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**THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF SELF-CREATION:  
NIETZSCHE, RORTY, AND FOUCAULT**

by

David Carter

B.A. (Honours) Queen's University, 1990

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

Philosophy

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NIETZSCHE, RORTY, AND FOUCAULT

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## ABSTRACT

Nietzsche exhorts us to take responsibility for the historical contingencies from which we spring in our efforts to create ourselves. I explore the tension in Nietzsche's description of the subject as both produced by a web of historical contingencies and a potential creator of herself which drives his conception of self-creation. I also pursue an account of the Nietzschean subject in the descriptions of the self and self-creation suggested by Richard Rorty and Michel Foucault.

In Part I I show how the tension in Nietzsche's description of the subject as both the produced by the will to power and the potential creator of herself is resolved in his account of the free-spirited individual. I pay particular attention to the figure of Zarathustra as an exemplification of such a subject.

In Part II I examine Rorty's account of a privatized version of Nietzschean self-creation and the grounding of that task in poetic redescription. I show, however, that Rorty's separation of a subject's life into private and public spheres of responsibility fails to take seriously enough ways in which we are produced by a social fabric. I suggest that Foucault's genealogical descriptions of the subject's production by power fills in that part of the picture Rorty leaves out. Foucault's Nietzschean descriptions of the web of relations which produce the subject suggests roots, contra Rorty, for a politicized account of self-creation.

Matt Selena Sadie Josh Jill Arnie

and France

My formula for greatness in a human being is **amor fati**: that one wants nothing to be other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity. Not merely to endure that which happens of necessity, still less to dissemble it - all idealism is untruthfulness in the face of necessity - but to love it....

Friedrich Nietzsche  
Ecce Homo

The hope of such a poet is that what the past tried to do to her she will succeed in doing to the past: to make the past itself, including those very causal processes which blindly impressed all her behaviors, bear **her** impress.

Richard Rorty  
"The contingency of selfhood"

I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not at the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a love relationship is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end.

Michel Foucault  
Interview October 25, 1982



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## INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche often likened people to works of art. He thought that we have the potential to create ourselves out of ourselves -- out of the historical contingencies from which we spring. Nietzsche's subject is a knot of causes, of drives, and of affects which has, as its highest achievement, the task of self-creation. This study aims at illuminating the richness of the tension in Nietzsche's descriptions of the subject as both a web of historical contingencies and as the potential creator of herself. Nietzsche's impact on contemporary accounts of the subject and self-creation can be seen in the description of the subject as self-creator suggested by Richard Rorty. His account of poetic self-creation is, we will see, deeply indebted to Nietzsche. Another of Nietzsche's inheritors, Michel Foucault, provides a compelling politicized alternative to Rorty's poetic account of self-creation. For Foucault, we shall also see, echoes Nietzsche in his description of a modern subject who is produced by the social fabric from which she springs.

The conversation in which I will engage Nietzsche, Rorty, and Foucault is aimed, ultimately, at suggesting a response to the question: What would it be like to take up the project of self-creation? My concern in Part I of this thesis is to simply present a **view** of Nietzsche's account of the self and of self-creation. The point is to establish an understanding of Nietzsche in which I can root the the discussion of Rorty and Foucault in Part II. To that end I will suggest how we might see Nietzsche's account of the subject in connection with other facets of his project. The aim is to get

a view of Nietzsche that is both broad enough and detailed enough to support the tension I will draw out between Rorty and Foucault as the inheritors of his philosophy.

While Nietzsche is not a systematic philosopher his project is not without either order or intricacy. His account of the subject and of self-creation occupy key positions in the web of descriptions which comprise his philosophy. Moreover, his discussion of this subject and the task of self-creation which confronts her is anchored to that web in a multitude of places and with a wealth of detail. Nietzsche sees people as bound to the historical contingencies from which they spring. His discussion of the subject is bound to his conception of the will to power and to history and genealogy. The account is further complicated by his suggestion that values are created by individuals and groups of individuals in response to the contingencies of their time and place. Perspectives are adopted under specific circumstances and imposed on the world. All of this serves to embed the subject in a world of particulars and to embed Nietzsche's discussion of the subject in a similarly intricate web.

Nietzsche's subject is an expression of what he calls the "will to power." A subject's descriptions of herself and her relationships to the world are expressions of her power. She is also, inversely, produced by the power expressed in the values and objects and subjects around her. We can think of Nietzsche's subject as an interstice embedded in time and place: both the product of historical contingencies and capable of re-creating the world and re-creating herself. The tension between these descriptions drives Nietzsche's account of the subject. My task, again, will be to show how his suggestion that we see the subject as a product of a contingent social fabric is

made to mesh with his conception of the subject as a creator of herself. We will find, in Nietzsche's reconciliation of these descriptions of the self, footings for the descriptions of the subject and self-creation offered by Rorty and Foucault.<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter I I will be concerned with developing an account of Nietzsche's subject and self-creation which brings together his suggestions that we are both produced by a social fabric and, potentially, the creators of ourselves. I will, with that end in mind, aim at an analysis of Nietzsche's description of the **free spirit**. For it is this type of individual, Nietzsche suggests, that is capable of reconciling the descriptions of itself as both produced by a web of historical contingencies and productive of itself. To establish an understanding of this type of subject it will be

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<sup>1</sup>Nietzsche, Rorty and Foucault have all been variously and sometimes deservingly accused of resistance to feminist concerns (a just accusation this paper may not escape either). Nietzsche, in particular and inexcusably, expressed misogynistic views on numerous occasions. Rorty, perhaps in an attempt to ward off the lesser accusation of insensitivity, makes use of feminine pronouns throughout the texts I will be referring to. He often polarizes his discussions pitting good guys and against bad guys where the good guy is a "she" and the bad guy is a "he." That practice has not, however, saved him from the accusation that his liberalism keeps his politics naive and oblivious to entrenched social practices hostile to women. Foucault too, has been accused of a disregard for women's issues. The lack of women's voices in his History of Sexuality, for instance, has not helped his case.

Having said this, I do not believe that the descriptions of subjectivity and self-creation suggested by either Nietzsche, Rorty or Foucault are inherently hostile to either women as a heterogeneous group or to feminism as a political praxis. Their sort of descriptions seem to me to be good resources for feminist thought. However, a feminist critique of self-creation would take me outside the artificial limits I have set in an effort to contain a project already grappling with the thoughts of three not easily netted figures.

I will be using feminine pronouns throughout this paper - except where it would very badly confuse the intelligibility of a view I am trying to express. At times this practice will seem disruptive, incongruous or simply jarring. I take that as a justification for it.

necessary to explore how Nietzsche's account of the subject hooks up to his discussion of the will to power. And in order to do this it will be necessary to explore briefly Nietzsche's concepts of genealogy, perspectival knowledge and nihilism.

In Chapter II I turn to the figure of Zarathustra. Here the discussion becomes more finely grained. Drawing on the conclusions established in Chapter I I show how Zarathustra exemplifies this free-spirited individual engaged in the task of self-creation. Zarathustra exhorts us (in his teaching and by way of example) to take responsibility for the historical contingencies we spring from -- to say of the past "Thus I willed it." He also urges us to "Become who you are" -- to weave those contingencies into a powerful and creative person. These two teachings reflect the tension in his description of himself as both created and creator. Zarathustra's successful pursuit of his own teachings and his creation of himself as a work of art will be seen to reconcile Nietzsche's descriptions of the subject as both the product of historical contingencies and the creator of herself.

In Part II of the thesis I will examine Rorty and Foucault as the inheritors of Nietzsche's conception of the self. I will, in Chapter III, discuss Rorty's adoption of the phrase "Thus I willed it" as a central motif in his own account of the subject and self-creation. Rorty's Nietzsche teaches him about the value of private projects of redescription in light of our historically contingent subjectivity. Rorty wants to use Nietzsche to exemplify a project of poetic self-creation in much the same way that Nietzsche uses Zarathustra to exemplify his account of self-creation. When asked: 'What would it be like to take up the project of self-creation?' he wants to point to

Nietzsche as an example. Rorty takes Nietzsche to have succeeded in creating himself by redescribing his relation to his philosophical predecessors. In Rorty's eyes, Nietzsche succeeded in making the past bear his impress; his redescription allowed him to say of the past "Thus I willed it." Nietzsche imposed a description on his precursors that stuck -- a description which influenced his philosophical successors.

Rorty's appropriation of Nietzsche takes place within a broader liberal vision. It is a context which, it turns out, has a large impact on the spin Rorty puts on him. I will take up Rorty's philosophical and literary ironism as well as his account of a **final vocabulary** (the words according to which a person understands herself and her place in the world (Rorty, 1989 73)) in order to better articulate the limits he hopes to set on self-creation. Rorty's account of self-creation differs significantly from the account of self-creation Nietzsche describes insofar as he privatizes this project. I will, therefore, explore Rorty's motivations for confining self-creation to the private sphere. Nancy Fraser's analysis will be helpful in illuminating a confusion in Rorty's description of the threat to the public sphere he sees in the political pursuit of sublime attempts at self-creation. Rorty's description of self-creation fails to take into sufficient account how a subject is socially constructed. I suggest that this failure leads him to privatize self-creation and thereby deny the possibility of self-creation to those individuals whose attempts at self-creation are contingent on its politicization. Rorty's suggestion that we separate our lives into private and public spheres is, thereby, put under serious strain.

In Chapter IV I pursue an account of the subject and an account of self-

creation which takes into account the subject's production by a social fabric. To this end I take up Daniel Conway's attempt to improve upon Rorty's liberal and perspectival account of the subject. Conway suggests that Rorty has not offered us a way of attaching a subject's perspectives to the self. Conway wants to save Rorty's perspectivism from what he calls disembodiment. He claims that Rorty's account of self-creation is excessively voluntaristic insofar as Rorty fails to attribute enough significance to the limits a social fabric places on a subject's self-creative possibilities. He argues that on Rorty's account of the subject and perspectivism there is no continuous thing to which perspectives can attach. Conway's criticism points to an important problem with Rorty's perspectivism and his account of self-creation. Nonetheless, I will argue that we should not accept the metaphysical corrective Conway suggests.

I suggest that a better corrective to Rorty's difficulties can be found in Michel Foucault's description of the subject. Foucault's account of the self raises difficulties for Rorty's description of self-creation similar to those raised by Conway. Foucault thinks of Nietzsche as the philosopher of **power** and offers, accordingly, a genealogical account of the subject which echoes Nietzsche's. Foucault holds that the subject is produced by the relations of power and knowledge which locate her in time and place. I will argue that Rorty's account of self-creation (an account which relies exclusively on redescription) leaves out a public and political dimension of self-creation which Foucault's account of the subject and power illuminates.

