



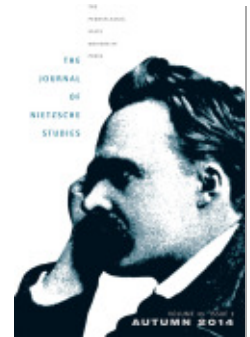
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Nietzsche, Carlyle, and Perfectionism

WILLIAM MEAKINS

ABSTRACT: Perfectionist readings of Nietzsche have paid much attention to the positive influence of Emerson. I suggest that exploring Nietzsche's reception of Thomas Carlyle, a leading contemporary and friend of Emerson's, provides us with additional interesting insights into Nietzsche's thought. What is distinctive here is that Nietzsche strongly objects to the ethical picture that Carlyle propounds in the lecture series *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*. By looking at the grounds of this opposition I argue that Nietzsche holds a skeptical, antiromantic perfectionism that is sensitive to the very dangers to which it gives rise.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Carlyle, hero worship, romanticism, skepticism, perfectionism

Introduction

The aim of this article is not to resolve all issues pertaining to Nietzsche's perfectionism but to offer some thoughts for understanding his position. These thoughts follow from a contemplation of Nietzsche's relation to the perfectionist ethic of Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). Why Carlyle? As I hope will become fully clear, studying the place of Carlyle in Nietzsche's thought allows us to see how he engages with a perfectionism that is by many accounts close to his own. Not only are Nietzsche's positive ethical ideas in family resemblance to Carlyle's but so are many of his questions and even his motivations for posing them. This is so because Nietzsche was taking up, and responding to, a current in an intellectual climate substantially shaped by Carlyle, one that was reexamining the highest human achievements and their role in ethical life.¹ Yet, in contrast to the now well-known positive influence of Emerson, Nietzsche's reception of Carlyle is both remarkably hostile and also little remarked upon by other commentators. This is intriguing, not only for the contrast but also because Carlyle had a strong literary friendship with Emerson that gave rise to a fertile intellectual engagement and two volumes of published correspondence.² Therefore, the question that I pose here, and which I take to be important to searching out the parameters of Nietzsche's perfectionism, is

this: what kind of perfectionism did Carlyle possess, and what was problematic about it for Nietzsche's position?

In what follows, I first survey current readings of Nietzsche's perfectionism in order to arrive at the salient features of this discussion. Second, I turn to look at the place of Carlyle in the nineteenth century and outline Nietzsche's reception of his ideas. Third, I reconstruct Nietzsche's criticisms of Carlyle by detailing the three main objections that he offers, and thus show what this informs us about Nietzsche's perfectionism in a negative sense (i.e., what it is not). Fourth, I chart aspects of their respective accounts of the problem of modernity, pointing to the principal differences that separate them. Finally, from this account of the Nietzsche-Carlyle confrontation, I offer suggestions for understanding how Nietzsche appreciated the dangers of perfectionism.

Perfectionist Readings of Nietzsche

Perfectionist ethics concerns itself not with the delineation of our commitments, nor with the gratification of our appetites, but in the attainment of excellence in our qualities and attributes. Such excellence is to be specified either freely according to our choosing or more strictly according to a diagnostic of what is most fundamentally human and natural for us to perfect. There are many permutations of this ethic, but there are at least three features identified by commentators that stand out in defining Nietzsche's perfectionism. First, Nietzsche's ethics marks a break with Aristotle in producing a nonteleological perfectionism: there is no specific end goal that Nietzsche takes to realize the human ideal as such.³ Second, we might also note that this produces a processual vision of ethical life, wherein the development of one's attributes and qualities becomes an interminable project.⁴ Finally, this lack of a *telos* produces a largely formal, rather than substantive, set of criteria for determining excellence. Nietzsche's perfectionism is concerned with the unification of our capacities and propensities, and with the extent of our efforts, but it does not prescribe any particular direction that this should take.⁵

In articulating their interpretations, commentators tend to divide into those who take up a narrower reading and those who take up a broader reading of Nietzsche's texts. The narrow readings derive from John Rawls's classification of perfectionism in *A Theory of Justice* and his depiction there of Nietzsche as an iconic perfectionist.⁶ What typifies a narrow reading, in the sense that I am invoking here, is that it resolves to base its conclusions about Nietzsche on a single text, *Schopenhauer as Educator*. Rawls finds in this text a proposal for the ordering of society around antiegalitarian principles—that an elite few should reap all profit and reward from the labor of others.⁷

Subsequent to Rawls, the most famous exposition of a Nietzschean perfectionism is that given by Stanley Cavell, who offers a contrary reading of *SE* in which the textual basis for Rawls's reading is subjected to close criticism.⁸ Cavell's picture of a Nietzschean perfectionist ethic traces his ideas to the work of Emerson. This presents us with a nonteleological, nonmoralizing, and resolutely individualist ethic. The individual's ethical work is to criticize society and its institutions, not support them, and in so doing culture is furthered and freedom won. An upshot of this is that Nietzsche's ethical perfectionism becomes egalitarian—we are not to give ourselves to the support of an elite above us who acts as our model and master.⁹ Instead, we are to find what is great and noble in others as the spur to develop ourselves, to actualize our higher potential.

But note that Cavell's reading remains narrow for it is still closely confined only to the third *Untimely Meditation*. Likewise, other commentators who either favor a perfectionist reading or stand against it bind themselves to this text.¹⁰ I want to set aside the deep textual disputes about *SE* and to concentrate more broadly on what can be said overall about Nietzsche's stance. Attention paid to Nietzsche's later writings will provide us with a greater sense of the direction of his thought and enrich any account we can give of his perfectionism. It is not, of course, certain that by addressing the whole corpus we will come to any clear and unambiguous statement of his position, but the later works do add important nuances and qualifications, not all of them straightforward or comfortable, which must be addressed. It is also, of course, in the later works that we find Nietzsche's explicit criticisms of Carlyle.

