate outward to the mass of culture from

individuals who could expand their understanding and introduce “new expressions of what it is to be human.” This widened scope of understanding, which Nietzsche hoped might have an effect on a cultural scale, nevertheless “can only happen locally, from within individuals who, through their own internal and external channels — that is, through their own judgments and actions — will have elaborated, tried, and finally embodied new values. Culture, in other words, rests upon the individual person” (Beland, 2024, p. 86). While the starting point of this cultural change would be within the individual, in their “judgments,” the endpoint would be “external,” emanating from the individual but legible to the larger culture in which the actions based on such personal judgments could be seen and considered by others. These individual actions would not then be adopted by all, but would instead provide a *model* of individuality that would encourage others to turn back to their own “internal channels” to examine and adjust their own judgments and in turn add something of their own individuality to the larger culture through their actions. In section #210 of *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*, titled “*Tongue looseners*,” Nietzsche describes the kind of individual forces that might have a culture-scale effect: “The value of many people and books rests solely upon the quality of forcing everyone to express what is most hidden, most inner: they are tongue-freers and crowbars for the most stubborn teeth” (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 88). Despite the fact that such “people and books” have, potentially, an effect on “everyone,” both the starting point and end point of this process lies within individuals in their examination of the most fundamentally personal parts of themselves, encouraging them to see their individuality and its perspective as a valuable resource and resist becoming lost in a system that effaces individuality.

There is a vast discrepancy between the impersonal aims of state-sponsored education and the individuality of the large number of students whose subjectivity and potential must be subjugated to a singular vision. Inevitably this results in a procrustean bed where individuality

and its potential are sacrificed for the sake of conformity to the state, and the end result is a kind of education that is accessible to many but also disappointingly bland and mediocre, acting to *reduce* individuals, not *produce* them as Nietzsche might hope. As Nietzsche writes in section #467 of *Human, all too Human*, “Schooling will always be mediocre at best in large states for the same reason that the cooking in large kitchens is mediocre at best” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 250). Any kind of “fare” - gustatory or intellectual - that is meant to account for the needs of such a broad range of individuals will require sacrificing the kind of personal freedom and particularity that Nietzsche values so greatly, and the thought of genuine individuals existing or thriving in such an institution - whether they be the professors or the students - seems impossible; and that impossibility clearly weighed on Nietzsche until he left academia once and for all. Reflecting much later in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche writes

What the “higher schools” in Germany really achieve is a brutal training, designed to prepare huge numbers of young men, in as little time as possible, with as little loss of time as possible, to become usable, abusable, in government service. “Higher education” and huge numbers — that is a contradiction to start with... All great, all beautiful things can never be common property. (Nietzsche, 2014, p. 46)

An education that seeks to allow individuals to encounter, on their own terms, “great” and “beautiful things,” the kind of teaching that Nietzsche seeks to instill in his audience, is not possible in an institution where all knowledge must be “common property,” let alone one in which the end goal is quickly and efficiently stamping individuals in the mold of government servants. For Nietzsche, German higher education was primarily an exercise in preparing individuals for professional roles and reinforcing allegiance to the state. By 1888, when *Twilight*

of the Idols was published, Nietzsche found that only by disassociating himself from forms of education that prioritize institutional and nationalistic formation could he engage with, and teach others through his writings about, thinking that “wants to be learned like dancing, as a kind of dancing,” the sort of thinking that allows one the freedom to experiment and push boundaries in accordance with their individual perspective (Nietzsche, 2014, p. 47).

Even in moments that Nietzsche might have found more freeing, when his attention could turn to teaching his own courses or engaging with the same texts and ideas that he would continue to pursue in his post-academic life, he was held back by the larger system and academic culture of which he was obligated to be a piece. “One gets lonely even in one’s field of knowledge” he wrote in February, 1870 to Erwin Rohde, Nietzsche’s former classmate and fellow philologist. “The most irksome thing of all is that I am always having to impersonate someone – the teacher, the philologist, the human being... But I am so bad at doing this, and I keep forgetting how” (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 62). While Nietzsche is no stranger to the idea of wearing a “mask” and performing a certain kind of identity, it must have been particularly difficult and painful for him to have needed a mask even in his professorial duties, dealing with the intellectual traditions, questions and ideas that would continue to interest him, but from a public and professional perspective that was not his own. As he wrote in another letter in the same month of 1870, “there are days on which I do not speak at all except in the service of my work” (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 64). That said, there were some days on which Nietzsche could speak, to a greater degree, in his own voice. Sue Prideaux writes that Nietzsche was “ecstatically proud to be the youngest ever professor appointed” at the University of Basel, where “he discovered how much he enjoyed teaching” (Prideaux, 2018, pp. 47-48). In the classroom he seemed to at least partially shed the mask he wore among his colleagues. “His spirit was greatly stirred by the energy of the River Rhine. When pupils entered his classroom they often found him at the open

window, mesmerized by its continuous roar. The grinding echo of the river against the tall walls of the medieval streets accompanied his walks through town,” a nascent image of the post-academic Nietzsche who worked out his ideas on long daily hikes (Prideaux, 2018, p. 48). In section #366 of *The Gay Science*, titled “*Faced with a scholarly book*,” Nietzsche describes the narrow, sedentary, cloistered confines of scholarly work as opposed to the liberating, free-spirited development of ideas one can cultivate in unbounded physical activity within natural settings: “We do not belong to those who have ideas only among books, when stimulated by books. It is our habit to think outdoors – walking, leaping, climbing, dancing, preferably on lonely mountains or near the sea where even the trails become thoughtful” as opposed to the kind of thinker one might find “sitting in front of his inkwell, with a pinched belly, his head bowed low over the paper,” stifled by “closet air, closet ceilings, closet narrowness... Every scholarly book also mirrors a soul that has become crooked” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 322). At the time of his Basel professorship, Nietzsche seemed pulled in these two directions at once, resentful of the institutional forces that may render his soul “crooked” and appreciative of the rarer moments in which he could find some of the “leaping, climbing, dancing” freedom that would later define his work and activities.

While the Nietzsche that the world would come to know was slowly coming into being in his personal world, and, to a lesser extent in his own classroom, that personage otherwise found little outlet in his day to day life. Looking back at his time in academia from the higher vantage point of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche reserves some of his most scathing and witty commentary for scholars and academia. While it is important to note the difference between Nietzsche the person and Zarathustra the fictional character, the two often overlap, and as Walter Kaufmann notes, the section titled “On Scholars” is “Nietzsche’s, not Zarathustra’s, autobiography” (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 81). Situating himself as someone who may

have lived and worked among scholars for some time, but never counted himself as a part of their world and its practices he writes: “We are alien to each other... And when I lived with them, I lived above them... and so far I have been heard least well by the most scholarly” (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 126). If Nietzsche saw himself as separate and apart from his fellow academics even prior to 1879 while he still “lived with them,” it is their way of pursuing knowledge and the motivations for its pursuit that is the important differentiating factor. Nietzsche’s work, focused on the individual and their ability to affect others through the communication of the fruits of their own personal interrogations, is in some sense speaking a different language, one that is difficult to “hear” from an academic perspective that prioritizes institutional education in service of the state, rather than the individual. Such an approach subverts the uniqueness of the individual and instead employs them as impersonal fodder for the machine-like workings of institutions: “Humanity makes pitiless use of every individual as material for heating its great machines: but what are the machines for, if all the individuals (that is, humanity) serve only to keep them going?” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 280). The arguments and counter-arguments that fuel the “machine” of scholarship in service of the state have no benefit for someone who values the pursuit of knowledge for its ability to offer personal insight to the individual, to grow their individuality rather than sacrifice it. The latter approach stands in stark contrast to Nietzsche’s view of academics, who he sees as using knowledge as a professional tool and means to establish a certain sense of authority and identity that depends on the opinions of others and a public standing within society and professional institutions.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, academics are characterized as being “trained to pursue knowledge as if it were nutcracking” (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 125), that is, as an attempt to chip away at the confusion around something and fully reveal the nut of truth that was concealed by a shell that needed only be cracked open with a mechanical approach. But this “truth,” one that

could be understood in the same way by multiple people and become the unchanging object of a communal discourse, is far from the kind that Nietzsche or Zarathustra propounds. As he writes in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche does see himself as engaged in intellectual activities that might be characterized as scholarly, even if he does not see himself as a scholar: "We are something different from scholars, although it is unavoidable for us to be also, among other things, scholarly." Even after leaving the scholarly world, Nietzsche continued to engage with thinkers and their works, although in a different context and with different aims, using them for productive personal thinking rather than as part of a standardized discourse to establish something like objective knowledge about them. And of course Nietzsche hoped to find an audience for his own writing - not so that it could become the object of scholarly debates or Wagnerian worship, but so that it could "inspire, elevate, and encourage" his readers with ideas that are communicated "briefly in order that they may be heard still more briefly" (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 345). Instead of "nut-cracking," the metaphor that Nietzsche employs to describe his "scholarly" activities is dancing, striving for the "greatest possible suppleness and strength that a good dancer desires from his nourishment - and I would not know what the spirit of a philosopher might wish more to be than a good dancer" (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 346). Returning to *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche describes the way that scholars engage with one another's ideas: "Like those who stand in the street and gape at the people who pass by, they [scholars] too wait and gape at thoughts that others have thought" (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 125). For Nietzsche, scholars are engaged in a pursuit of truth that is not individual and subjective but communal and ostensibly objective, a parasitic approach that lives off the work and original ideas of others, providing commentary and starting debates, pursuing professional achievements and building up their standing within the scholarly community, but ultimately never getting us closer to the kind of knowledge that Zarathustra and Nietzsche encourage readers and "companions" to

pursue within, and among, themselves. Nietzsche, who held Goethe in unusually high regard, must have recognized in his academic colleagues Faust's lament that even after having "gathered up and piled high the treasures of the human mind," without taking the further step of integrating the ideas into the lived experience of one's own life, the result of such passive possession of ideas is a disappointment: "My stature has not grown a wit // No closer to the infinite" (Goethe, 1989, p. 191). While the Nietzsche of *Zarathustra* would learn to climb the highest mountains and see from their peaks, his experience of university life and professional academic pursuits kept him disappointingly "grounded," so to speak.

Like Nietzsche, Zarathustra did not identify with the herd of academia, but still saw himself as engaged in activities that might likewise be called "scholarly," though certainly not the kind of scholarly activity that would be recognizable to the faculty of the University of Basel's philology department: "I am still a scholar to the children, and also to the thistles and red poppies" (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 124). The invocation of "children" brings to mind the figure of the child as the culmination of the "Three Metamorphoses," the stage at which one can embrace the creative potential of idiosyncratic truth, freed from the shackles of carrying the thoughts of others (the camel) or fighting against them (the lion), the latter two aligning more with Nietzsche's notion of the work of traditional scholars. The child represents "innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred 'Yes'" (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 27). If Nietzsche remains a scholar and educator after leaving academia, it is in service of students who will, through his teaching, become "a self-propelled wheel" rather than a cog in a machine. For Nietzsche, leaving academia behind opens up a space in which he can fully engage in the childlike wonder of creating something new, and something on his own terms, that cannot be touched by the understanding nor the misunderstanding of scholars, who

are ultimately engaged in a superficially similar but fundamentally different pursuit and use of knowledge.

At least for a time Nietzsche thought that he may have been able to retain some of the structure and community of university life, but without the stultifying culture and practices. In a December 1870 letter to Erwin Rohde, Nietzsche fantasizes about the creation of what he refers to as a “monastic and artistic community” where the two could “become real teachers” and engage in free-spirited thinking, as opposed to “university wisdom.” While he laments the fact that he may need to “drag on in this university existence for a few more years,” where “a completely radical institution for *truth* is not *possible*” and from which “nothing really revolutionary can come,” he holds out hope that he can “reach an island on which we shall not need to stop our ears with wax anymore. Then we shall be teachers to each other; our books will be merely fishhooks for catching people” (Nietzsche, 1969, pp. 73-4). Of course Nietzsche conceived of himself as a slightly different “fisher of men” than the figure with whom that phrase is customarily associated, but one can already see shades of Zarathustra in the desire for “companionship” in an intellectual environment dedicated to free thinking and a structure of mutual support (“teachers to each other”) as opposed to the rigid, hierarchical and institutional structure of academia. While his monastic dreams never came to fruition and Rohde, unlike Nietzsche, continued along the conventional scholarly and academic trajectory, Nietzsche never completely gave up on the idea that there could be some kind of communal endeavor in which his way of thinking might find a home, among others who likewise wanted to pursue knowledge within themselves and share the fruits of this pursuit with one another. As late as 1888, some 18 years after his letter to Rohde, Nietzsche was still thinking about the possibility of a community or institution that might act as a home for his ideas, one that would avoid the pitfalls of academia and university culture and practices: “At some point people will need institutions where they can

live and teach the way I understand living and teaching; perhaps there will be endowed chairs dedicated to Zarathustra interpretation” (Nietzsche et al., 2010, p. 100). The primary difference between his earlier conception and the one presented in *Ecce Homo* is Nietzsche’s own role: while he initially conceived of it as something he would participate in himself, that would be as much for his benefit as for anyone else (“We shall love, work, enjoy for each other”), by 1888 it is merely something he hopes will happen in the future, beyond the scope of his own lifetime: “the fact that people do not hear me these days, that they do not know how to accept anything I say, these facts are not only understandable, they even strike me as the way things should be” (Nietzsche et al., 2010, p. 100). While he finally came to accept that he would not be widely understood, let alone understood as part of a “monastic and artistic community” within his lifetime, Nietzsche never completely gave up on the idea of his ideas finding a public home.

While to some extent, as the following sections will show, the idea of creating a public, communal institution that could account for the needs and pursuits of multiple individuals while also encouraging the development of ideas and ways of living that are inherently personal and individual seems like an impossible task, and Nietzsche’s rejection of both Bayreuth and academia show the difficulties in looking to such institutions as viable options for such a pursuit, there remain other possible avenues for sharing ideas with others and helping them along the path to finding and using their own perspective. There is still much that can be learned from Nietzsche’s approach that can be integrated into more communal educational processes, though perhaps not exactly in the way Nietzsche envisioned in the imagined futures discussed in this section. While his ideas about knowledge gained through the mediation of one’s individual perspective will be the most useful for the purposes of this dissertation, there is still much that can be learned from Nietzsche’s early experiences and the lessons he himself learned from them. To paraphrase his own description of Pascal, we might say that Nietzsche

was the “most instructive victim” of the institutional pursuit of knowledge, and the following sections will show that he still managed to find a viable alternative to feeling “thrown hither and thither, and driven off my course, by my daily variegated professional work” (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 74).

2.

“*Der Mensch mit sich allein*”: The Free-Spirited Nietzschean Self¹

What do I care if my friends maintain that my current ‘freespiritedness’ is eccentric, something desperately forced against my own natural inclinations? All right, it may be a ‘second’ nature; but I shall yet show that only with this second nature did I come into proper possession of my first (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 69)

In Nietzsche’s work, the question of selfhood is never singular; it seems more accurate to say that there are many discussions of different “selves” that one might have, though an individual can never be reduced to a single iteration of who they are and how they present themselves, either to themselves or to others. What might be understood as the “self” is not some essential characteristic, but a mask, or set of masks - and while Nietzsche sometimes uses the image of the mask to cut down to size the inflated sense of self some people present to others, he also sees the mask as something good, and often necessary - there can even be, as one finds in “ancient life,” “delight in masks and the good conscience in using any kind of mask!” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 132). While the kind of individual understanding that characterizes one’s “second nature” is itself a kind of mask, the mask is often a part of the individual encountered by others - even when the individual is not physically present in encounters with others: “a mask of himself wanders around in place of him in the hearts and minds of his friends” (Nietzsche, 2014, p. 42). Jacques Derrida, in *Otobiographies*, notes the difference

¹ “By oneself alone” - the title of Chapter 9 from *Human, all too Human*.

between Nietzsche's personal self and the self encountered by others; his "own identity" that is "out of proportion with his contemporaries, has nothing to do with what they know by this name, behind his name" (Derrida, 1985, p. 8). The name acts as a kind of mask that circulates through his public presence, in either social or professional relations or published works, but it is in reality only tenuously connected to the way he sees and understands himself, a self that cannot circulate or be recognized in public discourse. Nietzsche's personal sense of self, "the identity he lays claim to here is not his by right of some contract drawn up with his contemporaries. It has passed to him through the unheard-of contract he has drawn up with himself" (Derrida, 1985, p. 8). While both the self that finds expression through the name or mask of Friedrich Nietzsche, writer and former professor, and the self that only he can perceive through his own experience can said to be real, they come into being in very different ways with significant and divergent implications. His public self depends on something like a "contract" between himself and others, a self built on promises and commitments that can be consulted and negotiated between individuals, whereas his "own identity" cannot become legible to others, because the "contract" through which it can come into being is an agreement with himself, and an "unheard-of" agreement, something internal to him that cannot be communicated to others without necessitating the drawing up of a very different, interpersonal kind of contract that would transfigure the personal self into a public one. In section #629 of *Human, all too Human*, Nietzsche writes that to demand of an individual that he "stand behind what he said, promised, resolved in passion – this is among the heaviest burdens that oppress humanity," because such "loyalty" exists at the price of "doing damage to our higher self" (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 295). In fact, individuals should not feel obligated to honor such promises, the commitments that make up a "contract" between themselves and others that may only be momentary identities brought into being by a particular "passion," because "there is no law, no obligation of this kind" and

instead “we must be traitors” if we want to continue growing, evolving and changing in accordance with the self that only honors the contract it has made with itself, that is not dependent on promises or agreements made to others (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 295). While both orientations of the self - either personal, or public - are objects of Nietzsche’s concern throughout his works, it is the latter sense of self, one that is the product of a singular, individual perspective, that Nietzsche always encourages his readers to pursue and honor contractually.

While Nietzsche does not offer a singular definition of the self, Alexander Nehamas’ writings on Nietzsche develop a fairly clear notion of what the individual, personal sense of self, that is subject to experiments of creation and investigation by way of one’s own perspective, looks like. As can be seen in the excerpt above from a letter to Hans von Bulow, the way that Nietzsche understands who he is, his *own* “self,” characterized by “freespitedness,” is something difficult to discern, even for his friends, and something that seems both an inherent, natural, and original part of him (“my own natural inclinations,” “my first [nature]”) and something that he has created and worked to bring into existence (“something *desperately* forced,” “second nature”). For Nietzsche, as exemplified by the famous dictum “wie man wird, was man ist,” “how one becomes, what one is,” the self is simultaneously something that we already are, something we must become, and something that seems to lack enough definite features to clearly define or pin down in a coherent and communicable way. All the same, Nietzsche is very concerned with his own sense of self and the possibilities it contains for creation and action, and in turn, in a related way, with the selves of his audience or readers who might take his efforts to “become who he is” as a model for their own personal work. So it is not a simple matter to talk about what “the self” means for Nietzsche, though it is still possible to delineate among *se/ves* and identify which forms of identity are conducive to personal growth. As Nehamas writes, “The phrase ‘Become who you are’ is problematic” not just due to Nietzsche’s denial of “the distinction

between becoming and being” but also “because he is convinced that the very idea of the self as a subject in its own right, from which he claims this distinction is derived, is itself an unjustified invention” (Nehamas, 1985, p. 172). Nehamas, however, still manages to provide a useful and original interpretation of Nietzsche’s conception of the personal self and what coming to know it, and in turn cultivate it, looks like:

The creation of the self therefore appears to be the creation, or imposition, of a higher-order accord among our lower-level thoughts, desires, and actions. It is the development of the ability, or the willingness, to accept responsibility for everything that we have done and to admit what is in any case true: that everything that we have done actually constitutes who each one of us is. (Nehamas, 1985, p. 188)

Returning to the letter quoted at the beginning of this section, an individual’s “first nature,” correlating to Nehamas’ “lower-level thoughts, desires and actions,” is a sense of self or identity that each individual possesses whether they are aware of it or not; it is the self they carry around with them simply by dint of being human, and possessing such a self does not require the kind of purposeful creative effort that becomes possible through introspection, though it, in turn, is created and shaped by the circumstances an individual encounters in the course of their life. In either case, for Nietzsche the self is created, and is continually shifting depending on what is influencing its growth. That shifting could be the purposeful work of an individual on themselves, the work of a “free human being” who, as Nietzsche writes in *Dawn*, “is unaccustomed and immoral because, in all things, he wants to depend upon himself and not upon a tradition.” Or it could be an attempt to define oneself by “obedience to mores, no matter what ilk they might happen to be,” the social and moral demand “that one observe rules and

precepts without thinking of oneself as an individual” (Nietzsche, 2011, pp. 10-11). Of course both processes still occur in the same world, one in which “rules and precepts” exist and shape the possible forms of thought and action, but the choice of relating to those forces “as an individual,” with the freedom to respond in a personal way, or as an unquestioning representative of a community and its moral standards, results in very different kinds of selves. However, through dedicated efforts at self-examination, individuals can come to understand this ordinary, “lower-level” self, and corral it using the “higher-order accord” that leads them toward their “second nature” and a reconsideration of their “first nature.”

The creation of the self for Nietzsche is not a matter of becoming a completely new and different person, which would amount to denying and attempting to negate “everything that we have done,” which includes elements that may be classified as “individual” as well as one’s personal history of encountering and being shaped by people and ideas that serve to cohere individuals within a community. Rather, as Nietzsche writes in section #290 of *The Gay Science*, it is a matter of an individual “giving style” to the “character” that they already have according to a “single taste” that is the product of their own perspective and personal judgment:

Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed – both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime... In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste! (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 232)

While Nietzsche does not reference Kant directly in this passage, it is nevertheless suffused with Kantian language (“ugly,” “taste,” “sublime”) and opens up space for a discussion of the difference between Kantian and Nietzschean approaches to aesthetics and the relationship between individuals and others, and the important implications this difference has for understanding the role of the creative individual in Nietzsche’s works. In particular, this passage is informative regarding the notion of the beautiful and the function of taste, and how Nietzsche’s understanding of these concepts traces a kind of indirect influence from Kant, engaging with Kantian ideas and terms but reorienting them in accordance with his own understanding of them. In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant writes that taste “is the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by means of a liking or disliking devoid of all interest,” and that the “object of such a liking is called beautiful” (Kant, 1987, p. 53). He adds that if “someone likes something and is conscious that he himself does so without any interest, then he cannot help judging that it must contain a basis for being liked [that holds] for everyone” (Kant, 1987, p. 54). On the other hand, for Nietzsche, matters of taste and the beautiful are both invested with desire and interest in a personal way, and cannot hold true “for everyone,” or even for multiple individuals. If, as Kant writes, judgment of taste “requires... agreement from everyone” then such an approach would not be conducive to the process of giving style to one’s character in the way Nietzsche encourages; the individual would then find themselves back in a communal space in which the understanding and creation of their own self was dependent on and could only be validated through agreement with others who are nevertheless unable to see and account for those parts of the individual’s self that are personal and not discernible to others (Kant, 1987, p. 60). The process Nietzsche describes in section #290 of *The Gay Science* is “constrained” by a “single taste” - that of the individual who “survey[s] all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit[s] them into an artistic plan,” and such an “artistic plan”

seems incompatible with an approach that is disinterested (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 232). Not only is such a process singular rather than subject to validation through agreement with others - the repetition of “single taste” and emphatic exclamation point reenforce the crucial nature of this element - it involves a desire to create and transform, not merely behold one’s character. Because the object in question is the self of the individual who is also making the judgment, that individual has a strong interest in it and a privileged perspective on it; a disinterested approach to understanding one’s own self could not lead to the creative feats Nietzsche describes in section #290, nor to the work of the “higher self” described by Nehamas. As Heidegger writes, for Nietzsche “The question of art is the question of the artist as the productive, creative one; *his* experiences of what is beautiful must provide the standard” (Heidegger, 2001, p. 70). The finished “work” that one beholds after having altered one’s own character and given it “style” is both the product of personal, singular experience and validation, created using the “standard” of an individual’s own perspective on themselves, and something in which the individual has an active hand in producing, a “productive, creative” approach that requires interestedness. As Nick Zangwill writes in his essay “Nietzsche on Kant on Beauty and Disinterest,” for Nietzsche the appreciation of beauty involves “highly personal intense experiences” that are not “universal” or “sharable” as in Kant’s account; “something so widely sharable could not have the value of something preciously personal and particular,” especially if the thing in question is the individual’s own self or character (Zangwill, 2013, p. 89). For Nietzsche, taste is singular, and its singularity is defined by the “personal and particular” nature of the individual’s perspective.

In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche does explore the question of interestedness in beauty in the context of a more explicit commentary on Kant, and argues that Kant’s approach to the “aesthetic problem” has a kind of blind spot in its emphasis on the spectator over the artist and creator: “Kant, like all philosophers, instead of envisaging the aesthetic

problem from the experiences of the artist (of the creator) only reflected on art and the beautiful from the standpoint of the ‘spectator’” (Nietzsche, 2014, p. 292). While it may be argued that a spectator *could* find something beautiful in a disinterested way, because they could look at a particular object in a passive way, an artist’s relationship with beauty is both an interested one, through the act of creation, and a personal, individual one, particularly in the example from section #290 of *The Gay Science*, in which the “work” is the product of a kind of artistic vision built out of a perspective that is dictated by one’s individuality. Nietzsche comments more explicitly both on the standards of beauty and artistic creation ten pages prior to section #290, in section #276, where he proclaims that he wants “to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 223). There is a direct relation between *seeing* and *making*, and if one is a spectator in relation to something, especially their own self or character, for Nietzsche it is only as the first step toward becoming an artist, the creator of a version of their own self that can be deemed to be beautiful. Likewise what is “necessary” for the individual in giving their character style is something only the individual can decide for themselves - if others were to dictate what was necessary for someone’s understanding of themselves, it would not be based on the individual’s own self-understanding. Such standards from others could only be *imposed* on the individual in a way that may produce internal conflicts and confusion, not *integrated* into their own understanding and experience. Whereas Kant writes that “A judgment of taste... is merely contemplative, i.e., it is a judgment that is indifferent to the existence of the object,” for Nietzsche it is a process that is active and interested, whether that be in relation to things in general, as in section #276, or the self or one’s character, as in section #290 (Kant, 1987, p. 51). The difference between the disinterested spectator and the interested artist or creator is evident when comparing these examples from Nietzsche’s work with the examples Kant provides: “It would be ridiculous if

someone who prided himself on his taste tried to justify [it] by saying: This object (the building we are looking at, the garment that man is wearing, the concert we are listening to, the poem put up to be judged) is beautiful *for me*" (Kant, 1987, p. 55). All of the examples that Kant provides are objects external to the individual, which can be made the subject of debate or agreement among multiple individuals, who all have equal access to perceptions of buildings, garments, concerts or poems. However, one's own self or character is something to which multiple individuals have unequal access, and the individual always has a greater ability to both understand and reorder or create the elements of themselves that only they can perceive from an internal perspective; others may choose to comment on the quality of someone's character, but they do so from a perspective that is not embedded within the individual in question. While Nietzsche ultimately diverges from Kant in his interpretation of taste and the beautiful, the engagement represents a productive source for Nietzsche's thought. Like his relationship with Wagner, Nietzsche's relationship with Kant represents both a source of influence and a divergence, but not a complete abandonment. As R. Kevin Hill writes, "For Nietzsche... Kant is the philosopher with whom one must come to terms. One must either become a Kantian, or, starting from a Kantian foundation, think one's way out of Kantianism," and Kant's ideas about aesthetics still provide Nietzsche with a framework and set of ideas and arguments to which he can productively respond and which he can adapt to his own understanding of taste and the beautiful (Hill, 2003, p. 6).