The strategy here will be to undercut Rorty's liberal claim that both Nietzsche



and Foucault are of relevance only to **private** projects of self-creation. The account of a subject produced by power and knowledge which Foucault provides suggests difficulties for Rorty's privatization of self-creation. Foucault's Nietzschean suggestion that the subject is produced by power reveals political possibilities for self-creation which Rorty's poeticization of Nietzsche blinds him to. Moreover, the genealogical account of the subject which Foucault offers suggests tactical avenues along which one might move in an attempt to disrupt the relations of power which inhibit projects of self-creation. We will see that Foucault's account of the subject and self-creation adds greatly to the pressure Fraser's analysis has brought to bear on Rorty's privatization of self-creation.

But all of this begins with Nietzsche and his account of a subject capable of self-creation. The seeds of Rorty's poetic description of self-creation and of Foucault's politically charged account of the subject and power can be found therein. It is to Nietzsche, then, which we now turn.

## **PART I**

## CHAPTER I

### NIETZSCHE'S SUBJECT

We are, for Nietzsche, subjects capable of becoming more than the contingencies from which we spring. More, that is, in the sense that an individual has before her the possibility of shaping those contingencies into a whole -- a character which is governed by a single taste. We are creatures capable of self-creation.

Over the next several pages I will be exploring Nietzsche's subject -- a subject he thinks of as a bundle of drives and affects pushing and pulling in competing directions. The atomic and essential subject described by Plato, Descartes and Kant, a subject blessed by the Jews and the Christians, is very much under attack. Nietzsche suggests that we are produced by the social milieu into which we are born. We are subjects which spring from historical contingencies and subjects which, potentially, strive to master those contingencies -- to create ourselves out of the social fabric of which we are a part. Nietzsche's account of the will to power is central to this understanding of the subject. I will, accordingly, spend some time with this concept in an effort to see how it allows him to describe a subject at once produced by a world and productive of a world. Nietzsche's cryptic exhortation to "Become who you are" will serve as a handle which will help us grasp his account of the subject as will to power.

If, with Nietzsche, we think of the subject as something akin to a work of art, his description of the subject as will to power may come a little easier. Nietzsche's

account of self-creation describes a subject who attempts to manipulate both the effects the world has on her and the affects which drive her. We are a myriad of conflicting elements capable of being composed. To succeed in creating oneself is, he suggests, to give style to oneself -- to succeed in creating the values according to which one might judge oneself.<sup>2</sup>

The free spirit is the type of individual which Nietzsche sees engaging in the task of self-creation. Only these sorts of subjects have the strength necessary to impose a meaning of their own creation on the contingencies from which they spring. Nietzsche argues that a subject requires an immense strength to reconcile the descriptions of herself as at once a product of a social fabric and the creator of herself. But in order to grasp both the degree and the kind of strength necessary for the task of self-creation we will need to begin with an analysis of the will to power. For free spirits are, Nietzsche suggests, powerful and refined expressions of such a will.

Nietzsche uses the concept of will to power to explain how everything in the world relates to everything else. It is as close as he comes to ontology. Subjects are, for Nietzsche, simply one sort of expression of the will to power. Richard Schacht's account of the will to power will help us to establish what Nietzsche means by this.

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<sup>2</sup>The Gay Science, Beyond Good and Evil, On the Genealogy of Morals, and The Will to Power will be of interest here. I should say a little more about my use of The Will to Power. The status of this collection of Nietzsche's notes has been contested for some time now. While I have found it a useful text I do not rely on it to the exclusion of his other texts in my account of either the subject or self-creation. The scholarly debate over the status and value of The Will to Power (as a collection of notes rather than finished aphorisms) does not directly concern us here. I am more interested in Nietzsche's use and influence than I am in the hermeneutical exercises of those involved in that debate.

We will inquire into what it means to be constituted by one's affects (roughly speaking: the drives one expresses as will to power) as well as how one's affects come to take on the patterns they do. The aim here will be to establish how the effects on an individual (the impresses her culture imposes on her) relate to the affects which constitute her.

In order to have a context in which we might ultimately understand the free spirit I will explore another of Nietzsche's subjects: the small man of the herd. We will see how he is a product of the social fabric he exists in. That fabric consists, in large part, of what Nietzsche terms herd morality. This sort of morality is the product of an earlier set of historical contingencies. It springs from an ancient attempt, on the part of Jews and early Christians to generate a meaning for otherwise meaningless suffering. A discussion of the small man of the herd will therefore involve us in an explanation of perspectivism (Nietzsche's account of knowing); genealogy (his perspectival inquiry into the origins of herd morality); and nihilism (the varying species of which relate to the various ways subjects confront meaninglessness).

I will, finally, undertake to describe the free spirit's creation of herself in the face of an oppressive herd morality. We will see how she attempts to describe herself as at once produced by a social fabric informed by herd morality and the creator of herself as a work of art. The successful reconciliation of these descriptions will mark her as a free spirit able to impose a meaning of her own creation on an otherwise meaningless world.

If we are to understand Nietzsche's subject as a particular expression of the will to power then we need an idea of what he means by the will to power in general.

Nietzsche suggests that we think of the world as a vast and intricate interplay of forces which have inscribed themselves into a sort of web. Loci of power, systems or quanta of force, are set in antagonistic relationships with one another. He suggests that we think of these arrangements of forces as engaged in a perpetual struggle. These struggles are both internal, insofar as the arrangement of forces within a system are themselves rooted in antagonism and resistance, and external, insofar as systems of forces are in perpetual conflict with the arrangements of forces which constitute the rest of the web.

Nietzsche describes this interplay of forces in the following ways (admittedly rather obtusely):

The drive to approach -- and the drive to thrust something back are the bond, in both the inorganic and the organic world. . . . The will to power in every combination of forces, defending itself against the stronger, lunging at the weaker, is more correct (WP 655).

Again:

[My theory would be:-] that the will to power is the primitive form of affect, that all other affects are only developments of it . . . that all driving force is will to power, that there is no other physical, dynamic or psychic force except this (WP 688).

And finally:

Not merely conservation of energy, but maximal economy in use, so the only reality is the will to grow stronger of every center of force -- not self-preservation, but the will to appropriate, dominate, increase, grow stronger (WP 689).

Nietzsche, then, offers an account of the world that describes objects and subjects, as well as our various relationships to the world as rooted in force, more particularly, in power. We are, as subjects, expressions of the will to power -- expressions of a web of forces (which he often calls affects when speaking of forces in 'human' terms) in perpetual opposition and resistance to other expressions (both organic or inorganic) of the will to power. Nietzsche wants to be able to understand **everything** in these terms. As Richard Schacht succinctly puts it, in his Nietzsche, "[i]n its most general and rudimentary form, 'will to power' for Nietzsche is simply the basic tendency of all forces and configurations of forces to extend their influence and dominate others" (Schacht, 1983 220).

We might think of the will to power as a sort of quasi-ontology. That description is helpful up to a point. The will to power describes what there is. To ask what these relations of force are, or what lies behind these forces and motivates them, or directs them, or channels them in particular ways, is to beg the question against Nietzsche. It is to look for some sort of causal **being** behind the **becoming** which Nietzsche's notion of the will to power aims at explaining. For it is precisely as an interplay of forces (of drives and affects) that Nietzsche wants to understand the seemingly static and atomic objects and subjects we think of as having a fixed nature. Nietzsche wants to see objects and subjects as in a perpetual state of becoming -- a state which is produced by a thing's dynamic relationships with other things. And all of those relationships are relationships of power -- the interplay of forces, of drives and of affects.

Nietzsche has not, however, provided a description of the way the world is in itself. Even affects, he writes, "are a construction of the intellect, an invention of causes that do not exist" (WP 670). Affects, like the concepts of subject and object, are simply very useful fictions. They lend the world intelligibility. Nor has Nietzsche attempted to provide a description of how the world appears to us with his talk of affects and power. Nietzsche suggests, as he puts it, a view of the world "from the inside, the world defined and determined according to its 'intelligible character' -- it would be 'will to power' and nothing else" (BGE 36). But he is not suggesting that this description will be familiar to us or even commonsensical. This view of the world might be thought of, rather, as a primordial description, one in which other descriptions can be rooted; but it has no metaphysical or ontological pretensions to a connection with the Real world. It is Nietzsche's view of the world, a view of which he emphatically declares his ownership: a description of the world "as the development and ramification of **one** basic form of the will -- namely, of the will to power, as **my** proposition has it" (ibid.).

The potentially misleading term "will" simply serves to illuminate, as Schacht points out, the dispositional nature of power: the tendency to struggle, to expand and to dominate. There is no "Will" operating here in Schopenhauer's sense of the term. And there is no teleological impetus behind the expression of power in anything like Hegel's sense of "Spirit." Nor is it a question of Being in a process of Becoming. Nietzsche's conception of the will to power is far more earthy than any of those notions. We might, in an effort to ground the concept in rather staid un-Nietzschean



terms, think of the will to power as a technical (and metaphorical) term denoting the "universal power-struggle among power-oriented quanta of force" (Schacht, 1983 221). It is a dull way of putting it, though not, at least, misleading.

If this is what Nietzsche understands, in general, by the will to power, then what does it mean to say that the subject is an expression of the will to power? How does the notion of the will to power inform Nietzsche's account of the subject? It will be helpful, before answering these questions, to establish the sort of conception of the self which Nietzsche wants to reject. The destructive part of his task, as he is fond of saying, is aimed at dismantling (or obliterating) the idea of a soul-entity or otherwise essential self. There is, he argues, "no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed" (GM I 13). The idea of a fixed essence or entity distinct from and the cause of the "processes of a thing," a subject's actions, thoughts, inclinations or motivations is, he suggests, just a piece of "ancient mythology" (WP 631; cf. WP 480; Schacht, 1983 130-131). This is a vehement rejection of a fundamental and shared feature of Platonic, Cartesian, Kantian, and Christian conceptions of the self.

Nietzsche accepts, however, the obvious fact that there are individual subjects in the world -- subjects who have much in common with their fellow subjects as well as subjects that are idiosyncratically themselves. And he accepts, also, that the conception of a self with a fixed essence and a multitude of accidental (and bodily) qualities and experiences goes a long way toward making sense of both of these

observations. He thinks, however, that that sort of essentializing account runs in the wrong direction. Nietzsche's description of the subject as will to power is aimed at articulating a non-essential description of the self.

In abandoning a conception of the self as a fixed essence Nietzsche does not intend to entirely vanquish all talk of "souls." It can certainly be confusing to hear him speak in this way after his attack on the Platonic-Christian conception of the self - a conception which rests on the idea of an immutable soul-substance which provides a subject with its essence. But Nietzsche's use of "soul" subsequent to his critique of the Platonic-Christian use of that term aims at introducing a very different sense to the word. The way is open, he says, "for new versions and refinements of the soul-hypothesis; and such conceptions as 'mortal soul' and 'soul as subjective multiplicity,' and 'soul as social structure of the drives and affects,' want henceforth to have citizens' rights in science" (BGE 12). We can, in fact, see his account of the inter-relatedness of a subject's affects and the historical contingencies she springs from as an attempt to put some flesh on these refinements of the soul-hypothesis.

