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FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE
Untimely Meditations

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FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Untimely Meditations

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 **CAMBRIDGE**
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521584586

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First published 1997
Eleventh printing 2007

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 1844–1900.

[Unzeitgemässe, Betrachtungen. English]

Untimely meditations / Friedrich Nietzsche: edited by
Daniel Breazeale; translated by R. J. Hollingdale.

p. cm. – (Cambridge texts in the history of philosophy)

Includes index.

ISBN 0 521 58458 2 (hardback). – ISBN 0 521 58584 8 (paperback)

1. Strauss, David Friedrich, 1808–1874. 2. History – Study and teaching.
3. Schopenhauer, Arthur, 1788–1860. 4. Wagner, Richard, 1813–1883.

I. Hollingdale, R. J. II. Title. III. Series.

B3313.U52E5 1997

193 – dc21 96–37028 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-58458-6 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-58584-2 paperback

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Introduction

Individually and collectively, the four ‘untimely’ meditations’ are unquestionably among Nietzsche’s most widely neglected works. Published between 1873 and 1876, they seem to lack both the dramatic originality of the work that preceded them (*The Birth of Tragedy*) and the epigrammatic brilliance of the book that followed (*Human, All Too Human*). Their ostensible subjects are so diverse – David Strauss, the study of history, Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner – that they seem to be connected by little beyond their collective title and common form: namely, that of the traditional polemical essay divided into numbered, untitled sections.

Upon closer examination, however, they reveal a thematic unity that is not always obvious at first. The *Untimely Meditations* contain important, early discussions of such essential ‘Nietzschean’ subjects as the relationship between life, art and philosophy; the character and cultivation of the ‘true self’; education (and its vital erotic dimension), and the difference between genuine wisdom and mere knowledge (or ‘science’). Moreover, these four short works – especially the last two – always retained a special, deeply personal significance for their author, who considered them to be key documents for understanding his development as a philosopher. They are not, admittedly, as immediately accessible as many of Nietzsche’s other writings, largely because of the way in which the *Untimely Meditations* are related to specific events, authors, and intellectual and cultural movements of his own era. The following remarks do not give even a preliminary analysis of the philosophical *substance* or *content* of these works; instead, they aim to provide readers with some understanding of the specific *context* within

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which Nietzsche conceived the project of the *Untimely Meditations* and with an appreciation of its significance within the larger context of his thought and development.

At the age of just 24 Nietzsche accepted an appointment as an Associate Professor of Classical Philology at the University of Basel, where his duties also included teaching Greek in the *Pädagogium* (the senior class of the high school). He arrived in Basel 19 April 1869, six weeks prior to the beginning of the summer semester. One of the chief attractions of Basel for Nietzsche was that Richard Wagner and Cosima von Bülow (who were not actually married until 1870) were then living in nearby Tribschen. Nietzsche had become personally acquainted with Wagner at a private party in Leipzig the previous fall, where he and the 54-year-old composer were immediately attracted to each other, at least in part on the basis of their shared enthusiasm for Schopenhauer's philosophy. Though Nietzsche already had some acquaintance with Wagner's music, he could hardly have been prepared for the tremendous personal impact made upon him by Wagner. He immediately plunged into an intense study of the voluminous writings of the composer whom he began describing in his letters of this period as 'my mystagogue' and 'the living exemplar of what Schopenhauer calls a genius'.¹ Nietzsche called on the Wagners for the first time on 17 May and visited Tribschen twenty-three times over the next four years. Indeed, he became almost a part of the family and was present for many holidays and special occasions. He was such a frequent visitor that a special 'thinking room' was reserved for the use of 'the professor'.

The young classicist proved to be a diligent and popular professor; he began to publish the expected philological articles in professional journals and seemed well launched upon a brilliant, albeit conventional academic career. He also began to receive offers from other universities and was quickly promoted (in 1870) to Full Professor. Nietzsche, however, had more ambitious and unconventional plans for himself, plans closely related to his enthusiasm for Schopenhauer and Wagner and to his rapidly growing concern with questions of cultural, educational and social reform. As his inaugural lecture on 'Homer and Classical Philology' demonstrated, he never subscribed to the professional ideal of 'pure, disinterested science' or 'knowledge for its own sake'; instead, he believed scholars in general and classical philologists

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in particular had a special role to play in the increasingly urgent task of cultural renewal – a conception of the academic calling which he believed he shared with his distinguished colleague at Basel, Jacob Burckhardt, author of *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860).

