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## Man is a Downgoing

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# Man is a Downgoing

Olorin Etemad-Lehmer

Presented to Roger Berkowitz, Elizabeth Barringer, Daniel Berthold  
with special thanks to David Shein

*To George and Doris*  
*Aging gone awry, a life too human*  
*I'd take you over any underman*

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## Abbreviations

GS — Gay Science

TSZ — Thus Spoke Zarathustra

BGE — Beyond Good and Evil

AC — The Anti-Christ

WP — Will to Power

Aphoristic texts will be cited by number. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by page. Quotes from Nietzsche's notebooks are cited by number in Kaufmann and Hollingdale's *Will to Power*, although the text is drawn from Phillippe Nonet's unpublished translation.

## Introduction

I write in pursuit of the question: what is the difference between Friedrich Nietzsche's overman and the posthuman foretold by transhumanists? Of course, in this question I make the hypothesis that they are in fact distinct propositions. I do not doubt that this has colored my perspective. I have read many convincing arguments that they are the same. I choose my side because I have experienced what Nick Bostrom calls "the yuck factor," a reflexive sense of moral disgust at radically new technologies (Bostrom 1, 5). But it is not technological progress that offends me. I see efforts to incorporate man into machine already in place throughout the world. How long have we had artificial limbs or the iron lung? How adrift do I feel when my phone dies? How many imbibe concoctions to improve their mood or sharpen their focus? Babette Babich writes "we are (already) transhuman" (Tuncel, 102), and I feel it. I think the smartphone is the most telling example. It is inseparably attached to us. For some it has grown from the pocket, to the wrist, to the ears. Soon it will cover our eyes. We think in terms of it. We talk to it. We hold our friends, our memories, our directions, our entertainment in it. I could hardly buy groceries without it. But it makes things so much easier! Why shouldn't we continue to enhance ourselves and grow through scientific ingenuity? For one, I doubt that technology has driven us out of the nihilism Nietzsche identified as the greatest ill of mankind more than 100 years ago. A new study comes out every week. "Instagram ranked worst for young people's

mental health” “The relationship between addiction to smartphone usage and depression among adults: a cross sectional study” If my phone, and the astonishing technological innovations it contains beneath that shiny black surface, is a value, then it is not one that gives me meaning. I grow to resent it. Even as I rely on it more and more, I only resent it more. It stands resolutely in the way of my social relationships and my self-reliance. Martin Heidegger foretold a future where the technological method of relating to the world overcomes all others. Where humans only regard other humans as objects, standing-by, waiting to be used for some further end. Eventually, we may understand ourselves as only objects, without internal purpose, buried underneath layers of Technik. I believe we are close to this destiny, and transhumanism risks pushing us still closer.

Still I could live with this. Maybe it is better to continue on a dark road than to hack through the forest. No, I am not offended by technological progress. I am offended by the blatant commercialism of the transhumanist project and the insane desire to live forever.

Transhumanism is not a philosophy; it is a marketing scheme. It is a growing network of scammers keen to play on your fear of old age and death. They offer human perfection and immortality, at a steep price. Babich calls it science fiction, all of their products lie decades in the future (I'll take the cash upfront). I love science fiction, but not when people mortgage their homes or cash out their life insurance policies on a dream and a freezer in Arizona set to house their brain for untold years. The last place I wanna go when I die is Scottsdale, Arizona. But I do want to die. Not now, but eventually. Everybody needs to die eventually. The reason is the same one that drove Nietzsche to come up with a species beyond man, the overman; the people around today are not good enough to be around forever. If you transhumanists say you want to improve the human, I might tentatively agree, but Nazi Germany would lurk in the back of my mind.

Wait. You can't possibly mean you want to improve the very same humans alive today? Forever!?! The same ones raping the Earth and blinking about it? It's fine, you say, we'll enhance them with technology. Their values will have to change when they can think 100x faster. No. There's a limit. A limit called death. A limit to how much enhancement one body or one soul can take, and if you tell me there's no limit then I'll tell you you're talking about God, and even God is dead (GS, 125).

I have found two significant differences between Nietzsche's overman and the posthuman:

1. Nietzsche does not advocate for the extension of the human life in pursuit of the overman. Quite the opposite, it will take many generations of births and deaths to bring about the overman. Overlong lives block the way to the overman. Life extension is a universal principle of transhumanism.
2. Nietzsche hates the value of equality. He despises its Christian origins. He argues that structural inequality, even a rigid caste structure, is most beneficial for bringing about the higher and highest types of man. Every transhumanist pays homage to equality.

These points make up Chapters 3 and 4 of my project. The second chapter presents an overview of popular transhumanist voices and their specific deviations from Nietzschean principles.

In Chapter 3, on life extension and its opposite, willed death, I analyze the prologue and 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra's speeches in the prologue are underscored by the timely fall of the tightrope walker. As he attempts to travel from end to end, from man to overman, he is surpassed and dies. This will happen to all of us in our crossings, but still, the crossing furthers species man towards its goal, the overman, which is also its own demise. To go



over, we must go under. My main interlocutor is Laurence Lampert in his book, *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Chapter 4 opposes the Christian, slave moral of equality with Nietzsche's preferred political system for bringing about the maximization and overcoming of man, a rigid aristocracy or the establishment of a new nobility. It is precisely inequality that improves the few. The mediocre are required to toil beneath them for the good of the advancement of the higher. I work between Tracy Strong and Martin Heidegger. Heidegger helps me interpret Nietzsche's conception of the transformation of values through will to power as art, while Strong portrays the coming of the overman as the historical progression from slave morality, to a master morality, and finally to the morality of the overman. I reveal that my understanding of Nietzsche's relationship with death is akin to Heidegger's being-toward-death. Death orients you towards a goal. In Nietzsche's case, the goal of the overman requires your death. Your striving and overcoming, then, are focused entirely on life. While death both enables the coming of the overman and permits you to work towards him.

I conclude with a brief recapitulation of my argument.

There is excellent academic work on the relationship between Nietzsche and transhumanism. I believe the conversation begins with Peter Sloterdijk's controversial *Rules for the Human Zoo*. He reads all of humanism as a mission of taming the beast man. He opposes this to a lineage of philosophers focused on *breeding* man that stretches from Plato, to Nietzsche, and finally Heidegger. With rapid developments in our ability to manipulate the human genome, these human breeding projects have a new scientific foothold. He sees the implementation of such projects as inevitable and coming fast. In anticipation, we must establish ethical guidelines around human breeding now. "Because abstaining or omitting will eventually be insufficient, it

will become necessary in the future to formulate a codex of anthropotechnology and to confront this fact actively” (Sloterdijk, 24). Sloterdijk reveals the eugenic possibilities of transhumanism. Most transhumanists focus on the benefits they can provide to the living, they often omit the potential to craft embryo according to our whim. Still less do they acknowledge that such decisions might eventually fall into the hands of the state, in a system resembling fascist eugenics.

Jürgen Habermas reacts negatively to Sloterdijk’s provocation in *The Future of Human Nature*. He offers a definition of a liberal eugenics, “a practice that entrusts interventions into the genome of an embryo to the discretion of the parents,” but he also takes issue with this perhaps more tolerable form of genetic intervention (Habermas, 78). He argues that the genetic manipulation of an embryo with no ability to consent restricts the freedom of choice it will gain when it is born. Further, working between Kant’s categorical imperative and Aristotle’s distinction of grown and made, he argues that the child may not be able to fully participate in the kingdom of ends. They might see themselves as something made rather than natural and thus not truly an end.

From this point, Stefan Sorgner takes credit for discovering the connection between transhumanism and Nietzsche. He has made it his work to respond to every essay in the narrow field. He has even established a conference series on posthuman studies entitled Beyond Humanism. He is most adamant that transhumanism follows in Nietzsche’s footsteps and has made this argument on multiple counts.

Since, a number of noted Nietzsche scholars have weighed into the debate. Their conversations are recorded in the very helpful collection, *Nietzsche and Transhumanism: Precursor or Enemy*, edited by Yunus Tuncel. Keith Ansell Pearson, who translated the first text

of Nietzsche's I ever read, buys the connection whole cloth. He has written on the subject in his own text *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and Transhuman Condition*. He argues for a more complex understanding of transhumanism than I have been able to provide here. He notes its movement as a cultural meme beyond published authors. Paul Loeb inserts Eternal Recurrence into the conversation. He urges transhumanists to consider Nietzsche's teachings on time and not fall into the spirit of revenge, the feeling of impotence at our inability to will backwards, but he maintains a favorable position regarding the correlation between Nietzsche and transhumanism.

The two essays I found most helpful were Babette Babich's *Nietzsche's Post-Human Imperative: On the "All-too-Human" Dream of Transhumanism* and Yunus Tuncel's *The Question of Pain and Suffering in Nietzsche and Transhumanism*. Babich's essay is beautifully written, witty, and informative. Her comments can be found throughout this paper. I took most seriously her claim, "The technological singularity is all about not dying. Transhumanism is all about not dying" (Tuncel, 120). These words opened the door to my second chapter. I agree with her and I do not think that Nietzsche or the overman is all about not dying. She is the only writer in the collection to take a strong position against the connection between Nietzsche and transhumanism. She also raises an economic concern about transhumanism that I take very seriously but do not study closely in this paper. Tuncel studies the question of death directly. He writes, "Death is part of life and it is a sign of overhumanly power to know when to die, which Zarathustra calls 'free death'" (Tuncel, 228). You can find my thoughts on "On Free Death" in section b of Chapter 2. In the editor's introduction, an odd privilege to summarize your own paper, "Tuncel concludes that Nietzsche and transhumanist thought are more similar than

different” (Tuncel, 11). I side with them in this paper, with a particular focus on the relation to death and values that most effectively bring about Nietzsche’s overman.

A Brief Note on Gender:

The German word *Mensch* denotes human, but is often translated as man. For ease of grammar and interaction with source material, I will bounce between both. The meaning is always the species human.

There is some discussion on the translation of *Übermensch*. I follow Del Caro and Pippin’s ‘overman.’ The injection of *-hu-* breaks the sound of the original. The prefix *super-* recalls the man from Krypton and loses the “word play” of “going under and going over” (TSZ, 5).

## Transhumanists

I define transhumanism as the belief in the augmentation of the human body by technological means. Francis Fukuyama provides a critical perspective on the worldview that inspires transhumanism. “As ‘transhumanists’ see it, humans must wrest their biological destiny from evolution’s blind process of random variation and adaptation and move to the next stage as a species” (Fukuyama, 42). The next stage involves the technological control and enhancement of every conceivable biological process: from eating and disposing, to the efficiency of the immune system, and even the cognitive processes of the brain. Where adaptations in such biological processes were understood to occur across generations through evolution, and thus far

beyond individual human control, the introduction of nanotechnology and genetic manipulation will allow scientists to optimize these functions at will. Transhumanists believe strongly in pursuing and employing these technologies towards the improvement of and beyond the human.

In this chapter, I will explore the work of some significant transhumanists, and begin to draw distinctions between their project and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. The Nietzschean concepts I introduce here will be further explored in later chapters

### Ray Kurzweil

Ray Kurzweil, in his book *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, portrays his vision of the transhuman future. His term, singularity, refers to the “culmination of the merger of our biological thinking and existence with our technology, resulting in a world that is still human but that transcends our biological roots. There will be no distinction, post-singularity, between human and machine nor between physical and virtual reality” (Kurzweil, 7). Kurzweil looks towards the end goal of transhumanism in which human and machine become one. If transhumanism is the process by which scientists attempt to overcome the biological limitations we currently face (e.g. disease, a brain limited by the speed and connectivity of our synapses, and most notably, death), then the singularity is the final destination in which these boundaries have been far surpassed by both the placement of machine elements in the human body and the development of machines that more closely resemble the human. To crudely represent Kurzweil’s argument in Friedrich Nietzsche’s terms, by the maximization of will to power (through technological means alone), the Overman is near. The great distinction that I would draw between these two visions of the future is the promise of personal salvation. Kurzweil’s singularity is an ideal that you yourself can reach. “We will gain power over our

fates. Our mortality will be in our own hands...By the end of this century, the nonbiological portion of our intelligence will be trillions of trillions of times more powerful than unaided human intelligences” (Kurzweil, 9). Even as he disavows utopia, Kurzweil repeatedly conjures up fantastic scenes of human perfection mere inches from your grasp. Nietzsche’s overman is a generational undertaking. It is a goal beyond your human reach. It will not be seen in your lifetime. It may never come.

Kurzweil’s book is not overly philosophical. It is more concerned with describing the scientific progress in, and great potential of, human augmentation by machine. When he responds to ethical critiques of his coming singularity, he calls on scientific studies and theories rather than philosophical arguments. One chapter in his book addresses what he finds to be the most pressing philosophical question. It is evoked in the subtitle “Still Human?” Kurzweil’s answer is a resounding yes. In order to establish this claim, he calls upon two of Friedrich Nietzsche’s ideas: will to power and the overman.

