

## COSMOLOGY without HEADACHES

(Lecture Series)

(compiling, transcribing, researching, editing always in progress)

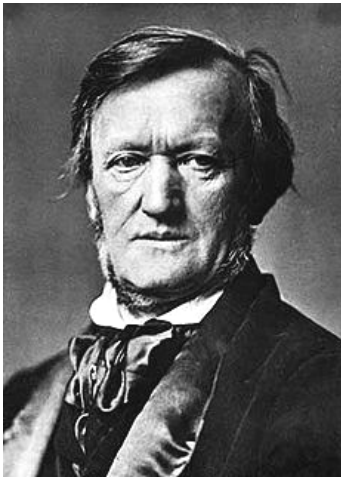
LECTURE XXIX: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Upheavals (4):

Wagnerism; Nietzsche



So we have seen *Darwinism* engendering new respect for biology and suggesting that even insentient materialism might be ‘progressive’ both naturally and sociologically. And we have *Marxism* explaining the dialectic and proclaiming the inevitable revolution to end all revolutions by means of the deterministic historical process of ‘progressive’ class conflict. But what could be meant by *Wagnerism*?—and what does it have to do with cosmology, or progress, or with anything other than opera?

### Wagnerism?



Can you think of any other musician—any artist or poet, for that matter—warranting an ‘ism’? Think of the best of them: There is no Shakespeare-ism; no Leonardism; no Beethovenism or Mozartism or Chopinism or even Bachism, much less Verdi-ism or Puccini-ism. Why then Wagnerism?—and why, moreover, does one of art history’s more despicable personalities garner such respect?

**Richard Wagner** [1813-1883] did not exactly burst onto the scene like the prodigy Liszt, or cause indigestion among the luminaries at the Paris Conservatoire as did Berlioz, or contract like Faust with the devil as was suggested of Paganini—some thought he might even *be* the devil. Wagner had relatively brief formal training, from no one particularly famous, in piano and in music theory; won no prizes; got no university degrees. As a youth there was not much exceptional about him beyond his high energy and intense drive, and all of that toward no certain goal beyond wanting to conduct orchestras. His artistic theories were yet embryonic if they were sensed by him at all. He was inspired to become a conductor because he had heard the Beethoven 9<sup>th</sup> and because he had the ‘Alpha-male’ syndrome or ‘Napoleonic complex’ in spades—to a degree that might have incapacitated a man of lesser mental power. He learned composition mainly by stealing from his betters. A terrific borrower of styles, his youthful Symphony in C sounds alternately like just about every symphonist since Haydn. A famous soprano, I seem to recall it being Schröder-Devrient [citation lost], said the singers often laughed in the rehearsals of one of his early operas (likely *Das Liebesverbot*) because it sounded exactly like Donizetti. His genius, then, was not of great originality but of enormous scope not yet realized. Such large-scale visions necessarily took shape over decades rather than weeks, and he used every trick and pretense and confidence scam and duplicitous ruse and flimflam stratagem to get what he wanted or ‘needed’ to get on with his work and his pleasure. He saw his financial debts as gifts, whose givers he often rebuked for their stinginess. Other men’s wives—especially those of his beneficiaries—were but toys to exercise his passions, though that is not to say he didn’t love each of them deeply and sincerely, if only temporarily as suited his changing situation.

The slowly forming idea of a gathering of all the arts into a mighty chorus was certainly remarkable, but his purpose went beyond mere entertaining (however much he may have reveled in the adulation of inferiors). It was social transformation he wanted to accomplish; nothing less than to engineer through art the very unification of Deutschland by means of the Teutonic lore that would be shared by means of his operas. The idea of progress in art, in both its means and its functionality, may have seemed quite natural after the age of Comte and Hegel and in the midst of the new biology and the repetitively politically new France. Little by little he formulated and expressed his theories in articles and essays, well before he knew how he would go about writing or scoring or staging them. In that sense he was developing a new science of art, the deterministic history of which had led from the ancient Greek public poetry and tragedy, the painting and carving there and in Rome, through the minstrels and minnesingers, the masses and motets and operas and oratorios, the breakthrough in perspective of Brunelleschi and Masaccio and the polymath Leonardo, the profound works of Shakespeare and Goethe, the musical eruption of Beethoven: all the centuries of art evolution leading inevitably toward ultimate fulfillment in him, Richard Wagner. In considering himself the supreme artist, was Wagner not, then, also the supreme egoist? Not by his account. This passage from *The Artwork of the Future* [1849] may seem contradictory in presenting the supreme egoist as a communist. He says of “the man of understanding” that

...the joy in his own self, engendered by the knowledge of his higher, unsurpassable attributes, betrays the intellectual-man into the arrogant imagining that he may use those attributes which are really his foundation-props as the handmaids of his own caprice. The sovereign might of physical sensation and heart-emotion, proclaim their sway as one which all men must obey in common, as that of feelings and emotions of the race. The isolated feeling, the separate emotion, which show themselves in the individual aroused by this or that personal contact with this or that particular phenomenon, he is able to suppress or subjugate in favour of a richer combination of manifold phenomena conceived by him; but the richest combination of all the phenomena that he can cognize leads him at last to *Man as a species and an integral factor in the totality of Nature*; and, in presence of this great, all-mastering phenomenon, his pride breaks down. He now yields himself, not to a love for this or that particular object, but to wide *Love* itself. Thus does the egoist become a communist, the unit all, the man God, the art-variety Art.

[Part II, sec.1; p.94 of Ashton Ellis's Translation;

THE ART-WORK OF THE FUTURE: and Other Works by Richard Wagner;  
Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1994

(reprint of VOL. 1; RICHARD WAGNER'S PROSE WORKS; K. Paul, Trench, Trübner; 1895)]

Wagner holds to an ancient axiom that man is a political animal and individuals cannot reach peak human potential apart from society since isolation deprives one of full humanity, going so far as to claim (obviously still reveling in his 1849 revolutionary fervor) that “only in Communism does Egoism find its perfect satisfaction”. By his new definition of egoism he means not “the isolation of the single, in which each severed nullity shall rank as somewhat, but the great commonalty as naught; in which each unit struts as something special and ‘original,’ while the whole, forsooth, can then be nothing in particular and for ever a mere imitation”. He means “the natural and rational egoism which finds its perfect satisfaction in the community of all”. [Ibid.: p.99]

So is Wagner a communist? He does not give us his definition of communism. We, today, associate the terms Marxist and communist as if Marx & Engels invented communism instead of merely predicting and promoting the proletarian revolution as a means to it. As we have seen, other than expecting an indefinite dictatorship of the proletariat, they did not even describe the social structure that would emerge from the revolution except to voice support for complete (or a particular sort of) equality as Nature's end for humanity and for Marx's prediction that the state, now unnecessary, would wither away. Marx spent by far the majority of his effort negatively analyzing history as the interactions of variously oppressive economic systems rather than presenting the ultimate regime: a process-ending perfect state (or non-state, whatever that can mean). Everything is about the *overturning*: about why things *must be overturned* and how the modern, bourgeois, socio-economic world inevitably *will be overturned*.

Furthermore, the notion of communism does not necessarily include equality in its definition but merely puts the commune above the individual as a natural phenomenon. Appeals to equality by Marxists are propaganda to enlist support of the have-nots and have-littles for what would actually result in stricter control over their lives by the more capable (and completely indoctrinated) leaders. Nature bestows neither equality nor freedom. These are inventions, not gifts. The aim of Marxist communism is best described as "from each according to his ability; to each according to his need". From Wagner's point of view, he gave himself entirely and that gift was huge: *all*—the most a towering genius could give. His needs were also great and he expected 'all' in return. The apparent paradox between egoism and communism was not at all contradictory from his perspective. Love was the ultimate answer, he thought (in his more Christian moments), and it was the primal cosmic force. He took, therefore, as lovingly as he gave. He was thus shocked and enraged when investors demanded a personal return and were seemingly dissatisfied with the world's gain in the quantity and quality of beauty due to his creations, for which they had paid. We admit his gifts to the world were prodigious and they are still with us for all the foreseeable future—so, did he really take so much?

