Nietzsche's Environmental Philosophy: A Trans-European Perspective

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Against the background of a growing interest in Nietzsche's moral philosophy, several articles have appeared in these pages in recent years dealing with his relation to environmental ethics. While there is much here that is helpful, these essays still fail to do full justice to Nietzsche's understanding of optimal human relations to the natural world. The context of his life helps to highlight some ecological aspects to his thinking that tend to be overlooked. His ideas about the Overhuman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* undermine the traditional anthropocentric attitude toward nature. By understanding Nietzsche's idea of will to power primarily as interpretation, following his suggestion that we engage the world as a play of interpretive forces, and paying attention to the relevant parallels with Chinese Daoism and Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is clear that Nietzsche takes a salutary step beyond biocentrism to a Dionysian celebration of existence as a whole.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of a growing interest in Nietzsche's moral philosophy, several articles have appeared in these pages in recent years dealing with its relation to environmental ethics.[1] While many of the ideas in these articles are helpful, some are misguided, and collectively they fail to do justice to the depth of Nietzsche's thinking on nature. Ralph Acampora's article, informed by a healthy skepticism, exemplifies the widespread view that Nietzsche is such a strong advocate of will to power as domination and exploitation that one cannot sensibly count him as a contributor to environmental philosophy. In preparing to criticize Max Hallman for portraying Nietzsche as a proto-deep ecologist, Acampora warns against "rushing to the conclusion that Hallman has seen an entirely new side of Nietzschean texts, a side that has eluded several generations of the most acute critical eyes."[2] But the ecological dimension to Nietzsche's work has always been there: it has just been ignored, for two

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[1] Max O. Hallman, "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 13 (1991): 99–125; Ralph R. Acampora, "Using and Abusing Nietzsche for Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 16 (1994): 186–94; Martin Drenthen, "The Paradox of Environmental Ethics: Nietzsche's View of Nature and the Wild," *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999): 163–75.

[2] Acampora, "Using and Abusing Nietzsche," p. 187.

reasons. First, the context of the man's life has been neglected—a distinct disadvantage in the case of such an avowedly personal thinker as Nietzsche. Second, there has been a failure to appreciate the extent to which his philosophy constitutes a radical departure from its antecedents in the Western tradition. Thus, on the topic of nature especially, there is much to be gained from approaching Nietzsche's ideas from a comparative, non-Western perspective. When seen in the light of Daoist and Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, for instance, his thinking about nature reveals facets that have escaped the notice of commentaries based solely in the Western traditions.[3] Given Nietzsche's insistence on the close connections between the philosophy and the life, a discerning assessment of his contributions to environmental philosophy does well to take (auto)biographical circumstances into account. In view of the bulk of the Nietzschean corpus, and the fact that his ideas about nature developed over the course of his career, the major focus is on the mature work (from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on). The scope of this essay precludes a full consideration of the parallels with East-Asian thought, but the interested reader is invited to follow up on the relevant references. This essay adopts a trans-European perspective in accordance with a remark by Nietzsche that his "trans-European eye" is emblematic of his freedom from prejudice and broadness of vision.[4]

II. CONTEXT OF THE LIFE

At age thirty Nietzsche wrote: "I learn from a philosopher to the extent that he is able to provide an example . . . through his expression, bearing, clothes, eating, and manners more than through his speaking or even his writing."[5] His consistent application of the idea that "every great philosophy is a self-confession on the part of its originator" to himself justifies our looking to

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[3] For comparisons of Nietzsche's ideas about nature with ideas from the East-Asian traditions, see Roger T. Ames, "Nietzsche's 'Will to Power' and Chinese 'Virtuality' (*De*)," and Ōkōchi Ryōgi, "Nietzsche's Conception of Nature from an East-Asian Point of View," in Graham Parkes, ed., *Nietzsche and Asian Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 130–50 and 200–13, and Graham Parkes, "Human/Nature in Nietzsche and Taoism," in J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, eds., *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 79–98, and "Nature and the Human 'Redivinized': Mahāyāna Buddhist themes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*," in John Lippitt and James Urpeth, eds., *Nietzsche and the Divine* (Manchester, U.K.: Clinamen Press, 2000), pp. 181–199.

[4] Letter to Paul Deussen, 3 January 1888. Exceprts from the letters are my own translations from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Briefe, Kritische Studienausgabe* (Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986).

[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, p. 3; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), 1:350. References to Nietzsche's works are to aphorism or section (rather than page) number, so that the passages can be found in any edition. Translations are my own of the original texts in the standard *Kritische Studienausgabe* (cited as KSA followed by volume and page number).