Once we expand the range of texts that we must address, it becomes more relevant to see that there is an element to Nietzsche's perfectionism that is not so apparent in *SE*, but which can be recognized as a central insight: that perfectionism is related to personal and social danger.¹¹ This is important to address because it became so crucial to Nietzsche's conception of the stakes of ethical life and because it is what distinguishes him from thinkers like Carlyle who ostensibly treated the same subject. Looking at the existing literature dealing with perfectionism, a number of thinkers have pointed out key areas in which Nietzsche is pessimistic about the effects of perfectionism, and it is helpful to begin by reviewing these claims: First, Cavell has alluded briefly to the connection between perfectionism and martyrdom, that Nietzsche thinks of the great man as involved in a self-expenditure: "In Moral Perfectionism, as represented in Emerson and in Nietzsche, we are invited to a position that is structurally one of martyrdom; not, however, in view of an idea of the divine but in aspiration to an idea of the human."¹² Second, David Owen has noted that Nietzsche holds a tragic worldview that informs his perfectionism, and means that he views man as subject to the vagaries of fortune and contingency.¹³ Third, Thomas Hurka has pointed out the ways in which Nietzsche's vision is less idealistic than the perfectionism of his predecessors. In this regard, Hurka singles out Nietzsche's

willingness to confront the difficulties of ethical life, that he does not share the optimism of other perfectionists with respect to the direction of history. Thus, Hurka shows that Nietzsche denies (1) that we have a fundamental desire to develop ourselves, (2) that developing ourselves is the most pleasant end, (3) that there are no conflicts between perfection and other goods, and (4) that there are no external or internal obstacles to our realizing perfection.¹⁴ Finally, Herman Siemens has shown how, for Nietzsche, the conditions that are most deleterious for perfectionism can also appear to be the conditions that are most fruitful for it.¹⁵ This paradoxical state of affairs clearly suggests that the path to a Nietzschean perfectionism is no straight road and provides no assurances. In what follows, I aim to show how Nietzsche's reception of Carlyle brings to the fore these self-destructive, tragic, nonidealistic, and paradoxical aspects, and so allows us to clarify the ways in which he believed perfectionism to be both dangerous and desirable on that account.

Nietzsche's Reception of Carlyle

I should preface what I am about to discuss by saying that I am chiefly concerned with how Nietzsche has interpreted Carlyle, and that the main work of Carlyle's that I will refer to is his lecture series *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*. This is a preliminary attempt to grasp what is at stake in Nietzsche's discussions of Carlyle. Thus, my explicit goal is to become clearer about how Nietzsche *understood* Carlyle, not whether he was *correct* in so understanding him. Nor, therefore, am I straightforwardly interested in matching their thinking against each other and adjudicating the result. Furthermore, it must be admitted that we know relatively little about what Nietzsche in fact read of Carlyle's work or even what he had read about him.¹⁶ In what follows, therefore, I focus more directly on Nietzsche's own words about Carlyle and draw upon Carlyle's *On Heroes* as the text with which Nietzsche seems most engaged (the reasons for this selection, I hope, will become apparent as I proceed).¹⁷

Thomas Carlyle was one of the foremost literary and cultural critics of the nineteenth century, achieving the kind of contemporary recognition and influence that Nietzsche could only dream of. By introducing German literature to a wide circle of English readers, stridently arguing against Enlightenment values, and striving to challenge audiences with a powerful moral vision, Carlyle's works served to provoke the interest of many leading figures. Indeed, two of Nietzsche's own favorite authors had taken Carlyle very seriously—both Goethe and Hippolyte Taine viewed him as an important thinker. Taine devoted a book to Carlyle, which although it mixes both criticism and praise, nonetheless found him to be *worthy* of being written about.¹⁸ Goethe is reported to have treated him with great respect, stating that "Carlyle is a moral force of great importance.

There is in him much for the future"¹⁹ and that "the temper in which he works is always admirable. What an earnest man he is! and how he has studied us Germans! He is almost more at home in our literature than we are. At any rate, we cannot vie with him in our researches in English literature."²⁰ Goethe even personally wrote the introduction to the German edition of Carlyle's *Life of Schiller*. Carlyle was not some marginal figure, as he might seem to some today, but rather a productive intellectual force whose writings stirred the imagination and sentiments of his age.²¹ Indeed, his lectures on heroism attracted an audience of such "aristocratic rank and intellect" that he was able to speak directly to the highest levels of London society.²²

Yet, perhaps some might still expect a comparison between Nietzsche and Carlyle to be relatively unimportant to an understanding of the former's perfectionism. This impression could well arise from the fact that there are very few references to Carlyle in Nietzsche's work: only nine direct mentions in his published books and just twenty-one references to him in the *Nachlass*. Couple this with Nietzsche's unreserved condemnation and derision of Carlyle and it could well appear that his significance is minimal. His invective, for instance, includes abuse of the following sort: Carlyle is listed among those personal *antipodes* of Nietzsche; "Carlyle" he says is akin to "pessimism as indigestion" (*TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 1); he is called a "muddle-head" (*D* 298); a "countefeiter" (*EH* "Why I Write Such Good Books" 1); and a "rhetorician" lacking "real *power* of spirituality, real *depth* of spiritual insight, in short philosophy" (*BGE* 252). Nowhere is there any positive estimation of what they both share as thinkers.

This violent reaction against Carlyle is interesting because *prima facie* one might expect him to be just the kind of thinker that Nietzsche would approve of: here is someone who attacked democracy, saw the current age as one of decline and transition, disliked the pettiness of contemporary thought, approved of hierarchy, rejected utilitarian moral thinking, believed biography to be central to philosophy, preferred activity to passivity, championed the works of Goethe, and thought that individual greatness was the pinnacle of ethical and political life.²³ Despite being criticized and rarely mentioned though, Carlyle's work is instructive for us precisely due to his very closeness to the position that Nietzsche articulated. Working out what divides them here is an essential means of clarifying what Nietzsche's perfectionism involves.

Heroism

Preceding Nietzsche by several decades, Carlyle had already developed a perfectionist ethics based on "heroism." Nietzsche clearly signals his worries about being associated with Carlyle in *EH* "Why I Write Such Good Books"

1, where he rejects any attempt to draw parallels between his notion of the *Übermensch* and Carlyle's notion of the hero. Carlyle, then, was a figure whose ethic Nietzsche felt was, at least superficially, too close to his own, or with whom others had directly compared him. But what did Carlyle mean by the term *heroism*? Certainly not the popular ideas that we may commonly, or immediately, think of (saving people from burning buildings, knights slaying dragons, etc.)—it was not the heroic archetype of folklore that interested him. Instead, Carlyle develops in his lecture course an account of heroism that emphasizes three main features: First, heroes are defined as being the leaders of men. They possess an insight and sincerity unsurpassed by others and are able to shape the collective history of humanity:

They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these.²⁴

The six figures that Carlyle draws upon (various priests, prophets, generals, and men of letters) to illustrate his claims all bear this out in different ways as they were all dedicated to guiding the social order and habits of their contemporaries.

Second, Carlyle suggests that in essence all great men are the same but only take different forms depending on their environment. That is, the character of the hero is universal, but his individual form can vary in concrete instances: "For at bottom the Great Man, as he comes from the hand of Nature, is ever the same kind of thing: Odin, Luther, Johnson, Burns; I hope to make it appear that these are all originally of one stuff; that only by the world's reception of them, and the shapes they assume, are they so immeasurably diverse."²⁵ Thus, although a historian, Carlyle takes an ahistorical view about what is essentially heroic in a hero. The content of heroism itself stays the same but is simply allowed varying expressions.