Wagner also speaks, Marx-like, of the folk as the great unwitting force behind the historical mechanism. Perhaps their blindness in regard to a mission conferred upon them by Nature is why we have no clear picture of where we are headed: what exactly will this communism be like; how will it work? We will not find out from Wagner. He merely bends his political philosophy (if it can be called such) to the defense of his artistic vision. He claims the bad version of egoism, whereby an individual isolates himself from his social grouping by placing himself above the folk, is also, somehow, an attribute of the individual art forms. "This is the genuine Egoism," he tells us, "in which each isolated art-variety would assume airs of universal Art; while, in truth, it thereby loses its own peculiar attributes," just as the isolated human loses his human attributes. To reach their full potential, then, just as humans must be enmeshed in their natural social units to be truly free, the various arts must be fused into the *gesamtkunstwerk*. They resist mightily, however, their loss of independence, so they must be forced to comply.

Something like a Caesar or Napoleon of the arts, then—certainly not a Washington, who was forever linked to the idea of independence and separation—or, some would say, Wagner was the Adolph Hitler of art, confining and dominating the various resistant 'art varieties' rather than freeing them: enslaving and limiting them to playing parts in his dramas. Out of chaos he would fashion order: an artistic *e pluribus*

*unum*. But the American motto meant the new ‘*unam*’ was established to *protect the individuality* of those who made up the multitude, not to crush them into uniformity. In his attempt to fuse the arts Wagner perhaps provided a goodly amount of the pressure (pardon the apropos mechanistic metaphor) necessary for their later explosion and re-separation; the expanding universe of a ‘new’ modernity. This is not to say he painted or sculpted, but he did write the complex poetry for his own libretti; he was enough of a philosopher to support his artistic theories, a very capable philologist, and a devastating critic, though his prose is unnecessarily complicated and strange—and not merely in translation; he had a hand in every facet of the stage design of his own demanding productions; he trained orchestras and singers, who often complained that his music was unsingable; brought new life to conducting, even writing a treatise on it; demanded and designed new and better instruments, and ultimately his own very special theater; and, of course, he was a supreme composer.

In his mid-twenties he had achieved some renown as a promising director of music and opera when he married actress Mina Planer [1836]. During the next ten years he worked his way into a quite respectable position: second in command of the *Dresden Stats Oper*. Mina was certainly proud of their much improved status and could not understand why her rebellious husband was dissatisfied. Wagner apparently felt stifled by the traditions and the demands—not to mention the low expectations of the musicians—so much so that when the theatre burned during the revolutions of 1849 he rejoiced so heartily that he was suspected of setting the fire. He was, in fact, what today we would call a co-conspirator in inciting the rebellion; a leader, in concert with his friend, the famous anarchist Mikhail Bakunin [1814-1876] and other, lesser known socialist revolutionaries. Wagner, though certainly philosophically inclined, was more commentator than political or economic theorist (despite Bernard Shaw’s later socialist interpretation of the RING). He was not exactly a Marxist; certainly not an anarchist but a nationalist strongly influenced by the rising tide of socialism—as long as he thought it would turn out well for his art and fame. The type of government to be established was not as important to him as encouraging the softening of the several German principalities, such that they might be reforged, in the manner of his art-varieties, into a modern nation. In that regard he was more a Hegelian German than on the side of Marx, who was an internationalist—a proto-globalist.

To his immediate misfortune, however, the revolt was quickly smothered by Prussian troops. Much to Mina’s dismay her little Kapellmeister’s name appeared on the arrest list. The couple had to escape to Franz Liszt [1811-1886] in Weimar, hence to Switzerland. He was banned from entering into any German territory until after 1860. A rather ironic predicament for a nation builder but, not unlike Marx, who found his support in England, he would have to carry on his work beyond the borders of his homeland. Selling Germanic legend (mainly *Tannhäuser*) in Paris, however, was tough sledding, even with the magnanimous and sometimes enthusiastic support of Hector Berlioz [1803-1869], from whom Wagner stole plenty of ideas, and who, despite Richard’s egomaniac streak, never had a bad word to say (at least in public) about his potential rival’s music.

It was, of course, the overwhelming power of his musical expression that carried these new ideas about art and theater, as it still carries his outsized theatrical notions having to do with taming the ‘art varieties’. Like a vast metaphysical sponge his mind had absorbed the artistic environment of the age and stored the experiences as raw

material for future constructions. It often is argued that Wagner was not so original; that he borrowed unconscionably from his predecessors, especially Karl Maria von Weber [1786-1826], from friends like Berlioz and Liszt, and conceptually even from the Jew-tainted work (Wagner's perception) of his one-time arch-enemy, Giacomo Meyerbeer [1791-1864]. In admitting that, it also should be said that it was equally true of Darwin (boosted by Leyell, Lamarck, Malthus, *et al*), true of Marx (raised by St. Simone, Comte, Hegel) and true of the mighty Newton ('standing on the shoulders' of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Gassendi—and his cantankerous contemporary, Robert Hooke). So let us be fair: originality is extremely rare. The important thing is how these various 'rescued and recycled' (not to say 'stolen') materials are utilized; how they are incorporated; how they are exploited in unexpected and custom-shattering ways that move civilization forward while often lending, usually undeserved, demigod-like status to the new architect. If Wagner utilized every useful trick developed by Romantic artists, musicians, poets and playwrights, along with some significant ones of his own invention, he created (or 'arranged' if you must) a world of fantasy-realism that pretty much summed up the Romantic spirit and left little more to be said in that vein. Despite the evidence of other sources, his finished products were unique and so amazingly out of the ordinary that he virtually forced art and theater into testing new directions.

At the very least, it caused a tsunami of discussion (pro and con), with practically every artist, writer, and thinker weighing-in, deepening the sense of profundity about the works and their meaning. As if that were insufficient fame, a whole new ring was added to the circus when the young Bavarian king, Ludwig II, became a worshipper [1860s]—



Ludwig II -- 1865

perhaps the most inspired of all, imagining himself (even dressing-up) as Lohengrin and designing swan boats. Wagner managed, naturally, to abuse that friendship, as he did with every friend and lover he ever had (except perhaps Cosima—but he had stolen even her from Hans von Bülow), and he quickly made enemies of the entire Bavarian court. Shamelessly parading his unorthodox love affair with another man's wife through the streets of Munich, he put the young King in an untenable position: having to separate himself from the ruder aspects of the genius. True to the already well established reaction to Wagner's abuse, the King continued in his admiration for the miracle-artist and 'the friend' with whom he and all of contemporary Europe were privileged to share the age. Later, when the Wagner societies came up short, Ludwig stepped briefly back into the composer's

life to provide funds for completion of his *Festspielhaus* at Bayreuth—to the consternation of the ministers of state who saw him spending Bavaria into bankruptcy with his extravagant dream-castles and his mini-version of Versailles, all blamed, of course, on the influence wielded by



Wagner's Festspielhaus

this daemonic artist and his *gesamtkunstwerk* in persuading their strange, impractical monarch that life ought to be lived as an opera. And now, a theater-shrine to the very demon! Incidentally, Ludwig's Neuschwanstein castle, still not completed, is now one of the great Bavarian landmarks: a valuable tourist attraction bringing in millions of deutschemarks [now euros] every year. On the other hand, its never-ending construction and the annual maintenance costs may well exceed its income. Incidentally, a book that ought to be in your school's library—actually in your personal library—is *THE DREAM KING* by Wilfrid Blunt [Penguin Books, 1973]—guaranteed to amaze you.