Even during his student days at Leipzig, Nietzsche had toyed with the idea of switching from classical philology to philosophy,² and the idea seems to have reoccurred to him at Basel, for during his fourth semester there he unsuccessfully petitioned to be appointed to a recently vacated chair of philosophy and to have his own chair filled by his friend Erwin Rohde. Even if his burning interest in cultural and philosophical issues could not be adequately reflected in his classes and lectures (with the exception, perhaps, of his lectures on pre-Platonic philosophy), he was determined that these interests should receive prominent expression in his first book. Encouraged by the Wagners at every step of the way, he transformed his manuscripts on 'The Dionysian Worldview' and 'The Origin of Tragic Thought' into the stunning *Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, the second half of which was devoted largely to Wagner's 'art of the future' and to the prospects for a *rebirth* of tragic culture in late-nineteenth century Germany.

After being rejected by one publisher, *The Birth of Tragedy* was finally published at the beginning of 1872 by Wagner's publisher, E. W. Fritsch.³ At this time, Nietzsche was at the height of his popularity as a professor in Basel and was just beginning a series of five, well-attended public lectures 'On the Future of Our Educational Institutions', in which he sharpened and amplified his critique of the 'disinterested pursuit of pure science' and called for nothing less than a complete reform of higher education and a total cultural revolution. As if in response to this call, Wagner's ambitious plans for establishing a permanent 'festival theatre' at Bayreuth were gathering momentum, and Nietzsche was intimately and enthusiastically involved in this planning process from the start, at one point even offering to resign his professorship so that he could become a full-time lecturer and fund-raiser on behalf of the festival theatre project. Only a few months later, in April 1872, the Wagners relocated to Bayreuth, thus bringing to a rather abrupt end what were unquestionably the happiest three years of Nietzsche's life.

Barely a month later, another event occurred that had equally

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fateful consequence for Nietzsche's future: the publication of a pamphlet by the then-young classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorf savagely attacking *The Birth of Tragedy* and directly challenging the professional competence of its author.⁴ Wagner's and Rohde's public efforts to defend Nietzsche were to no avail; indeed, they only served to reinforce the growing doubts about his professional soundness. The impact of Wilamowitz's pamphlet upon Nietzsche's career was swift and dramatic. Whereas twenty-one students (out of a total student population at the University of Basel of 156) had enrolled in his lectures during the summer semester of 1872, only two enrolled for the winter semester of 1872-3 – and neither was a student of classical philology.⁵

During this period, Nietzsche himself was more preoccupied than ever with such 'non-philological' subjects as philosophy, science and the theory of knowledge, though he usually tended to focus his own reflections on these topics through the lens provided by his ongoing and intensive study of the pre-Platonic philosophers. It was during this period that he began such well-known works as the 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense' and 'Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks', neither of which was published until many years after his death. As his letters and notebooks make clear, he expected that his next book would be explicitly devoted to philosophy and philosophers, though he seems never to have made up his mind about the precise form that his projected '*Philosophenbuch*' would take – whether it would be limited to the early Greeks, or would also include more general reflections on philosophy and epistemology.⁶

It was also during this period that Nietzsche's health began to deteriorate progressively and rapidly, a process that may have begun in Fall 1870 when he contracted dysentery and diphtheria while serving briefly in the Prussian medical corps during the Franco-Prussian War. In any event, he took the first of several sick leaves from his university during Spring 1871, though his health continued to decline. He was granted a sabbatical leave for the entire academic year of 1876-7, though once again any improvement in his physical condition was only temporary (in part, no doubt, because he never ceased to devote himself to his studies and his writings). Finally, in Spring 1879, he was forced by the parlous state of his health to resign his position at the University of Basel, from which he received thereafter a modest pension.

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Returning to the years immediately following the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche visited Bayreuth for the second time in April 1873, more than three years prior to the completion of the theatre and the inauguration of the festival. As was his custom, he brought along a work-in-progress to read to the Wagners, in this case, the manuscript of 'Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks'. Wagner, who was totally preoccupied by the urgent demands of the Bayreuth project, proved to be less than enthusiastic about Nietzsche's expenditure of his talent and energy upon a subject as 'remote' (and as unrelated to Wagner's own interests) as pre-Platonic philosophy. This cool reception may help explain why Nietzsche never actually published his profoundly original study of early Greek philosophy, even though he prepared a fair copy for the printer.

