

Nietzsche's Last Idol

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by

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the notion of will to power formulated by Friedrich Nietzsche. Adapted from the romantic idea of will, Nietzsche hoped to make will to power the centrepiece of his philosophy and the basis on which a revaluation of all values would be possible. In all aspects of this ambitious project, Nietzsche encountered problems that were to prove insurmountable. The very criticisms he had directed at his predecessors returned to sabotage his plans.

Nietzsche believed that the ascetic ideals of his time devalued life and diminished man. Instead, he extolled Homeric ethics and promoted a naturalistic epistemology, taking will to power as his yardstick for both. However, his underlying romanticism ensured that his ethics and epistemology were aligned and based on an otherworldly conception. Will to power is asceticism interpreted romantically.

Following the Romantics, Nietzsche criticised materialism for its underlying world dualism and lack of an internal dynamic. For him, the world is will to power. However, individuation is impossible if the world is only will to power. Insofar as it is based on the concept of power, will to power is a surface interpretation. Will to power as a theory of actuality is materialism interpreted romantically.

For Nietzsche, psychology is based on an erroneous Platonic-Christian-Cartesian ontology. According to his view, man is a locus of psycho-physiological wills to power. Yet his opposition to reductionism and his proto-existentialistic stance demand an ontology that is not reducible to physiology. Will to power is the soul interpreted romantically.

Will to power is a stillborn philosophical chimera: even with an element of naturalism, romanticism cannot be reconciled with ancient heroism. Nietzsche's attempts to erect a new philosophy of (will to) power ended in failure and it is reasonable to believe that Nietzsche recognised this.

Thesis Certification

This thesis is entirely my own work except where referenced or acknowledged. It has not been previously submitted to any other academic institution.

Some of the arguments offered below were presented and discussed during the 2010 Conference of the Australasian Association of Philosophy, organised at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, from July 4th to July 9th, under the heading ‘Will to Power and Ascetic Ideal’.

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This study is dedicated to my two very young daughters. Nothing will ever offset the systematic absences of their father. A labour of love is easily discharged under their impatient gaze.

Abbreviations and Conventions

Throughout the text, references to Nietzsche's translated works follow conventions widely used in the literature. Roman numerals refer, where relevant, to main parts of Nietzsche's books (with the special case of *Ecce Homo* detailed below) and Arabic numerals refer to section numbers, not pages. For instance, GM-III 12 refers to the 12th section of the Third Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. I have relied on Walter Kaufmann's, R.J. Hollingdale's, Anthony Ludovici's, Marianne Cowan's, Kate Surge's and Marion Faber's translations of Nietzsche's works (appearing below as WK, RJH, AL, MC, KS and MF).

AC	<i>The Anti-Christ</i> (translation RJH)
BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> (translation MF)
BT	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> (translation WK)
CW	<i>The Case of Wagner</i> (translation WK)
D	<i>Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudice of Morality</i> (translation RJH)
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i> (translation WK)
	EH-I 'Why I am so Wise'
	EH-II 'Why I am so Clever'
	EH-III 'Why I Write Such Good Books'
	EH-IV 'Why I am a Destiny'
	The other chapters of this work are referred to using the abbreviations mentioned here; for instance, EH-BT points to the chapter dedicated to <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>
GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> (translation WK)
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i> (translation WK)
HH	<i>Human, All-too-Human</i> (translation RJH)
	I: first volume
	Ia: 'Assorted Opinions and Maxims'
	Ib: 'The Wanderer and his Shadow'
NCW	<i>Nietzsche Contra Wagner</i> (translation AL)
PTAG	<i>Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks</i> (translation MC)
TI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i> (translation RJH)
U	<i>Untimely Meditations</i> (translation RJH)
	I: 'David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer'
	II: 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for life'
	III: 'Schopenhauer as Educator'
	IV: 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth'
WLN	<i>Writings from the Late Notebooks</i> (translation KS)
WP	<i>The Will to Power</i> (translation WK)
Z	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> (translation RJH)

Nietzsche's posthumous fragments are referenced by their 'section' in the readily available *The Will to Power* whenever this is possible or, where it is not, following the convention retained in the *Writings from the Late Notebooks* edited by Rüdiger Bittner; for example, WLN 34[3] refers to Notebook 34, fragment 3.

Schopenhauer's main work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, generally known to English readers as *The World as Will and Representation*, is referred to as WWR-I to IV. References to this work follow the same logic used for Nietzsche's: Roman numerals indicate the book, Arabic numerals the section. Where mentioned, page numbers refer to the 1966 edition of E.F.J. Payne's translation, in two volumes (noted i and ii); note that WWR-II does *not* refer to the second volume of the English translation but to Book II of Schopenhauer's work.

References to other works, although provided in the footnotes and not in-text, follow the author-name system completed by page numbers if appropriate. Full details of all works quoted or referenced are provided at the end of this thesis. The rare translations of French quotations are all mine.

Nietzsche (and after him his editors and translators) regularly uses ellipses '...' as a rhetorical device to indicate a pause in speech, an unfinished thought or an aposiopesis (deliberate invitation to the reader to complete the sentence by himself). When quoting selectively Nietzsche and to avoid confusion with the contents of his texts, omitted words appear as ellipses enclosed in square brackets (that is, appear as [...]), whereas simple ellipses are Nietzsche's own. Quotations marks (") in Nietzsche's texts have been replaced by simple inverted commas ('); simple inverted commas remained unchanged. For sake of consistency, the same conventions have been followed when citing other authors.

In this thesis, 'man', 'individual' and 'human' (as substantives) are employed interchangeably and mean 'people', i.e., men and women. Similarly, uses of masculine pronouns (he, his or him) to refer to a generic individual are made only as a matter of convenience. There is no intention to convey a value-laden agenda; any such impression left by the text is as involuntary as it is unfortunate.

“One repays a teacher badly if one remains a pupil.
And why, then, should you not pluck at my laurels?”

Thus Spoke Zarathustra I 22 (3)

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