"Life," Nietzsche says, "is merely a special case of the will to power" (WP 692). We are not, as living subjects, entities entirely different from either inanimate objects or beasts. We are, like them, interstices in a web of power relations. And we are, ourselves, webs of such relations. It might be useful on some occasions to think of a subject as a player or actor engaged in relationships with other actors. It might also be useful, on some other occasion, to consider that same subject as a web of competing drives and impulses; of inclinations and desires; of forces and affects.

These two perspectives are not, Nietzsche suggests, unconnected. The drives an individual has, the affects that push and pull a subject through her relationships with other subjects and with the world, are intimately connected to the effects the world impresses on her.

Schacht summarizes the new conception of the self Nietzsche suggests:

In short: while granting and indeed insisting upon the diversity of human psychological phenomena, Nietzsche contends that they all are either affects or functions and manifestations of affects; while they in turn are to be referred ultimately to "physiological systems and forces" (WP 229), and secondarily to the social circumstances which shape their direction and manner of expression (Schacht, 1983 322).

Differences in character among subjects are, therefore, attributable both to the social fabric a subject exists in and to the relative strength, multiplicity and organization of the affects operating in different human beings (ibid.). In order to explain how it is that subjects come to express their drives in the various ways that they do Nietzsche describes two processes (ultimately understandable in terms of the will to power) which tie a subject's affects to her social situation: the first he terms **internalization** and the second **spiritualization**.

"These notions," Schacht explains, "refer to processes whereby various relatively simple affects (confined largely to the level of the accomplishment of basic organic functions) are untracked, diverted and diversified" (Schacht, 1983 323). A subject's affects might be brought together under some kind of order and channeled toward some end that allows her to respond to something in her environment. Or, conversely, a subject's affects might be left to degenerate into disarray. This first possibility is a tendency Nietzsche associates with the subjects of higher cultures and

powerful individuals. The second is associated with the weak inhabitants of cultures in decline or stagnation (like most of the subjects of his contemporary Europe).

The **internalization** of the subject, Nietzsche suggests, involves the "turning inward" of "instincts [drives] that do not discharge themselves outwardly" (GM II 16; Schacht, 1983 323). The "inner world" of consciousness is the long conditioned product of human being's channeling of primitive affects back in on itself. Over time this inner world "acquired depth, breadth and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was inhibited" (ibid.).

The internalization of a subject's affects produced new arrangements of drives and new configurations of impulses attuned to her social circumstances. These new configurations, the product of limitations social settings have imposed on the subject, allowed her to survive in a culture which prohibits a 'natural' (and chaotic) expression of her drives. Nietzsche suggests that where a subject's drives are not harnessed in response to external demands the subject will be destroyed -- either by ineffectual railing against external circumstances or by a frustrated self-destruction. The organization of drives that can not find their outlet in their natural state teaches a subject, on threat of extinction, "shrewdness, clarity, severity and logicity" (WP 433; Schacht, 1983 324).

This process of internalization also produces **spirituality** in a subject. When an affect, or a configuration of affects, has been mastered by a subject and turned toward some desirable end (not necessarily the end pursued by an affect left unharnessed) Nietzsche describes that affect as spiritualized. The spiritualization of

sensuality, for example, is called love; the spiritualization of hostility produces competitiveness and an appreciation of the value of enemies (TI V 1); the spiritualization of the drive to revenge produces justice (WP 255); while the pursuit of knowledge is rooted in a drive to appropriate and conquer (WP 423).<sup>3</sup>

Restraint is the key to the spiritualization of an affect. It can be imposed externally as we saw in the account of internalization. There, social circumstances forced the subject to direct her affects inwardly -- the possibility of expressing her affects outwardly was prohibited by the circumstances she found herself in. Restraint can also be imposed on a configuration of affects by another affect which "rules" the rest. This sort of restraint produces, understandably, different sorts of subjects than those produced by external restraints. These are the strong individuals which Nietzsche cherishes. In both cases, however, the spiritualizing of an affect is an exercise that is to be valued above all others:

What is essential 'in heaven and earth' seems to be, to say it once more, that there should be **obedience** over a long period of time and in a **single** direction: given that, something always develops, and has developed, for whose sake it is worth while to live on earth; for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality -- something transfiguring, subtle, mad, and divine (BGE 188).

For the most part Nietzsche sees the spiritualization of affects as the product of various social needs and circumstances which single out one or more affects and rear them up on the backs of others. (WP 889) In some social settings a "high" culture is produced "because a selected multiplicity of strong affects have been organized,

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<sup>3</sup>These examples of spiritualized affects are borrowed from Schacht (1983, 324).

cultivated, and taught sublimated and creative forms of expression" (Schacht, 1983 325).

With the basic structure of the relationship between a subject's drives and the impresses produced in her by her situation in a larger social fabric established, Nietzsche's account of the subject can be seen as splitting into two diverging (though complimentary) pursuits. One line of pursuit explores the type of subject that Nietzsche names the **free spirit**. This sort of subject, exemplified best by Zarathustra, is engaged in the project of self-creation. This is a subject able to impose a restraint on her affects and bring together her drives and the impresses her culture imposes on her in such a way that she can be said to have created herself.

The other line of pursuit explores the type of subject Nietzsche names the **small man**. Nietzsche's genealogies are aimed at revealing the origins of this sort of subject -- a herd animal produced by European-Christian morality. Although our foremost concern here is with offering an account of Nietzsche's conception of self-creation, a task taken up by free spirits, we do need to know a little about Nietzsche's account of herd morality. The free spirit is understood by Nietzsche to be a subject that has broken free of the herd. So, the free spirit must be understood, in part at least, in opposition to herd morality. We will take a cursory look, therefore, at Nietzsche's genealogical account of the moral subject in Beyond Good and Evil and in On the Genealogy of Morals.

We need to ask, however, what the epistemological status of his accounts there

are. Nietzsche cannot claim that his genealogical account of the origins of herd morality occupies a 'higher' epistemological ground than, for instance, does the Church's history of its table of values. Nor can he claim that his description is True in any metaphysically absolute sense. The possibility of that sort of truth is exactly what he will deny herd morality. He cannot, therefore, consistently turn around and declare that he has finally got the story **right**. However, Nietzsche's perspectival account of knowledge does not entail a flattening and homogenizing of all descriptions. His description might be better than any historical analysis offered yet, but it will not be better because his account gets at what **really** happened. His description will be better (if this should prove to be the case) because it more convincingly answers the questions he has set out than competing descriptions do.

'Mere' descriptions, Nietzsche suggests, are the only sort we have. What is more, they are all we need. The description he offers of the generation of herd morality in terms of the will to power is, therefore, only, and self-consciously, a description. But it is a very compelling description. If we re-frame Nietzsche's epistemological position in his own terms we see that he does not deny that his perspective on the genesis of Christian morality is **merely** a perspective. What he does deny is that a description could be anything but the perspectival creation of a historically situated individual or group of individuals.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>I will have a little more to say about Nietzsche's perspectival account of knowing later in my exploration of Rorty's and Foucault's Nietzschean accounts of self-creation. I hope, however, only to establish a working understanding of this term not to offer a detailed analysis of it. It is certainly true that Nietzsche's perspectivism goes hand in hand with his account of the will to power and his account of the

Nietzsche's genealogies aim at describing, in detail, how a subject has been created by the social fabric it exists in. They ask why the subjects of Nietzsche's contemporary Europe hold the values they do. And they also invert the question and ask: How it is that a moral subject has been produced which configures its drives and affects in the way it does? More specifically: how has a subject been produced which sees itself as atomic; as having a soul; a subject that values docility and meekness; a subject able to keep promises; a subject that sees the values it lives by as absolute? The first question and the latter series of questions are opposite sides of the same coin. The first question reflects, potentially, a view of the subject as the creator of value. The second series of questions is tied to the description of the subject as a product of historically contingent value. Together they inquire into the relationship between the descriptions of the subject as both produced and productive of value. We are, for Nietzsche, an interstice of the impresses our culture imposes on us no less than we are a bundle of affects: we spring, as particular sorts of subjects and as individuals, from a web of historical contingencies.

Nietzsche's genealogies are responses to these questions. But what sort of responses are they? Mark Warren, in his book Nietzsche and Political Thought, likens Nietzsche's genealogy to the unfolding of a dialectical movement. It is a potentially misleading comparison. "Like Hegel," he claims, "Nietzsche understands our

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subject. And it is also true that an involved discussion of Nietzsche's epistemological views would offer an interesting way into his philosophical project. I have not, however, chosen that road. Nietzsche's account of the will to power and his description of Zarathustra are a more direct route into his account of the subject and self-creation.



experiences of value to flow from the confirmations of selfhood that result from worldly engagement. . . . Nihilistic values [for instance] emerge from situations -- those, for example, of a politically oppressive nature -- that frustrate practices that confirm the effectiveness and continuity of the self in time" (Warren, 1988 29). We would be better off to think of Nietzsche's genealogy as a description of a series of historical contingencies, some of which **happened** to provide fertile ground for others. The connections tying these contingencies together may be the acts of individuals or contingencies of an inorganic or bestial nature. There is not, however, any sort of teleological necessity stringing historical contingencies together. It is only a human will, as we will hear Zarathustra tell in Chapter II, that can lend coherence and meaning to the series of contingent "accidents" that have led to the generation of particular values and persons.

Nietzsche's genealogy has its roots in a detailed analysis and reinterpretation of buried historical details. Genealogy is, in Nietzsche's hands, the effort to understand **how** the values of what he calls the herd (the unquestioning Christian masses) have been established. He asks what purposes herd values serve; how these values were entrenched; and why they have proven so enduring. Ultimately, he wants to know what can be done to disrupt these values; how one might break free of herd morality and create oneself as a creator of value.

What, then, does Nietzsche's genealogical account of Christian morality reveal about the origins of the moral subject? The absolutist nature of Christian morality is, Nietzsche suggests, a result of the human will's horror vacui: "it needs a goal -- and

it would rather will nothingness than not will" (GM III, 1). The weight of unbearable suffering at the hands of a master class created a situation, according to Nietzsche, in which the Jews and the early Christians were compelled to create an other-worldly meaning for the suffering they experienced in this world. Nietzsche describes the turn away from the world of practical activity and experience as nihilistic (a concept I will have more to say about shortly). It is a turn which is characterized by the denial of the claim that all experience is inherently meaningless, including suffering, apart from the meaning it is given by historically contingent valuations. Jews and early Christians gave suffering meaning by inventing a God who demanded of his flock that they suffer in order to enter his kingdom. The Jews' and the early Christians' drive to create meaning, an expression of their will to power, finds its outlet in the generation of a justification (of an absolute nature) for the various pains a social fabric has imposed on them.