Another book I hope you can find, one very closely entwined with our present discussion, is Bernard Shaw's *THE PERFECT WAGNERITE*. If it is not in the library, there is an inexpensive Dover Press edition available, which serious musicians and connoisseurs ought to own. In this small book (176 pages) Shaw analyzes *THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG* as a socialist and anti-capitalist musical discourse. His analysis has given rise to a number of special, modern adaptations wherein we find, for instance, the Nibelung, Alberich, as an exploitative industrialist enslaving his own kind (species/race/class/tribe) under the power of the magic Ring. Shaw's portrayal envisions the gods as something like 19<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic capitalists with the giants representing the proletariat, employed and being exploited and scammed by Wotan and his scheming counselor Loge. The workers are alienated by such contempt to the point of revolt, thereby subjecting the gods to the disbelief of their minions—thus to loss of their immortality and the threat of destruction (the collapse of their world via revolution). At the last moment, however, the giants are bought-off by the gods (as capitalists might buy-off labor unions) with stolen gold: 'profits gained without work', let us say—got perhaps by a sort of usury from the former (now ruined) bourgeois mining-industrialist, Alberich of Nibelheim. Shaw, wrongly in my opinion, thought Wagner was perplexed as a socialist—at least before he met King Ludwig—over how to find the proper utopian ending to his orchestrated political and economic discourse while keeping the conclusion in line with the Norse legends. So, as if tired of working seemingly eternally on the RING, he succumbed to a merely functional, grand operatic finale. Shaw surmised that Wagner (now wealthy and respected—even worshipped) had lost his communistic angst by the time he reached *GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG*, some twelve years after starting the work, and had adjusted his political thinking to new circumstances. This, however, is a misleading picture, revealing perhaps a lack of certain information concerning Wagner's process in composing the RING—possibly an assumption by Shaw that the work was completed in the order of its stage chronology. Actually, the poems were written in reverse order; then scored in the proper chronology, so that any politico-economic content in the last opera was penned at the very beginning of the poetic process before changing the title to *Götterdämmerung* from *Siegfried's Tod*. One would have expected Shaw to have known that. But it didn't seem to matter since Wagner liked Shaw's interpretation. Though admitting he was not aware of doing this when he wrote his masterwork, he reminded us that an artist's true but subliminal intentions are often uncovered by clever analysis on the part of thoughtful others. So sometimes, at least, he agreed that Shaw was right; at other times he had other ideas about the true meaning of his epic.

In any case, instead of Shaw's projected expectations of some sort of birth of a new socialist utopia at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, Wagner concluded his monstrous drama with everyone somehow corrupted (well, possibly excepting the Norns)—even

Earthmother Erda having been seduced between musical adventures by Wotan's inexhaustible wantonness so that she might deliver a whole troop of flying horsewomen in time for their appearance in *Die Walküre*—*everyone* having been dishonored in one way or another, or destroyed (or both) and the whole depraved civilization, along with the entire undeserving world, collapsing back into a primitive state of nature. So The RING is not about the new social science of Comte or Marx or the historicism of Hegel or the triumph of communism—unless you want it to be. It's really much bigger than any particular economic theory. It is a musical theater model of modernist cosmology, wherein a rational response to the *a priori* principle of universal imperfection (which appears as a kernel of evil in an otherwise innocent appearing Nibelung and/or even in the childlike Rhine Maidens), while creating and progressing, also corrupts until, through the conflict of ideas (or the representatives or personifications of ideas), the pace of decay overwhelms the world's creative capacity. The increasing degradation can no longer be obscured by efforts at political spin or patched over by shifting morality on the part of the world's intelligent and rational characters. Nor can it be reversed by revisions of the theories of nature or the resulting technological improvements (like magic swords and tarnhelms—or air travel and computers), and, ultimately, chaos reigns again in accordance with the second law of, in this case, 'sociodynamics'. Evolution loses to entropy (a term not yet invented when Wagner began his tetralogy, but the establishment of thermodynamics was well underway) and the complicated and twisted Universe growing out of DAS RHEINGOLD is ultimately reduced and re-simplified, its cosmic clock essentially reset to midnight such that the world, presumably, will begin all over again.

As a creator of a new artform, Wagner himself has been portrayed as cataclysmic volcano engulfing the world of art; forcing modernity to find new ways and modes of expression, a new method of looking at art and life, but not necessarily in imitation of his way. If this sounds in any way like a defense of a despicable Wagner-as-man in deference to the sublime Wagner-as-artist, I assure you Wagner needs no defense. As Barzun has said, he is a colossus that will not be toppled. 'His way', despicable though not entirely out of synch with his time (despite his legendary ability to create the 'art-work of the future'), was that of a racist, grossly anti-Semitic, self-centered, progressive materialist who saw himself as the Hegelian absolute and Nietzschean superman and therefore the last great artist, and he managed to convince not only a great many of his own era—even a good many Frenchmen!—but generations afterward of that self-delusion as truth.

We tend, nowadays, to try to contemplate the artist as a mirror of a particular cultural era; to treat works of art as semi-transparent windows through which we can catch distorted glimpses of history, or in which to find some unique understanding of the present. There are visionaries, certainly, among the artistic *avant garde*, many of whom see themselves as revolutionary. Shocking as their work may be, hardly any of them have much of an impact, directly, on events beyond the art world. Wagner, perhaps more than any other artist in history, through his art and his theories of art (and just being Wagner), actually *affected* the course of his age as much or more than he *reflected* it. There is the proof, as much as such proof might be had, that art need not be impotent outside the frame of a painting or the double bars of a symphony or the covers of a novel or beyond the stage curtain. It does have the potential, if seldom realized, to pierce the barrier between the dream and the real; it can, given special circumstances, sustained marketing, and the hand of a supreme master, actually change the world.

In that respect, there are some rather serious questions that need asking about the possible effect of Wagner's anti-semitic expressions on the next generation's encounter with Hitler; questions presenting something like four colors of argument.

First, let us have a look at both of the opposing sides of the relationship as a debate from the perspective of *looking forward* from Wagner:

SIDE A (red vs. blue): Did Wagner create Hitler?

(1—*Red*) The anti-Wagnerites, for the most part, admit that Hitler was not subliminally inspired to rid the planet of Jews by any special or occult arrangement of pitches or orchestral instrumentation or unorthodox poetry. They do, however, contend that he was influenced by the example and racist outpourings of one of his several special heroes, Richard Wagner, which makes Wagner, in some degree, indirectly responsible for the Holocaust. After all, Hitler considered himself a brother artist (whose paintings, he would surely argue, are valued comparably to the great works—though not for the proper reason). Then, too, just as Wagner (allegedly) burned the *Dresden Staats Oper* before ultimately becoming the king of musical theater, Hitler (allegedly) burned the Reichstag before becoming *Fürher* of Germany. The idea 'as went Wagner, so tended Hitler', was long bolstered by the general feeling for it as truth felt by actual Holocaust survivors, who understandably had developed a hatred of this music, leading in fact to the banning of it in Israel. The ban was lifted, I believe in the 1980s, when Zubin Mehta, in the face of death threats and despite nearly half the Israeli Philharmonic leaving the stage in protest, was politically permitted to present the Middle-East debut of the 'Prelude and Love-Death' from *Tristan and Isolde*. While the lifting of the ban may have signified a delayed acceptance that there can be nothing political or hateful about any particular organization of sonic vibrations, it was Wagner's own theory that claimed the opposite. Such claims are far from new, as they are found further back in history than Plato: the Greek theories regarding the various emotive powers of their musical modes. Furthermore, did Wagner not actually intend and expect, by the promulgation of his music-dramas, to fuse not only the wispy elements of art but the very real-world principalities of the German federation and/or to alter a society? It could be said, then, that he laid the groundwork also for Bismarck with not only his operas but his writing and his fame. After all, the unification of Germany came at the very apex of Wagnerism. If he had, through his art, indeed inspired a king to try to live out his dramas, and motivated Bismarck to raise *realpolitik* to a level that would have made Machiavelli proud, and encouraged all of Germany to unite as a nation and a people, why is it so far fetched to suppose that he might have inspired Hitler to seek the 'final solution'?