While Nietzsche does occasionally engage with philosophical concepts and ideas that are clearly defined, such as Kant's writing on aesthetics, in general his writings do not offer clear or consistent, widely used terminology. Given the individual and incommunicable nature of Nietzsche's conception of the personal self, employing concepts or language as guideposts for his readers to come to know or create their own selves would be incongruous with the task they

must undertake, which language cannot contain or communicate in comparison to a direct and intuitive experience of oneself. While the lack of clear and consistent terminology in discussions of the self, or selves, makes it somewhat more difficult to discuss and lay out Nietzsche's ideas about them, it also allows him to frame these discussions in a way that is not limited by the definition of a conceptual term or set of terms that might preclude his individual readers from adapting and reframing them through an individual perspective. Still, Nietzsche wants to be able to share these ideas with others and make them communicable to *some* extent, and in service of that goal he does use some helpful and occasionally consistent, though not singularly definitive, terms to characterize his idea of the personal self, and taken together these terms seem to form a generalized and helpful picture that individuals can take as a starting point for consideration from a personal perspective without the risk of the ideas encroaching on or limiting the possibilities of knowledge that can be created from the individual's own perspective.

While it is not a particularly specific or insightful word, Nietzsche frequently employs the term "personal" (*persönlich*, alongside variations such as *unpersönlich*, *Persönlichkeit*, *persönlichen*, etc) to refer to what could be thought of as the individual perspective through which the action of the Nietzschean free-spirited self occurs. The term and its variations are used especially frequently in the two volumes of *Human, all too Human*, where they appear over sixty times. A good example of this term is in section 576, titled "Danger of personal influence," (*"Gefahr persönlichen Einflusses"*): "Anyone who feels that he exerts a great inner influence upon someone else must allow him completely free rein, indeed be pleased to see occasional resistance and even induce it himself: otherwise he will inevitably make an enemy for himself" (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 278). The similar constructions of "personal influence" and "inner influence" are helpful here in showing that, for Nietzsche, what is "personal" is also "inner." Because the work that can be done in this "personal" space must be mediated through the individual's *own*

personal perspective as opposed to someone *else's* personal perspective, which would become impersonal to the person on whom it is being imposed. To transpose someone else's perspective, whether it is their personal perspective or one that purports to be universal and impersonal, would require that the individual efface themselves and become a blank slate for something foreign. If someone does want to guide and influence others, they must allow each individual to develop in a way that may be incomprehensible or objectionable from other perspectives, and they should even be happy to see resistance toward their own ideas in others as a sign of each party's *Persönlichkeit*. While productive interpersonal relations are not impossible, as the following section will show, establishing this *persönlich* sense of self and its unique perspective is the first necessary step in understanding one's own self and its relations with others, which are complicated by the personal, individual nature of the perspective that enables personal knowledge and experience, which must be given "completely free rein" if it is to flourish. The domain of such free rein is not necessarily limited to what is contained strictly within the individual, but in order to productively assimilate the influence of others, the individual must not feel imposed upon by such influence, but instead use it as a catalyst that works indirectly toward encouraging their own personal growth. Hence why it is seen as positive that one individual might induce resistance in another, but negative when their influence impedes the agency of the other individual and curtails or denies resistance. As Alexander Nehamas writes in *The Art of Living*, Nietzsche considers "the self to be not a given but a constructed unity," and its unity is constructed out of "the particular circumstances in which one finds oneself and that, in the nature of the case, are different for each particular individual" (Nehamas, 1998, p. 4). These "particular circumstances" that are "different for each particular individual" define and shape that individual's unique perspective, and this perspective must be given free rein to find

its own way and interpret what it encounters according to its own contours if the process is to lead to free-spirited self-fashioning and “giving style to one’s character.”

Nietzsche’s use of the word “personal” and its variations is helpful in understanding the kind of perspective through which one must interpret themselves and their experiences in order to be able to engage in the kind of self-fashioning he sees as valuable. While these terms are more frequently encountered and provide a more consistent picture, he also provides a more specific, though not consistently or frequently used, term that complements and expands on the more general notion of the “personal.” In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche employs the neologism “ipsissimosity,” (*ipsissimosität*) which Adrian Del Caro translates as “‘very ownness’: N’s [sic] coinage from Latin *ipsissimus* (‘very own’)” (Nietzsche, 2014, p. 380n6). The word appears in a context that is typically Nietzschean: at first seemingly negative, a lamentation that will then be turned on its head to be seen in a positive light. The passage begins with a reference to “the *objective* spirit” toward which we might be “grateful” in comparison to its opposite: “who has not been sick to death at least once of everything subjective and its damned ipsissimosity!” (Nietzsche, 2014, p. 106). While the unquestioning passivity of the “objective spirit” may seem like a tempting alternative to the particularity and specific demands of a self defined by a strictly delineated personal border, any attempt to make ourselves into something objective, to make our own spirit and the “objective” spirit one and the same, means in reality being “only a tool” or a “mirror” for the ideas of others, resulting in a “de-selfing and de-personalizing of the spirit (*die Entselbstung und Entpersönlichung des Geistes*),” connecting the idea of ipsissimosity back to the more broad term “*persönlich*” and its variations. For the objective spirit, “Whatever remains of ‘person’ (*Person*) in him seems accidental to him, often arbitrary, even more often disturbing: that is how much he has become a passage and reflection to himself of strange shapes and events” ending up ultimately as someone who is completely

incapable of acting out of their own motivations or identity, which they would not be able to recognize besides: “who first has to wait for some kind of content and substance in order ‘to shape’ himself accordingly” (Nietzsche, 2014, pp. 106-108). With this in mind, now that “damned ipsissimosity” does not seem so bad after all; if one is to have any kind of self that can be called one’s own, or personal, for Nietzsche it seems that it must be defined by its ipsissimosity, its adherence to what is its own, as opposed to some objective principle that would leave the individual “selfless.” So, at least in part, for Nietzsche the “self” is that part of an individual that is “our very own” and could not belong to anyone else, the things that are “ours” alone - the emotions one feels, the experiences one has, the inclinations and patterns of behavior one returns to consistently, even sometimes in spite of themselves, as opposed to patterns of behavior or emotions that one might find reflected in the public sphere, or as ideas received from others, which can only exist as direct experience to the individual who is experiencing them, and otherwise act as objects of experience for other individuals, but not a replacement for their own experience.

The written representation of an experience that, in turn, can serve as the object of others’ experience can still be of use to the individual, provided they do not mistake it for a substitute for their own experience, or a representation that recreates the entirety of someone else’s experience. In the preface to *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, Nietzsche carefully delineates between his own experiences, which have informed what is communicated in the book, and the book as an indirect product of experience, a representation after the fact, which allows him to communicate something about them, but is not, itself, either Nietzsche’s own experiences or a substitute for those of his readers. Here Nietzsche again employs two variations of the term ipsissimosity that can add to and expand the understanding of what is genuinely “one’s own” in Nietzsche’s thinking: “My writings speak only of my overcomings: ‘I’ am

in them along with everything that was inimical to me, *ego ipsissimus*, in fact, if a prouder expression is allowed, *ego ipsissimum*” (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 3). Gary Handwerk offers an insightful footnote and translation of these terms - the relatively straightforward “ego ipsissimus,” or “I my very self,” and the more nuanced “ego ipsissimum,” a “pregnant pun, not readily unpacked.” This latter term could be rendered as “I myself, as object,” however “‘unpersoned’ or ‘depersonalized’ would work as one sense of the self as object” (Handwerk, 2013, p. 446n3).

While the book allows for a communication of the ideas that have come about as a result of Nietzsche’s experience, they are presented to the reader in a “depersonalized” form, abstracted from the “personal” element to which only Nietzsche himself had access, which cannot be communicated in writing. Nietzsche’s use of quotation marks around “I” is also telling; he frequently presents terms in quotation marks, such as “truth,” to denote that he is not actually referring to something definitive. Jacques Derrida refers to such uses of quotation marks as “the epochal regime of quotation marks which is to be enforced for every concept belonging to the system of philosophical decidability. The hermeneutic project which postulates a true sense of the text is disqualified under this regime,” and Nietzsche seems to be discouraging his readers from attempting to uncover the “true” Nietzsche in that “I,” and the truth of his experiences (Derrida, 1978, p. 107). Nietzsche goes on to describe the space between experience and its representation in writing, the need to allow for “the time, the convalescence, the remoteness, the distance, until the desire moved within me to skin, to exploit, to expose, ‘to represent’ (or whatever one wants to call it) retrospectively for knowledge something that had been experienced and survived” (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 3). What is communicated is not something that allows the reader direct access to what “had been experienced and survived,” but instead a retrospective representation, infused with the reflection on the experience that has occurred in the intervening time, the purpose of which is “knowledge” which, unlike experience, can be

shared with others through writing, and in turn become the catalyst for experiences for his readers that *are* their own.

What others communicate of their experiences can be of value to the individual, so long as they are careful to take them as starting points for their own personal development. To simply copy or attempt to reenact what one encounters through others would mean an attempt to integrate something otherwise personal into a shared, communicable form, which many others could then adopt verbatim. But as Alexander Nehamas writes, “the effort to become who one is requires that the whole one constructs, the self one fashions, be significantly different from all others. If it isn’t, then one is not distinguishable from the rest of the world: one has not become an individual” (Nehamas, 1998, p. 142). And of course, this difference is not an arbitrary one, difference for the sake of difference, but one that is built out of one’s ipsissimosity, “events peculiar to him alone: accidents of birth and growth, health and sickness, choices made consciously and unconsciously, friendships made and lost, works composed or left unfinished, features liked and despised” (Nehamas, 1998, p. 141). For Nietzsche what counts as “experience,” which is to say what counts as the activities of the personal self, is “not those crude ‘events’ that come from without, but the destinies and throes that befall the most solitary and quiet life that has leisure and that burns with the passion of thinking” (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 242). This quote appears in the context of a critique of Schopenhauer and Kant, with Nietzsche taking the latter to task for what he sees as a lack of such experiences informing his ideas: “Kant appears, when he does appear through his thought, as upright and honorable in the best sense, but as insignificant: he lacked breadth and power; he did not experience very much and his way of working deprived him of the *time* to experience anything” (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 242). Setting aside Kant’s immense influence on both Nietzsche and in the history of philosophy, and the theoretical value of his work, from Nietzsche’s perspective his ideas offer little to someone

interested in philosophical thinking that values testimony informed by personal experience, which cannot be represented or communicated in a systematic and highly conceptual form, and whose end point is knowledge that is primarily valuable in an intuitive way for individual people. Nietzsche ultimately accuses Kant of writing a “biography... of the head” rather than one of the “soul,” and it seems that, especially in aphoristic and poetic works of the middle period that prioritize attempts to allow the soul to communicate something of its experiences, this difference in the motivation and source of ideas is an important distinction.

Having sketched out some of the contours of the Nietzschean personal self, defined broadly by its “personal” nature, and this “personal” nature understood as, in turn, being defined by its “ipsissimosity,” the perspective and experiences that find their center within the individual, we can now return to look more in-depth at examples of the more frequent occurrences of the term “personal” with a clearer understanding of what it implies for the Nietzschean self-created self. In section 223 of *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*, Nietzsche discusses what is necessary “if we want to descend into the river of what seems to be our most individual and personal nature (*unseres anscheinend eigensten und persönlichsten Wesens*),” while keeping in mind that the self is constantly changing and shifting in becoming: “we are ourselves nothing except what we experience at every moment” in the flow of time (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 95). On the one hand, Nietzsche seems to be leading his readers toward a moment of revelation in which the deepest essence of their selves could be revealed, the “most individual and personal nature”; on the other hand, this moment of potential revelation is qualified by the fact that it only “seems to be” the full revelation of the self, which would require an understanding of the self changing through time, which cannot be perceived in self-observation that is limited to a given moment or period of time. However, the fact that its mere semblance lacks the stability sufficient to define it in absolute, definite terms should not dissuade individuals from pursuing their most personal

sense of self. For Nietzsche, this personal self can still be spoken of and said to exist (or perhaps more accurately to have the ability to be brought into existence, to be created) not as a permanent, stable identity with a rock-solid core, but rather as an ever-changing process that involves the continual encountering of one's own personal history and the patterns of behavior or desire that have led individuals to each present moment with new and changing circumstances that surround them. As Alexander Nehamas writes, "Nietzsche's conception of the self is still compatible with change" and

so long as we are alive, we are always finding ourselves in new and unforeseen situations; we constantly have new thoughts and desires, we continue to perform new actions. In their light we may at any point come to face with the need to reinterpret, to reorganize, or even to abandon earlier ones. (Nehamas, 1985, p. 189)

Nehamas' conception of the Nietzschean personal self is helpful to understand what this hard-to-define or describe thing is for Nietzsche, characterized by its ipsissimosity and "personal" nature, but at the same time never completely stable - the specifics of what is "true" for an individual personally may change over time, as can the perspective through which they understand these details. As Nietzsche goes on to say in section #224 of *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*, "Immediate self-observation is far from sufficient for getting to know ourselves: we need history, for the past flows on, through us, in a hundred waves" (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 95). Nietzsche's particular understanding of history is not one that seeks to establish definitive narratives built around an objective understanding of the meaning of certain events or the forms of knowledge that should be applied to understand them. Michel Foucault, in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," provides a useful sketch of the difference between the

historical method of traditional historians, and the historical sense of individuals who do not try to efface their own perspective in the pursuit of understanding how meaning and knowledge evolve in tandem with the individual circumstances that are their object, a method that “gives equal weight to its own sight and to its objects.” Whereas traditional historians “take unusual pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy... Nietzsche’s version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 156-157). If individuals want to get to know themselves, the investigation must take their personal perspective, their “own sight,” as the starting point for an examination of their personal history and the way the history of the world has shaped it. While the “objects” of such a perspective will not be limited to the individual themselves - in Nietzsche’s case, we have seen how the figure of Wagner and his project are objects of Nietzsche’s personal history, as are thinkers, writers and other historical figures who lived and died before Nietzsche - the perspective that Nietzsche employs in understanding the meaning of Wagnerism, for example, in relation to himself is his own, not that of Wagner, who would inevitably have a very different understanding of the relationship and subsequent break between the two.

In section #345 of *The Gay Science* titled “*Morality as a problem*,” Nietzsche discusses the more or less personally engaged ways that people relate to ideas, here specifically ideas about morality, and how an engagement that is “cold” and “impersonal” differs fundamentally from one that is defined by “personal distress, torment, voluptuousness, and passion” (Nietzsche, 1974, pp. 283-4), which is to say engagement that is purely objective, impersonal, and capable of forming part of a communal or universal dialogue, as opposed to an engagement that occurs within a personal perspective bounded by the individual’s ipsissimosity:

It makes the most telling difference whether a thinker has a personal (*persönlich*) relationship to his problems and finds in them his destiny, his distress, and his greatest happiness, or an "impersonal" (*unpersönlich*) one, meaning that he can do no better than to touch them and grasp them with the antennae of cold, curious thought. In the latter case nothing will come of it: that much one can promise in advance, for even if great problems should allow themselves to be grasped by them they would not permit frogs and weaklings to hold on to them. (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 283)

For Nietzsche, the perspective with which one approaches an idea is just as important as the content of the idea, because the way the idea is approached will determine whether or not something personally meaningful and useful will come out of the engagement. The denial of such a personal perspective gives room for forces outside the individual's perspective to dictate the meaning of an idea. As Foucault writes, this leads individuals to give precedence over themselves to "the sovereignty of a timeless idea" that forces the individual to "silence his preferences and... blur his own perspective and replace it with the fiction of a universal geometry" (Foucault, 1977, p. 158). If the most important part of engaging ideas is to extract something that is valuable and meaningful on a personal, individual level from them, then this kind of cold, objective analysis is the opposite approach, favoring something more like the objectivity of an impersonal, even inhuman "universal geometry" over the living and often illogical identity of an individual. As Nietzsche writes here, "nothing will come out of" an engagement that is strictly impersonal. Of course, *something* can come out of such an engagement - a type of analysis that remains cold and intellectual could still be the basis for a certain kind of knowledge, or even for the kind of "self" that Nietzsche opposes to the free-spirited one, a depersonalizing mask - but that is not the type of *something* that Nietzsche

values. On the other hand, the “great problems” that form the object of either kind of inquiry do remain relatively stable regardless of the perspective through which they are considered. Nietzsche is just as concerned with the fundamental questions that occupy philosophical inquiry such as truth, morality, and knowledge; what he rejects is not the problems, but the explanations provided for them that have occupied philosophical discourse, and the bases that have been provided for justifying the truth of such explanations. As he writes in section #103 of *Dawn*, “I deny morality the same way I deny alchemy, which is to say, I deny its presuppositions, not however that there were alchemists who did believe in these presuppositions and acted in accordance with them” (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 71). The objects of Nietzsche’s inquiry are the same questions that occupy others, and form a discourse that must be entered into and contended with if he is to contribute to the practice of philosophy; but what he brings into this discourse is the elevation of individual perspective and its personal specificity over the historically dominant “presuppositions” that are otherwise the starting point for engaging with problems like morality.

Toward the end of section #345 of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche provides an extremely useful differentiation between the public discourse or understanding of an idea and the value or meaning of an idea that in some ways has little to do with how it might be understood or discussed on a communal, interpersonal level. Considering the misguided efforts of those he calls “historians of morality,” Nietzsche writes:

they uncover and criticize the perhaps foolish opinions of a people about their morality, or of humanity about all human morality – opinions about its origin, religious sanction, the superstition of free will and things of that sort – and then suppose that they have criticized the morality itself. But the value of a command “thou shalt” is still fundamentally

different from and independent of such opinions about it and the weeds of error that may have overgrown it... Even if a morality has grown out of an error, the realization of this fact would not as much as touch the problem of its value. Thus nobody up to now has examined the value... and the first step would be – for once to question it. (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 285)

Here the difference is apparent between what Richard Schacht refers to as “truth-value” and “life-value” for Nietzsche. In his essay “Nietzsche’s Kind of Philosophy,” Schacht notes that Nietzsche “insists upon the distinction between the plausibility and soundness of various ideas, on the one hand, and their ‘value for life,’ on the other (between their ‘truth-value’ and their ‘life-value,’ as it were)” (Schacht, 1996, p. 154). The “life-value” of morality, which is to say an engagement with moral ideas from an individual perspective, assessed using the means of one’s ipssissimosity and with the goal of providing meaning and value to the life of an individual, is of a different nature than the “opinions” about it, correlating to Schacht’s notion of “truth-value,” which neither depends upon nor provides insight into an individual’s life but instead contributes to a communal discourse and shared sense of truth. The difference ultimately depends on the orientation of the inquiry’s purpose - whether it is a reflexive kind of thinking that returns back to the individual to inform their values on a personal level, or whether it is oriented outward to inform an impersonal, communal discourse in which various opinions about morality compete. Both notions of value can take communal discourse as the object of inquiry, but the difference lies in who benefits from it and for what purposes. While the “truth-value” of an idea can be “disproven” in a logical or rational sense, the power of such proof exists primarily in interpersonal interactions or dialogue, whereas in the personal space of the individual’s “life-

value” such a refutation loses much of its potency and meaning; the morality may be “proven wrong” but such proof does not touch the value it holds for an individual.

In section #376 of *Human, all too Human*, “*Of friends*,” Nietzsche considers the difference in the status of opinions for an individual and for a group, even a group of friends, asking us to consider “how even the same opinions have a wholly different place or intensity in the heads of your friends than in your own; how hundredfold occasions arise for misunderstanding or for hostile evasion of one another” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 217). What could be considered an “error” in the context of an objective and communal discourse could at the same time be held as true for someone who considers that idea from their own personal perspective in which it has a personal sense of value and meaning, without the former necessarily negating the latter. What becomes error and a point of contention within a group of people who are attempting to find a mutually assented common understanding can still be true for any individual member of such a group. Nietzsche goes on to argue that “all the opinions” we might encounter in “fellow human beings as well as their type and their intensity are just as necessary” for each individual and he urges his readers to see “how this inner necessity of opinions arises from the indissoluble interweaving of character, occupation, talent, environment” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 217). With this understanding of the relationship between individual perspectives that will always contain some kind of uncrossable gap, the ability to hold things to be true personally can be reconciled with the inability to share that personally held truth with others, finding common ground not in a shared understanding of an idea or its value but instead in a shared recognition of each individual’s unique perspective. As Alexander Nehamas points out, there is a difference between absolutism that is “tentative,” which is characteristic of the Nietzschean free spirit, and absolutism that perceives itself as universally true: “At any particular moment Nietzsche's free spirits... can have every faith in the practices in which they are

engaged: they know that, at that time at least, they cannot live without them. But in addition they also know that others could not live with them” (Nehamas, 1985, p. 70). In setting out his own goal of questioning the life-value of morality rather than taking a particular side regarding the status of its truth-value in public or communal discourse, Nietzsche makes clear that he is interested in the way that a given morality (or idea more generally) affects the personal experience and understanding of an individual who uses it as a personal organizing principle rather than an objective intellectual debate about the status of that morality or idea within a philosophical, nationalistic, religious or historical discourse or practice.

Having established more clearly what the free-spirited, personal self looks like in general for Nietzsche, it is worth looking in more detail at Nietzsche’s accounts of how he came to create and embody his own such self and what that process entailed. It is important to note before beginning this analysis that, while Nietzsche’s more specific and personal account of his own endeavor does not provide any knowledge or wisdom that can be directly appropriated and adopted by others, it still provides something that is useful in an indirect way, giving his readers a rough model for what this process looks like that can act as a catalyst for any given individual’s pursuit of self-understanding and creation. The following sections will address the difficulty of interpersonal relationships and communication and how Nietzsche meets the challenge of communicating ideas to others, but this section’s proceeding analysis of Nietzsche’s own undertakings should be seen and understood in the specific context of a model to be loosely followed, that is a representation or translation of Nietzsche’s experiences mediated by contemplation and literary form. As Robert Pippin writes in *Nietzsche, Psychology and First Philosophy*, “He offers himself as a unique individual possibility, not an instance of a universal rule but a possible paradigm instance to be imitated” (Pippin, 2011, p. 64). Nietzsche’s readers should only “imitate” the paradigm Nietzsche introduces inasmuch as they can do so in

a way that leads to their own “unique individual possibility,” and what Nietzsche provides to his readers is not definitive knowledge or a blueprint for personal knowledge but proof that such a path is possible.

In the preface to *Dawn*, Nietzsche describes himself as someone who has been submerged in “his own long darkness, his incomprehensibility, concealment, enigma... don’t ask him what he’s up to down there; once he has ‘become human’ again, he will tell you himself” (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 1). While it is possible to, as it were, “report back” from this subterranean part of the self, the space in which experiences and encounters in the course of an individual’s life can be considered from a personal perspective, the action of the endeavor itself is hidden away from others who lack that individual’s perspective, a perspective that is necessary to see or understand what is occurring there in a legible and coherent way. This may lead readers to believe that while they cannot understand the experiences that are the source of the book, the book itself might still provide them with something they can accept in its entirety, in what Nietzsche “will tell you himself.” But in the same preface he makes clear that even his description of the personal experience and hardships entailed in this process are not meant to be taken at face value as universally true or applicable to the subterranean undertakings of each individual reader, who “needn’t worry that I will summon you to the same perils... For whoever travels down such paths of his own encounters no one: such is the nature of ‘own paths.’” (Nietzsche, 2011, pp. 1-2). This provides a useful model for the relationship between the general nature of what Nietzsche suggests or models to his audience, and the content of what occurs in each individual in the process of such an undertaking. Though Nietzsche does encourage his readers to follow their “own paths,” and even makes clear that without taking such a step his ideas and their implications will not be understood, he also reiterates that the conclusions of his own sojourn are his alone. While such a sojourn will inevitably involve

consideration of the ideas of others, it does not involve the use of perspectives other than one's own to investigate such ideas. In fact, Nietzsche remarks that at least some of this internal, personal work was focused on ideas and traditions that extend far beyond the temporal and spatial limits of his individuality: "I began to investigate and to dig away at an ancient trust upon which, for the past few millennia, we philosophers have tended to build as if it were the securest of foundations... I began to undermine our trust in morality" (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 2). While the philosophical foundations that are the object of this investigation are recognizable, it is the perspective Nietzsche employs in this undermining - his own - and the experience of the undermining investigation, that remain obscure to others. As Jernej Kaluza writes, "Every experience and each life-path is singular, and such should also be everyone's thought: not forced, not even oriented from the outside. Thought must express the inner intensive experience" (Kaluza, 2019, p. 287). The object of such thought may come from others, from outside the individual, but the orientation must be conditioned by one's own perspective on these external ideas. The conclusions, difficulty, and personal trajectory of this inquiry are informed and oriented by Nietzsche's own perspective and if his readers wanted to pursue their own investigation according to this method, they would need to do so from *their* own perspectives if they, too, want to have access to this kind of "inner intensive experience." Ultimately, Kaluza writes, "Nietzsche introduces a different function of writing, which is almost a way of self-healing, through the expression of one's singularity" (Kaluza, 2019, p. 287). What Nietzsche's writing communicates is not ideas to be taken up and accepted directly by his readers, but a self-expressive model of his own "singularity" or ipsissimosity that readers can use as a model and adapt to their own similar, but also distinctly personal, process of self-examination and self-healing.

Looking at Nietzsche's account of his own pursuit of knowledge developed through his personal perspective is valuable not because readers can copy the trajectory of his experience verbatim, but because the testimony of his personal experience opens up a new possibility for establishing new kinds of knowledge and values, ones that do not come from outside the individual, either from gods or supersensory ideals, or from other human beings. Nietzsche does not show his readers what might lie on their own paths, what traditions or foundational assumptions about life they may contend with or what reorientations and revaluations they might make based on this journey, but he shows that such an approach is possible and that he has found in it a new, personally meaningful way to think about himself and his relation to the kinds of "great problems" that have been the focus of generations of philosophical thinking. As Heidegger writes, "Man remains mired in naivete as long as he does not really act on the knowledge that he alone is the one who posits values" (Heidegger, Capuzzi, et al, 1982, p. 80). If it is "man" alone who posits values, then this positing is the result of individual perspectives, the only kind of perspective to which human beings can lay claim if they want to understand themselves as individuals. Heidegger continues, "Man should no longer be borrower or lender, nor should he submit himself to what is dispensed by him alone as if it were something foreign to him" (Heidegger, Capuzzi, et al, 1982, p. 81). Only by coming into awareness of the fact that human beings are the sole source of their own values, and that human values are always shaped by the perspective of the individual who produces them, can such individuals free themselves from the obligation to efface their individuality through submission to something ostensibly external, but which, in fact, has always been the product of individual human beings. To not just accept this knowledge but "act" on it and confirm it through action is the individual's first step toward coming to know their own perspective and having confidence in the personal values and knowledge that can come from it. By acting on such knowledge, Nietzsche's readers

are more loyal to him than they would be if they tried to simply copy his account verbatim. As Derrida writes, “Nietzsche advises us, as he will do in the case of Zarathustra, to forget and destroy the text, but to forget and destroy it through action” (Derrida, 1985, p. 26). If Nietzsche wants his followers or companions to forget about him or leave him behind, it is in his role as a kind of disposable catalyst - once readers have acted upon the ideas they encounter in Nietzsche’s books, they no longer have a need for the book or its knowledge, which is only rudimentary and preliminary in relation to what they can cultivate through their own action - at which point they could rejoin Nietzsche as fellow living individuals, if not as followers or disciples of a master who only appears in written works.

