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Nietzsche on Enlightenment and Fanaticism:

On the Middle Writings

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Introduction

The topic of fanaticism has been almost wholly neglected in the literature on Nietzsche and yet it is crucial to understanding the intellectual stance of the middle period texts (1878-82).¹ Focusing on the problem of fanaticism in Nietzsche can do two things: first, it can illuminate the nature of his attack on morality and its immodest claims; and, second, it can shed light on the specific mode of philosophizing Nietzsche is keen to unfold and stage in his middle writings. Nietzsche has a definite project in these texts that centres on cooling down a human mind prone to neurosis, and he appeals to various philosophical sources to mount a programme of mental reform from the ancient likes of Epicurus (WS 7 & 295) and Epictetus (D 131 & 546) to modern figures such as Voltaire (HAH 221).² Indeed, at this time Nietzsche defines the philosopher as a human being who speaks “from a cool, invigorating resting place” (WS 171). In this essay I seek to illuminate Nietzsche’s stance on fanaticism, which, I endeavour to show, is best seen in the context of his reception of the Enlightenment and his search for a new enlightenment.³ It is often said that Nietzsche is a thinker with a revolutionary agenda. It is important to appreciate, however, that he is decidedly anti-revolution, which he associates with the cultivation of fanaticism. What he prizes is what he finds in Voltaire: the highest freedom of spirit with an absolutely unrevolutionary disposition (HAH 221).

Nietzsche and the Enlightenment

As one commentator has noted, in the eyes of many of his adherents as well as opponents, Nietzsche is an anti-Enlightenment irrationalist (Martin 2008: 79). In his well-known construction of “the philosophy discourse of modernity” Jürgen Habermas depicts Nietzsche as the modern enemy of reason par excellence (Habermas 1987: 105). One of the reasons why a study of the middle period Nietzsche is important, and proves so fruitful, is because it can show this viewpoint to be a caricature, if not an outright distortion. Nietzsche is hostile to the French Revolution, but seeks in his writings is to sever the link between enlightenment and revolution because he suspects that revolution breeds fanaticism and is a throwback to a lower stage of culture. As Nicholas Martin notes, Nietzsche takes the Enlightenment very seriously and as a cultural critic of the late nineteenth century he cannot afford to escape its legacy (ibid. 80). He is an admirer of the critical and rationalist spirit of the Enlightenment, of both the eighteenth-century version, as we find it in the likes of Voltaire and Lessing, and earlier incarnations, such as find it in the likes of Epicurus, Petrarch, and Erasmus. Nietzsche shares many of the ideas and commitments of the modern Enlightenment, including the attack on superstition, religious dogmatism, rigid class structures, outmoded forms of governance and rule, and so on. Its fundamental spirit is one of demystification, of liberation of the human from its chains (see WS 350), seeking “to provide the individual with the critical tools to achieve autonomy, to liberate himself from his own unexamined assumptions as well as the dictates of others” (Martin 2008: 80). Nietzsche is an enlightenment thinker, then, in this critical sense: his overriding aim is to foster autonomy and maturity in his readers. In this respect Nietzsche is an inheritor of Kant, as he acknowledges in *Dawn*.⁴ In fact, he presents himself as being even more faithful to the rational spirit of enlightenment than Kant was with his irrational or incomprehensible residues, such as the thing in itself and the categorical imperative (D 207).

Nietzsche is keen to expose what he takes to be a delusion in the theory or doctrine of revolution. The error, he contends, belongs to Rousseau, namely, that buried within the accrued habits and vices of civilization there lays concealed an original or primordial but stifled human goodness:

There are political and social visionaries who ardently and eloquently demand the overthrow of all social order in the belief that the most splendid temple of a beautified humanity would immediately be raised, as if by itself. In these dangerous dreams, we can still hear an echo of Rousseau's superstition...(HAH 463)

On the Rousseauian-inspired picture, as Nietzsche conceives it, not only is there a stifled human goodness buried underneath the weight of civilization, but the blame for such stifling is to be levelled squarely at the institutions of culture, such as embodied in state, society, and education. However, Nietzsche holds that historical experience teaches us an important lesson, namely, that revolutions bring with them, "a new resurrection of the most savage energies in the form of the long-buried horrors and excesses of the most distant ages" (HAH 463). He does not deny that revolutions can be a source of vital energy for a humanity that has grown feeble, but he contests the idea that it can work as an organizer and perfecter of human nature. He thus appeals to Voltaire over Rousseau, that is, in his eyes to a nature that knows how to organize, purify, and reconstruct, as opposed to a nature that is full of passionate follies and half-lies. Against the optimism of the spirit of revolution, Nietzsche wishes to cry with Voltaire, "*Écrasez l'infâme!*" It is the spirit of revolution that frightens off the spirit of enlightenment and "of *progressive development*" – and it is this spirit Nietzsche calls upon his readers to cultivate and nurture.⁵ "*Écrasez l'infâme!*" is, of course, Voltaire's rallying cry against fanaticism, and as the motto of the French Enlightenment it stands for "the rejection of authority and obscurantism, the ground clearing sparked by the

intellectual audacity that is the mark of the *Siècle des lumières*, the *Sapere aude*” (Mostefai & Scott 2009: 9). It is precisely obscurantism that Nietzsche pits his philosophical wits against in the middle writings.