Nietzsche's life for instruction about his attitude toward nature.[6] From early childhood up until his mental collapse at the age of forty-four, he was enthralled by the natural world—and indeed he depended on close relations with it for his physical and psychical flourishing. With the loss of his Lutheran pastor father (and consequently his Christian faith) at an early age, Nietzsche's strong religious feelings were soon displaced onto the natural world.[7]

At thirteen he writes: "From childhood on I would often seek solitude and would feel best when I could abandon myself to myself undisturbed. This usually happened in the open temple of nature, where I would find the truest friends."[8] The majority of the poems he wrote during his childhood contain lyrical evocations of the natural world.[9] The young Nietzsche's poetry and his love of nature were encouraged by voracious reading of authors such as Goethe, Byron, Shelley, Hölderlin, and—above all—Ralph Waldo Emerson.[10]

Nietzsche appears to have developed special affinities with trees and rocks as a child, as suggested by an autobiographical aphorism titled "The Mirror of Nature," where he asks whether a human being "is not well described when we hear that . . . among great, thick-leaved nut-trees he feels quite at home, as if among his blood relations . . . [and that] from childhood on he experiences and reveres unhewn rocks as witnesses of prehistory that are desirous of language."[11] As his autobiographical essays and letters to friends attest, Nietzsche was an enthusiastic hiker throughout his career, often spending "six to eight hours" a day striding around outdoors. "*Sit* as little as possible!" he writes. "Do not trust any thought that was not born in the open air and in free movement—where the muscles too are celebrating a feast and festival."[12]

His favorite place for walking—and living—was around the village of Sils-Maria in the Upper Engadin (in southeastern Switzerland), where he felt a profound kinship with the majestic Alpine landscape of mountains and lakes. Soon after arriving in St. Moritz for the first time, he writes of his feeling "*related* to *this* very nature."[13] In an aphorism from the same period, he writes

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[6] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, par. 6 (KSA, 5:19).

[7] For a comprehensive and beautifully illustrated account of the importance of the physical environment for Nietzsche's creativity, see David Farrell Krell and Donald L. Bates, *The Good European: Nietzsche's Work Sites in Word and Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[8] Nietzsche, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), sec. 1, vol. 1, p. 288 (hereafter abbreviated as KGW).

[9] See Nietzsche, KGW, vols. 1 and 2.

[10] For Emerson's influence on Nietzsche in this respect, see Graham Parkes, "Floods of Life around Granite of Fate: Nietzsche and Emerson as Thinkers of Nature," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 43 (1997): 207–40.

[11] Nietzsche, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*, par. 49 (KSA, 2:410). Two notes concerning memories of his childhood home read: "Near Naumburg, digging calcite and gypsum" (KSA, 8:11[11]); and "*Windlücke* [near Naumburg]. Rocks as witnesses of prehistory" (KSA, 8:28[6]).

[12] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, sec. 2.1 (KSA, 6:281).

[13] Nietzsche, letter to Franz Overbeck, 23 June 1879, in Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Briefe*.

of the joy in being able to say of one's physical environment: "*This* [part of nature] is intimate and familiar to me, related by blood, and even more than that."[14] Even when he lived in larger cities he would always take long walks beyond the city limits: in Genoa he hiked along the Ligurian coastline and in the hills behind the city; similarly in Nice, where he lived close to the sea and basked beneath cloudless skies; and in autumnal Turin he walked several kilometers along the banks of the River Po every day, feeling "like a God at leisure . . . as painted by Claude Lorrain."[15]

Yet throughout his life Nietzsche lived simply, and especially during the last, nomadic decade of his active life, when his constant moving from place to place discouraged the accumulation of more possessions than would fit in a trunk and suitcases. After his early retirement from the University of Basel in 1879 his meager pension did not allow extravagance, but Nietzsche was in any case something of an ascetic—one of several characteristics he shared with Henry David Thoreau—and was seldom moved to excess in eating or drinking. This utterance of his alter ego, Zarathustra, applies especially personally: "Whoever possesses little is that much less possessed: praised be a little poverty!"[16] All these factors conduced to a life guided by sufficiency and lived "lightly upon the earth," which in turn provides a context for some environmentally beneficial thinking.

III. OVERHUMAN VERSUS ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Although occasionally somewhat prolix, Max Hallman's pioneering study of Nietzsche's relevance for environmental ethics clearly makes many of the points that need to be made. He claims that Nietzsche shares a number of "crucial concerns" with modern environmental writers and especially with deep ecologists[17]: "(1) [H]e rejects the existence of a transcendent world": he does, and any philosophy for which this world here and now is the only world is likely to provide helpful resources for environmental ethics. "(2) [H]e rejects the human-nature dichotomy and [anthropocentrism]": he does, and most "naturalisms" like Nietzsche's, which see the human as inextricably grounded in the natural world, will also be concerned with how we behave toward nature. "(3) [H]e . . . formulates, in the will to power, a principle that explains change immanently and that suggests the interrelatedness of all living things": he does, but the interrelatedness encompasses not only living things but also the so-called "inanimate" realm. "(4) [H]e calls for a kind of 'return to nature'

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[14] Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, 338 (KSA, 2:699).