Kurzweil defines the human as “the species that inherently seeks to extend its physical and mental reach beyond current limitations” (Kurzweil, 9). This is a reasonable, if brief, definition of will to power. I read will to power as the overcoming of limitations in both their internal and external manifestations. Kurzweil acknowledges only the mental aspect of the internal, and misses the cultural and spiritual. Roger Berkowitz has defined will to power as, “the natural drive for man and all beings to assert themselves in their difference and superiority over others” (Berkowitz, 110). In a social sense, this is correct. Will to power is the innate search for conflict and dominance. It asserts that every being seeks to overpower and grow in every contact with another being—to the detriment of the other, who must submit and retreat. The will to power of the other is experienced as a limitation, which must be overcome. Will to power

emerges in the social being “in every combination of forces, *defending itself against the stronger, dashing at the weaker*” (WP, 655). This seems utterly brutal, but Nietzsche asserts it as the essence of life. It is the basic fact that allows beings to persist and grow. That it comes at the expense of others is as necessary a consequence for Nietzsche as Newton’s third law, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Every victory brings another’s defeat and every growth a corresponding contraction. There is also an internal element of will to power, which is intertwined with the social. It is best captured in the quote from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “*I am that which must always overcome itself*” (TSZ, 89). One does not always encounter the will to power of another being in the form of a physical struggle for life and death. Morals that have been internalized, rocks that one cannot move, and art that entrances you with its beauty are all understood by Nietzsche as the will to power of another being dominating your own will to power. Will to power also becomes an overcoming of another that you have incorporated into yourself as a limitation: the morals you hold were created by another, the weakness of your body is really the strength of the rock, your gaping awe at Michelangelo’s nonfinito *Slaves* is in fact your submission to Michelangelo’s will to power. The very nature of your life, as a need for dominance over your self and others, urges you to overcome these limitations. Kurzweil’s understanding of will to power comes close to this, but misses Nietzsche on two counts. First, Kurzweil defines the human as will to power. For Nietzsche, will to power is precisely life. All species are defined by their need to grow, expand, and overcome. Second, Kurzweil neglects a cultural and spiritual overcoming that is equally significant to Nietzsche, and most important to Heidegger’s reading of will to power as art. Heidegger defines the being by its creative and destructive need to legislate, or create truth from out of semblance. It strikes me that transhumanism focuses its technological efforts almost exclusively on the overcoming of the

human body. They seem to expect that any cultural transformation will occur organically when the technology becomes sufficiently impressive, and they have done little to directly affect the culture. Below, I will examine the tablets of values they have prepared. They are jumbled and short. They do not shine to me.

In order to establish a relationship between his singularity and Nietzsche's overman, Kurzweil calls on Max More, CEO of the Alcor Life Extension Foundation and Doctor of Philosophy. More invokes Nietzsche's description of man in the opening book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Man is a rope, fastened between animal and overman—a rope over an abyss...What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal." The goal for More and Kurzweil is the singularity, the fusing of man and machine in which formerly biological functions are handled by nanobots and diseases and deficiencies are genetically edited out prebirth. For Nietzsche, the goal is the overman. The overman is also the next step in the evolution of the human. In this paper, I will not argue against the resemblance of their calls to surpass the human. I will draw distinctions between their targets and methods of overcoming. Unlike the transhumanists, Nietzsche does not want to overcome the biological fact of death in pursuit of the overman. Unlike Nietzsche, the transhumanists remain committed to the value of equality in breeding towards "the higher and highest types" (AC, 57).

### Max More

Max More is currently President and CEO of Alcor Life Extension Foundation. Alcor offers cryonic preservation. That is, they will freeze your body after your legal death. They adamantly prefer the term vitrification due to the importance of preventing ice formation and the injection of various preservative chemicals into your organs, but it involves drastically lowering



your body temperature<sup>1</sup>. I'll call it freezing for ease. They will store you (if your brain in a jar is indeed still you) in a vat of liquid nitrogen for an indefinite amount of time. Should the technological possibility of revival emerge, they will endeavor to restore you to life. The cost of this service ranges from \$80,000 (for just your brain) to \$200, 000 (entire body). You can also fund your cryonic procedure through life insurance policies. Should you be close to death, they offer to monitor your deathbed in order to freeze you immediately, for an additional fee<sup>2</sup>. We have all heard the rumors of Walt Disney's brain in deep freeze somewhere beneath Disneyland. Alcor works to bring science fiction into reality, or maybe they're charging 80 grand to freeze 3 pounds of meat.

Alcor asserts very particular definitions of the self and death. They must in order to market their services and operate under the law. Due to legal restrictions, cryonics cannot begin until death has been declared by a doctor. Thus they separate death into its legal standard, which they define only as the point at which modern medicine can no longer help you, and a true death that presumably comes later but can be indefinitely delayed through cryonics. **“Cryonics is not a belief that the dead can be revived.** Cryonics is a belief that no one is really dead until the information content of the brain is lost, and that low temperatures can prevent this loss<sup>3</sup>.” Alcor does not tie death to the ceasing of any biological function, such as the heart or lungs. They define death as the disruption of information content located entirely in the brain. They believe they can revive *you* someday from just your brain on ice, because this information content remains intact<sup>4</sup>. What, then, is this information content? More relates it to the “self” in his

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<sup>1</sup> Find a video of Max More describing the cryonic procedure here, <https://www.singularityweblog.com/alcor-max-more/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.alcor.org/BecomeMember/scheduleA.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.alcor.org/cryomyths.html> emphasis original

<sup>4</sup> See More's dissertation in which he argues for a similar definition of death based on information. <https://web.archive.org/web/20040610182354/http://www.maxmore.com/disscont.htm>

dissertation. The chapter in which he discusses death as the irreversible loss of information is entitled, "The Terminus of the Self." More, and his company Alcor, thus believe that an individual is not dead until the self cannot be restored. They locate the self entirely in the brain, and name only the brain's death as the true death of the self. More's information content seems related to another term, the soul. Like the self, or the information content of your personality, the soul is particular to one individual. Without it, one is said to no longer be themselves. Descartes famously locates the soul in the pineal gland of the brain. This seems oddly similar to More's assertion that the "information content" of a person is located entirely in the brain, and that one is only truly dead when this content has been destroyed. Whether we identify "information content" with the self, a connection More himself makes, or with the soul, potentially a religious imposition he might reject, it is most significant that we recognize that Alcor identifies the human brain as the seat of a person's personhood, and because of this, believes that they can revive the person from only the brain.

Nietzsche would reject the assertion that the self is located entirely in the brain. He also considers the relationship between the self, the soul, and the body, but from the mouth of Zarathustra, he calls for a reevaluation of the body as the self entire. His chapter, "On the Despisers of the Body," openly mocks Descartes conception of self through the separation of body and mind. He offers his alternative view of the relation between thought and extension. "But the awakened, the knowing one says: body am I through and through, and nothing besides; and soul is just a word for something on the body" (TSZ, 23). Here Nietzsche asserts the primacy of the body over the soul. The self proclaims itself to be entirely body. The soul is diminished in two ways. First, it is only an attachment to the body. It has no existence or significance without

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the body. Second, soul is only a word. It only comes about through its naming. This suggests that the soul's significance is a cultural product rather than innate fact. Zarathustra's self is distanced from the soul. It declares the body as its equal. To say the body is the location of the self would also be inaccurate. I am my body "through and through." The self is precisely the body<sup>5</sup>, while the soul is a name for one part of the body and thus only one part of the self. If More looks for the soul as the location of the self then he does something very unNietzschean. If he finds the soul or the self in a piece of the brain, which is again only a name for a part of the body, then he commits the same mistake as the despisers of the body. He fails to value the body as the self. When he excises the brain in order to preserve the self in vitrification, he despises the body. He rejects Nietzsche's claim that the body is the self. In Nietzsche's configuration, the self cannot exist without the body and vice-versa.

Perhaps it is not necessary that every part of Max More's life align with Zarathustra's teaching. His dissertation, after all, is an interaction with the work of Derek Parfit that does not cite Nietzsche, but Alcor is the financial and practical enactment of his transhumanist ideals. He has chosen cryonics as his personal foray into the posthuman project. He also makes the most declarative statement on the connection between Nietzsche and transhumanism—going so far as to say, "transhumanist ideas were directly *influenced* by Nietzsche" (More, Tuncel, 27). I argue absolutely in the following chapter on Nietzsche that policies of life extension (such as cryonics) are not the appropriate method for bringing about the overman, but we can see already in More's location of the self in the brain that his transhumanist practice is not in line with Nietzsche's position. What could show more disgust with the body than to throw it away and claim that you have still preserved the self? Nietzsche's call to return to the valuing of the body, which is also a

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<sup>5</sup> Consider the following quote that supports this claim, "he is called self. He lives in your body, he is your body" (TSZ, 23).

call to impermanence and change, is openly advocated by the transhumanists, in that they wish to enhance and perfect the body (note: perfection  $\neq$  impermanence), but the practice of brain-in-a-jar cryonics flies in its face. A crucial inescapable aspect of the body, and of impermanence, is degradation and death. In their devout quest for life extension<sup>6</sup>, they also ignore Nietzsche's call for a generational breeding of man, but more on this in Chapter 2.

More has been involved with Alcor since 1986. Until 1995, he also ran the Extropy Institute. It is currently run by his partner, Natasha Vita-More. The Extropy institute is dedicated to advocating for More's particular brand of transhumanism, which he calls extropy. Extropy, More's own neologism, is defined as "the extent of a system's intelligence, information, order, vitality, and capacity for improvement." It is the antithesis of entropy. He organizes transhumanism around the attempt to increase extropy, i.e. to push the boundaries of their system. In 1995, More published the first version of *The Extropian Principles*<sup>7</sup>. It is his account of the guiding values of transhumanism. Version 3.0, published 2001, is self-consciously inspired by Nietzsche. He is not cited, but even a quick glance makes it clear. The 6 values he espouses are,

1. Perpetual Progress
2. Self-Transformation
3. Practical Optimism
4. Intelligent Technology
5. Open Society
6. Self-Direction

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<sup>6</sup> Ponce de Leon would be proud, as would Francis Bacon. Cf. *New Atlantis* on the scientific utopia of life prolongation.

<sup>7</sup> <http://vency.com/EXtropic3.htm>

The first two are directly inspired by Nietzsche's conception of will to power. The demand of will to power is that you constantly overcome yourself—that you initiate and complete numerous self-transformations throughout your life and never be satisfied with a single one. More aligns transhumanism with Nietzsche very closely by beginning his tablet of values with will to power. Where he falters, is in associating “an indefinite lifespan” with perpetual progress. The death of individual humans is crucial to the production of Zarathustra's overman. It is necessary in every evolutionary process. More is not unique in this effort. Every single transhumanist I have studied identifies the extension of the human life as a key mission of transhumanism. Nietzsche never advocates fleeing from the spectre of death. He wants you to make both your life and your death meaningful, on your own terms. The individual will to power must meet its end when it is ultimately overcome by another's. To oppose the final limit of one's will to power, the unavailability of death, is to render the striving itself meaningless. What is particularly unique in Nietzsche's notion of will is that an overgoing is also a downgoing. As you seek to expand, you also dig at your own grave. You invite the aggression of greater wills as you expand in your own. It has often been said, life is meaningless without death, so too is evolution without a limit. Nietzsche takes this principle to the extreme. Nietzsche invites you to strive to overcome all limits, but it is the risk that you yourself will be overcome, and the bare fact that eventually you will be, that renders this ceaseless battle the organizing structure of all life and progression. If More wishes to organize his transhumanism in line with Nietzsche, he cannot forget the importance of death. But I imagine this would not make his high-tech meat packing business very profitable.

The third speaks of a kind of resistance to nihilism and a search for joy. If this is not the teaching of Zarathustra, then it is his own personal mission. Heidegger identifies the overcoming

of nihilism as Nietzsche's central philosophical concern. This section is perhaps the most unconditionally related to Nietzsche in that it teaches both the overcoming of nihilism and the recreation of values. More preaches, "We maintain a constructive skepticism to the limiting beliefs held by our associates, our society, and ourselves<sup>8</sup>." Zarathustra, too, preaches the recreation of values. He scorns the supposedly absolute truth of Christianity and humanism. In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche himself attempts to trace the origin of deeply held values with an eye towards the possibility of their recreation. The recreation of values is a principle of transhumanism that I am doubtful of. Bostrom and More express the need for a recreation of values in the pursuit of the posthuman. Still, I cannot help but notice that they express a loyalty to Christian values that Nietzsche despised, most notably equality. I also notice that they tend to enact their transhumanism within the existing value structures of capitalism (in the case of More), science (de Grey), and the academic institution (Bostrom). I feel a certain need to take them at their word. To doubt the validity of their principles would be to do an injustice, especially when that principle is to constantly reexamine their principles, but I would note that the practice of transhumanism thus far has done little to antagonize the dominant values of scientific reasoning, capitalism, and democratic liberalism. Indeed, More's principles display an association with them.

More expresses an affinity to the value of equality in the fifth principle, Open Society. More is unique in that he does not directly invoke the word equality, like Bostrom and Kurzweil. This may be a product of Nietzsche's influence, as equality was a value that he derided with particular vehemence. However, the spirit of capitalist democratic equality is clearly visible in his writing. Instead of the involuntary imposition of political authority More admires "free

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<sup>8</sup> You might notice that he apes a bit of Zarathustra's dramatic, proclamatory style for his tablet of transhumanist values.

exchange” and voluntary association<sup>9</sup>. “The freedom of expression of an open society is best protected by a social order characterized by voluntary relationships and exchanges. We oppose self-proclaimed and involuntarily imposed ‘authorities.’” In his espousal of freedom of expression and voluntary exchange, More shows love for the hallmarks of capitalist democracy. In his condemnation of involuntarily imposed authorities, he even expresses a need for something akin to voting. Democracy is both the dominant value system of our time and a political structure that Nietzsche mocked. In encoding its tenets within his transhumanist principles, More absolutely does not look towards destroying existing values and creating new ones. He expresses loyalty to the dominant values of our time in a very unNietzschean manner. Ironically enough, the quote which most expresses the value of equality in More’s text is highly similar to Zarathustra’s description of the last man, the worst possible destiny of man and the one we are already heading towards<sup>10</sup>. “Extropians seek neither to rule or be ruled.” This is a statement against hierarchies of rank and in favor of a system of equality. Nietzsche found a natural order in such hierarchies<sup>11</sup>. Nietzsche despises equality for its slave morality, for fostering the weak, and for its Christian origins (Antichrist, 43). Again, this is neither a statement that is in line with Nietzsche’s politics nor is it a destruction of the dominant values of today. In claiming equality and capitalistic democracy as tenets of transhumanism, More fails to abide by both Nietzsche’s specific politics and the ethical position of destruction that he demands we take in regards to existing values. He goes along with the status quo of the day, one that is shockingly similar to the one Nietzsche decried 100 years ago.