Nietzsche locates in the French Revolution’s histrionicism, a “bestial cruelty,” as well as a “sentimentality” and “self-intoxication,” and holds Rousseau responsible for being its intellectual inspiration and for setting the Enlightenment on “its fanatical head.” He sees the Enlightenment as being, in fact, alien to the Revolution, which if it had been left to itself would have “passed through the clouds as quietly along like as a gleam of light, satisfied for a long time simply with transforming individuals: so that it would only very slowly have transformed the customs and institutions of people as well” (WS 221). The task, he says, is to continue the work of the Enlightenment, in each and every individual, but also “to strangle the Revolution at birth” and ensure it does not happen. In *Dawn* Nietzsche argues contra Rousseau that it our “weak, unmanly” societal notions of good and evil, and the way they dominate over body and soul today, that are making all bodies and souls weak, shattering the “pillars of a *strong* civilization”, which for Nietzsche can only reside in unfettered individuals who are self-reliant and independent (D 163).

The extent to which Nietzsche is an astute or serious reader of Rousseau is debatable. He ignores the role played by Rousseau in the struggle against intolerance and fanaticism, evident in the fact that Voltaire reprinted excerpts from Rousseau’s writings in the collected volumes he published as part of his campaign against these phenomena (Mostefai & Scott 2009: 10).⁶ As Nicholas Martin notes, Nietzsche’s critical perspectives on intellectual figures such as Rousseau are more palatable if one sees his use of proper names as signifying psychological states and ideological positions rather than historical individuals (Martin 2008: 94). What is clear is that Nietzsche strongly allies himself with progressive forces but insists that social transformation, which is desirable, ought to be pursued gradually and patiently:

there is no miraculous solution to human ills. Moreover, though, in his middle writings Nietzsche wishes humanity to go beyond religion altogether – see especially *Dawn* 96⁷ – and so he necessarily positions Rousseau as an anti-Enlightenment enemy. For Rousseau fanaticism has its uses and philosophy its abuses. This is a position he makes clear in a long footnote in book four of *Emile*. Here he notes that whilst he agrees with Pierre Bayle that fanaticism is more pernicious than atheism, and acknowledges its cruel character, it is nevertheless “a grand and strong passion which elevates the heart of man, making him despise death, and gives him a prodigious energy that need only be better directed to produce the most sublime virtues” (Rousseau 2010: 479). Rousseau writes in praise of religion against philosophy, and as Hume noted, the *philosophes* rejected Rousseau because he was seen to ‘overbound’ in religion (Hume cited in Mostefai & Scott 2009: 14).

Nietzsche positions himself against morality and religion, as Rousseau construes them, in his middle writings, especially *Dawn*. In particular, he is suspicious of morality’s exalted language and the claim that morality puts us in contact with the sublime. Against such claims Nietzsche appeals to a philosophy of modesty and to the need for more modest words (see D Preface), and he even makes an appeal to a more modest conception of the sublime (D 449). Furthermore, against the tyrannical encroachments of modern morality, with its cult of the sympathetic affects, especially compassion and pity, he favours the cultivation of peaceful, self-enclosed gardens that feature gates of hospitality (D 174).

I want to now focus attention on a particular aphorism in *Dawn* so as to illuminate further Nietzsche’s construal of his relation to enlightenment thinking. The aphorism is entitled “The German’s hostility to the Enlightenment.” In it Nietzsche wishes to take note of the intellectual contribution Germany, including German philosophers, have made to culture at large. He sees German philosophy of the first half of the nineteenth century as a retrogressive force: “they retreated to the first and oldest level of speculation, for, like the

thinkers of dreamy ages, they found satisfaction in concepts rather than in explanations – they resuscitated a pre-scientific type of philosophy” (D 197). Nietzsche sees similar retarding forces operating in German history and German science. In the former a general concern was to accord honour upon primitive sensibilities, especially Christianity, but also folk-lore and folk-language, oriental asceticism, and the world of India.⁸ In natural science German scientists have struggled against the spirit of Newton and Voltaire and, following Goethe and Schopenhauer, “sought to erect once again the idea of a divine or a daemonic nature suffused with ethical (*ethischen*) and symbolic significance” (ibid). Thus, Nietzsche infers, the proclivity of the Germans runs contrary to the Enlightenment as well as contrary to the revolution in society. The German spirit is antiquarian: “piety towards everything then in existence sought to metamorphose into piety towards everything that once had existed in order that heart and spirit might once again grow *full* and no longer have any room for future, innovative goals” (ibid.). German culture has erected a cult of feeling at the expense of a cult of reason with German composers – Nietzsche surely has in mind Wagner amongst others – being artists of the invisible, of raptures, and of the fairy-tale. Nietzsche objects to this cultural development, it is important to note, for one main reason: it serves to retard, suppress even, knowledge, as in Kant’s famous words to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) that he has found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith and thus to draw up the limits of knowledge. Nietzsche makes it clear that he champions the genuine enlightenment and against all the forces of obscurantism (see also MOM 27):

And strange to say: the very spirits that the Germans had so eloquently invoked became, in the long run, the most injurious for their invokers – history, understanding of origin and evolution, sympathy with the past, the newly aroused passion for feeling and knowledge, after having for a time appeared to be beneficial companions of the spirit of rapturous obscurantism and reaction, assumed one day by a different nature

and now fly on the widest wings above and beyond their earlier invokers as new and stronger geniuses of *that very Enlightenment* against which they had been invoked. This Enlightenment we must now carry on – unperturbed that there has existed a ‘great Revolution’ and then again a ‘great reaction’ against it, that indeed both still exist: they are, after all, the mere ripple of waves in comparison to the truly great tide in which *we* surge and want to surge! (D 197)

As Mazzino Montinari notes, a note from the spring of 1881 – that is, just prior to the publication of *Dawn* – provides additional clues for deciphering *Dawn* 197 (Montinari 2003: 51). In it Nietzsche portrays the nineteenth century as one of reaction in which a conservative and preservative frame of mind predominates. The note runs as follows:

