
Joel Westerdale
Nietzsche's Aphoristic Challenge

Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung

Begründet von
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Das Maass ist uns fremd, gestehen wir es uns;
unser Kitzel ist gerade der Kitzel des Unendlichen, Ungemessenen.

Jenseits von Gut und Böse
aus Aphorismus 224

Measure is alien to us, let us admit it;
our thrill is the thrill of the infinite, the unmeasured.

Beyond Good and Evil
from aphorism 224

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List of Abbreviations and Sources

Abbreviations of Nietzsche's Works

References to the *Kritische Studienausgabe* of Nietzsche's works (KSA) will be made according to volume and page (for example, KSA 6:365 means page 365 of volume 6), except in the case of those books composed of texts numbered according to a single continuous sequence (*The Birth of Tragedy*; *Human, All Too Human*; *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*; *The Wanderer and his Shadow*; *Daybreak*; *The Gay Science*; *Beyond Good and Evil*; *The Antichrist*), which are referred to according to section number preceded by an abbreviated title of the work in which they appear. References to the preface and three treatises of *On the Genealogy of Morals* consist of "Preface" or the Roman numeral I, II or III, followed by the section number.

Where no reference to a published English translation is provided, the translation is my own.

A	<i>The Antichrist</i> , PN 565–656.
AC	<i>Der Antichrist</i> (The Antichrist), KSA 6:165–254.
AOM	<i>Assorted Opinions and Maxims</i> . In: <i>Human, All Too Human</i> . Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 215–299.
BAW	<i>Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe. Werke</i> . 5 vols. Edited by Hans Joachim Mette and Karl Schlechta. Munich: Beck, 1933–44.
BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , BWN 179–435.
BT	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> , BWN 1–144.
BT Self-Criticism	Attempt at a Self-Criticism
BWN	<i>Basic Writings of Nietzsche</i> . Edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: The Modern Library, 1992.
CV 1	"Ueber das Pathos der Wahrheit" (On the Pathos of Truth), KSA 1:755–760.
CW	<i>The Case of Wagner</i> , BWN 601–645.
D	<i>Daybreak</i> . Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Edited by Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
D Preface	Daybreak, Preface
DS	David Strauss (= <i>Unfashionable Observations</i> , First Piece).
EH	<i>Ecce homo: How One Becomes What One Is</i> , BWN 671–791.
EH Clever	Why I Am So Clever
EH HH	Human, All Too Human
EH Destiny	Why I Am a Destiny
EH Wise	Why I am So Wise

EH Zarathustra	Thus Spoke Zarathustra
EH	<i>Ecce homo. Wie man wird, was man ist</i> , KSA 6:255–374.
EH klug	Warum ich so klug bin
EH MAM	Menschliches, Allzumenschliches
EH Schicksal	Warum ich ein Schicksal bin
EH weise	Warum ich so weise bin
EH Zarathustra	Also sprach Zarathustra
FW	<i>Die fröhliche Wissenschaft</i> (The Gay Science), KSA 3:343–651.
GD	<i>Götzen-Dämmerung</i> (Twilight of the Idols), KSA 6:55–161.
GD Alten	Was ich den Alten verdanke
GD Sokrates	Das Problem des Sokrates
GD Sprüche	Sprüche und Pfeile
GD Streifzüge	Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen
GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> , BWN 437–599.
GM Preface	On the Genealogy of Morals, Preface
GM	<i>Zur Genealogie der Moral</i> , KSA 5:245–412.
GM Vorrede	Zur Genealogie der Moral. Vorrede
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i> . Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974.
GT	<i>Die Geburt der Tragödie</i> (The Birth of Tragedy), KSA 1:9–156.
GT Versuch	Versuch einer Selbstkritik
HH I	<i>Human, All Too Human (I)</i> . Translated by Gary Handwerk. In: <i>The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche</i> , vol. 3. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
JGB	<i>Jenseits von Gut und Böse</i> (Beyond Good and Evil), KSA 5:9–243.
KGB	<i>Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> . Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1975–.
KGW	<i>Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> . Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1967–.
KSA	<i>Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe</i> . Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. 15 vols. Munich/Berlin/New York: DTV/De Gruyter, 1999.
KSB	<i>Sämtliche Briefe. Kritische Studienausgabe in 8 Bänden</i> . Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. 8 vols. Munich/Berlin/New York: DTV/De Gruyter, 1986.
M	<i>Morgenröte</i> (Daybreak), KSA 3:9–331.
M Vorrede	Morgenröte, Vorrede von 1886
MA I	<i>Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I</i> (Human, All Too Human I), KSA 2:9–366.
NL	Nachlass (writings from Nietzsche's literary estate), KSA vols. 7–14.