No doubt chastened by his visit to Bayreuth, and certainly sharing some of Wagner's frustration and despair over the many obstacles and setbacks encountered by the festival theatre project, Nietzsche returned to Basel and immediately threw himself into an entirely new literary project, one that would be of unmistakable relevance to the concerns he shared with Wagner. The ironically titled *Untimely Meditations* are the fruits of this reorientation of Nietzsche's efforts. The first contribution to the series, *David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer*, was completed in only a few months in the Spring and Summer 1873. Thanks in part to the timely personal intervention of Wagner with Fritsch, the book was published that August, by which time Nietzsche was already at work on the next contribution to the series.

The original plan was to write and to publish two *Untimely Meditations* per year until the series was complete. Like many authors, Nietzsche was inordinately fond of drawing up plans and outlines, and his notebooks of this period are filled with drafts for the projected series of *Untimely Meditations*. Most, though not all, of these outlines project a total of thirteen separate titles. The following list, from early 1874, is representative:

- Strauss
- History
- Reading and Writing
- The One Year Volunteer
- Wagner

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Secondary Schools and Universities
Christian Disposition
The Absolute Teacher
The Philosopher
People and Culture
Classical Philology
The Scholar
Newspaper Slavery⁷

Other outlines include such additional topics and titles as: 'Literary Musicians (How the Followers of a Genius Cancel His Effects)', 'Military Culture', 'Natural Science', 'Commerce', 'Language', 'The City', 'The Path to Freedom', 'Woman and Child', and 'Those Who Are Frivolous'.⁸

That the first *Untimely Meditation* was devoted to Strauss was, in fact, something of an accident and directly reflects several conversations and letters exchanged between Nietzsche and the Wagners in the immediately preceding months, in which Wagner had expressed to Nietzsche his deepseated personal animus against the aging Strauss (with whom Wagner had previously engaged in several vitriolic public disputes). David Friedrich Strauss was a theologian and philosopher closely identified with the so-called 'Young Hegelian' movement and best known – then and now – for his *The Life of Jesus* (1835/6), a pioneering effort to present a 'demythologized' portrait of Jesus as a historical person and moral teacher. It quickly became a *cause célèbre*, and the resulting controversy destroyed Strauss's academic career. Nietzsche himself had been profoundly affected by the liberal humanism of Strauss's work, which he first read while he was a high school student at Pforta. Indeed, some interpreters believe Strauss's book was an important contributing factor in Nietzsche's own abandonment of Christianity only a year later, during his first year in college (1865). Strauss later abandoned the radical Hegelianism of his youth and championed instead an eclectic and more socially conservative materialist philosophy, though he remained a staunch critic of Christianity. This is the position expounded by Strauss in his work of 1882, to which the title of Nietzsche's first *Meditation* directly alludes, *The Old Faith and the New: A Confession*, a rather innocuous and prolix work of Strauss's final years.

The real subject of the first *Untimely Meditation* is not David

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Strauss at all, but the smug and false complacency of the 'cultivated' German bourgeoisie in the aftermath of Prussia's victory over France in the Franco-Prussian War and the subsequent establishment of the second German *Reich*. Nietzsche's *David Strauss* was meant as a direct rebuke and challenge to the hoard of uncultivated chauvinists who interpreted Prussia's military victory as a clear sign of the superiority of their own popular culture and received ideas. Upon these self-satisfied newspaper readers and consumers of culture Nietzsche bestowed the fitting name *Bildungsphilister* or 'cultivated philistines' (a term he later – albeit mistakenly – claimed to have coined).⁹

The enormous difference between a *genuine* and a merely *popular* culture was a theme very close to Nietzsche's heart during the early Basel period and is explored, for example, in his lectures 'On the Future of Our Educational Institutions'. That he should have selected precisely Strauss as the illustration and embodiment of the kind of 'cultural' philistine he wished to unmask seems to have been little more than a concession to Wagner, without whose urging Nietzsche would certainly never have concerned himself with *The Old Faith and the New*. In fact, Nietzsche soon came to regret the strident and personal tone of his polemic. When Strauss died shortly after its publication, Nietzsche confessed, in a letter of 11 February 1874 to his friend Gersdorff, that 'I very much hope that I did not make his last days more difficult and that he died without knowing anything of me.' (In fact, the aged Strauss was familiar with Nietzsche's book and professed to be puzzled by the motives for such a vitriolic personal attack.)