19th century, Reaction: people sought the *basic principles* of everything that had *lasted*, and sought to prove it was *true*. Permanence, fruitfulness and good conscience were seen as indices of truth! This was the conservative mentality: they called everything that had not yet been shaken; they had the egoism of the possessors as their strongest objection to the philosophy of the 18th century: for the non-possessors and malcontents there was *still* the church and even the arts (for some highly talented individuals there was also the worship of genius by way of gratitude if they worked for the conservative interests). With *history (Geschichte)* (new!!!) people *proved* things, they became *enthusiastic* for the great fruitful complexes called cultures (*nations!!!*). A huge part of the *zeal for research* and of the *sense of worship* was thrown at the past: modern philosophy and natural science *forfeited* this part! - - Now a **backlash!** History (*Historie*) *ultimately* proved something other than what was wanted: it turned out to be the most certain means of destroying those principles. Darwin. On the other hand sceptical historicism as aftereffect, empathy. People became *better* acquainted with the *motivating* forces in history (*Geschichte*), not our ‘beautiful’ ideas! Socialism has a *historical* foundation, similarly national wars for historical reasons! (KSA 9, 10 [D88])⁹

For Nietzsche, then, it is history that serves as the means of destroying the conservative principle, and this history includes Darwin’s theory of evolution. What we need to learn and take cognisance of are the real forces operating in history and not our beautiful ideas.

Everything that comes into existence – e.g. socialism – plants its own foundations in history.

As Nietzsche presents it in *Dawn* 197 the basic idea is that the enlightenment project we are to further is to make its claim, “not *against* but rather beyond a great revolution (socialism) and a great reaction, *beyond* the conservative frame of mind” (Montinari 2003: 52). It is thus an error in Nietzsche’s account of the story to conceive the Enlightenment as the cause of the Revolution, a misunderstanding that is the “reaction” itself and it would be equally an error to conceive the continuing enlightenment as the cause of socialism. As Montinari notes, the new great reaction in the form of the conservative mentality consists in this error. As he further notes, from 1878 onwards, Nietzsche considers a new enlightenment as the noble task for the free spirit of his own times. There have been to date two great historical periods in which an enlightenment has sought to flourish but has been halted by a paired revolution and reaction: first, the enlightenment of Italian and European humanism, or the Renaissance (Petrarch and Erasmus), but followed by the German Reformation and the Counter-Reformation; the Enlightenment of France, notably Voltaire, with the French revolution and German romanticism as the corresponding revolution and reaction. In progress now is a third enlightenment, conceived by Nietzsche as a new enlightenment and which contrasts itself to both the great revolution and great reaction of modern times, socialism and conservatism (see HAH 26).¹⁰ Nietzsche notes in HAH 26, entitled “Reaction as progress,” that in the previous two enlightenments the new free spirited tendencies were not powerful enough to withstand the appearance of impassioned but backward spirits who conjured up once again a bygone phase of humanity. This is the case with Luther’s Reformation in which “all stirrings of the freedom of spirit were still uncertain, delicate, youthful” and “science could not yet raise its head.” It is the case in the nineteenth century where Schopenhauer’s metaphysics showed “that even now the scientific spirit is not yet strong enough”: in spite of the achieved destruction of Christian dogmas in Schopenhauer’s doctrine the whole medieval Christian world-view once again celebrated its resurrection. Although there is in Schopenhauer ‘a

strong ring of science' this does not master his thinking; rather, it is the metaphysical need that does. But even in this reaction there is progress to be had Nietzsche thinks:

It is surely one of the greatest and inestimable advantages we gain from Schopenhauer that he sometimes forces our sensations back into older, powerful ways of viewing the world and people to which no path would otherwise so easily lead us. The gain for history and justice is very great: I believe that without Schopenhauer's assistance, nobody now could easily manage to do justice to Christianity and its Asiatic relatives: to do so on the basis of present-day Christianity is impossible. Only after this great *success of justice*, only after we have corrected in so essential a point the way of viewing history that the Age of Enlightenment brought with it, can we once more bear the flag of the Enlightenment farther... (HAH 26)

As Martin notes, Nietzsche wants an "enlightenment of the Enlightenment" (Martin 2008: 89). Nietzsche sees the task as a never-ending critical process; the problem with revolutions is that they often aim at the achievement of an imagined end and this longing for finality and resolution is ultimately seen by Nietzsche as a symptom and defining characteristic of nihilism (ibid.: 94). What is clear is that Nietzsche construes the French Revolution as a counter-enlightenment development, "a violent expression of repressed Christian *ressentiment* that overwhelmed and destroyed the last flowering of the noble, sceptical culture in Europe in seventeenth and eighteenth-century France" (Garrard 2008: 601). This commentator is correct to infer that the event of the Revolution was for Nietzsche a secularization of Christianity's slave revolt in morality in spite of the "deceptive anti-Christian mask that the Revolutionaries chose to wear" (ibid.).

Nietzsche and Fanaticism

Let me now turn in this section of the essay to probing Nietzsche's position on fanaticism. It is important to Nietzsche that his words are not those of a "fanatic", that there is no

“preaching”, and with no “faith” being demanded; rather, he is keen to write and philosophize in terms of what he calls a “delicate slowness” (EH Foreword; see also D Preface 5). In *Ecce Homo* he prides himself on his non-fanatical nature: “you will not find a trace of fanaticism in my being” (EH “Why I am so clever”, 10). This “non-fanatical” Nietzsche emerges, or comes to the fore, in the middle period texts. We live in fanatical times for Nietzsche and fanaticism is to be understood as ranging across religion, morality, and philosophy.¹¹ Our attachment to ideas that are in danger of being adhered to fanatically include: the idea that there is a *single* moral-making morality; the idea that *true life* is to be found in self-abandonment; and the idea that there are *definitive, final truths*. Nietzsche is a critic of all three ideas.