Third, heroes are identified by their adherence to a perennial set of religious and moral truths about the world:

I say, this is yet the only true morality known. A man is right and invincible, virtuous and on the road towards sure conquest, precisely while he joins himself to the great deep Law of the World, in spite of all superficial laws, temporary appearances, profit-and-loss calculations; he is victorious while he co-operates with that great central Law, not victorious otherwise:—and surely his first chance of co-operating with it, or getting into the course of it, is to know with his whole soul that it is; that it is good, and alone good!²⁶

While this morality is never spelled out in detail by Carlyle, it is captured in images of potency, might, and sincerity. Importantly, it is the sincere and passionate belief in these truths that makes men *heroic*. Indeed, for Carlyle, insofar as

men maintain sincere belief in the true morality, it is possible for whole nations to embody heroism (although it remains the case that only a few great men actually instantiate this ethic in its fullest sense).²⁷ To be a hero means, therefore, to be someone who forms the ideas of his age and directs his community according to the moral realities of the world that he perceives. In Nietzschean terms it is to be a legislator of values. The question to pose here is precisely this: why does Nietzsche object to *this* picture of legislation? There are several related reasons.

Residual Christianity

Despite the fact that Carlyle's heroism is not overflowing with meekness, he does appear to retain certain residual elements of Christian morality. This can be seen in his assumption that there is a core part of morality that has always and everywhere been the same, so that he even interprets Norse culture as one rooted in pity and a preference for a metaphysical "real world" behind the apparent one. Carlyle also directly connects Viking valor to the Christian virtues of pity and humility, stating that "indeed Valor is the fountain of Pity too"²⁸ and also that "Odinism was *Valor*; Christianity was *Humility*, a nobler kind of Valor."²⁹ Contrast this to Nietzsche's account of the Norse ethos: "'A hard heart has Wotan set in my breast,' it says in an old Scandinavian saga: a just expression coming from the soul of a proud Viking. A man of this type is actually proud that he is *not* made for pity: which is why the hero of the saga adds as a warning: 'he whose heart is not hard in youth will never have a hard heart.'"³⁰ This contrast exposes the problematic ahistoricism of Carlyle, his failure to comprehend the differences that deeply divided Christian morality from Odinism.

This Christian element is also prominent in his discussion of Islam, where Carlyle claims that self-denial and self-annihilation are the pinnacle of religious-moral teaching:

Islam is definable as a confused form of Christianity; had Christianity not been, neither had it been. Christianity also commands us, before all, to be resigned to God. We are to take no counsel with flesh and blood; give ear to no vain cavils, vain sorrows and wishes: to know that we know nothing; that the worst and cruellest to our eyes is not what it seems; that we have to receive whatsoever befalls us as sent from God above, and say, It is good and wise, God is great! "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Islam means in its way Denial of Self, Annihilation of Self. This is yet the highest Wisdom that Heaven has revealed to our Earth.³¹

It is precisely statements such as this that would lead Nietzsche to call Carlyle a "pessimist," since a Christian bias colored all of his cultural interpretations. Again, parallel to his discussion of Islam, Carlyle's discussion of Norse religion displays this pessimist coloring clearly—the Vikings are said to view this world as only a dream, a shadow of the *real* world, the world beyond: "They seem to

have seen, these brave old Northmen, what Meditation has taught all men in all ages, that this world is after all but a show,—a phenomenon or appearance, no real thing. All deep souls see into that,—the Hindoo Mythologist, the German Philosopher,—the Shakespeare, the earnest Thinker, wherever he may be.”³² It is certainly this religious aspect to Carlyle’s perfectionism that Nietzsche finds mistaken and problematic—since it construes greatness as a creed for people still trapped in the metaphysical worldview of Christianity.

Worship

Furthermore, it seems that Nietzsche objects to Carlyle’s account of perfectionism because it relies on a form of “hero-worship” that openly mandates idolatry. For instance, Carlyle claims that: “We all love great men; love, venerate and bow down submissive before great men: nay can we honestly bow down to anything else?”³³ Carlyle does not simply request that we acknowledge greatness, rather he urges us to “admire without limit”³⁴ those who are great, and even to institute “theocracy.”³⁵ To understand Nietzsche’s rejection of Carlyle is to realize that he opposes the institutionalized idolatrous veneration of great men, that he does not want to empower a select social class that demands unlimited reverence from the rest of mankind. To see that this is so it is useful to turn to the second *Untimely Meditation*, in which Nietzsche examined the attitude of “monumental history.” Monumental history is the notion that history is composed of singular great figures whom we are to revere as guides to action and life. This, Nietzsche says, has its advantages in that it educates present-day man that greatness is possible (*HL 2*, p. 69). But, he also tells us, its shortcomings lead us into very dangerous territory, especially when monumentalism exists at the expense of other more critical historical attitudes. In particular, Nietzsche says, a monumental historical attitude is liable to be abused by two sorts of people: On the one hand “scoundrels” of rank and influence interested in gathering and maintaining power for their sole petty interest; and on the other hand, those inclined to revere cultural life, but who lack creativity and use examples of previous forms of greatness as a way to attack and hinder future forms of greatness (*HL 2*, p. 71). Nietzsche points out that a perfectionist ethic, if it is to retain its ability to augment and invigorate our lives, ought not to traffic too closely with authoritarianism or with envious and petty inertia.

In addition to the social and political consequences of an errant monumentalism, Nietzsche later discusses the psychological effects it produces. The central problem of hero worship is that it frequently ignores the human, all too human; it is incorrigibly unaware that worshippers are forced into self-deceiving attitudes, that they step further and further into fanaticism and illusion about the human reality of those they idolize. Carlyle’s brand of “heroism” is liable to

deform both an individual's character and his or her intellectual conscience. Thus, Nietzsche claims that "Carlyle deafens something within him by the *fortissimo* of his reverence for men of strong faith and by his rage against the less single-minded: he *requires* noise. A continual passionate *dishonesty* towards himself" (*TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 12). In a telling passage from *Daybreak* titled "The Hero Cult and Its Fanatics," Nietzsche points out how wary we must be of this attitude: "He who idealises a person sets this person at so great a distance from himself that he can no longer see him clearly" (*D* 298). The fanatic is fundamentally deluded about the reality of the person he or she has effectively deified. And, as he later notes, such heroes are frequently nothing more than a post facto creation used to convey reverence upon "the fatherland, the earth, the dignity of mankind and themselves" (*BGE* 269). Consequently, Nietzsche tells us, "'great men,' as they are venerated, are bad little fictions invented afterwards; in the world of historical values false coinage *is the rule*" (*BGE* 269).