On the Genealogy of Morals attempts to illuminate the details of this process. The description Nietzsche pursues there exposes the historical and psychological relationship between the Jewish and early Christian subjects' affects and the impresses the dominant culture of a master class imposed on them. As expected, the discussion is framed in terms of resistance and restraint, and internalization and spiritualization. The details he offers of what he terms a "slave revolt" in morals fleshes out the account of internalization and spiritualization I discussed in general terms earlier. While I will leave the actual account of this process alone in order to pursue his related account of self-creation, we do need to understand the outcome generated by

the slave revolt in morals. For the concrete possibility of Nietzsche's free spirit springs precisely from the particular web of historical contingencies produced, in large part, by Christian morality.

Creating a meaning for suffering filled a psychological and social need. This meaning solidified, eventually, into a basis for herd morality. The herd "'knows' what is good and evil," Nietzsche writes, but their knowledge is the product of a long and blindered obedience to the "capricious laws" of Christianity (BGE 202). Their absolute knowledge of moral Truths is justified in the Platonic pretension to fuse reason and moral "instinct" into a single absolute goal: the good or God (BGE 191). The herd man denies the contingency of his own morality. His further denial of his own potential to carve out either a new table of values or generate new and better types of individuals who could create new values unsupported by absolutist pretensions is a historical possibility, a contingency, that fills Nietzsche and Zarathustra, as we will see later, with despair. "[A]nyone", he says, "who fathoms the calamity that lies concealed in the absurd guilelessness and blind confidence of 'modern ideas' and even more in the whole Christian-European morality -- suffers from an anxiety that is past all comparisons" (BGE 203). Nietzsche's account of the free spirit and the task of self-creation which lies before such a subject is the antidote he offers in response to the small man of the herd.

The absolutist nature of herd morality does not permit the man of the herd to admit the possibility of either another morality or another type of individual apart from herd morality and the herd animal. "The herd man in Europe today," Nietzsche

claims, "gives himself the appearance of being the only permissible kind of man, and glorifies his attributes, which make him tame, easy to get along with, and useful to the herd" (BGE 199). Nietzsche, conversely, suggests that the "herd animal morality" of Europe is "merely one type of human morality beside which . . . many other types, above all higher moralities, are, or ought to be, possible. But this morality resists such a 'possibility,' such an 'ought' with all its power: it says stubbornly and inexorably, 'I am morality itself, and nothing besides is morality' (BGE 202). The stubborn resistance to recognize its own historical contingency, its own createdness and its own inadequacies, is herd morality's trademark. Without such an insistence it could scarcely claim, however unjustifiably, that it is the Truth. Nor could the small man continue to conceal his masking of a direct confrontation with meaninglessness from himself.

In a radically different way Nietzsche's free spirit is also engaged in a response to a meaningless world. Unlike both the Jews and the small men of Christendom she offers a celebration of her own attempt to create herself in response to a meaningless universe. Nietzsche's free spirit sets herself apart from the herd with a rejection of the belief in an absolute morality. It is a rejection which is rooted in a conception of herself as a creator of value rather than an obedient follower of a table of absolute commands.

Free spirits are individuals of high, strong and multiple drives; individuals who have instilled an order on those drives; individuals who, we will see, have given birth

to themselves in their creation of themselves. The measure of this strength is, Nietzsche holds, the extent to which "one can endure to live in a meaningless world **because one organizes a small portion of it oneself**" (WP 585). The rejection of herd morality places the free spirit in direct confrontation with meaninglessness. Herd morality, after all, finds its roots in the attempt to mask that confrontation. This concept can be clarified further with reference to the concept of nihilism.

Nietzsche often calls both the small man and free spirits nihilists. He means, however, very different things in his application of the same word to these different sorts of individuals. Both have in common, as subjects which value, a relationship to meaninglessness. Herd morality, on one hand, denies that the universe is meaningless. It claims that it is in touch with an absolute Truth which imposes a table of values on all people. This denial of the meaninglessness of the world is one species of nihilism. It is a passive sort of nihilism which masks itself in a denial of meaninglessness thereby concealing itself, as nihilism, from itself.

Free spirits, on the other hand, reject the absolute nature of the herd's table of values. They see herd morality in the same way Nietzsche does: as the creation of a group of individuals responding to the pressures of a particular time and place. They see herd morality, therefore, as produced by a web of historical contingencies and productive of the small man who is unable to face the sheer contingency of his most cherished values. This makes free spirits appear nihilistic to the herd -- nihilistic in the sense that they seem to deny all value. Since to deny the absolute validity of the herd's table of values is to deny the foundation on which that table is premised.

However, the free spirit is not simply a denier of all absolute values. The free spirit's direct confrontation with meaninglessness has a strong positive aspect which introduces yet a third sense to nihilism. This is an active nihilism (WP 22). It is a joyful affirmation of contingently created values.<sup>5</sup>

Zarathustra is one example Nietzsche offers of the free spirit. He is, I will be arguing a little later, the free spirit **par excellence**. For now, however, let us simply pay attention to his rejection of the possibility that one might specify a particular way of life that would be appropriate for every subject. Herd morality, of course, suggests that there is such a thing as "good for all, evil for all." Zarathustra's response to this is a quick condemnation: "'This is **my** way; where is yours?' -- thus I answered those who asked me 'the way.' For **the** way -- that does not exist" (Z III 11 2). It is a strength not known to the small man that allows Zarathustra to make this claim (a claim that we will see him struggle to confront in his own attempt to create himself).

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<sup>5</sup>Robert Solomon, in his essay "Nietzsche, Nihilism, and Morality" offers a quick summary of his analysis of the various ways Nietzsche construes nihilism. Solomon's response to the question of whether or not Nietzsche is a nihilist should indicate how one might quite rightly see Nietzsche's larger project as an attempt to understand the implications of nihilism:

Is Nietzsche a nihilist? In the sense that he is the diagnostician of the "devaluation of the highest values" and the corruption of the foundations of "morality," in the sense that he denies any moral order or purpose to the universe, in the sense that he demands freedom from imposed values, in particular the authoritarian values of the "other-worldly," and in the sense that he rejects moral principles and rules in favour of personal style and character - yes. But Nietzsche is not a nihilist in the sense that he attacks all values, or in the sense that he endorses principles or positions simply because they are anti-moral, or in the sense that he adopts those values which he calls "nihilistic," i.e. those "hostile to life . . ." (Solomon, 1973 208-209).

He has denied, succinctly and brutally, the most sacred commitment of herd morality.

But what is this strength that the free spirits possess? For it is a strength that allows such a subject to impose a meaning of her own creation on the world without any pretense to discovering a meaning already there. Or, to ask the question in Nietzsche's own tone of voice: How does a free spirit become who she is? These questions are best answered by his suggestion that we see the subject as a work of art:

**One thing is needful.** -- To "give style" to one's character -- a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed -- both times through long practice and daily work at it. . . . In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste! (GS 290)

Nietzsche's description of the task of giving style to oneself here echoes the account we heard earlier of the spiritualization of affects. High spirituality in a culture, or in an individual, is the result of one affect dominating the rest and establishing order in a character. If we substitute "affect" for "taste" in the passage above we get a description, in terms of the will to power, of a subject of incredible strength.

Nietzsche is careful, in this passage, to make clear that he will not specify what taste should govern the rest. If we preserve our substitution, we hear that he will not dictate what spiritualized affect should govern the rest. A designation of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of any governing taste or affect would fly in the face of Zarathustra's condemnation of an absolute morality: 'The way? That does not exist'. The strength exhibited by free spirits does not consist in their having any

particular set of affects. Their "greatness of character" consists, rather, in their possession of the affects they have "to the highest degree -- [and] in having them under control" (WP 928; cf. WP 1025). The self-control free spirits exhibit in their imposition of meaning on a meaningless world is an expression of the will to power. They neither flee nor crumple nor perish in the face of meaninglessness. They create. Theirs is a strength hardened by **restraint**: the restraint they have practiced in the spiritualization and rule they have imposed on their affects.

"The highest man," Nietzsche says, "would have the greatest multiplicity of drives in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured. Indeed, when the plant 'man' shows himself strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully . . . but are controlled" (WP 966). What he says of the higher man holds true for free spirits as well. Free spirits are, after all, exemplifications of the highest levels of spirituality in humankind. And Zarathustra, to whom we will now turn, exemplifies the greatness of character, of style, which Nietzsche values above all.



## CHAPTER II

### ZARATHUSTRA AND FREE-SPIRITED SELF-CREATION

In Chapter I I offered a description of Nietzsche's account of the self. We have seen how Nietzsche understands the subject as an expression of the will to power, and how that description leads him to suggest that we see ourselves as works of art -- subjects confronted with the task of bringing together our impressions and affects under a single taste. Throughout the chapter I emphasized the productive tension in Nietzsche's suggestion that we are at once determined by our social milieu and productive of ourselves. I have claimed that Nietzsche's image of the free spirit allows us to see how we are at once produced by the will to power as well as creative expressions of that will in our efforts to create ourselves.

I turn in this chapter to a more specific task -- that of offering a detailed account of Zarathustra's attempt to overcome and create himself. But why spend this time on Zarathustra? I have set out to provide a compelling response to the question: "What would it be like to take up the project of self-creation?" I believe that Zarathustra is Nietzsche's most developed response to that question. Thus Spoke Zarathustra is a sustained and detailed account of Zarathustra's attempt to take responsibility for the historical contingencies from which he springs -- an account which describes his attempt to create himself.

It would be fair to say that Nietzsche models his understanding of self-creation

on, in part, the creative efforts of an ideal Romantic artist. Goethe, Beethoven, Wagner, and even Napoleon and Caesar Borgia are at various times offered as examples of individuals who have succeeded in creating themselves. But while each of these individuals has an impact on Nietzsche's conception of self-creation none is explored with as much subtlety as he devotes to Zarathustra. And while all are illuminating examples of the type of character he names the **free spirit**, Nietzsche's creation of a fictional character frees him from the constraints which accompany the description of historical figures. We have, in Zarathustra, a character who takes on the project of self-creation in precisely Nietzsche's own terms. Zarathustra tries different paths, learns from his mistakes, modifies his teachings and his practices and, ultimately, succeeds in taking responsibility for his own contingency.