Dawn (1881) is an avowedly anti-revolution work in which Nietzsche seeks to promote a philosophy of the morning based on “slow cures” (D 462) and “small doses” (D 534). In his middle writings he displays a preference for individual therapy and self-cultivation over political revolution. Nietzsche explicitly writes against impatient political invalids and argues instead in favour of these small doses as a way of bringing about change (D 534). He is of the view that the last attempt in Europe at a transformation of evaluations, and specifically with regards to political matters, namely, the Great Revolution, “was nothing *more* than a pathetic and bloody *quackery*...” (D 534) The task, he says, is to continue the work of the Enlightenment in each and every individual but also “to strangle the Revolution at birth” and ensure it does not happen (see D 197).

When Nietzsche writes in favour of a new enlightenment and contra fanaticism he is addressing what he calls “our current, stressed, power-thirsty society (*machtdürstigen Gesellschaft*) in Europe and America” (D 271). He seeks to draw attention to the different ways in which the “feeling of power” is gratified through both individual and collective forms of agency (see D 184). At this stage in his thinking this is what he means by “grand

politics” (*grossen Politik*), in which the “mightiest tide” driving forward individuals, masses, and nations is “*the need for the feeling of power*” (*Machtgefühls*) (D 189). Sometimes this assumes the form of the “pathos-ridden language of virtue”, and although Nietzsche has a concern over the fanatical elements of a politics of virtue, his main concern at this time is that such behaviour gives rise to the unleashing of “a plethora of squandering, sacrificing, hoping...over-audacious, fantastical instincts...” that are then utilized by ambitious princes to start up wars. (D 179) As one commentator points out, Nietzsche first introduces the notion of power into his writings not as a metaphysical truth or as a normative principle, but as a hypothesis of psychology that seeks to explain the origins and development of the various cultural forms that human beings have fashioned in order to deal with their vulnerability or lack of power (Ure 2009: 63). As Nietzsche points out in *Dawn*, in the development of human history the feeling of powerlessness has been extensive and is responsible for the creation of both superstitious rituals as well as cultural forms such as religion and metaphysics (D 23). The feeling of fear and powerlessness has been in state of “perpetual excitation” for so long a time that the actual feeling of power has developed to incredibly subtle degrees and levels and has, in fact, become our “strongest inclination” (D 23). We can safely say, he thinks, that the methods discovered to create this feeling constitute the history of culture (*Cultur*).

Today, Nietzsche notes, although the means of the appetite for power have altered the same volcano still burns: what was formerly done for the sake of God is now done for the sake of money, “for the sake of that which *now* imparts to the highest degree the feeling of power and a good conscience” (D 204). Nietzsche, therefore, attacks the upper classes for giving themselves over to “sanctioned fraud” and that has “the stock exchange and all forms of speculation on its conscience” (D 204). What troubles him about this terrible craving for and love of accumulated money is that it once again gives rise, albeit in a new form, to “that

fanaticism (*Fanatismus*) of the *appetite for power* (*Machtgelüsten*) that formerly was ignited by the conviction of being in possession of the truth” (D 204)

Through his psychological probing of the “fantastical instincts” and of the need for the feeling of power Nietzsche is led to cultivate scepticism about politics in *Dawn* and favours instead a programme of therapeutic self-cultivation. He favours, for example, the cultivation of “personal wisdom” over any allegiances one might have to party politics (D 183). Moreover, as he says at one point in the book, we need to be honest with ourselves and know ourselves extremely well if we are to practice towards others “that philanthropic dissimulation that goes by the name of love and kindness” (D 335). Nietzsche ultimately favours a project of free-minded social transformation in which small groups of free spirits will practice experimental lives, sacrifice themselves for the superior health of future generations, endeavour to get beyond their compassion, promote “universal interests”, and seek to “strengthen and elevate the general feeling of human *power*...” (D 146)

That fanaticism is a major concern of Nietzsche’s is made explicit in the 1886 preface to *Dawn*, where he also writes as a teacher of slow reading and a friend of *lento*. In it Nietzsche exposes the seductions of morality, claiming that it knows how to “inspire” or “enthuse” (*begeistern*); and with his attempt to render the ground for “majestic moral edifices” level and suitable for construction Kant set himself a “rapturous” or “enthusiastic goal” (*schwärmerischen Absicht*), one that makes him a true son of his century - a century which more than any other, Nietzsche stresses, can fairly be called “the century of “rapturous enthusiasm” or, indeed, “fanaticism” (*Schwärmerei*). Although Kant sought to keep enthusiasm (*Enthusiasmus*) and fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*) separate, Nietzsche is claiming that there is in his moral philosophy what Alberto Toscano has called a “ruse of transcendence,” or the return of universally binding abstract precepts and authorities that are beyond the domain of human and natural relations (Toscano 2010: 120-1). Nietzsche’s

critical point is that Kant betrayed the cause of reason by positing a “moral realm” that cannot be assailed by reason. Indeed, Nietzsche holds that Kant was bitten by the “tarantula of morality Rousseau” and so “he too held in the very depths of his soul the idea of moral fanaticism (*moralischen Fanatismus*) whose executor yet another disciple of Rousseau’s, namely, Robespierre, felt and confessed himself to be...” (D Preface 3) Although he partakes of this “Frenchified fanaticism” (*Franzosen-Fanatismus*) Kant remains decidedly German for Nietzsche – he is said to be “thorough” and “profound” - in his positing of a “logical ‘Beyond’”, a “non-demonstrable world”, so as to create a space for the “moral realm.”¹² Nietzsche wants this space to be subject to sceptical and critical inquiry.