(2—*Blue*) The pro-Wagner folks see that anti-Semitism, despite its being promoted through name-recognition and associated with a great genius, was not invented by Wagner. It was, had been for many generations, and still is rampant in Europe and it was never confined to Germany. Wagner was just a musician, however extraordinary. How could his ignorant and twisted political or social opinions be the impetus for fascism and despotism? Furthermore, Hitler was not the only one who admired Wagner as a composer, and the use of his music for

NAZI rituals and propaganda was a natural, given its power to sway emotions. But emotions are the opposite of rational intellect. The content of his operas: the legendary Teutonic history and Norse mythology were not his inventions but were already shared by all Germanic people. Hitler also admired Nietzsche—why not blame it on him? Besides, the man’s music has nothing to do with a political agenda. Music is simply variations in a series of meaningless sounds. There cannot be anti-Semitic or pro-NAZI music, nor any sort of musical politics.

Then there are the two sides of the argument *looking backward* from the present:

SIDE B (black vs. white): Would Wagner, had he lived later, have joined the NAZIs?

(3—*Black*) The master race concept, the Aryan purity idea, and especially the anti-Semite aspect would have fit Wagner perfectly. With his best political apprentice, Hitler, in the director’s chair the stage would be set for even more ‘art-work of the future’ in goose-step with Hitler’s ‘politics of the future’ and the ultimate conquest of the world, the thousand year Reich, and immortality for the final artform. Hitler’s reaction to Wagner’s mesmerizing power was similar to that displayed by Ludwig II: wallowing in the fantasies, funding Bayreuth, and spending great public sums on special performances. Wagner would have been worshipped in NAZI Germany and could hardly have resisted playing a part, something like a Froh—or better: a Loge to Hitler’s Wotan—but he would insist on having significant influence in every aspect of the regime, including the war councils. One could even see him in a special military uniform—naturally of his own design and lined in silk.

(4—*White*) The silliness of Wagner’s expressions of anti-Semitism would be comedic had it not been for our later experience of the NAZI holocaust. It was either George Sabine or Jacques Barzun [citation lost] who remarked that, despicable though it was, we would welcome Wagners Jew baiting if we could put it in place of the NAZI version. While he may, according to legend, have conducted Mendelssohn wearing gloves and made nose jokes about Meyerbeer, he would hardly have consigned either composer, or even his nemesis the Jewish musical journalist Eduard Hanslick to the gas chamber, nor any of their work to the flames, despite what he perceived to be inherent ‘Judaic flaws’—excepting probably Hanslick’s specific anti-Wagner attack articles). Moreover, as for joining the Party, Wagner would never join any cause but his own. Besides, if he had joined he could never have kowtowed like Heidegger and Furtwangler, or looked away without opinion like Richard Strauss. He likely would have been driven away by Hitler’s ministers for meddling—exiled, perhaps again to Switzerland. After all, there could be only one *führer*.

It is the most precious irony in this regard that, according to Nietzsche (in one of his letters, perhaps—I cannot now find the reference—though it might have been cited in Ernest Newman’s marvelous WAGNER AS MAN AND ARTIST), Wagner confided to him (though apparently to no one else) that his biological father was the same as the only father he remembered: his much respected parental father, the Jew Ludwig Geyer, who was also a prominent theatrical man (the family patriarch, Josef Wagner, a policeman, having died suddenly while Richard was still an infant of less than six months, and Frau



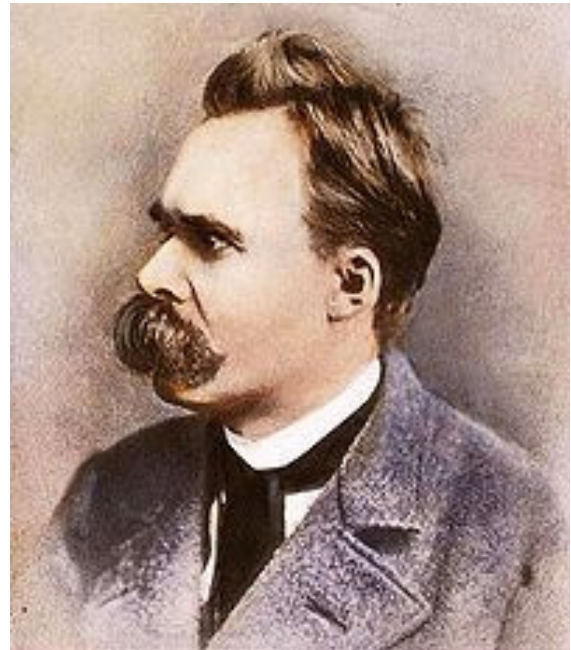
Caricature of Wagner by Karl Clic in the [Viennese](#) satirical magazine, *Humoristische Blätter* (1873). The exaggerated features refer to rumors of Wagner's Jewish ancestry

Wagner, curiously if not scandalously, having married Herr Geyer, a long-time friend of the Wagners, within only a few more months of her husband's passing). If that is so, the arch anti-Semite Wagner was himself awash in Jewish blood and genes. One wonders: How would Hitler have reacted to that? One also wonders why Wagner would have confided that delicious morsel to Nietzsche? One further wonders: If he actually did not do so, why would Nietzsche have made something like that up? His anti-Semitism could easily be explained (not excused) by possible vigorous denials engendered while he was still a child, perhaps by anti-Semitic jokes or teasing by his schoolmates (either of him or of other known-to-be-Jewish students) and the gaining of their acceptance by joining them in their hateful games. This, of course, is all just supposing with out a shred of evidence.

### Nietzsche Contra Wagner:

**Friedrich Nietzsche** [1844-1900], another great but, some believe, flawed German mind (of course, in the larger sense aren't we all?) is thought by many to be the principal proto-NAZI. In most cases this is due to the inaccurate assumption equating his famous prophecy in *ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA* of the *übermensch* or 'superman' with Hitler's eugenic concept of an Aryan 'master race'—or with Hitler himself. Hitler did indeed find much to his liking in Nietzsche's amazing writing and mined those works as apropos to his purpose—and probably did see himself as the first of *übermenschen*. Nietzsche's power of the pen was married to Hitler's power of oratory (not to mention the circumstances that produced an audience amenable to it: the impossible situation in which Germany found herself per the Treaty of Versailles). While Nietzsche had vigorously criticized all religions as various mixtures of pabulum for the masses, he also recognized their value in guiding and controlling the behavior of the unenlightened, thus preparing Western civilization for its transmutation from the ancient ways during the re-discovery of philosophy. But philosophy, having been Germanized, had become very much like religion: its 'systems' serving as vaulted temples enclosing the mind; its sterile dogma as scripture.

Though he was, as Will Durant pointed out, very much "a child of Darwin", Nietzsche was not a racist and seems to have had more respect for Judaism than for Christianity, the latter of which he thought guilty of promoting individual weakness in its members for the benefit of unity of the Church as an economic and political institution.



This was done by means of what he considered to be a kind of bureaucratic distortion of the message of Jesus, whom he found admirable as a man. He did favor the ancient Greeks as a special culture, admiring their ‘ahistorical’ approach to life; their fully living-in-the-moment. We have seen a number of modernist thinkers yearn for the ‘freedom’ of



those Greeks. What they meant (since Hegel at least) is that the ancients were free of history because they did not know it. History, as truth, was not important to the Greeks. Pagan mythology was important, however, and, one would think, left them no more free than would history. Mythology was important because it controlled their present behavior in ways even history could not—and cannot. But of course it is *history as progress* which makes the great difference between Western culture and all others. The ancient outlook had a great deal to do with their paganism, a distorted version of which was also influential in the NAZI mindset, having much to do with a kind of Greek renaissance, with Berlin as a kind of new Athens—or, perhaps more apropos,

a new Sparta. But as we have seen, Nietzsche was hardly the first German philosopher to favorably compare the two cultures. Though he saw moderns as clearly inferior in that regard, it was Germany that he thought had the greatest potential for such a revival. This was partly due to Nietzsche’s conclusion that Germans, primarily because of their rather messy history and lack of unity, had not yet developed a distinctive culture.