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<sup>9</sup> The difference between oppressive and voluntary authority are explored in the notion of liberal eugenics by Sloterdijk, Habermas, and Sorgner. It is also important to note that neither More nor Bostrom acknowledges the need for nor the possibility of a genetic breeding program under the auspices of transhumanism.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. TSZ 10, “Who wants to rule anymore? Who wants to obey anymore? Both are too burdensome.” Analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Berkowitz, 2007

Despite this, More returns transhumanism to Nietzsche when he rejects the ideal and the utopian. “Extropians avoid utopian plans for ‘the perfect society’... In place of the static perfection of a utopia, we prefer an “extropia”—simply an open, evolving framework” Too often Kurzweil tries to sell you paradise. This is all too similar to the Christian image of heaven that Nietzsche despised. He thought that the valuing of an ideal, post-world left the imperfect, changing world of semblance meaningless. The transhumanist sales technique often imagines the perfect, immortal human inhabiting the perfect, technological world. The singularity in particular, is an image of perfect coherence between man and machine without conflict. It is a unification. Nietzsche loved strife and conflict over perfection. By stating clearly that utopia is not in the dreams of his transhumanism, More describes a system that might change according to the will of its inhabitants. He imagines a more Nietzschean futurescape than Kurzweil.

It is easy to target More because he is not a dedicated academic, but it is difficult to separate his extropian transhumanism from Nietzsche because he tries so explicitly to bring the two into alignment. Still, I have noticed a few disparities in both his philosophy and his practice. His philosophy expresses the same unNietzschean principles that other transhumanists avow. First, he wants to extend the human life. Second, he maintains that a system of equality is possible and desirable in a posthuman world and our reaching towards it. I will structure chapter 2 around a reading of Nietzsche that absolutely disavows these principles. In addition, his cryonics business shows a great disdain for the human body in that it imagines the self to be located exclusively in the brain<sup>12</sup>. Zarathustra argues against this directly when he associates the entirety of the body with the self. He wishes death on those who show disdain for the body. I

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<sup>12</sup> More himself has opted to only preserve his brain, per video cited above.



imagine More would not particularly like that, but I bet there is an icebox ready and waiting for him.

### Nick Bostrom

Nick Bostrom is a professor at Oxford University and the founding director of the Future of Humanity Institute. He studies the political and philosophical impacts of technology. He is the academic darling of the transhumanist facebook group I joined when I began this project. His work regularly argues for the importance of transhuman technological research and the ethical viability of increasing our technological dominance over the Earth and modifying the human body. As my placement of his work suggests, I consider him to be both a transhumanist in his own right and an academic who studies transhumanism. Unique among the transhumanists, he acknowledges two distinctions between his transhumanism and Nietzsche.

The first is the manner in which the overman is brought about. “What Nietzsche had in mind, however, was not technological transformation but a kind of soaring personal growth and cultural refinement in exceptional individuals<sup>13</sup>” (Bostrom 1, 4). Bostrom reads the creation of the overman as the cultural elevation of a selected few. This is very evident in *Beyond Good and Evil*, but I also read it as an evolutionary step through Zarathustra’s prologue. The creation of a new species from out of man is much more akin to the transhumanist project. Due to Nietzsche’s appreciation of science as art, it is not unreasonable to imagine that technological modifications of the body would form a part of our path to the overman. Babette Babich walks the line between Nietzsche’s call for both spiritual and corporeal upliftment beautifully. “Thus we overcome both

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<sup>13</sup> He continues, “(who he thought would have to overcome the life-sapping “slave-morality” of Christianity).” Nietzsche finds the slave morality of Christianity to be the origin of the value of equality in *The Antichrist* 43. I carry out this analysis in Chapter 3. The value of equality is maintained in Bostrom and More’s tablets of transhumanists values.

body *and* soul” (Tuncel, 124). The soul dictates the spiritual refinement and the cultural values of the individual. Both the body and the values of the individual are transformed in the overman. Thus the values of the culture of overmen are inherently different from our human values. In that the transhumanists focus their technological development on the enhancement of the body, they neglect the soul and the need for cultural transformation. While they call for the recreation of values, and even write new tablets in a very Zarathustran manner, the values they propose are shockingly similar to the human ones we hold today. In fact, I will argue that the culture they propose in the posthuman world is all too similar to our present values, significantly in perpetuating the slave morality of equality. While I would argue that the mission of enhancing the body, excepting the prolongation of human life, is shared by Nietzsche and transhumanism.

Bostrom founds his second distinction on the transhumanists’ maintenance of the value of equality, as I do. In *A History of Transhumanist Thought*, Bostrom finds, “Despite some surface level similarities with the Nietzschean vision, transhumanism...Enlightenment roots, its emphasis on individual liberties, and its humanistic concern for the welfare of all humans” (Bostrom 1, 4). He disavows Nietzsche’s connection to transhumanism on the basis of conflicting values. He calls on other influences like the Enlightenment and the humanism and liberalism that spawned from it. Each of these systems are viciously critiqued by Nietzsche. Today they are criticized for hypocrisy and a selective definition of the rights-bearing human. The same states that adopted the values of freedom and equality simultaneously carried out extensive and exploitative colonialist projects. Nietzsche critiques them on very different grounds. For him, they are a covert extension of Christianity. They perpetuate the morals that deny life and the constant change of the Earth. They reach towards the infinite and degrade the only world we have to live on, this one. (AC, 43). Insofar as transhumanism hopes to persist in

these morals, they maintain old values that Nietzsche despised. I very much agree with Bostrom that the values of transhumanism, specifically their devout adherence to equality, are not compatible with Nietzsche's politics. The cultural transformation he desires is not separate from the creation of the overman. Zarathustra works to destroy the same tablets in an effort to prepare the world for the overman. Perpetuating the principle of equality is no way to fulfill Zarathustra's prophecy.

Bostrom has also tried his hand at creating a tablet of transhumanist values. Unsurprisingly, he advocates for equality under the heading "Wide Access." It bears many similarities to More's offering of an Open Society, but it is significantly less favorable to capitalism. Instead of lauding free exchange, Bostrom calls out structural inequality. Without offering any concrete ways that transhumanism might reach a broad swath of people, he expresses the need for such technological development to not increase inequality. "It would be sub-optimal if the opportunity to become posthuman were restricted to a tiny elite" (Bostrom 2, 8)<sup>14</sup>. The charge of inequality has been levied against transhumanism frequently. It has consistently been refuted. In a world where upgrades to physical strength and intellectual capacity can be bought and sold—the world that the transhumanists look forward to—it is a bit terrifying to think of the corporeal, 'innate' advantages the rich could gain over the poor. Kurzweil consistently argues that rapid technological expansion will not increase global inequality, while others express deep concern. Still, transhumanists consistently pay lip service to equality.

What is important to me in Bostrom's desire, and Kurzweil's argument, that transhumanism will not increase inequality, is that they advocate for the value of equality. They

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. My chapter 3. Nietzsche loves the tiny elite.

not only laud it in this world, they claim it as a value of their posthuman fantasies. Nietzsche despises the value of equality. He finds it to be Christian in its origin and directly opposed to a natural political landscape, which inherently forms divisions of rank and hierarchy. It is these very ranks that allow the refinement of the highest men. Furthermore, Zarathustra's project of bringing about the overman is undertaken in part as the destruction of old values and the creation of new ones. Equality was a too old a value in Nietzsche's time and it has only gotten older. Even if equality were not a value that Nietzsche found particularly hideous, he would not recommend its maintenance in the world of the overman nor in the project of preparing this world for the overman.

Bostrom touches on another point critical to my argument without making a clear determination. I will argue that Nietzsche does not intend for humans to transform themselves into the overman, but only to become "forefathers of the overman" (TSZ, 65). The question becomes: can one individual pass from the base human state into the higher state of the overman? If we conceive of this passage as the transition from one species to another, as it appears in the opening lines of Zarathustra's prologue<sup>15</sup>, then the answer is clear. No animal has ever transitioned from one species to another. At best, through the accumulation of a few mutations one can be closer to the aspects of the next species. One particularly mutated individual might "give birth to a dancing star," or birth the overman, but one cannot break the species barrier themselves (TSZ, 9). Thus one can be transhuman and maybe posthuman, but never overman, if they were ever human. Bostrom makes no definitive determination on the possibility of transition, but he shows an openness to it. "if the posthuman being originated from a human being" (Bostrom, 6). Bostrom does not promise that you can become posthuman, but he

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<sup>15</sup> TSZ, 5, 6 This section is repeatedly quoted by the transhumanists as evidence of Nietzsche's support for their project.

does conceive it as a possibility. Zarathustra never opens this possibility to humans. He only asks them to prepare the earth for the coming of the overman, to live towards the meaning of the earth, and never to make the transition themselves. But Bostrom is alone in failing to promise you fantastically new technological capacities. Other transhumanists do preach a message of personal transformation into the ideal posthuman. Kurzweil promises that you yourself can become a dancing star if you are not too old already. De Grey promises you passage to the other side so long as you invest in his anti-aging serum, and More, perhaps the least attractive, asks you to freeze yourself until we can just get the science right (But of course you won't be dead!). I am not particularly surprised that you have to pay all of these people to ferry you to the posthuman world. Bostrom, with his Oxford salary, is the only one comfortable enough not to ask for tithes. Without a need to beg, he has no need to promise the personal salvation of your soul.

I would make a brief point that among Bostrom's tablet, and as advocated by every single transhumanist, is support for the extension of the human lifespan. This is one of my two main distinctions between Zarathustra's preaching of the overman and the transhumanist message of the posthuman. Zarathustra tells you that man "lives too long" and needs to die at the right time, while the transhumanists want to extend your lifespan, ultimately in order to turn you yourself into the posthuman. I cannot say that Bostrom makes this error, because he is the only transhumanist who recognizes that Nietzsche is not an appropriate forefather to their mission. But he shares the valuing of a long life that Zarathustra derided. Others are much more distant from Nietzsche than even the Nietzsche denier. Aubrey de Grey goes so far as to promise immortality.

## Aubrey de Grey

Aubrey de Grey is a biogerontologist. This means that he studies the effects and mitigation of biological aging. He is the Chief Science Officer of the SENS Research Foundation. It is dedicated to the attempt to end aging, first in mice and then in humans. Do not be fooled by the fact that he looks like Zarathustra, he does not promise the overman.<sup>16</sup> De Grey promises immortality, in a roundabout way. Technically, he promises to extend the length of your vitality indefinitely. And he needs your donations to get it done! His book spends at least 20 pages begging for your political and financial support. Write your congressman and donate to my foundation, if you don't want you or your loved ones to die a slow, painful death.

De Grey understand aging as the steady increase of damage within your body. Hypothetically, he can repair this damage through gene therapies I do not understand<sup>17</sup>. The manner in which de Grey hopes to make humans immortal is called the Longevity Escape Velocity. "there is a threshold rate of biomedical progress that will allow us to stave off aging indefinitely" (de Grey, 330). He claims that he can extend your life indefinitely by putting you on a hamster wheel of rejuvenation therapies. If he can extend your life by 20 years by repairing a given amount of damage, then in that 20 years anti-aging processes will have progressed to the point that they can repair both the since accumulated damage and a bit they could not manage before, thus giving you another 20 or 30 years, and so on until infinity. I think this is a great business model because it not only requires return customers but constant research funding. Similar to the aeronautic escape velocity, given a certain speed, of technological development in this case, one can supersede the limit entirely. Age related death would never visit you, so long

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<sup>16</sup> Insofar as he looks like Rasputin. See the cover art for Oxford World Classics *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Estep et al. 2006 also do not understand de Grey's work. They strongly question his legitimacy. They title their refutation, *Life Extension Pseudoscience and the SENS Plan*.  
<https://www2.technologyreview.com/sens/docs/estepetal.pdf>

as the research never reaches a financial or technological limit and you return periodically for cell rejuvenation.

De Grey calls on the “history of technology” to argue that technological progress consistently reaches a particular inflexion point (de Grey, 331). Before the base invention is made, progress is slow and difficult, after developments accelerate at a rapid pace. His main example, in keeping with the theme of escape velocity, is flight. Before Kitty Hawk, hundreds of years were spent attempting organized flight, while the “first supersonic airliner (Concorde)” flies a mere sixty years later (de Grey, 328). This seems like a modification of Moore’s Law, the proposition that the number of transistors on chips will double every two years. Some have expanded this into the general rule that technology increases exponentially. De Grey modifies this only in that he establishes an origin point at a particular invention. He claims that we have not yet reached that point in the fight against aging, but it will come when he can extend the life of a mouse by 2-3 years. After this point, he expects anti-aging technology to develop at a rapid, even exponential, rate, thus staving off age-related death forever<sup>18</sup>. He elaborates on this argument with a metaphor that sounds curiously Zarathustran. He moves from the believable history of airflight to the unwieldy future of jetpacks. “consider the analogy with literal escape velocity, i.e. the overcoming of gravity” (de Grey, 331). You jump off a cliff with a jetpack on. As you fall you steadily increase the power, slowing your fall and eventually “start shooting upward” (de Grey, 331). You have overcome gravity, for a moment, but have you overcome the spirit of gravity? The spirit of gravity is one of Zarathustra’s most significant overcomings, but it is not the same as simple gravity.