Let me probe more deeply into the conception of morality Nietzsche is taking to task in texts such as *Dawn*. The morality that humanity has cultivated and dedicated itself to is one of “enthusiastic devotion” and “self-sacrifice” in which it looks down from sublime heights on the more sober morality of self-control (which is regarded as egotistical). Nietzsche suggests that the reason why morality has been developed in this way is owing to the enjoyment of the state of intoxication that has stemmed from the thought that the person is at one with the powerful being to whom it consecrates itself; in this way the feeling of power is enjoyed and is confirmed by a sacrifice of the self. For Nietzsche, of course, such an overcoming of the human self is impossible: “In truth you only *seem* to sacrifice yourselves; instead, in your thoughts you transform yourselves into gods and take pleasure in yourselves as such” (D 215). Activities of self-sacrifice serve to intensify the feeling of power as one of the key needs of human life and are not to be taken at face value; this means that the sacrifice of the self is an appearance in which the value of the act resides in the pleasure one derives from it. In his consideration of intoxication, visions, trance, and so on, Nietzsche is, then, dealing with the problem of fanaticism that preoccupies him in his middle and late periods (D 57-8, 68, 204, 298; see also AOM 15; BGE 10; GS 347; AC 11, 32, 54). As he notes, such

“enthusiasts” or fanatics (*Schwärmer*) will seek to implant the faith in intoxication as “as being that which is actually living in life: a dreadful faith!” (D 50) Such is the extent of Nietzsche’s anxiety that he wonders whether humanity as a whole will one day perish by its “spiritual fire-waters” and those who keep alive the desire for them. The “strange madness of moral judgements” is bound up with states of exaltation (*Erhebung*) and “the most exalted language” (D 189). Nietzsche is advising us to be on our guard, to be vigilant as philosophers against, “the half-mad, the fantastic, the fanatical (*fanatischer*)”, including so-called human beings of genius who claim to have “visions” and to have seen things others do not see. We are to be cautious, not credulous, when confronted with the claims of visions, that is to say he adds, “of a profound mental disturbance...” (D 66)

In criticising fanaticism Nietzsche largely has in mind the Christian religion (though one also suspects he has Wagner in mind when he critically addresses genius). Christianity has brought into the world “a completely new and unlimited *imperilment*”, creating new securities, enjoyments, recreations, and evaluations. Although we moderns may be in the process of emancipating ourselves from such an imperilment we keep dragging into our existence the old habits associated with these securities and evaluations, even into our noblest arts and philosophies (D 57). Nietzsche holds that in wanting to return to the affects “in their utmost grandeur and strength” – for example, as *love* of God, *fear* of God, fanatical *faith* in God, and so on - Christianity represents a popular protest against philosophy and he appeals to the ancient sages against it since they advocated the triumph of reason over the affects (D 58).

As we have seen, in the preface to *Dawn* Nietzsche accuses Kant of fanaticism and claims that Kant was bitten by Rousseau, that “tarantula of morality” (D Preface 3).¹³ However, although he criticises the Kantian legacy in moral philosophy he is, in fact, close to Kant on a number of points. We can note the following: for Kant, (a) the task of the

Enlightenment is to be perpetual¹⁴; and (b) revolution cannot produce a genuine reform in our modes of thinking but only result in new prejudices.¹⁵ Where he thinks Kant is inconsistent is with respect to his ambition of imposing the demands of a universalist morality upon humanity. For Nietzsche we simply lack enough knowledge to morally legislate for individuals, let alone for humanity as a whole, and this insight forms a crucial part of his independent enlightenment project. Nietzsche contends, first, that the moral precepts directed at individuals are not, in fact, aimed at promoting their happiness; second, that such precepts are also not, in fact, concerned with the “happiness and welfare of humanity.” Here his concern is that we simply have words to which it is virtually impossible to attach definite concepts, “let alone to utilize them as a guiding star on the dark ocean of moral aspirations” (D 108). We cannot even appeal to evolution since “Evolution does not desire happiness; it wants evolution and nothing more” (D 108). Mankind lacks a universally recognized goal, so it is thus both irrational and frivolous to inflict upon humanity the demands of morality. Nietzsche does not rule out the possibility of *recommending* a goal that lies in humanity’s discretion, but this is something that for him lies in the future. There is much critical working through and enlightenment-inspired undermining to be done first.

Nietzsche’s stance contra revolution and on moral fanaticism – the objects he singles out for attack in the 1886 preface to *Dawn* – is part of an established tradition in German thought dating back to the 1780s and 1790s (for insight see La Vopa 1998: 90-91, 103-4). Although Nietzsche especially criticises Kant in the preface to the text he fails to consider in any serious or fair-minded way Kant’s position on morality and revolution, and he has nothing to say on Kant’s own critical position on the issue of fanaticism. The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* defines fanaticism as “excessive enthusiasm”, especially in religious matters. Enthusiasm here is to be understood as “rapturous intensity of a feeling on behalf of a cause or a person” (see Passmore 2003: 212). This is part of Nietzsche’s understanding of

fanaticism and informs his critique of it. As such, he is perhaps closer to the likes of Locke and Hume than he is to Kant: where Locke and Hume critique enthusiasm, identifying it with what we would today call fanaticism, Kant is careful in some of his writings to distinguish between enthusiasm (*Enthusiasmus*) and fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*): where enthusiasm functions as a sign of a moral tendency in humanity, the pious fanatic has otherworldly intuitions.¹⁶ Kant thus locates fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*) in the “raving of reason” and “the delusion of wanting to SEE something beyond all bounds of sensibility.”¹⁷ Kant is looking for evidence of a “historical sign”, such as resides in an event (e.g. the French Revolution), that might indicate that man has the power of being the cause or author of his own improvement (Kant 1991: 181). However, Kant is acutely aware of not being dogmatic here, that is, we cannot have too high an expectation of human beings in their progressive improvements less our aspirations turn into “the fantasies of an overheated mind” (Kant 1991: 188). Of course, this does not save Kant completely from the charge of “moral fanaticism” (see La Vopa 1998: 105-6, 108-9), but it does serve to indicate something of the complexity of his position.