It is, however, a relatively simple matter to appreciate the first *Meditation* while ignoring Nietzsche's graceless defamation of Strauss and his heavy-handed criticism of Strauss's literary style. What gives the essay enduring value is precisely the way it calls into question the relationship between 'genuine' and 'popular' culture, a question that has, of course, lost none of its urgency over the past century and a quarter. Though Nietzsche's attempt to provide a positive description of genuine culture ('unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people', p. 5) may strike the reader as unduly abstract and in need of further elaboration, what he has to say about the deficiencies of an 'entertainment culture' ruled by public opinion is certainly not without contemporary relevance. Nor is there anything obsolete about his harsh indictment of intellectuals and academics for their

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participation in the debasement of the idea of culture, for their failure to assume any responsibility for the abject state of contemporary culture and society and, above all, for their fundamental hypocrisy.

Though the first *Meditation* is today the most neglected of the four, it was the one that attracted the greatest attention and public comment from Nietzsche's contemporaries. It sold more copies than any of the other *Untimely Meditations*, though it still fell short of the optimistic expectations of both the author and publisher. It also received more than a dozen (generally hostile) reviews.¹⁰ Nietzsche professed to be pleased by the stir and was delighted that his book had, in his words, 'found a public'.

Maintaining the rigorous production schedule he had imposed upon himself, Nietzsche devoted the last half of 1873 to composing the second *Untimely Meditation*, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, which was published in February 1874. Though he had already published two books, it is significant that this was the first that was not written under the direct influence of Wagner (who greeted its publication without enthusiasm and described it as 'very abstract' and 'somewhat arbitrary'¹¹). This might suggest that it more accurately reflects Nietzsche's own concerns during this period, though once again he employs other authors as foils for his own systematic discussion of 'the uses and disadvantages of history for life': one positive foil, the Austrian dramatist Franz Grillparzer, and a negative one, the German philosopher Eduard von Hartmann.

Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869), an uneasy blend of Schopenhauerian and Hegelian elements, was a work that Nietzsche had studied closely and that influenced his views concerning the origin of language. In the second *Meditation*, however, Nietzsche is primarily concerned only with Hartmann's complacent 'historicism', which, on Nietzsche's reading at least, is simply a means for deifying success and idolizing whatever happens to be the case: a philosophy of history ideally suited for the cultural philistines portrayed in the first *Meditation*.

What Nietzsche seems to have admired about Grillparzer, whose *Political and Aesthetic Writings* (1871) he was reading at the same time he was composing the second *Meditation*, is his direct and eloquent appeal to 'correct' (immediate) *feeling* as the highest criterion of moral and aesthetic judgment, as well as his

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conception of the 'plastic' or creative power of human beings and societies to overcome and to transform themselves. As in his earlier use of Strauss as a rhetorical means for introducing his own thoughts on the differences between genuine and spurious culture, however, Nietzsche's highly original discussion of the relationship between history (and the study of history) and human life is not really dependent upon his choice of this particular pair of contemporary thinkers to illustrate certain points in his discussion.

Though the second *Untimely Meditation* is sometimes read as a blanket rejection of 'historicism', this is far from the truth. What Nietzsche rejects in neo-Hegelian philosophies of history (such as Hartmann's) is not the basic thesis that every aspect and expression of human life is unavoidably conditioned by history, but rather, the progressive or whiggish consequences that are typically – albeit, in Nietzsche's view, quite illicitly – drawn from this thesis. It is not historicism *per se* to which he objects in this *Meditation*, but rather the unexamined teleology that usually accompanies it.

'History', of course, can mean either the past itself or the study or knowledge of the past, and the second Meditation is concerned with the 'use and disadvantages for life' of history in both senses of the term, though, admittedly, Nietzsche does not always bother to make this distinction clear to his readers. Despite the fact that the attention of commentators has generally been focused upon his discussion of various approaches to the *study* of the past (and, more narrowly, upon his influential distinction between 'monumental', 'antiquarian' and 'critical' approaches to 'history'), a perhaps more important feature of the second *Meditation* is precisely the way in which its author seeks simultaneously to concede the inescapable historicity of human existence and to affirm the creative capacity of human beings to overcome themselves and their past. One of the things that Nietzsche attempts to do in this brief text is thus to begin constructing a new account of our relationship to time in general and to the past in particular – a project that, by the time of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–5), will come to occupy the very centre of his attention. In the language of *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, the project is to show how human life requires us to adopt *both* a 'historical' and an 'ahistorical' perspective upon ourselves.