There is only one other character who exemplifies Nietzsche's account of self-creation as well as Zarathustra. That character is Nietzsche himself. Alexander Nehamas's exploration of Nietzsche's account of the self and self-creation, in Nietzsche: Life as Literature, offers a compelling interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy that explores how Nietzsche created himself through his philosophical writing. Nehamas's book has had a large impact on my interpretation of Nietzsche and Zarathustra. I have little to add to his description of Nietzsche's attempt to create himself. I do, however, have a spin to offer on Zarathustra -- an interpretation which will help to hook up Nietzsche's use of Zarathustra with Rorty's use of Nietzsche in

the next chapter.<sup>6</sup>

Zarathustra's teaching of the **redemption** of all "It was" resonates in his exhortation to himself to say of the past "Thus I willed it." His effort to embrace his own teaching is his attempt to "Become who he is." I will, in this chapter, examine what Zarathustra means by these phrases. We will see that an understanding of Zarathustra's teachings and an examination of his own attempt to embrace these teachings illustrates a reconciliation of Nietzsche's description of the self as at once created and creator.

The tension in Nietzsche's descriptions of the subject as both the product of a web of historical contingencies and the potential creator of herself are reconciled in Zarathustra's free-spirited imposition of meaning on the knot of contingencies he springs from. We will see that his successful effort at self-creation turns on his willingness to embrace his contingency on the small man of herd morality (a character I examined in the last chapter). In order to understand the heaviness of the burden this places on Zarathustra I will return to an examination of Nietzsche's conception of

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<sup>6</sup>Daniel Conway, in "Literature as Life", takes issue with Nehamas's undertaking on the basis that Zarathustra, and not Ecce Homo, provides the better illustration of the effort to "Become who you are." While Conway can support his claim that this is, in fact, what Zarathustra is up to he gives no reason to think that it is not also what Nietzsche is up to in Ecce Homo (as well as in most of his other texts). We have no reason, however, to ultimately exclude one in favour of the other. I am pursuing an account of Zarathustra's self-overcoming but I do not see that account as anything like an attack on Nehamas's description of Nietzsche's self-overcoming. We might see Nehamas's description of Nietzsche's relationship to his books as operating at a meta-level and my description of Zarathustra's exemplification of self-creation as operating at a level beneath that. We will see, in Chapter III, how Rorty makes use of the account of self-creation which Nehamas weaves out of Nietzsche's own life.

will to power. We will see how Nehamas's insightful work in this area can explain the necessity of the inter-relatedness of all "It was," given Zarathustra's commitment to the will to power. Nehamas's analysis of the will to power permits us to view Zarathustra's redemption of the past as a successful attempt to see all of his effects as an expression of his own will to power. Ultimately, Zarathustra's affirmation of his own contingency on the small man marks his successful redemption of the past. This affirmation becomes the measure of his success in his attempt to create himself out of the web of contingencies from which he springs.

I will, in rounding off the discussion of Zarathustra's free-spirited self-creation suggest how we can see the attitude of affirmation as fundamental to his successful pursuit of that task. Affirmation will be seen as providing a key to the reconciliation of Nietzsche's descriptions of the subject as both self-creator and produced by a historically contingent social fabric. Zarathustra's teaching of the eternal recurrence and Nietzsche's account of **amor fati** can, I will claim, be seen as celebrations of this affirmative attitude toward a self-created existence.

In Chapter I I explained that Nietzsche does not want to suggest that individuals are merely the passive interstices of a set of historical contingencies. We are subjects capable of becoming more than the contingencies that we spring from. More, that is, in the sense that an individual has the potential to shape those contingencies into a character governed by a single taste and so become a creator of herself. To create oneself is to be engaged with the world. To manipulate the contingencies from which

one springs is to make the particular values, practices and truths which intersect to form the self take a certain shape and bear certain relationships to one another. That manipulation is an expression of the will to power.

Zarathustra, echoing Nietzsche's account of self-creation, describes his task to a hunchbacked listener in the section titled "Of Redemption":

And it is all my art and aim, to compose into one and bring together what is fragment and riddle and dreadful chance. And how could I endure to be a man, if man were not also poet and reader of riddles and the redeemer of chance! To redeem the past and to transform every 'It was' into an 'I wanted it thus' -- that alone do I call redemption!" (*Z* II, 20)<sup>7</sup>

Alexander Nehamas's description of Nietzsche's subject can give us a handle on the art and aim Zarathustra speaks of here. He explains that "Nietzsche believes that nothing is left over beyond the sum total of the features and characteristics associated with each object and that no person remains beyond the totality of its experiences and actions. If any of these were different, then their subject, which is simply their sum total, would also have to be different" (Nehamas, 1985 155). A subject's manipulation of the relationships between the historical contingencies that make her up is not the manipulation of accidental qualities by an intrinsic subject. Nor would it be correct to

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<sup>7</sup>While we can do so in this specific instance, it would be imprudent to always and arbitrarily treat Zarathustra as Nietzsche's spokesperson. The tale of Zarathustra's self-overcoming works, in its entirety, as a literary telling of a coherent philosophical story. However, Zarathustra is only a character in that story and Nietzsche sometimes has him misunderstand himself or initially fail to perceive the complexities and profundities of his own teachings. In this case Zarathustra gets Nietzsche right, but we should be alive to the possibility that Nietzsche sometimes has Zarathustra get Nietzsche wrong. Attention to what Zarathustra does and not only to what he says, as well as to his moods and interlocutors, gives us all the clues we need to pull a cogent philosophical interpretation out of Nietzsche's most literary work. It is, of course, the narrative quality of this work that makes it particularly valuable for my purposes.

suggest that the grammar of the expression 'a subject's expression of her will to power' identifies a subject distinct from the totality of her expressions. Nietzsche wants to avoid an ontological account of personhood based on a grammar that predicates qualities of subjects. The idea of a subject as an entity underlying or distinct from the totality of its expressions, something that qualities and experiences are somehow attached to, is part of the ontology of substance that Nietzsche seeks to discredit. It is a myth perpetuated by a particular and optional grammar and the historical contingencies Nietzsche describes in the genealogical account of the moral subject.

The task of bringing together what was mere chance and accident is, then, not simply the task of taking stock of who one is -- the generation of some sort of lading list of one's character traits, experiences and practices. It is (although Zarathustra does not fully recognize it as such in this section) to "Become who one is."<sup>8</sup> To turn what was riddle and accident into something more than riddle and accident is to redescribe the sort of values one has lived by, the practices one has engaged in and the experiences one has had, in such a way as to see all of those experiences and actions as necessary to oneself. It is, as we heard Nietzsche explain in The Gay Science, "[t]o 'give style' to one's character -- a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses

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<sup>8</sup>Zarathustra comes to recognize his task in precisely these terms at the opening of Part IV in "The Honey Offering."

delight the eye" (GS 290).

Nehamas points out, however, that "Nietzsche accepts the stronger view that if any object in the world were at all different, then every object in the world would also be different. This is because . . . he thinks that the properties of each thing are nothing but its effects on other things, the properties of which are in turn nothing but still further such effects" (Nehamas, 1985 155). So, for Zarathustra to bring together all "It was" into a whole of which he can say "But I willed it thus" he must bring together not only his own past and the immediate and obvious historical contingencies from which he springs but **all** past events, beliefs, acts and values.

The tremendous weight of this burden stops Zarathustra in mid-speech and transfixes him with terror. At the close of "Of Redemption" he suddenly breaks off his speech and "looked exactly like a man seized by extremest terror. With terrified eyes he gazed upon his disciples; his eyes transpierced their thoughts and their reservations as if with arrows" (Z II, 20). Zarathustra recognizes, in teaching the redemption of what is past to the hunchback, the crushing despair that this redemptive willing of the past is capable of generating. His pity for the hunchback, however, prevents Zarathustra from sharing the heaviness of his thoughts with him. Pity and disgust for the weak and the small man (of which the hunchback is an example) are the objects of Zarathustra's most difficult overcoming. He understands in principle that he must will the entire past but he has not yet overcome his disgust at his contingency on the small man or his pity for him.

It is of crucial import that we do not misunderstand the nature of this disgust.

It is not simply distaste Zarathustra is expressing. He recognizes, here, his contingency on the small man. Zarathustra's art and aim, to bring together all that was riddle and accident, is an attempt to generate an account of himself and his relation to the world that he can take responsibility for. This must be a description which expresses the responsibility he has not just for a particular constellation called Zarathustra but for **all** "It was." Zarathustra must become a creator of the past. If he can adopt an attitude that allows him to see himself as the redeemer of every "It was" as well as contingent on all "It was," then he will have reconciled the tension between the descriptions of himself as both self-creator and the product of historical contingencies. We can now see how the anxiety he faces in that reconciliation is rooted in the existence of the small man. The subject, as will to power, is not an essence. It is produced by the effects of other objects, subjects and values. Zarathustra is a knot of causes embedded in the history of a social milieu. The small man is a part of that milieu. Insofar as Zarathustra exists as an interstice in time and place he is bound to that other interstice: the small man.

Zarathustra's disgust and despair at the small man only makes sense if we accept Nietzsche's view that, in Nehamas's words, "if any object in the world were at all different then every object in the world would also be different." But why is such a view not simply a **reductio** of itself? Why should we think that an entirely trivial occurrence in one's own life years previously, or the existence of another individual, let alone an entirely trivial occurrence in some complete stranger's life years earlier, would have any impact at all on one's becoming who one is? Answering this question takes



us to the heart of Nietzsche's conception of self-creation.

Nietzsche wants us to adopt a view akin to his own perspective -- to think of objects as the will to power and of subjects as just special sorts of objects capable of, among other things, description. Subjects are the history of their effects on other objects and the effects of other objects on them which are in turn the effects of yet other objects. Nietzsche's own perspective and his perspectival account of knowing rejects the sort of fixed and complete accounts of being which the metaphysical descriptions we are used to aim at providing.

The ability to describe ourselves as a knot of effects and affects is central to the account of personhood that Nietzsche puts forward. Ordering the world in some way, making it intelligible and coherent, forcing the world to take on a shape in which we can live in it, all of these involve description. They are expressions of the will to power. The perspectivism Nietzsche advocates suggests that we take responsibility for the descriptions we generate. Nietzsche wants individuals strong and free enough to accept that the descriptions of the world and themselves which they generate will be the products of their own creative efforts: a spirit "who would take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, being practiced in maintaining himself on insubstantial ropes and possibilities and dancing even near abysses" (GS 347). The certainty the free spirits take leave of is the metaphysical certainty which philosophy has historically aimed at providing. Nietzsche wants us to stop striving after that certainty -- to see ourselves as the creators of descriptions rather than the discoverers of essential Truths about the world. By collapsing the appearance-reality distinction on

which the metaphysics of Truth is based Nietzsche also collapses the distinction between describers and creators. This leaves us responsible for all that our perspectives encompass -- including all smallness and pettiness. To become the creators of ourselves entails, therefore, that we take responsibility for what we describe.