Ultimately, Nietzsche and Kant diverge owing to the fact that they each have a different conception of what makes for signs of our moral maturity. For Kant this resides not simply in our being “civilized” or “cultivated” and other semblances of morality, but in our “cosmopolitan” achievement and sense of moral purposiveness. For Nietzsche by contrast we stand in need of liberation from the fanatical presumptions of morality. There is a need to recognize our ethical complexity, for example, that it is naïve to posit a strict separation of egoistic and altruistic drives and actions, and that it is equally naïve to assume a unitary self that is completely transparent to itself. So what, in Nietzsche’s eyes, makes for moral maturity? It is a question and task of *modesty* and for Nietzsche, as he makes clear in the preface to *Dawn*, the attack on “morality” is based on a struggle for “more modest words” (*bescheidenere Worte*) (D Preface 4). For Nietzsche we simply lack the knowledge into moral

matters that morality presumes, and for him this necessitates experimentalism in the domain of ethical life. For example, it is necessary to contest the idea that there is a single moral-making morality since every code of ethics that affirms itself in an exclusive manner “destroys too much valuable energy and costs humanity much too dearly” (D 164). In the future, he hopes, the inventive and fructifying person shall no longer be sacrificed and “numerous novel experiments shall be made in ways of life and modes of society” (ibid). When this takes place we will find that an enormous load of guilty conscience has been purged from the world. Humanity has suffered for too long from teachers of morality who wanted too much all at once and sought to lay down precepts for everyone (D 194). In the future, care will need to be given to the most personal questions and create time for them (D 196). Small individual questions and experiments are no longer to be viewed with contempt and impatience (D 547). Contra morality, then, he holds that we ourselves are experiments and our task should be to want to be such. We are to build anew the laws of life and of behaviour by taking from the sciences of physiology, medicine, sociology, and solitude the foundation-stones for new ideals if not the new ideals themselves (D 453). As these sciences are not yet sure of themselves we find ourselves living in either a preliminary or a posterior existence, depending on our taste and talent, and in this interregnum the best strategy is for us to become our own reges (sovereigns) and establish small experimental states.

In *Dawn* Nietzsche employs what we can call an antique care of the self as a way of taking to task what he identifies as some troubling developments in modern society. Here the chief goal or end of the cultivation of self-sufficiency is freedom. He draws on the Stoic Epictetus to promote such a care of self, and what he admires in him is a non-fanatical (*nicht fanatisch*) mode of living. Although this ancient thinker was a slave, the exemplar he invokes is without class and is possible in every class. He serves as a counterweight to modern idealists who are greedy for expansion. Epictetus’s ideal human being, lacking all

fear of God and believing rigorously in reason, “is not a preacher of penitence” (D 546). He has a pride in himself that does not wish to trouble and encroach on others: “he admits a certain mild rapprochement and does not wish to spoil anyone’s good mood – Yes, he can smile! There is a great deal of ancient humanity in this ideal!” (ibid.). The Epictetean is self-sufficient, “defends himself against the outside world” and “lives in a state of highest valor” (ibid.). Nietzsche offers this portrait of the Epictetean as a point of contrast to the Christian. The Christian lives in hope (and in the consolation of “unspeakable glories” to come) and allows himself to be given gifts, expecting the best of life not to come from himself and his own resources but from divine love and grace. By contrast Epictetus “does not hope and does allow his best to be given him – he possesses it, he holds it valiantly in his hand, and he would take on the whole world if it tries to rob him of it” (ibid.).

This portrait of Epictetus contra the Christian provides us with a set of valuable insights into how Nietzsche conceives the difference between fanatical and non-fanatical modes of living: one way of life is self-sufficient and finds its pride in this, renouncing hope and living in the present; the other devotes itself to living through and for others, its attention is focused on the future (as that which is to come), and it lacks the quiet and calm dignity of self-sufficiency that is the Epictetean ideal (see also D 131). It’s clear that with this usage of Epictetus Nietzsche is seeking a counter ideal to the ideal of morality. It conforms to his expectation of modesty and it works against the aspirations of morality.

It is also in *Dawn* that Nietzsche discloses the nature of his political scepticism: he has a distrust of the allegiances people show to party politics and an even deeper distrust of the psychological motivations for pursuing grand politics, such as the need to satisfy the feeling of power as it manifests itself in masses and nations and that often leads to war. Nietzsche seeks to encourage individuals to undertake the work of therapeutic self-cultivation

so as to prepare the ground for new individual and social relations resting on friendship and mutual aid.

Conclusion

At the outset of this essay I claimed that a focus on the problem of fanaticism can help to illuminate two core aspects of Nietzsche's middle period project: the nature of his attack on the presumptions and prejudices of morality, and the character of the mode of philosophizing he is keen to develop in the middle writings. Let me conclude the essay by saying something on the mode of philosophizing that is being unfolded and played out in this period.