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<sup>18</sup> Babich has mocked Kurzweil for making the same claim about other transhumanist developments and the coming of the singularity. “taking Moore’s Law not as a statistical generalization thus far and as applied to chips but as if it were a cosmic law of nature applicable to everything technological” (Tuncel, 124). I am not qualified to determine the truth of the proposition that technology increases exponentially, but it is a truism I have heard for years.

The chapter “On the Spirit of Gravity” begins with the metaphor of the heaviness of earth and the flight of the bird escaping its pull, but the second part transitions into a reading of the metaphor as the heaviness of nihilism and the flight of “*learning to love oneself*” (TSZ, 154). “Heavy do earth and life seem to him; and the spirit of gravity *wants* it so! But whoever wants to become light and a bird must love himself—thus *I teach*” (TSZ, 154). Zarathustra’s spirit of gravity is the weight of the unvalued world. To one who wants to escape into the infinities of heaven or Plato’s world of ideas, the world is a terrible burden. It drags down his yearning soul and brings great depression and apathy. As the world is without value and all values are detached from the world, so all values become meaningless. To love oneself is to love the imperfect and the everchanging. It is to love the Earth and the body and the new meaning of the Earth, the overman. Both Nietzsche and de Grey use the metaphor of overcoming gravity, but they represent very different things. De Grey’s metaphor calls us away from the momentary and into the infinity of immortality. Nietzsche, paradoxically, implores us to return to the valuing of the Earth. One should learn to love oneself, but not into the infinite. A love for oneself is a love for becoming and overcoming, but each of these finds their meaning in the limits imposed by the Earth. If gravity is a law that denies life, then we will write a new one, but even that one will not live forever. Each law is to be loved for its overcoming and its ability to be overcome. Each body is to be loved for its life *and* its death, when that death is towards the goal of the overman. De Grey reaches towards the infinite and so he conceives of the limit, death, as a burden. The secret to overcoming the spirit of gravity is learning to love its effect on you. You must learn to love yourself as pinned beneath the limit and thus overcome it in spirit. You must not reach towards the infinite lest every limit, and death most of all, becomes a burden that drags you into nihilism.



Every transhumanist advocates for the extension of the human life, but only Aubrey de Grey promises immortality. I will argue that life extension alone is not a practice that Nietzsche thought would lead to the overman. Immortality, though, is absolutely not Nietzschean. Immortality through transformation is the promise of Christ. The immortality of the idea, and your access to it through transformation in your journey out of the cave, is the promise of Plato's Socrates. Nietzsche despised both. They were the greatest ills of history and the source of his need to make of life change, becoming, and semblance. It would be all too easy to hold de Grey up as exemplary of all transhumanism and discard them as idealists and neo-Christians who reach for the infinite, but it would also be disingenuous. Further, it is a bit slippery to target de Grey at all because he does not speak of Nietzsche as influence, kindred spirit, surface level similarity, or even at all. De Grey is not, though, disavowed by other transhumanists as he has been by others in the biological gerontology community. He is invited to their conferences and quoted in their texts. A more moderate form of his fantastical promise, life extension, is a key part of their doctrine. Life extension alone is refuted several times in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, most significantly in the metaphor of the tightrope walker and the chapter "On Free Death." I bring de Grey into the conversation as the extreme of a widely held norm—an anti-Nietzschean position on an already unNietzschean principle. The transhumanist mission of life extension separates transhumanism from Nietzsche's philosophy and the posthuman from the overman.

In my exploration of transhumanism, I have tried to expose a few ancillary distinctions between their work and Nietzsche's. Ray Kurzweil lacks an understanding of the cultural overcoming that is crucial for Heidegger's will to power. Max More locates the soul in the brain. He believes we can discard the body and still preserve the self, while Nietzsche identifies the soul and the self with the body. Both Nick Bostrom and Max More maintain the value of

equality, which Nietzsche both detested and thought had no place in the striving for a higher man. Aubrey de Grey's policy of immortality reaches beyond the flux of the earth and into the infinite. If it falls short, then it lands only on life extension, which Nietzsche also derided. All of these are significant differences, but I rest the bulk of my argument only on the two clearest disparities: the extension of the human life and the value of equality.

### Downgoing: Dying Towards a Goal

This chapter argues that the extension of the human life is not an appropriate method for bringing about the overman. I read in the fall of the tightrope walker, which comes about by his being surpassed, a metaphor for the appropriate human living towards the overman. Man should "live dangerously" and perish, so that another can travel a bit further along the rope (GS, 283). I understand Zarathustra's call to "Die at the right time!" as maintaining the purpose of death in species evolution (TSZ, 53). One grows withered and old, unfit for striving, not only in the weakness of old bones but also in one's steadfast adherence to old values. The perilous rope dance from man to overman is a generational overcoming. No individual can make the entire crossing. This is violently opposed to Kurzweil's promise that you can witness the singularity and de Grey's efforts to extend the human life to infinity.

#### The Fall of the Tightrope Walker

"But you could well create the overman. Not you yourselves perhaps, my brothers! But you could recreate yourselves into fathers and forefathers of the overman: and this shall be your best creating! —" (TSZ, 65)

Not you yourselves—Recreate yourselves into forefathers. Forefathers of the overman—*Not you yourselves*. This is the crucial difference between Nietzsche's overman and transhumanist vision of the posthuman singularity. By extending the length of your life and the breadth of your capacities<sup>19</sup>, the transhumanists offer to turn you yourself into the next species that surpasses man. As though any single individual could transition from one species to the next. Nietzsche, on the other hand, asks you to live your all too human life in such a way that one day long after you are gone the overman might come about. The promise of personal, eternal life, the promise of personal self-transformation, is the promise of Christ, scorned by Nietzsche. It is also the promise of Plato's escape from the cave—that you yourself might emerge from darkness into the light and be transformed. Nietzsche asks you to modify the way you live on earth with your eyes toward a goal, but he never promises you eternal paradise. Crucial to being a forefather of the overman is your own death. You can only progress so far along the rope between man and overman. Others will emerge who are better. They can reach closer to the goal. If you remain past the point at which you are the best, you only take up space. You must die. Not only to clear space for the overman, but also to clear space for the next man who will draw the species that much closer to the other side. You cannot make the crossing alone. You cannot make the crossing at all. Just as early humans ate and fucked the Neanderthals into nonexistence, so will the overman do the same to us. No Neanderthal ever became human. At best his seed was incorporated into our species only to embarrass you in your 23&me report (Only 2% caveman!). So too, you will never be the overman. No human will ever become overman. The overman, if he

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<sup>19</sup> One of these things is not like the other. The latter aligns with Zarathustra's vision of the overman. I will argue that the former does not.

ever comes, is a rare mutation born from the best of us. He is entirely unhuman. At best, you can be his forefather, you can live in such a way as to hasten his coming.

The prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* consists of two parts: Zarathustra's descent from his mountain cave and his first speech to the public. His descent recalls Moses' return from Mt. Sinai carrying the new tablets of his faith or the opening line of Plato's *Republic*, "Socrates: I came down from the Piraeus." Zarathustra descends to teach a new lesson and a new set of values. As Moses returns to find the Israelites worshipping the golden calf so does Zarathustra find the people worshipping a false idol. They have come to the marketplace to see the tightrope walker. Zarathustra wants to focus them instead on the unseen end of his perilous walk, the overman. "Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman—a rope over an abyss" (TSZ, 7). When More and Kurzweil cite this line, they do so without context. They claim only that Nietzsche affirms an evolutionary step beyond man. They are not wrong in this, but they neglect that no human will ever reach this end. Each human, if they live dangerously in pursuit of the goal of the overman, will try and fail like the tightrope walker. In trying, they will strive for self-overcoming and even the ultimate overcoming of their species. In failing, they will die and allow the one who surpasses them to travel a bit further. This is stated directly by Zarathustra and portrayed metaphorically in the tightrope walker's fall from the line when he is surpassed by another. The overman is brought about precisely through the churning of generations, the birth and death of many individual men. In the following, I will provide this missing context. I will argue that it is crucial that man's life not be extended in pursuit of the overman, but that man live dangerously and perish so that something better may take his place. In pursuit of a species beyond man, from out of man, the transhumanists follow Nietzsche's vision of the overman. However, in making the extension of the human life a principle and method of this pursuit, they

neglect that the death of individual humans is a necessary step in the generational production of the overman.

It will be helpful to trace the action of the scene in relation to Zarathustra's speeches. The two are intertwined. The crowd and the acrobat respond to Zarathustra, and he adjusts his rhetoric in order to respond to them. I offer a reading in which the tightrope walker's fate serves as a metaphor for the human pursuit of the overman. I am not alone in this. Laurence Lampert reads a similar interaction between action and content. He divides Zarathustra's first speech into three parts. Each describes a different image of the overman and employs a different tactic of persuasion. Each also corresponds to movement by the tightrope walker. All of Zarathustra's efforts to persuade the crowd fail. They consistently misunderstand and mock him. It is simply not easy for man to understand the overman—to understand something that is entirely beyond himself. The same is true today.

Zarathustra's first speech begins before the tightrope walker emerges onto the rope. His first words to the public read, "*I teach you the overman. Human being is something that must be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?*" (TSZ, 5). The overman is the product of the overcoming of man. It is presented as both a teaching and a challenge. The overcoming of man is insisted upon. It is a statement against contentment, passivity, and self-satisfaction. It expresses disgust with the belief that you, as human, are the fulfillment of everything that has come before you, rather than a small step along the way. You are confronted on your efforts to overcome the species, but the manner in which this overcoming is to be done is not yet clear. Sloterdijk reads it as a matter of programmatic breeding, I read it as a political system of inequality that improves the upper class, but Zarathustra first lays the values groundwork of his mission. "I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth* and do not believe those who speak to you of

extraterrestrial hopes” (TSZ, 6). This is a statement directly against Socrates and by extension Christ. Metaphysics thus far has privileged the ideal, the immortal, and the infinite truth. Socrates and Christ, in their promise of a world beyond, scorned the temporary, fractured, and imperfect earth. Zarathustra calls us to reject the false hope of the infinite. He calls us to value that which is imperfect and does not last forever. This is a part of the genesis of the overman. A valuing of the temporary earth and a rejection of the infinite and ideal. The promise of immortal life is both the promise of transhumanism and the promise of Christ. It is a lie that Nietzsche despises for its degradation of the earth. “Once the soul gazed contemptuously at the body, and then such contempt was the highest thing: it wanted the body gaunt, ghastly, starved. Thus it intended to escape the body and the earth” (TSZ, 6). The valuing of the body is here tied to the valuing of the Earth and impermanence. At first glance, this seems to be in line with transhumanism. They speak of the enhancement and the health of the body. But Zarathustra’s valuing of the body is both a literal pronouncement and a metaphorical call to impermanence—to artistic creation on earth without resorting to the infinite. Transhumanism enhances the human body not with an eye towards constant recreation or the death of the human but rather towards perfection and immortality. Zarathustra loves the health of the body, but he demands that we not try to escape it in its inherent fragility and impermanence. This is very different from the transhumanist creed.

The crowd thinks Zarathustra has been hyping up the tightrope walker. They mistake the overman for the man who walks over them. He is not the overman. Zarathustra explains the metaphor: the rope is man, its beginning at animal, and its end at the overman. The tightrope walker is the man who lives dangerously, the man who makes his “vocation out of danger” (TSZ, 12). He is not the overman, but he is the one who attempts the crossing. He represents the strong

human that tries, and necessarily fails, to make it to the overman. In this section of the prologue, the tightrope walker begins his performance. Zarathustra's call to "herald" the overman plays on this beginning of the treacherous crossing. Both Zarathustra and the tightrope walker act as heralds. The herald foretells a great coming, but he is not the prophesied in himself. Zarathustra too does not claim to be overman in himself, and the tightrope walker will never reach his desired end. He will "perish" in the crossing as man must in his reaching for the overman (TSZ, 9). The striving for the overman is not intended to reach its completion. Zarathustra calls on man to foresee and foretell the overman. He calls on us to reach for the end without any promise of heavenly satisfaction or infinite reward. This is the separation between Zarathustra's call and the Christian promise of heaven. It is also the distinction between the overman and de Grey's promise of immortal perfection. You will never reach the end of the rope, but you must still strive for it and perish along the way.

This passage is of the utmost significance to disputing transhumanism's false attachment to Nietzsche. They offer to turn you yourself into the immortal, ideal posthuman. The overman is not something any human will ever reach. It is brought about precisely through the death of the human and the death of many strong humans who prepare the world for the overman. "what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossing over* and a *going under*" (TSZ, 7). It is true that man must try to cross over into the overman, but in that crossing he brings about his own downfall, as an individual and as a species. In crossing over, humans and human must go under. The crossing over is promised by Christ and transhumanists who promise your own transformation into the posthuman, but going under is the qualification that demands you recognize your own inadequacy. Two quotes from this passage emphasize the going under of man and the need for individual humans to bring their own downgoing in pursuit of the overman.