PN	<i>The Portable Nietzsche</i> . Edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1982.
PT	“On the Pathos of Truth (1872),” in: <i>Philosophical Writings</i> . Edited by Reinhold Grimm and Caroline Molina y Vedia. New York: Continuum, 1995, 83–87.
RWB	Richard Wagner in Bayreuth (= <i>Unfashionable Observations</i> , Fourth Piece).
SE	Schopenhauer as Educator (= <i>Unfashionable Observations</i> , Third Piece).
TI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i> , PN 463–563.
TI Maxims	Maxims and Arrows
TI Ancients	What I Owe to the Ancients
TI Socrates	The Problem of Socrates
TI Skirmishes	Skirmishes of an Untimely Man
TL	“On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense (1873),” in: <i>Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language</i> . Edited and translated by Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair and David J. Parent. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 246–257.
UB	<i>Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I–IV</i> (<i>Unfashionable Observations I–IV</i>), KSA 1:157–510.
UO	<i>Unfashionable Observations</i> . Translated by Richard T. Gray. In: <i>The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche</i> , vol. 2. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
VM	<i>Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche</i> (<i>Assorted Opinions and Maxims</i>), KSA 2:367–534.
WA	<i>Der Fall Wagner</i> (<i>The Case of Wagner</i>), KSA 6:9–53.
WL	“Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne” (<i>On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense</i>), KSA 1:873–890.
WP	<i>The Will to Power</i> . Edited by Walter Kaufmann. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage, 1968.
WS	<i>The Wanderer and His Shadow</i> , In: <i>Human, All Too Human</i> . Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 301–395.
WS	<i>Der Wanderer und sein Schatten</i> (<i>The Wanderer and His Shadow</i>), KSA 2:534–704.
Z	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> , PN 103–439.
Z I Despisers	On the Despisers of the Body
Z I Reading	On Reading and Writing
Z I Prologue	Zarathustra's Prologue
Z I Women	On Little Old and Young Women
Z II Self-Overcoming	On Self-Overcoming
Z III Gravity	On the Spirit of Gravity

Z III Return	The Return Home
Z III Tablets	On Old and New Tablets
Z	<i>Also sprach Zarathustra</i> (Thus Spoke Zarathustra), KSA 4.
Z I Lesen	Vom Lesen und Schreiben
Z I Vorrede	Zarathustra's Vorrede
Z I Verächtern	Von den Verächtern des Leibes
Z I Weiblein	Von alten und jungen Weiblein
Z II Selbst-Ueberwindung	Von der Selbst-Ueberwindung
Z III Heimkehr	Die Heimkehr
Z III Schwere	Vom Geist der Schwere
Z III Tafeln	Von alten und neuen Tafeln

Abbreviations of Works by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

All quotations from Lichtenberg's *Waste Books* (Sudelbücher) are from Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*. Edited by Wolfgang Promies. 3 vols. Munich: Carl Hanser, 1980. Passages are identified by the abbreviation "Sudel-", followed by a letter and a number indicating notebook and passage respectively, e. g., Sudel-F 1219. Notebooks A through L (except G) appear in Volume I. Passages from Sudel-G and those marked with the subscript _{II} appear in volume II. All English translations are my own.