Working through the problem of fanaticism not only influences Nietzsche in his thinking about an ethical reformation in his middle writings, it also defines significant aspects of his philosophical project as a whole at this time and centred on a therapeutic cooling down of the human mind. In part, he conceives the art of the maxim in therapeutic terms. The modern age has forgotten the art of reflection or observation, in which it is possible to gather maxims "from the thorniest and least gratifying stretches of our lives" so as to make ourselves feel better, to give ourselves a lift and a tonic. We can return to life revived rather than depressed from our encounter with thorny problems, and with "presence of mind in difficult situations and amusement in tedious surroundings." There is a need, therefore, for modern spirits to learn how to derive pleasure from the art of the maxim, from its construction to its tasting. Nietzsche notes that it is virtually impossible to say whether the inquiry into the "human, all too human" will work more as a blessing than a curse to the welfare of humanity; at any rate, and for the time being, the issue is undecided (HAH 38). He further notes that because science, like nature, does not aim at final ends, any fruitfulness in the way or promoting the welfare of humanity will be the result of science's attaining something purposeful without having willed it. But where science is needed now, as part of

general therapeutic practice of reflection and observation, is in cooling down the human mind: “shouldn’t we, the *more spiritual* human beings of an age that is visibly catching fire in more and more places, have to grasp all available means for quenching and cooling, so that we will remain at least as steady...and moderate as we are now...” (HAH 38) The illnesses and neuroses we encounter in humanity require that “*ice-packs*” be placed on them (ibid.).

What is clear is that at this time in his intellectual development Nietzsche appeals to philosophical moderation over enthusiasm, sentimentality, and self-intoxication. Nietzsche makes his standpoint clear in the various figurations we find in his middle writings of his position “contra Rousseau.” Although Nietzsche makes clear that he is *gegen* Rousseau in *Dawn* 163 and then in the 1886 preface to that work, he first begins to position himself critically against Rousseau in the volumes of *Human, all too Human*. In *The Wanderer and His Shadow* Nietzsche warns against the moralism of Kant (and Schiller) that has its source in Rousseau and the reawakened Stoic Rome (WS 216). Although these intellectual positionings by Nietzsche may not do full justice to the thinkers in question, such as Rousseau and Kant, they do reveal something important about the character of his thinking and the nature of his fundamental project, such as the critique of morality and the appeal to modesty.

As part of his enlightenment commitments Nietzsche positions himself in opposition to “the fogs of a metaphysical-mystical philosophy” (MOM 28). He also rejects the “gleaming mirage” of a philosophical system (MOM 31). However, he is in search of a blending together of knowledge and wisdom (MOM 180), as well as a philosophy of spiritual health (MOM 356). He is convinced that, thanks to the modern enlightenment project, the walls that separate nature and spirit, human and animal, ethics and physics are breaking down (MOM 185), and this offers prospects for a novel synthesis of science and philosophy, or knowledge and wisdom. He will freely draw, though, on ancient and modern sources and

holds up Epictetus as a teacher of wisdom in which wisdom “is the whispering of the solitary with himself in the crowded marketplace” (MOM 386). Perhaps most surprising of all is the recognition Nietzsche accords Socrates as a philosophical exemplar of first-rate importance: against priests and idealists of every kind he teaches a care of self and does not unduly concern himself with human beings in the abstract and with an equally abstract conception of science (WS 6). Indeed, Nietzsche looks forward to a time when humanity will advance morally and rationally by taking in its hands the memorabilia of Socrates rather than the Bible, “and when Montaigne and Horace will be utilized as the forerunners and signposts for understanding the simplest and most imperishable mediator-sage” (WS 86). All the roads of the most varied ways of living philosophically lead back to Socrates and in these different ways we can identify the most important task of a life: to rejoice in life and also rejoice in one’s own self. Nietzsche goes so far to esteem Socrates over Christ because he is cheerful in his seriousness and his wisdom is of a playful kind: this, he says, “constitutes the best spiritual condition for humans” (WS 86).

It is with the aid of such teachings derived from Socrates and the antique schools that Nietzsche will endeavour to refashion the tasks of morality. He writes, for example, of transforming the passions of humanity into “delights” (WS 37), of a morality of continual self-mastery and self-overcoming in both large and the smallest of things (WS 45), of an ethics of moderation based on the individual virtues such as justice and peace of mind (WS 212). In all of this the task is to become “spiritually joyful, bright, and sincere” (WS 88). More than this, free spirits are willing to “*look directly at the great task of preparing the earth for a growth in the greatest and happiest fertility...*” (WS 189) If we call upon the thinker for assistance we do so not simply as an educator but rather “as someone self-educated,” one who has experience (WS 267).

In short, Nietzsche's philosophical commitment in the middle writings is informed by enlightenment sensibilities. Fanaticism for him is, in part, the stance of impatient political invalids. In seeking a quick fix to the ills of society revolution, and the fervour that drives it, is a poor vehicle for our education and maturation. It is for this core reason that Nietzsche rejects it and seeks to take it to task in his writings. Although there much more to be said about Nietzsche's critique of fanaticism, this essay has sought to open up some possible pathways by which the topic can be illuminated in his writings and shown to be of genuine importance for their proper appreciation.

Further Reading

On the engagement with fanaticism in Nietzsche see the essay by Reginster (2003), who focuses on the difference between the free spirit and the fanatic. For insight into fanaticism in modern philosophy see the essay by Passmore (2003). For insights into Nietzsche's reception of the Enlightenment see the essays by Garrard (2008) and Martin (2008). For a stimulating introduction to aspects of Nietzsche's middle period philosophy as a whole see Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a recent stimulating volume of essays on Nietzsche's free spirit philosophy across his corpus, see Rebecca Bamford (ed.), *Nietzsche's Free Spirit Philosophy* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2015).

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¹ An exception is Reginster (2003). His focus is, however, different to mine, though it is a most useful contribution to the barely existent literature on Nietzsche and fanaticism.