Note that Zarathustra's teaching of downgoing or perishing is incompatible with any doctrine of human immortality. "I love the one who makes of his virtue his desire and his doom: thus for the sake of his virtue he wants to live on and to live no more" (TSZ, 8). To live on and to live no more is a contradictory construction. It is both immortality and mortality, both desire and doom. It is impossible to choose a privileged term in this opposition. Neither truly is. They are concomitant. If one maps this opposition onto the opening of this section, one's desire becomes the crossing over and doom the going under. Man lives on in that he brings about something better, the overman, but he lives no more, he is doomed, in that man perishes in this bringing about. Man is only immortal in the product of his own mortality. This is as true in the hopes of childbearing as it is in the Nietzschean production of the overman. In perishing, he allows an improvement on his form to flourish. Transhumanism misses this need for the doom of man. They offer immortality to those who are still all too human. Zarathustra calls on man and men to die and live forever only in the ultimate genesis of a better overman. In striving for a better man, transhumanists are in line with Nietzsche, but in offering that to man as he is now, they ignore the generational, evolutionary production of the overman. They hope to extend man through the species barrier, in the remnants of old values and individual, human lives. The overman is brought about through *both* the striving for better life and the engine of death!

The need for the human to perish in the birth of the overman becomes clearer. "I love the one who justifies the people of the future and redeems those of the past: for he wants to perish of those in the present" (TSZ, 8). In this quote, the people of the future, the overman, are set entirely distinct from those of the present and the past. We in the present are not told to become our hopes for the future, but only to justify them. We justify them in living towards them as a goal and in acknowledging that we are not fit to become them. We must perish in order to



prepare space for those who come after us, better men and overman alike. Those transhumanists who call for an end to aging, most notably de Grey, ask us to remain past our expiration date. They ask us to extend our lives and maintain our presence on Earth. They ask for a change in capacity, but they suggest the maintenance of a constant: you and your life. Is it any surprise that this plays directly on your fear of death and decrepitude? Zarathustra implores you to accept this death as necessary in pursuit of a goal. Transhumanists do not offer the production of a new, improved species that comes at the cost of your own death and the death of your loved ones as Zarathustra does. They offer abatement from your fears and contentment with yourself. They tell you that you can be the “ebb of this great flood” of constant species improvement that every animal has engaged in out of their own will to power (TSZ, 5). Zarathustra asks you to face your doom and have contempt for yourself (TSZ, 6). Zarathustra never offers that you yourself can become the perfect overman, as the transhumanists do with the posthuman, in their promises of eternal immortality and physical perfection. Instead, he calls on you to be the herald of the overman. “they herald the coming of the lightning, and as heralds they perish” (TSZ, 9). As Sloterdijk puts it, Nietzsche thinks of the overman in “an era of the world far in the future” (Sloterdijk, 22). More than a long way off, the overman is only possible given your death and the death of man. This plays out in both the fate of the tightrope walker and the speeches of Zarathustra. The next man cannot travel further along the rope if you clog it up. You must fall for others to progress. At best, you can hope to herald the overman, to prepare the way for the overman, and to live in such a way that you might be the forefather of the overman.

Zarathustra’s call for the death of man to provide the way for overman is misunderstood by the crowd. “I am not the mouth for these ears” (TSZ, 9). Zarathustra’s teachings are just as fundamentally misunderstood today by the transhumanists if they believe they can become

overman within their lifetime, however long it may be extended. In Lampert's words, Z moves from his "description of a *future* goal" to an attempt to shame the crowd into hearing his teachings (Lampert, 18 emphasis mine). He begins to speak of the "*last human being*" (TSZ, 9). According to Lampert, this is an alternative, and much worse, destiny of man, not a precursor to the overman, "the victory of the last man would preclude the coming of the superman" (Lampert, 24)<sup>20</sup>. Man is currently progressing towards this dreaded last man. He offers the overman as an alternative, but one that will require an immense effort of will and preparation. The last man blinks at this prospect. He is self-satisfied and feels no need for improvement. He thinks he has already reached the ideal. "The time of the most contemptible human is coming, the one who can no longer have contempt for himself" (TSZ, 9). Contempt for yourself brings with it the yearning for a better man, an overman. It is the willingness to herald your own doom in pursuit of the other shore. It is the desire paired with doom. The last man has no desire and definitely no desire for his own doom. There is no chaos or yearning in him. He thinks himself perfect already. Isn't this more akin to the posthuman that transhumanists speak of? Their new species is not brought about through death and striving, or the recreation of values and a new conception of time. It is brought about through the extension of the human into infinity, in both his individual personality and his old values. They continue to hold the old value of equality dear, and personal longevity, as the mask of the fear of death, is at the heart of their project. The last man loves both his own longevity and passive equality. "like the flea beetle; the last human being lives longest" (TSZ, 10). The last man is a pest that cannot be eradicated. He lives on and on never giving way to

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<sup>20</sup> I very much agree. "It is time that mankind set themselves a goal. It is time that mankind plant the seed of their highest hope. Their soil is still rich enough for this. But one day this soil will be poor and tame, and no tall tree will be able to grow from it anymore" (TSZ, 9). My assertion that only the death of man will lead to the birth of the overman risks suggesting that the "last man" would be a necessary step in this process. But my model for human death, as Zarathustra's, is the tightrope walker who lives dangerously and risks all in trying to make his crossing—only to fall into the abyss. The last man is an image of contentment and passivity. He is the crowd. I will even argue that he is an image of the transhuman posthuman.

something better. He clogs the rope indefinitely. The species improvement that Zarathustra calls for cannot take place within a single individual who remains across time. It demands death and rebirth. Zarathustra calls on the crowd to live dangerously and die—to fight to reach the other side and necessarily fall so that others can make it a bit further. In the figure of the last man, he shames those who want to remain in contentment and ease. The transhumanists offer permanent, placid contentment. They tell you that you are good enough to be in yourself the end of human evolution. They offer to turn you into the complacent last man who does not dream beyond himself, blinking. Like the last man, they honor equality<sup>21</sup>. “One no longer becomes poor and rich: both are too burdensome. Who wants to rule anymore? Who wants to obey anymore? Both are too burdensome” (TSZ, 10). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche associates equality with a slave morality. The weak resent the strong. They try to hold them back through the morals of equality and humility. The overman, as the maximization of will to power, is a society of masters—a community in which each strives to dominate the others. The last man is content to make everyone a slave to no real master—a castrated bull with no yoke, content to chew the cud and plod the fields aimlessly. “No shepherd and one herd!” (TSZ, 10). This is the political vision of equality proffered by transhumanists like Bostrom and More. It is entirely un-Nietzschean. They offer the despised last man and shudder at the brutality and egoism of the overman. Like the last man, transhumanists value longevity, equality, complacency, and self-satisfaction. The transhumanist posthuman, or singularity, or precisely the vision of man that Zarathustra employs to shame us into action. The overman, unlike the posthuman, embraces danger and death in order

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<sup>21</sup> Their claim that the ability to purchase physical perfection and immortality will bring about equality is highly dubious. Kurzweil claims that technology drastically reduces in price after an initial surge. He loves the example of the smartphone. Babich tackles this well (Tuncel, 117). As soon as the old model depreciates, a new, more culturally desirable one is released at the same (or higher) initial price. Still, they claim equality as a part of their proposed future. Particularly Bostrom but also More.

to clear the way for the overman. The human cannot become the overman in himself, but he can become the last man and he can become posthuman, or he can will the overman in his own death.

This vision of the last man marks the end of the prologue as the collection of Zarathustra's initial speeches, but the action of the scene continues. The death of the man who lives dangerously, the tightrope walker, in his pursuit of the other side, the overman, metaphorically enacts Zarathustra's teaching. In the scene, Zarathustra's teachings continue to be tragically misunderstood. The crowd laughs at him. They find the image of the last man more favorable than the overman. "'Give us this last human being, oh Zarathustra' – thus they cried – 'make us into these last human beings! Then we will make you a gift of the overman'" (TSZ, 11). Lampert interprets this as an exchange. The crowd will accept the destiny of the last man and leave the overman to Zarathustra. In my understanding, the crowd misunderstands the sequence of the creation of the overman. They believe they can progress from man to last man and finally into overman, when in fact they are two opposing destinies of man. One of the universal slave morality of the last man, and the other of a new kind of will to power represented by the overman. If the transhumanists reach toward the overman at all, this is the manner of their quest. They will first turn man into last man so that he can become overman. In this process, though, they will ruin the soil that might grow a "tall tree" (TSZ, 9). They will deplete man of his chaos such that he can no longer "give birth to a dancing star" (TSZ, 9). Zarathustra calls us to reject the placid health and self-complacency of the last man in striving for the overman. The transhumanists call on us to strive for longevity and equality, thus precluding the possibility of a new, ranked birth from out of the death of man.

The true genesis of the overman is revealed in metaphor by the fate of the tightrope walker. Man must live dangerously and die in order to turn himself into a forefather of the

overman. When the brave acrobat is midway across the rope, a jester<sup>22</sup> emerges from the first tower. He rapidly catches up to the walker and begins to jeer at him. His mocking is focused on the tightrope walker's inadequacy and the need for competition and generational improvement. "Forward, sloth, smuggler, pale face! Or I'll tickle you with my heel! What business have you here between the towers? You belong in the tower, you should be locked away in the tower for you block the way for one who is better than you!" (TSZ, 11). Despite the tightrope walker's practice and diligence, the one who comes immediately behind him is already surer of foot and more confident in his crossing. The jester urges him on toward the goal before questioning his business on the rope at all. We already know, and Zarathustra will affirm it in his death, that the tightrope walker is among the bravest of men. Unlike the crowd who gaze complacently, blinking, the tightrope walker strives to make the crossing to the other side, to the overman. Still, he is quickly surpassed. He "block[s] the way for one who is better" (TSZ, 11). It is the same with man in his pursuit of the overman. We must all obey our will to power, strive for self-overcoming, and try to make the crossing, but soon someone better will come along. They will be able to make it a bit further towards the goal, and in doing so, they will have to pass us by. This passing is not a peaceful one. In the right pursuit of the overman, unlike the cunning survival of the weak in slave morality, the weak will perish and the strong will survive, until they too are bested by the next. We must die as we are passed—both because the next will knock us from our perch whether we like it or not, and because we will choose our own death out of a

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<sup>22</sup> His status as a jester is a curiosity. Lampert sees him as a cynical figure who mocks the heroic striving for the overman. His claim that the tightrope walker ought to remain in the tower, "in stasis," suggests that he has no hope for the overman (Lampert, 28). In my telling, the jester represents the next man. His mocking displays the contempt each successive generation has for the last as man inches across the rope towards the overman. Because he can make it a bit further, what came before is useless. To me, his jesterhood is the playful and rude nature of youth. Later, Zarathustra states, "But only a jester thinks: 'human being can also be *leaped over*'" (TSZ, 159). I cast man not as the jester but as the tightrope walker. What is important to me in the jester is the inevitable fact of being surpassed. The rapid progress of leaping is not implied by my reading.

supreme desire for the goal of the overman. By lingering on the rope, continuing to strive when we are no longer the strongest and the best, we block the path for those who can bring man closer to overman. This is a fact of evolutionary progress. Birth and rare mutation are necessary to bring about change, but so is the death of the old and outdated. And so the tightrope walker dies as he is passed. “—he let out a yell like a devil and leaped over the man who was in his way. This man, seeing his rival triumph in this manner, lost his head and the rope. He threw away his pole and plunged into the depths” (TSZ, 11). We will all be leapt over. It comes as a shock. It marks the beginning of our end. A rival will emerge and surpass us. The best we can do at that moment, after we struggle and fail to assert our dominance, is to die and let the better travel as far as they can. They will be surpassed soon too. The striving for the overman is a procession of valiant attempts and necessary falls. No human makes it to the overman. Just as the tightrope walker’s journey ends tragically when the next man leaps over him, individual men must die so that the species can progress towards its own end, which is also its fulfillment, the creation of the overman. Zarathustra honors the tightrope walker in his necessary death. In a brief moment that might stand against Alcor’s assertion that the body can die without you dying along with it, Zarathustra says to the fallen man, “Your soul will be dead even sooner than your body — fear no more!” (TSZ, 11). The futuristic scam of cryonics relies oddly heavily on the archaic notion of the immortality of the soul—the persistence of your personality after the death of your body. Zarathustra commends a valiant and complete death from out of a perilous life.

This is precisely what the transhumanists miss when they promise immortality. They forget that the human is not suited to become the overman. The overman is an entirely other species. Man is suited for striving, but that striving reaches a necessary limit. That limit occurs when the next generation emerges superior. If man lives forever, and we instead curb the

birthrate as de Grey hesitates to suggest, then we limit the possibility for the progressive, generational improvement of man. The old will clog the rope and prevent the young from moving past them. They offer to continuously improve you and your physical and mental capacities, but your deficiency, your contemptible humanity, is not only based in your limitations. It is also based in the limitations of your parents. If these can be overcome in the body, they cannot be so easily overcome in the values held in the mind (BGE, 264). Your values are a product of your origin that cannot be overcome with gene therapy. Humans are beholden to their human origin. Only those who are born as slightly better men can destroy old values and create new ones. The old are too ingrained in what the human was. We must perish so that the better can take our place. Not just the overman, but also the next man—the next generation who can make it a bit further. If man truly wants to bring about Zarathustra's overman, he must strive to live dangerously and die so that others can journey a bit further. The transhumanist promise of immortality absolutely prevents the evolutionary, generational genesis of the overman. The posthuman is not the overman. He is the complacent, contemptible last man.