Timeline of Key Publications Discussed and their Publishers

- 7 May 1878 *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister* (Human, All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits); published by Ernst Schmeitzner, Chemnitz.
- 20 March 1879 *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister. Anhang: Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche* (Human All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits. Supplement: Assorted Opinions and Maxims); Schmeitzner, Chemnitz.
- 18 December 1879 *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten* (The Wanderer and his Shadow); Schmeitzner, Chemnitz.
- Late July 1881 *Morgenröte. Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurtheile* (Daybreak. Thoughts on Moral Prejudices); Schmeitzner, Chemnitz.
- 10 September 1882 *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (The Gay Science, Books I–IV); Schmeitzner, Chemnitz.
- End of August 1883 *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None); Schmeitzner, Chemnitz.
- Late 1883/early 1884 *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen, 2*; Schmeitzner, Chemnitz.
- 10 April 1884 *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen, 3*; Schmeitzner, Chemnitz.
- Early May 1885 *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen. Vierter und letzter Theil* (Fourth and Final Part); printed by C. G. Naumann, Leipzig.
- 4 August 1886 *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft* (Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future); C. G. Naumann, Leipzig.
- 31 October 1886 *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Oder: Griechenthum und Pessimismus. Neue Ausgabe mit dem Versuch einer Selbstkritik* (The Birth of Tragedy. New Edition with the Attempt at a Self-Criticism); printed by E. W. Fritzsche, Leipzig.
- 31 October 1886 *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister. Erster Band. Neue Ausgabe mit einer einführenden Vorrede* (Human, All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits. First Volume. New Edition with an Introductory Preface); Fritzsche, Leipzig.
- 31 October 1886 *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister. Zweiter Band. Neue Ausgabe mit einer einführenden Vorrede* (Human, All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits. Second Volume. New Edition with an Introductory Preface); Fritzsche, Leipzig. NB: volume comprised of VM and WS.

- Late 1886 *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen. In drei Theilen* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None. In Three Parts); Fritzschn, Leipzig.
- 24 June 1887 *Morgenröte. Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurtheile. Neue Ausgabe mit einer einführenden Vorrede* (Daybreak. Thoughts on Moral Prejudices. New Edition with an Introductory Preface); Fritzschn, Leipzig.
- 24 June 1887 *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft. Neue Ausgabe mit einem Anhang: Lieder des Prinzen Vogelfrei* (The Gay Science. New Edition with a Supplement: The Songs of Prince Vogelfrei); Fritzschn, Leipzig. NB: this edition includes Books I–V.
- 16 November 1887 *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift* (On the Genealogy of Morality. A Polemic); C. G. Naumann, Leipzig.¹

¹ For a more comprehensive account of Nietzsche's publication history, see Schaberg, *The Nietzsche Canon*, which serves as the immediate source for this timeline.

Introduction. The Challenge

In 1878 Nietzsche published his first collection of aphorisms, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (Human, All Too Human). Years later he would portray this event as a challenge, claiming that he sent two copies to Richard Wagner at the same moment that Wagner was sending him the libretto for his own most recent project, *Parsifal*. According to Nietzsche's account, when the two texts crossed in the mail he heard an ominous sound: "Did it not sound as if two swords had crossed?" (EH HH 2; BWN 744).¹ Though this event may not have unfolded exactly as Nietzsche so dramatically depicts it in *Ecce homo* (he actually received his copy of *Parsifal* several months before *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* appeared²), nevertheless conceptual swords did cross, and once they had, there would be no reconciliation between the philosopher and his former idol. A new phase of Nietzsche's career had begun. A cold scientific tone replaced the heated rhetoric of his earlier writings, a tone matched with a new scientific approach that contrasted the Wagnerian romanticism of those earlier works.