The delusion of hero worship is a danger when it precludes self-overcoming, induces servility, and discards the idea of originality as creative or imaginative novelty. Creativity in particular is central to Nietzsche's perfectionism, as is made clear in *Zarathustra*, where they are directly equated: "The people have little idea of greatness, that is to say: creativeness" (*Z I*: "Of the Flies of the Market-Place"). This sense of creativity puts its emphasis on newness, on attaining or producing "new values." In contrast to this, while Carlyle talks of "originality," and deems it of importance to those who would pursue the heroic ethos, his account of what the quality of being "original" designates is radically different. Carlyle's conception of originality is defined not in terms of *novelty*, but in terms of *sincerity*. Carlyle states, "The merit of *originality* is not novelty; it is sincerity. The believing man is the original man; whatsoever he believes, he believes it for himself, not for another."³⁶ In this way originality is fundamentally disconnected from creativity, and instead emphasis is placed on strong faith, on an extreme, intemperate avowal (*TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 12). Despite the quest for sincerity and moral truth that Carlyle thinks it represents, from the Nietzschean perspective such hero worship only encourages conformity, bad faith, and zealotry (*A* 54).

Romanticism

As I have already mentioned, to "worship" something for Carlyle means to "admire without limit." This exaggerated pose of "without limit," an expression of unconstrained feeling of respect and idealization, is exactly the source of Nietzsche's anxieties and why he criticizes Carlyle for being a romantic (*D* 298; *TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 12). What is wrong with romanticism?

In general there are at least three features of romanticism to which Nietzsche objects. First, it exhibits a lack of measure. In contrast to classical culture, romanticism is excessive, seeking uncontrolled freedom rather than embodying discipline or order (*KSA* 12:9[165], *KSA* 12:9[166], translated as *The Will to Power* 79, 848). Second, romanticism is directed at producing an excess of passion in order to achieve sedation and intoxication. For Nietzsche, such excessive need for exaggerated feeling signals a lack of ethical care of the self, an inability to order oneself. Furthermore, the motivations provoking the search for such sedation manifest a profound dissatisfaction with this world (*KSA* 12:2[114], translated as *The Will to Power* 845), and a desire to escape from it through intense experiences of emotion. Fundamentally, then, romanticism is a form of pessimism born of weakness. It marks an inability to truly face the world, and contrasts sharply with the tragic view of life that recognizes the ills of existence, but yet still finds ways to affirm them. Thus, Nietzsche tells us that romanticism is ultimately an attitude held by “those who suffer from the *impoverishment of life* and seek rest, stillness, calm, seas, redemption from themselves through art and knowledge, or intoxication, convulsions, anaesthesia, and madness” (*GS* 370). Third, romanticism is further criticized because it inevitably produces a series of desperate, empty imitations of grandeur, but yet lacks the capacity for true greatness (in the sense of either euphony of the soul or newly creative legislation). This is precisely why Nietzsche criticizes Carlyle as being “continually agitated by the desire for a strong faith *and* the feeling of incapacity for it” and why he tells us that in this way Carlyle is “a typical Romantic!” (*TI* “Expeditions of an Untimely Man” 12). Worse still, this romantic posturing fundamentally confuses master and slave morality, such that all figures of nobility are falsely understood to be instantiations of Judeo-Christian values. The deficiency of the romantic is thus not just in his desire for faith but in his fundamental vision of the human ideal as well (*KSA* 12:10[2], translated as *The Will to Power* 1021). Thus, as mentioned already, we find that Carlyle’s discussion of particular heroes, such as Odin or Muhammad, presents them all as instantiating a Christian moral ideal—there is no sense that alternative higher ethical visions are possible.³⁷ Carlyle’s confusion here occurs in much the same way that Wagner’s romanticism conflated noble and Christian imagery; Nietzsche claims it is a symptomatic problem “to make eyes at master morality, at *noble* morality (Icelandic saga is almost its most important document) while mouthing the counterdoctrine, that of the ‘gospel of the lowly’ of the *need* for redemption!”³⁸

What this romantic impoverishment and its confusion of value systems reveals ultimately in its lack of measure, in its escapism, in its desperation for grandeur and intoxication with a false greatness is an unbalanced psychological type. That is, Nietzsche’s semiotic diagnostic of this ethical position uncovers a chaotic emotional background. Thus, romanticism, whether manifest in Carlyle or Wagner, is a sign of the disorder and disequilibrium within their guiding

instincts. For Nietzsche, Carlyle's romantic ethic is symptomatically part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, to our cultural malaise. It is perhaps possible to see here that Nietzsche's critique of Carlyle and Wagner as romantics was inextricably bound up with his own self-critique. That is, precisely these features of romanticism were apparent in Nietzsche's own earlier hero worship of Wagner. In recognizing the psychological conditions for, and effects of, this romantic-heroic perfectionism, it became possible for Nietzsche to mark an advance beyond it.³⁹

Responding to Modernity

Both Nietzsche and Carlyle focus upon the character and sources of modernity: and it is precisely from within a framework that explores the upheavals of modern life that they elaborate their respective perfectionist visions. In talking of modernity here, I refer to what these thinkers saw as the moribund, leveled and increasingly disordered character of ethical and social life. But this convergence of interest on the same predicament also reveals to us that both thinkers elaborate subtly different accounts of the problem. In what follows I point out three important similarities between Carlyle and Nietzsche's diagnosis of the ills of modernity before then considering the important ways in which they diverge from one another.

First, Carlyle links the turmoil of modernity to the loss of belief, to the lack of faith in religion and morality. Belief, for Carlyle, is what defines the hero, the great man; it is out of strong conviction that he is able to act and direct the world.⁴⁰ Through unwavering belief, communities are strengthened and all civilization finds its uppermost excellence attained. Without this all kinds of problems are bequeathed a society: "when Belief waxes uncertain, Practice too becomes unsound, and errors, injustices and miseries everywhere more and more prevail, we shall see material enough for revolution. At all turns, a man who will *do* faithfully, needs to believe firmly."⁴¹ This bears a certain similarity to Nietzsche's discussion of the death of God, the decline of firm belief in a transcendent metaphysical ground of values and the nihilism that follows from this. Thus, for both thinkers, the decline in belief is seen as leading to the declining power of our inherited shared values and the forms of social life they sustain. But whereas Carlyle sees our declining culture as overly influenced by the atheism, rationalism, moral questioning, and materialism of the eighteenth century,⁴² and that we require new heroes to reinstitute belief, Nietzsche essentially proposes an intensification of these movements.⁴³

Second, Carlyle focused his thinking on the notion that ethics grounds our existence in surer ways than does metaphysics, that practical action ensures our flourishing more than speculation can.⁴⁴ Ages that affirm and passionately

act upon moral precepts achieve greater harmony, and are witness to greater achievements than ages that sink into criticism and doubt. In articulating this vision, Carlyle talks of championing the yea-saying spirit over the no-saying spirit, with the latter being identified with Goethe's Mephistopheles:

The shrewd, all-informed intellect he has, is an attorney intellect; it can contradict, but it cannot affirm. With lynx vision he descries at a glance the ridiculous, the unsuitable, the bad; but for the solemn, the noble, the worthy, he is blind as his ancient mother. Thus does he go along, qualifying, confuting, despising: on all hands detecting the false, but without force to bring forth, or even to discern, any glimpse of the true.⁴⁵