Christopher Janaway writes that Nietzsche “sees in philosophy’s habitual self-understanding as an impersonal, objective enquiry into truth a mutation of the very same valuing of selflessness that underlies morality” (Janaway, 2009, p. 5). Conventional ideas about morality that depend on a spirit of “selflessness” in order to justify themselves are diametrically opposed to Nietzsche’s pursuit of ideas that are encountered and understood through an individual perspective, through what only an individual can know about themselves. If morality is built on communal customs whose upholding persists at the expense of the individual members of that community or are ascribed to a source that is not human, this kind of “selflessness” has a destructive effect on individuals and their potential to find their own paths. In adhering to morality dictated by custom, Nietzsche writes in section #89 of *Mixed Opinions and Maxims* titled “*Custom and its victim*,” “the individual outvotes himself by means of his morality.” Rather than finding their own orientation toward thought and action, the individual subsumes themselves under “a feeling for the aggregate of the customs under which one lives and has been raised - and indeed, raised not as an individual, but as a member of a whole, as an integer of a majority” (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 40).

If Nietzsche is to make a shift in what can be done with philosophy, then he necessarily has to detach it from ways of thinking that lead back down the path of universal morality. Such thinking, claims Janaway, leads individuals to “devalue their own feelings and subjectivity, the body, and even the entire empirical world of change, imperfection, and transience” - and yet, these elements that morality demands be sacrificed by the individual are precisely what is necessary in the “concealed” and “enigmatic” activity hinted at in the preface to *Dawn* (Janaway, 2009, p. 5). Despite Nietzsche’s ability to communicate something about his own experiences, even the communication is not enough to convince or show others that something is indeed happening within him - it is only from an internal, personal perspective that the full image emerges, and so there is no way to assuage the skepticism of others. Echoing the letter at the start of this section, Nietzsche writes “even his friends cannot discern where he is or where he’s going... from time to time, they ask themselves, ‘What? Is he even going at all? Does he still have - a path?’” (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 2). The existence of a personal, individual “path” and the knowledge that someone plans to pursue it does not provide us with any knowledge about the content of the path or the experiential feeling of pursuing it; other people cannot access the fundamentally important, but also fundamentally personal space in which something new is revealed or learned or created, even if they can be given a rough description of what characterizes such a space. The public-facing representation and communication of Nietzsche’s experiences merely points in the direction of a certain type of path to be taken if his readers want to pursue the same kind of self-understanding and personal creativity and knowledge for themselves. Belief in this method rests not on an adherence to a conceptual model or universal truth, but on the personal recreation of the model or precedent of Nietzsche’s own similar undertaking and inward-facing journey - as Heidegger says, individuals can only escape the naivete of living in submission to ostensibly external values by *acting* on that knowledge.

Stepping back from Nietzsche's own experience laid out in the preface to *Dawn*, I want to look now in more detail at what can be said generally speaking about what the activity of the self in its ipsissimosity looks like for any given individual, and more specifically the importance of investing ideas with a personal sense of meaning and value. While it is impossible to share or communicate the exact contents of any given individual's path to personal truth, it is still possible to establish in a general way that meaning and value are the specific elements that are subject to personal creation and understanding. The general outlines of a method for the pursuit of personal knowledge and the model given by Nietzsche can be communicated in a limited, but still useful way, with a careful approach to communication and precautions taken not to include elements that might preclude the readers' ability to take up this task as their own. It is not the method nor even the ideas or realizations that are incommunicable, but their *meaning*, *value* and *significance*, which can only be personal and which is not transferable from one perspective to another; transferring it to another perspective means transferring it to a context in which it will be misunderstood and transfigured by the unique and different distribution of experiences and personal history inherent to the other person. As Nietzsche writes in *Dawn*, "You finally give someone your very best, your jewel... but the person who receives it certainly does not have in it his best and consequently he lacks that full and ultimate gratitude with which the giver had reckoned" (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 228). Attempts to communicate and share what is most meaningful for a particular individual face the barrier of the other person's own ideas of what is "best," what is most meaningful to them, which may not align at all between two individuals and only result in misunderstanding. This is in line with Nietzsche's more general ideas about how real, authentic meaning is cultivated away from institutions as broad-ranging as the church, the state, and the academy, and out of sight of other people generally speaking. In section #103 of *Dawn*, Nietzsche provides a useful analysis of the relationship between actions that are

commonly called moral or immoral, and the values, meaning and reasoning behind labeling those actions as such, elements that are more closely associated with a kind of inner, personal feeling than a communicable, abstract process of thought:

I don't deny that it is best to avoid and to struggle against many actions that are considered immoral; likewise that it is best to perform and promote many that are considered moral – but I maintain: the former should be avoided and the latter promoted for different reasons than heretofore. We must learn to think differently – in order finally, perhaps very late, to achieve even more: to feel differently. (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 71)

The most crucial part of this passage for establishing the notion that the meaning or value of an idea is the component that is both most personal and most difficult to either communicate or hold as a communal principle is the fact that, while Nietzsche makes clear that the motivation for what would ordinarily be called moral actions must be rethought to provide different reasons that would impel us to act in this way, those different reasons are not named or characterized with any specificity beyond stating that the change in motivation would involve thinking and feeling “differently.” If there is a principle at play here, it is not a moral principle that might guide individuals to a particular different form of morality, but the principle of differentiation. Nietzsche exhorts his readers to think in a way that is different from the customs of morality that have dictated thought and action traditionally. Whatever it is that differentiates an individual’s own “different reasons” from such customs will vary among them; the important thing is that difference be seen as a positive and necessary step toward thinking and action that is not dictated by traditions or customs that negate the individual’s perspective and what can be created through it. Gilles Deleuze, in his essay on Nietzsche from *Pure Immanence*, employs

the notion of active and reactive forces that Nietzsche develops in *On the Genealogy of Morality* in a way that can help explain the importance of a principle of productive difference such as the one we encounter in the quote above. Deleuze writes that “active forces *affirm*, and affirm their difference: in them affirmation is first,” whereas reactive forces are characterized by “their opposition to what they are not, their tendency to limit the other: in them, *negation* comes first” (Deleuze, 2001, p. 74). In order to think and feel differently, individuals must affirm the difference of their personal perspective and allow it to become a creative force, rather than seeing it as a hindrance and source of resentment that would drive individuals to negate their difference in order to align themselves instead with another person or a universal standard, or to impose such standards on others as a way to limit their individuality. In *On the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche writes that the “active, attacking, infringing individual” who, through their “stronger, braver, nobler” spirit has “a *freer* eye” is not obligated “to appraise his object falsely and with prejudice in the way the reactive person does, and must do” (Nietzsche, 2014, p. 263). Morality binds an individual’s perspective to its own parameters and forces the individual to negate in themselves what differs from it, whereas an active, affirmative and productive perspective with its “*freer* eye” allows the individual to differentiate themselves from the confines of morality and, as it were, “see for themselves” the way toward thinking and feeling differently in their own way.

While it is not possible to say what exactly will characterize the differentiation by which an individual might uncleave themselves from traditional morality, it is possible to say a bit more about the type of difference Nietzsche seems to be gesturing toward, the “how” if not the “what.” Rebecca Bamford, drawing from section #98 of *Dawn*, notes that for Nietzsche, “all innovations in moral thinking are ‘successful crimes’—according to him we make moral progress by means of such ‘change.’” (Bamford, 2016, p. 24) As is the case in committing a crime, thinking and

feeling differently in the Nietzschean sense involves a high amount of risk and reward, so this “different” feeling is one that will necessarily also entail risks and even something that might - from the perspective of traditional morality - seem almost criminal if it is to be successful; it will not simply be difference for its own sake. The idea of acting as a criminal or breaking laws as a necessary step in creating something new and personal shows up, in a very literal sense, in “On Old and New Tablets” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. There Zarathustra turns the crimes of “robbing and killing” on their heads and asks “Is there not in all life itself robbing and killing?” before exhorting his followers to “break, break the old tablets!” (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 202). Here there is both a literal and figurative example of laws (the physical tablets, as well as the immaterial commandments) being broken, criminal acts committed in the name of thinking and feeling differently. While there is certainly a large amount of risk in doing this, and potential consequences as well, given the alternative of following and upholding laws that reenforce an inauthentic sense of self that is cut off from accessing its ipsissimosity by adherence to a universal morality or way of thinking, it may still be the better choice: “when considered in the context of the enormous disincentives to risk taking that Nietzsche has shown to be a key and highly problematic part of customary morality, taking some risks for the sake of exploring a new and potentially fruitful way of thinking” is not only worthwhile but necessary if “customary morality” and its attendant possibilities for self-understanding and creation is to be escaped and replaced with something of one’s own (Bamford, 2016, p. 24).

In framing the matter of the revaluation of morality in this way, showing readers the *way* toward something different if not the *something different* itself, Nietzsche avoids the trap of replacing an old universal set of moral values with a new, equally systematic and dictatorial one, that is, replacing one principle of value or meaning with another, and instead replaces any given communicable meaning or value with the principle of differentiation based on an affirmation of

one's own personal perspective. It is possible to think and feel differently, and these actions are necessary in order to reevaluate the meaning of moral actions, but it is not possible to communicate what must be a strictly personal sense of meaning and reasoning that would inform an individual's understanding of their motivation to act in a certain way. Even if Nietzsche were to tell his readers what he considers, personally, to be ethical or unethical and the meaning that informs that valuation, they could not use this information to inform their own sense of ethics and actions; they could not put themselves in the same perspective, that of Nietzsche, through which that reasoning would click into place and make sense. To adapt the idea so that it could be embraced verbatim by others would require universalization, effacing the personal element and placing one's own perspective in a subordinate relation to external ideas. As Heidegger writes, "the man who wills himself as the 'good man' erects transcendent ideals above himself, ideals that offer him something to which he can submit himself" so that the individual effaces their personal particularity in submission to "ideals that exist in themselves and over which man may no longer have any power" that nevertheless have a certain kind of appeal in their offer to "secure an aim for his life" (Heidegger, 2001, p. 76). While the goal of such submission is to give the individual a "secure" direction for their thinking and action, it would not be the individual's own, the direction they could find through the parameters that define their difference from others, and others' perspectives. That possibility would be precluded in the relinquishment of personal power, an exchange of one's personal perspective for security rooted in "transcendent ideals." Nietzsche's principle of difference without specific different content encourages his readers to find their own "aim" while not, at the same time, merely providing another, alternative "transcendent ideal."

In section #103 of *Dawn*, Nietzsche writes that his rejection of morality comes from a desire "to deny that ethical judgments are based on truths," recalling Richard Schacht's notion of

“truth-value” as opposed to the more desirable “life-value.” According to Nietzsche “errors operate as the foundation of all ethical judgments” (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 71) which is problematic if one is looking for truth-value, though not necessarily a barrier to life-value. Any kind of personal foundations for ethical judgments will inevitably, in some way, seem erroneous from the perspectives of others, though not necessarily from the perspective of someone who has built such foundations for strictly personal use and who finds genuine value in them, value validated through action and personal experience. What is necessary for the formation of the self guided its ipsissimosity is that individuals adopt that task for themselves alone, guided by the spirit of thinking and feeling “differently,” in order to provide their own answer to these questions, their own truth that reveals itself to each individual in a uniquely tailored way. As Horst Hutter writes, this possibility only becomes tangible and available for modification in solitude, away from outside forces that would try to shape individuals according to their own principles: “Solitude permits dissociating oneself from one’s spirit of gravity... What one has hitherto considered one’s self becomes apparent as only one of the possible ‘identities,’” and a new sense of identity becomes possible that is radically personal (Hutter, 2006, p. 99). This approach is what would allow individuals not only to “think differently” - that is, to question and reevaluate the meaning and reasoning of morality and existence, an endeavor that *could* be more easily undertaken with others in theory, with whom certain kinds of thoughts can be shared - but to “feel differently,” rooting the goal in a fundamentally more personal sensation that exists below the threshold of a common language and communication and that is accessible only through the pursuit of one’s own “path” to personal truth. This “feeling” can’t be named, but it is no less true or real, at least to the subject for whom it is a direct experience, because of its inability to be stated clearly; it can be felt in its full intensity by the individual in whom it is occurring, but the understanding of this feeling only extends as far as the limits of

their own ipsissimosity. As Nietzsche writes in section #86 of *The Gay Science*, titled “*Of the theater*,” there is a difference between one’s own feelings and the feelings individuals can experience only when they are induced by something external. The passage starts with the statement “I had strong and elevated feelings again today,” though does not elaborate on what these feelings were or any other details about them, then goes on to contrast such personal feelings with those induced by music and art “that tries to intoxicate the audience and to force it to the height of a moment of strong and elevated feelings... The strongest ideas and passions brought before those who are not capable of ideas and passions but only of intoxication!”

Whereas Nietzsche sees no need for intoxication or an inducement of feelings when ones that are more personal can be induced by the individual themselves: “But what are their drinks and their intoxication to me? Does he that is enthusiastic need wine?” (Nietzsche, 1974, pp. 141-142). Such emotional experiences that are only possible through others will inevitably be lacking a suffusion of personal meaning, and so they only benefit the individual in a fleeting, and ultimately misleading way. So it can be said that the valuable element of using one’s own perspective and experience to make sense of things that cannot be communicated or provided by others is the *meaning* and significance or value of an idea, feeling or action. It is this personal meaning and new, “different” sense of self that is both at the core of Nietzsche’s own conception of the personal self, his project of encouraging others in his capacity as a catalyst or model, and that is fundamentally hidden from others, visible only from one individual perspective from which it can cohere, and without which it can only be understood in a partially obscured way that withholds the fullness that gives an individual’s life meaning and value from view.

3.

“*Der Mensch im Verkehr*”: Interpersonal Challenges and Rewards²

If the development of an individual's personal knowledge of their own self and the unique perspective through which they understand the ideas, people and things they encounter is complicated, defined by the limits of that individual's personal perspective, then the task of communicating the products of this experience to others (if not the experience itself) entails a monumental and unwieldy challenge. While Nietzsche has shown that, through very hard work and dedication, there can be a relative amount of clarity in knowledge and experience mediated by the individual's personal perspective, interpersonal understanding and communication will necessarily mean coming to terms with the hard limits of multiple individual perspectives that are, to some degree, mutually incompatible in an irresolvable way. To borrow a phrase from Rilke, at best our interactions with others are moments when “two solitudes protect and border and greet each other” (Rilke, 1984, p. 78). Or, as Nietzsche himself puts it in section #376 of *Human, all too Human*, “how uncertain is the ground upon which all our affiliations and friendships rest, how near are cold downpours or foul weather, how isolated is every human being!” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 217). However close we can come to another person, the ipsissimosity that defines their personal borders cannot be experienced by anyone but the individual in whom it is embodied. At best, individuals can have a mutual recognition of the unresolvable differences between themselves and others that are so prone to misapprehension and conflict, and find connection in the fact that they have come to be friends despite this

² “In Relations with Others” - the title of Chapter 6 of *Human, all too Human*.

knowledge. As Nietzsche writes in section #376 of *Human, all too Human*, titled “Of friends”: “yes, there are friends, but their errors and delusions about you are what led them to you and they must have learned to keep silent in order to remain your friend,” because making an issue of these differences does not bring about a reconciliation of views, but the destruction of connection: “such human relationships almost always depend upon a few things never being said,” and if these things are said “the friendship follows along behind them and shatters” (Nietzsche, 1995, pp. 217-18). This clarifies the distance that exists between individuals, even between friends, but it also highlights the difficulty in an interpersonal relationship that attempts to consciously account for the kind of differences that may threaten to “shatter” the entire endeavor. In *Nietzsche’s Therapy*, Michael Ure takes a psychoanalytical approach to understanding Nietzsche that will be particularly helpful in the effort to uncover both the psychological and philosophical aspects of interpersonal relationships, communication and education in Nietzsche’s works. Ure writes that Nietzsche was keenly aware of the risks and threats that come all too easily with interpersonal relations, “the anger and fear generated by the unyielding communal demand that one yield one’s individuality to the tyranny of the collective conscience” (Ure, 2008, p. 214). All the same, a sense of security in an individual’s own self-understanding that is not threatened by the “errors and delusions” others will inevitably have about them can allow them to enter into these potentially fraught interactions in a way that will not threaten their individuality even as they extend themselves out toward others: “if Nietzsche objects to market-driven communitarianism in the name of self cultivation, he does so because he thinks that unlike the modern practices that go by the name of ‘pity,’ self-cultivation can enrich the relationship between self and other” (Ure, 2008, p. 200). If one approaches others with a spirit of self-cultivated joy (*Mitfreude*) rather than one of enmeshed pity (*Mitleid*), then it becomes possible to communicate something of one’s own personal experience and sense of

self and provide ideas that can catalyze the self-cultivation and understanding of others or form the basis of a companionship defined by mutual commitment to each party's respective ipsissimosity.

Despite this challenge, Nietzsche's oeuvre shows a desire to reach out to and connect with other people, particularly in the mode of an educator who seeks "followers" who will ultimately become equals. If Nietzsche refers to himself as a "teacher" or "prophet," it is not in the sense of an authority figure, in possession of objective knowledge and from whom students can also passively receive such knowledge. Martine Beland points out that, in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, "Nietzsche uses the German word *Erzieher*" to refer to Schopenhauer,

and an educator as *Erzieher* is not an educator as *Lehrer*. A *Lehrer* is a teacher or professor who transmits doctrines, typically within an institution such as universities or high schools. An *Erzieher* is one who pulls (the verb in German is *ziehen*) pupils towards something... The educator, in this sense, is closer to an emancipator, a force of liberation through self-becoming. (Beland, 2024, p. 91)

If Nietzsche is a teacher, or "educator," he serves in this role not to maintain authority over proprietary knowledge, but to have the opportunity to play a role in the emancipation of others, in their journey toward the cultivation of their own perspective through which self-liberation and self-creation become possible. The image of pulling others toward something calls to mind Nietzsche's earlier remark in the letter to Erwin Rohde that his books should be "fishhooks for catching people." Nimrod Aloni writes, in his essay "The Three Pedagogical Dimensions of Nietzsche's Philosophy," that Nietzsche is primarily interested in "educating educators who wish first to educate themselves," in a process that will entail "artfully combining and utilizing insight,

passions, moods, and styles to liberate and empower individuals toward authentic, autonomous, and creative life.” Nietzsche “guides his readers... to explore those elements in life which can enrich and heighten their mode of existence” and show “them how to become self-determining, creative individuals” (Aloni, 1989, p. 304).

If Nietzsche has or desires authority in the relationship between himself and ostensible students or disciples, it is only at a preliminary and ultimately disposable beginning stage where he can act as a model or catalyst for the pursuits of others, who will then eventually leave him behind once they’ve gotten their own footing. While Nietzsche is certainly concerned with helping others improve their lives, he is always careful to do so in a subtle way; the only trace of his involvement should be as the source of a method, the emulation of which is merely a preliminary stage on the path to finding what this method can allow the individual to do and think through their own perspective. This is no easy task, which Nietzsche himself would have known through his relationship with Wagner, which had a lifelong and not particularly subtle or ephemeral impact on him, as he describes in *The Case of Wagner*; Nietzsche imagines that there was no one “more dangerously attached to – grown together with – Wagnerizing; nobody tried harder to resist it; nobody was happier to be rid of it” than himself (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 155). A commanding attitude toward others, such as that of Wagner in relation to Nietzsche, cannot form the basis of the kind of relationship Nietzsche wants to have with *his* audience; simply commanding them to see him differently would not necessarily help avoid the relationship dynamic of master-disciple. Trying to reorient the nature of the relationship into something more equal through authoritative commands would amount to using the very kind of authority and power Nietzsche is attempting to repudiate to achieve the repudiation.

As Stuart Dalton writes of Zarathustra, who in many ways serves as an avatar for Nietzsche’s own project of educating his readers and leading them toward free spirited self-

liberation, Zarathustra's "companions would continue to think of themselves as his disciples" regardless of Zarathustra's attempts to convince them otherwise, and "he couldn't change that simply by commanding them to change their attitude towards him. Instead he adopts strategies to erase his own authority and thus subvert his students' attempts to defer to him" (Dalton, 2021, p. 86). One way that Zarathustra erases his authority is by repeatedly emphasizing that his ideas should be understood not as doctrines to be strictly followed but as negotiable starting points for personal experimentation. Using himself as an example and model, he continually points others toward an examination of themselves and their own perspective, so that they can establish their own authority vis-a-vis themselves. Zarathustra encourages patience and a tolerance for frustration in this process, which is much more difficult than simply seeking an answer that someone else may be able to offer readily, but which will ultimately produce something far more valuable than what others could give:

By many ways, in many ways, I reached my truth: it was not on one ladder that I climbed to the height where my eye roams over my distance. And it was only reluctantly that I ever inquired about the way: that always offended my taste. I preferred to question and try out the ways themselves. A trying and questioning was my every move; and verily, one must also learn to answer such questioning. (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 195)

If Zarathustra or Nietzsche's followers want to develop their own, individual perspective, the place where *their* "eye roams over" *their* "distance," they must rely primarily on themselves and feel reluctant to turn to Zarathustra or anyone else for guidance. As Horst Hutter writes, "Nietzsche's 'doctrines' are challenges and provocations to readers to explore their own specific forms of enslavement; they and their exposition are misunderstood if they are not seen as

invitations to engage in the kind of thinking that becomes a moment in one's striving for self-perfection" (Hutter, 2006, pp. 80-1). If "striving for self-perfection" is a process that can only be undertaken within a personal space, drawing from one's ipsissimosity away from the influence and ideas or perspectives of others, then Nietzsche's "doctrines" should be understood primarily as "challenges and provocations" for activity that will start with Nietzsche, but proceed and end without him. As Nietzsche himself puts it in a letter to Malwida von Meysenbug, "I know I've helped many people, and given them a nudge in the direction of self-enhancement, serenity and strength of mind" (Fuss & Shapiro, 1971, p. 51). For Nietzsche, giving a "nudge" in the right direction is the furthest that a teacher ought to go, pushing the student or disciple toward the lesson they will ultimately teach themselves using their own personal resources and experiences.

While Nietzsche was long concerned with education and the relationship between teachers and students or masters and disciples, going back at least as far as the 1872 essay "On the Future of our Educational Institutions," it is *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a book explicitly following the efforts of a not-entirely-successful teacher, that best captures Nietzsche's particular approach to such relationships and their dynamics. Of all of Nietzsche's works, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* presents the most developed and consistent engagement with the relationship between a thinker and their followers or disciples, chronicling the difficult and not entirely successful endeavors of Zarathustra to find the paradoxical kind of follower who ultimately follows themselves: a "follower" who only follows until they have learned to lead themselves, an interpersonal process that finds its sense of completion within each individual follower rather than in the figure who only initially acts as a "leader" and who in the end becomes an equal. Zarathustra sums this idea up succinctly as he is departing from his followers: "Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me

will I return to you" (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 78). Zarathustra does not want his followers to completely reject him, but to deny him in his role as leader which becomes a hindrance at a certain point if what they are looking for is something they must ultimately find within themselves. When Zarathustra returns, both he and his "followers" will have transformed and taken on different roles, meeting again not as follower and leader but rather as "companions," equal to one another, and this word helps explain the kind of relationship Nietzsche would like his readers to have with him and his writings:

An insight has come to me: companions I need, living ones - not dead companions and corpses whom I carry with myself wherever I want to. Living companions I need, who follow me because they want to follow themselves... let Zarathustra speak not to the people, but to companions. Zarathustra shall not become the shepherd and dog of a herd. (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 23)

The idea of others as "companions" offers a useful way to understand not just Zarathustra's desired relationship with others as pertains to the dissemination of ideas, but also Nietzsche's own hoped-for relationship with his readers and audience, who in turn can see Nietzsche as a kind of companion in a relationship that is not entirely equal, as that would require the kind of universal leveling that is an impossibility for Nietzsche, but that is nevertheless characterized by a sense of mutuality: as Stuart Dalton puts it, Zarathustra wants to "give a gift of knowledge without at the same time taking away some of the learner's freedom" (Dalton, 2021, p. 80). This is in opposition to the image of "dead companions and corpses" who have no freedom and can be carried, passively, in any direction, just as a "shepherd" or "dog" may also hold their herd in a kind of passive thrall with a clear delineation between leader and led, and no room for the led to

lead themselves. In this passage, however, there is a clear expression of the paradoxical relationship between Zarathustra and such individuals who follow him “because they want to follow themselves.” Zarathustra only wants to lead as the first stage in a process that will end with neither leaders nor followers, in order to help elevate those who may begin as followers to their final status - a status to which they must ultimately elevate themselves - of companions and equals, a collective of individuals who have each given their own style to their respective characters in a process of self-creation and self-overcoming.

In the section titled “On the Spirit of Gravity” Nietzsche presents perhaps the most crystalized and focused statement defining the relationship Nietzsche desires to have with his readers, or companions. Zarathustra both lays out the indirect and personal path that he took to acquire the knowledge and wisdom that guide him and inform his understanding of himself and the world, and offers some helpfully admonishing guidance to those who would wish to do the same: “‘This is *my* way; where is yours?’ – thus I answered those who asked me ‘the way.’ For *the* way – that does not exist.” (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 195). For Zarathustra, as for Nietzsche, knowledge is never singular or holistic in a generalized, universal sense, and even that which is shared amongst a small group of theoretical disciples will always contain the epistemic gaps and abysses that separate multiple individuals, that cannot be crossed or closed through the metaphysical force of a definitive way of thinking, “*the* way.” As Heidegger notes in his essay “Who Is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra,” Zarathustra can neither lead anyone down his own path, nor follow anyone down theirs to the point where they “cross over” into self-overcoming and self-creation: “what summons the person crossing over shows itself in full clarity only when he has crossed. To the person crossing over, and indeed to the teacher who is to show the bridge, to Zarathustra himself, the destination remains always at a distance” (Heidegger, 1967, p. 416-17). While the moment of arrival *at* the destination is something that can only be experienced by a

lone individual, a general idea of the destination and more importantly the bridge to it, the nature of the journey if not its content, can be held in common among multiple individuals, and must first be indicated by the teacher: “This destination must be kept in view by us, first of all, by him who crosses over, and above all by the teacher who is to reveal it” (Heidegger, 1967, p. 416). Were it possible to create a community of like-minded *Übermenschen* who have each crossed over to their own self-creation, they would share in the spirit of a certain kind of personal, individual pursuit, but the fruits of this endeavor would not be shared directly; united in following their own paths, but still singular and individual in the trajectory and destination of their personal sojourns.