But *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* presents a challenge to more than Wagner. Its aphoristic structure can be seen as a formal challenge to the dominant mode of *Systemphilosophie*. In presenting his philosophy in aphorisms, Nietzsche refused to subject his own views to the formal constraints imposed by systematic discourse. The aphorism collection, one might say, is a formal manifestation of Nietzsche's later vow in *Götzen-Dämmerung* (Twilight of the Idols, 1888) to "mistrust all systematizers and [...] avoid them" on the grounds that the "will to a system is a lack of integrity" (TI Maxims 26; PN 470).³ The aphoristic volumes deliberately shun the formal conventions of academic writing, forgoing sustained argumentation in favor of an array of isolated texts ranging in length from a single sentence to several pages. Though numbered consecutively and at times loosely organized into thematic sections, the aphorism books of Nietzsche's so-called Middle Period, which include not only *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, but also *Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche* (Assorted Opinions and Maxims, 1879), *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten* (The Wanderer and His Shadow, 1879), *Morgenröte* (Daybreak, 1881), and *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (The Gay Science, 1882), often come across as *disjecta membra* collected together without any necessary order. Erecting no edifice of sober argumentation leading to a unified conclusion, but instead providing a compilation of discrete statements that the reader must interpret and assemble without any assurance of eventual resolution, Nietzsche's aphorism collections openly challenged the formal conventions of the systematic philosophical treatise. "I don't write treatises," he

1 "Diese Kreuzung der zwei Bücher – mir war's, als ob ich einen ominösen Ton dabei hörte. Klang es nicht, als ob sich Degen kreuzten?" (EH MAM 2; KSA 6:327)

2 Nietzsche received Wagner's libretto to *Parsifal* in January; *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* did not appear until May of 1878; see Schaberg, *The Nietzsche Canon*, 58.

3 "Ich misstraue allen Systematikern und gehe ihnen aus dem Weg. Der Wille zum System ist ein Mangel an Rechtschaffenheit" (GD Sprüche 26; KSA 6:63).

would write in a note from 1885; “they’re for jack-asses and magazine-readers.”⁴ Instead, he offered *Aphorismenbücher* – books of aphorisms.

Yet even as *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* presented a challenge to Wagner and to the conventions of philosophical method, its aphoristic form also poses a significant challenge for Nietzsche’s reader. The author later conceded in the preface to *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (On the Genealogy of Morals, 1887) that “the aphoristic form causes difficulty” (die aphoristische Form [macht] Schwierigkeit; GM Preface 8; GM Vorrede 8). With interconnections by and large withheld, contextual orientation is suspended, denying the reader even the pretense of the argumentative coherence and demonstrated development that characterizes more conventional academic and philosophical writing. Such a structure thwarts hermeneutic habit, unleashing a cascade of questions: What kind of text is this? What leads Nietzsche to write this way? How do these discrete statements fit together? How are they to be navigated? Does it matter where we start? What exactly are we supposed to do with such texts? The more one reflects on the form, the more the questions proliferate. Without recourse to the standards and expectations of academic convention, the reader must develop new rules of engagement to approach these works. Nietzsche acknowledged that the aphoristic form causes difficulty, but the difficulty, he contended, derives from the fact “that this form is *not* taken *seriously enough*” (dass man diese Form nicht schwer genug nimmt; GM Preface 8; GM Vorrede 8). The current study aims to remedy this situation, not only by itself taking the form seriously, but by investigating exactly why Nietzsche did, and what it means to do so.

The years since Nietzsche decried this neglect have done little to improve the treatment of the aphorism in Nietzsche scholarship. There are remarkably few book-length studies dedicated primarily to the works of Nietzsche’s Middle Period at all, for scholars tend to read these works in isolated excerpts or simply as forerunners of Nietzsche’s more mature philosophy.⁵ Though there are notable exceptions,⁶ these too invariably manage to circumscribe the issue of the aphoristic form rather than address it directly. There are those who openly disregard the aphorism, seeing it as a notion applicable only to a very narrow selection of Nietzsche’s writings, despite the emphasis he

⁴ “Abhandlungen schreibe ich nicht: die sind für Esel und Zeitschriften-Leser” (NL 37[5], 1885; KSA 11:579).

⁵ Though the subtitle of Strobel, *Das Pathos der Distanz* (namely “Nietzsche’s Decision in Favor of the Aphoristic Style”) suggests that the study would address Nietzsche’s initial turn to the aphorism, it focuses primarily on those works produced after *Also sprach Zarathustra*, particularly *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, devoting only eight pages to a work associated with the Middle Period (and that is the fourth book of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, i.e., a book on the cusp of Nietzsche’s mature philosophy).