² For insight into Nietzsche's reliance on Epicurean teaching, and as a way of combating extreme modes of thinking, see Ansell-Pearson (2015). The current essays builds on this previous effort.

³ For recognition of the importance of the 'whole heritage' of the Enlightenment for Nietzsche see Kaufmann 1974: 350 & 361

⁴ Kant famously defines enlightenment as a human being's emergence from their self-incurred immaturity or the courage to use their own understanding without the guidance of another. See Kant, "An Answer to the question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" (1784) in Kant (1991), p. 54. For Kant it is religious immaturity that is "the most pernicious and dishonourable variety of all" (p. 59). "Laziness and cowardice," Kant writes, "are the reasons why such a large proportion of men, even when nature has long emancipated them from alien guidance... nevertheless gladly remain immature for life." Compare the opening to Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer as Educator*. For insight into Kant and enlightenment see Deligiorgi (2005).

⁵ For insight into Voltaire's role as a thinker of the Enlightenment see Israel 2007: 751-762. Nietzsche extols the virtues of Voltaire's play on fanaticism, *Mahomet*, in HH 221. See also Voltaire's work of 1763, *Treatise on Toleration*. For insight into Rousseau's reception of Voltaire's play, *Mahomet*, see Kelly (2009).

⁶ As Mostefai and Scott point out, Rousseau sought to stake out an uneasy position between the theologians and the philosophers, and he did so by engaging with the *philosophes*, including Voltaire, "in which he both appropriated and rejected their own approach to religion, toleration, and fanaticism" (2009: 12).

⁷ Nietzsche holds that Europe remains behind Indian culture in terms of the progress it needs to make with respect to religious matters since it has not yet attained the 'free-minded naiveté' of the Brahmins. The priests of India demonstrated "pleasure in thinking" in which observances – prayers, ceremonies, sacrifices, and hymns – are celebrated as the givers of all good things. One step further, he adds, and one also throws aside the gods – "which is what Europe will also have to do one day" (D 96). Europe remains distant, he muses, from the level of culture attained in the appearance of the Buddha, the teacher of self-redemption. Nietzsche anticipates an age when all the observances and customs of the old moralities and religions have come to an end. In a reversal of the Christian meaning of the expression "*In hoc signo vinces* [In this sign (cross) you will be the victor]," which heads *Dawn* 96, Nietzsche is suggesting that the conquest will take place under the sign that the redemptive God is dead. Buddha is a significant teacher because his religion is one of self-redemption, and this is a valuable step along the way of ultimate redemption from religion and from God. Instead of speculating on what will then emerge into existence, he calls for a new community of non-believers to make their sign and communicate with one another: "There exist today among the different nations of Europe perhaps ten to twenty million people who no longer 'believe in God' – is it too much to ask that they *give a sign* to one another?" He imagines these people constituting a new power in Europe, between nations, classes, rulers and subjects, and between the un-peaceable and the most peaceable.

⁸ It should be noted that elsewhere in *Dawn* Nietzsche appeals to the progressive cultural forces at work in Indian history, such as the free-minded naivete of the Brahmins and the redemptive teaching of the Buddha (see D 96).

⁹ The note is not translated in Montinari's essay and was prepared for me by Duncan Large.

¹⁰ I borrow this schema of enlightenment in Nietzsche's thought from Montinari, p. 52. See also Martin 2008, pp. 89-90.

¹¹ In an article on fanaticism and philosophy John Passmore has written that "...philosophical, as distinct from psychological or historical, works which announce that they are directed against fanaticism are exceedingly rare" (Passmore 2003). One might reasonably contend that Nietzsche's *Dawn* is one such work.

¹² Nietzsche does not come to this insight into Kant and fanaticism until the 1886 preface to *Dawn*; he also criticises him for making a sacrifice to the "Moloch of abstraction" in *The Anti-Christ* (AC 11). In *Dawn* itself he actually praises Kant for standing outside the modern movement of ethics with its emphasis on the sympathetic affects (D 132). The problem with Kant's ethics is that it can only show duty to be always a burden and never how it can become habit and custom, and in this there is a "tiny remnant of ascetic cruelty" (D 339).

¹³ Although Nietzsche holds Rousseau to be responsible for being the Revolution's intellectual inspiration and for setting the Enlightenment on "its fanatical (*fanatische*) head" and with "perfidious enthusiasm (*Begeisterung*)" (WS 221), one commentator observes that Rousseau was in fact terrified at the prospect of revolution (Brooke 2012: 207). His intention was not to foment revolt and he was of the view that in our postlapsarian state insurrections could only intensify the enslavement they are so keen to remedy (Kavanagh 2010: 127).

¹⁴ See Kant (1991: 57): "One age cannot enter into an alliance on oath to put the next age in a position where it would be impossible to extend and correct its knowledge...or to make any progress whatsoever in enlightenment."

¹⁵ Compare Kant (1991: 55): "A revolution may well put an end to an autocratic despotism and to rapacious or power-seeking oppression, but it will never produce a true reform in ways of thinking. Instead new prejudices, like the ones replaced, will serve as a leash to control the great unthinking mass."

¹⁶ For example, see Hume 1998: 38-43. For Kant on "genuine enthusiasm" see the essay, "An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race constantly progressing?" in Kant 1963: 137-54.

¹⁷ Kant 1989: 135. As Toscano rightly points out, for Kant fanaticism is immanent to human rationality: "Vigilance against unreason is no longer simply a matter of proper political arrangements or social therapies, of establishing secularism or policing madness: it is intrinsic to reason's own operations and capacities, requiring reason's immanent, legitimate uses to be separated from its transcendent or illegitimate ones" (Toscano 2010: 121).