Zarathustra's attempt to transform accident and riddle into an expression of his power is a dance near abysses. The abyss is meaninglessness (a despair of which is one strand of the nihilism Nietzsche describes in the Genealogy). His dance is an attempt to make the contingencies he springs from, the web of contingencies he is, meaningful. Zarathustra has taught, in the opening pages of his story, that God is dead.<sup>9</sup> There is no Real world his description can attach to and pin its legitimacy on; that world died with God. A correspondence of his descriptions to the "Real" world of metaphysics cannot, therefore, anchor his understanding of himself. There is no "Real" world to give meaning to Zarathustra's life because that world has been abolished by the perspectivism he advocates.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Zarathustra's teaching of

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<sup>9</sup>However, simply telling everyone that "God is dead" and suggesting that people **should** take responsibility for the values they live by does not, he learns in the "Prologue," generate much interest in his account of self-creation. The crowd he speaks to there mocks his description of man as the creator of value and laughs at his pedagogical fumbblings (Z Prologue, 3 & 5). Daniel Conway makes the point that "Zarathustra thus discovers that it is insufficient simply to debunk certain values if those individuals whose lives depend on these values are powerless to renounce them" ("Literature as Life," 49).

<sup>10</sup>Nietzsche tells a very short (but compelling) story of philosophy's relation to this "Real" world in Twilight of the Idols, "How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth." The last moments in the history of this "error" call for free spirits and for Zarathustra:

God's death denies the possibility of meaningfulness that the social milieu (a set of beliefs and practices entrenched in herd morality) provides. That meaning is also contingent on a world ordered by God -- a world which purports to provide discoverable Truths. Zarathustra's attempt to transform accident and riddle into a self which has 'become who it is' can, therefore, only be a creative effort.

To embrace this sort of responsibility for description entails embracing responsibility for the past as well -- to describe the past as the creative effort of one's own will. It is to reconcile the description of oneself as a contingent product of a historical web of accidents with the suggestion that one see oneself as the creator of oneself.

Zarathustra's confrontation with a past that seems to lie beyond the reach of his will provides us with a final formulation of the tension in Nietzsche's view of the self.

"Willing liberates:" Zarathustra explains, "but what is it that fastens in fetters even the liberator? 'It was': that is what the will's teeth-gnashing and most lonely affliction is called. Powerless against that which has been done, the will is an angry spectator of

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5. The 'real world' - an idea no longer of any use, not even a duty any longer - an idea grown useless, superfluous, consequently a refuted idea: let us abolish it!

(Broad daylight; breakfast; return of cheerfulness and bons sens; Plato blushes for shame; all free spirits run riot.)

6. We have abolished the real world: what world is left? the apparent world perhaps? ... But no! with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!

(Mid-day; moment of the shortest shadow; end of the longest error; zenith of mankind; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.)

all things past" (Z II, 20). In a very obvious sense the past lies beyond our reach: how can we, then, make what has been our own?

Nietzsche's peculiar use of the concepts of necessity and contingency support his counterintuitive claim that one can lay claim to the past and make it one's own -- that we can, meaningfully, say of all 'It was': 'Thus I willed it'. Nehamas warns us against an ignorance "of the specific historical and genealogical tangles that produce the contingent structures we mistakenly consider given, solid, and extending without change into the future as well as into the past" (Nehamas, 1985 110). But he also suggests that Nietzsche holds the view that "nothing that ever happens to us, even if it is the result of the most implausible accident and the wildest coincidence, is contingent -- once it has occurred" (Nehamas, 1985 149). Nietzsche, then, wants to claim both that everything is contingent but, once in the past, necessary.

Nietzsche proposes the view that everything is interconnected and an expression of the will to power. We cannot, therefore, single out a detail from the past and treat it as ontologically independent. Every detail, no matter how trivial, is the effect of something else and has effects on something else. There is no way of ultimately singling out one event or object from all others. So Nietzsche is (happily enough) forced into the claim that **everything** is interconnected and that all of the details which make up the past are necessary for the present to be as it is. However, Nietzsche also wants to claim that the will is a creator and that radical disjuncture is possible.

The genealogy of morality he offers in Beyond Good and Evil and in the

Genealogy describes the past in such a way as to reveal how certain contingencies spring from other contingencies. Genealogy does not, however, attempt to provide a determinate or teleological explanation of our seemingly solid present values and practices. There, Nietzsche only hopes to show how we might understand the contingencies of those values and practices. However, under any description that accepts Nietzsche's view of the interconnectedness of things (and of the interconnectedness of the subject with an historical moment in the world) the entire past, no matter how it is described, must be seen as necessary. The past determines the future but not determinately. At any point in the present different futures can be created, but once the present slips into the past what was contingent also becomes necessary. To redeem the past, then, is to accept its necessity but to describe it in such a way as to make it one's own responsibility. This is Zarathustra's task as he struggles to become who he is.

In Beyond Good and Evil Nietzsche exhorts free spirits to strive to "end that dominion of nonsense and accident that has so far been called 'history'" (BGE 203). Zarathustra responds to that exhortation with a question in "The Wanderer": "The time has passed when accidents could befall me; and what could still come to me that was not already my own?" (Z III, 1). 'Nothing' is the answer he wants to embrace. Zarathustra is struggling to reconcile himself to his own view that all contingencies can be seen not as simple accidents that have happened to him but rather as contingencies necessary to his own becoming. It is a question of adopting a certain attitude towards oneself, then, not only of adopting a philosophical description of the

subject. The attitude Nietzsche suggests we take, and the attitude that Zarathustra struggles to make his own, is one of affirmation: to love this life in the face of the necessity of all of the suffering and pain and pettiness of the past that made it possible. It is an attitude which calls for a confrontation with meaninglessness -- a dance around an abyss.

Nietzsche does not suggest that one should adopt an attitude of resignation to the necessity of all 'It was'. Nor do I take him, for the reasons his own genealogies explore, to be making the naive suggestion that all possibilities are open to all persons regardless of their pasts. The redemption of the past does not render every "It was" palatable. But it is, in a sense, to appropriate what is already one's own, to embrace the sheer contingencies from which one springs as necessary to who one is. It is, moreover, to embrace the thought that what one might make of oneself in the future will be made of the entirety of what one has already been. **To give style to one's impresses and affects, to become a free spirit: the material for this task is who one already is.**

Nietzsche hopes that the free spirits he calls for will be creators of new descriptions and new values -- creations that do not find their justification in a metaphysical absolute in the way that the Christian herd values of good and evil do. The creators of these values will recognize their creations as contingent on their own creative will. These sorts of values would be at once powerful and fragile works of art, the creations of the sort of individual that Zarathustra prepares the way for in his own striving to overcome himself and become who he is. To become this sort of

person is, I have suggested, to embrace responsibility for the historical contingencies from which one springs. It is to recognize that there is no inherent meaningfulness to existence, no inherent order of things, no archimedean point to which values are fixed. It is to confront an abyss of meaninglessness and affirm oneself as a creator in the face of that meaninglessness. It is, as Nietzsche says, to joyfully declare: "My judgement is my judgement': no one else is easily entitled to it" (BGE 43).

Nietzsche provides us with two intriguing images which illustrate the attitude of affirmation he sees as the key to an individual becoming who she is -- an individual capable of affirming her perspective as a perspective of her own creation. I want to conclude this discussion of Nietzschean self-creation with a glance at both the **eternal recurrence** and the **amor fati**. Both of these teachings celebrate the individual's success in declaring of the past 'Thus I willed it'.

Zarathustra's teaching of the eternal recurrence reflects the question the demon puts before us in our "loneliest loneliness" (a famous passage in The Gay Science): "This life as you now live it and have lived it," the demon says, "you will have to live once more and innumerable times more . . . . The question in each and every thing, 'Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?' would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight" (GS 341). We, like Zarathustra, should we accept the description of the subject that he teaches, are confronted with the possibility of either affirming our life exactly as we have lived it life or of denying it. Nietzsche's account of the subject does not permit us (or Zarathustra) to say yes to only a part of

the past. To want to redeem a part of the past is to ask for all of it back. To say yes to the return of one happiness entails a yes-saying to the entire past -- a moment of happiness (like any event or object) is inextricably bound up with the entire past.

The eternal recurrence is not a theory about the world. It is meant to bring home a view of the self.<sup>11</sup> But it is not a theory about the self. It is, rather, a tool that helps Nietzsche prompt his readers into an affirmation of life. The eternal recurrence aims to provoke an individual into a confrontation with the attitude they have toward the contingencies they spring from. Nietzsche is trying to inculcate in his readers an attitude of affirmation toward life -- toward the sometimes brutal and sometimes mediocre contingencies that the past, and one's life, is made up of. It is a thought experiment, more poetic than philosophical perhaps, that aims at driving home the task of redeeming all 'It was'.

In "The Second Dance Song" Zarathustra affirms a love of life in the face of his despair at the thought of the eternal recurrence of the small man. While the

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<sup>11</sup>This view, which I will not be arguing for in any detail here, belongs to Nehamas. His discussion of the eternal recurrence in Life as Literature disputes the commonly held view (by such commentators as Walter Kaufmann, Ivan Soll and Arthur Danto) that Nietzsche's account of the return must have cosmological pretensions. Nehamas suggests that eternal recurrence should be seen as a teaching which suggests adopting an attitude towards one's past which is not rooted in the way the world **really** is. Nehamas argues that if we treat the recurrence as a hypothetical possibility it will do all the work Nietzsche wants it to do (that of spurring people into taking responsibility for the past) without incurring the difficulties a cosmological view of the recurrence generates. Nehamas suggests that the eternal recurrence amounts to a consideration of the possibility that "If anything in the world recurred, including an individual life or even a single moment within it, then everything in the world would recur in exactly identical fashion"(Nehamas, 1985 156). Such a consideration, however, is capable of profoundly affecting the way a person perceives herself - as noble or weak, as an abider of rules or a creator of value.



midnight bell tolls at Zarathustra's darkest and most honest hour he sings to his love,

Life:

**One!**  
O Man! Attend!  
**Two!**  
What does deep midnight's voice contend?  
**Three!**  
'I slept my sleep,  
**Four!**  
'And now awake at dreaming's end:  
**Five!**  
'The world is deep,  
**Six!**  
'Deeper than day can comprehend.  
**Seven!**  
'Deep is its woe,  
**Eight!**  
'Joy -- deeper than heart's agony:  
**Nine!**  
'Woe says: Fade! Go!  
**Ten!**  
'But all joy wants eternity,  
**Eleven!**  
'-- wants deep, deep, deep, eternity!  
**Twelve!** (Z III, 15)

The voice of "deep midnight" is Zarathustra's own voice in his loneliest loneliness as he faces his most abysmal thought. "Woe," or despair, says to the thought of the eternal recurrence of the same and the eternal return of the small man "Fade! Go!". "Joy," however, longs for the eternal return of the same, for the eternal return of joy -- in the face of the eternal return (however hypothetical) of woe.