This recognition of our complex relationship to history and to time clearly has direct and important implications for Nietzsche's

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conception of the self; and one of central questions explored by the *Untimely Meditations* as a whole is: What constitutes one's 'true self'? This question, which is merely touched upon in the second essay, where it is discussed in conjunction with Nietzsche's rejection of the claim that the 'true self' is something purely 'inward' and private, is explored in much greater detail in the third.

Despite the fact that *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* has attracted more attention from twentieth-century commentators than the other three *Meditations* combined, it was the least successful with Nietzsche's contemporaries, receiving only one review and selling fewer copies than the others.¹² By Fall 1874, at a time when Nietzsche was negotiating with a new publisher, Ernst Schmeitzner (and thus trying to put the best possible public face on his literary prospects), his private letters reveal how deeply disappointed and depressed he was by the public reception of the first two *Untimely Meditations*. Reflecting upon his literary prospects, in a letter to Rohde of 15 November 1874, he can only quip, 'What a future!'

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Schopenhauer as Educator was written during summer 1874 and published (by his new publisher, Schmeitzner) on Nietzsche's 30th birthday, 15 October. Many of the notes incorporated into this third *Untimely Meditation* were originally written during the preceding summer and fall and were intended for use in two separate *Meditations*, one to be devoted to 'the philosopher', and the other to 'the scholar'. Traces of this dual origin can still be discerned in the published text of *Schopenhauer*, which devotes as much space to a polemic against mere 'scholars' or 'academic philosophers' as it does to characterizing the 'genuine philosopher'.

As virtually everyone who has written on the third *Meditation* has observed, what is conspicuous by its absence in *Schopenhauer as Educator* is any serious discussion of Schopenhauer's actual philosophy. Though there are numerous citations from him, almost all of these are from the 'popular' writings contained in his collected *Parerga und Paralipomena* (1857) or in his posthumously published papers. There is, however, an excellent reason for Nietzsche's relative silence concerning Schopenhauer's principal work, *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), and for his complete disregard of Schopenhauer's most characteristic philosophical doctrines. The simple truth is, as Nietzsche revealed in his 1886 preface to volume 2 of the second edition of *Human, All Too*

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Human, that by the time he wrote *Schopenhauer* he himself 'no longer believed in Schopenhauer'. And there is plenty of documentary evidence from Nietzsche's own correspondence and unpublished papers, as well as from the testimony of friends such as Paul Deussen, to show that he began to have serious reservations about the most central doctrines of Schopenhauer's philosophy only a few short years after his dramatic 'conversion' to Schopenhauerianism as a student in Leipzig during Fall 1865.¹³ By 1871 at the latest, he had privately rejected not only Schopenhauer's 'world-negating' pessimism, but also his fundamental dualism of 'appearance' ('representations') and 'reality' (the 'will' qua 'thing in itself'). Even if one remains suspicious of Nietzsche's later claim that 'I distrusted Schopenhauer's system from the start',¹⁴ there still can be no doubt that by the time he wrote the third *Meditation* he had long since jettisoned any allegiance he may once have had to the two most distinctive features of Schopenhauer's philosophical system.

Why then does Nietzsche, writing in 1874, still consider Schopenhauer to be the very exemplar of a philosophical educator? The answer to this question lies in the radically new conceptions of both 'education' and 'philosophy' that are propounded in this text – though neither will seem all that new to readers acquainted with Nietzsche's unpublished notes from the immediately preceding years, for much of the content of *Schopenhauer* is directly anticipated in 'The Philosopher as Cultural Physician' and other posthumously published notes and manuscripts originally intended for use in the 'philosophers' book' project.