For Carlyle, the yea-saying spirit must affirm a moral order and strive beyond mediocrity and empty ritual to assert a strong faith in its deeds. Again, here, we can see a certain similarity with Nietzsche's concern with the affirmation of life, and the need to move beyond mere criticism to legislation (*BGE* 208–11). Yet, despite not seeking to engage in metaphysics, Carlyle still essentially supports the metaphysical tradition in his religious outlook: "Love not Pleasure; love God. This is the everlasting yea, wherein all contradiction is solved."⁴⁶ For Nietzsche, though, the problem with Western culture is to be found precisely in belief in a metaphysical world, in a denial of the value of our self. Any passionate pursuit of such a transcendent realm, regardless of whether such a pursuit is intellectual or practical, betrays a fundamental neglect of our worldly life.⁴⁷ Thus, he would not be surprised to see that Carlyle is still clinging to the form and sentiments of the Christian religion, that for this "everlasting Yea" to take place, the "the Self in thee" needs "to be annihilated."⁴⁸

Third, belief for Carlyle meant not just intellectual assent, but also affirmation derived from our most fundamental feelings and emotional orientations.⁴⁹ Carlyle conceives of "belief" as the ground of a worldview that is rooted in feeling—a prereflective understanding and comportment. Speaking of his archetypal heroes, Carlyle states: "The thoughts they had were the parents of the actions they did; their feelings were parents of their thoughts."⁵⁰ These shared feelings Carlyle understands as being the content of a man's religion, not any particular doctrine or ritual, and he therefore takes this to be the most fundamental fact we can know about a person.⁵¹ He held that it was necessary for our increasingly chaotic and leveled age to take up the ideal of heroism and point the way back to the core religious feelings and moral sentiments that had previously guided humanity. Carlyle struck out at the psychology of two types of person he labeled the "skeptic" and the "dandy" as being symptomatic of this decline, and he again traced their emergence to eighteenth-century politics, literature, and philosophy. For him, these figures cut at the firm foundations of strong belief and the actions that follow from it, they encouraged a spurious and facile game with truth from which no great achievements or moral insights emerged.⁵² Ultimately, the materialism and atheism that dominated these circles effectively

scuttled any hope of accessing the felt religious realities of the world, thereby raising the rule of a leveled, petty, and mundane worldview that numbed people's sensitivity to passionate belief.

Interestingly, Nietzsche also connects many of the problems of modernity to the realm of our prereflective feelings, which he often names our "instincts" or "drives" (*TI* "The Problem of Socrates" 4; *TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 41; *BGE* 200, 208, 258; *KSA* 11:26[119]). For Nietzsche, one of the enduring problems of Western civilization has been that it continually seeks to excise rather than embrace these unconscious forces and so leaves individuals internally conflicted or diminished (see *TI* "The Problem of Socrates" 4; *TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 41). An important part of Nietzsche's perfectionist project, therefore, is to overturn the hyper-rationalism of Socrates and the self-mortification of Christianity, allowing for the freer development of our instincts and thus for a deeper attachment to the world (*GS* 143).⁵³ The ability to cultivate and unify enduring instinctual structures thus becomes for Nietzsche a central ethico-political concern that serves to distinguish healthy individuals and communities from unhealthy ones (*TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 39).⁵⁴

Nonetheless, despite some measure of agreement between Nietzsche and Carlyle on the role of our prereflective feelings, it is important to note that there are four crucial differences here that starkly separate these thinkers. First, for Nietzsche, having an emotion or passion can be dangerously excessive and is not in and of itself something positive.⁵⁵ As we have seen, Carlyle's emphasis on the sheer force of affect to drive our activity is symptomatic of romanticism. Nietzsche is wholly opposed to proof by potency, and does not view an undisciplined embrace of emotion as a cure for excessive rationalism (*D* 58).

Second, for Carlyle, there was nothing wrong in the past ages of Christendom, with all their fervor and zeal for strong belief. But precisely here Nietzsche detects a phenomenon Carlyle is oblivious to: even though social order is maintained, psychological torment, distress, and spiritual atrophy can still be rampant.⁵⁶ Guilt, excessive pity, fear of hell, and feelings of sinfulness, combined with the denigration of many of man's most fundamental traits, had led Western civilization to an ethically stunted existence.

Third, Nietzsche takes a historical view of the instincts, one that provides a much richer and more nuanced account of their potential for transformation. For Nietzsche, our instincts are always changing because our institutions and patterns of life are always changing (*GS* 7). This is not just the result of old beliefs dying, or of reductive materialism disenchanting the world but also of new circumstances, values, and competing worldviews arising.⁵⁷ For Nietzsche, there is no single perfect form our instincts can take—no universal ethos to fit all circumstances and potentialities of human life. Our emotions are mediated by our historical and social situation, they are not simply something we can trust without reflection and careful scrutiny (*D* 35). Indeed, Nietzsche's interest is precisely in

changing the feelings and cultivating new sensibilities, not uncritically relying on the sentiments acquired during our upbringing (see, for instance, *D* 109 and *GS* 337). The problems of modernity for Nietzsche cannot be solved by extending the rigidity of mores and sentiments in a community: for even though belief is firm, if there is not sufficient flexibility or development the community will stagnate (*HH* 224). Rather, we need to continually seek ways to balance and integrate an emerging plethora of instincts into our individual and collective life and to unify them with those instincts that are still currently sustained in us.

Fourth, there is disagreement about the role of skepticism. Both thinkers describe the breakdown of a shared prereflective orientation of belief or instinct in modernity. These affective compartments have been undermined through a gradual process of scientific discovery and enlightenment opposition to dogmatism. In short, skepticism has eradicated the basis for a whole way of living and feeling: Christianity. And so it is especially against skepticism that Carlyle strives so strongly, hoping to reverse its influence.⁵⁸ Indeed, for Nietzsche as well, one of the chief aspects of modernity is skepticism—the self-conscious, reflective questioning that undermines our unreflective practices and attachments. But while Carlyle considers skepticism of religious and moral truth to be the main opponent of a heroic ethic, the case of skepticism is more complex for Nietzsche.⁵⁹ Here we meet with an important idea at the heart of his perfectionism, because, for Nietzsche, skepticism of the proper sort is necessary for development.⁶⁰ This is made emphatically clear when, in *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche draws his comparison between Zarathustra and what he now terms “Carlylism”:

One should not let oneself be misled: great spirits are sceptics. Zarathustra is a sceptic. The vigour of a spirit, its *freedom* through strength and superior strength, is *proved* by scepticism. [...] Convictions are prisons [...] A spirit who wills greatness and also wills the means to it is necessarily a sceptic [...] the need for belief, for some unconditional Yes and No, Carlylism if I may be excused the expression, is a requirement of weakness. The man of faith, the ‘believer’ of every sort is necessarily a dependent man—such as cannot out of himself posit ends at all. The ‘believer’ does not belong to *himself*, he can be only a means, he has to be *used*, he needs someone who will use him. [...] Every type of faith is an expression of self-abnegation, of self-alienation.⁶¹