In the section “On Old and New Tablets,” Zarathustra lays out in a fairly clear way what his role is vis-a-vis his companions, what he can and cannot do for them, and what they will hopefully be able to achieve once he has shown them the bridge to their self-overcoming and they have started off down their own paths. With the initial “nudge” of Zarathustra’s help they can begin to engage in the personal, creative work that is the desired outcome of a process that starts with an encounter with Zarathustra and ends in the depths of themselves:

O my brothers, like a fresh roaring wind Zarathustra comes to all who are weary of the way; many noses he will yet make sneeze. Through walls too, my free breath blows, and into prisons and imprisoned spirits. To will liberates, for to will is to create: thus I teach. And you shall learn solely in order to create.

And you shall first *learn* from me how to learn – how to learn well. (Nietzsche, 1966, p.206)

The metaphorical language of the first paragraph contains a number of images that help to understand the role of Zarathustra as that of a catalyst who can help individuals to open up a space within themselves or spur their thinking and understanding in a new direction, even while he resists adding any of his own knowledge into that new space, leaving it instead for each individual to populate out of the resources of their own perspective. The three images used here, “a fresh roaring wind,” a “sneeze,” and a blowing “free breath,” all point to a rousing change in the conditions of thought and understanding or an invigorating, revitalizing jolt out of complacency. Just as Nietzsche himself pursued fresher air in southern Mediterranean climates and found in this weather an intellectual and spiritual inspiration in addition to a gentler climate for his own physical health issues, Zarathustra hopes to act as a kind of Mediterranean breeze personified and come to the aid of those who may otherwise see themselves as “imprisoned” or “weary of the way.” While Zarathustra may want to help them break down the walls of their prison or rejuvenate their otherwise weary souls through the violent, but stimulating burst of a sneeze or a blast of air, what it is that they do in this liberated state is less his concern - that they find their way to their own path toward self-liberation is Zarathustra’s hope and also the far limit of what he can achieve as an aid to others. This first set of images shows the impact that Zarathustra has in encountering others; not necessarily what he teaches them or shares with them, though in an indirect way an expression of what he has learned for himself - not the content of this knowledge but the nature of it, its general outlines as something free, at times overwhelming, and ultimately liberating, providing a path that can lead one out from rigid, weary thinking that would hold one in something like a prison. Important to note as well about the use of such metaphors is that they, like Zarathustra or Nietzsche, have only a temporary and contingent use or benefit. Nietzsche is not trying to establish a metaphysics of the sneeze or the breeze - they are useful images, but could be replaced with something else to the same effect,

and Nietzsche's readers could just as easily replace them with some other image that has a greater personal meaning. According to Haim Gordon, in "Nietzsche's Zarathustra as Educator," "Zarathustra's approach is extremely anti-dogmatic and anti-catechistic. Of course a clever distorter could develop a dogma and a catechism based on Zarathustra's teachings; but the teachings as presented – descriptive thought experiments based on aphorisms and apothegms, without commandments – rebel against being dogmatized or catechized" (Gordon, 1980, p. 191). Such metaphors or "thought experiments" allow Nietzsche to find a sense of balance in desiring "his readers to accept his views, his judgments and his values as much as he wants them to know that these are essentially *his* views, *his* judgments, and *his* values," and the use of enigmatic forms of communication serve to short-circuit attempts to turn them into dogmatic principles (Nehamas, 1985, p. 35).

In addition to this more vague notion of an inspirational catalyst who points others toward a reawakened and liberated sense of personal knowledge and experience, there is a bit more specific commentary here on what it is that Zarathustra can teach to others: he can teach them *how* to learn in a new way (though not *what* to learn), and he can teach them what this new kind of learning can allow them to achieve, namely, the act of creation as an expression of personal will. He cannot give them instructions to follow passively or verbatim in regards to what it will look and feel like to assert their will and create something of their own - that is born out of their own perspective - but he can show them the first step on the path toward which those individual pursuits are the end. "What is at stake, then," writes Heidegger, "is that we must first learn how to learn from the teacher, even if it were only to raise questions that go beyond him," and the students must go beyond the teacher in order to finally reach themselves, but first they also must learn how to "raise questions that go beyond him," as if what one could "learn" from Zarathustra was a kind of preliminary adversary to be defeated before moving on to greater

challenges (Heidegger, 1967, p. 416). As Zarathustra lays out the dynamic here, “learning” is the first step on this path, and this is a step that he can help with to some extent: “you shall first *learn* from me how to learn.” Although it is not made explicit here, these two kinds of “learning” seem to refer to different activities: what one will learn from Zarathustra, and what that experience and knowledge will allow one to learn without Zarathustra, on one’s own path, having ultimately moved beyond the weaker, initial communal sense of learning. In the first sense one would learn from Zarathustra’s model, seeing him as an example of someone who has achieved the kind of personal understanding they are still pursuing. But this is a minor, preliminary kind of learning that in itself does not allow one to move to the next step, “to create,” which is the true goal of this process: “you shall learn solely in order to create.” Zarathustra or Nietzsche can describe what kinds of experiences they have been through, what kinds of challenges they have had to face, and how they have been able to go through a process of self-overcoming and gain a new sense of meaning and understanding that is personal rather than shared, but this information cannot be used by others in a creative way. This model is useful as the first step on the path toward creating something of one’s own, but following a guide or model that comes from someone else necessarily negates the possibility, at this first stage, of creating something of one’s own, even as it is also a step in that direction, and care must be taken that the model or example given by someone else is not mistaken for the further stage of individual and personal creation. As Nietzsche writes in the section “On the Gift-Giving Virtue,” “You revere me; but what if your reverence tumbles one day? Beware lest a statue slay you” (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 78). The kind of model one might learn from at this stage is like a statue - an externalization and approximation that provides a limited and rigid image, one that is not flexible or adaptable in the way personal experiences are; such personal experiences may in turn come to undermine or challenge what the model can show in its more limited and static

presentation, which can only “indicate the general dimensions of self-shaping, but the action must be performed by each individual in his/her own inimitable way” (Hutter, 2006, p. 98). At this point one would have to choose an allegiance either to the rigid and unchanging statue or model, or one’s own personal sense of will and creation that can grow and evolve and break out of its own previous errors or misunderstandings with a creative force rather than a destructive one.

The second stage is the one in which the individual departs from following the example or model of someone more experienced, leaving their initial point of inspiration and its source behind as they are no longer needed and would be a hindrance to personal development and cultivating a personal sense of meaning. At this stage one has learned how to think differently, out of one’s own perspective, and is able to “will” and to “create,” terms that Zarathustra sees as synonymous, and in doing so to break into a new domain of personal freedom: “To will liberates,” and it is a liberation so radical it frees one even from the figures who inspired one to pursue it. Once this is achieved the individual could return to Zarathustra transfigured into something new: an equal, a companion, and it is only at that point that they could embrace and affirm one another again. We can look again to “On The Gift-Giving Virtue” to see what this may look like: “lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you... with a different love shall I then love you. And then once again you shall become my friends and the children of a single hope” (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 78). At the beginning of this process all involved may have shared a single hope in some sense: Zarathustra with his own experience of self-overcoming and creation, and his disciples with the hope of undertaking a similar pursuit. Though they shared a single hope, they related to that hope in very different and unequal ways, having either already achieved it or only desiring to do so. Only when they can come back together after the disciples have undertaken this process for themselves and

become their own source of understanding can they share in this “single hope” as equals, each with a personal understanding that differs from one individual to another, but that is united by the embracing of a free-spirited notion of truth as something individual and fundamentally personal.

While *Zarathustra* provides a particularly valuable and rich resource for Nietzsche’s ideas about teaching and learning in an interpersonal context, these issues appear throughout his works, and it is useful to look at them in a slightly different context, more specifically Nietzsche’s poetic writing. As David Taffel writes in *Nietzsche Unbound*, “he passes elliptically by his topics numerous times, approaching from numerous different angles, each time emphasizing something somewhat different. One cannot just take a single statement of his view on a topic as the one where he hit the nail on the head” (Taffel, 2004, p. XXXI). When Nietzsche returns to the same ideas repeatedly throughout his works, he does so not only thematically, but also stylistically, using different forms of writing as new perspectives to examine ideas and express his own personal understanding of them. Poetry in particular offers Nietzsche a chance to communicate philosophically in a new register and style, an opportunity to replace “the ideal of knowledge, the discovery of truth,” which is the normal aim of philosophical writing, “with *interpretation* and *evaluation*. Interpretation establishes the ‘meaning’ of a phenomenon, which is always fragmentary and incomplete” (Deleuze, 2001, p. 65). This “fragmentary and incomplete” meaning is different from establishing something like a definitive meaning, being able to say “this *is* what such and such means.” Instead, the kind of meaning Nietzsche can communicate, though not in an explicit and direct form, reflects the kind of personal meaning discussed in the previous section, which is incomplete both in its inability to be communicated fully and in its changing nature within the individual who has a sense of vigilance toward themselves. While these poems do not bring us any closer to Nietzsche’s personal experience

of meaning than any other literary style might, they at least provide a model of the kind of meaning that Nietzsche values, the kind that his readers should search for on their own terms.

Though Nietzsche may not have been as gifted a poet as figures like Goethe, Schiller and Hölderlin, from whom he took inspiration, his poems are often witty and biting and allow him to speak in another voice about the ideas that appear in his writing regardless of form or style. As James Luchte writes, Nietzsche's poems play "an indispensable role in these books, including a philosophical role, as it discloses the makeshift status of philosophical inquiry and the impossibility of a unified, logical system of truth. Poetry is not a mere ornament for a 'substantive philosophy', frills for a 'gay science' – it opens up a topos for the pursuit of truth" (Luchte, 2010, p. 30). The "topos" of poetry is one that allows Nietzsche's creativity to assume new and more expressive, artistic forms, and its enigmatic approach to the use of language dovetails with Nietzsche's own skepticism toward linguistic expression. In the following section I will examine Nietzsche's writing style and forms of communication in greater detail, but for the time being the content of Nietzsche's poetic output provides a valuable source of insight into his role as teacher or educator. Even if the literary quality of his poems does not stand up to many of his lyrical heroes, they can still be of use for their insights into his thinking, and the particular way that it allows him to undermine attempts to find a definitive or systematic thread running through his writings, instead offering a more intuitive and artistic form of expression to complement his more serious and detailed experiments in prose. Poetry allows Nietzsche, even more so than any other form of writing with which he experiments, to descend "into the depths of existence so as to gain a glimpse of truth in her own domain" and "to open up – and hold open – a creative space for his own convalescence" (Luchte, 2010, p. 39). If Nietzsche wants his readers to not just think differently but also *feel* differently, poetry allows Nietzsche to express the vicissitudes of emotional experience and feeling with more intensity than his prose,

even the more enigmatic and fleeting forms of prose like aphorisms. The heightened capacity to express emotional intensity and a personal sense of meaning in poetry also provides a new lens to understand the importance of Nietzsche's poems: they should be evaluated not as good or bad poems, but as literary representations of Nietzsche's experiential, emotional states, a significance that is not detracted from by questions of their stylistic or formal quality.

The Gay Science is a particularly rich resource for an examination of Nietzsche's poetry, containing a prelude of 63 brief poems that offer a kind of kaleidoscopic journey through many themes that will be familiar to his readers and with a variety of tones that range from the playful and humorous teasing of "My Roses" ("For my joy – enjoys good ruses // Would you like to pick my roses?") to the more serious exhortations of "Undaunted" ("Where you stand, dig deep and pry!"). There are also 14 longer poems at the end of the book collected under the title "The Songs of Prince Vogelfrei," so the two sets of poems form bookends to the ideas contained between them and provide a frame for the prose within that expands on the same ideas in a different and more intensified register. Here I will focus on the handful of poems that deal with interpersonal matters, and that seem to act as a very loose set of guidelines or suggestions to the reader for how they ought to approach the ideas they will encounter in the proceeding sections of more "serious" essayistic and aphoristic writing. The poem titled "Vademecum - Vadetecum," Latin for "go with me - go with yourself," offers a crystalized and focused formulation for the kind of interpersonal relationship Nietzsche values, one in which communal *activity* is possible, if not communal *truths*. Here more specifically the relationship is framed as that which would exist, ideally, between the readers of Nietzsche's books and their author, and in turn the readers' relationships to themselves and their experience of reading the books:

Lured by my style and tendency,

you follow and come after me?

Follow your own self faithfully–

take time – and thus you follow me. (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 43)

Beginning with the title Nietzsche shows the transition he hopes his readers make from the starting point as “followers” of Nietzsche’s ideas to the end point as “followers” of themselves, and thus equals and companions to Nietzsche, or anyone else who embraces his conception of the free spirit. As Bernard Williams writes in a footnote to this poem, *vademecum* “refers to a book one carries all the time,” (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 12) giving the title both a personal and literary significance. *Vadeteum*, a Nietzschean neologism, offers an “improvement on the idea” according to Williams, an evolution from the follower of someone else’s book to the follower of one’s own. The poem also indicates that the process is not necessarily simple or quick, and will require not only work done in reading Nietzsche’s book, but in avoiding the temptation to be “lured” by Nietzsche’s ideas and writing (or any other person’s ideas or writing) into a sense of passive complacency that is accepted at face value. And that is only the preliminary stage: what is most important is the personal work that can be started after the book has been closed. Yet despite the challenge of this poem and its message, a long undertaking to be done in solitude, it is not framed as an undertaking that will be unpleasant or that will be strictly defined by brutal difficulty (though that may also be encountered). In the German, the last line encourages the reader to take their time in following themselves and proceed in an unforced manner: “*Geh nur dir selber treulich nach // So folgst du mir – gemach! Gemach!*” (Nietzsche, 2010, p. 168). Nietzsche seems to be encouraging the reader, gently pushing them away from himself but assuring them that if they take their time - “*gemach! Gemach!*” - and follow their own path, eventually the space of their own understanding, within themselves, will open itself up for

creative experimentation. Here we can see how Nietzsche's frequent criticisms of pity do not necessarily mean that, in interactions with others, he encourages individuals to act out of an instinct that is opposite to pity, to be cruel or unhelpful to others. It is not that Nietzsche is unconcerned with the being and well-being of other people, but that he knows how much and to what extent he - or any given person - can help others, and at what point such "help" becomes a hindrance. As Michael Ure writes, "Nietzsche envisages a form of reciprocity that depends not on leveling equality... but on a mutual commitment to individual elevation" (Ure, 2008, p. 239). If Nietzsche were to encourage others to "go with" his book, his ideas, instead of their own, he would be doing them a disservice in their pursuit of themselves, trying to use himself as a "leveling" principle against which everyone else should judge and adjust themselves. By gently pushing them away, at least for the time being, as they are in the process of working through themselves, Nietzsche shows how he is in fact laying the groundwork for what could still become a meaningful interpersonal relationship defined by a "mutual commitment" to their "individual elevation" through self-creation.

The poem titled "To My Reader" explores the same problem of encouraging readers with one's ideas, while also being sure that they understand the preliminary nature of that encouragement - it is not the personal knowledge that readers seek, but it is a step toward developing the ability to pursue such knowledge. The metaphoric framing is different here, employing images of cooking and eating rather than books one carries around, and it is a series of images no doubt drawn from Nietzsche's own personal experiences with dietary experiments and digestive ailments and the power of digestion, a metaphor he will return to as an illustration for the hard, personal, experiential work that happens outside the act of simply reading something. In any case the different images and framing pass back over the same idea from a slightly different perspective, and so provide some new insight into it:

I am the cook.

Good teeth, strong stomach with you be!

And once you have got down my book,

You should get on with me. (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 63)

Here the book is presented as if it were some kind of food or drink that is difficult to tolerate (*vertragen*), an acquired taste to which one must become accustomed - perhaps overwhelming or off-putting at first, but finally tolerable and even enjoyable with experience and time to build up an appreciation for something that may even be repulsive at first bite. And it is through this difficult to build up tolerance and personal appreciation that one finally gains a more intimate access to Nietzsche himself, as stated in the last line - if you can stomach and digest the book, then you will have come closer to understanding the *kind* of work Nietzsche himself undertook to arrive at his current personal and creative perspective, and the *kind* of experience (if not the experience itself) that is the source of the ideas contained in the book. At the same time, the reader will have also put themselves through an experience that is challenging and that must be overcome, *doing* what Nietzsche encourages and in the process gaining a personal understanding of his thinking rather than simply accepting the ideas passively with no deeper effort or personal contribution. As hard as that may be, it is the necessary process to become not just a mere follower of Nietzsche, but a peer or companion who is likewise engaged in the pursuit of idiosyncratic truth and meaning.

While the preceding poems take for granted that, despite its difficulty, it is possible for Nietzsche to communicate something of his own experiences and thinking in a way that can help his readers to pursue similar experiences and develop new ideas of their own, it is worth

keeping in mind the frustrations of both Nietzsche and his avatar Zarathustra in their attempts to find equals, companions, who could understand their ideas or pursue a similar path toward personal knowledge and experience, let alone something like the monastic fantasies of his earlier years. For Nietzsche this would remain a lifelong problem, such that in *Ecce Homo* he writes “When Dr. Heinrich von Stein once complained very honestly that he didn’t understand a word of my Zarathustra, I told him that this was perfectly in order” (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 278). Even if Nietzsche was not, could not have been, understood by those in his own world or lifetime and readily admitted as much, he nevertheless continued to produce written works through the end of his productive life. In the poem titled “The Pen is Stubborn,” Nietzsche shows both the conviction he maintains, despite his frustrations, that he has struck upon a meaningful new way to think about life and understand himself, and the knowledge that despite all his efforts, this may all fall on deaf ears:

The pen is stubborn, sputters-hell!
Am I condemned to scrawl?
Boldly I dip it in the well.
My writing flows, and all
I try succeeds. Of course, the spatter
Of this tormented night
Is quite illegible. No matter:
Who reads the stuff I write? (Nietzsche, 1974, pp. 65-7)

The poem seems to vacillate between two poles: one successful, in his attempts to engage a rewarding personal literary exercise, and the other a source of frustration, in his dismissive

skepticism about his ability to communicate anything to other people. On the one hand, he seems able to dive into the writing process and become fully submerged in it: "My writing flows, and all // I try succeeds." But what kind of "success" does this point toward? It seems to be, at the same time, negated by images of a pen that "sputters," a night that is "tormented," and writing that is "illegible" - illegible to whom? I would argue that to himself, all that he writes "succeeds" and is "legible" as a self-expression of his own experience. There is a complete circuit that can run through Nietzsche, into his writing, and back into his self-reflection. Though what he writes is not self-same with his experiences, *he* can see the connections running between them in a way that no one else can, because to do so requires his ipsissimosity which no one else possesses. On the other hand, that same material would appear very different to another person, if they were to read it at all. It is the pen that writes to others and must use fundamentally inadequate language to do so that "sputters," and "scrawl[s]" illegibly. While this is frustrating, to write more clearly does not seem to be an option; of course, Nietzsche *could* lay out ideas in a clear, systematic way, but to do so would require the use of a kind of language and style that belied the nature of what he is trying to say. As David Taffel puts it, presenting his ideas in a clear, straightforward way would rely upon "the unjustified presupposition that if a view could be successfully presented and defended in a seemingly impersonal manner, in an apparently neutral form of discourse, then it must be true" (Taffel, 2004, p. 7) And yet it is hard to imagine how Nietzsche's writing, especially a poem such as this one, could be expressed in an "impersonal" or "neutral" way without losing what is essentially important about it, the lived experience it can be traced back to. As Christian Sell writes, Nietzsche "can be understood as making a sacrifice in thematic clarity in order to gain the aesthetic means to provoke experiential evidence for their central claim in the reader" (Sell, 2012, p. 414). While it may be the case that no one will read what Nietzsche writes, if they do engage with it, it must appear in language that

pushes the limits of communication and legibility, so as to indicate that ultimately the language must be broken through to access the personal “experiential evidence” toward which it points. While Nietzsche may not have succeeded in founding his monastery or finding fellow free-spirited “companions” within his own lifetime, he maintained a belief that his books could act as “fish hooks,” for potential equals, those who wanted to pursue for themselves the same experiential endeavor in that Nietzsche both lived and expressed through his writing.

4.

“Die vielfachste Kunst des Stils”: Communicating the Incommunicable³

In *A Theory of the Aphorism*, Andrew Hui describes a “tripartite relationship that will be paradigmatic” for all of Nietzsche’s work: “his aesthetic process, his philosophical project, and his audience” (Hui, 2019, p. 153). So far we have examined, at least in part, his philosophical project as it relates to the concept of the “self,” its ipsissimosity, and the potential for overcoming and creation and his audience, and the companions he seeks, the “certain types of human beings,” as Horst Hutter puts it, for whom his writings are “fishing rods” (Hutter, 2006, p. 65). The third element, his “aesthetic process” will be the focus of this section. Nietzsche’s writing and the considerations he put into it - his “aesthetic process” - is both an extension of his personal experiences and the medium through which his teachings can be accessed by contemporary readers, and by dint of its mediation, something that is one step removed from Nietzsche himself - “I am one thing, my writings are another” as he puts it in *Ecce Homo* (Nietzsche et al., 2010, p. 99). While readers ought to be careful not to mistake the linguistically mediated representation of Nietzsche and his experiences they find in his writings for the experiences of the person himself, they can also make good use of this representation, which is the only form of access readers have to Nietzsche in his role as model or guide for those who want to engage in a process of self-overcoming and self-creation in the present day.

³ In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche claims to possess “the most multifarious art of style” of any writer yet to live, which allows him to communicate a kaleidoscopic variety of inner states.

For Nietzsche, language and writing are double-edged swords and compromises necessary for communication, but undertaken very carefully and with a sense of caution about the unpreventable errors they may introduce. As Horst Hutter writes, "One of the insights to be gleaned from Nietzsche's writings is the ambiguous nature of language," which "consists in the fact that language both reveals things and thoughts by pointing to them and expressing them and conceals them" (Hutter, 2006, p. 179). Language is a medium through which experiences and thoughts can be communicated, but as a medium that is distinct from that which it contains, it also introduces elements of its own that are not present in the experience it is nevertheless communicating: a sense of certainty, permanence and fixedness. While this cannot be completely avoided, Nietzsche does take care to use language and styles of writing that almost undermine their own sense of stability or authority:

Nietzsche uses his changing genres and styles in order to make his presence as an author literally unforgettable and in order to prevent his readers from overlooking the fact that his views necessarily originate with him. He depends on many styles in order to suggest that there is no single, neutral language in which his views, or any others, can ever be presented. His constant stylistic presence shows that theories are as various and idiosyncratic as the writing in which they are embodied. If the very same style is used consistently over time, it becomes easy to think that some views at least are independent of style, since it may appear that they are presented in no style at all. Nietzsche's shifting genres serve to prevent this. (Nehamas, 1985, p. 37)

If experience tends toward becoming in its ever-evolving nature, then language tends toward being in its sense of stability, and there is a tension between these two forces in Nietzsche's

writing that he is aware of and attempts to navigate as deftly as possible so that something of the original experience can still make itself heard through language that, at least in part, also conceals it.

In section #178 of *Human, all too Human*, titled “*The incomplete as what is effective*,” readers can get a good sense of Nietzsche’s approach to communication and use of language and writing, and the way that, despite its limiting and “concealing” effect, something of the dynamic vivacity of experience can still be communicated, though in a way that is both indirect and that depends crucially on the participation of the person on the receiving end; the experience that they ultimately understand by way of the writing is more their own than Nietzsche’s:

As figures done in relief work so strongly upon the imagination because they seem just about to step forth from the wall, as it were, and then suddenly, somehow hindered, come to a stop: so the relieflike, incomplete representation of a thought or of a whole philosophy sometimes has more effect than working it out thoroughly does: we leave more for the viewer to do, he is roused to continue shaping and to think through to the end what has set itself before him in such strong light and shadow, and to overcome by himself the obstacle that hindered it from fully emerging before. (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 132)

Nietzsche sets up an opposition here not between incomplete and complete ideas and representations of thought, but incomplete and “thorough” (*erschöpfende*) approaches. Even more thoroughly developed or exhaustive approaches to developing ideas do not result in philosophies or systems of thought that might be called “complete,” that could offer the final

word on the problems that occupy, and have occupied, philosophical inquiry. If a “complete” system of thought is not possible, and Nietzsche’s notion of “incomplete” ideas find their antipode in “thorough” or “exhaustive” ideas, rather than complete ones, it could be said that Nietzsche’s advocacy for incomplete forms of thinking is more of an attitudinal stance - one should not seek to be too exhaustive or thorough, even when it would be possible. The advantage of such a restrained, purposefully incomplete presentation of ideas is that it is more conducive to a process in which both author and reader play necessary roles in developing knowledge out of what is presented in a book. As Andrew Hui writes of section 176,

In particular, Nietzsche’s image of the “figure . . . on the point of stepping out of the wall” suggests a temporal punctum that can only be intersected by two axes— the line of the artist, judiciously suspended, as she unfurls her creation; and that of the viewer, who must reanimate this vision. More precisely, the deliberate chiaroscuro of the philosopher-artist can only be rendered visible by the light of the reader’s imagination. Thus “effectiveness,” *Wirksame*, works only if there is a dialectic between production and reception, genesis and hermeneutics. (Hui, 2019, pp. 152-3)

The incomplete is “effective” not as a tool to convey ready-made ideas about universal truth or human nature writ large, but in the effect that it has on the audience and the task and challenge that it poses to them, to pursue truth and knowledge through their own perspective and in the service of self-creation. For Nietzsche, all efforts at communication and writing already imply the duty of the reader who might “complete” them through a “hermeneutics” that operates according to the logic of ipsissimosity.

While this way of thinking does preclude the creation or dissemination of any complete system of thought that could be mutually understood in an objective way, it does not entirely cut off a sense of completion in relation to thoughts or ideas. The difference is that the sense of completion will not be found in the written or otherwise communicated presentation of the ideas themselves or the system of which they may be a part, nor in the person who communicates them to others, whether through teaching or writing. Instead, the completion is achieved anew within each individual who encounters such ideas-as-catalysts. Revelation and a sense of completion is not impossible, but the moment of revelation occurs not when reading the book or otherwise encountering an idea or way of thinking as communicated by someone else; these are only the starting points of a process that will find its conclusion in the work of each individual reader, rather than the author. As Rogerio Miranda de Almeida writes, for Nietzsche “there is no single interpretation, no single meaning, no single road. What one finds, or, better, what one creates, what one brings forth, are new evaluations, new horizons” (Almeida, 2006, p. 72). What emerges from an engagement with Nietzsche’s writings is not an understanding that will finally align with Nietzsche’s own thinking and perspective as if two separate, identical images were being merged into one, but instead a new understanding and sense of meaning or value brought into being with the shift from what Nietzsche sets before his readers in an incomplete state to the personal force of creation that each reader brings to the process of engaging with Nietzsche’s writing from the perspective of their own experience. As Nietzsche writes, the “thought” or “whole philosophy” can still “fully emerge”; it need not remain eternally incomplete or partial, but this moment of holistic emergence cannot be interpersonal, or occur outside of an individual, relying on a sense of meaning or values that have already been established and agreed upon communally. As Christian Sell writes, “Nietzsche’s texts can be seen as purposefully paradoxical – as attempts to invite the reader to complete the thought in his or her

own way. The fact *that* we have to make sense of these issues ourselves might be at least as important for Nietzsche as the question of *what* particular sense we make of it" (Sell, 2012, pp. 416-17). The sense that each reader makes of Nietzsche's writing will necessarily be personal and incommunicable, but the challenge to the reader in requiring their participation in order to understand the idea, is something that Nietzsche can still achieve through his "paradoxical" texts. As Horst Hutter writes of Nietzsche's aphoristic work specifically (though this idea applies to his thinking and writing more generally), it "is a form of writing peculiarly designed to initiate sequences of thinking in its readers. It is unfinished and open-ended to the future and needs to be completed in the acts of reading. That is, the reader has to finish 'writing' the aphorism" (Hutter, 2006, p. 183).