As described in the third *Meditation*, the philosophers' task is 'to be lawgivers as to the measure, stamp and weight of things' (p. 144) and to provide their contemporaries with a new 'picture of life' (p. 141); and it is precisely by establishing these new values and by erecting this 'new image of man' (p. 150) that a philosopher 'educates' others. He does not, however, accomplish these things primarily by what he writes in his books or by the doctrines he propounds in his system, but rather by *the example of his own life*. This is precisely how Nietzsche had interpreted the task and accomplishment of the pre-Platonic philosophers in 'Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks', and it is also how he interprets Schopenhauer's accomplishment as a philosophical educator in this essay. Nietzsche thus feels free to ignore Schopenhauer's philosophical doctrines in a book entitled *Schopenhauer as Educator*

because he contends that the real achievement of any philosopher – Schopenhauer included – lies precisely in the *example* he provides to others of ‘the courageous visibility of the philosophical life’ (p. 137).

To be ‘educated’ by a philosopher, therefore, has nothing to do with subscribing to his favourite theories or philosophical doctrines: one is educated by Schopenhauer if one’s own manner of living has been decisively affected by his ‘example’. The word ‘example’ is here placed within quotation marks for the simple reason that the ‘example’ provided to Nietzsche by Schopenhauer was not really that of his actual life, though Nietzsche certainly did admire him for his rejection of all academic and institutional ties in favour of a more independent mode of living. Though a few anecdotes are sprinkled throughout the third *Meditation*, Nietzsche is clearly not interested in relating Schopenhauer’s biography. What he holds up to his readers instead is something altogether different, a mere ‘image’ of human life: not an idealized version of the actual person, Arthur Schopenhauer; still less, an ideal embodiment of the world-denying philosophy expounded in *The World as Will and Representation*; but rather, ‘the Schopenhauerian image of man’ (pp. 152–5).

What directly inspired – and thus educated – the young Nietzsche was a certain notion of human possibility, an image of a particular way of living and of a particular kind of person, an image that he apparently constructed for himself as he continued to read and to reflect upon Schopenhauer throughout the late 1860s and early 1870s. Nietzsche’s image of the ‘Schopenhauerian man’, whom he describes as ‘voluntarily taking upon himself the suffering involved in being truthful’ (p. 152) and as a ‘destroying genius’,¹⁵ resembles neither Arthur Schopenhauer himself nor Schopenhauer’s ideal of the world-denying ‘saint’, but is instead a product of Nietzsche’s own philosophical imagination. He associated this image with Schopenhauer primarily out of simple gratitude for the fact that he had arrived at this ‘image of human life’ through years of sustained, critical reflection upon Schopenhauer’s arguments and assumptions – as well, no doubt, as through reflection upon the well-documented contradiction between Schopenhauer’s life and his philosophy.¹⁶

That Nietzsche drew from his personal encounter with Schopenhauer’s philosophy conclusions radically at odds with those drawn by Schopenhauer himself does not imply that there is

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anything disingenuous about his description, in 1874, of Schopenhauer as his most important 'educator'. On the contrary, he was grateful for precisely this reason, as is apparent from the following note, written four years later: 'The Schopenhauerian man drove me to skepticism against everything I had previously defended and held worthy of high esteem – including the Greeks, Schopenhauer, and Wagner – against the genius, the saint – the pessimism of knowledge. By means of this *detour* I arrived at the *heights* with the fresh wind'.¹⁷ The thesis of the third *Meditation* is that true education involves the *liberation* of the self from everything foreign to it, including those elements of oneself that one judges to be incompatible with one's true (future) self. Schopenhauer 'educated' Nietzsche by provoking and inspiring him to 'become himself', even if this should involve – as it certainly did – a decisive rejection of Schopenhauer's philosophy.

Schopenhauer as Educator remains one of Nietzsche's most personal and stimulating books, valuable not merely as an essential document for understanding his own spiritual development, but also as an early and eloquent exploration of some of his most characteristic themes and ideas. Particularly noteworthy is the discussion, which begins on the very first page, of the deeply problematic conception of the 'true self'. Here one finds Nietzsche already striving to defend a novel conception of genuine selfhood as a never-to-be-completed process of self-development and self-overcoming, a philosophical project that recognizes the elements of truth contained in both essentialist and existentialist theories of the self, while committing itself fully to neither. The 'true' self, according to the author of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, is neither an externally given and unchangeable 'essence' (such as Schopenhauer's 'intelligible character') nor an arbitrary and freely-willed 'construct'. My true self is something I have to 'become', but it is also what I already 'am'. The implications of this new conception of the self are by no means fully apparent in the third *Meditation*, nor are the difficulties it raises fully explored. For this, one will have to wait another decade or more. But the basic idea of the 'Nietzschean self' – as well as the fundamental problems raised by such an idea – is already present in *Schopenhauer as Educator*.