### On Free Death

The prologue is not the only place where Zarathustra affirms the need for the death of man in the genesis of the overman. “On Free Death” is a chapter usually taken to concern suicide, the free choosing of one's death<sup>23</sup>. This is not wrong, but in this discussion we can also find the broader commandment: “Die at the right time!” (TSZ, 53) Suicide is the willing of one's death, but one should also will one's death even without the act itself, for the good of yourself

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<sup>23</sup> Karl Jaspers reads it in this way. Suicide turns death into an activity of life. Michael Hauskeller also calls on this chapter to argue against the transhumanist policy of life extension. See Tuncel, 34. He writes, “The overhuman understands how to live *and* how to die. The transhumanist, in Nietzsche's view, understands neither” (35). Dying is central to the life of the overman. I argue that it is also key to the human living towards the overman.

and the good of the species. In Zarathustra's teaching, one should die at the right time, when one is withered and no longer useful. The transhumanists seek to prevent withering as they extend the life, but they forget that the mind grows old along with the body. Even if it did not become slower and more confused, it would still become set in old values. You can't teach an old dog new tricks, not even with bionic legs.

Zarathustra tells his followers that they must learn to die and die at the right time. Learning to die is not a new teaching. Ironically, given Nietzsche's lambasting of Socrates in *Beyond Good and Evil*, it is also the lesson of *The Apology*. Zarathustra crucially adds the addendum: at the right time. When is this right time? When one has established for themselves "goal and heir" (TSZ, 54). The goal and heir of man is the overman. He is the goal at the end of the rope and heir by way of his generational production. The production of generations, the steady progression across the rope, occurs through birth and death. We are all too ready to laud the joy of birth, but Zarathustra laments, we have yet to turn death into a "festival" (TSZ, 53). Death, when it comes at the right time, is a joyous, cyclical, and necessary occurrence. It should be looked forward to and celebrated, not run from. "And out of reverence for his goal and heir he will no longer hang withered wreaths in the sanctuary of life" (TSZ, 54). It is out of our desire to bring about the overman that we must die. When we are withered, we can no longer progress along the rope and we must clear the way for others. The transhumanists claim that they will only prevent withering and extend vitality, but they forget that the creation of the overman is a generational process. One human cannot make it all the way to the overman. He must, like Zarathustra, pass the golden ball of his goal to an heir—who will pass it to the next and the next.



<sup>24</sup>Like the tightrope walker who falls from the rope when another surpasses him, the last generation must make room for the next. It is not always a peaceful process. The tightrope walker is killed by the rude jester, but if one knows when one's time has come, and one respects both the final goal and the potential for the next to reach a bit closer to that goal, then one will clear space on the rope of their own volition. They will die freely at the right time. Zarathustra reinforces this claim in the following line. "Indeed, I do not want to be like the rope makers: they stretch out their threads and in doing so they always walk backwards" (TSZ, 540). The transhumanists are ropemakers. They hope to stretch the human life as long as possible. In doing so, they clog the bridge between man and overman. They extend the rope we walk on and make it a longer journey to the other side. They walk backwards. Their aim is not the overman, but the self-interest of the all-too-human individual. The dawn of the overman is the twilight of the human. By extending our life and our comfort, they drive us deeper down the way towards the complacent last man, blinking, and forget the danger, risk, and brevity of the tightrope walker. They prevent our progress towards the final goal by extending the life of humanity. This goal is the creation of our own heir, the overman, but it is also our own end.

Zarathustra calls for death at the right time as both a personal and species good. When you have lived too long, and begun to rot on the branch, you do yourself a disservice by continuing to cling to it, but you also harm the progression of the next generation by occupying space. Death at the right time must be freely chosen as the culmination of your own life and with the goal of species progression towards the overman in mind.

Far too many live and far too long they hang on their branches. Would that a storm came to shake all this rot and worm-food from the tree! (TSZ, 54)

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<sup>24</sup> Lampert argues that Zarathustra's refusal to die at the end of Book 1, having completed his initial teachings and passed the golden ball, is his failure to live as he preaches. It is for this that he apologizes. "More than anything I like to see you, my friends, throwing the golden ball! And so I linger yet a bit on earth: forgive me that!" (TSZ, 55).

The human is compared to the fruit. If it is not picked when it is ripe, at the right time, then it rots on the branch. It becomes useless and sickly. “Far too many live and far too long” Zarathustra laments the mass quantity of humans and the length of their lives. He is concerned with the overpopulation of the Earth by the less than admirable human species, and one of its main causes, the dramatic extension of the human life<sup>25</sup>. Unlike Malthus, his concern with the quantity of humans is not tied to the amount of available resources. Zarathustra is concerned with vitality and evolutionary progression. The quantity of the population clogs the rope and prevents us from marching steadily, generationally, towards our goal and our end. The sickly and withered nature of humans in their final years is both physical and spiritual; he ties this withering to love and action as much as physical capacity. Why do so many cling to the branch for too long and hold on to their lives past their time? “It is cowardice that keeps them clinging to branch” (TSZ, 54). Zarathustra acknowledges that the plunge into the unknown is frightening. The comfort of life, however diminished, seems a universal good to fruit that knows nothing other than the branch, but he calls on us to be brave and live dangerously. He calls on us to risk the crossing and accept the fall when our time comes. The storm that comes to shake our rotten and withered fruit from the branches of life rings of a new plague or predator to come and feast on the weak—leaving only the strong and vital. But this would be an involuntary death. Zarathustra encourages death freely chosen. What is necessary is not some new danger in the world to winnow the human race. What is necessary is a shift in values such that life is good only when one drives the species towards the goal of the overman, and this goal is placed above all others. When the overman is forefront in the human mind, as our overgoing and downgoing, as goal and

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<sup>25</sup> Caleb E. Finch reports, “Since 1800, lifespans have doubled again” Nietzsche lived at a time when the European adult life expectancy was increasing by nearly a decade. Aubrey de Grey hopes to extend the lifespan to the point of infinity.

heir, as the new meaning of the Earth, then death becomes a necessary step in the achievement of that goal. Death becomes the downgoing of the individual that enables the overgoing of the human into the overman. Death becomes a bequeathing to the heir in pursuit of the goal. We cannot get to the overman alone, by the infinite extension of our lives and the supposedly infinite extension of our capacities, because the overman is not an individual mission. It is the goal and heir, the overgoing and downgoing, of the species. It is the creation of a new species from out of the ruins of the human. It is necessary that the human must die so that the overman can live, but it is also necessary that the individual human must die so that the next human can progress a bit further along the rope or throw the golden ball to the next human. The overman is brought about over time and generations. This is the distinction between the overman and the posthuman. They locate the species transformation within one body or one soul. This shows a dramatically different, and I think poor, understanding of evolution, while the creation of the overman requires the churning, the birth and death and birth and death of many generations of humans.

The change in values necessary to bring about the overman through numerous individual deaths and the ultimate death of the human must be brought about through new artists or new preachers. In Nietzsche's understanding of the alteration of values, old ones are destroyed and new ones created by exceptional artists, those who bring out what shines from out of semblance or *Schein*.

Would that preachers of *quick* death came! They would be the right storms and shakers of the trees of life for me! But I hear only preaching of the slow death and patience with all things "earthly" (TSZ, 54).

Zarathustra yearns for the preachers of the quick death. This is the right method of individual death for Zarathustra. He does not encourage the creation of new diseases or predators such that our position of dominance over Earth would be reduced. He calls for a new value on life and

death to be taught by preachers and ingrained into the populace. Quick here refers to both the speed of death once it has begun and the length of a single lifetime. Once one has become truly rotten on the branch, it does not do you or the progression of the species any good to hang on through excessive medical treatments like breathing machines and feeding tubes. These are expensive and largely ineffective. The quality of life they provide is extremely low.

Transhumanists agree. They claim that they will extend your vitality. Even if they succeed, Zarathustra would still say that it is better to die and clear the way for other fruit to grow ripe. The health of the tree is not the health of the fruit. The comfort of the fruit might be found in remaining on the branch as long as possible, but the health of the tree is in growing and shedding and growing again. This is the health of the species over the health of the individual. Your rottenness is not just the poor health of your body. It is also the old values you carry from your generation. When you hang on the branch too long, you stand against the wave of value change that Nietzsche loves to ride. Zarathustra does not call for preachers of the slow death, preachers of hanging on to the branch like the transhumanists. He calls for preachers of the quick death. He calls on you to live fast and live dangerously—to push and exceed your limits, yes, but also to rise to meet your final limit so that the next man can overcome you and reach closer to the overman.

The impetus to freely choose your own death is not compatible with the transhumanist policy of life extension. Zarathustra laments the overlong life of current man. Our lifespans have only gotten longer since, but there is no indication that we have learned to live fully and dangerously as we ought to in pursuit of the overman. Nor is there any indication that transhuman upgrades would increase our life as Nietzsche means it—as a joyous, vibrant, painful affair. It seems to me that the increase in technological capacity and reliance will lead us further

into placid contentment. It will lead us further down the road toward the last man, blinking now on some mechanical retina but still blinking. It will surely lead us to rot on our branches, if not in health then in the remnants of old values that cannot be overcome by old minds.

## Equality / Nobility

Two intertwined issues are at play in understanding Nietzsche's relationship to equality. First is his position on values and their transformation. Nietzsche takes issue with values that claim to be derived from the divine. He calls for the artistic creation of values from out of worldly material. Values should be constantly challenged by the creation of new art. The new creation destroys the old. In Nietzsche's view, no value could ever be permanent or universal. They should be in constant flux, with the old and tired ever superseded by the new and shining. Equality was a tired value in Nietzsche's eyes. It derived from the Christian valuing of each individual soul by the divine and not from the hierarchical, competitive nature of life. It was a value that he himself aimed to destroy and replace with a better artistic creation. This is the second matter. To Nietzsche, equality was also the product of a slave morality that aimed to restrict the strong and preserve the weak. He hoped to replace it with a master morality that allowed the strong to strive fully for the improvement of themselves and man. The master morality is the initial step towards the morality of the overman (Strong, 237). The master morality is established against the value of equality. When More and Bostrom maintain the value of equality in their tablets, they fail to align with Nietzsche on three counts. First, they embrace

an old value instead of challenging it with their own artistic creation. Second, they maintain a value that Nietzsche despised for its foundations in Christianity and a slave morality. Third and most importantly, Nietzsche identifies rigid *inequality* as the optimal political structure for surpassing man. In this chapter, I will first describe Nietzsche's position on the transformation of values, which I draw largely from Heidegger's reading. I will then consider Nietzsche's specific condemnation of equality on the grounds of slave morality in *Beyond Good and Evil* and Christianity in *The Antichrist*. Both provide an image of overcoming man through inequality.

Heidegger defines the heart of Nietzsche's philosophical project as an overcoming of the nihilism inspired by Platonism and Christianity. These idealistic systems reach for the divine and otherworldly in their search for the truth. In doing so, they devalue the earthly and leave us without meaningful values to interact with in our lives—they leave us in nihilism (AC, 43). They attempt to find and fix eternal, unchanging truths. But this is contrary to the perspectival nature of life. Humans develop particular perspectives based on their surroundings and interactions. Their personal truths change across time and through conflict with the perspective of another, altering both in the process. When the student of Socrates' cave emerges into the light to find the true essence of things in the light of the Sun, he in fact only "petrif[ies]...any single given perspective" (Heidegger, 214). The truth found in the divine is neither eternal nor universal, it is the reification of a momentary, individual notion. The values of Christianity derive from these allegedly eternal truths. They deny and degrade the experience of life as mere semblance, an apparition disguising eternal truth. Nietzsche wants us to refocus and revalue *Schein*, or semblance. He loves the ever-changing becoming of life and the opportunities for revaluation that it provides. We must recognize truth as "always only an apparentness that has come to prevail," and thereby recognize that any given truth or value can be overcome by a better one

(Heidegger, 214). In the world of *Schein*, our relationship to truth and value cannot be that of reaching for and repositioning ourselves in relation to the Eternal. It must be a relation of will to power as art. That is, Nietzsche calls on us to take the world of semblance as the only world, as reality itself, and to make of it a battleground of artistic creation and destruction. When we encounter a value or truth, we are to regard it as the art of another raised to prominence. It is the imperative of our being, the demand of our will to power, to challenge and overcome it. Any truth or value can be destroyed if another creation aligns more closely with life and outshines it in the perspective of a multitude. This is the manner of being in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. One should live in the real and only world. When confronted with a value or truth that limits us or does not align with our perspectives, we should destroy it and create a new value in its place.

This is also the mission of Zarathustra as the transformer of values and the herald of the overman. "Here I sit and wait, old broken tablets around me and also new tablets only partially written upon" (TSZ, 156). Zarathustra himself breaks tablets, breaks the old values and tries to replace them with new artistic creations. He calls on others to do the same, "Yes my brothers, break, break me the old tablets" (TSZ, 162). As one of Zarathustra's main teachings is the overman, so the destruction of old values and the creation of new ones must be an effort to prepare the Earth for the overman. More and Bostrom, too, express the need to recreate our values in light of the posthuman. And yet, their continued allegiance to the stale value of equality expresses something entirely different. The cling to an old, comfortable value that, according to Nietzsche, has held humans back from the true, competitive, ranked nature of life. In the same chapter cited above, "On Old and New Tablets," Zarathustra proclaims, "my brothers, we need a *new nobility*, which is the adversary of all rabble and all despotic rule" (TSZ, 162). The

disavowal of equality forms one of Zarathustra's half-written tablets. He yearns for the creation of a new elite to hold back the rise of a tyrant, and perhaps more importantly, the rule of the masses. What is the rule of the masses but equality and democracy? Zarathustra loves neither (Nor does he appear to love fascism, contrary to readers of the third reich). In calling for a new nobility, Zarathustra calls for hierarchy and rank in society. He does so in direct opposition to the value of equality. Lampert agrees that this new nobility forms Nietzsche's proposed political system against the "two modern political extremes of tyranny and democracy" (Lampert, 206). He calls it a reformulation of aristocracy based not on bloodlines, but on the ability to guide the future and redeem the past, i.e. cultural knowledge and creative potential. The ability to first know and then destroy old values, and then finally to create new ones in their place. He makes no apologies for the clear elitism in Nietzsche's message of aristocracy and nobility. Nor does he try to cast it as the problematic ramblings of only a half-finished tablet. It is clear to me already that Nietzsche is not in favor of equality, but it becomes explicit in Nietzsche's critiques of equality in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Antichrist*.

