

Chapter 11

Conclusion

Not every end is the goal. The end of a melody is not its goal; and yet: if a melody has not reached its end, it has not reached its goal. A parable.¹

Nietzsche's prominent position in modern society creates significant difficulties for any attempt at an objective evaluation of his music. Because his contributions to contemporary thought overshadow all else he created it becomes difficult to interpret his music in isolation. Upon beginning an evaluation of Nietzsche's music, critics may appreciate certain aspects of his music, but inevitably his enormous literary and philosophical impact is mentioned. After recognizing the huge scope of these latter accomplishments, his music cannot help but fade in the harsh light of comparison. The inevitable failure of regarding Nietzsche's music objectively does not, however, leave the critic without alternatives. Objectivity's failure sends the seeker of truth into the arms of subjectivity, and consequently into the post-modern world Nietzsche himself helped invent. If Nietzsche advises humanity to abandon objectivity and dialectics—those Socratic inventions by which humanity's "noble tastes is thus vanquished"²—should not a conscientious investigator of Nietzsche's music follow the same advice? In the previous chapters there are numerous examples of Nietzsche expressing himself both musically and philosophically while internalizing new ideas. Especially in his early years, any alteration or refinement of his outlook was reflected in music *and* text.

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, transl. R.J. Hollingdale. with *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* and *Human, All-too-human* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986); 204.

² TI, 475: The Problem of Socrates, 5.

As for the validity of addressing Nietzsche as a whole instead of examining his output on a discipline by discipline basis, the fragmentary appearance of his works in general—both philosophical and musical—seems to call out for a wider interpretation. In particular, the paradoxes and contradictions in his philosophical writings are mirrored in the correspondingly contradictory interpretations of his interlocutors; interpretations that variously label Nietzsche a Nazi, a humanist, a philologist, an anthropologist, a psychologist, or even a poet. Much of this divergence of opinion concerning Nietzsche's philosophy could, however, be avoided if only adequate attention was paid his musical works. Ironically, examinations of his musical works suffer from a similar fate. In comparison to the music of his friend, Richard Wagner, or his musical hero, Beethoven, Nietzsche's compositions appear awkward and eccentric. Yet when taken as part of a larger project—a project that transcends philosophy *and* music—Nietzsche's music assumes a new significance.

Nietzsche's fundamental project must be seen as encompassing more than just his prose, poetry and music. Nietzsche sought out the purpose and meaning of life in a world stripped of a metaphysical baseline. When God is dead and *a priori* truths perish with Him, how must one live and why? Having undermined his own authority along with everyone else's, Nietzsche could not undertake a traditional philosophical investigation in to life's meaning and purpose. Deprived of one method, he utilized his keen observational and expressive skills to invent another, choosing to exemplify, rather than demonstrate. After deconstructing modernity's faulty paradigm, he narrates his own

wanderings through the resulting void.³ In a certain sense, his wanderings consist of thought experiments undertaken in this newly created world—free of outside references and host to an entirely different set of human possibilities. Because perspective is impossible without inherited fixed reference points, his writings therefore take on a fragmentary appearance. It is precisely this illusory fragmentation that has led to the wide divergence of interpretation amongst Nietzsche scholars. Therefore, in a striking reversal of literary method, it is the process that contributes the continuity to Nietzsche's works, not the material. As Walter Kaufmann pointed out, Nietzsche's experiments are unified by his "intellectual integrity." Each investigation is "...a possible corrective for any inadvertent previous mistakes. No break, discontinuity, or inconsistency occurs."⁴ Furthermore, the ultimate subject of his experiments is Friedrich Nietzsche himself. At this point a hermeneutic paradox occurs in which the absurdity of one entity simultaneously existing as observer and observed threatens to destroy the entire project. In this light, it becomes apparent that the Nietzsche-persona expressed through his works must be an experiment as well. The literary "Nietzsche" is an invention perpetrated by the historical Nietzsche, and as such is the philosopher-Nietzsche's archetype of the new world's ideal inhabitant.

A recurring theme in Nietzsche's literary works is that this ideal inhabitant justifies his existence aesthetically. It is through his *style* that he distinguishes himself from his fellow wanderers.

Giving style to one's character—a great and rare art! It is exercised by those who see all the strengths and weaknesses of their own natures and then comprehend

³ The title of his book, *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, further reinforces this metaphor.

⁴ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974); 91.

them in an artistic plan until everything appears as art and reason and even weakness delights the eye.”⁵

With this in mind, an integral component of Nietzsche’s fundamental project is to create a style for his literary persona. Through studying and integrating all of Nietzsche’s works—philosophical and musical—one internalizes the persona in a way as much emotional and intuitive as it is intellectual. Once the style is understood, one is able to go beyond the texts and extrapolate how “Nietzsche” would behave in any given situation. Of pertinence to the idea of an organic, process-centered approach is the following excerpt from *Genealogy of Morals*.