The substantial riches of the third *Untimely Meditation* were largely lost on Nietzsche's contemporaries and have been only rarely recognized by subsequent generations of readers and interpreters. Despite the vigorous promotional efforts of Nietzsche's new

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publisher, the third *Meditation* sold almost as few copies as the second and received only a few uncomprehending reviews.¹⁸

Even before the publication of the third essay, Nietzsche was already at work on the next instalment. Over the course of the following year (1875), however, he seems to have gradually lost interest in and enthusiasm for the entire project. This surely had something to do with the poor sales of the first three *Meditations* and with their apparent failure to achieve what Nietzsche himself described as their primary goal: namely, to attract the kind of readers and followers who might be interested in the further development of his ideas.

As the many notes accumulated by Nietzsche for the project indicate, the fourth *Meditation* was originally intended to be an explicit coming to terms on his part with an issue that he had at least touched upon in all of the first three: the origin, status and value of 'disinterested scholarship', particularly as embodied in his own discipline of classical philology. The working title for the new book was, accordingly, 'We Philologists'. Some time during summer 1875, however, Nietzsche abandoned further work on this nearly completed project and began instead to make notes for a completely different topic, with the title *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*.

The period 1874–5 was a particularly difficult one for everyone concerned with the Bayreuth project, which was beset by such serious financial and technical difficulties that Wagner himself considered abandoning it. It was also during this time that the first overt signs of tension began to appear between Wagner and Nietzsche, whose private notebooks begin to contain unflattering and critical remarks about Wagner. Outwardly, however, Nietzsche was still very much the faithful Wagnerian, having dutifully travelled to Bayreuth for the ceremonial laying of the corner-stone of the festival theatre in May 1872 (an event rather lugubriously described in the opening passage of *Wagner in Bayreuth*) and also having – at no small personal expense – become an official 'patron' of the festival.¹⁹ He was also still prepared to spring to Wagner's public defence and to subordinate his own projects to the requirements of 'the movement' – as he did, for example, when he agreed, in October 1873, to write an 'Exhortation to the Germans' to raise funds for the Bayreuth project, a document that was subsequently (and prudently) rejected by the officers of the Wagnerian Society as poorly suited for its intended purpose.

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A new coolness nevertheless seems detectable in Nietzsche's relationship with the Wagners, beginning perhaps during his visit to Bayreuth in August 1874, when he and Wagner quarrelled openly over Nietzsche's admiration for Wagner's great rival, Brahms, and over other musical matters. Nietzsche subsequently turned down repeated invitations from the Wagners to spend the Christmas holidays 1874 with them and to attend the rehearsals scheduled for summer 1875. (Wagner's plan called for a summer of rehearsals a year prior to the actual first performance of the *Ring* cycle.) It was under these circumstances that he began to write *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*. Though he had mentioned a *Meditation* with this title more than a year earlier (in a letter to Gersdorff of 11 February 1874), it is difficult not to see his decision to revive this project as an effort to demonstrate his fealty to the maestro who was irritated by his absence from Bayreuth that summer.

Whatever Nietzsche's actual reasons for beginning this new essay may have been, he soon began to have serious reservations about continuing the series of *Untimely Meditations*, and, in a letter of 7 October 1875, he confided to Rohde that he was abandoning the *Meditation* on Wagner on the grounds that 'it is of value only for me, as a way of orienting myself with respect to the most difficult points of our recent experience'. It was around this same time that a young musician named Heinrich Köselitz, who, at Nietzsche's suggestion, adopted the stage name 'Peter Gast', entered his orbit and began to serve as his assistant; and it is largely due to Gast's intervention that the fourth *Untimely Meditation* was ever published at all. Gast read the unfinished manuscript of *Wagner in Bayreuth* in Spring 1876 and insisted that it should be completed and published. Once again Nietzsche maintained that the piece was too 'personal' for publication, though he agreed to allow Gast to make a fair copy for presentation to Wagner on his birthday (22 May). Eventually, however, he decided instead to add some additional material to this manuscript and, as he had intended, have it published as the fourth *Untimely Meditation*. Printing was completed over the summer, and Nietzsche was able to present Wagner with a copy in August, during the first Bayreuth festival.