Before I elaborate on Nietzsche's critiques of equality, I would like to discuss the transhumanist's need to maintain the principle of equality in their mission. I believe it is not out of a moral imperative towards treating each man like an end in himself, nor out of a belief that God loves each individually and universally the same. I believe they maintain equality out of political necessity. Ironically enough, it is because their project lies so close to Nietzsche's that they must break with him. Because the mission to develop a higher man immediately rings of a lived inequality between higher and lower, because the development of a higher man must necessarily leave some behind and who will be left behind is still at question, the transhumanists must avow equality in an effort to delay the obvious criticism. I would argue that equality is not



even compatible with their own project, and it absolutely violates Nietzsche's. I do not buy Kurzweil's story of the falling price of technology. Not everyone has a cellphone, as Babich reminds us. And even those who do cannot afford the latest model. When the latest model is a 20% increase in intelligence, those who have will get jobs and those who have not will be shoveling shit. Already, how much better do students with laptops do in school, not to mention private tutors<sup>26</sup>. The accusation of inequality is the greatest peril for hawkers of transhumanism. They advocate for equality with such dedication from a defensive position, out of a slave morality if you will. It is natural to wonder, if the rich can buy physical and mental upgrades, won't they dominate the poor even more than they do now? If we believe Lampert, then Nietzsche calls for precisely such a relationship of inequality between man and overman. The transhumanists maintenance of equality is incongruous with Nietzsche's demand that we destroy all old values and create new ones from out of semblance. It further violates Zarathustra's call for us to do the same in our living towards the overman. But it also violates Nietzsche's specific hatred of the value of equality, and his mission to breed higher men from out of a system of inequality.

### What is noble?

Part 9 of *Beyond Good and Evil* is entitled, "What is noble?" It is a call to nobility, to divisions of rank, and a rallying against equality in the mission of bettering man. Nietzsche begins with an unequivocal statement, "Every enhancement so far in the type "man" has been the work of an aristocratic society — and that is how it will be, again and again, since this sort of

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<sup>26</sup> As much as a .4 increase in GPA according to Gulek and Demirtas, *Learning with Technology: The impact of Laptop Use on Student Achievement* 2005

society believes in a long ladder of rank order and value distinctions between men, and in some sense needs slavery” (BGE, 151). I could not find it any clearer. Nietzsche believes that the enhancement of the type man, “the constant ‘self-overcoming of man’” is only possible in a society of profound inequality (BGE, 151). This constant self-overcoming of man is the very definition of a will to power that lives towards the overman. Man can be developed and surpassed in no other society than one that makes distinctions of value between different men and different types of men. Species improvement comes from the continuous raising of an elite to ever higher psychic and cultural levels, and this raising comes at the cost of treating those who are not elite as “tools, all *for the sake of the aristocracy*” (BGE 152). Man himself can be overcome only through the establishment of a nobility, and a nobility can only be established in opposition to the downtrodden workers. Nietzsche goes so far as to call for a need for slaves in the mission of improving man. All this in his book subtitled “Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future.” More and Bostrom have undertaken a similar project in their tablets of values, but among them they consistently include equality. Nietzsche’s is not a doctrine of equality. It is a doctrine of inequality, and it is also a doctrine of improving and surpassing man by the extension of that inequality. Unlike the transhumanists, Nietzsche recognizes the political consequences of his call to improve man. When they call for an equal society, while calling for the improvement of man through capitalist exchange, they dream. Nietzsche argues that the improvement of man comes first in the few at the cost of the many. His critique of equality itself is still harsher, but it follows from the same logic. It prevents the improvement of man by restricting the strong and uplifting the weak. It denies the essentially exploitative character of life.

First, Nietzsche describes the value of equality as, “the will to *negate* life” (BGE, 153). This is because “life *is* precisely will to power” (BGE, 153). That is, life is inherently combative.

Every being, in its innate urge to grow, seeks to spread its power and win dominance over others. The value of equality denies this brutal fact of life. It asks the strong to limit their potential and live in harmony with the weak. It protects the weak from being absorbed into the development of the strong. Equality is acceptable to Nietzsche only when it is among individuals that have “genuinely similar quantities of force and measures of value, and belong together within a single body” (BGE, 152). Among members of the aristocracy, or the new nobility, for example, it makes sense for the strong to not challenge the similarly strong and those they form an alliance with. If equality is “held to be the *fundamental principle of society*,” as it is in many democratic nations and as it supposedly will be in the posthuman societies of the future, then it denies the dominative, violent essence of life and our necessary drive to grow and surpass limits.

If equality is first and foremost a denial of the essential nature of life, then it is also disliked by Nietzsche for its deleterious political consequences. It holds back the development of the highest men by tethering slave and master together in peaceful mediocrity. The morals of the slave are only destructive and never creative; they only restrict the strong and never enhance growth. The opposition of a slave and master morality is a historical process akin to Hegel’s construction of Lord and Bondsman, but they find themselves in different locations and reach towards opposite ends. If Hegel works to “ensure the future to the bondsmen,” then Nietzsche finds that we already live in a time of slave morality (Strong, 251). He desires another period of master morality exemplified by the rise of a new nobility and, ultimately, the dominance of the overman (Strong, 237). The rise of slave morality in modern culture is tied to the supremacy of Socratic and Christian thought, while the return of a master morality is Nietzsche’s dream towards the goal of the overman. Master morality is characterized by the creative, legislative authority of the higher ranks. “The noble type of person feels that *he* determines value, he does

not need anyone's approval, he judges that 'what is harmful to me is harmful in itself,' he knows that he is the one who gives honor to things in the first place, he *creates values*" (BGE, 154). The master is a practitioner of will to power as art. He creates values from out of his own limits. He identifies the good with himself and the bad as those things opposed to him. The good becomes the qualities of the nobility: power, dominance, "elevated proud states of the soul that are perceived as distinctive and as determining rank order" (BGE, 154). The master morality loves distinctions of rank and value judgements of individuals. Universal equality is entirely foreign to a world in which masters determine the moral structure. But, according to Nietzsche, we have not lived in such a world since the idealism of Plato came into play. Slave morality is the opposing movement. It is determined not by the positing of values from a creative and destructive energy, but out of a reactive, resentful attitude toward the morality of the masters. "The slave's gaze resents the virtues of the powerful...it has a *subtle* mistrust of the "good" that is honored there —" (BGE, 155). Slave morality does not posit its own independent values. It is only destructive and not creative, only a no-saying and never a Yes! All of its values are established in reaction to the dominance of the master, and particularly the master's definition of the "good" as its own dominance. Thus, "qualities that serve to alleviate existence for suffering people are pulled out and flooded with light: pity, the obliging, helpful hand, the warm heart, patience, industriousness, humility...the desire for freedom, the instinct for happiness" (BGE, 156). The values of the slave are not suited to striving for an improvement in the species or the culture. They are only suited to tolerating a life spent under foot. Instead of uplifting power and fullness, the slave loves those values that demand others reach down and lend a helping hand. They hold pity as a virtue not out of a creative defining of their own limits, but as a reactive need from their own sorry state. They push the value of freedom for the restrictions it places on the

master rather than seeking to grow in their own right. The slave hates the hierarchies of order that elevate the dominant type. Unsurprisingly, equality also finds its home among a slave morality. “the slaves' theory of suffrage universal and ‘equality’” (WP, 364). Both democracy itself and equality, its foundational principle, are found to be born from a slave morality. Tracy Strong describes, and I have adopted, a future transition from a slave morality to a master morality and finally to the superior, as yet unidentified morality of the overman. This means that Nietzsche calls for the politics of the future to abandon the values of pity, freedom, and equality in pursuit of the overman. As the transhumanists pursue their own version of the overman, the posthuman who lives far too long, they cling to the values of slave morality. They continue to vaunt freedom and equality in their tablets. This is a clear separation between the historical development of the overman that Nietzsche foresees and the transhumanist development of the posthuman. Nietzsche idolizes nobility and distinctions of rank, while the transhumanists cling to an equality that reeks of Christianity. Further, Nietzsche does not believe that any development of man can occur without such inequality. In his notebooks, Nietzsche repeats the claim found at the beginning of BGE Chapter 9, “inequality of rights, concealment, stoicism, tempter-art, devilry of every kind, in short the opposite of all herd-desiderata, are necessary for the elevation of the type man<sup>27</sup>” (WP, 957). For Nietzsche, any improvement of man must come through the development of a new nobility at the cost of the downtrodden. It must abandon the stasis and

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<sup>27</sup> I feel a responsibility to acknowledge that the quote continues in a way that could offer an out to the transhumanists should they want to follow Nietzsche’s project, but I doubt it is one they would take up. “A morality with such inverse intentions, which wills to breed man to the heights, instead of to the comfortable and mediocre, a morality with the intention to breed a governing caste -- the future *masters of the earth* -- must, in order to be able to be taught, introduce itself in connection with the standing customary laws and under their words and semblances; but that to this end many means of transition and deception are to be invented” (WtP, 957). The old values can be taken up as a mask to disguise the coming of a master morality. The only transhumanist who I would attribute this to is Max More, who finds himself inspired directly by Nietzsche. His value of Open Society is qualified by the potential need to transform our values. Even then, this transformation is only acceptable to him with the “consent of those involved.” This seems to maintain a call for the values of equality and voluntary association that is very far from the relation of master and slave or even nobility and serf.

resentment of slave morality and acknowledge that supreme cultural heights can only be achieved when a select few dominate the rest. The transhumanists bring slave morality into their project of enhancing man, and distance themselves from Nietzsche in so doing—both in his hatred of slave morality and in his understanding of the cultural elevation of man through nobility.

### Anti-Christ

*The Anti-Christ* is the last book written and published by Nietzsche before his mental breakdown. It launches a brutal attack on Christianity. I would like to highlight three points of his critique. First, he argues that the immortality of the soul, similarly proffered by transhumanists More and de Grey, saps the meaning from life. Second, Nietzsche finds the equality of souls before God to be the origin of the political value of equality. He scorns both equalities as antithetical to a natural fact of life, the ordering of the castes. Third, he again affirms that the surpassing of current man is only possible in political systems of rigid inequality.

For the sake of an ordering of Nietzsche's texts, I must return now to the argument of the last section with a twist. I previously argued that Nietzsche was against the extension of life as a rule and as a method for reaching towards the overman. I held the assumption that Nietzsche would absolutely not tolerate immortality for its relation to the Christian afterlife and the eternal truth of Plato's idea. Here, I present the latter claim to you in Nietzsche's own words.

The enormous lie of personal immortality destroys all reason, everything natural in the instincts, — everything beneficial and life-enhancing in the instincts, everything that guarantees the future, now arouses mistrust. To live *in this way*, so that there is no *point* to life anymore, *this* now becomes the 'meaning' of life...you cannot heap enough contempt on this, every type of selfishness increasing *shamelessly* to the point of infinity  
(AC, 43)

Both More and de Grey promise the immortality of the soul. More through the freezing of your brain and de Grey through the simultaneous immortality of your body. But Nietzsche does not even specify the soul. He derides “personal immortality” on two counts. First, it removes the meaning of life. Second, it represents the maximal extension of personal selfishness.

The first is a very existential point. Nietzsche claims that life is meaningless without death, as an end and a limit. It orients our instincts in relations of will to power. Every overcoming of a limit is in the context of the final, inescapable limit. Each conflict between two wills risks the death of one or the other. The immense significance of the conflict is defined by this danger. We overcome out of our need to grow, yes, but also out of the need to not be overcome in ourselves. It is the looming fear of death, sometimes close and sometimes far, that quickens our pace. When we work towards a goal, like the overman, we know that we may not reach it, and we establish heirs to pursue this goal in our stead. In a world of personal immortality, there is no urgency and no danger, no need to grow and expand. There is no point in “working towards any common goal or even keeping one in mind” (AC, 43). The birth of the overman comes through our own downgoing. All goals are raced towards or left to our children in the shadow of death. Nietzsche’s very lust for life, proclaimed again and again throughout his work, is born from an intimate relationship with sickly liminal experiences, from the nearness of death. Without such a final limit, complacency falls on us too easily and we are left blinking like the last man (who lives longest).