Nietzsche worked hard at freeing himself from Germanism. He was no socialist, nor was he democratic or in any sense egalitarian. He had little to say about political freedom, restricting it to whoever could achieve it. He saw two permanent classes of humans, but they were not engaged in Marxian class warfare. Masters and slaves are clearly divided eternally by Nature and, from the widest perspective, co-existing symbiotically. The slave-type is generally malleable but essentially a loose mob: something worse than a herd; incapable of planning or self-organizing or even thinking on a level conducive to an advanced society. The masters provide direction and inducement—OK: ‘compulsion’. Though in his ‘will to power’ there is a remnant of Hegel’s vital ‘spirit’ behind the world, he announced that God (as intelligent Cosmic Creator and as a special guardian of humanity—or at least the protector of His faithful) was exhausted as a concept; dispatched by science and modern philosophy. He ridiculed the Hegelian-Marxist idea of historicism, however, whereby the clash of ideas over time results in mass movements marching inevitably uphill toward some final absolute or utopian state of affairs. Instead he saw great men acting in their own perceived interest and living as if above vulgarity. These were the mighty beings who, disdainful of history, had a more direct connection to the ‘will to power’ or, perhaps more accurately, realized the potential that developed within them, which would be recognized as ‘will to power’: a higher type who might be capable of saving human cultures from the weakness inflicted by mental diseases such as theism (especially Christianity), bad modern ideas, and nature-inhibiting human institutions. Judaism was bad enough, channeling the human spirit through orthodoxy, but Christianity was worse, infecting even the masters with the idea that there was something respectable and virtuous in simple weakness and that strength was only good if it should be used in carrying the weak.

You will look in vain through his writings for an answer to the problem of our salvation, however, for Nietzsche was not really about saving humanity. Humanity, in his view cannot be saved and, generally, is hardly worth saving. The masses of mankind amount to little more than the means to achieving the *great man*. The ‘many’ are merely graded and compacted plains upon which mighty castles or modern sky-scrapers might be erected. In reading him one may tend to fret about how it will all work out for mankind and how in all his writing he seems to be saying ‘might makes right’; favoring tyranny. The superman, indeed, will rule with a kind of justice, in as much as he must tend to the health of the many in order to maximally exploit them—as one must cultivate and nourish a garden to fully realize its potential produce. But exploit them he will. Here is Nietzsche from THE GENEALOGY OF MORALS:

It is not surprising that the lambs should bear a grudge against the great birds of prey, but that is no reason for blaming the great birds of prey for taking the little lambs. And when the lambs say among themselves, “Those birds of prey are evil, and he who is far removed from being a bird of prey, who is rather its opposite, a lamb—is he not good?” then there is nothing to cavil at in the setting up of this ideal, though it may also be that the birds of prey will regard it a little sneeringly, and perchance say to themselves, “We bear no grudge against them, these good lambs, we even like them: nothing is tastier than a tender lamb.” To require of strength that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should not be a wish to overthrow, a wish to become master, a thirst for enemies and antagonisms and triumphs, is just as absurd as to require of weakness that it should express itself as strength.

Even with those who have stepped away from Christ, he goes on to explain, there is a new trick of language used by the weak, or in their behalf by revolutionaries—those who would be their protectors (from nature, of course)—that things can be otherwise: that we *choose* our nature (which would mean *there is no nature*, but only choice and/or fortune) and thus they engender our modern, falsely based, artificial morality.

What wonder, if the suppressed and stealthily simmering passions of revenge and hatred exploit for their own advantage their belief, and indeed hold no belief with a more steadfast enthusiasm than this—“that the strong has the *option* of being weak, and the bird of prey of being a lamb.” Thereby do they win for themselves the right of attributing to the birds of prey the *responsibility* for being birds of prey: when the oppressed, downtrodden, and overpowered say to themselves with the vindictive guile of weakness, “Let us be otherwise than the evil, namely the good! and good is everyone who does not oppress, who hurts no one, who does not attack, who does not pay back, who hands over revenge to God, who holds himself, as we do, in hiding; who goes out of the way of evil, and demands, in short, little from life; like ourselves the patient, the meek, the just,”—yet all this, in its cold and unprejudiced interpretation, means nothing more than “once for all, the weak are weak; it is good to do *nothing for which we are not strong enough*”; but this dismal state of affairs, this prudence of the lowest order, which even insects possess (which in a great danger are fain to sham death so as to avoid doing “too much”), has, thanks to the counterfeiting and self-deception of weakness, come to masquerade in the pomp of an ascetic, mute, and expectant virtue, just as though the *very* weakness of the weak—that is, forsooth, its *being*, its working, its whole unique inevitable inseparable reality—were a voluntary result, something wished, chosen, a deed, and act of *merit*.

He proceeds to tell us that the very invention of the ‘soul’ is, for the weak,

...the best dogma in the world simply because it rendered possible to the horde of mortal, weak, and oppressed individuals of every kind, that most sublime specimen of self-deception, the interpretation of weakness as freedom, of being this, or being that, as *merit*.

[*Quotes (ital.included) are from THE GENEALOGY OF MORALS, No.13 (Horace B. Samuel, trans.) in THE PHILOSOPHY OF NIETZSCHE; Modern Library (Random House), NY, 1954; pp.655-658]*

On the other hand, from Nietzsche’s perspective, nature compels the strong to dominate. The master-type adds reasoning to raw might to make his domination more efficient—even mutually beneficial. Otherwise, scientifically, without intervention of the hero exhibiting ‘will to power’, the natural course of human events might follow the 2<sup>nd</sup> law of thermodynamics into ever increasing entropy: a down-flowing to the equilibrium of the ‘last-men’; utter mediocrity. He feared that Tocqueville’s perspective might have been correct: that the democratic spirit was here to stay and that, unchecked, it would contrive to flat-line humanity, sucking life-affirming energy out the great souls and leveling society to a point of such ennui that it could not recover—something like the classless communism of Marx, for instance.

To prevent that, a transvaluation of values is needed, which is to be provided by the superman type: transcendent, uncontaminated souls who, like Wagner’s Siegfried (though hopefully significantly smarter), are free of tradition, dogma, and all morality due to their ignorance of all history; free thus to forge their own values—*natural* values based on the *a priori* ‘will to power’. Nietzsche seemed to think such type *must* arise — or *ought* to arise—from the rotting carcass of our dead civilization after the next great European war he so presciently predicted. But human problems would not be dissolved thereby. He could give not reason or assurance that his superman would, in reinvigorating civilization, recreate the world as paradise. He argued that there could be no ‘science’ of history, nor natural laws governing it. Progress is not inevitable, and sociology is a hopeless idea. On the other hand, he proclaimed a determinism as certain as that found in classical physics. He saw a finite, materialist universe but no such limit on abstract time. Thus, over eternity, based perhaps on Wm. Thomson’s suggestion (before he was Lord Kelvin) that, if all is statistics, it would seem there would be nothing preventing the recurrence of highly organized states. Every possible cosmic state will inevitably reappear. Moreover, every series of causal events leading to those states has to happen again; over and over, as in certain Oriental cosmologies, like the Hindu teachings that the Universe is cyclical, thus *eternal recurrence*. Though Nietzsche, as a young professor at Basil, may have been aware of Thomson’s concerns over thermodynamics, he must not have seen Boltzmann’s staggering improbability numbers.