The Importance of Skepticism

Nietzsche opposes any conception of perfectionism that forces obedience to an authority or seeks to be obedient to an unquestionable order.⁶² Such an attitude of obedience would only evade and destroy skeptical enquiry, reason, and truth—those things that allow the possibility of independence, imagination, growth, and originality. Thus, Nietzsche criticizes Carlyle on exactly this point: “The desire for a strong faith is *not* the proof of a strong faith, rather the

opposite. *If one has it* one may permit oneself the beautiful luxury of skepticism: one is secure enough, firm enough, fixed enough for it” (*TI* “Expeditions of an Untimely Man” 12). But now, is not Nietzsche seemingly caught in a paradoxical situation? He champions both balanced, measured (as opposed to romantic) instinctive life *and* the skepticism that can lead to its destruction. To see that this is not a paradox we need to recognize that Nietzsche advocates not just the homeostasis of our instincts but rather their growth and development. Such development, he suggests, can come only from skeptical experimentation (*GS* 51). Thus Nietzsche provides a picture of skeptical, probing innovation as the means to spiritual growth, one that highlights how perfectionism can be both productive and destructive of shared forms of life. Rather than champion people who are bound together in an inflexible faith and set of habits, it is people who break down such internalized bonds and erect new ways of living that are of importance (*HH* 224–28). The skeptic who questions and ventures out in new directions is the model of greatness (*A* 54). In an important passage for understanding his position, and one that inverts his usual rhetoric, Nietzsche presents the ethical role of the skeptic in the form of a fundamental contrast between the “strong” who preserve a society and the “degenerate” who question and alter it (*HH* 224). The outcome of this skeptical influence is that the society, no longer held together by the same instincts, can verge toward breakdown:

The danger facing these strong communities founded on similarly constituted, firm-charactered individuals is that of the gradually increasing inherited stupidity such as haunts all stability like its shadow. It is the more unfettered, uncertain and morally weaker individuals upon whom *spiritual progress* depends in such communities: it is the men who attempt new things and, in general, many things. [...] they effect a loosening up and from time to time inflict an injury on the stable element of a community. (*HH* 224)

While Nietzsche submitted to the idea that one of the chief manifestations of cultural turmoil is the advent of skepticism (e.g., *KSA* 13:11[375], *BGE* 208), he nonetheless takes this as one of the engines of ethical life. There are positive, productive, skeptical orientations that can be cultivated, especially those forms of skepticism that do not end in paralysis but afford one the means of further experimentation.⁶³ Thus skepticism is not something to be avoided, since although the consequences it brings can never be foreseen, upon it hangs the “spiritual progress” of the community.

Nonetheless, Nietzsche’s careful account of skeptical perfectionism also importantly recognizes that among its consequences are three principal risks: First, on an individual level, the dangers that perfectionism gives rise to are chiefly twofold: (1) the execution or exile of those whose efforts to excel in self-development challenge the mores of their community (this is the martyrdom that Cavell has spoken of) (see *HH* 224); and (2) the failure or ruination of the individual arising from their own efforts at higher attainment or unforeseen

developments (the tragic element in Nietzsche's thought that Owen noted). Nietzsche's perfectionism is a formal, rather than substantive, ethos, and although it is clearly associated with the attainment of excellence, it is also not necessarily synonymous with success or with the eradication of all human limitations.⁶⁴

Second, on the communal level, Nietzsche notes that if the social and political effects of pursuing perfectionism are substantial, then it can unravel whole traditions and modes of existence (*HH* 224). Thus, the danger of perfectionism is not just the martyrdom of the individual concerned, nor that they are bound to a particular fate, nor even that the world is not hospitable to their ethical aspirations. Rather, their skepticism and creative activity can produce cultural turmoil that exceeds rational control, one for which there is no single means of remedy. This results in unpredictable and possibly enduring conflict and struggle (*HH* 224).

Third, and again on the communal level, Nietzsche is wary that perfectionism can slip into unquestioning hero worship. Nietzsche is under no illusions that even those of great merit are still all too human. The motivation for Nietzsche's perfectionism is not emulation, adulation, or obedience to an authority (indeed he recommends talking of "greatness" cynically) (*KSA* 13:11[411]).⁶⁵ This stands in contrast to Carlyle, who proposed that great men are universally beneficial to us, so that any traffic with them is edifying,⁶⁶ and who also suggested that obedience be commended: "Great souls are always loyally submissive, reverent to what is over them; only small mean souls are otherwise. I could not find a better proof of what I said the other day, that the sincere man was by nature the obedient man."⁶⁷ What stands out in Nietzsche's position is the way in which perfectionism is neither a matter of subjection before a higher power nor simply justified or acclaimed on account of what its effects are. Rather, we come closest to Nietzsche's viewpoint when he states, "A people is a detour of nature to get to six or seven great men.—Yes: and then to get round them" (see *BGE* 126). This develops a transcommunal or historical edge to his perfectionism—Nietzsche is not concerned with any one state, nation, or class but rather, as others have noted, with mankind itself.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Fundamentally, Nietzsche's vision of perfectionism differs from Carlyle's in two important ways. First, his is not a universalist, perennialist moralism; rather, Nietzsche sees perfectionism as a relative capacity to question and transform ethical life. Second, he believes it is unproductive and corrupting to practice hero worship. Against an "English" and "religious" way of understanding greatness, such as Carlyle represents, Nietzsche is adamant that we recognize the "*danger* which lies in great human beings" (*TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 44).

Nietzsche does not think the great man should be an autocratic sovereign revered unreservedly, in fact he seeks to remove the spiritual tyranny that models of attained perfection can generate (see *HH* 262). The great man might well be our own most spiritual enemy, a person who challenges us most of all to become what we are in contradistinction to what they are: we do not need to imitate, emulate, or worship, but to overcome them.⁶⁹ Nietzsche criticizes Carlyle because the latter seeks theocracy, seeks a rigid system in which true skepticism and innovative ethical transformation are discouraged. Where Carlyle's doctrine has the effect of falsifying both history and greatness (*KSA* 12:9[157]),⁷⁰ Nietzsche's view rejects romantic idealization in favor of developing a more contextualized understanding of perfectionism that would identify both its conditions and its dangers. Consequently, he shows that the conditions necessary for perfectionism are also those in which the dangers to self and community are most present (*BGE* 200).

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NOTES

1. Thomas Hurka suggests that we see Nietzsche in a tradition of perfectionism that stretches right through the "mainstream of nineteenth-century philosophy." Thomas Hurka, "Nietzsche: Perfectionist," in *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 27.