As Nietzsche says of Zarathustra in Ecce Homo, "he who has the harshest, the most fearful insight into reality, who has thought the 'most abysmal thought', nonetheless finds in it no objection to existence, nor even to the eternal recurrence of

existence -- rather one more reason **to be himself** the eternal Yes to all things" (EH X, 6). Zarathustra exemplifies a subject willing to take up the responsibility Nietzsche lays before his readers -- the task of self-creation. He is a character willing to accept himself as a historically contingent intersection of beliefs and values and practices, of effects and affects, and to take on the responsibility of disentangling and affirming his existence as that knot of effects.

Nietzsche's teaching of the **amor fati** goes hand in hand with his teaching of the eternal recurrence. "My formula for greatness in a human being is **amor fati**: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it -- all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary -- but **love it**" (EH II, 10). To love one's fate in this way is to go well beyond the acceptance of a philosophical view of the self that suggests that one is **merely** the interstice of historical forces. It is to celebrate that fact -- to celebrate and embrace the historical contingencies one springs from, to want nothing about oneself to be different. And how could one hope to adopt such an attitude toward oneself without becoming who one is? For that task involves, as we saw in the first part of this chapter, giving style to oneself: the demand that a person bring all of her impresses and affects together under a single taste.

It may be that talk about the affirmation of life does not fall within a philosophical way of speaking most of us are used to. However, it should be clear enough that careful attention to this attitude is essential to an understanding of Nietzsche's account of self-creation. Nietzsche's description of the subject is rooted in

a view of the self grounded in genealogy, psychology and philosophical analysis. Zarathustra's love for life, a love that Nietzsche also professes, expresses an attitude toward a philosophical view. Nietzsche suggests, exhorts even, that we do more than adopt a certain view of the self. He wants his readers to adopt an attitude toward life which he sees as fitting to that self. "Zarathustra once defines, quite strictly, his task," Nietzsche writes, "it is mine, too -- and there is no mistaking his meaning: he says Yes to the point of justifying, of redeeming even all of the past" (EH X, 8).

The tension in Nietzsche's suggestion that we are at once produced by a web of historical contingencies as well as the potential creators of ourselves is ultimately reconciled by Zarathustra's life. For he sees **himself** as "the eternal Yes to all things, 'the tremendous unbounded Yes and Amen'" (EH X, 6).

## **PART II**

### CHAPTER III

#### RORTY'S NIETZSCHE AND IRONIST REDESCRIPTION

I suggested in Part I that Nietzsche's description of the subject as both the product of a social fabric and the potential creator of herself creates a deeply rooted and productive tension in his thought. I asked what it would be like to become the creator of oneself given Nietzsche's suggestion that we are historically contingent creatures, subjects constituted by contingent expressions of the will to power. Nietzsche's answer to this question and the resolution of his description of the subject is, I showed in Chapter II, fulfilled in his account of the free-spirited figure of Zarathustra. Zarathustra affirms the inter-relatedness and necessity of all past contingencies to his own person and to his project of self-creation. He succeeds in overcoming his disgust and despair at the necessity of the small man of the herd and thereby frees himself for the task of creating himself anew. Nietzsche, then, gives us a character, Zarathustra, and a type, in response to the demand that he offer an account of what it might be like to take up the task of self-creation he exhorts us to.

Neither Richard Rorty nor Michel Foucault take up Nietzsche's description of Zarathustra. Both turn elsewhere in the effort to put some flesh on Nietzsche's exhortation to us to create ourselves. Rorty, we will see, views Zarathustra as the embodiment of Nietzsche's unfortunate relapse into metaphysics. Foucault, to the best of my knowledge, never said in writing why he did not pursue Zarathustra. I suspect, however, that Zarathustra is, quite simply, a figure too much Nietzsche's own for

anyone to appropriate him as their own. In distancing themselves from Zarathustra's greater than human effort, to say of all the past "Thus I willed it," Rorty and Foucault abandon Nietzsche's resolution of the tension in his account of the subject. Their diverging engagements with Nietzsche's thought succeed in re-entrenching the distance between Nietzsche's description of the subject as both created and creator which Zarathustra is meant to overcome.

I suggested in the Introduction that Rorty and Foucault are the inheritors of both Nietzsche's subject and the task of self-creation which confronts that subject. Rorty and Foucault vigorously engage Nietzsche and their respective appropriations of him lie close to the heart of each of their own projects. However, the different uses each makes of Nietzsche lead them in radically divergent directions. We have, in Rorty's description of the ironist intellectual, a contemporary response to the question of what it might be like to take up the task of self-creation which Nietzsche exhorts us to. Foucault's genealogical account of the subject as an interstice in a complex web of relations of power problematizes Rorty's description. He gives us good reason to believe that the attempt to take up the Nietzschean responsibility that Rorty describes as a private project of self-description can only come with a shift in the relations of power which constitute the individual.

Rorty appropriates a Nietzschean account of the project of self-creation redescribing it in exhilarating, accessible and democratic terms as an ironist's project of self-description. Borrowing Alexander Nehamas's description of Nietzsche, Rorty illustrates his account of self-creation with Nietzsche himself. Rorty uses Nietzsche

here in much the same way that Nietzsche illustrated his description of self-creation with Zarathustra. Rorty emphasizes the existential dimension of the task of taking responsibility for one's own historical contingency and tries to find a place for the engagement of that project within the private spheres of a post-modern bourgeois liberal utopia and the less utopian liberal democracies of the West.

Foucault also recommends the Nietzschean project of self-creation. However, his appropriation of Nietzsche's genealogical method of description and analysis gives rise to detailed and disconcerting accounts of the relations of power embodied, for example, in the medical, penal and sexual practices which help to constitute the modern subject. Even in the face of his own affirmation of the importance of creating oneself, Foucault's genealogies tend to engender the appearance of a suffocating intransigence in the values and contingencies out of which a person might hope to take on that project.

Foucault's adaptation of Nietzsche's view of the subject and his perspectivism can lead a person to wonder about the possibility of attempts at self-creation which do not amount to merely trivial or naive re-descriptions of current situations -- descriptions which do not succeed in generating a significant shift in relations of power or in creating anything new but simply allow a person a sort of illusory comfort. Foucault makes it difficult to believe, for compelling Nietzschean reasons, that either Nietzsche's exhortation to say of the past "Thus I willed it" or Rorty's liberal echo of that exhortation suggest a project as readily engaged as Rorty would have it appear.

I begin my analysis of Rorty's inheritance of Nietzsche with an examination of

Rorty's description of self-creation. Rorty suggests that the project of self-creation be understood as the successful redescription of oneself. The concepts of "final vocabulary" and "irony" provide a basis for his account of redescription. I will, accordingly, spend some time discussing these terms and their origins in Hegel's early thought. We shall see here that while Rorty pays a lot of attention Nietzschean self-creation he pays little to Nietzsche's description of the subject's production by a social milieu. Rorty, we will see, uses Nietzsche to exemplify his account of self-creation. However, Rorty, unlike Nietzsche, wants to keep projects of self-creation relegated to private life. Rorty suggests that Nietzsche's account of self-creation is dangerous to public political life. Rorty would place limits on self-creation which would keep public life and politics safe from the dangerous and sublime redescription ironists like Nietzsche strive toward.

The remainder of this chapter explores Rorty's analysis of the dangers he sees for liberal democracies in projects of self-creation. I inquire into Rorty's reasons for curtailing the public use of Nietzsche's thought and ask what, in particular, these commitments are which lead him to privatize Nietzschean self-creation. Rorty, we will see, conflates the ironist theorist's temptation to metaphysical sublimity with the concrete political danger such a figure only potentially presents. I argue that the privatization of projects of self-creation and the division of a life into private and public spheres which Rorty advocates as a preventative measure against sublime attempts at political self-creation presents serious difficulties. And finally, I suggest that Rorty's lack of attention to the ways in which subjects are produced (that part of



Nietzsche's account of the subject which he largely ignores) constitutes a serious failing in his account of self-creation.

I will take up Nancy Fraser's analysis of Rorty's recommendation that we see ourselves as liberals with distinct spheres of private and public responsibilities. Fraser's analysis shows up the failure of Rorty's description of the self-creation to adequately address the subject's production by a social fabric. I will suggest that Rorty's gloss over this dimension of Nietzsche's account of the subject has a tremendous impact on his views on the possibilities for subjects to create themselves. Fraser's criticisms of Rorty's account of self-creation places a lot of strain on Rorty's suggestion that self-creation be relegated to the private sphere. I raise the possibility at the close of this chapter that the privatization of self-creation is too costly a safeguard against sublime and political attempts at self-creation. I suggest that this possibility might be illuminated by a return to a Nietzschean account of the subject's production by her social milieu. We will see, in Chapter IV, how Michel Foucault's account of the subject reinforces Fraser's criticisms of Rorty's account of self-creation and adds to the strain his privatization of that project has come under.

What, we might ask by way of beginning, does Rorty's account of self-creation look like? Self-creation is, for Rorty, intrinsically tied to the role he sees description playing, not only in philosophical discourse, but in private and public life. His ironist intellectual is a figure willing to make the claim that she has 'willed' the past, but she means by this neither that she has redeemed the past nor that she sees herself as an

expression of the will to power (Rorty, 1989 97). One need not, on Rorty's account of self-creation, say of all that is past "Thus I willed it" in either Nietzsche's or Zarathustra's tone of voice. When Rorty's ironist intellectual says of the past "Thus I willed it," she claims to have secured her autonomy by redescribing the past in her own terms instead of trying to live up to past descriptions of success or flourishing. Rorty's ironist is "trying to get out from under inherited contingencies and make his own contingencies, get out from under an old final vocabulary and fashion one which will be all his own" (Rorty, 1989 97). The thrust of the project of self-creation is much the same for both Nietzsche and Rorty: to become something more than what one happens to be as a result of the historical contingencies from which one springs. Nietzsche's project, at least as undertaken by Zarathustra, revolves around overcoming "riddles and accidents." Rorty's turns on creating new descriptions in place of old ones.

So why does Rorty tie his account of self-creation to description? The beginnings of his answer rest heavily on the notion of a final vocabulary -- the set of words that provides a person with a basis for her practices and convictions and lends her her identity. "These are the words," Rorty says, "in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives" (Rorty, 1989 73). This vocabulary is "'final' in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far

as he can go with language; beyond them there is only helpless passivity or a resort to force" (ibid.). The words in a final vocabulary serve as markers and touchstones for a person's commitments. Some of those words are "thick," as Rorty puts it, and pack a lot of concrete detail. Those are words like representative democracy, a Rawlsian conception of justice, lefty social programs, or a free press. Some are "thin" and can be found in most people's final vocabularies, words like justice, freedom and truth. Rorty thinks that the thicker "more parochial terms do most of the work" insofar as they, better than the thinner more ubiquitous terms, map out a person's past commitments and focus future projects (ibid.).