⁶ Most recently Franco, *Nietzsche’s Enlightenment*; also Abbey, *Nietzsche’s Middle Period*. A few studies focus on a single work from the period, for example Cohen, *Science, Culture, and Free Spirits*; Higgins, *Comic Relief*. Others have an even narrower focus, for instance Heller, *Von den ersten und letzten Dingen*; and the philosophical complement to Heller’s study, Claesges, *Der maskierte Gedanke*.

placed on the form.⁷ They contend that the term *Aphorismus* applies only to a very restricted subset of Nietzsche's works, and thus the generic designation is proportionally restricted. Such an understanding is inconsistent both with Nietzsche's use of the term and with the tradition of aphoristic writing in which he participates. In order to clear up this common misunderstanding, the current study begins with an examination of the genre of the aphorism itself. Part One, "Nietzsche and the German Aphoristic Tradition," argues for a broader understanding of the genre *Aphorismus*. The genre encompasses a variety of forms, and this formal diversity itself constitutes an integral part of the German aphoristic tradition's critical stance vis-à-vis systematic discourse. Not all of Nietzsche's aphorisms enjoy the pithy concision of the well-turned *Sentenz* (maxim), but their formal multifariousness and their excess of forms constitute a crucial moment of critique that aligns his aphorism collections felicitously with the larger tradition of aphoristic writing in German letters.

Part Two, "The Turn to the Aphorism," illuminates Nietzsche's initial conversion to aphoristic writing in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*. As a form often situated at the crossroads of literature and philosophy, the aphorism seems particularly suitable for a writer whose works straddle these two disciplines. But Nietzsche's turn to the form coincides with his burgeoning interest in the methods of the natural sciences. This too is in keeping with the German aphoristic tradition, though the form's more prominent association with literature and philosophy has long overshadowed this aspect. The German aphorism's origin in the natural sciences, I argue, is crucial for Nietzsche's turn to aphoristic writing in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*. Yet Nietzsche bends the form to suit his own purposes, and as his philosophy develops, the aphorism collection becomes a formal correlate to the Death of God, confronting his reader not only with the freedoms enabled by his developing philosophy, but also with the danger of chaos and nihilism that is its potential legacy.

Augmenting both the freedom and the danger of the aphorism collection is the fact that the author himself is not univocal in his account of the form or in the approaches he prescribes. Some readers gloss over the formal challenge by simply assuming there to be a coherence behind the aphoristic works, regardless of how the structure of the works may resist such a reading.⁸ Even Franco's exemplary study devotes very little space to justifying such a methodology, citing Nietzsche's appeal in the preface to *Morgenröte* that one read him slowly and deliberately, "looking fore and aft" (rück- und vorsichtig)⁹; Franco reads this as an invitation to seek out a coherent philosophy from behind the disjointed texts of the *Freigeist*-trilogy.¹⁰ Franco is

⁷ This position also emerges in one of the more recent studies dedicated specifically to the aphorism in Nietzsche's writing: Marsden, *Nietzsche and the Art of the Aphorism*.

⁸ Kaufmann promoted such an approach; Franco is its most recent and perhaps most compelling advocate.

⁹ D Preface 5; M Vorrede 5; KSA 3:17.

¹⁰ NB: *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* alone actually consists of three books, including *Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche* (Assorted Opinions and Maxims, 1879) and *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*

not alone in this assumption.¹¹ But to assume such coherence is to assume a lot. Even if one agrees with Franco's take on the preface to *Morgenröte*, one must not forget that this preface was prefixed to the collection in 1887, that is, several years after the volume's initial publication in 1881. And the intervening years were pivotal for Nietzsche's development. Though Nietzsche's perhaps most notorious declaration – that God is dead – first appeared in the original edition of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (GS 108; FW 108), the aphorism collections of the *Freigeist*-trilogy largely lack the key concepts that underlie Nietzsche's mature philosophy: particularly the will to power and the eternal recurrence of the same.¹² Only with the publication of *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 1883–1885) did these terms emerge as gravitational centers of Nietzsche's writings. The aphorism collections, lacking clear argumentative structure, are particularly susceptible to such gravitational shifts.