Given eternal recurrence, one must accept what is; learn to say ‘Yea’ to life, whatever happens. The secret to happiness is attitude—meaning to fully assuming the psychic viewpoint that all is just as you would wish it to be because it will be exactly this way again and again for all eternity. Can he have seriously believed in eternal recurrence? It seems absurd. He must have been proposing it as dogma: a hook on which to hang belief; a substitute for what was lost in the demise of religion; comforting those who, intellectually, could not get ‘beyond good and evil’. Durant makes the point:

The ethical philosophy of Spencer was not the most natural corollary of the theory of evolution. If life is a struggle for existence in which the fittest survive, then strength is the ultimate virtue, and weakness is the only fault. *Good* is that which survives, which wins; *bad* is that which gives way and fails. Only the mid-Victorian cowardice of the English Darwinists [what Crane Brinton, in *THE SHAPING OF MODERN THOUGHT*, calls the Victorian Compromise], and the bourgeois respectability of French positivists and German socialists, could conceal the inevitableness of this conclusion. These men were brave enough to reject Christian theology, but they did not dare to be logical, to reject the moral ideas, the worship of meekness and gentleness and altruism, which had grown out of that theology. They ceased to be Anglicans, or Catholics, or Lutherans; but they did not dare cease to be Christians.—So argued Friedrich Nietzsche.

[from *THE STORY OF PHILOSOPHY*, ch.IX, 'Friedrich Nietzsche', p.435 (*emphasis in orig.*)]

In fact, Nietzsche proclaims

“The secret stimulus of the French free-thinkers from Voltaire to August Comte was not to remain behind the Christian ideal, ...but to outbid it if possible. Comte, with his ‘Live life for others,’ out-Christianizes Christianity. In Germany it was Schopenhauer, and in England John Stuart Mill, who gave the greatest fame to the theory of sympathetic affections of pity, and of usefulness to others as the principles of action ... all the systems of socialism placed themselves unwittingly ... upon the common ground of these doctrines.”

[*ibid.*; p.436; *quoted in* E. Faguet, *ON READING NIETZSCHE*; NY, 1918; p.71]

In his most famous book, his protagonist, the wandering prophet Zarathustra, is busily preparing the way for the superman. But the ‘last-men’ cannot understand him (as average men misunderstand Nietzsche) and they run him out of town like any unwelcome vagrant. Realizing they are cerebrally limited, he retreats to his cave to contemplate the foibles of humanity and wait through the darkness of social chaos for the dawn of the superman. Democracy is hopeless: the many can never govern. Marx is also wrong. The state will not become outmoded with the ‘advance’ of communism. If it is to disappear it will be amid total civil collapse, which to Nietzsche seemed imminent. But he is no better than Marx at defining the nature of the end and explaining what will replace the modern world or how to achieve it. Huge historical movements were unpredictable; not susceptible to science. Ultimately his writing might be taken as a warning that we had better keep things in balance and not let ourselves go slipping into darkness. But that is not how he meant his philosophy to be understood. Actually his work is anti-philosophy. He certainly set himself against German philosophy and railed against Socrates. And Nietzsche hated such a mediocre idea as preservation of the status quo, apparently believing there is nothing we can do anyway to stop the transmutation of the present.

The question is still mulled over: Into what, per Nietzsche, are we about to be transmuted? What will a future without religion, tradition, and history be like? We will still need rules and their enforcement for society to continue; morality, too, is needed to establish the necessary loyalty and expectations of decency and honor. Philosophy, having killed God (the moral source), if it would now rule us, must replace revealed dogma with rational dogma—‘dogma’ in both cases because the many are incapable of understanding either the mysteries of religion (thus the need for priests and interpreters) or the logic of nature (thus the need for philosophers, scientists, and ‘spin doctors’).

If philosophy were to rule, it would have to establish a morality for the many in which they can believe—as with Kant and St. Simon and Comte and Jeremy Bentham. Nietzsche could care less about the many, nor does he seem overly concerned for philosophers of the future. He cares only about finding and exposing truth. In that sense he is a philosopher, but not a system builder. He accepts that there are contradictory truths and knows philosophy is weak—especially since it has admitted the limitations of reason—and it cannot rule society. The human understanding of nature having changed, the virtues (at least the ordering of virtues) must also change, i.e., a ‘transvaluation of values’. Determination of new moralities will fall upon the superman—or, more likely, through the clash of supermen. The Nietzschean future, beyond good and evil, will be ruled apparently by supermen over slaves, with intellectuals (hardly supermen) finding refuge (like Heidegger would during the Third Reich) in the courts of these purely intuitive despots or (like Zarathustra himself) taking to the untamed hills to live as hermits (the great solitude experienced by Nietzsche himself). Philosophers seem reduced either to craven consultants or jesters, of lesser effect even than the priests of Egypt under Ikhnoton, or else to cave-dwelling ascetics of no use at all, hatching their broods of metaphysical profundities in darkness from which they dare not emerge.

Leo Strauss, says Laurence Lampert [*ref. to par.28 of Leo Strauss's essay, "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil"*] presents Nietzsche's position on this:

Philosophical laborers, “professors of philosophy,” ought to be subservient to philosophy [not to governments or leaders or institutions] as its handmaidens, but instead they have experienced “emancipation” from philosophy. Apparent emancipation, however, came at the cost of actual servitude, for philosophical laborers have become the servants of modern democratic politics. Emancipated from the naturally high that they ought to serve, they—we [today's philosophers or scholars of Nietzsche's future]—are indentured to a politics whose comprehensive goal is the emancipation of the low from subordination to the high. This is “the degeneration of the modern scholar” of which Nietzsche often spoke.

[from LEO STRAUSS AND NIETZSCHE, ch.2: *How Strauss Read Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil*; Univ. of Chicago, 1996; p.87—referenced essay by Strauss is appended to Prof. Lampert's book],

Stepping beyond good and evil puts us in the wilderness without a compass. We must be able, first of all, to determine right from wrong. Before Nietzsche brought us here, we had four basic methods of seeking solutions to questions of morality:

- (1) *Revelation*—e.g., oracles, dreams, sacred books, angels, prophets, authority;
- (2) *Tradition*—history, culture, trans-generation institutions; custom, habit;
- (3) *Reason*—reflection, common sense, science, philosophy; and
- (4) *Intuition*—individual passions, desire, natural wants and needs.

These are ways of finding rules of conduct, but rules and laws and codes are useless without enforcement.

*Revelation*: enforced supernaturally by gods or fear of punishment here and now (or soon), or (even better) in an after-life shaped somehow by one's behavior in the present or in a future reality; one might call it ‘another-chance-life’, tinged with karma accumulated by behavior in past lives. By basing morality on religion, the codes thus taught to gullible youth become, to an individually uncertain but generally significant degree, self-enforcing through life.

*Tradition*: the next-best means for guaranteeing overall behavior conducive to cementing a society, most effective when mixed with religion/revelation.

*Reason*: what we are reduced to when science/philosophy has managed to discredit all other methods. One realizes bad behavior might bring failure and reduced happiness, but weighing the risks now becomes part of ethics. Reason usually reduces to rationalizing: careful calculations of self-interest. Honor and virtue become superficial garments: mere appearance for reputation's sake rather than attributes of the soul. Besides, the many do not seem to reason all that well.