[15] See Nietzsche's letters of 24 November 1880, 8 January 1881, 24 March 1881, 4 December 1883, 1 May 1883, 18 October 1888, in Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Briefe; Ecce Homo*, sec. 3; *Zarathustra,* sec. 4 and "Twilight," sec. 3.

[16] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1.11 (KSA, 4:63).

[17] Hallman, "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics," pp. 100–01.

whereby the anti-natural tendencies of traditional Western thinking are dispossessed": he does, though Hallman's account of what this return consists in is vague (these tendencies are "dispossessed"?). Even though he says that this return is not "retrogression," Hallman's frequent use of the phrase "re-immersion into nature" strongly suggests a regression to a prior absorption rather than the "*going up* to a lofty, free, even terrible nature and naturalness" that Nietzsche explicitly advocates.[18]

A lacuna in Hallman's treatment is apparent near its beginning, when he writes that "some of Nietzsche's more infamous concepts, most notably that of the Overman [*Übermensch*], may be superfluous or perhaps even antithetical to the development of an ecologically oriented, environmentally concerned philosophizing."[19] On the contrary, the idea of the *Übermensch*, or "Overhuman"—representing the possibility of a radically new way of being for the human—is profoundly relevant for ecological thinking. It is most fully presented in Nietzsche's favorite among his own works, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In "Zarathustra's Prologue" the protagonist broaches the topic of the Overhuman right at the beginning of his first speech to the people:

> *Behold! I teach you the Overhuman. Behold! I teach you the Overhuman!* The human being is something that must be overcome. . . . The Overhuman is the sense of the earth. . . .
>
> I swear to you, my brothers, *stay true to the earth* and do not believe those who talk to you of otherworldly hopes! …
>
> Once sacrilege against God was the greatest sacrilege, but God died, and those sacrilegious ones with him. The most terrible thing now is sacrilege against the earth.[20]

The Overhuman signifies a way of being that is attained by "overcoming" the human, which, as the rest of *Zarathustra* shows, requires that one go beyond the merely human perspective and transcend the anthropocentric world view. (Acampora's claim that one should attribute a "high humanism" to Nietzsche is rendered problematic by the repeated assertions of the protagonist of his favorite book to the effect that "the human being is something that must be overcome."[21]) This is not a transcending toward some God's-eye perspective or view from nowhere, but rather a broadening of the human world view to include an appreciation of the perspectives of the natural phenomena with which we share the world. (Nor does it help for Acampora to call Nietzsche's thought "naturalistic transcendentalism"[22]: Nietzsche's thinking on nature

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[18] Ibid., pp. 112–13; Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 9.48 (KSA, 6:150).

[19] Hallman, "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics," p. 100.

[20] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, Prologue, sec. 3 (KSA, 4:14–15).

[21] Acampora, "Using and Abusing Nietzsche," p. 194.

[22] Ibid., p. 191. Acampora remarks in a footnote that the "transcendentalism" isn't to be taken in an Emersonian sense—so why use that term? If it means people's capacity "to transcend, or 'make more' of, their ordinary conditions," it sounds more like Emerson's "perfectionism."

follows the contours of his mentor Emerson *except* where the latter's transcendentalist tendencies hold sway.[23]) The injunction to "stay true to the earth," which Hallman rightly suggests comes close to being a "moral imperative," is complemented by a warning against "sacrilege against the earth," for the locus of the Divine is now fully this-worldly rather than in some transcendent heaven.[24]

Zarathustra's next characterizations of the Overhuman invoke the elements of water and fire: "Behold, I teach you the Overhuman: he is this ocean . . . Behold, I teach you the Overhuman: he is this lightning. . . ." (The fourth traditional element, air, follows later, in the form of storm winds.) In exhorting his audience to prepare the way for the Overhuman, Zarathustra says: "I love him who works and invents to build a house for the Overhuman and prepare for it *earth* and *animal* and *plant*. . . ."[25] They are to be prepared because the way to overcome the human is to acknowledge and emulate the nonhuman nature—mineral, animal, and vegetal—of which we are composed and on which we depend. A contemporary entry in Nietzsche's notebooks reads: "N.B. The highest human being to be conceived as a copy [*Abbild*] of nature."[26]