We have no right to *isolated* acts of any kind: we may not make isolated errors or hit upon isolated truths. Rather do our ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit—related and each with an affinity to each, and evidence of *one* will, *one* health, *one* soil, *one* sun.⁶

Considering the grand scope of Nietzsche’s fundamental project, his music necessarily takes on added importance. Music, as the most abstract of art forms, owes the greatest debt to style. After considering Nietzsche’s condemnation of programmatic music (see the discussion of “On Words and Music” in Chapter 8), the importance of stylistic elements increases within his preferred realm of absolute music. If a proper understanding of Nietzsche’s project requires a proper understanding of his unique style, or even more to the point, if Nietzsche’s fundamental project *is* his style, then it is in his music that we find the purest form. From this perspective his music’s wide diversity is less indicative of musical discontinuity than it is of an intentionally wide application of his own musical style. His oratorios, lieder and symphonic poems are analogous to his

⁵ GS, 232: IV, 290.

⁶ GM, 16: Pref., 2

literary aphorisms, polemics, novels and poetry in that their variety better illustrates Nietzsche's project by exhibiting it in multiple contexts. Therefore, not only is his music an important resource for understanding his written works, but familiarity with his written works becomes an integral part in understanding and appreciating his music. Understanding this relationship sheds light on perhaps the most important relic Nietzsche left for posterity: his perspective.

Postulating the necessity of having read Nietzsche (his literary works) before one can properly hear Nietzsche (his musical works) inevitably stirs up controversy. Must not music be self-contained? If some music needs external validation, does that not make it inferior to self-subsisting musical works? These questions stem from the fallacy that music must either be proven great or relegated to oblivion. While no one—not even Nietzsche at his most megalomaniacal—would describe his music as “great,” it hardly follows that his music is not worth study and performance. While the music of J.S. Bach is undeniably great, even within the vacuum of hypothetically complete objectivity, Nietzsche's does not fare so well when removed from his personal halo of historical significance. In fact, Nietzsche's music would not likely have survived if it had not been for his philosophical fame. Yet it has survived, largely because of the pseudo-mystical quality modernity attaches to all things related to the strange little man. The extraordinary character of Nietzsche's influence forces the critical scholar to remove himself from the sealed chambers of academic divisions and evaluate Nietzsche's *entire* body of work. And if his music is to accurately and thoroughly understood, it must be carried out by those who are best qualified: musicians.

It may then come as a surprise that, after wading through the weighty and lugubrious philosophical backwash that inevitably follows in his wake, the musician discovers Nietzsche's music to be striking in its optimism and vitality. Despite being written in his school years, one can easily see the man who would go on to flesh out these ideas in more depth through his dazzling prose. The very fact that they *were* written early in his life, before his health declined and his personal relationships faltered, enable them to encapsulate the Superman's "overflowing, superabundance of life" in a way not possible in his written works. They reflect the mind of a young man who realized his own great power and was anxious to exert that power in any field he could. Nietzsche himself reflected that, he wrote:

I revised the compositions of my youth and put them in order. It remains perpetually strange to me how through music the unchangeable aspects of character are revealed; what a boy says through it is so clearly the language of the essence of his whole nature that the mature man does not want it changed - except, naturally, imperfections of technique and such like.⁷

The many faults in his music represent the missteps of a child who does not know his own strength. His ideas spilled out through a medium that required more grace and restraint than he possessed at that time. That he frequently stumbled when setting out on his musical journeys is readily seen. However, it would be a great mistake to make too much of the blunders and throw out the wheat with the chaff. Very rarely does a thinker of Nietzsche's magnitude leave us such an immediate souvenir of his personality. If anything can be said of Nietzsche's music, it is that it was a strictly personal expression. Unlike his books, his music was not written to boldly lead mankind to its true potential.

⁷ HKB III, 325; January 1875 to Malwida von Meysenbug.

His music was written in response to Nietzsche's own "superabundance of life" and gave him a necessary creative outlet. Nietzsche's musical output can be seen as an afterimage of his personality, existing long after the original light has faded. It gives us a unique view of genius—not by way of his mastery, but instead through the lens of his passion. Finally, his music allows us to encounter the person behind the "Superman," the "Will to Power," and the "Slave Morality" in a very personal and intimate way. The music is worthy of study and performance, and through both its successes and its failures, paints a complete picture that exists "Beyond Good and Evil."