*Intuition*: would seem to lead to a lack of cohesion; anarchy; Hobbes' 'state of nature'. Intuition appears too weak to overcome the strength of the passions, which is why no society allows intuition to determine allowable social behavior. Yet here is where Nietzsche would base the human future by putting it in the care of the natural intuition of the superman. In fact, he claims this is where we are brought by reason—or the failure thereof. He says he is the first philosopher to have the courage to see all the way through; to fathom the abyss and to accurately report his finding. The problem: human weakness. Gregory Bruce Smith explains:

The weakening of modern man's personality can be traced to Socrates, but was clearly exacerbated by Kant and abstract, formal, anti-natural, modern morality: "It comes to this: he has annihilated and lost his instinct; . . . he can no longer let go the reins and trust in the 'divine animal.' So the individual becomes timid and unsure and may no longer believe in himself: he sinks into himself, into his inner being" (*from ON THE ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE OF HISTORY FOR LIFE*, pp.28-29). As a result, "he fails to see something which is yet seen by *the child*, he fails to hear something which is yet heard *by the child*." (*Ibid.*, p.28; *emphasis by Smith*). Having a "personality" requires a childlike, unself-consciousness, "instinctive" relation to life in which one leans on the realm of appearance as the locus of eternity. Without personality so conceived, the individual withdraws into internal chaos and accomplishes nothing. Highly self-conscious modern individuals cannot act in any genuinely historical, or history-making, fashion. Consequently, they cease to be "sincere" in relation to themselves and others. According to Nietzsche, an environment dominated by individuals of this kind will not be sympathetic to art and religion, the "true helpers" of culture, only to the uniform, general education that makes man into a "walking lie." And under the circumstances of modern, historicist reality, real philosophy is in danger of being banished (*Ibid.*, pp.29, 30).

[Gregory Bruce Smith; NIETZSCHE, HEIDEGGER, AND THE TRANSITION TO POSTMODERNITY; Chicago, 1996]

The glorification of history as a science had made things worse. Modern man was already overburdened with history and tradition and dogma. He had become a product rather than a man: dehumanized; the mere result of a process; a sociological building-block; an atom of carbon in the turbulent storm of Marxist-Hegelian historicism.

Hitler saw the solution clearly enough: the superman must appear earlier than anticipated, destroy all enemies of greatness, weed out corruptors of racial purity, eradicate opposition to the science of eugenics as applied to humanity, and restore the good-old days of the ancient world—enhanced, certainly, by modern technology. Though Nietzsche's *übermensch* was a *type*, not an individual savior like Christ or a destroyer like Lucifer (and Nietzsche) or a super-hero protector of truth, justice, and the Teutonic way, still Hitler did see himself as Superman—or the first of supermen: a procession of

great souls like himself that would develop out of his enforcement of the necessary racial policies, something resembling the breeding of domestic cattle applied to Germans, which would come to full fruition during the thousand-year reign of the Third Reich; thus to be enshrined forever as the greatest founder in human history.

Like Wagner, Nietzsche, though apparently opening the door for fascism, may not have foreseen anything quite like Hitler, though he should have. Certainly he had sufficient knowledge of human history to expect there always would be monsters. Did he really think philosophy could somehow contain the superman? Not a chance. Still, to direct us away from the unknown abyss to portside, he would steer us into the submerged rocks to starboard—certain to be wrecked there but still live, rather than to be sunk and extinguished in the fathomless sea. In his youthful infatuation with a great and accepting mentor, he at first expected Richard Wagner and his ‘art-work of the future’ to be a kind of ‘bridge to the superman’. He saw Wagner’s art as an attempt to build a philosophical instead of cultureless elite (who might even become capable of understanding him, but who actually wouldn’t need him or waste their precious time reading his works), and pointing not so much toward German unity (though that was exactly what Wagner was doing) as to the next step: a new Europeanism.

The breaking of their friendship was probably inevitable since both were, of other men’s works and behavior, among the most negative chroniclers in history. Little by little Nietzsche began to see flaws in the imposing Wagnerian edifice (as he saw flaws everywhere). It didn’t help that Wagner laughed at Nietzsche’s forays into musical composition. Though he was far from any attempt to challenge the master, he was an accomplished pianist and dabbled in writing for the instrument. Jeremy Pound relates,

When Cosima Wagner and Hans Richter played his *The New Year’s Echoes* for piano duet in 1871, Wagner himself apparently had to leave the room, doubled up in hysterics. The following year, Nietzsche’s *Manfred Meditations* for solo piano met an even worse reception from Hans von Bülow. ‘Have you no better way to kill time?’ wrote the conductor on receiving the score, adding that Nietzsche had ‘raped the muse of music’.

[from the article: *15 Unlikely Composers*, BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE; Bristol, UK; Oct., 2010; p.38]

At first Wagner’s theory seemed promising to Nietzsche: to recreate and enhance the ancient tragedy of the Greeks, further intended as a force to revive something of their more natural culture. But, then, while still writing his *Thoughts Out Of Season*, Nietzsche had taken in the Bayreuth spectacle and was appalled. As Jacques Barzun describes it,

Crude and high-priced, Bayreuth combined snobbery with sightseeing, and was steeped in sensuality and beer. Nietzsche took a sorrowful farewell of the place where the new art might have come to birth. Tears stood in his eyes as he sighed, “And that was Bayreuth!”

For Nietzsche, Barzun continues, rather than rising to a new plateau,

...art took a step downward in order to reach, not the people, but the middle classes of a decadent era. Everything in Wagner was designed for them: the size and crudity of the show, the aura of technicality and religion, the figure of the author as wonder-worker, the association of nationalism with the turgid dramas, and finally the music ... crude, pretentious, and turgid too....It was the opiate of the people.

The tricks of the master did not escape the one-time disciple. Nietzsche saw that the music drama is only theater writ large and pompous. The wooden structure of the plays is concealed by a false continuity of verse and sound. Like any Meyerbeer, perhaps even less skillfully, Wagner pulls his subject about to satisfy some conventional stage demand; two whole acts without a female voice are unbearable; the heroines, however, are busy elsewhere: never mind! Wotan will wake up Erda and discuss philosophy for want of small talk. The effect is achieved and no one will notice too closely—except an artist.

.....

...Wagner's music is decadent and for decadents. It lacks gaiety, strength, intelligence, freedom from gross material aids; above all it lacks artistic integrity: it comes out of a bag of tricks.

The philosopher, it seems, failed to notice in their early acquaintance that among the many hats in the closet of his chosen mentor was the jester's cap of Wagner the showman, a facet of the composer fully on display at his new theatre and shrine. The more Nietzsche contemplated that spectacle, the more he saw his mission: exposure of Wagnerism as a symptom rather than a cure of the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century European malady. Music, for Nietzsche, had become an opiate, says Barzun, as with all of Romantic art, because the late 19<sup>th</sup> century world "with its hopeless positivism was too dreadful to be faced, and those who have made it are too stupid and cowardly to remake it". Nietzsche saw Wagner as selling-out to the vulgar bourgeoisie and superficial intellectuals in return for their adoration. He felt cheated, but still had the decency and patience to wait until his one-time friend had passed away to publish his backstabbing essay, *NIETZSCHE CONTRA WAGNER*, the fourth section of which was entitled *Music Without Any Future*.

"Nietzsche," Barzun further remarks,

scorns most the two things Wagner stands for most—Germanism and anti-Semitism. To be a good European, an anti-German, a lover of 'Mediterranean' music, an anti-pessimist, and a witness of the rebirth after decadence, one must be first an anti-Wagnerian, a wholehearted detester of the 'Music Without Any Future'.

[Quotes above are from *DARWIN, MARX, WAGNER* by Jacques Barzun; Anchor Books (Doubleday), Garden City NY, 1958; pp.299-302]

A year later the philosopher's mind broke and he was confined. Near the end a visitor brought on a rare lucid moment by showing him a photo of Wagner. Gazing upon the likeness of his one-time friend and then nemesis, he remarked "Him I loved."