Although Zarathustra is a herald of the Overhuman rather than its incarnation, his development as a character takes place against a backdrop of the natural world (mountain and sea, lake and forest) with only occasional visits to sites of civilization such as towns. Moreover, this development is portrayed primarily in images and metaphors drawn from the natural world. In the first half of part two alone, there is a lake within Zarathustra, and his soul is a mountain torrent that plunges into the valleys; as a storm cloud he wants to hurl showers of hail into the depths; his wild wisdom is a lioness ready to drop a litter of cubs; he is a north wind to ripe figs, light that drinks back into itself the flames that break out from it, a forest and a night of dark trees, with rose-arbors beneath his cypresses.[27] Moreover, Zarathustra's maturation as a teacher is presented in images of human engagement with natural phenomena: there is preparing of soil and sowing of seed, transplanting of trees and pruning of vines, tending of gardens and harvesting of crops, hunting and herding, breeding and training of animals, and angling with a golden rod for companions as for fish.[28] These examples show the crucial part played by nature in the cultivation of human nature—so that for Nietzsche, if we abuse the natural

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[23] See Emerson, "Floods of Life around Granite of Fate," secs. 2 and 3.

[24] See the penultimate paragraph of the present essay.

[25] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, Prologue, secs. 3, 4 (KSA, 4:15–17); emphasis added.

[26] Nietzsche, *KSA,* 11:25[140] (1884). References to the unpublished notes will be to the volume, notebook, and section number, so that the passages may also be found in the KGW edition.

[27] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, secs. 2.1, 2.2, 2.9, 2.10.

[28] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, secs. 2.5, 2.1, 2.2, 3.3, 3.14, 4.11, 4.1. For a comprehensive discussion of this natural imagery, see Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chaps. 4, 5, and 6.

environment on which we depend, we not only jeopardize our bodies but also impoverish our souls.

IV. WILL TO POWER AS INTERPRETATION

Hallman's claim that Nietzsche's idea of will to power corresponds to the ecologists' insight into "the interdependency of all living things" is on the mark, though its justification is weakened by a less than judicious treatment of the relevant texts. Acampora rightly complains about Hallman's "continual citation of a notoriously dubious text, *The Will to Power*."[29] It is true that one of the central ideas of *Zarathustra* is that all life is will to power: "Wherever I found the living," Zarathustra says, "there I found will to power; and even in the will of the one who serves I found the will to be lord."[30] But the point here is not simply that living beings live by dominating (to the point of incorporating and assimilating) other living beings, for it is amplified when the Diotima-like figure of Life herself says to Zarathustra: "I am that *which must always overcome itself*." Whatever overcoming is involved in will to power is also, perhaps more importantly, practiced on oneself. Life goes on to tell Zarathustra that will to power is a matter of "valuing," echoing his own first mention of will to power, where he connects valuing with self-overcoming.[31]

Hallman understands Nietzsche's thinking as basically biocentric, repeatedly emphasizing the importance of "nonhuman life forms," "the web of life," and "will to power as a principle that emphasizes the interrelatedness of all living things."[32] This emphasis is too narrow. A refrain that occurs, and recurs, in *Zarathustra* in connection with the thought of eternal recurrence (which is closely related to will to power) proclaims the interdependence of "all things"—not just "all living things" as Hallman has it. The climactic formulation goes like this:

> Did you ever say Yes to a single joy? Oh, my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe as well. All things are chained together, entwined, in love—
>
> If you ever wanted one time a second time . . . then you wanted *it all* back!
>
> All anew, all eternally, all chained together, entwined, in love, oh then did you *love* the world![33]

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[29] Acampora, "Using and Abusing Nietzsche," p. 188, n. 3. Given that Nietzsche warns against readings of texts based on selecting excerpts out of context, and that he took painstaking care concerning just which passages from his voluminous notebooks went into his published works, a Nietzsche interpretation that is largely based on notes that he chose *not* to publish is hermeneutically suspect. On his fanatical perfectionism with regard to his published works, see William Schaberg, *The Nietzsche Canon: A Publication History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[30] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, sec. 2.12 (KSA, 4:147–48).

[31] Ibid. and sec. 1.15 (KSA, 4:149, 74).

[32] Hallman, "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics," pp. 116, 119, 123.

[33] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, sec. 4.19.10 (KSA, 4:402).

But the *locus classicus* for the idea of the world as will to power is aphorism 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche proposes the thought experiment of extrapolating from what we know immediately and intimately, "the world of our desires and passions . . . the reality of our drives," to the rest of life *and* to "the so-called mechanistic (or material) world." This proposal would lead to our determining "*all* efficient force as *will to power*," the entire world as "will to power and nothing besides."[34] This is by no means an instance of anthropocentrism, since Nietzsche has just desubstantialized the "soul" into a configuration of forces ("a social structure of the drives and affects"), shown the human "I" to be a fiction generated by the grammatical habit of positing a doer being every doing, and demonstrated "will" to be a complex function of forces issuing from a social structure of multiple "souls" deep within the body.[35] Far from being the "will power" exerted by a human ego, the will of will to power is (as in Schopenhauer's conception of will) a cosmic force.