While scholars have frequently noted the lack of apparent order in the aphorism books,¹³ there are those who recognize a change after *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Eva Strobel, for instance, notes that the aphorism collections published after *Zarathustra*, namely Book V of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* and *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (Beyond Good and Evil), are more coherent and refined.¹⁴ Likewise Werner Stegmaier's comprehensive study of Book V of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* argues that while there may be little structure to Books I–IV,¹⁵ in Book V Nietzsche allows himself no digressions or trivialities; here his art of the aphorism achieves full maturity.¹⁶ This is also the time when Nietzsche would provide his most lucid and sustained discussions of aphoristic writing. After the publication of *Also sprach Zarathustra* Nietzsche developed guidelines for reading the *Freigeist*-trilogy that reflected the emerging coalescence of his thought, returning to his earlier aphoristic works and supplementing

(The Wanderer and his Shadow, 1880), but because Nietzsche describes these latter two as supplements to *Menschliches* (and indeed, Nietzsche would later combine them under the title, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II*), Franco treats them as a single work.

11 Peter Heller, for instance, sets out to demonstrate the unity of Nietzsche's works, even if it is “the unity of dynamic antithesis” (Heller, *Von den ersten und letzten Dingen*, xi–xii); despite Heller's insistence on unity, his formulation nevertheless smacks of what Werner Stegmaier has recently criticized as the “dogma of ambivalence and contradictoriness” pervasive in Nietzsche scholarship; see Stegmaier, *Nietzsches Befreiung der Philosophie*, 77. Stegmaier himself operates on the hermeneutic principle that contradictions are not in Nietzsche's text, but result from interpretation, and the interpreter should seek to neutralize such contradictions along with ambivalences (Stegmaier, *Nietzsches Befreiung der Philosophie*, 86). Like Franco, Stegmaier gives Nietzsche the benefit of the doubt with regard to the coherence of his at times formally disjointed philosophy.

12 The eternal recurrence of the same does make a brief appearance in the penultimate passage of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*'s first edition (GS 341; FW 341), but the volume does not develop the concept explicitly.

13 Most famously by Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher; but even Richard Schacht has described Nietzsche's works as an “assemblage of ... rather loosely connected notes” (Schacht, Nietzsche, xi).

14 Strobel, *Das Pathos der Distanz*, 163.

15 Stegmaier, *Nietzsches Befreiung der Philosophie*, 85, fn. 148.

16 Stegmaier, *Nietzsches Befreiung der Philosophie*, 61.

them with prefaces. This includes the preface to *Daybreak*, which plays an important role in the approaches of both Franco and Stegmaier. In discussing his works as a whole, the prefaces hint at the unexpressed coherence of the respective aphorism collections. This impression is further reinforced by the “model” of interpretation Nietzsche claims to provide in 1887’s *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, in the preface of which he claims:

An aphorism, properly stamped and molded, has not been “deciphered” when it has simply been read; rather, one has then to begin its *exegesis*, for which is required an art of exegesis. I have offered in the third treatise of the present book a model of what I regard as “exegesis” in such a case – an aphorism is prefixed to this treatise, the treatise itself is a commentary on it. (GM Preface 8)¹⁷

That model attests to the underlying unity and coherence of all Nietzsche’s works. Part Three of the current study, “Re-Reading the Aphorism,” examines this model and argues that while the approach suggested by these guidelines may reflect the position of the mature, post-*Zarathustra* Nietzsche, they do not necessarily align with the writing strategy motivating the earlier aphorism collections themselves. As Nietzsche puts it elsewhere in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*: “The cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart” (GM II 12).¹⁸ In Nietzsche’s case, part of the challenge is to distinguish what initially led him to aphoristic writing in his Middle Period from the role he assigned to it in his mature philosophy.