2. Borges notes that a number of Emerson's critics considered him to be an American imitator of Carlyle. See Jorge Luis Borges, "Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men*," in *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922–1986* (London: Penguin, 2001), 417.

3. Stanley Cavell, "Aversive Thinking: Emersonian Representations in Heidegger and Nietzsche," *New Literary History* 22 (1991): 143.

4. See David Owen, "Equality, Democracy, and Self-Respect: Reflections on Nietzsche's Agonal Perfectionism," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 24 (2002): 113–31.

5. See Hurka, "Nietzsche: Perfectionist."

6. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 286.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Cavell, "Aversive Thinking."

9. Cavell, "Aversive Thinking," 152–53.

10. For the former, see James Conant, "Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of *Schopenhauer as Educator*," in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude to the Future*, ed. Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 181–257; for the latter, see Vanessa Lemm, "Is Nietzsche a Perfectionist? Rawls, Cavell, and the Politics of Culture in Nietzsche's 'Schopenhauer as Educator,'" *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 34 (2007): 5–27.

11. See in this regard *TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 45. The relation between destruction and creativity, between greatness and the explosive radical social effects has rightly been a focus of much critical attention. In the following, I merely show that undue focus on *SE* can lead us to overlook this aspect of Nietzsche's perfectionism, seeing it as excessively optimistic. Moreover, I establish that it is this very sense of the dangers of perfectionism that

separates Nietzsche from Carlyle. I use the following translations of Nietzsche's works: "Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); *Human, All Too Human: A Book For Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1969); *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990); *On the Genealogy of Morals/ Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989); *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967); *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990); *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968).

12. Cavell, "Aversive Thinking," 152.

13. Owen, "Equality, Democracy, and Self-Respect," 117.

14. Hurka, "Nietzsche: Perfectionist," 13–15.

15. Herman Siemens, "Nietzsche's Critique of Democracy (1870–1886)," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 38 (2009): 20–37. Siemens links these negative conditions to democracy, yet clearly his point has wider applicability when taken as a general characterization of Nietzsche's thought about the conditions of greatness (i.e., whether democracy is present or not, the conditions needed for greatness are also adverse for its emergence).

16. According to Thomas Brobjer, we lack any material indication that Nietzsche had read Carlyle's books, although he might have read Hippolyte Taine's work on Carlyle. See Thomas Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 236. It has also been suggested that had he read a German translation of Froude's *Life of Thomas Carlyle (Das Leben Thomas Carlyles)*, published 1887; see J. Hillis Miller, "Hieroglyphical Truth in *Sartor Resartus*," in *Victorian Perspectives*, ed. John Clubbe and Jerome Meckier (London: Macmillan, 1989), 1–20.

17. It is also not my intention to suggest that no other text of Carlyle's is of relevance to Nietzsche's philosophical thought, but the limits of this article impose constraints on what I can cover.

18. "With the exception of Burckhardt, Taine is the only man who has had something cordial and sympathetic to say about my writings, so that I sometimes think of him and Burckhardt as my only readers." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, ed. and trans. Peter Fuss and Henry Shapiro (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 276.

19. Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe with Johann Peter Eckermann*, trans. John Oxenford (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1998), 222.

20. Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe*, 270. It is worth noting that Nietzsche not only had read Eckermann's *Conversations of Goethe*, but also acclaimed it as "the best German book there is" (*WS* 109).

21. It is noteworthy that Charles Dickens dedicated *Hard Times* to Carlyle and also that George Eliot could write of him in the following way: "[T]here is hardly a superior or active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle's writings; there has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been different if Carlyle had not lived. The character of his influence is best seen in the fact that many of the men who have the least agreement with his opinions are those for whom the reading of *Sartor Resartus* was an epoch in the history of their minds. The extent of his influence may be best seen in the fact that ideas that were startling novelties when he first wrote them are now become common-place. And we think few men will be found to say that this influence on the whole has not been for good." George Eliot, "Thomas Carlyle," in *The Oxford Book of Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 239–41.

22. See chapter 15 of Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946).

23. So close are their ethical visions that it is easy to see why they could be mistakenly identified as possessing strong similarities. It is also notable that they both share the dubious honor of being blamed for Nazism. On Carlyle's supposed relation to the movement, see, for instance, J. Salwyn Schapiro's "Thomas Carlyle, Prophet of Fascism," *Journal of Modern History* 2 (1945): 97–115 or H. F. C. Grierson's *Carlyle and Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933).

24. Thomas Carlyle, "Lecture I," in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and The Heroic in History* (Teddington: Echo Library, 2007), 4.

25. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture II," 29.

26. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture II," 38.

27. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture IV," 80.

28. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture I," 24.

29. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture I," 24.

30. *BGE* 260.

31. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture II," 38.

32. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture I," 25.

33. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture I," 12.

34. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture I," 9, 10.

35. "Theocracy, Government of God, is precisely the thing to be struggled for! ... That right and truth, or God's Law, reign supreme among men, this is the Heavenly Ideal (well named in Knox's time, and nameable in all times, a revealed 'Will of God') towards which the Reformer will insist that all be more and more approximated. All true Reformers, as I said, are by the nature of them Priests, and strive for a Theocracy" (Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture IV," 96). This line of thought is why Nietzsche presumably criticizes Carlyle's "religious" way of understanding greatness (*TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 45).

36. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture IV," 80.

37. Nietzsche, of course, does think such alternatives are, and have been, possible (see *BGE* 202).

38. *CW* Epilogue.

39. I wish to thank an anonymous referee at the *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* for suggesting this idea.

40. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture IV," 80.

41. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture IV," 76.

42. "The Eighteenth was a *Skeptical* Century; in which little word there is a whole Pandora's Box of miseries. Skepticism means not intellectual Doubt alone, but moral Doubt; all sorts of infidelity, insincerity, spiritual paralysis. Perhaps, in few centuries that one could specify since the world began, was a life of Heroism more difficult for a man. That was not an age of Faith,—an age of Heroes! The very possibility of Heroism had been, as it were, formally abnegated in the minds of all. Heroism was gone forever; Triviality, Formulism and Commonplace were come forever. The 'age of miracles' had been, or perhaps had not been; but it was not any longer. An effete world; wherein Wonder, Greatness, Godhood could not now dwell;—in one word, a godless world!" Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture V," 108.

43. For Nietzsche, there is no turning back to earlier forms of life (*TI* "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 43). We should not see Nietzsche as advocating the pursuit of rationalism above all else (*TI* "Problem of Socrates" 11), but certainly as intensifying the role of critical thought (*A* 54) and our intellectual conscience (*GS* 2).

44. "Conviction, were it never so excellent, is worthless till it convert itself into Conduct. Nay properly Conviction is not possible till then; inasmuch as all Speculation is by nature endless,

formless, a vortex amid vortices, only by a felt indubitable certainty of Experience does it find any centre to revolve round, and so fashion itself into a system." Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1897), 177.