The power of will to power is manifest along a continuum with brute force at one end and world-interpretation at the other. The kind of power wielded by a Hitler or a Pol Pot (though capable of putting millions in prison, to torture, and to death) is a crude form of power that ceases as soon as the egomaniac is dead. The opposite kind, as wielded by a Socrates or a Jesus (both of whom happened to be victims of brute force rather than perpetrators), continues to hold sway long after the individual's physical demise. This latter is will to power as interpretation ("the will to power *interprets*"), philosophy as "the most spiritual will to power."[36] If Nietzsche's suggestion that "all existence is essentially an *interpreting* existence"[37] strikes us as strange, this is because we are so accustomed to the Cartesian dichotomy between the animate and inanimate (with only the human animate, *res cogitans*, being capable of interpreting). Less anthropocentric philosophies like Daoism and Mahāyāna Buddhism assume a continuum between natural and human, with each particular on the continuum construing the world from its own perspective.

V. BEYOND BIOCENTRISM

Nietzsche suggests that we understand the so-called inorganic realm as "a more primitive form of the world of affects" and "a kind of drive-life in which all organic functions, with self-regulation, assimilation, nourishment, excretion, metabolism, are synthetically bound up with each other—as a *preform* of

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[34] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 36 (KSA, 5:54–55). Hallman ignores this key aphorism in favor of a more graphic but unpublished formulation (*The Will to Power*, sec. 1067; KSA, 11:38[12]); "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics," p. 122.

[35] Ibid., 12, 17, 19 (*KSA,* 5:27, 31, 32–33).

[36] Nietzsche, KSA, 12:2[148] (1886), *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 9 (*KSA,* 5:22).

[37] Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science*, sec. 374 (KSA, 3:626). For more on will to power as interpretation, see the section "Drives Archaically Imagining" in chap. 8 of *Composing the Soul.*

life."[38] He means that the drives interpret at different levels of complexity. Rock, for instance, works at a fairly basic level of interpretation, as if to say, "This, here, is what it means to exist." As the "powerful unity" of the "material" world "branches out and develops in the organic process,"[39] the interpretation becomes more complex: in assimilating earth and water and sunlight, the plant offers a richer interpretation: "*This* is what it means to exist." And so forth, for animals, which assimilate vegetation, and so interpret existence as involving locomotion in addition to reproduction; then for the human organism, which assimilates vegetation and animals, and constitutes an even richer sense of existence—all the way to philosophy as "the most spiritual will to power."

Neither Hallman nor Acampora seems to appreciate this interpretive dimension of will to power, Hallman being too focused on "the interrelatedness of all living things," and Acampora overemphasizing "exploitation."[40] The latter rightly asserts the importance in Nietzsche of the ideas of "order of rank" and "pathos of distance"[41]—but these are ideas that he applies to hierarchies *among* human beings and not to a putative superiority of humans *over* natural beings. Nietzsche is admittedly an elitist—but with respect to his fellows rather than to animals, plants, and other natural phenomena. Indeed, both Hallman and Acampora cite Nietzsche's definitive pronouncement: "The human being is by no means the crown of creation: every creature is, alongside the human, at a similar level of perfection."[42]

Nor may we exclaim with Acampora that Nietzsche "explicitly and forcefully defines . . . *will to power* as 'exploitation'!"[43] In the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* that Acampora quotes in support of this assertion, Nietzsche is discussing exploitation within human societies when he writes that "'exploitation' . . . is a *consequence* of genuine will to power."[44] This exploitation has nothing to do with the human exploitation of nature, which for Nietzsche is a hopelessly crude expression of human will to power and never something that he condones. Rather, he counts as one of the "basic errors" the vain belief that the human being is "the astonishing exception, the over-animal [*Übertier*], the demi-God, the meaning of creation, that-which-cannot-be-thought-away, the answer to the cosmic riddle, the Great Lord over nature."[45] Thus Nietzsche explicitly condemns the arrogance of the modern stance toward the natural world: "Our whole attitude toward nature today is *hubris*, our raping of nature

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[38] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 36 (KSA, 5:54–55).

[39] Ibid.

[40] Martin Drenthen, by contrast, does appreciate the interpretive dimension of will to power: "The Paradox of Environmental Ethics," p. 167.

[41] Ibid., pp. 188, 191.

[42] Nietzsche, *The Antichristian*, sec. 14 (KSA, 6:180).

[43] Acampora, "Using and Abusing Nietzsche," p. 189.

[44] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 259 (KSA, 5:208) (emphasis added).