The fourth and final part of this study, “The Aphoristic Paradigm,” seeks to account for Nietzsche’s sustained interest in the form despite substantial developments in his philosophy. It locates this unifying thread in the dynamic of excess – of transgression through superabundance – which characterizes Nietzsche’s writings throughout his career. Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, the aphorism constitutes a formal manifestation of the Dionysian excess Nietzsche thematizes in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (The Birth of Tragedy). The structure of Dionysian excess provides a framework for understanding the operations of the aphorism, which revels in the transgression of the tight bounds drawn around it. In the act of reading, we are constantly tempted to establish the boundaries of a text, to limit potential meanings in order to discern the text’s meaning. We try to neutralize semantic multivalences by

¹⁷ “die aphoristische Form [macht] Schwierigkeit: sie liegt darin, dass man diese Form heute nicht schwer genug nimmt. Ein Aphorismus, rechtschaffen geprägt und ausgegossen, ist damit, dass er abgelesen ist, noch nicht ‘entziffert’; vielmehr hat nun erst dessen Auslegung zu beginnen, zu der es einer Kunst der Auslegung bedarf. Ich habe in der dritten Abhandlung dieses Buchs ein Muster von dem dargeboten, was ich in einem solchen Falle ‘Auslegung’ nenne: – dieser Abhandlung ist ein Aphorismus vorangestellt, sie selbst ist dessen Commentar” (GM Vorrede 8; KSA 5:255–256).

¹⁸ “die Ursache der Entstehung eines Dings und dessen schliessliche Nützlichkeit, dessen tatsächliche Verwendung und Einordnung in ein System von Zwecken [liegen] toto coelo auseinander” (GM II 12; KSA 5:313).

making them explicit, or to restrict a text's freedom through categorization in terms of genre, style, theme, or authorship. Nietzsche's writing willfully resists such attempts, and the guises that this resistance repeatedly assumes can be unified under what this study calls "excess." Through the concept of excess we can begin to understand the motivations behind his sustained interest in the aphorism, situating his aphoristic writings within his greater oeuvre and determining the relationship that this form encourages between Nietzsche's work and his reader.

Nietzsche's choice of the aphorism as the object for his model of an "art of exegesis" is particularly apt, for the aphorism has long been situated at the intersection of systematic and non-systematic discourse. Anglo-American Nietzsche scholarship tends to bifurcate along precisely this fault line. On the one extreme are those who insist on the systematic coherence of Nietzsche's philosophy.¹⁹ On the other end of the scholarly spectrum are those "postmodern" readings that render Nietzsche's writings somehow "beyond interpretation, by failing to have a determinate structure, form, or meaning."²⁰ Though there may indeed be many "beyonds" in Nietzsche's writing, moving "beyond interpretation" is not one of them. This notion is problematic not because the description of Nietzsche's writing as irreducible to a particular meaning is necessarily false, but rather because it relies upon a false appositive: to lack determinate meaning is not the same as being beyond interpretation. Reciprocally, just because a text can be subjected to interpretation does not imply that its definite meaning can therefore be determined. This false appositive gives rise to a false opposition that pits interpretation and meaning against one another, as though the former provided liberation and the latter chains, or from another perspective, the former chaos and the latter stability.

Werner Stegmaier's strategy of "contextual interpretation" offers a compelling alternative to these extreme positions. His method begins by reading the individual aphorism in isolation, then broadens the scope gradually to consider the aphorism's place within the context of the published collection in which it appears, and finally reads the text in light of Nietzsche's oeuvre as a whole.²¹ Stegmaier's most comprehensive illustration of this strategy, *Nietzsches Befreiung der Philosophie* (2012), follows in the footsteps of Peter Heller's 1972 study of the first section of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* both in the general contours of its method and in its focus on a single contig-

19 Brian Leiter's portrayal of Nietzsche as a "speculative methodical naturalist" provides one of the strongest presentations of this approach; as the designation implies, Leiter sees Nietzsche as a philosopher whose methods are continuous with those of the natural sciences, including a degree of rigor that precludes contradiction (Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*). See also, e.g., Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*; Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*; Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, and Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*.

20 Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 20; see, e.g., Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*; Jacques Derrida, *Spurs/Éperons*; Oliver, *A Dagger through the Heart*.