Nietzsche continues to engage with the notion of incomplete or partial communication and understanding in section #32 of *Human, all too Human*, titled "*Being unjust necessary*," which can help expand the understanding of this idea as a literary principle or technique and the effect it is meant to have on, and in, readers. In this section he writes about judgment in general, but these ideas can be applied more specifically to the kind of judgment one might bring to the reading of a book and reception of the author's ideas. "All judgments concerning the value of life" are unjust, he writes, because

impurity of judgment lies first in the way that the material is available, namely, very incompletely, second, in the way that the sum is made out of it, and third, in the fact that every individual piece of the material is once again the result of impure knowing and, to be sure, in a wholly necessary way. For example, no amount of experience with a person, however near to us he may be, can be complete enough that we would have a logical right to reach a total appraisal of him; all assessments are premature and have to

be so. And finally, the standard with which we measure, our own being, is not of an unchanging size, we have moods and waverings, and yet we would have to know ourselves as a fixed standard in order to justly appraise the relation of anything whatsoever to ourselves... We are from the beginning illogical and therefore unjust beings, *and can recognize this*. (Nietzsche, 1995, pp. 39-40)

If all things and worldly phenomena - an individual person, the other people they interact with, the ideas they encounter through writing or other forms of communication - contain irreconcilable epistemic gaps between them, and moreover, such gaps are not static, then if individuals are to communicate with one another, they must account for this fact - they cannot surmount it, but they “can recognize this,” and that recognition allows them to be strategic in their attempts at interpersonal communication if nothing else. If Nietzsche prioritizes modes of communication that are “incomplete” or partial, then he does so as a way to account, in the form of his writing, for the fact that this is characteristic of all communication, and to communicate the idea itself in the content of his writing. While it may be confusing to the reader to receive an idea in incomplete form, the confusion can still be resolved by the reader, using their own personal resources to fill in the “empty” space left by a partial form of communication. As Deleuze writes, Nietzsche values “the unity of life and thought,” and these two elements balance each other out in a beneficial way: “one step for life, one step for thought. Modes of life inspire ways of thinking; modes of thinking create ways of living... A unity that turns an anecdote of life into an aphorism of thought, and an evaluation of thought into a new perspective on life” (Deleuze, 2001, pp. 66-7). If Nietzsche provides the element of “thought” to his readers, which is in turn a translation of the “anecdotes” of his own life into aphorisms and other forms of writing, then the reader in turn uses this material to open up “a new perspective on life” for themselves. However, if a reader

were to encounter confusion in their attempt to reconcile a unified, holistic system of thought with their own experience, the means needed for holistic reconciliation would be located outside of the realm of their experience, in a set of ideas sufficiently thorough to be adopted as one's own framework for life and the author who created it. If it is the meaning and value of an idea that is the most fundamentally incommunicable and personal aspect, then it is easy to understand why Nietzsche notes that this inability to fully communicate something is not just a problem for judgment but specifically for "judgments concerning the value of life," and so an acceptance of this necessary and unavoidable incompleteness is the first step toward the development of the kind of knowledge an individual can possess nevertheless.

While the dimension of space - the internal and external and the irreconcilable epistemic gaps between one individual and others - is crucial to understanding the structure of interpersonal communication and relationships in Nietzsche's writing, the dimension of time, in particular the slowly unfolding work of understanding, is just as important. If Nietzsche expects his readers to act as authors and "complete" the partial ideas he presents to them, then he also understands that, like the development of his own books through journals and notebooks and hours spent walking in nature, his readers will need time to meditate on ideas that do not readily reveal themselves. In the section of *Human, all too Human* titled "The slow arrow of beauty," Nietzsche describes a process of understanding and learning that requires time and patience to unfold and develop within an individual *after* they have initially encountered an idea and begun to take it up on their own terms. After having initially received or encountered an idea, especially in the enigmatic form(s) Nietzsche uses to write his books, it must still be engaged and reckoned with through personal experience so that it can be taken out of its initial context and re-situated within their own personal perspective and the context of their lived experience. Not only will this process of developing a personal understanding and sense of meaning not occur

while reading the book or simply after having finished it due to the absence of any available complete idea that could be immediately understood, it will take even more time still as it transitions to a personal undertaking, and this extension of the initial engagement must be allowed to develop slowly and carefully without rushing to grasp some preliminary, simple or self-evident explanation; such easily accessible notions of truth or understanding may prove immature or remain too closely attached to the person, idea or writing that served as its starting point. This slow sense of development leads from an external idea to an internal, personal revelation as Nietzsche describes “the noblest sort of beauty,” defined by its action upon us: “the slowly penetrating sort that we carry around with us almost unnoticed and that we encounter again at times in a dream, but that finally, after it has laid discreetly upon our heart for a long time, takes full possession of us and fills our eyes with tears, our hearts with yearning” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 116). This passage illustrates a crucial element that stands in opposition to ideas or truths that can be communicated completely, accepted as-is or taken at face-value, or even complex ideas that may require time to unpack and understand but that still have a meaning that ultimately returns to its source for confirmation, rather than the kind of meaning that Nietzsche describes here that is not entirely or only nascently present in the source, that finds its final confirmation and form in the reader. If individuals are to create their own, personal sense of meaning - or in this case, allow space for such meaning to grow and unfold within themselves - they must account for the temporal development of this process if they want to reach the endpoint wherein something overwhelmingly powerful and new reaches maturity within them, by becoming integrated into their personal perspective. For Nietzsche, the reader is the soil in which truth and meaning must grow (the “heart” upon which beauty must lie for some time, taken either as a metaphor for the soul or literally as an internal organ, is in either case something concealed inside the individual) and all he can do is provide to his readers the seeds

of new ideas and ways of thinking. The dynamic that Nietzsche describes here between the beauty that unfolds slowly, “almost unnoticed,” and the individual in whom it develops, provides some nuance as well to what it means for an individual to create or forge their own understanding or experience of beauty. It is not a matter of being given all the pieces so that the individual can then immediately and actively set to work on assembling them; there is a part of this process that happens within the individual, but that is also, to some extent, beyond their conscious or active control, subject to a process that can still only occur at an individual level but that is not necessarily within the individual’s conscious reach. This seems to involve a delicate balance of control and relinquishment; control in that it takes patience and intention to receive something and allow it to develop within the personal space of the individual, but relinquishment in resisting the desire to rush too hastily to an underdeveloped conclusion, regardless of how powerful such an initial conclusion may feel, or, worse yet, how much it may impress others. As Nietzsche writes in section #211 of *Human, all too Human*,

Artists are by no means people of great passion, but they frequently present themselves as such, unconsciously sensing that others give greater credence to the passions they portray if the artist’s own life testifies to his experience in this area. We need only let ourselves go, not control ourselves, give free play to our wrath or our desire, and the whole world immediately cries: how passionate he is! But there really is something significant in a deeply gnawing passion that consumes and often swallows up an individual: whoever experiences this surely does not describe it in dramas, music, or novels. (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 141)

The “noble” kind of beauty that Nietzsche describes as slowly unfolding within an individual could not be found through simply “let[ting] ourselves go” and allowing whatever occurs in this “free play” to immediately come to the surface, legible to both the individual and others. If it does entail “control,” it is not control of the feeling developing within the individual but the individual exercising the self-control required to allow or even endure the process of something unfolding within them. The last sentence of the passage above seems more aligned with the previously cited passage, wherein something is allowed to develop within the individual in an almost overpowering way, something that “consumes” and “swallows up” the person experiencing it. Nietzsche does not say what happens after the individual has been “consumed” or “swallowed up” by beauty or passion, but he does make clear what does *not* happen: the experience does not find an outlet in forms of expression for the sake of others, “dramas, music or novels.” The section preceding the one quoted above, #210 titled “*Tranquil fruitfulness*,” does give readers a clue, however: “The ceaseless desire to create is vulgar, a sign of jealousy, envy, ambition. If one is something, one does not really need to make anything – and yet one does a great deal” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 140). By allowing something to become integrated into themselves through a slow, and to some extent unconscious process, the individual can still change who they are without taking the more active and conscious approach to self-creation that Nietzsche describes elsewhere, even if both the more active and more unconscious processes are part of the same overall effort to transform oneself. If there is no need to “make anything” if one “is something,” it seems there are two different forms of creation at play here. On the one hand, the desire to create something like “dramas, music or novels” that entails a discernible product to be given to and shared with others, as opposed to the desire to create oneself, the final product of which *is* oneself - a different form of the self, but not something external to it that attempts to represent it,

that nevertheless still involves and requires a kind of creative activity, but one that occurs internally for the individual with no product external to the self to represent it to others.

However, there is still a risk in presenting even these carefully stated ideas, the risk that readers will mistake an account of sublime beauty and intense emotional and personal feeling developing internally for the experience itself. A seductive but premature *description* of the culminating moment of revelation and immersion runs the risk of making it seem as if this final moment can be achieved and experienced simply through reading about it, understanding it on a conceptual, but not experiential level. But this approach would completely bypass the particularities of experience that a conceptual representation might point to, but does not in itself contain. This initial descriptive step, unlike the subsequent meditative, personal one, must be brief by contrast if it does not want to be mistaken for an equivalent to the experience behind the description. As Sarah Kofman notes, while an aphorism “must take a reader’s breath away and not leave him time to recover and grow more weighty,” the process of understanding an aphorism requires “the art of rumination, which illuminates even the briefest of writings” as opposed to those who are seduced by the brevity and immediacy characteristic of an aphorism or who misrecognize what is “weighty” as the aphorism itself rather than their own personal experience, “the light minded and superficial who want to laugh too soon” (Kofman, 1993, p. 115). To “laugh,” in the Nietzschean sense of an affirmative, positive attitude toward life *is* ultimately the goal of such a process, but temporal considerations make the difference between a laugh that is superficial and one that is existential. Nietzsche addresses this risk and is careful to end the passage with a warning to prevent such a premature feeling of accomplishment, a kind of experiential barrier that makes clear that simply *reading* about this process and the experience of beauty is not enough to understand it on a personal, experiential level in which there is an additional layer of meaning and value according with one’s ipsissimosity, that is

incommunicable in a mere written description. What one might *imagine* is contained in this experience is not necessarily what one will encounter, and so the initial, overly general image of pure beauty that readers encounter on the page is an abstract and vague, incomplete characterization of what they should expect to feel in a complex, developed specificity for themselves.

While Nietzsche cannot tell readers exactly what this experience will look like in the context of any one individual perspective - his own, or that of his potential readers - he can at least pose the question of what it may contain as a reminder that there is still much to be answered for by those who choose to pursue the meaning of this conception of beauty for themselves: "What do we yearn for at the sight of beauty? To be beautiful: we imagine that there must be much happiness bound up in this. – But that is an error" (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 116). The section ends here and Nietzsche provides no explanation for why it would be an error to associate "the sight of beauty" - for example, what readers see in his description of an experience of beauty in this passage - with "much happiness," instead leaving the reader to puzzle over the question as a kind of riddle whose answer resides somewhere inside them, something to be laid on their own hearts and carried with them if they are to understand its full meaning. As Horst Hutter writes, "Nietzsche wishes to induce his free-spirited readers to wrestle with themselves and with their acquired and consciously or unconsciously held views" (Hutter, 2006, p. 30). The absence of a definitive answer for such questions serves not just to communicate something factual to his readers, but to "induce" confusion within them and challenge them to find their own resolution to it.

Finally, this passage reflects, in a subtle and indirect way, what Nietzsche seemed to gain and realize in his break with Wagner (and so also accounts for his desire not to become a Wagner to his own readers), and the repudiation of his former "master's" cultural-aesthetic

project, theatrical works, and the growing spectacle of Bayreuth. This noble form of beauty “does not sweep us away all at once, does not make stormy and intoxicating assaults (such beauty easily awakens disgust)” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 116). While not named explicitly (and frequently it is the case that Nietzsche approaches figures of whom he is critical in oblique or indirect ways), it is hard not to hear Wagner’s operatic oeuvre in the description of “stormy and intoxicating assaults” that “sweep us away all at once” - that is, that suffuse the audience with a total intensification of beauty within the moment, doing all the work for a passive audience that need only sit in a theater, for example, and allow themselves to be enraptured, to give themselves over to someone else’s totalized representation of beauty rather than working toward creating that moment and reckoning with it on their own terms, using their own, personal means. This is an exhilarating, but flimsy and ultimately “disgusting” notion of beauty that plays powerfully upon the audience *in the moment*, but leaves them with nothing but its own echoing resonance afterward. The echo of Wagner is present again in section #3 of *Human, all too Human*, titled “*Estimation of unpretentious truths.*” In this section, Nietzsche lauds the esteem of “the small, unpretentious truths found by rigorous methods” that he sees as “the characteristic sign of a higher culture,” compared with the “beautiful, splendid, intoxicating, perhaps even enrapturing” truths “that stem from metaphysical and artistic ages” (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 17). In resisting the seductive pull of “splendid” and “intoxicating” truths that are nevertheless not one’s own, individuals can enter, on their own terms, “the realm of inner, spiritual beauty” that is “continually being deepened and widened” in the establishment of higher culture, and in which “a spirited glance can be worth more than the most beautiful structure or the most sublime construction,” setting up an opposition between the aphoristic and unpretentious presentation of ideas in Nietzsche’s work and the totalizing display of intoxicating beauty in those of Wagner (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 18). This difference is not so much something he learned *from* Wagner,

than it is something that his encounter with Wagner allowed him to understand on his own terms, even in spite of the man himself.

While Nietzsche himself rarely uses consistent terminology or concepts with specific meanings, it is not uncommon to encounter secondary readings of Nietzsche that take moments in his writing that feel conceptually dense and turn them into a principle for understanding larger swaths of his thinking - “the will to power,” “the eternal recurrence,” and “the Übermensch,” among others, have a status in scholarship that can feel disproportionate to their appearances across his oeuvre. For example, the idea of the eternal recurrence is only named as such once in *The Gay Science*; in section #341, titled “*The greatest weight*.” While Walter Kaufmann notes, “Nietzsche himself considered section 341 the first proclamation of ‘the basic idea of Zarathustra’ (Ecce Homo, BWN, 752), meaning the eternal recurrence” section #341 does not actually include the phrase, though the word “eternal” does appear by itself twice in that section (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 273n71). Conversely, “eternal recurrence” appears eight times in Kaufmann’s introduction and six times in his footnotes. While the idea is certainly present in that book and others, in various forms, it appears less often as a specific term or word than as an association between specific instantiations that all differ somewhat from one another and that would be harder to summarize using a single phrase or concept. In Nietzsche’s works, especially in the aphoristic middle period, ideas tend to develop and take shape not through the use of specific concepts or terms, but through the intuitive associations that can be made between sequences of aphorisms that all address similar ideas but do so in distinct ways that shift subtly from section to section. While it is true that the later works adopt more consistent ideas and terms, such as “genealogy” and “will to power,” such terms are used much more sparingly in the middle period, which also differentiates it from his early works like *The Birth of Tragedy* and its heavy dependence on the concept of the Dionysian. While all representation, in

some sense, “lies” about the reality of that which it seeks to reduce to communicable form, concepts in particular can be misleading in their attempt to sum up what Jean-Luc Nancy refers to as “the infinite particularities of things that we allow to escape us, and in relation to which we *lie*” (Nancy, 1990, p. 70). While even experience does not offer access to an *infinite* number of particularities, it provides a kind of open-ended space and possibility for experimentation and shifting of perspective that a concept, stamped in the limiting form of language, does not. While it may be argued that even Nietzsche’s aphorisms “lie” through their instantiation in language, they do so in a way that is more self-aware than a concept, conscious of the fact that they are “lies” in relation to the particularity of things that individuals can encounter in a less encumbered way through experience, which is the culminating realm of the aphorism.

While it is certainly possible to extract concepts or systems of thought from Nietzsche’s work, it is worth looking at what Nietzsche himself has to say about communicating philosophical ideas by way of something like a principle or precept, a single unifying idea that might unlock the value and meaning of others, in a way that can be held in common by multiple individuals through the use of a consistently defined terminology. In section 108 of *Dawn*, he writes that “one ought not to give the individual any precepts regarding the path to happiness: for individual happiness springs from its own impenetrable laws; external precepts can only hinder and check it” (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 74). The path to happiness for each individual is “impenetrable” to others, only accessible from within a personal space upon which “precepts” can only act as misdirections. The state of happiness embodied by an individual might be observed and communicated, but where it comes from, the particular constellation of meaning, value and feeling that allowed it to come into being, can be seen only through an individual perspective that cannot be “penetrated” by others, or carried back out in a representative form like writing. Again, one might imagine, or even be able to find an example of, a philosophical

precept for achieving happiness, but to Nietzsche, such an approach to philosophy misses the experiential element by stopping short at the conceptual. As Horst Hutter writes, for Nietzsche, writing is “never a self-sufficient activity, nor is it identical with philosophizing. Rather, writing is one instrument of philosophers and subordinate as an activity to philosophizing itself. This means that it is in principle possible for someone not to write, or to write very little, and still be a philosopher” (Hutter, 2006, p. 147). While writing and language are one way to communicate philosophical ideas, one can still engage in personal philosophical activity without recourse to something like precepts, principles, or terminology of any sort. The kind of “happiness” that could be cultivated on the basis of “external precepts” is like the kind of morality that could be established and communicated with universal consensus: an epistemic error, not of the fundamental sort, to which all knowledge is subject, but of the communal sort, which mistakes something held to be true by a large number of people with something that has an actual metaphysical grounding.

At this point it may appear that Nietzsche has fallen into one of his own traps, however - in stating the difference between one method of cultivating happiness or morality authentically and another that only produces erroneous and misleading understandings, Nietzsche does seem to provide a kind of universal principle or precept: authentic feeling can only ever be found through one’s own perspective, and never outside it. But even this does not escape his eye, and he is clear in making this a contingent statement, one that could still change should conditions shift somehow, which is to say it is not necessarily eternally or universally true: “Only if humanity had a universally recognized goal could one propound ‘such and such should be done’: for the time being, there is no such goal” (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 75). While it may be hard to imagine what conditions might affect such a shift in humanity’s goal(s), and Nietzsche makes no indication of what this may look like, this precautionary statement serves to remind readers that

for Nietzsche ideas are neither universal nor eternal, even if they are still broadly applicable and have a long history - by any measure, there is no way to make them unified or holistic in an absolute sense. In order to balance this negation of universal or eternal values, Nietzsche does sketch out an alternative model, if not an alternative *system* of thought: "To recommend a goal to humanity is another matter entirely: then the goal is thought of as something that is in keeping with our own discretion" (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 75). A *recommendation*, like a model or example, allows for communication and (limited) interpersonal interaction, while remaining too unstable or vague to serve as an actual precept. Without this firm ground of absolute, universal and communal truth, Nietzsche can make sure that the "recommendation" ultimately points back into the personal experience of the person receiving it as the direction toward which one must go to find a deeper understanding, and eventually be able to cast off the other person or writing that merely acted as a catalyst and starting point for that process.

While all of Nietzsche's stylistic communicative experiments are valuable in their own way and provide some kind of new and unique literary perspective or way of approaching an idea, his extremely brief aphorisms (those that only amount to twenty or so words at most) are, like his poetry, of particular interest due to their enigmatic brevity and the way that they make particularly challenging demands of the reader if they are to be understood. Of course, all of Nietzsche's writings in some way demand more of their readers than an ordinary text might, but the most ephemeral aphorisms in particular allow Nietzsche to push this demand further than something like the relatively fleshed out and developed essays of *On the Genealogy of Morality*. These extremely succinct aphorisms allow him to share his thoughts, as Robert Pippin writes, "without, and with no hidden reliance on, a 'deeper' philosophical theory of human nature or of reason or of anything else," elements that would be nearly impossible to develop coherently in the span of a few dozen words (Pippin, 2010, p. 10). If there is a sense of depth in these

aphorisms it is not a theoretical one, but one that emerges from the depths of Nietzsche's experience to inform what he communicates in writing, and which readers take with them into their own personal depths for contemplation and development. As he writes in section #127 of *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*, titled "Against the faulters of brevity," "A brief saying can be the fruit and harvest of much long thought," which should not be mistaken for something "embryonic" or "immature and unripe" just because it is not is not thoroughly developed in writing and argued at length (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 57). Readers should understand the lack of some deeper, more structured philosophical theory in the aphoristic works, and the middle period more generally, not as a limitation but as an inevitable and necessary feature "if one is to write 'honestly,'" out of the "long thought" that occupies experience (Pippin, 2010, p. 10). This sense of "honesty" is important for Nietzsche, as it is what allows his readers to see themselves as they are, to "become what they are," and to see the errors in "dishonest" conceptions of themselves. It is also something that Nietzsche believes we are only beginning to understand. As James Luchte writes, Nietzsche "told us, after all, that honesty is our youngest virtue" (Luchte, 2010, p. 24). In a less aphoristic and more extended section, #355 of *The Gay Science*, which nevertheless will help explain the aphoristic content elsewhere in the book, Nietzsche describes himself and his fellow free spirits: "We, however, want to become those we are – human beings who are new, unique, incomparable," and cites "our honesty" as an important principle and motivation in this pursuit (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 266). As Jean-Luc Nancy writes in an analysis of section #355, Nietzsche's "probity," or honesty, "consists in the *acknowledgement of reality*: things are not what our concepts make of them, nor what our myths tell us they are" (Nancy, 1990, p. 70). Nietzsche's use of aphorisms whose brevity precludes the ability to make "concepts" or "myths" out of them seems like an attempt to express his personal experiences and communicate his ideas in a way that is "honest," with a spirit of probity, while also making

them just-legible-enough for readers to gain a foothold and take a step closer, beyond the aphorism, toward their own peak.

Looking at the aphorisms in book three of *The Gay Science*, sections #244 and #248, both of which seem to speak to the inability to communicate the depths of personal experience through language or writing, provide a useful example in both form and content of Nietzsche's valorization of brevity. That these ideas are communicated through aphorisms, and in particular aphorisms that only comprise 10-15 words, seems to be purposeful; like haikus, they exist just on the legible side of linguistic communication but point to a process of understanding and unpacking that will not employ or require language or any kind of communication but instead personal insight and meditation. As Alexander Nehamas writes, "What matters is not whether or not we like an interpretation but whether the interpretation masquerades as something that it is not. Nietzsche's interpretations announce themselves as such. They transmit that information through the very forms, the very styles, in which they are presented" (Nehamas, 1985, p. 40). Both the content and form of the following aphorisms seem to be communicating the same message: what the reader encounters here is only an interpretation, and only one person's interpretation, and to gain a deeper understanding, readers will have to continue to do their own work that takes them away from books and writing and into personal experience. In aphorism #244, titled "*Thoughts and words*," Nietzsche writes: "Even one's thoughts one cannot reproduce entirely in words," and just below on the same page in aphorism #248, titled "*Books*," he writes "What good is a book that does not even carry us beyond all books?" (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 215). Looking at these two aphorisms together a picture begins to form - perhaps an incomplete picture, but one that still contains enough to be useful to a reader who wants to take the ideas up for their own personal consideration. They confront the reader with both the limits and the utility of *language* as it relates to internal, personal *experience*; while it is possible to

represent thoughts or experiences in language, this is only a partial capability: thoughts cannot be reproduced *entirely* in words, but the aphorism seems to imply that there still remains a limited amount of expression or representation that is possible - a hint (like the previously analyzed “nudge” or “recommendation”) can be given, if not an answer. Likewise, books cannot, in their written text, contain the entirety of what they may hold as potential for the reader to learn or understand, but they can still be a starting point that nevertheless carries the reader beyond the book itself into some other realm that is fundamentally different from that of books, reading and language, which would accurately characterize the movement from reading to personal experience. Reading a book, one of Nietzsche’s for example, can then act as a catalyst for personal experimentation and self-understanding, even if it does not contain any of the answers within its pages.

While ideas presented in written or linguistic form can provide a limited and imperfect mode of interpersonal communication, there is still a hard limit to this use of books as a vehicle for even Nietzsche’s ideas-as-catalysts. No matter how intimately an individual knows “one’s thoughts,” there is no form of language that can be used to reproduce and recreate the experiential, personal, embodied *feeling* of those thoughts. Readers may come close to seeing some intimate part of Nietzsche’s own experiences in his descriptions of subterranean journeys on personal paths, but they cannot say that through having read the description, they have also had the experience - a gap exists between the two that cannot be bridged. In section #242, shortly preceding the aphorisms discussed above, titled “*Suum Cuique*,” or “to each his own,” Nietzsche seems to address more specifically what it is that one gains from encountering another person’s ideas, in writing or elsewhere: “However great the greed of my desire for knowledge may be, I still cannot take anything out of things that did not belong to me before; what belongs to others remains behind” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 214). Whatever knowledge it is

that one might gain from things that do not belong to them - books or any form of communication, linguistic or otherwise - ultimately comes from an individual's own perspective and personal efforts. The value or meaning that the author or speaker has in mind does not translate, even if the rough outline of the idea does. If a good book "carries us beyond all books," then it could be argued that a bad book takes the knowledge it communicates at face value and purports to offer a kind of knowledge that words can never truly communicate. While aphorism #242 is mostly focused on what a reader or audience might gain from a book or speaker, it also reveals something about the inverse side: that which it is possible and not possible for an author or speaker to express through writing or speaking. While they may be able to communicate the form or outline of an idea, they will be unable to communicate or express any of the personal, internal value or meaning of the lived experience that is behind the linguistic communication - it will "remain behind," accessible to its originator but out of reach for its audience. No matter how powerful the language or concepts contained within a book are, what is encountered there will never reach its full strength and potential if it does not carry the reader beyond the book itself, into the - from the outside, at least - indiscernible space of ipsissimosity and individual perspective, where the most valuable and meaningful activity nevertheless occurs. If readers want to access the kinds of experiences Nietzsche gestures toward for themselves, it is not through an attempt to recreate the author's perspective and experiences that they might do this but through taking this task up for themselves. Each individual must engage their own experiences in the place where they exist beyond language and let Nietzsche's catalyzing writing and thinking carry them beyond the books into their own experience and personal knowledge and perspective.