[45] Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow,* sec. 12 (KSA, 2:548).

by means of machines and the unthinking resourcefulness of technicians and engineers."[46] It would be difficult to be more ecologically prescient than this. In the only aphorism in *The Joyful Science* to mention the idea of will to power, where Nietzsche argues that the drive for self-preservation is derivative from the genuine "basic life-drive" which aims at "*expansion of power*," he writes: "One should, as a researcher into nature, get out of one's human corner."[47] An important way of doing this for Nietzsche is by adopting the perspective of the inorganic. A gem of an aphorism titled "How one is to turn to stone" puts it this way: "Slowly, slowly to become hard like a precious stone—and finally to stay lying there still and to the joy of eternity."[48] To understand this rather gnomic utterance, let us look at some passages that come after it.

"Let us be wary," Nietzsche writes, "of saying that death is opposed to life. The living is merely a species of the dead, and a very rare species."[49] Several contemporaneous notes evince a fascination with the possibility of a reversion to the genus of the dead, one of which tells us what "love of nature" is for the author: "To be released from life and become dead nature again can be experienced as a *festival*—of the one who wants to die. To love nature! Again to revere what is dead! This is not the opposite [of life], but the mother's womb. . . ."[50] We express our love of nature by becoming, identifying ourselves with, that part of it from which we generally like to distinguish ourselves as living beings. Nor is this a grim undertaking—quite the contrary:

> The "dead" world! eternally moving and without error, force against force! . . . It is a *festival* to go from this world across into the "dead world" . . . Let us *not* think of the return to the nonsentient as a regression! We become quite true, we perfect ourselves. *Death* is to be *reinterpreted*! We thereby *reconcile* ourselves with what is actual, with the dead world.[51]

This note is followed by a "sketch" with the heading "The Recurrence of the Same," and the signature "Beginning of August 1881 in Sils-Maria, 6000 feet above sea level and much higher above all human things!"[52] This is the first recorded mention of the thought of eternal recurrence, which Nietzsche later characterizes as "the highest formula of affirmation that can possibly be attained." He goes on: "I was walking that day through the woods bordering Lake Silvaplana; I stopped beside a powerful pyramidal towering block not far from Surlei. This thought came to me there."[53] It is significant that Nietzsche's

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[46] Nietzsche, *Toward the Genealogy of Morality*, sec. 3.9 (KSA, 5:357).
[47] Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science*, sec. 349 (KSA, 3:585).
[48] Nietzsche, *Dawn of Morning*, sec. 541 (KSA, 3:309).
[49] Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science*, sec. 109 (KSA, 3:468).
[50] Nietzsche, KSA, 9:11[125] (1881).
[51] Ibid., 9:11[70].
[52] Ibid., 9:11[141].
[53] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, sec. 3; *Zarathustra,* sec. 1 (KSA, 6:335).

most life-affirming thought struck him as he stood beside a pyramid of "lifeless" granite.

Later in the same notebook Nietzsche reverts to the topic of our close relations with the dead world in remarking the dependence of the organic on its opposite:

> How distant and superior is our attitude toward what is dead, the anorganic, and all the while we are three-quarters water and have anorganic minerals in us that perhaps do more for our well- and ill-being than the whole of living society! . . .
>
> The inorganic conditions us through and through: water, air, earth, the shape of the ground, electricity, etc. We are plants under such conditions.[54]

This move of Nietzsche's beyond biocentrism to a kind of "ecocentrism" (a move that is also characteristic of Daoism and Mahāyāna Buddhism, where one finds a similar reverence for earth and rock) is of special relevance to environmental ethics, insofar as someone who experiences from such an eccentric or ecstatic perspective will not exploit the anorganic realm out of selfishly anthropocentric motives.

VI. INTERPRETING NATURE

In the context of the debate between traditional environmental ethicists and postmodern environmental philosophers concerning the role of interpretation in our dealings with the natural world, Martin Drenthen writes: "Nietzsche strongly emphasizes that we can only know *interpretations* of nature and never nature as it is in itself."[55] Nietzsche is certainly concerned with our interpretations of and projections on to the natural world, but this does not mean that we can never know nature "as it is in itself." To understand why not, we need to appreciate Nietzsche's "task," which he characterizes as "the dehumanizing of nature and then the naturalizing of the human, after it has attained the pure concept of 'nature.'"[56]

For Nietzsche our experience is the result of our drives' interpreting a "text" of nerve-impulses from the sense-organs—a complex business since, insofar as the world is will to power, what inscribes that text upon the nervous system will be nothing other than will to power in the form of other drives.[57] Since there are multiple drives within each individual, one acquires a better sense of what is going on by entertaining as many different perspectives, letting as

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[54] Nietzsche, KSA, 9:11[207].