21 See Stegmaier, *After Montinari*, particularly 14–15. For similar strategies, see Heller, *Von den ersten und letzten Dingen*, and van Tongeren, *Reinterpreting Modern Culture*.

uous group of aphorisms from one of the aphorism books – in Stegmaier’s case, Book V of the *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. What emerges from this monumental study is an understanding of Nietzsche’s aphoristic writings as unified, but not systematic. By revealing how the aphorisms form thematic clusters that appear to eventually move on to a new topic only to circle back again, Stegmaier demonstrates compellingly how the forty-one texts that make up this 1887 addendum to *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* weave together into networks of themes (“Geflechte von Themenketten”²²) rather than a static systematic philosophy.²³ Such “contextual interpretation” is ambitious, fostering rigorous interpretive activity (Stegmaier’s study encompasses over 750 pages, drawing on his intimate familiarity with Nietzsche’s entire oeuvre as well as an expansive awareness of Nietzsche scholarship), but it is also modest, for it lays no claim to any kind of finality. Even after assembling such a study, Stegmaier freely acknowledges that one is never finished reading an aphorism, for interpretation is an endless process; one can read as meticulously as possible, only to realize upon further rumination, that one has still read far too imprecisely.²⁴ Such modesty stands at odds with a systematic reading in search of the kind of clarity of interpretation that yields determinate principles, totality, finality, and universal validity.

As a generic tradition, the aphorism invites the reader to consider the relationship between the text and the formulation of meaning, foregrounding the role of the reader in this process. The aphorism formally manifests this tension between the systematic and anti-systematic impulses to be found not only in Nietzsche scholarship, but in Nietzsche’s writings themselves. Through the aphorism, this tension is written into the form of the philosophy itself. For those willing to take Nietzsche’s aphorisms seriously, the study of the genre itself has distinct advantages, for in denying the reader the comfort of conventional development, his aphorism-books induce the reader to reflect upon the situation of reading and the interpretive options available to one searching for coherent understanding. Approaches to reading expose themselves as no longer self-evident. For J. Hillis Miller, Nietzsche’s turn to aphoristic writing demands consideration of the form and prompts an array of questions: “What is an aphorism? Why does Nietzsche use aphorisms? Through what mask are they spoken? Where do they get their authority? Where do they come from? What force do they have? What do they do to their readers?”²⁵ Though each of these questions is compelling, most telling is the fact that Miller begins this interrogation with the question of kind: “What is an aphorism?” In other words: What kind of text is it? What is its generic identity? What rules of engagement does this kind of text demand? To begin with this question of kind makes perfect sense, for the notion of genre carries with it all the subsequent considerations. The undetermined nature of the form, that is, the unfamiliarity of its structure, its objectives, per-

22 Stegmaier, *Nietzsches Befreiung der Philosophie*, 11.

23 Stegmaier, *Nietzsches Befreiung der Philosophie*, 86.

24 Stegmaier, *Nietzsches Befreiung der Philosophie*, 87–88.

25 Miller, *Aphorism as Instrument of Political Action in Nietzsche*, 72.

spectives, and effects, leaves the reader wondering just how to process and evaluate such works. Precisely these are the parameters that notions of genre conventionally establish before reading begins, as they help us determine the contours of the textual landscape and chart the horizon of reader expectations.

The generic analysis presented here addresses these kinds of questions. It assays the impulse to aphoristic writing as derived both from without – from the aphoristic tradition in which Nietzsche participates – and from within – from Nietzsche’s own philosophical priorities and writing practices. It considers the interplay of form and content that marks Nietzsche’s aphoristic writing and that emerges from his statements on such writing. It examines what exactly the aphorism is, the function it serves in his works both as a mode of writing and as an object of interpretation, what normative reading practices can be determined through an understanding of the genre, and what these norms convey about Nietzsche’s development as a philosopher. The current study answers the challenge posed by Nietzsche’s aphoristic writing by looking at the genre itself and by demonstrating how his use of and proclamations about the form position his reader and reflect key aspects of his early, middle, and mature philosophies. Given sufficient attention and scrutiny, the generic designation “aphorism” offers a tool for negotiating the formal and thematic disarray of Nietzsche’s works. In short, this study answers Nietzsche’s challenge by, as he says, taking the form itself seriously.

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