Nietzsche’s discovery of life’s meaning in death recalls Heidegger’s notion of being-towards-death. “Death is a possibility of being that Da-sein always has to take upon itself. With death, Da-sein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-of-being” (Being and Time, 50). Man constantly confronts his own death. For, Heidegger, the manner of this confrontation should

not be a constant thinking about or less an active causing, but an anticipation. The anticipation of his own death reveals to him his individuality, his ownmost self separated from the mass 'they,' and his very potential. Heidegger uses the word potential in a double way. He defines death as the angst inspiring potential to not be, both in concert with others and in one's own self. So potential is one's very existence and the possibility of its end. The second meaning reveals Nietzsche's own angst about the disappearance of the goal and point of life. The revelation of a man's potential also comes when he organizes himself in relation to his goals. In a paragraph that quotes Nietzsche, Heidegger writes, "Becoming free *for* one's own death in anticipation frees one from one's lostness in chance possibilities urging themselves upon us, so that the factual possibilities lying before the possibility not-to-be-bypassed can first be authentically understood and chosen" (Being and Time, 53). When one acknowledges the ever-present possibility of death, one gains a new kind of freedom. A new urgency is brought upon us. We become centered in the now by the realization of a final limit. Instead of being adrift in a sea of meaninglessness, lost in nihilism, we can grasp and choose among the manifold possibilities that lie before that final eventuality. The finality of death, the anticipation of one's non-being, orients one among the chaos of life. It provides a pressure to achieve and strive. It drives man to greater heights and the achievement of his goals. It reveals to man both who he is alone and what he wants most, exactly because there is not an infinite amount of time to try everything. Personal immortality removes all of the immediacy from life. It breeds contentment. Without the looming end, we are unable to find our place in the world or the need to reach for the place we want to be. I take an existentialist understanding of Nietzsche's relationship to death. The defined limit enhances the life. It empowers the need to overcome. The goal of the overman provides a twist. Our overgoing is also our downgoing, our goal is also our grave. The unity of goal and grave, usually opposed,



places the pure striving of life above all else. I believe it has the potential to rescue us from nihilism. The posthuman reaching beyond the Earth cannot. The transhumanists sap the conflict and meaning from life in exactly the same way as Christianity—through the promise of personal immortality.

Nietzsche's second critique of personal immortality is a bomb I would happily lob at any transhumanist. What makes you so fucking special that you should live forever—that you are good enough to become the overman? Is Aubrey de Grey a master, that aristocratic legislator that Nietzsche so admires? I doubt it. When we make a time capsule in our backyard, we choose the best and most representative items—those things that need to be preserved and revealed to future generations. When we send records into space in the hopes of reaching some distant alien species, we send The Beatles. When Max More freezes a brain for revival at the dawn of the posthuman, he takes anyone with enough money (or anyone willing to deny their children a life insurance payout). The transhumanists are not preserving and enhancing the best and the brightest today. They are preserving and enhancing those who are selfish enough to believe they can become the apex of human evolution with just a bit more time, a bit more science, and a bit less self-reflection.

Particularly interesting to my argument is the connection Nietzsche draws between the lie of personal immortality and equality. Not only are they the twin lies of Christianity, but it is also the immortality of the soul, bestowed to all individuals, that justifies the doctrine of equality. Each is made equal to all in the universal relation to eternity. “That as immortal souls, everyone is on the same level as everyone else, that in the commonality of all beings, the ‘salvation’ of *each* individual lays claim to an eternal significance...’Salvation of the soul’—in plain language: ‘the world revolves around *me*’...The poisonous doctrine ‘*equal* rights for everyone’” (AC, 43).

The value of equality is born out of the promise of a universal, eternal relation to God. In God's eternal love, all can find solace in his embrace, all are equal before his eyes, and so should be treated as such in the political orders of the world<sup>28</sup>. Both values, immortality and equality, flatter our "vanity" and selfishness (AC, 43). They tell us we are good enough, as good as anyone else who is or will be, and good enough even to live forever. Immortality and equality are concomitant values. Nietzsche hates both. First for their Christian origin, but also for the unearned self-satisfaction they bestow upon every person without distinction. The overman is the positing of a better man. It demands contempt from yourself and never contentment.

Transhumanism similarly plays on an acknowledgement of our personal worth. The time is now for human to become posthuman, they say. We are ready to ascend into the superior, transformed plane. I don't buy it, but we have revealed an interesting trick in interpreting transhumanism's relation to Nietzsche. Transhumanism preaches immortality and equality. This mirrors the logical unity that Nietzsche identifies to critique Christianity. We already know that transhumanism does not follow in Nietzsche's footsteps. They perpetuate the values of a slave morality that stands "against health, beauty...*against life itself*" (AC, 62). And yet, they also preach the breeding of a higher man. This bears an immediate resemblance to Nietzsche's overman. Immortality and life extension are not the way to enhance "the type man," but neither is equality. Nietzsche praises nobility and divisions of rank as raising the higher men to their highest point. Only a select few can be raised, and they must be raised by the work and utility of the lower classes. This is the joke: the transhumanists have taken a strictly corporeal understanding of the overman and dressed it in the trappings of slave morality. They have stripped Nietzsche of his recognition of death and radical political ideals. If transhumanism is

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<sup>28</sup> "in earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, KJV)

Nietzsche, then it is only a Nietzsche made palatable to we who live in the shadow of God, and this is no Nietzsche at all. The overman is born out of Nietzsche's need to overthrow the lies of immortality and equality raised to prominence by Socrates and Christ. He, the overman and Nietzsche, cannot be removed from his political context and repurposed for the technocratic ideals of a group of men selfish and cowardly enough to believe they should live forever.

Foreshadowed in "What is noble?" Nietzsche reaffirms the need for social hierarchy in his adoration of the Code of Manu. Nietzsche raises the Code of Manu in opposition to the "*despicable*" values of Christianity (AC, 57). Unlike the life degrading messages of the beyond, immortality and its cohort equality, "preserves and defends life" by maintaining a political order of castes akin to the natural division of peoples (Berkowitz, 110). The mission of the Code of Manu, and any appropriately designed law book in Nietzsche's eyes, is to allow for the improvement of the culture. This means increasing the health, power, and perfection of the highest class. The end of law is to "give a people the right to become master one day, to become perfect, — to aspire to the highest art of life" (AC, 57). Note that Nietzsche marks two familiar terms, master and art. In master he calls for the historical transition to a master morality of domination and rank from out of the slave moralities of equality and Christianity. In art he asks for the creation and destruction of law from out of semblance. The good law is asked to create good lawmakers, creators and destroyers of law. This is the answer to Roger Berkowitz' "dangerous paradox of the art of legislation" (Berkowitz, 115). Any law threatens to "petrify into a lifeless and will-less morality of justification" (Berkowitz, 117). True, but an appropriate, life and hierarchy-affirming law creates the very creative legislators most capable of destroying that law when it grows stale. Even as Nietzsche admires the codification of created truth in the Code of Manu, he recognizes its temporal and earthly nature. The values inscribed there will be

surpassed when the best have outgrown them. New laws will be manufactured once the culture has progressed beyond the old (BGE, 262). Eternity cannot be tolerated; it is not the way of life and becoming. This recalls the transhumanist invitation to reexamine old values, but it does not relate to their stubborn cling to equality. That is a value grown stale and eternal for Nietzsche. Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century he felt it was deleterious to life, a slave morality. In *The Anti-Christ* most of all, he demands that it be destroyed and replaced with a life-affirming aristocracy. The transhumanists do not answer this call. Worse still, their attempt to breed a higher man from out of the fallow ground of equality is utterly backwards in Nietzsche's scheme of cultural improvement.

What Nietzsche loves most in the Code of Manu's right to mastery is its adherence to the natural order of inequality. "Caste-order, *order of rank*, is just a formula for the supreme law of life itself, splitting off into three types is necessary for the preservation of society, to make the higher and highest types possible—unequal rights are the condition for any rights at all" (AC, 57). Organized inequality, a codified hierarchy, is favored by Nietzsche for two reasons. First, it aligns with the supreme law of life. Life as will to power denotes competition and striving, but this conflict cannot be constant. The weaker must submit to the strong lest they be destroyed. The strong find no advantage in challenging the similarly strong. Individual wills settle into organizations of rank, relations of dominator and dominated, in the interstices of struggle. Life as will to power is the constant battle for rank and domination, and the organized hierarchy is its momentary resting place. Equality denies the constant striving for growth and overcoming that Nietzsche takes to be the very definition of life. A life-affirming political order must allow for distinctions between wills of different magnitude.<sup>29</sup> Second and most importantly for the mission

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<sup>29</sup> What the logic of will to power further suggests, though Nietzsche does not seem to account for it in the rigidity of the caste structure, is the need for mobility among the ranks. Although he believes in the inheritance of weakness

of breeding a higher species, be it posthuman or overman, it makes the development of “the higher and highest types possible” (AC, 57). The development of a cultural rarefication required to write and surpass laws, the overcoming of both body *and* soul necessary to one day bring about the overman, is founded on the pursuit of the best and only the best, while the rest work at the bare necessities of political life.

The Code of Manu demands three, defined castes. Nietzsche finds that these correspond to natural temperaments and fulfill societal needs. Each needs the others to function, but each represents a different quantity of value and so is afforded different rights and responsibilities. The highest, strongest, and fewest are the legislators. They are “spiritual people” with ascetic natures (AC, 58). They embody the highest form of will to power, and from out of it, they make art. “Only these ‘most spiritual men’ have the privilege to establish beauty and the good upon the Earth” (Berkowitz, 108). Those enshrined in the highest caste are tasked with creating law from out of semblance. All cultural improvement occurs at this rank. Already at the height of their culture, they raise themselves when they overcome an old truth and craft a new one more in line with life. The second order guard the law. They are the warriors and kings. They “take over everything *crude* in the art of ruling” (AC, 57). These muscular men enforce the laws of the highest caste, but they do not dictate them. The validity of those laws, though, does not come only from their enforcement. Laws gain truth from their adherence to life. From out of the raw material of the earth, the ascetic priests express their highest will to power to artistically create a truth that even they cannot overcome. There is a cultural and even spiritual experience that

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(BGE, 264), surely not everyone born of an aristocratic rank will have the will of a master. The same follows with exceptional individuals born of a lower rank. The hierarchy of wills is established in lived conflict. It is not settled at birth like the castes. Strong writes, “One does not have slave morality in the same manner as one has social-economic status, or even in the manner in which one is a negro or an Anglo-Saxon” (Strong, 239). Slave and Master moralities correspond to differing quantities of will to power. Strong argues that one is not born into a quantity of will as one is born into a caste. A given will to power will necessarily change and grow throughout life.

guarantees a law for as long as it cannot be overcome by another law more closely aligned with the life of the people (TSZ, 43). Still, as in Socrates' healthy city, "guardians" are needed to mind the boundaries (AC, 57; Berkowitz, 108). The third and lowest caste is an interesting case. I have already cast them as the downtrodden and the proletariat, forced to work for the benefit of the higher castes. Nietzsche takes a very different view. He does not mention the material pleasures of wealth or the social benefits of a high class. Instead, he focuses on the pressure of problems and responsibilities, and he finds the lowest to be the most privileged. "Let us not underestimate the privileges of the mediocre. Life becomes increasingly difficult the higher up you go—it gets colder, there are more responsibilities" (AC, 57). The highest and strongest rise to a life of challenge and striving. The mediocre are satisfied with the happiness of employment. They are "destined by nature" to be a "public utility, a wheel, a function" (AC, 58). This seems to be a curious defense of class structure. The poor are said to be happy with their lot, while the upper classes face the hardship of decisions and power. The natural inclinations of each caste, the distinctions in their will to power or their need to strive, align with their societal position. "Everyone finds his privilege in his own type of being" (AC, 58). Nietzsche does not acknowledge any exploitation of the worker in the Code of Manu. Each finds their position according to their destiny. There is a natural order of inequality of will that is merely encoded into political structure. What is not unfamiliar is the reliance of the higher classes on the workers. Their striving is enabled by the, now happy, toil of the mediocre. "A high culture is a pyramid: it needs a broad base, its first presupposition is a strongly and healthily consolidated mediocrity...Mediocrity is needed before there can be exceptions: it is the condition for a high culture" (AC, 58). The development of a high culture requires that the spiritually mediocre fulfill their mediocre destiny, while the higher are freed to pursue cultural refinement, growth in their

will to power, and the very transcendence beyond the type man. Whether we have to imagine the workers happy or downtrodden, Nietzsche's reading of the Code of Manu is unequivocal. It is precisely inequality that allows for the surpassing of man. The transhuman insistence on maintaining social equality and simultaneously enhancing and going beyond man is not a manner of social evolution that Nietzsche believes in. The striving to the heights of man and beyond requires distinctions of value and rank inconsistent with the equality of all souls. The transhumanist's love of equality not only violates Nietzsche's moral structure, it also undermines their project of improving man. Nietzsche finds that precisely *inequality* is optimal for the enhancement of the type man.

## Conclusion

I argue that Nietzsche's striving for the overman and the transhumanist pursuit of the posthuman stand apart on two important grounds.

First, life extension, claimed by every transhumanist as the most important overcoming, does not take us further down the road to the overman. The overman as species is brought about through a generational churning of birth and death. It is a vision of ideal man only distinct from Christ's message of Heaven in that you will never reach it yourself. It is precisely your death that allows your heirs to reach closer to the final goal. Placing immortality and perfection within human reach is Christian and idealistic. It breeds scorn for the impermanence and becoming of the Earth and the now. It ends in nihilism. The transhumanists peddle the same old story at a profit. They want the overgoing, but none of the downgoing. Zarathustra's promise of species improvement is radical because he asks you to hang on the cross and receive no praise for it.

Everyone will do it in turn. And you should hurry up already! We could use the wood. Mankind is a rope, but we are nowhere near Nietzsche's end. Many more bodies have to fall and try and try and fall before we reach the other side, if we ever do. The overman is a goal to constantly strive towards through generations. The posthuman is Nietzsche in Christ's robes, a bad fit.

Second, Nietzsche scorns equality. As ludicrous as it may be that transhumanism would produce greater equality, every transhumanist claims the value with gusto. More important than his hatred of equality and its Christian origins, is its inconsistency with his project of the overman. The higher and highest men of master moralities are born out of a radical aristocracy of profound inequality. The mediocre must be made even into slaves to fuel the enrichment of the upper class. Only from the best men and the highest men can the overman be born. Equality is old, Christian, and inefficient for traversing the bridge to the overman.



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