[55] Drenthen, "The Paradox of Environmental Ethics," p. 166. Also: "According to Nietzsche . . . it is impossible to see nature as it is in itself" (p. 172).

[56] Nietzsche, KSA, 9:11[211].

[57] Nietzsche, *Dawn of Morning,* sec. 119 (KSA, 3:111–14); *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 36 (KSA, 5:55).

many drives interpret as possible: "The task: to *see* things *as they are! The means:* to be able to see with a hundred eyes, from *many* persons!" Not only that, but the more one can "practice seeing apart from human relations," the more one will be able to "*experience cosmically*."[58] The way the drives interpret the world is naturally conditioned by culture, and in discussing the pervasiveness of fantasy "projection" in human relations to nature, Nietzsche emphasizes how much these projections have varied in different historical epochs, and under the sway of different cultures and religions.[59]

He sometimes suggests that simply by virtue of being the organisms we are, we are always interpreting, fantasizing, or "dreaming" in this way, and so the best we can do is to become aware of, and take responsibility for, this process. But then he begins to entertain the possibility of seeing things "as they are." As a complement to multiplying perspectives in order to attain a fuller picture, one can also practice reducing the force of the drives by reverting to the "dead" world, as described above: "To procure the advantages of one who is dead. . . . To think oneself away out of humanity, to unlearn desires of all kinds: and to employ the entire abundance of one's powers in *looking*."[60] (This practice is reminiscent of "emptying the heart-mind" in Daoism, or "reducing attachments" in the Buddhist tradition.) For the mature Nietzsche, the discipline of the sciences may also help us "see through" our projections to some extent.

> The total character of the world is to all eternity chaos, not in the sense of lacking necessity but lacking order, articulation, form, beauty, wisdom and whatever else our human aestheticizings call it. . . . When shall we have completely de-divinized nature! When shall we be able to start to *naturalize* ourselves with pure, newfound, newly redeemed nature! [61]

This "chaos" refers to what is left when the projections that customarily give the world order and form are withdrawn.

A fuller sense of how things might appear under such conditions is conveyed in one of the most important scenes in *Zarathustra*, where the protagonist in the course of a sea voyage addresses the predawn heavens with "the enormous, unbounded saying of Yea and Amen" which affirms all things in the "innocence of their becoming":

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[58] Nietzsche, KSA, 9:11[65], 11[10], 11[7]. For a comprehensive discussion of drives, perspectives, fantasy, etc. as plays of will to power, see *Composing the Soul,* chap. 8.

[59] See, for example, *Human, All-Too-Human*, sec.111 (*KSA,* 2:112–16), *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, sec. 295 (KSA, 2:686–87); *Dawn of Morning*, sec. 17 (KSA, 3:29–30); *The Joyful Science*, secs. 54, 57, 59 (*KSA,* 3:416–24); and also the discussion of this issue in "Floods of Life around Granite of Fate," secs. 3–5.

[60] Nietzsche, KSA, 9:11[35].

[61] Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science*, sec. 109 (KSA, 3:468–69).

> But this is my blessing: to stand over each and every thing as its own heaven, as its round roof, its azure bell and eternal security. . . .
>
> For all things are baptized at the fount of eternity and beyond good and evil. . . .
>
> Verily, it is a blessing and no blasphemy when I teach: "Over all things stands the Heaven Chance, the Heaven Innocence, the Heaven Contingency, the Heaven Exuberance."
>
> "Lord Contingency"—that is the oldest nobility in the world, which I restored to all things when I redeemed them from their bondage under purpose.[62]

When a particular thing is what it is only thanks to the role assigned it under some overarching divine Providence, or the position occupied in some scientific projection of the world, it is not free to be itself. Just as the Daoist sage and the Zen master are able to experience events in the "self-so-ing" of their spontaneous unfolding, so Zarathustra's blessing lets each particular thing generate its own horizons, arising and perishing just as it does. In terms of environmental ethics, to experience in this way allows one to appreciate the intrinsic value of the natural world absolutely.

Both Hallman and Acampora cite the aphorism in *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche questions the possibility of living "according to nature" as the Stoics purport to do.[63] Hallman reads it as demonstrating the arrogance of believing "that human beings can perfect nature": Nietzsche does believe that human beings are arrogant in this way, but that isn't the point of the aphorism. Acampora comments by asking: "Is this the speech of a 'forerunner of deep ecology'. . . or of someone who believes that 'the land' might be in any way normative for human behavior?" The answer is actually, "Quite possibly." When the passage is read in conjunction with aphorism 188, the answer to the question, "Isn't the Stoic [whose *métier* is "self-tyranny"] a *piece* of nature?" becomes clear: "Yes, indeed." "The probability is by no means small," Nietzsche continues, "that the tyranny of arbitrary laws" imposed upon oneself is precisely what "nature" and being "natural" involves. Nature turns out to be the consummate self-tyrannizer, and everything cultural that "makes living on earth worthwhile, such as virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality" comes about through the artist/thinker's emulation of nature. In this respect "'Nature' *as it is*, in all its extravagant and *indifferent* magnificence . . . appalls us, but is noble."[64] Acampora's emphasis on what he calls the "feral" nature of Nietzsche's philosophy is in several ways salutary, but not if it prevents our appreciating the crucial role in his life and thought of self-tyranny as a means

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[62] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, sec. 4.3 (KSA, 4:209).