Part Two: Montaigne

Introduction to Part Two:

Nietzsche, Montaigne and The Joy of Living on this Earth

In many ways Montaigne and Nietzsche are very different figures - French and German, essayist and philosopher, sociable, if somewhat reluctant, public figure and solitary wanderer, separated in time by 250 years. Despite these differences, Montaigne occupies an important place in the lineage of figures whom Nietzsche respected and admired throughout his life and who seem to have themselves acted as catalysts for Nietzsche to develop his own thinking. In this chapter I will examine Montaigne's ideas on knowledge and his concept of judgment, education and individual experience, and the literary forms and approaches he uses to communicate these ideas.

Despite their differences, Nietzsche wrote of Montaigne, in *Unfashionable Observations*, "I know of only one other writer whom, as regards his honesty, I would set equal to or even above Schopenhauer: this is Montaigne. The joy of living on this earth has truly been increased by the fact that such a person wrote" (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 181). Honesty, about oneself and about the state of the world, forms a major part of each figure's thinking. Montaigne writes that he hopes to "gain credence... about those things that we claim to understand" through an "honest and conscientious declaration" of his "ignorance in many things" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 578), while Nietzsche writes, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, that honesty is the "virtue from which we can not get away, we free spirits," which should be continually worked on "with all our malice and love" and which free spirits should "never tire of 'perfecting'" (Nietzsche, 2014, p. 130). While Nietzsche did not often mention Montaigne or engage deeply with his writing - as is often the case, Nietzsche spends much more time criticizing those thinkers he dislikes than building

ideas directly from writers he admires - a strong, albeit indirect, affinity exists between the two, as in their shared valorization of honesty as a virtue. In many ways Montaigne's thinking presages a number of important ideas concerned with learning and education, pushing the boundaries of literary form, and understanding individual experience that Nietzsche will later develop in his own way, integrating Montaigne's influence into his own perspective and producing insights for which Montaigne may have been the catalyst but that were also distinctly Nietzsche's own. As he writes in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, Montaigne's *Essays* contain "more real ideas than all the books of German philosophers put together: ideas of the kind that produce ideas" (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 243). If Montaigne is not often referenced directly in Nietzsche's writing - and even when he is referenced directly, it is often only in passing or in a list of various thinkers and writers - it is because of his productive influence on Nietzsche - he appears indirectly through the ideas his *Essays* allowed Nietzsche to "produce."

In particular, Montaigne's thinking on education and pedagogy and the importance of individual experience in cultivating knowledge resonate with, and complement (even as also they differ from) Nietzsche's thoughts on the same topics. While Nietzsche presents a method of pursuing knowledge that is almost entirely solitary and individual, relying only initially and indirectly on others as catalysts for a process that will for the most part be undertaken alone, Montaigne views education as something that both requires the direction and guidance of others, and that attains its final stages of development solely within the individual. Montaigne writes that most education involves taking "the opinions and the knowledge of others into our keeping, and that is all," whereas he believes that in order to learn something from others' knowledge or opinions, we "must make them our own" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 101). While other people play a more prominent role in Montaigne's ideas about education and acquiring

knowledge than in those of Nietzsche, the end point for both is the individual who makes their own use of what they learn based on the particularities of their experience and sense of self.

Montaigne also introduces a more specific function of education, learning and knowledge: the development of judgment. As Raymond La Charité writes in *The Concept of Judgment in Montaigne*, Montaigne's use of the word, while not employed in a technical sense, also goes beyond the word's ordinary meanings: "Montaigne's use of the term *jugement* does not lend itself to easy analysis. The modern temperament does not find the word unusual, striking, or complex and is apt to dismiss too readily the intricacies which it includes for Montaigne" (La Charité, 1968, p. 13). Despite Montaigne's judicial career, his notion of judgment does not refer to the judgment of morality or laws, but to a personal capacity. While hard to define outside of the contexts in which Montaigne uses the word, and he never offers a clear definition of it, broadly speaking it is the capacity to evaluate what one encounters either directly through experience or indirectly through reading or other secondhand information using only one's own mental faculties, without direct reliance on other people or sources of knowledge. In a passage comparing "ancient fashions" with those of his own time, Montaigne argues that "we may strengthen and enlighten our judgment by reflecting upon this continual variation of human things" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 216). Any "things," human or otherwise, and their "continual variation" show the scope of what both helps one cultivate judgment and what offers itself as an object to be examined.

Both Nietzsche and Montaigne see habit, custom and law as defining much of human conduct, identity and self-understanding, and also being less stable or definitive than one might assume. Both writers think it is possible to look beyond the kinds of identities, moralities and practices that custom and law might make one take for granted, even as they differ somewhat in their response to this relativistic understanding of identity and law. When Montaigne writes, in

the essay “That the taste of good and evil depends in large part on the opinion we have of them”:

If what we call evil and torment is neither evil nor torment in itself, if it is merely our fancy that gives it this quality, it is in us to change it. And having the choice, if no one forces us, we are strangely insane to tense ourselves for the course that is more painful to us, and to give sicknesses, poverty, and slights a bitter and unpleasant taste if we can give them a good one and if, fortune furnishing merely the material, it is for us to give it form.
(Montaigne, 1958, 33)

it is hard not to hear shades of Nietzsche and see the seeds of what will become a more full-throated critique of morality as a whole in Montaigne’s 19th century German inheritor. Likewise, Montaigne’s conjecture that it is possible to replace “a bitter and unpleasant taste” with “a good one” strongly resonates with Nietzsche’s claim, in *The Gay Science*, that he wants “to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 223). While Montaigne still takes for granted that evil, in an essential form, exists (“in itself”), he also concedes that “if no one forces” individuals to categorize certain things or experiences as “evil,” it is up to those individuals to decide on the “form” that their response and understanding will take. Montaigne’s less extreme version of relativism does not seek to upend morality or custom entirely, as Nietzsche does, but it still gives equal weight to individual experience and judgment alongside mutually held, common understandings. Alan Levine, in his essay “Montaigne’s Conception of the Self: A Non-Rights Basis for Toleration,” argues that Montaigne recognizes the shared humanness of individuals, the “universal human attributes that underlie” individuality, while also emphasizing “the need to

live autonomously” and ultimately landing on “a middle ground of self-development – between a domineering, categorical universalism on the one hand and complete subjectivity on the other” (Levine, 1999, p. 4). In Montaigne’s thinking there is a place in life for both individual experience and the capabilities like judgment that require it, and space for acknowledging and participating in the communal structures that hold people together, whether on the larger scale of nations or political structures or on the more intimate scales of friendship, neighborliness, marriage and family.

While their preferred literary forms are somewhat different (though there, too, there is overlap), both Nietzsche and Montaigne share an experimental spirit and a desire to express something of their own personal experience through their written works. For both Nietzsche and Montaigne, writing serves as a communicative embodiment of experience - while their writings do not offer direct access to each writer’s subjective experience, they provide a means to translate this experience into something that can be at least roughly understood by their readers, who in turn can use that knowledge to better pursue the fruits of their own experience. It is sense of self and experience that informs the shape of their writing, not literary conventions of the formal constraints of genre and style. As Carl H. Klaus writes in “Montaigne on His Essays: Toward a Poetics of the Self,” Montaigne strives “not only to track the flow” of his thinking and subjective experience, “but also to record the flow and thus ‘immobilize’ it at the very same time that one is immersed in the process of thinking... Montaigne’s ultimate goal, then, is to depict the self as it is known only by the self alone” (Klaus, 1991, p. 7). In order to do so Montaigne employs the experimental and novel literary form of the essay, a form that can bear the fluctuations and vacillations of subjective experience. Montaigne is less vexed than Nietzsche by the difficulties of interpersonal communication, and less focused on the idiosyncratic primacy of the individual - he takes for granted that it is possible to communicate, if

not the entirety of his being, at least the aspects of his being he has come to know through self-examination, through writing. All the same his writing gives the reader both a non-definitive, but still honest, portrait of the Essays' author that they might take as a model or example for their own pursuits (but should not copy directly) and a more practical, theoretical guide to self-understanding and development through historical, literary and anecdotal examples and Montaigne's judgment of them.

While Nietzsche pursued his literary experiments in a number of styles and forms, and arguably did quite a bit of work in reviving the tradition of the aphorism, he differs from Montaigne in not having invented any new forms of writing. Montaigne for his part only wrote in one form, but to his credit also brought it into being: the essay, in nascent form, still holding on to both its literary meaning and its root in the verb *essayer*, reflecting both Montaigne's insistence on putting ideas to the test, experimenting with them in order to know them and integrate them into judgment, and also his desire to experiment and test out new forms of writing to find one that would better allow him to present his literary self-portrait. Montaigne's preface "To the Reader" provides a good summary of what he hopes to do in this book, and with the essay form he is employing for this project: "If I had written to seek the world's favor, I should have bedecked myself better, and should present myself in a studied posture. I want to be seen here in my simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice; for it is myself that I portray. My defects will here be read to the life, and also my natural form" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 2). For Montaigne, the essay is a form that allows for authentic communication of personal experience, while not impeding with an ostentatious, purely literary presence - at least not one that would be recognizable to his readers, who would have no associations or preconceptions around the essay as an established literary form. What comes through ideally is a literary version of Montaigne the human being - just as messy, complicated, and at times

inexplicable as the man himself. The essay does not seek to put forth an argument that is carefully developed at length, nor does it provide material to be used in taking sides in a polemic, but instead offers an opportunity for experimentation, freedom and personal free association. As Theodor Adorno writes in "The Essay as Form," the essay

does not permit its domain to be prescribed. Instead of achieving something scientifically, or creating something artistically, the effort of the essay reflects a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done... It does not begin with Adam and Eve but with what it wants to discuss; it says what is at issue and stops where it feels itself complete - not where nothing is left to say. (Adorno, 1984, p. 152)

And what Montaigne wants to discuss is himself - his experiences, temperament, likes and dislikes, thoughts on history, politics, war, medicine, and any other given topic that occurs to him, all fall under the purview of the essay. Even when he discusses others, what he is really pursuing is himself by way of contact with other people and the outside world. And it is worth noting that in some sense Montaigne's Essays never truly reach a stopping point. While there is a final page in the book, Montaigne continued writing and revising the same work over and over until his death. All the same, his death in some sense marks a more authentic end to the book than a final page or back cover could - it marks the end of the life that extended itself on to the page, where both life and work feel themselves "complete." If Montaigne is right that he has "no more made my book than my book has made me — a book consubstantial with its author" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 504), then the essay provides an ideal form for such an undertaking.

The following sections will elaborate on each of these three components of Montaigne's project - his notion of individualistic knowledge and its relation to judgment, his approach to education and the development of judgment, and the way he communicates these ideas in a novel and experimental literary form, all of which work together to encourage his readers to pursue similar experiences in their own lives and develop the kind of judgment and self-knowledge that Montaigne simultaneously advocates, demonstrates and cultivates for himself through his writing.

1.

Knowledge, the Individual, and the Cultivation of Judgment

While Montaigne acknowledges that there are many different reasons for wanting to acquire new ideas or gain new knowledge, he does not judge them all equally, and prioritizes one particular purpose as the most valuable: the cultivation and development of judgment. To say what judgment *is* presents a challenge, because Montaigne himself does not define it or employ it in clear or entirely consistent terms. One might get a better sense of the nature of judgment by asking not what it is, but what it does, and Montaigne usually makes reference to it in relation to its ability to do something - to offer new insight, increase self-knowledge, or navigate a difficult and ambiguous situation. When judgment is more clearly defined, it is often in contrast to other faculties or abilities, rather than directly on its own terms. In the essay "Of Books," Montaigne considers the difference between encountering factual information in a book, and encountering the judgment of the author: "I also like to read the *Letters to Atticus*, not only because they contain a very ample education in the history and affairs of his time, but much more because in them I discover his personal humors. For I have a singular curiosity, as I have said elsewhere, to know the soul and the natural judgments of my authors" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 302). Judgment, then, has more to do with an individual's "soul" or "personal humors" than with the factual information they may possess or communicate. As Kurt Spellmayer writes in "The Essay in the Academy," "Montaigne's real concern is not knowledge proper, but the relationship between individuals and the conventions by which their experience is defined and contained" (Spellmayer, 1989, p. 254), and the capacity for judgment is much better at evaluating and discerning such "conventions" in relation to individuals than the broad, but also static kind of

knowledge one encounters in something like ostensibly objective historical accounts. Judgment is also fundamentally individual and non-transferable; an individual's own judgment is readily available to them should they choose to recognize and cultivate it. In the case of other people, their judgment is encountered only indirectly, through traces that one must "discover" in them, but only as a reference point, not as something to be transplanted directly from the "soul" of one person to that of another - only one's own "soul" can form the soil in which judgment grows. Raymond La Charité writes that individuals must use their judgment to find their identity "within oneself, not at the hands of friends nor in the world at large. One must decide, come to an agreement as to one's personality, and this is what Montaigne has in mind whenever he says 'I judge myself.' Everything one needs to know is within oneself, within one's life" (La Charité, 1968, p. 82). Montaigne does not develop his own judgment directly in discovering the "personal humors" of another author's judgment, but the experience can still be an exercise in the development of his own judgment, judging his own reaction and opinions in relation to those of someone else. As La Charité writes elsewhere, judgment "deals with intangibles that are not readily verifiable. There is an openness to *juger*, an awareness of shades and grades, that is based upon the acceptance of the idea that facts are not all and that perhaps behind them there lies a truer and fuller meaning" (La Charité, 1968, p. 17). While the fruits of one's judgment and the activities it entails may be difficult to communicate to others and impossible for those others to embody directly in their own experience, they can be understood and made use of from the perspective of the individual. If judgment is not transferable between individuals then its open-ended nature provides one clear indication of why this is the case: unlike factual or commonly held knowledge, the "intangibles" of judgment and its openness to the pursuit of deeper meaning(s) do not allow for tangible or static representations that accurately represent the

activity that is their source. The concept of judgment can be communicated in general terms, but the activity of judgment can only be experienced in its specific instantiations in each individual.

The closest that Montaigne comes to defining judgment directly is in “Of pedantry,” where he contrasts two different modes of pursuing knowledge and their respective purposes: “learning,” which is, on its own, passive, impersonal and unchanging, the domain of facts and rote education, compared with the active, personal and dynamic nature of judgment, a mode of knowledge that can grow, change, move and most importantly be put to use in an investigative and evaluative mode in relation to the self, others, and anything else one might encounter. While he does not define these two terms in a technical or entirely consistent way, and sometimes employs them inconsistently or in association with other, similar terms, these two modes of acquiring knowledge are the object of frequent discussion across the *Essays*, and provide a valuable way of understanding the particular form of pursuing knowledge (and employing that knowledge) that Montaigne practices himself, and encourages in his readers, as well as the form that he sees as unproductive in relation to these pursuits. As he writes in “Of Pedantry,” “learning is less valuable than judgment. The latter can do without the former, and not the former without the latter... Now we must not attach learning to the mind, we must incorporate it; we must not sprinkle, but dye. And if learning does not change the mind and improve its imperfect state, certainly we do much better to let it alone” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 103). The kind of knowledge Montaigne characterizes as mere “learning” is not entirely useless, but only gains value if it is practiced in tandem with judgment, which, unlike learning, does not need any other kind of knowledge appended to it in order to be valuable and to be put into practice in an effective and productive way. While it is possible to know a certain fact or certain information without it in any way having a personal effect, sitting alongside its knower rather than within them, judgment requires the further step of incorporation into the individual, and

subsequently change: not just the change of something new being incorporated, but the continual change that this now-incorporated ability requires of the individual if it is to remain in active use. As Rachel Starr argues, Montaigne encourages acceptance of the fact that “we cannot make pronouncements that will reverberate throughout the ages. ‘How many things were articles of faith to us yesterday that are fables to us today?’ Instead of uncovering timeless anonymous facts about human nature, we renew the question of how to think our humanity” (Starr, 2015, p. 130), and this question can constantly be renewed as judgment encounters new information and experiences. Judgment gives individuals the ability to understand themselves, others and the world at large in a way that accounts for their active, living and changing dimension. This dynamic dimension of things can be arrested in a particular moment and represented through static or passive knowledge, but that particular instantiation of what is ultimately an ever-evolving process will inevitably only remain true for a time, at best, in a caricatured kind of way. In Montaigne’s own investigations of himself, David T. Hansen writes in “Well-Formed, not Well-Filled: Montaigne and the Paths to Personhood,” he encounters a self within himself that “seems to dart out of the spotlight just as he is about to inscribe a settled judgment,” not entirely indiscernible or unknowable but also not knowable in its entirety, defined by something like “stable instability” or “recognizable variability” (Hansen, 2002a, p. 135). In order to come to know this self better in its vacillating and unstable movement and in its always-evolving self-image, it is necessary to approach it with judgment, a form of knowledge that can account for and follow alongside the dynamic characteristics of its objects of study.

While Montaigne grants that there is still a place for learning, in tandem with judgment, he also warns about the dangers of learning on its own, and argues that the benefits of mere learning are both different from, and far less valuable or respectable than those to be gained through judgment. In “Of the art of discussion,” he writes that while learning “in its true use” is

“man’s most noble and powerful acquisition” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 707), this “true use” is not frequently encountered. Instead of providing the insight and understanding that come with judgment, or that judgment can lend to learning when used in tandem with it, learning alone provides a form of knowledge that is of dubious value. While learning may form a valuable part of a larger constellation of intellectual and personal skills, “in those (and their number is infinite) who base their fundamental capacity and worth on it... and can do nothing except by the book, I hate it, if I dare say so, a little more than stupidity” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 707). Montaigne here identifies learning with books - in the French, the language is the same as the English, “*ne peuvent rien que par livre*,” pointing both to a kind of knowledge that is rooted in, and dependent on the established, communicable forms of understanding of books, and also to a restricted ability to act upon that knowledge. What one can achieve is delimited by the static and often impersonal forms of knowledge that books contain and communicate, and so the individual and their understanding are defined not by their own capacity, but by the capacity of their sources of knowledge. And yet, Montaigne also notes that this is how the majority of people (“their number is infinite”) operate. In the essay “Montaigne and the Values in Educating Judgment,” David T. Hansen writes: “People look everywhere but within, Montaigne observes, for help in deriving a workable human compass” (Hansen, 2002b, p. 150), perhaps because external sources of knowledge offer simpler solutions, even if the price of their simplicity is greatly restricted efficacy. While Montaigne acknowledges that even the more valuable and useful judgment is fundamentally imperfect and limited, and must “recognize its own imperfection and natural weakness” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 116), judgment, as opposed to learning, at least takes one much further, and provides a much more valuable, if not all-encompassing, perspective for understanding. Likewise, the fruits of such learning are usually oriented toward the impersonal or communal, and rather than providing the individual with insight that speaks to their life

experience and particular perspective, instead learning provides something, either literally or figuratively, like knowledge as common currency: “In my country and in my time learning often enough mends purses, rarely minds” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 708). While for some this goal may be reasonable and acceptable, for Montaigne, who wants to know himself and his experience of the world as deeply as possible, personal gains are much more valuable than financial ones, and the kind of self-worth one can gain through learning only retains value for the individual among others who can validate it through recognition, a very different situation than that of individual judgment that generates and retains its value strictly for and through the individual, regardless of others’ evaluations or misunderstandings of it.

Having made clear the difference between learning and judgment, or more broadly, between passive and active, impersonal and personal modes of acquiring and using knowledge, the more particular use and value of judgment for the individual become clearer. For Montaigne, judgment’s purview encompasses all of an individual’s experience, and can be applied productively to any inquiry: “Judgment is a tool to use on all subjects, and comes in everywhere. Therefore in the tests that I make of it here, I use every sort of occasion” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 219). If judgment is so widely applicable, it is because it can offer some new understanding or perspective, not for all of humanity, but for the individual who makes use of it. As Montaigne goes on to write in the same section quoted above,

I take the first subject that chance offers. They are all equally good me. And I never plan to develop them completely. For I do not see the whole of anything; nor do those who promise to show it to us. Of a hundred members and faces that each thing has, I take one, sometimes only to lick it, sometimes to brush the surface, sometimes to pinch it to

the bone. I give it a stab, not as wide but as deep as I know how. (Montaigne, 1958, p. 219)

This helps bring more definition to the unique capacities and benefits of judgment, as well as its limitations. Despite being a more valuable and worthwhile mode of knowledge than learning alone, judgment does not differ from learning or other modes of knowledge in coming any closer to something universal or absolute; it does not offer an understanding of “the whole of anything,” although it differs from the kind of absolute knowledge that others may “promise” is possible. While reason may be universal in the sense that all human beings have the capacity for it, the products of reason are multifarious, as Pierre Manent argues in *Montaigne: Life without Law*: “people remain rational animals, at least in this sense that they can give reasons for all their usages. But instead of unifying itself in a rigorous criterion, reason expands and takes on as many forms as the human imagination has of turns” (Manent, 2020, p. 130). No one can provide a mode of knowledge that is all-encompassing, not only because each individual has their own unique usage of reason, but because that absolute perspective is limited to God, whose mode of knowledge is so different from and alien to humanity that to speculate about it is essentially pointless. As he writes in “Apology for Raymond Sebond,” “Our powers are so far from conceiving the sublimity of God, that of the works of our creator those bear his stamp most clearly, and are most his, that we understand least” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 368). So while judgment does not bring individuals any closer to absolute knowledge, it is also more honest in what it promises to bestow: knowledge that, like others modes, remains incomplete and partial, but that, unlike other modes, is also correlated more closely to the individual who is pursuing it, contoured to the shape of their own abilities in going “as deep” as they “know how.” If judgment has limits, they are not external to the individual but defined by their own borders and limits. So

while the knowledge produced through the exercise of one's judgment remains only partial, the part that it does provide from among the "hundred members and faces that each thing has" has a particular value to the individual that outweighs what other modes of knowledge can offer. When Montaigne writes that he may only investigate one particular side of something, that side is not arbitrarily chosen but chosen on the basis of its relevance to the individual and their experience. Paradoxically, by limiting the pursuit of knowledge to only one side or face of the seemingly infinite geometry of any given object of knowledge, Montaigne offers a more flexible kind of knowing that, in its adaptability and instability, is able to account for and expand to include more knowledge than a system that is superficially more all-encompassing but that is also predetermined and inflexible. As Carl H. Klaus writes, Montaigne "contrasts his work with the methodical discourse of classical rhetoric and medieval scholasticism" and believes that such approaches "were expressive of a mental certitude about the nature of things that he did not possess," and that, despite promises otherwise, no human being seems to possess (Klaus, 1991, p. 9). By contrast, Montaigne's use of judgment and its expression in his writing is "attuned to his sense of the mind's wandering movement and thus of his frequently shifting perception of things" (Klaus, 1991, p. 10). As Montaigne himself puts it, in "Of books," "As my fancies present themselves, I pile them up; now they come pressing in a crowd, now dragging single file. I want people to see my natural and ordinary pace, however off the track it is. I let myself go as I am" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 297). He may choose to inspect one side of something now, another at a different time, but he gives himself the freedom and flexibility to do so without in any way negating the increased understanding he has gained or the judgment he has used to acquire this understanding. Likewise, even within the smaller scope of investigating a single aspect of something, there are still different modes of investigation, ways to test and experiment

in relation to a single thing, and the images Montaigne employs - licking, brushing, pinching to the bone - imply a wide variety of methods to test one's judgment on something.

The images that Montaigne employs in the passage analyzed above - licking, brushing and pinching of judgment - point to the important active and embodied element of judgment and its use in tests (*essais*) of things that require of the individual not just thought but action. While learning alone can remain static, abstract or theoretical, judgment requires action and movement, both in the individual who employs it and in the understanding it produces of its objects of study or experimentation. Montaigne writes, in "Three kinds of association," of the need for movement and thought to work in tandem in order to continually produce something new: "Every place of retirement requires a place to walk. My thoughts fall asleep if I make them sit down. My mind will not budge unless my legs move it" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 629). The fruits of judgment must become part of the individual in a holistic sense, not just lodged in the mind but suffused in the body whose limbs are its engine. Thoughts must not only be sought out in the mind, but in the physical world as well, and all kinds of movement and action are necessary for the continual development of judgment. In the essay "The Body's Eye: On the Origins of Self-Observation in Montaigne's Essays," Jonathan Kim-Reuter writes: "every opinion and perspective becomes the occasion for a new rotation in the field of experience, there is no 'outside,' no interpretive ground on which to stand and withstand – i.e., to systematize – the roving movement of the subject in the world and the world in the subject" (Kim-Reuter, 2009, p. 223). Each instance in which judgment is deployed by the individual offers both something new for their understanding, and, with this newly gained knowledge, new questions to be put to the test, in contemplation and in activity, by the individual who has been productively modified by what they have discovered.

If action is a necessary component of both the use and development of judgment, then memory plays a similar role in relation to mere learning. Montaigne is very critical of knowledge that requires only storage in one's memory in order to be possessed. Montaigne does not pursue knowledge that is valuable simply by being acquired and filed away - knowledge needs to be brought back out from memory and put to the test in the present in order to be valuable. In "Of Pedantry," Montaigne writes of "schoolmaster" types, or as he calls them, "little men of learning," who are filled to the brim with facts and information, but who fall apart and prove themselves incapable when asked to put this knowledge to use: "Fine words escape them, but let another man apply them... Whoever will closely observe this sort of people, who are very wide-spread, will find, as I have, that most of the time they understand neither themselves nor others, and that they have a full enough memory but an entirely hollow judgment" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 102). As in the case of learning without judgment, memory without judgment - without the understanding that judgment provides and without the necessary experiential step of applying these ideas in real life and putting them to the test - is of no use to Montaigne. As Raymond La Charité writes, "Memory is a shell, an envelope, a facade; it reacts to knowledge, to experience, as does a tablet of wax to a knife; a record is made, an imprint is left, but neither the memory nor the wax is fundamentally altered. That which undergoes change, that which must change, is judgment, the faculty which not only stores experience, but also digests it" (La Charité, 1968, p. 16). If judgment requires action, it also requires change, the change that is inherent in any activity through its movement and evolution. Knowledge should, like food that is digested, become a part of the individual who encounters it, rather than being stored within them, retained by memory but not integrated by experience.

There are ostensible benefits to this kind of memory-delimited knowledge, but they are related only to the aesthetic or social trappings of knowledge, not to knowledge itself.

Montaigne gives the example of one such “little man of learning” who “was a man of letters and reputation, and wore a fine gown” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 102), attributes that may mean something to others but that offer nothing to the individual alone with themselves. However, even in interactions with others this respectable image offers nothing of use when the man’s actual knowledge is challenged. Montaigne recounts that the “little man of learning” is led on by a friend of Montaigne’s in an ostensibly intellectual debate, with the friend employing “a jargon of windy nonsense” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 102) that his interlocutor nevertheless took seriously. For Montaigne, having a good reputation or fine clothing is not the point of knowledge, and offers little of value in comparison to the cultivation of judgment which can be put into action in any situation and shed light on any subject, refined or otherwise. It is also worth noting the way that Montaigne himself has come to this conclusion about people who prioritize memory-based knowledge: through close observation. In the almost passing remark about those who “will closely observe this sort of people,” Montaigne points to the action that puts judgment to use and allows one to test out an understanding of such people. The opinion he has of these kinds of people is not based on an abstract principle or concept, but is the fruit of action, the act of observation and contemplation. The passage also shows the variability and limits of knowledge inherent in judgment; though he characterizes this kind of person in broad terms, they are not absolute, and it is still possible that some cases may refute what he says here, which is only true “most of the time.”