From Nietzsche's perspective, could it not have been Wagner's unrealized potential to fulfill the philosopher's own visions that he actually loved, or simply the composer's strength of mind and force of character that yet could not conquer his weakness for fame, adoration, and luxuriousness? As an aspiring musician himself, perhaps it was the music that irresistibly attracted him, as it still attracts so many (despite Barzun's mean description). After all, Wagner's writings, as we have noted above, expose his intellectual arguments for communism and even Judeo-Christian elements in his recipe for morals, leading to what Nietzsche would later deplore as the 'last men'. How could Nietzsche have loved that? Besides, there is little evidence that Nietzsche was actually capable of love, or really understood it. Whatever truth he knew and portrayed, if his painting of it was somewhat skewed by the warped lens of a disturbed soul, his colors are raw and his canvas certainly not lacking in light. As Stefan Zweig describes:

No doubt the light that sparkles here is a perilous one. It has the phantasmal and morbid luminosity of a midnight sun glowing red above icebergs; it is a northern light of the soul whose unique splendor makes us shudder. It does not warm us, it terrifies us. It does not dazzle, but it slays.

[from HOLDERLIN, KLEIST, AND NIETZSCHE: *The Struggle with the Daemon* (in MASTER BUILDERS OF THE SPIRIT, Vol.2); Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ (USA), and London (UK), 2011; third section: "Nietzsche, 1844-1900"; p.522 (orig. pub.: Viking Press, 1939)]

He was, after all, however brilliant cerebrally, only a partially formed man: son of a true-believing minister, studying first theology, then rejecting religion and avenging himself against it by declaring that God is dead; never marrying, perhaps never having had sex; certainly not weak—in fact a constitution incredibly resistant to the damage induced by violent headaches and overly sensitive nerves continually on edge; a brilliant thinker of dark thoughts: pessimistic things repellant to a modernist age of industrial and technological advance that paid him no heed, offered him no respect, preferred not to hear this new ‘crying in the wilderness’. His works were not read and made no decipherable impression; he received no feedback, even from those he skewered on his verbal lances (not to mention enduring ridicule from some of the best musicians of the age as a hopeless composer). Hardly able to attune to the normal masculine psyche and almost without a sense of tenderness, having held no woman softly and lovingly, he walked among mankind almost without meaningful contact and he could hardly be expected to understand the feminine nature—or did he see it all too clearly?

To wit: One day Zarathustra’s disciples notice he is hiding something beneath his robe, and they inquire about it. He explains it is merely ‘a little truth’ given to him by an old woman. But the little truth has a great voice that she charged him to muffle. She had complained to him that, in all his preaching of man and superman, he had said little about woman and she wanted his frank opinion. He had resisted her, not wanting to expose her to his own possibly harmful truth. “Concerning woman,” he advised, “one should only talk unto men.” She softened his attitude, “Talk also unto to me of woman,” she implored, “I am old enough to forget it presently.” Reluctantly he explained,

The happiness of man is, “I will.” The happiness of woman is, “He will.”  
 “Lo! now hath the world become perfect!”—thus thinketh every woman when she obeyeth with all her love.

Obey, must the woman, and find a depth for her surface. Surface is a woman’s soul, a mobile, stormy film on shallow water.

Man’s soul, however, is deep, its current gusheth in subterranean caverns: woman surmiseth its force, but comprehendeth it not.—

Then answered me the old woman: “Many fine things hath Zarathustra said, especially for those who are young enough for them.

Strange! Zarathustra knoweth little about women, and yet he is right about them! Doth this happen, because with women nothing is impossible?

And now accept a little truth by way of thanks! I am old enough for it!  
 Swaddle it up and hold its mouth: otherwise it will scream too loudly, the little truth.”

“Give me, woman, thy little truth!” said I. And thus spake the old woman:

“Thou goest to women? Do not forget thy whip!”

[From THUS SPAKE ZARATHUSTRA, verse 18, ‘Old & Young Women’ (excerpt); T. Common, trans.; in THE PHILOSOPHY OF NIETZSCHE; Modern Library, NY, 1927 & 1954; pp.68-70]

He was not idealist. His was not at all a constructive force. He despised nationalism. He did not seek a philosophy of contentment or fulfillment or a social system conducive to peace and happiness. His superman, if he were to arise at all, would not come as a savior but to serve only himself and the natural 'will to power'. While Nietzsche certainly understood that he was a wrecking machine; a destroyer of false values, even a killer of God, he could not be blamed; it was not by choice. It was the result of his having been given by nature the fearlessness of hard seeing; the ability to penetrate through the many intricate veils humans weave to prevent them from having to notice and recognize the brutal facts: the worthlessness of mere existence; the cold meaninglessness of death, and the harsh austerity of such truth. No societal or economic or political system can ever change that. Each individual must deal with such truth on his own terms and embrace his fate with a positive attitude: acceding to the universal 'will to power'. Acting in accordance with what he is given to feel and to know, to fulfill his needs anyone might ascend a little toward the superman and the transvaluation of all value. The alternative is that of sinking into—or never arising from—the thoughtless, egalitarian herd of staring and blinking 'last men'; comforted by their very crowdedness; wandering aimlessly; hoping ultimately only for relief of worldly pain and sorrow: for eternal euphoria in the aftermath of the last round-up.

In a way this release of the untrammelled superman idea has been seen as conducive to someone just like Hitler—which, it is speculated among some scholars, is why the real philosopher of the Third Reich (however reluctant), Heidegger, seemed forced by his own philosophy born of Hegel's historicism, to accept the NAZI phenomenon as something historically determined; necessarily wrought by the process of nature; a mere reflection of the age. Instead, it seems to me, if 'supermen' were untrammelled they would come constantly into conflict with each other, thus preventing—actually in the best interest of the herd-men—such a single monstrosity from arising. Had Europe not been divided into the nationalistic cells that Nietzsche abhorred; had there, before Hitler, arisen the notion of the 'great European' our philosopher advocated and hoped might occur after the terrible war he had prophesied (and which came to pass only 14 years after his death), or something more suitable to the task than totally inadequate League of Nations, then Hitler and Mussolini and Franco, et al, might have been avoided. But Nietzsche saw much too far ahead than mere diplomats or even great statesmen. Despotism, despite the hunger of despots for expansion, seems to require small borders for an enduring tyranny and for the tightest possible control of populations by whim rather than by law and a moral code. One of the reasons, perhaps, that Nietzsche has been gaining some respect among today's generally leftist academicians, is his negativity toward nationalism, which they can twist, by a carefully selected reading of his works, into a suggestive proto-globalism—whereas before the latest 'deconstructivism' in literary studies he was seen as a proto-NAZI; using him, in either case, in support of positions he would have abhorred.

WARNING: Reading him can be exhilarating but perilous. As he said himself, "I am dynamite".

HANDOUT for Lecture XXX having to do with Comte's positivism out of mechanical philosophy toward Helmholtz and the Logical Positivism of 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Tableau III, *Entrada*, from M. Somers; GALACTIC EXODUS: COUNTERDANCE OF THE CYBERGODS; Trafford, UK & Canada, 2008; pp.54-73 (*required reading only through p.61*).

ALSO

HANDOUTS:

Intro to Helmholtz, On the Sensations of Tone, (not required)  
from [http://www.history.mcs.st-uk/Extras/Helmholtz\\_music\\_intro.html](http://www.history.mcs.st-uk/Extras/Helmholtz_music_intro.html)

PLUS

Article by Deems Taylor: *Wagner the Monster found in MUSIC LOVERS' ENCYCLOPEDIA; Compiled by Rupert Hughes, revised/edited by Deems Taylor and Russell Kerr*  
(Article originally from OF MEN AND MUSIC; Simon & Schuster, NY);  
Doubleday, NY, 1954; pp.541-544

AND

Recommended Reading (not required):

*Third section: "Nietzsche, 1844-1900"; from Stefan Zweig;*  
Holderlin, Kleist, and Nietzsche: *The Struggle with the Daemon* (MASTER BUILDERS OF THE SPIRIT, Vol.2); Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick NJ (USA) & London (UK), 2011; pp.441-530 (*orig. pub.: Viking Press, 1939*)