[63] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 9 (KSA, 5:21–22); Hallman, "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics," p. 118; Acampora, "Using and Abusing Nietzsche," p. 190.

[64] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 188 (KSA, 5:109); first emphasis added.

of self-cultivation, not to mention his abiding commitment to raising the level of human culture.[65]

The "as it is" is clearly meant to suggest the possibility of encountering a "dehumanized" nature on its own terms, and not just as it appears to human beings within a projected horizon of utilitarian or scientific or aesthetic concerns. While it may be appalling in its indifference, it is also noble—and thus worthy of human emulation. In this sense nature can serve as a standard for Nietzsche's task of the "renaturalization" of humanity—a humanity that might reasonably be expected to expend its energies tyrannizing itself for the sake of culture rather than tyrannizing nature for the sake of commercial profit.

The human being is for Nietzsche a part of nature, a distinctive part, although antinatural moralities have served over the millennia to obscure this condition. Thus a part of his "strange and wonderful task" is:

> To translate the human back into nature; to become master over the many vain and fanatical interpretations and side-meanings that have so far been scribbled on that eternal ground-text *homo natura*: . . . to make it that the human being henceforth stand . . . before that *other* nature, with fearless Oedipus-eyes and stopped-up Odysseus-ears, deaf to the enticements of all the metaphysical bird-catchers who have been whistling to it for too long: "You are more! You are higher! You are of another origin!"[66]

The talk of mastering the self-serving interpretations that obscure human nature, and of seeing that other nature with fearless Oedipus eyes, suggests the possibility of knowing nature (*contra* Drenthen) "as it is in itself." Of course, in a world of will to power as a play of interpretive forces, one might "eagerly object," as Nietzsche himself writes, that "this is still only an interpretation"—to which he is happy to reply, "Well then, all the better."[67] He is not claiming to deliver the truth of the matter, but is best taken as offering ideas for us to try out, experiment with (*versuchsweise*), in our own experience. "What if . . . ?"—as he is so fond of asking.

One last point, which I have elaborated elsewhere, deserves to be mentioned.[68] While the nature that is revealed when the projections are withdrawn is appalling in its magnificence (Oedipus eyes are always in danger of being put out), it is nevertheless not only noble but divine.[69] The "dedivinization" of nature that Nietzsche advocates may be followed by an epiphany in which the

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[65] Acampora, "Using and Abusing Nietzsche," p. 189.

[66] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 230 (KSA, 5:169).

[67] Ibid., sec. 22 (KSA, 5:37).

[68] See sec. 6 of "Staying Loyal to the Earth," and the more comprehensive discussion in "Nature and the Human 'Redivinized.'" A cogent argument for Nietzsche's "new religion" is developed by Laurence Lampert in his superb commentary on *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Nietzsche's Task* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), esp. chap. 3.

[69] Compare Annie Dillard's awesomely unsentimental portrayal of the natural world in *Tinker at Pilgrim Creek* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

natural world shows itself to be divine after all. Insofar as "the most terrible thing now is sacrilege against the earth," proper behavior toward nature will enjoy divine sanction on the part of the other party. Nietzsche's philosophy challenges us to experiment with such ideas. As "every great philosophy" says: "Here is a picture of all life: learn from this the meaning of your own life."[70]

Just as the Daoists and Buddhists, rather than issuing commandments for ethical conduct toward the natural world, advocate certain forms of somatic *practice* that conduce to an experiential realization of its sacred nature (whence reverential attitudes and behaviors follow as a matter of course), so the implications of Nietzsche's ideas for environmental ethics are aligned more with contemporary "virtue ethics" than with traditional ethical theories.[71] To the extent that one learns from his non-anthropocentric philosophy of will to power, it will be a learning by doing, by living through constant self-transformation that enhances one's sense of dependent participation in the force-field that is will to power. Fr01om such a life a variety of environmentally friendly virtues flow.

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[70] Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, sec. 3 (KSA, 1:357).

[71] For a brief account of the importance of somatic practice for securing the link between beliefs and behaviors, see the first part of my essay, "Lao-Zhuang and Heidegger on Nature and Technology," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (2003): 112–28.