Finally, I want to focus specifically on the individual, personal nature of judgment, which has been implicit in most of the quotes and ideas discussed so far in this section, but which is a crucial point worth investigating on its own. For Montaigne, judgment is something fundamentally rooted in individual experience. Though its objects may either be the self of the individual who cultivates or practices judgment or things or people they encounter in experience

(and neither self nor other has priority as objects of judgment), judgment is not rooted in books, facts, commonly held knowledge or information that can be transmitted directly from one person to another; instead it is rooted in, and can only be cultivated through, individual experience. In “Of custom,” an essay broadly concerned with the relationship between individual experience and the Procrustean bed of commonly held customary ideas and practices, Montaigne writes:

If, as we who study ourselves have learned to do, each man who hears a true statement immediately considered how it properly pertains to him, each man would find that it is not so much a good saying as a good whiplash to the ordinary stupidity of his judgment. But men receive the advice of truth and its precepts as if addressed to the common people, never to themselves; and each man, instead of incorporating them into his behavior, incorporates them into his memory, very stupidly and uselessly. (Montaigne, 1958, p. 83)

As in the quote above from “Of pedantry,” Montaigne contextualizes the ideas presented in this quote with the activity that is their source, the act and process of self-study, which aids individuals in developing their own sense of judgment (as opposed to something like the “ordinary stupidity” of uncultivated, commonly held judgments). This passage differentiates helpfully between the outcome of individual judgment encountering “truth and its precepts” which Montaigne encourages and an impersonal approach that simply files these away in the memory in an unproductive way.. If individuals understand and judge truths or precepts primarily from their own, personal perspective, the effect is productive and valuable in a twofold way. First, it can act as a shock to the system, a “whiplash” that, for someone who is still working toward cultivating their own sense of judgment, can illustrate the difference between accepting an idea passively and with an immobility that makes sudden movement dangerous, and

approaching it with an active, personal, and experimental mindset that can account for, and even seeks out, strikingly new experiences and knowledge. Second, it allows the individual to incorporate their understanding of that idea “into their behavior,” the necessary prerequisite for performing experiments with it - experiments which, in turn, allow for a deeper understanding and more questions to pursue. While Montaigne is not referring to his own writing in this quote, the same kind of personal, individualized integration is what Montaigne wants from his readers in presenting his observations about himself. As Alan Levine writes, in his “questioning, probing, and examining himself before the reader’s eye, Montaigne hopes to incite the reader to similar exploration, originality, and individuality” (Levine, 1999, p. 3). Just as Montaigne engages with others in order to better understand himself, his readers should engage with his writing not to get a better picture of the author but to come to know themselves through the same methods that Montaigne displays in his writing.

While Montaigne clearly sees personal, individual understanding as a necessary element of judgment, and the only path by which ideas can be integrated into the self and put to the test in action and experience, he also concedes that there are times when one should live and present oneself in accordance with laws or customs. In cases where the individual can only secure their place within a community by acceding to laws or customs that would otherwise impinge on their individuality, it is better to set aside, momentarily, their individuality in favor of what is demanded of them from without. In “Of custom” he writes that “the wise man should withdraw his soul within, out of the crowd, and keep it in freedom and power to judge things freely; but as for externals, he should wholly follow the accepted fashions and forms... For it is the rule of rules, and the universal law of laws, that each man should observe those of the place he is in” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 86). This adherence to custom and law is not, as it may be for Nietzsche, a threat to an individual’s personal judgment, which can still be exercised within its

own domain, the individual self, and perhaps also reflects the more dangerous religious and political situation of 16th century France in which expressing a personal opinion that went against the grain could result in death or other severe consequences. In his thinking about the relationship between a form of judgment that is primarily individual and personal, and a social experience that requires, for reasons both ordinary and existential, adherence to norms as the cost of entry, Montaigne more closely resembles Kant than Nietzsche, and the language in the above cited passage sounds strikingly similar to that of Kant's "What is Enlightenment." Kant outlines the difference between the duties of an individual who occupies a "civil post or office which is entrusted to him" in which "members of the commonwealth must conduct themselves passively in order that the government may direct them, through an artificial unanimity, to public ends," a situation in which "one must obey," and, on the other hand, the same individual "who in the role of a scholar addresses a public in the proper sense through his writings he can certainly argue, without thereby harming the affairs in which he is engaged in part as a passive member" (Kant, p. 60). This split between public and private identity, which all the same does not result in one winning out over the other, brings to mind the difference between Montaigne's somewhat reluctant role as mayor of Bordeaux, and his life after he retired from public office in which he was able to write and think, not as a representative of a community or government but solely in his own voice and with his own judgment. Montaigne writes, in "Of husbanding your will": "Messieurs of Bordeaux elected me mayor of their city when I was far from France and still farther from such a thought. I excused myself, but I was informed that I was wrong, since the king's command also figured in the matter" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 768). Here we encounter the rare moment in which Montaigne is "informed" that he is wrong, and despite his attempt to excuse himself from this duty, an attempt informed by his individual judgment, the king's command supersedes personal judgment. Contrast that with the unapologetically personal

attitude he takes as author of the Essays: "these are my humors and opinions; I offer them as what I believe, not what is to be believed. I aim here only at revealing myself" (Montaigne, 1958, pp. 108-109). So while the capacity for judgment is rooted in individual experience, and judgment can be applied in theory to anything an individual encounters, Montaigne still believes that there are times and places where one must set aside personal judgment and act externally in accordance with the impersonal principles of memory, learning, custom and law that he otherwise warns his readers against pursuing.

2.

Well-made, not well-filled: Montaignian Pedagogy

Education, teaching and learning are frequent topics for Montaigne throughout the Essays, where he offers reflections on his own idiosyncratic youthful education, examples of other educational philosophies and approaches, and more abstract ideas on the nature of both learning and teaching. Having already examined Montaigne's more general thoughts on knowledge and its relation to judgment, this section will examine in detail how individuals come to acquire knowledge and develop their capacity for judgment, and how others can play a productive role in facilitating this acquisition and development in an indirect way. While judgment is rooted in the individual, its objects can be either internal or external to that individual, and can be either unintentional, such as things one encounters by chance, or intentional, as in the case of a teacher or tutor who helps guide a student in developing their judgment through specifically chosen forms of engagement (but who does not do any of this engagement for them). As David T. Hansen writes, Montaigne "emphasizes engaging the child with 'things' (*choses*), a metaphorical term that stands for concrete experience of what the world brings, sometimes willy-nilly, into a person's life, as well as what it offers if the person responds with an open mind and open senses" (Hansen, 2002a, p. 149). What matters for Montaigne is not so much the material that makes up the lesson, but the attitude with which both student and teacher or tutor approach the material. I will first examine the relationship between student and teacher and Montaigne's ideas about formal education, then expand the scope of analysis to include more informal kinds of learning that do not require the student-teacher structure but that still adhere to the same principles of acquiring knowledge and developing judgment.

Ostensibly the focus of “Of the education of children” is providing advice to his friend Diane de Foix on the educational plan for her soon to be born child, and the essay begins with more formal advice on selecting a tutor and developing an educational program for tutor and child. However, like many of Montaigne’s essays, this one at times goes beyond this mandate and offers ideas about education, learning and the formation of judgment that would both be appropriate for child and tutor and that can also be of use to any individual who hopes to expand their understanding and cultivate their judgment. Because the tutor and student relationship establishes the basic elements of Montaigne’s thoughts on education, I will begin there and then discuss how this initial template can be expanded in ways that are universally valuable and useful. Any child may play the role of student, although not every child would have been afforded the luxury of a tutor; all the same, Montaigne’s conception of the person who cultivates judgment eschews the elitism of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, and although such forms of education were certainly not available to all in Montaigne’s time, he does not specify any particular kind of person who would be prohibited from or incapable of developing their judgment and acquiring knowledge according to Montaigne’s plan. As he writes in “Of custom,” “Human reason is a tincture infused in about equal strength in all our opinions and ways, whatever their form: infinite in substance, infinite in diversity” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 80). Reason is the universal substrate out of which judgment can be formed, and this substrate is inherent to all of humanity, even if what comes out of it is “infinite in diversity.” While Montaigne believes that others can model judgment as an indirect way of teaching it, each individual must still in turn develop and cultivate their judgment on their own, taking the work of their tutor, or of Montaigne only as a starting point to finding their own particular place within an “infinite diversity” of subjective experiences. As Alan Levine writes, by “questioning, probing, and examining himself before the reader’s eye, Montaigne hopes to incite the reader to similar

exploration, originality, and individuality. At a minimum, he wants to be imitated formally, desiring that his readers explore themselves as he does" (Levine, 1999, p. 3). While each individual follows their own path of self-development, others can still provide a formal model which either students or readers of Montaigne's writing can populate with their own experiences and ideas. Anyone who is determined to pursue it already has the capacity to recognize and engage personally with the formal model Montaigne describes.

The more particular figure in this relationship is the tutor, who, unlike the student, must be carefully chosen given the responsibility they have in aiding the formation of an as-yet undeveloped pupil. The title of this section, well-made, not well-filled, summarizes Montaigne's thoughts on the abilities and characteristics of the ideal tutor. "The task of the tutor," Montaigne writes, requires an "able man" rather "than a learned man... a guide with a well-made rather than a well-filled head; that both these qualities should be required of him, but more particularly character and understanding than learning" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 110). In essence, the tutor should be someone whose judgment is already formed, who can recognize the stages of development of judgment in their student, and whose base of knowledge is not limited to the scope of memory and "learning" but that also includes developed "character and understanding," which is to say, judgment. As David T. Hansen writes, for the "well-made" tutor, "good judgment comprises the ability to observe carefully, to listen patiently, to speak plainly," in interactions with a student, or with anyone they encounter, and the mark of a teacher whose judgment has been developed is that they continuously engage their "individuality through serious-minded and playful engagement with the world" as well as the reflexive ability to ponder "this process, so that the teacher can learn to recognize and support its emergence in students... the teacher's sense of judgment helps him or her grasp the potential meaning and value in the present moment, the moment when child and subject matter intersect" (Hansen,

2002a, p. 153). If the tutor is to aid the student in developing their judgment - a process that, for the student, will involve as much if not more personal work as it will involve work directly with the tutor - then the tutor must have already achieved that which the student is being guided toward. It is not enough for the tutor to *know* something about this kind of knowledge, which only requires learning and memory. They must have already had their own experience and personal history with it that will allow them to identify its path of growth and development in the student. And, as Darryl de Marzio writes in “The Pedagogy of Self-Fashioning: A Foucaultian Study of Montaigne’s ‘On Educating Children,’” the act of teaching, the considerations they have to make and the use of judgment the process requires, in turn means that both tutor and student are engaged in the development of their judgment, albeit at different stages: “the teacher works at self-transformation at the same time that they work toward the transformation of the student” (De Marzio, 2011, p. 388). However, the teacher is only able to develop their own judgment in this process because they already have a basis for understanding such judgment; the student, on the other hand, still requires guidance from the teacher in this process.

Having established the role of the tutor and the student, I want to turn now to Montaigne’s thinking on what the actual activity of instruction or tutelage looks like - what it is that such a “well-formed” tutor actually does in order to help the student acquire knowledge and cultivate the judgment that will make that knowledge valuable to them in a personal and active sense. For Montaigne, the objects of study in such an educational relationship are less important than the methods used to engage with them. As Darryl de Marzio argues, “How we cultivate and educate ourselves, as well as the value of our learning, centers round the relationship that these activities have to our judgment” (de Marzio, 2011, p. 393). So long as a given activity or topic can form an opportunity for the development of judgment, seemingly anything or anyone can become the object of a lesson. Because the development of judgment

does not, like the acquisition of learning and memory, require a specific type of material, like books, it need not be limited to what is ordinarily considered a part of the educational process. Montaigne writes that “for this apprenticeship, everything that comes to our eyes is book enough: a page’s prank, a servant’s blunder, a remark at table, are so many new materials” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 112) which can act as grist for the mill of judgment’s development. At this point it is worthwhile to make a slight detour into Montaigne’s own extraordinarily unique childhood education. While the story of his being raised with Latin as his native language is well-known, Montaigne’s father encouraged a number of experimental and non-traditional educational practices for his young son. David T. Hansen writes that as an infant, Montaigne “spent considerable time with several wet nurses in local villages, where he was immersed in the local Gascon dialect. When he could walk, his father would take him around neighboring hamlets so that the boy would grow accustomed to, and grow in affection for, ‘the common-folk’” (Hansen, 2002a, p. 131). These very early instructional experiences indeed had a profound effect on Montaigne well into adulthood, and Hansen argues that they “form the background to Montaigne’s passionate and subtle analysis of the vileness of cruelty, including as practiced on the weak, the helpless, and the defenseless” (Hansen, 2002a, p. 131). Moral education for Montaigne is just as likely to be the fruit of childhood encounters with people living in poverty as it is to be the fruit of a study of canonical written works on morality, and unlike written works, which can be more easily relegated to memory and learning, the experiential nature of encounters with others readily offers an opportunity for the deployment of judgment.

While anything can be the object of a lesson, and the tutor should not prejudice the student by choosing a narrow scope of material that might steer the student toward developing a sense of judgment that too closely reflected that of the tutor and that was not properly their own, the student has quite a bit of leeway on their part to make their own decisions in choosing

objects of study, and choosing among various objects of a certain type. As Darryl M. De Marzio writes, “When laying before the boy the principles of philosophers who may diverge on a subject, the tutor must let the boy make a choice between them, so that ‘if it is by his own reasoning that he adopts the opinions of Xenophon or Plato, they are no longer theirs: they are his” (p. 170). In this way, the boy will be enacting philosophy and not restating its precepts” (De Marzio, 2011, p. 393). The freedom of choice in deciding the material for a lesson gives the student a personal investment in it, and such personal choice reflects both the discovery and the development of judgment. As the student chooses among materials, they both come to know their sense of judgment, and, as they pursue the more specific avenues their personal experience leads them toward, they also refine and cultivate the judgment they have discovered. Montaigne is careful to point out that the student’s agency is not limited to choosing materials, but also to finding their own perspective with which they will come to understand these materials: “I have read in Livy a hundred things that another man has not read in him. Plutarch has read in him a hundred besides the ones I could read, and perhaps besides what the author had put in. For some it is a purely grammatical study; for others, the skeleton of philosophy” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 115). If the goal of education were simply memory and learning, there would only be one way to read these texts and authors, and a uniform curriculum would provide all one needs to know. For Montaigne, however, the knowledge to be acquired, and the ability for judgment to be developed, are not contained within the texts themselves, which act as a catalyst for development but that can only be activated as educationally valuable when brought into contact with the perspective of the individual student who will make use of them. As Pierre Force argues, Montaigne’s “practice of philosophy as spiritual exercise does not bar the use of concepts” that one might encounter in philosophical texts; however, concepts may still be used in educational or intellectual discussion as “a means to an end, which is the

shaping of a soul that has ‘strength and beauty.’ In that sense, organized knowledge does not have much value in and of itself, but it can be very useful as a pretext for discussion” (Force, 2009, p. 531). For Montaigne, knowledge external to that which the individual cultivates for themselves is valuable, but only as a step toward personal development. On its own, such knowledge cannot contribute to the cultivation of one’s individuality, which becomes subsumed by impersonal, widely recognizable concepts.

That said, Montaigne does not encourage students to pursue a narrow band of ideas or texts with which they agree - materials both familiar and foreign are equally valid sources of personal development. Montaigne writes that the entire world “is the mirror in which we must look at ourselves to recognize ourselves from the proper angle” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 116), which is to say that the individual’s unique perspective can be more readily identified and developed through encounters with things that both agree with and disagree with it, defined both by what that perspective shares with the rest of the world and what is properly its own. And because Montaigne believes that only God has such an all-encompassing perspective, and God’s perspective is fundamentally beyond the reach of human experience, engaging with ideas that contradict one’s own perspective also serves to develop the recognition of this fact: “So many humors, sects, judgments, opinions, laws, and customs teach us to judge sanely of our own, and teach our judgment to recognize its own imperfection and natural weakness” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 116). Students ought to engage with ideas that they do not find personally appealing or with which they may disagree, both in order to sharpen their own perspective and to temper the possibility of egotistical temerity. Kevin Williams and Patrick Williams write, in their essay “Lessons from a Master: Montaigne’s Pedagogy of Conversation,” that while “learning must be personalized, Montaigne also identifies the need for individuals to be able to decentre from their beliefs and commitments” in order to achieve “a critical distance from our own

personal beliefs and our culture to provide what can be described as an undermining, subversion or unsettling of the perspectives assumed within the individual's world view and culture" (Williams & Williams, 2016, p. 256). Because the individual student's perspective is, like any given individual human perspective, inherently imperfect and limited, such undermining and subversion represents not a threat to the coherence of their own worldview and capacity for judgment, but instead a productive opportunity to understand and define its limits and boundaries and more effectively steer its activity within the delimited space it can call its own.

The relationship between tutor and student, because it is intended to develop that specific student's individual and unique judgment, is also one that cannot easily be scaled up to the size of a classroom; it is fundamentally an individualized form of education. Montaigne writes that "If, as is our custom, the teachers undertake to regulate many minds of such different capacities and forms with the same lesson and a similar measure of guidance, it is no wonder if in a whole race of children they find barely two or three who reap any proper fruit from their teaching" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 110). This does not mean that out of a large group there will only be a small percentage of students who are capable of reaping "proper fruit" from the educational process; instead it points to the likelihood that only a handful of students will find something personally valuable in a lesson that is supposed to be impersonal, and the rest will at best retain the knowledge communicated only in rote memory. If the student is to become as "well-formed" in their judgment as their tutor, an individualized curriculum, guided both by the tutor and the student, is necessary. As David T. Hansen writes, a "well-formed teacher knows how to observe carefully, to listen attentively, and to speak honestly with the child. Such a teacher seeks insight into the distinctness and variability of the young and of the world they jointly inhabit" (Hansen, 2002a, p. 239). In order to identify and nurture the student's "distinctness and variability," the tutor requires a form of education that gives them the time to "observe carefully" and "listen

attentively” to such an extent that the tutor and student can occupy the same world, something that is not possible when their duties also entail managing and coordinating the education of a constellation of students simultaneously, each of whom inhabits a “world” of their own.

While Montaigne’s conception of individualized education as a mutual relationship between tutor and student necessitates a form of education that is now, as in Montaigne’s time, effective but not likely to be accessible or applicable to the vast majority of students, it is nevertheless possible to extrapolate pedagogical principles from his writings that can be adapted to contemporary educational practices, both informal personal efforts and institutional, formal ones. Moving beyond Montaigne’s more specific instructions for the education of his friend Diane de Foix’s soon to be born child, he offers a number of reflections on his continuing efforts at knowing the world better and more intimately outside formal educational practices, and contemporary scholars have identified ideas in these more general comments that can be adapted to educational practices in the present. Kevin Williams and Patrick Williams argue that “educators must exercise sensitivity to the family, class and cultural backgrounds of their pupils. Young people may come from homes where there is little stability and where daily life can be quite chaotic and inimical to traditional patterns of study” (Williams & Williams, 2016, p. 256). Montaigne’s ideas about the personalization of education taken in tandem with his relativistic understanding of cultural practices and beliefs offer together a conception of education that can account for gaps in cultural understanding or variability and make for classroom environments that feel inclusive, at least to an extent, for all students regardless of background. Montaigne notes, in “Of cannibals,” that “each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice; for indeed it seems we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and customs of the country we live in. *There* is always the perfect religion, the perfect government, the perfect and accomplished manners in all things. Those people are wild”

(Montaigne, 1958, p. 152). What individuals take to be true or “perfect” is less a reflection of universal truth (which, as Montaigne often reminds his readers, is a kind of truth inaccessible to humanity) than of an unquestioned cultural perspective, and people are too quick to discount the overarching equality of different cultural truths and beliefs, which are still all human at the end of the day: “All this is not too bad— but what's the use? They don't wear breeches” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 159). However, if teachers can hold equally the different backgrounds and educational paths each student takes to reach the same educational goals, the classroom environment can validate a diverse student body and ensure that each individual has an equal opportunity to understand, learn and grow on, at least to a certain extent, their own terms. Ideally such a classroom would still be uniform in being oriented toward the same pedagogical goals, for example the development of critical reading skills, but the particular path that each student takes to reach that goal and the material that they employ to build and develop their understanding of it will also reflect their individuality in an authentic way.

Beyond the classroom, Montaigne’s insistence that the formation of judgment and the acquisition of knowledge is a lifelong process, not something limited to youthful educational formation, points to the value of his ideas about acquiring knowledge and the cultivation of judgment for people of all ages and at all stages of life. In “Of experience,” Montaigne writes that to be “content with what we or others have found out in this hunt for knowledge” is merely “personal weakness,” but in truth there is “no end to our researches” except death (Montaigne, 1958, p. 817). As David T. Hansen writes, the “apprenticeship” of cultivating one’s judgment “is life long and necessary if persons are to move beyond the intolerance emblematic of his time” (Hansen, 2002b, p. 243) and embrace instead the “possibilities that lie at humanity’s feet, if only it would deign to look down at and appreciate the values in everyday life” (Hansen, 2002b, p. 242) that each individual’s judgment allows them to perceive. It is necessary to continually move

forward in the pursuit of knowledge, even if there is no endpoint to this pursuit; the pursuit itself is, for Montaigne, among the most valuable activities available to humanity: “A spirited mind never stops within itself; it is always aspiring and going beyond its strength; it has impulses beyond its powers of achievement. If it does not advance and press forward and stand at bay and clash, it is only half alive” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 818). This continual pursuit is necessary not just because the expanse of knowledge is infinite, but also because the subject who pursues knowledge is always changing and evolving as time moves on, so that the perspective one brings to a book, an experience or an idea itself changes, subtly if not radically, over time: “Never did two men judge alike about the same thing, and it is impossible to find two opinions exactly alike, not only in different men, but in the same man at different times” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 817). As David Halpin argues in “*Essaying and Reflective Practice in Education: The Legacy of Michel de Montaigne*,” Montaigne’s approach to acquiring knowledge and developing judgment is based on the fact “that there is scarcely a single hour that passes during [life] when thought and action achieve together an unperturbed unity of purpose... which means self-study, as he conceives it, is persistently the study of both a moving present and a personal identity that is more multiple than singular” (Halpin, 2014, p. 138). The bringing together of thought and action - the moments, however fleeting they may be, when this becomes possible - is the goal of Montaigne’s notion of education, but this goal is one that is continually achieved and lost and achieved again, as one both encounters new knowledge and experiences in the world, and as one changes on a personal level and must in turn come to know this new version of themselves, which in turn, provides the perspective on things encountered and inquired into through experience. Just as Montaigne insists that he needs physical movement in order to move along his thoughts, so too do thought and action in general motivate one another, even if they rarely achieve equilibrium. While the self-driven, informal approach to continual adult education differs

from the tutor-student relationship which has a more definite structure and plan, both approaches to education offer avenues toward the same goal of developing one's judgment, acquiring new knowledge about the self and the world the self experiences, and making use of that knowledge in tandem with judgment to remain within the fullness of life that typifies a "spirited mind" that is "always aspiring and going beyond."

3.

“I essay my judgment”: the *essai* as literary form and life philosophy

For Montaigne, the essay is both a new literary form, a way of writing that had to be invented in order to embody the kind of thinking with which it became synonymous, and a way of approaching the world experimentally, seeking to test (*essayer*) ideas and experiences using one's judgment as a way of knowing them. Such tests are both the moments when judgment is employed, and, as the previous section outlines, also the moments when judgment is developed, sharpened on the stone of experience: “Judgment is a tool to use on all subjects, and comes in everywhere. Therefore in the tests that I make of it here, I use every sort of occasion. If it is a subject I do not understand at all, even on that I essay my judgment” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 219). Accordingly, the literary form that shares its name with the method it expresses is one that does not seek to be overly contrived or gilded or that concerns itself with a particular linguistic or literary form or structure. What informs the shape and movement of the essay is the activity and fruits of individual judgment it seeks, in imperfect ways, to express:

Everything I write is crude; it lacks distinction and beauty. I do not know how to make things appear any more precious than they really are; my fashioning is no help to the matter. That is why I need my matter strong, with plenty of grip, and shining by its own light... my language has no ease or polish; it is harsh and disdainful, with a free and unruly disposition. And I like it that way. (Montaigne, 1958, p. 483)

If Montaigne believes that his way of writing has no “distinction” or “beauty” it is perhaps only because it is not, as he is in the process of creating it, recognizable as a literary form capable of achieving those attributes. But as an expression of his individual experience of the world, and the judgment he uses to try to understand that experience, the essay is the ideal form of writing and captures more effectively, and perhaps with more “distinction and beauty,” than other styles the fluctuating, imperfect, even irrational experience that informs what is expressed through writing. As Thomas E. Recchio argues in “A Dialogic Approach to the Essay,” we should understand “the essay as a kind of writing that reflects most openly the struggle of individual writers to harmonize the conflicting demands of the self, language, and experience” (Recchio, 1989, p. 280). If there is “distinction and beauty” in the *Essays*, it is located not in literary artifice but in the “matter” which is strong and which shines “by its own light” - the matter of Montaigne’s book informs the literary expression, and not the other way around. As Montaigne says in the preface, this “matter” is synonymous with himself: “I am myself the matter of my book” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 2). In this section I will examine how Montaigne’s “matter” - his sense of self and personal experiences, as well as his judgment and its fruits - inform the way that he communicates his thoughts and the literary style he inaugurates to do so.

At first glance, the *Essays* seem to be only loosely organized, at best. Each individual essay examines a different idea or subject matter announced by its title, and while these individual essays certainly resonate with one another thematically, and they also become much longer (particularly in book three) as Montaigne continues to work on them, there is not necessarily an easily identifiable logic to their organization or focus. This is true of the essays as a whole and, to a lesser extent, of each individual essay, each of which starts with a singular theme or question, but which also offers a kaleidoscopic variety of responses and observations on their titular focus. As Pierre Force writes in his essay “Montaigne and the Coherence of

Eclecticism,” “it seems clear that each essay has its own logic, which is a logic of question and answer: the coherence of each essay comes from the question or questions it discusses. However it would be futile to look for an overarching coherence in the whole work” (Force, 2009, pp. 533-534). While there may not be a thematic or topical coherence to the *Essays* as a whole, there is still a logic to the eclectic collection of different essays, and to the multitude of subjects, examples and ideas that appear within each essay. This logic is driven by Montaigne’s experience itself. As he writes in “Of giving the lie,” Montaigne is concerned with his “own self, an integral part of my life; not concerned with some third-hand, extraneous purpose, like all other books” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 504). The purpose and motivation of the *Essays* is Montaigne’s “own self,” and in its haphazard or eclectic structure readers do not encounter illogical nonsense, but rather a representation of the haphazardness and eclecticism that Montaigne has experienced, and that defines his sense of self. Andre Tournon and Matthew Senior write, in their essay “Self-Interpretation in Montaigne's *Essais*,” that Montaigne “demands the right to proceed haphazardly,” not because he wants to be aimless when structure and specific intention are possible, but because the self-reflective nature of his writing and thinking are themselves reflected back in “a stratified text in which assertions and arguments are combined with comments on the text itself causing a necessary break in the organization of the discourse” and resulting in “a system in which expression and a critique of thought take precedence over the rules of rhetoric” (Tournon & Senior, 1983, p. 53). What drives the organization of the *Essays* is the presentation of some question or “thing” (*chose*) given for Montaigne’s judgment - which is sometimes the capacity for judgment itself, or previous experiences of assaying judgment, and is sometimes something taken from without, like a quote from another book, a philosophical idea, an anecdote, or a historical event - and then the “comments” and “critique” that Montaigne in turn offers on what he has presented.