Richard Wagner in Bayreuth remains to this day one of Nietzsche's least popular and least read works, and it is not difficult to see why. It wholly lacks the stylistic unity of the other three

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Untimely Meditations, in part, perhaps, because it contains so many (usually unidentified) quotations from and paraphrases of Wagner's overwrought prose. Even for the specialist, it is a difficult and sometimes painful work to read, and one suspects that it must have been an equally difficult and painful book for Nietzsche to write. There is certainly something forced and deeply ambivalent about the overall tone of this essay, and again one suspects that this is an all-too-accurate reflection of the author's own profound ambivalence about his subject.

Just as *Schopenhauer as Educator* was written some years after Nietzsche had ceased to be an adherent of Schopenhauer's philosophy, so was *Wagner in Bayreuth* written at a point in his life when he had already formulated (albeit only privately) the basic elements of the devastating critique of Wagner as a 'histrionic romantic' that he would make public only many years later. Schopenhauer, however, was dead, whereas Wagner was not only very much alive, but was also extremely sensitive to any appearance of criticism or disloyalty on the part of his friends and allies. Hence Nietzsche's dilemma: he *did* admire Wagner and was certainly grateful to him (as to Schopenhauer) for the inspiration of his example and for his assistance in helping Nietzsche 'become himself'; on the other hand, he harboured increasingly serious reservations about Wagner's art and personality, not to mention his even stronger reservations about Bayreuth and the 'Wagnerians'. The problem was how to write a book, intended for the public, in which he could express his admiration without violating his intellectual integrity. Though it cannot be said that Nietzsche succeeded fully in resolving this problem, his strategy seems clear: to use Wagner's own words against Wagner himself. By quoting copiously from his writings, Nietzsche would erect a certain (Wagnerian) *ideal* of art and of culture, an ideal to which he himself once subscribed whole-heartedly and to which he could still subscribe at least in part. It would then be left up to the readers to determine for themselves – assisted, perhaps, by a few discreet suggestions from the author – how far short Wagner's actual achievement was from this ideal.

Despite the difficulties of 'reading' the fourth *Meditation* – or perhaps because of them – *Wagner in Bayreuth* remains a key document for anyone interested in Nietzsche's biography and intellectual development. Its interest, however, is not merely psychobiographical; it too contains its share of stimulating and original

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ideas concerning such topics as the relationship between art and science, the origin of language and (returning to the theme of the first *Meditation*) the origin and task of culture.

The completion of *Wagner in Bayreuth* coincided with yet another crisis in Nietzsche's health, one which forced him to cancel his classes several weeks prior to the end of the summer semester of 1876 and to apply (successfully) for a sabbatical leave for the following academic year. First, however, he had to attend the Bayreuth festival, which he dutifully did. Though he managed to attend the first performances of the *Ring*, the festival proved to be such a torment to him and the sight of the assembled Wagnerians was so repugnant that he soon sought refuge in the nearby village of Klingenberg. Just a few months later he was a thousand miles away, living in Sorrento with Paul Rée and working on an entirely new literary project.

The project in question, to which Nietzsche had given the tentative title 'The Free Spirit', had originally been intended as the next instalment in the series of *Untimely Meditations*. Some time during the year in Italy, however, Nietzsche underwent what he later described in a letter of 19 February 1888 to Georg Brandes as 'a crisis and shedding of the skin' and reconceived the structure and form of his next literary work accordingly. The title too was altered: it now became *Human, All Too Human* – a book as different in tone and in content from *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* as the landscape and climate of Sorrento is from that of Bayreuth, and the first book by Nietzsche to be published with no indication of the author's academic degree and institutional affiliation.²⁰

Coinciding as it did with the first Bayreuth festival, *Wagner in Bayreuth* naturally received a bit more partisan attention from the public and the press than the previous two instalments in the series, though it too fell far short of the publisher's and author's expectations.²¹ In reply to an inquiry from Schmeitzner about the possibility of continuing the series, Nietzsche replied on 2 February 1878, 'shouldn't we consider the *Untimely Meditations* finished?' Seven years later he briefly considered reviving them and adding one to three new 'Untimely Ones'.²² Nothing came of this, however, though a distant echo of it may still be detected in the name that Nietzsche gave to the longest section of one of his last works (*Twilight of the Idols*): 'Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen' or 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Person'.

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