45. Thomas Carlyle, "Goethe's Helena," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1855), 59.

46. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 175.

47. It is crucial, for Nietzsche, that the affirmation of our worldly existence takes the form of legislation (ZI "The Bestowing Virtue" 2).

48. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 174.

49. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture I," 5.

50. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture I," 5.

51. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture I," 5.

52. "[F]or these poor Skeptics there was no sincerity, no truth. Half-truth and hearsay was called truth. Truth, for most men, meant plausibility; to be measured by the number of votes you could get. ... Spiritual Paralysis, I say, nothing left but a Mechanical life, was the characteristic of that century. For the common man, unless happily he stood *below* his century and belonged to another prior one, it was impossible to be a Believer, a Hero; he lay buried, unconscious, under these baleful influences" (Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture V" 108).

53. See also Robert Pippin's *Nietzsche, Psychology and First Philosophy* and his account of "attachment."

54. On cultivating the instincts and drives, see *D* 560.

55. In this regard, Nietzsche even distances himself from Goethe (*BGE* 198).

56. Social order alone is not Nietzsche's interest, thus he points to the many detrimental ethical effects of Christianity (*D* 77; *A* 62; *EH* "Why I Am a Destiny").

57. In talking of the instincts, Nietzsche is not referring simply to biological processes. This point has been observed by several other commentators including Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 140; and Robert B. Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 18. Rather, his conception of instincts and drives involves viewing our deepest emotional orientations as fundamentally shaped by social and historical forces. In talking of instincts, Nietzsche does not generally operate with a sharp category, but includes emotions, feelings, desires, etc. For evidence that he treats emotional phenomena as instincts or drives, see *BT* "Attempt at a Self Criticism" 1 (mentions instincts in relation to cheerfulness and pessimism), *BT* 23 ("primal artistic drives," combining myth and feeling), *BT* 21 (instinct and political feeling); *HL* 6 ("various drives—curiosity, flight from boredom, envy, vanity, the desire for amusement"); *WS* 41 ("sympathetic, charitable, reconciliatory, ameliorating drives"); *D* 38 (humility, envy, hope, anger as drives), *D* 115 (in connection to anger, hatred, love, pity, joy), *D* 134 (pity as a drive); *GS* 14 (avarice and love as instinct), *GS* 118 (pity as instinct), *GS* 333 (instincts to laugh, lament, curse); *BGE* 12 ("soul as social structure of drives and emotions"), *BGE* 36 (drive is called the "world of desires and passions"); *GM* I:8 (Jewish vengeful love as a drive), *GM* II:16 (bad conscience and the internalization of drives and instincts); *EH* "Why I Am so Wise" 4 (selfless drives of "neighbor-love" and pity); *A* 24 ("The instinct of *ressentiment*"), *A* 39 (Christian "instinct of hatred of every reality").

58. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, "Lecture V," 108.

59. Carlyle does, however, allow "doubt" a place in cultural evolution (this is why he states that he can have different views from his grandfather about the world), but he will not allow a systematically radical undermining or transformation of whole domains of knowledge. Thus, he would question his grandfather's conception of religion and moral conduct, but would not seek to undermine the very notions of religion and morality. Skepticism is more destructive in this regard, as can be seen in Carlyle's anxiety that "Doubt gradually settled into Denial!" (*Sartor Resartus*, 168).

60. Tambling also mentions the role of skepticism in differentiating the ethics of Carlyle and Nietzsche, but he does not explore this idea in any depth: “The greatness that Carlyle values becomes inseparable from simple-mindedness; it is a desire for something unquestioned and unquestioning, as when, in the essay ‘Characteristics’ (1831), he says that ‘the healthy Understanding is not the Logical, argumentative, but the Intuitive; for the end of Understanding is not to prove and find reasons, but to know and believe.’ The language implies, in its resistance to doubt, submission and simple certainty; but in Nietzsche’s argument true ‘greatness,’ inseparable from an accompanying skepticism, is not at all simple” (328). See Jeremy Tambling, “Carlyle through Nietzsche: Reading *Sartor Resartus*,” *Modern Languages Review* 102 (2007): 326–40. More needs to be said about this than I can discuss at this point. An important thing to bear in mind is that Nietzsche does not think there is only one form of skepticism, and nor does he thereby advocate all possible forms of skepticism. See in particular the whole discussion in *BGE* 208, where the skepticism of Socrates and Montaigne is seen as problematic (because it has a consoling function), and where Nietzsche evolves his conception of the future philosopher in contrast to the merely skeptical philosopher.

61. *A* 54. Interestingly though, Carlyle does say that skepticism is just the preparation for “new better and wider ways” (Carlyle, *On Heroes*, “Lecture V,” 108). But what he means is that it prepares the space for a great hero to reinstitute belief and sincerity. He does not consider skepticism to be the basis of greatness; instead he calls it “a chronic atrophy and disease of the whole soul” (Carlyle, *On Heroes*, “Lecture V,” 110).

62. On this issue see Herman Siemens, who has insightfully argued that Nietzsche’s perfectionism is not only concerned with excellence, but is also intended to oppose tyranny in all its forms because it threatens to limit human potential (Siemens, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Democracy”).

63. See *GS* 51. This is possible because skepticism was not a unitary phenomenon for him; instead he followed Carlyle in at least arguing against certain negative forms of skepticism: that of the nihilistic, relativistic, and exhausted forms.

64. Perfectionism can well lead to one perishing without realizing one’s highest ends, but one may well have attained a level of excellence by unsettling or revaluing a certain field; in this sense there must be at least an indication of success in overcoming oneself. That he has a more nuanced position on this matter can be seen as early as the *Untimely Meditations*: “Greatness ought not to depend on success: Demosthenes possessed greatness though he had no success” (*HL* 9, pp. 113–14). But we should also note that many of the figures he invokes as exemplars met with an untimely demise (Borgia and Julius Caesar), defeat and exile (Napoleon), and the continued frustration and abandonment of creative ambitions (da Vinci).

65. Translated as *The Will to Power* “Preface” 1.

66. “One comfort is, that Great Men, taken up in any way, are profitable company. We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man, without gaining something by him” (Carlyle, *On Heroes*, “Lecture I,” 5).

67. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, “Lecture V,” 113.

68. Lemm traces this interpretive point to Simmel (“Is Nietzsche a Perfectionist?,” 15).

69. “In great men, the specific qualities of life—injustice, falsehood, exploitation—are at their greatest. But in so far as they have had an *overwhelming* effect, their essence has been most misunderstood and interpreted as goodness. Type: Carlyle as interpreter” (*KSA* 12:5[50.10], translated as *The Will to Power* 968).

70. *KSA* 12:9[157], translated as *The Will to Power* 380.