This meandering, but idiosyncratically cohesive train of thought, driven by intuitive connections whose most coherent logic is found in Montaigne's personal experience and judgment, can be seen by examining the chains of ideas, illustrative examples, and commentary that Montaigne lays out in "That the taste of good and evil depends in large part on the opinion we have of them." The thread I want to follow here starts with a rather broad assertion: "Opinion is a powerful performer, bold and immoderate." The subsequent development of such an idea could go in many different directions, and many different things could illustrate Montaigne's characterization of opinion. As Tournon and Senior argue, this offers the "assertion or argument" that opens up space for "critique" or "comments" by Montaigne on the claim about the nature of opinion that is, at the same time, also his own. In the next paragraph Montaigne offers several different examples of austerity and self-negation, writing of those who have "fled the sweetness of a tranquil life" in order to fling "themselves into humiliation, degradation, and the contempt of the world, and have enjoyed these and even sought them out," and then segues from examples of religious asceticism into sexual self-denial: "I know those who knowingly have derived profit and advancement from cuckoldry, the mere name of which frightens so many people." While Montaigne is already tracing a theoretical thread from one example to the next, the benefits that some people gain from acts or ways of living that might be considered frightening, self-negating or humiliating, the choice of each individual example is dictated by Montaigne's familiarity with them - he *knows* individuals who have "derived profit" from cuckoldry, and is familiar with stories of ascetics who have renounced the world. From the example of cuckoldry Montaigne then moves on to bodily pleasure more generally, noting that both the "members... which serve to beget us" and "sight" are among the "most pleasant" parts of the body, an observation he does not ascribe to anyone and which seems at least partly informed by experience, while also noting that to the contrary "many people have conceived a

mortal hatred for them, merely because they were too likable, and have rejected them because we prize and value them so highly” (Montaigne, p. 42). The essay continues with a number of other examples, transitioning from here into a discussion of poverty and wealth, but this chain of intuitively related connections shows us something about the logic of Montaigne’s writing, the way it follows the development of his own thinking and aims to inscribe this experience into literary form. While not all of these examples are of Montaigne’s own experiences, they are all things within reach of his experience, anecdotes that he has encountered in the course of living, rather than the product of research to seek out examples that confirm his claims. At the end of the essay, Montaigne comes full circle to offer yet another commentary on the initial idea above, about the strength of opinion, and the additional context of the examples he provides to illustrate and comment on this idea in detail: “Thus ease and indigence depend on each man’s opinion... Each man is as well or as badly off as he thinks he is. Not the man of whom it is thought, but the one who thinks it of himself, is happy. And by just this fact belief gains reality and truth” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 46). The culmination of this essay is not a pronouncement about which of the various illustrations Montaigne has provided offers the “correct” path or opinion; his thinking about opinion is not concerned with which one should be chosen or held by all people and all of the illustrations he offers show a certain kind of intensity, even if some forms of intensity are in conflict with one another. Instead it is a reflection, informed by Montaigne’s own judgment and experience, on the wide variety of forms opinion can take, and the effects it can have. The roundabout analysis of opinion does not culminate in a conclusion the reader can take away, that they could merely learn and then lodge in their memory. Instead, the essay as a whole displays the activity of judgment Montaigne has developed in himself, which he hopes his readers will be able to cultivate based on the model of the questions and assertions, examples, and reflection offered in the essay. If readers take anything away from this essay, it should be

that they too can take their own arguments or assertions, think through their possibilities using examples from their own experience, and come to their own conclusions about what all of this means when taken together. The essay as literary form permits Montaigne to make his “demand” that he be permitted to “proceed haphazardly” without such a haphazard approach getting in the way of communicability or internal logic; instead, the haphazardness asserts its own logic and communicates itself on its own terms.

The intuitive chain of illustrative examples just examined is one way in which the essay as literary form allows Montaigne to write according to a logic that comes out of his individual experience and judgment, but it is not the only one. Another form this takes can be found throughout the entirety of the *Essays* in his use of quotes from other writers, which he employs in a unique and particular way. As Montaigne writes in “Of the education of children,” he differentiates himself from others who appeal to quotations as a way of illustrating, or perhaps embellishing, their own thinking: “covering themselves with other men's armor until they don't show even their fingertips,” such writers “hide their borrowings and appropriate them” which Montaigne considers a sign of “injustice and cowardice” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 108). When a writer hides behind the thoughts of others, they do the opposite of what Montaigne attempts to achieve in the *Essays*, a kind of naked and authentic self-expression. Montaigne's critique of such concealing quotations makes sense in light of his overall project of self-examination and experimentation, but it still leaves open the question of what *he* is doing with so many quotations that often seem to fill in a blank in his own sentences. Rather than hiding behind quotes, Montaigne argues that he uses them to more effectively express himself: “I do not speak the minds of others except to speak my own mind better” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 108). This offers some sense of explanation for his use of quotes that stand in where his own thoughts fail, but even those who borrow from others in order to hide themselves could reasonably make the

argument that they are still only trying to speak their own minds better. The difference is not to be found somewhere in the act of borrowing from other writers, but in the self-awareness Montaigne has about his reasons for doing this. While others may hide behind such quotes in order to make themselves seem more impressive, “gaining deceitfully the ignorant approbation of the common herd, while discrediting themselves in the eyes of men of understanding” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 108), Montaigne allows such quotes to stand in for his own hazy or unformed thoughts where he knows precisely that *he* is too deficient to express some idea in writing, but that such expression is not impossible. Writing of authors whose quotations he appeals to more eloquently express his own thoughts, Montaigne writes that he knows and recognizes “the vast difference between them and me,” whereas the “undiscerning writers of our century who amid their nonexistent works scatter whole passages of the ancient authors to do themselves honor, do just the opposite” in using these quotes to try to cover up something about themselves (Montaigne, 1958, p. 107). Whereas others may invoke quotations in order to make themselves seem like more capable thinkers or writers by dint of the material they borrow, Montaigne still allows his self-perceived flaws or inability as a writer to stand alongside those he concedes are much more talented: “I let my thoughts run on, weak and lowly as they are, as I have produced them, without plastering and sewing up the flaws,” and what he shares with other writers is ultimately an opinion or understanding about something, not an equal ability to express it. Montaigne’s “opinions have the honor of often coinciding with” those of better writers and thinkers, and so in that sense Montaigne is not hiding his own opinion, or lack of one, behind those of others, and he sees himself alongside them at least going “the same way, though far behind them, saying ‘How true!’” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 107). This mix of Montaigne’s own, imperfect observations, and the use of quotes that aid in expressing his own opinions where his ability as a writer precludes him doing so does not negate Montaigne’s quest for self-

expression and self-knowledge, but instead is aligned with his ideas about the imperfect self that can nevertheless continually work on itself to sharpen and hone its abilities, the assaying of a self characterized by Richard Flathman as one “that is for as well as against itself, a self that recognizes and combats its weaknesses and deficiencies but that does so in the name of and for the sake of enhancing itself” (Flathman, 2000, p. 514). If Montaigne seeks self-enhancement through quotations, it is not like the empty festooning of others whose inability can be quickly identified by “men of understanding, whose praise alone has any weight, and who turn up their nose at our borrowed incrustations” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 108), but instead is an effort to both recognize his own inabilities, and also strive to find creative and experimental ways to make up for them while retaining his overarching authentic voice. These encounters with others both aid him in growing his own understanding by way of another similar, but different perspective, and offer his readers more clarity in comprehending what he is trying to communicate.

Most of the considerations here about Montaigne’s writing style and his approach to writing have so far been focused on the ways that the essay form and Montaigne’s experiments with it have allowed him to produce a written work that communicates something of himself to others. Montaigne’s readers encounter both the figure behind the book in his individuality, as well as a more impersonal, general model of the use of judgment which can be adapted to their own circumstances and individual experience. I want to shift the focus now slightly to think about not just the book that Montaigne would come to produce, but what the act of writing itself provides for Montaigne - not so much what might be learned from the book, but what might be learned from its production, which can illustrate Montaigne’s project of the cultivation of judgment and self-knowledge just as well as the contents of the essays. Richard L. Regosin writes in the essay “Montaigne’s *Essais*: Why Writing Matters” that the act of writing “matters because it allows Montaigne both to encounter what we might call his untrammelled self and to

restrain its impulses. He writes to domesticate his thought; his writing imposes itself on the disordered mind, tames it, mediates its wildness by reflection, and by the very syntax that gives it form" (Regosin, 2010, p. 12). In this light the act of writing is yet another experiential opportunity for both the use and cultivation of judgment in deciding what to put into words, and how to do so. In "Of practice," Montaigne provides an extended, four-page recounting of a horse riding accident and the rather serious injuries he incurred from it, which required an extensive and uncertain recovery. While the details he recounts are not particularly relevant here, beyond the fact that the accident and recovery were both traumatic and confusing, the commentary he provides after his narrative is instructive and helps illustrate the focusing and restraining effect that writing provides for Montaigne. Reflecting on both the experience of the accident and the experience of writing about it, he writes that an "account of so trivial an event would be rather pointless, were it not for the instruction that I have derived from it for myself" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 272). While the "event" itself was instructive, teaching him something about death by dint of how close he came to it, the writing of the "account" of this experience is also instructive for him: "What I write here is not my teaching, but my study; it is not a lesson for others, but for me" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 272). The act of writing is for Montaigne another avenue to study himself, to use his judgment to not just to try to understand an experience, one made all the more difficult by the temporary loss of his memory of it, but to understand it by giving it form through writing. He goes on to write that it is a "thorny undertaking, and more so than it seems, to follow a movement so wandering as that of our mind, to penetrate the opaque depths of its innermost folds, to pick out and immobilize the innumerable flutterings that agitate it" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 273). Writing offers a form of communication - both with oneself and with others - that captures and instantiates the movement of the mind in language. While this immobilized Montaigne may not be representative of him beyond the moment in which he writes himself down, it provides

him a different perspective on himself and his experiences, a different way to bring his judgment to the experience. As Richard L. Regosin writes, in the essay "Figures of the Self: Montaigne's Rhetoric of Portraiture," there is an element of projection and fragmentation in translating one's memories of an event into writing, a "process of self-depiction [which] demands fragmentation, distinction between the self as subject and object as if to underscore its always already partial nature" (Regosin, 1980, p. 69). While this involves, in some sense, a splitting of the self, for Montaigne the self is "always already partial" in its nature, and so rather than detracting from a possible unified self-image, this kind of personal reflection and judgment of experience and memory simply offers Montaigne another perspective with which he can examine himself.

Setting aside the personal value of writing, Montaigne still insists that this largely personal exercise can be of use to his readers, albeit in a less clear way, one that Montaigne cannot judge from his own perspective. In the same passage analyzed above, he writes that "it should not be held against me if I publish what I write. What is useful to me may also by accident be useful to another" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 272). As is the case for Nietzsche, for Montaigne the use and value that readers might gain from his writings will not be the same as what he describes of his own experiments in self-analysis and his own judgments on things. What the reader can get from the book is just as much something they must provide out of the resources of their own life experience as it is something that Montaigne provides in material for personal reflection. John O'Neill, in his book *Essaying Montaigne*, writes that "any reading of the Essays... must preserve a certain literary equality between the reader and the writer," equality defined by a "literary covenant which fulfils the exchanges between writer and reader in such a way that neither is made the slave of the other." (O'Neill, 2001, p. 8) This covenant requires an understanding of the role of linguistic expression in the *Essays*, in which "meaning is not trapped in words, sentences and characters, but merely gathers in words to overflow them,

falling back upon living which is the true source of the density and particularity of reading and writing” (O’Neill, 2001, p. 6). The meaning and value of the *Essays* is located partly in the writing that describes Montaigne’s thoughts and experiences, but also partly in those experiences themselves; for Montaigne’s readers, likewise, the ideas they encounter while reading can be meaningful and valuable, but that meaning and value also “overflow” what the book contains when those readers put the ideas they encounter in the book into action in their own lives.

As Montaigne writes in “Of experience,” ideas are equally valuable regardless of whether they are encountered in writing or in experience: “I, who do not disbelieve men’s mouths any more than their hands, and who know that people write just as injudiciously as they speak... quote a friend of mine as readily as Aulus Gellius or Macrobius, and what I have seen as what they have written” (Montaigne, 1958, p. 828). While the point of this quote and its larger context is a critique of those who place written ideas higher than ones encountered in conversation, it also serves to illustrate the fact that written ideas and ones encountered through experience are equally valid as sources of knowledge and objects for judgment, and both forms offer opportunities for encountering something new and productive. For Montaigne, the creation of the essay as literary form allows him to express his ideas in a way that does not make them appear more powerful or more impressive than encountering him in person, but that also gives him an opportunity to gain a new perspective on himself, and gives the reader an opportunity to make their own use of the model and starting point provided by Montaigne’s writings.

Conclusion:

From High Mountains and Towers to the Classroom

Despite their many differences, the preceding pages have shown that Nietzsche and Montaigne together offer a complementary set of approaches to education, the acquisition of knowledge, and coming to know and shape the self. While Nietzsche's direct references to Montaigne are few, and Nietzsche's work is often framed with different predecessors or intellectual peers, understanding his thinking in the context of his appreciation for Montaigne's work provides a new perspective on the significance of his psychological-philosophical way of thinking, particularly in his works of the middle period which I have focused on here. Likewise, in many ways Montaigne's *Essays* sit within a lineage of French *moralistes* of the 16th and 17th centuries who are generally not concerned with the often dark and dramatic metaphysical questions that occupy much of Nietzsche's writings, but all the same in concert with them Nietzsche's philosophical thought offers a more complex framework through which one can understand Montaigne's often fleeting essayistic observations. As R. Lanier Anderson and Rachel Cristy write, "although Nietzsche advocates a 'cheerful' mode of philosophizing for which Montaigne is an exemplar, he signally fails to write with the obvious cheerfulness attained by Montaigne" (Anderson & Cristy, 2017, p. 1514). While it may be true that Nietzsche's works are often darker and more fraught than Montaigne's, Anderson and Cristy note that Montaigne and Nietzsche share a similar notion of cheerfulness that is "produced in fact through practiced self-cultivation," and that Montaigne's example of self-cultivation and the pursuit of one's own cheerfulness "provided a *proof of possibility*... that served Nietzsche as a model," just as each

of these writers serves as a model for their respective readers (Anderson & Cristy, 2017, pp. 1536-1537). Taken together, Nietzsche and Montaigne offer a valuable bifocal perspective, both providing complementary but distinct approaches to working toward the same kind of self-cultivation and knowledge. While Nietzsche provides philosophical rigor, an engagement with the legacy of German metaphysics and a more purposeful approach to literary form and style, Montaigne offers an unalloyed joyfulness and sense of curiosity, as well as a courageous and steadfast dedication to diving into the unknown, whether that is creating new literary forms or taking seriously subjects that might otherwise be considered too mystifying or mundane or inappropriate for intellectual inquiry.

Nietzsche himself encourages his readers to see the link between his work and that of French thinkers of the 16th and, primarily, 17th centuries over and above Germans, even though he often spends more time in his writing discussing, and often critiquing, his fellow countrymen. As he writes in *Ecce Homo*,

The 'German spirit' is my bad air: I have trouble breathing when I am around the instinctive uncleanness *in psychologicis* that is revealed in a German's every word, every expression. They never went through a seventeenth century of hard self-examination as the French did – a La Rochefoucauld, a Descartes has a hundred times more integrity than the best of the Germans, – they have not produced a psychologist to this day. (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 141)

While the notion of a “French Nietzsche” often situates him as a predecessor - to 20th century thinkers like Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, and others in the postmodern tradition - assessing the meaning of his work in light of the French antecedents he revered offers a new avenue for

understanding his writings. The middle period works, with their particular focus on psychological insight or “hard self-examination” and heavy use of aphorisms, in many ways reflect the inspiration of writers like Montaigne and La Rochefoucauld even if they are not often invoked by name. While German thinkers do play an important role in the development and shape of his thought and many of the philosophical concepts and questions to which he responds, they differ in the critical and complicated relationship Nietzsche often had with them, as opposed to the more productive and, we might say “cheerful” relationship he has with French writers and thinkers of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Beyond the possibilities this pairing opens up for future scholarship and conceptualization of each thinker, the synthesis of Nietzsche and Montaigne’s ideas about knowledge, education and learning also provides a framework that can be put to use in contemporary educational settings, or be taken up by individuals in their own pursuit of self-knowledge and self-creation. Despite the differences between 16th century French, 19th century German, and contemporary global approaches to pedagogy and educational systems, the ideas of both of these thinkers offer much that is valuable to modern teachers and students. As pushback grows against rigid forms of educational assessment like standardized test scores, such as the University of California system’s 2020 decision to do away with SAT and ACT scores in the admissions process, Nietzsche and Montaigne’s ideas about the fundamentally individualistic nature of the acquisition and use of knowledge provide new ways of evaluating and teaching students. By centering the student’s fundamentally individual perspective and unique set of abilities and strengths, this approach provides an alternative to the leveling effect of standardized tests that fail to capture the potential of students whose skills, temperament or educational history may not prepare them for success in a particular mode of testing, even as

they still hold intellectual potential that manifests itself in other forms and that can be verified through an approach that takes their individuality into account.

As Montaigne's writings on the importance of travel and encounters with foreign peoples and cultures show, qualities like the capacity for reason and the maintenance and common belief in values, laws and customs are often distributed in equally across human communities, though the specific forms and manifestations in which they appear may vary, sometimes sufficiently enough to make them at first appear to be something entirely foreign. Montaigne's ideas about cultural relativism offer educators a way to understand why students with different cultural backgrounds and traditions may respond in varying ways to different pedagogical approaches, and why success may take different forms, even as achieving success is a possibility for any student. As Montaigne writes in *Of cannibals*,

When King Pyrrhus passed over into Italy, after he had reconnoitered the formation of the army that the Romans were sending to meet him, he said: "I do not know what barbarians these are" (for so the Greeks called all foreign nations), "but the formation of this army that I see is not at all barbarous." The Greeks said as much of the army that Flamininus brought into their country, and so did Philip, seeing from a knoll the order and distribution of the Roman camp, in his kingdom, under Publius Sulpicius Galba.

(Montaigne, 1958, p. 150)

In each of these examples, there is something both foreign and familiar in the Other, a portion of their identity or comportment that is unrecognizable, but that can also be in some way situated and understood through what is held in common - the armies may be unrecognizable, but their actions in formation provide a common point through which mutual recognition is

possible. Such a perspective, in which what is commonly held between two people or groups forms a point of mutual understanding, allows each side to recognize the validity of the other even if many of their other features are different, even alien to one another. Translated to the work of the classroom, it may mean that the teacher both requires, and can recognize, a certain degree of intellectual rigor and improvement in each student, even if the form and expression of those qualities varies from student to student. While Nietzsche's works deal less with notions of intercultural understanding or communication, his ideas about the relationship between meaning and value and personal, individual identity and experience speak to the ways in which educators must maintain an awareness of the diversity of forms of meaning-making among individual students. The role of the teacher is to provide a certain set of standards and skills that students are expected to meet and develop, though the paths that each student takes to meeting these goals, and what their accomplishment looks like, will be dictated by the individuality of their perspective and what it can most effectively bring into being.

As I have worked on this dissertation I have also had the opportunity to teach my own courses and try to integrate some of these ideas into my own approach to teaching and the structure of coursework and classroom activities. While I have only had time and opportunity to make some preliminary experiments of my own, I have tried to open up some space within the classroom for students to engage in what Charles Bingham terms "interpretive education," an approach that "asks learners to relearn their own lives as a result of new learnings" (Bingham, 2001, p. 349). While some of the goals of coursework necessarily must be more uniform, creating space for students to use new ideas to understand and evolve their conception of themselves and their own experiences and identities can contribute, albeit in an indirect way, to satisfying the core competencies expected of all students. At the beginning of each quarter, I outline the dynamic I hope to achieve in the classroom in the form of a "covenant" or mutual

agreement in which each party plays a crucial and necessary role in contributing to and developing the content and activity of the course. The way I generally frame this is by telling students that each person in the classroom brings something valuable that will contribute to our activity as a whole; I bring my subject matter expertise and experience analyzing and interpreting literature and ideas, and expressing that analysis in the form of effective writing, and the students bring their own personal histories, perspectives, interests and passions which will guide how we approach the material and frame our discussions and work. In addition to Nietzsche and Montaigne, I have drawn inspiration for this approach from contemporary thinking on pedagogy and education that resonates with the approaches of those two thinkers, such as the work of bell hooks. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks writes about what she calls “engaged pedagogy,” education “as the practice of freedom,” based on the belief that, as educators, “our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (hooks, 1994, p. 13). Merely sharing information only requires one side, the teacher, to be active, while the students remain largely passive, both in the reception of information and in their conception of themselves, which need not change or even be questioned in order to receive information. On the other hand, an “engaged” approach to teaching and pedagogy requires both sides to be active and participatory, and in turn opens up the space for a more productive, evolutionary experience for students and teachers. This approach reflects Montaigne’s differentiation between passive learning and active judgment, as well as Nietzsche’s conviction that one can only make productive use of new information or knowledge by understanding it through one’s own perspective.

Translating the knowledge acquisition process and student-teacher dynamics from Montaigne and Nietzsche's works into contemporary systems of education is not easy or seamless, and does require certain compromises. While Montaigne has a more generous attitude toward humanity and often seems to eschew social and intellectual hierarchies, Nietzsche has a more constrained vision of what self-knowledge and self-cultivation look like, as well as which kinds of people are capable of productively engaging in these activities; in short, there is a strain of elitism in Nietzsche, though it is less pronounced in his middle works, that complicates the notion of applying his ideas in an institution that is open to the public and that must serve large numbers of students. As Mark E. Jonas writes, while "Nietzsche's philosophy can be reconciled with democratic education, it should be said that, generally speaking, Nietzsche has great antipathy for democratic, egalitarian schooling" (Jonas, 2009, p. 165). While Nietzsche's overall project may be incongruent with the goals and structure of university education, the specific ideas discussed here can still be effectively adapted to fit within such a system. While students cannot be expected to think and work as independently as Zarathustra's disciples, it is still possible to give students a greater sense of control over the direction of their education by allowing them to suggest or choose specific concepts, themes or passages from assigned readings that will steer the direction of classroom discourse that is, at the same time, ultimately guided by the expertise and experience of the teacher. Likewise, even if the individualized tutor-student relationship for which Montaigne advocates is impractical in a classroom of dozens of students, there are still opportunities for more individualized elements of coursework, such as requiring one-on-one meetings to rework writing or requiring each student to give a short presentation and lead class discussion once per quarter. Providing ample opportunities for small-group or partner work and discussion can give students an opportunity to workshop their ideas in a more comfortable setting before sharing them with the teacher or

class as a whole, and emphasizing these opportunities for individual, personal preparatory work can result in students who are more comfortable and confident to express themselves in their other course work and activities. Despite the challenges imposed by the institutional nature of contemporary education, there are still opportunities for students to do work within the classroom that allows them to develop both the academic skills expected by the institution and more personal intellectual capacities that dovetail with academic work but also allow students to express and develop their individuality and unique intellectual perspectives and skills.

One of the most effective strategies I have developed in the classroom to account for variation in individual student interest and ability is to structure lesson plans so that they can account for a number of different potential directions for the day's class, which will be guided, in part, by student interest and inclination. While I choose the range of content for the lesson plan, the students have freedom, within the scope that I have demarcated, to move freely among different topics and, in some cases, exercises and classroom activities. What this looks like is effectively creating a lesson plan with a surplus of possible areas of focus, effectively creating several different lesson plans in one so that I can achieve the goals I have set for a given day while also retaining flexibility to adapt and account for student interest or suggestions in the moment. This means assembling a variety of different aspects of, or potential approaches to, the reading assigned for that day, whether that is different characters, sections or chapters, scenes, themes, applicable theoretical concepts or other interpretive modes. While I may have a set plan for a certain day involving, for example, a thesis statement writing exercise, the material or questions used in the classroom to engage with that exercise can come from student input. In turn, these student-led discussions and activities give me an idea of where the students' interest lies and what kinds of ideas they seem particularly motivated to investigate or discuss, and these areas of focus then inform the questions students respond to in their coursework. This

does not always follow a predictable path however; sometimes if students are overly resistant to working on developing certain crucial skills, that is an indication to me that I need to make sure we spend *more* time working on them, student protestations aside. However, if students do not seem interested in approaching readings or coursework from a certain perspective, I will have prepared myself to find a different way of presenting the material in the moment, ideally in a form suggested by the students themselves or drawn from prior discussions and coursework.

This approach to teaching and planning lessons and coursework means a fair amount of extra preparatory work for the instructor, but the payoff is that the students feel empowered to pursue questions that are personally meaningful to them while also developing the academic skills that the course and institution requires, such as effective writing, argumentation, interpretive reading ability and theoretical analytical skills. Given the demands on teachers across all levels of education, it is also understandable that many educators may feel disinclined to do more work than is required of them by institutional standards and expectations, and it is, to some extent unreasonable to expect this approach to be broadly adapted. As bell hooks writes,

Many professors remain unwilling to be involved with any pedagogical practices that emphasize mutual participation between teacher and student because more time and effort are required to do this work. Yet some version of engaged pedagogy is really the only type of teaching that truly generates excitement in the classroom, that enables students and professors to feel the joy of learning. (hooks, 1994, p. 204)

While excitement and joy are not requisite elements of a classroom or educational experience, and it is certainly possible to successfully teach and train students without these elements present, accounting for them means that students can gain more from the experience than a

passing grade or a set of passively received facts - they can also gain something personal, and something that they can keep with them to cultivate, nurture and grow even after they have graduated and moved beyond their formal education. While this approach to pedagogy and education does not completely mirror the ideal conditions Nietzsche and Montaigne outline for the personalized education and cultivation of individuals, there is still a productive place for such ideas within formal, institutional systems of education. My hope is that the ideas and writings explored in this dissertation offer new possibilities both to educators for innovation and experimentation in the classroom, and for students who can gain a new way of thinking about what it means to learn and grow as individuals and as members of an academic community.

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