A final vocabulary is historically contingent and subject to possible, though probably occasional, change. The different types of inhabitants of Rorty's liberal utopia will see the status of their quite malleable final vocabularies in different lights. One might have ironic doubts about a final vocabulary (as an ironist intellectual) or just be commonsensically nominalist and historicist (as a non-intellectual) in Rorty's bourgeois liberal utopia. In either case the final vocabulary one holds to is what counts in an existential sense. Sticking by the words in our final vocabularies prevents us from acquiescing to absurdity and distinguishes each of us as distinct individuals. We value the things we do according to the arrangements of the words in our final vocabularies.

Rorty is particularly concerned with the ironist inhabitant of his liberal utopia and insofar as he thinks of Nietzsche as an ironist (or as forerunner to ironism) so am I. Rorty defines an ironist thus: she has "radical and continuing doubts about the

final vocabulary she currently uses"; she "realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts"; and, finally, "insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself" (Rorty, 1989 73).

An ironist is a perspectivist, but a perspectivist with a poetic bent. She is a "nominalist and a historicist . . . [and] thinks that nothing has an intrinsic nature, a real essence" (Rorty, 1989 74). She shares Nietzsche's anti-foundationalist stance and disagrees with the metaphysician who, "assumes that the presence of a term in his own vocabulary ensures that it refers to something which has a real essence" (Rorty, 1989 74). Rorty's use of "metaphysics" here is, perhaps, overly simple and, therefore, something of a caricature of a large variety of philosophical positions. It does, however, succeed in generating the contrastive force Rorty needs to polarize his description of irony.

The ironist's attitude toward her final vocabulary, toward any final vocabulary, is one of tentative acceptance and perpetual doubt. However, we are not the sorts of creatures who can simply abandon **all** the beliefs and values and commitments we live by. The ironist cannot forsake her entire final vocabulary without abandoning her personal history and the history of the culture of which she is a part. That totality constitutes her. "If," Rorty says, echoing Nietzsche, "there is no center to the self, then there are only different ways of weaving new candidates for belief and desire into antecedently existing webs of belief and desire" (Rorty, 1989 84). To abandon all beliefs and desires would be to suddenly become a new person altogether.

We should be alive to the fact, however, that Rorty only echoes a part of Nietzsche's view of the subject. Nietzsche is very keen to point out that while there may be no center to the self, the patterns which we, as webs of belief and desire, form are largely given to us. We are produced by the history of the social fabric we exist in. That social fabric also impinges on the ways in which we weave new candidates for beliefs and desires into ourselves. Rorty simply does not do very much with this part of Nietzsche's account of the subject. Looking ahead a bit, we will see him self-consciously examine his own attempts to create himself, but the pursuit there is of his place in the history of philosophy. His status as an able-bodied, wealthy, white, educated, professional, heterosexual American male (among other potentially relevant descriptions) does not find its way into the conversation.<sup>12</sup> These sorts of descriptions matter to Nietzsche's account of the self for they help to illuminate how Rorty has been produced by a social fabric which favours his sort of individual. I will suggest that Rorty's attention also needs to be drawn in this direction.

Rorty does say, however, that if the ironist intellectual cannot abandon her entire vocabulary, she can at least play portions of her vocabulary off other new or different vocabularies. The metaphysician, in contrast to the ironist, thinks that we should be pursuing the "real essences" of the words in our final vocabularies. She

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<sup>12</sup>Rorty, to be fair, does pay attention to the exclusion of women from, for example, that 'private club' of young poets to which men can more easily gain membership. His discussion of Adrienne Rich's experience as a young female poet moves a little closer to a confrontation with the sorts of difficulties I will be pursuing in his description of self-creation ("Feminism and Pragmatism," 1991 8). However, Rorty's response to a political critique of his account of self-creation remains, I will suggest, inadequate.

thinks that our final vocabularies should be converging on the Truth. The metaphysician thinks, moreover, that we have the capacity to recognize the Truth when we see it -- that "we have already got criteria for the right answers" even if we do not yet have all the right answers (Rorty, 1989 76). Conversely, the ironist hopes that "by the time she has finished using old words in new senses, not to mention introducing brand-new words, people will no longer ask questions phrased in the old words" -- questions like "What is the essence of this word or that word (Rorty, 1989 78). Ironist intellectuals are always looking for a better final vocabulary -- a final vocabulary which they can see as their own "poetic achievement." They view this pursuit of a final vocabulary as dominated by metaphors of creating rather than finding, "of diversification and novelty rather than convergence to the antecedently present" (Rorty, 1989 77).

Therefore, the ironist's "preferred form of argument is," as Rorty says, "dialectical in the sense that she takes the unit of persuasion to be a vocabulary rather than a proposition" (Rorty, 1989 78). Her ability to exploit the possibilities of massive redescription, to play entire vocabularies off of each other is reminiscent of, and finds its origins in, Hegel's Phenomenology. Rorty suggests that the dialectical method Hegel employs in that work is not "an argumentative procedure . . . but simply a literary skill -- skill at producing surprising gestalt switches by making smooth, rapid transitions from one terminology to another" (Rorty, 1989 78). Hegel's tactic is not, Rorty thinks, to show up the internal inconsistencies of the arguments his predecessors offered to support their various descriptions of the world and their descriptions of the

relationship between subjects and objects. Rather, Hegel's Phenomenology engages in what we now think of as literary criticism. His "criticism of his predecessors was not that their propositions were false but that their languages were obsolete" (Rorty, 1989 78).

Rorty's redescription of the dialectic of the Phenomenology as literary criticism will strike some of his readers as ludicrous or perhaps just plain false. There is, of course, something outrageous in seeing Hegel as belonging to the genre of literary criticism rather than philosophy. But only if we think there is an exclusive interpretation of Hegel's book that demands of us that we pigeon-hole it as philosophy will we dismiss Rorty's interpretation out of hand. Rorty describes the ironist's project of redescription as an attempt to play old vocabularies and old descriptions off one another. He thinks that Hegel did this first. He sees himself, therefore, as one who, having learned from Hegel, is inclined to wax ironic over the philosophers (or theorists) who have come to occupy the canon of western thought known as metaphysics. Rorty, then, is engaged in redescrbing the descriptions his predecessors have given to themselves and their predecessors.

Redescrbing the dialectic as literary criticism is a part of Rorty's attempt to create himself. Rorty describes self-creation as the attempt at autonomy and suggests that the ironist intellectual can gain autonomy by getting out from under inherited contingencies and making his own contingencies. He wants to "get out from under an old final vocabulary and fashion one which will be his own" (Rorty, 1989 97).

Rorty's ironist can espouse descriptions she has created herself as well as those she

has inherited from her predecessors. However, success in creating herself entails getting out from under the influence of the inherited descriptions which she sees as ill-fitting. Getting out from under those descriptions involves playing old descriptions off one another as well as creating new descriptions (of herself, or the world, or her relation to the world and the other subjects in it) which might, in turn, be played off the descriptions she inherits.

The ironist's success at this task will be measured by her own satisfaction at having avoided the horrifying possibility of "finding oneself to be only a copy or a replica" of inherited descriptions (Rorty, 1989 9). Borrowing Harold Bloom's term, Rorty describes a "strong poet" as one who succeeds in doing to the past what the past tried to do to her: "to make the past itself, including those very causal processes which blindly impressed all her own behavings, bear **her** impress" (Rorty, 1989 29). When Rorty's strong poet, the ironist intellectual who has succeeded in creating herself, says of the past "Thus I willed it," she is claiming to have successfully attempted autonomy from an old final vocabulary imposed on her by the past. She claims to have succeeded in redescribing the past in her own terms instead of trying to live up to the expectations the past has of her.

In Rorty's case the past exerts pressure on him to ask the same philosophical questions it asked and to provide refinements on the answers it gave those questions. In giving up on the metaphysician's questions, questions about the nature of Truth and Essence, and asking new questions, sometimes retrospectively and sometimes prospectively, about the relationship between vocabularies, Rorty is out to redescribe



nothing less than the entire history of the philosophical tradition. Rorty wants to think of the practice of philosophy as simply playing the texts of that genre off one another and off texts from other genres. He wants to avoid thinking of what he is doing as the pursuit of either Truth or the right theory about Truth. He is, in his own terms, attempting to substitute a new description of an established practice for an older entrenched description.

The novelty of Rorty's redescription of Hegel in particular and philosophy in general will appear ludicrous or just plain false to those metaphysicians who see themselves as converging on the Truth and see Hegel as one important step in that direction. It will only cease to appear ludicrous to these people if Rorty's descriptions catch on with them. If Rorty's own private attempt at self-creation, his ironist redescription of the philosophical tradition, gets taken up by like-minded ironist philosophers and theorists, then he will have succeeded in becoming a strong poet. He will have succeeded in both making the past bear his impress and in manipulating the tensions of his own epoch in such a way as to, perhaps, "produce the beginnings of the next epoch" (Rorty, 1989 50). Whether Rorty gets described by the future as a once dangerous eccentric or a genius does not depend on whether the attempt to substitute the ironic terms of literary criticism for those of metaphysics gets in touch with an antecedent reality discoverable somewhere out there or deep within us. It turns on whether his description happens to "catch on with other people -- happens because of the contingencies of some historical situation, some particular need which a given community happens to have at a given time" (Rorty, 1989 37).

Rorty plays the books and authors which hold places in his own final vocabulary off one another in his attempt at autonomy. These are the words according to which he understands his past and orients his future. So revising the relations between these authors and books, and revising his own relation to them, is his way of revising his own identity. I have used, following Rorty, his own redescription of Hegel as a lever to access the ironist project of self-creation that Rorty advocates. His discussion of the Phenomenology suggests (to the chagrin of the orthodox) roots for his project of redescription.

Where we might think of actual practice of Rortyan redescription as modelled on the early Hegel, so we can think of the aim of that practice, the task of self-creation, as modelled on Nietzsche. Rorty's stance toward Nietzsche is analogous in important ways to Nietzsche's own stance toward Zarathustra. Neither's larger philosophical project either begins or ends with the descriptions they offer of Nietzsche and Zarathustra respectively. Rather, Nietzsche and Zarathustra serve as exemplifications of the self-creative projects Rorty and Nietzsche describe. Nietzsche's description of Zarathustra is a description of a purely fictitious character, despite those traits he might have in common with either Nietzsche himself or some of his heroes. I showed in Chapter II how well this tactic of creating a character from scratch serves Nietzsche's larger project. Similarly, Rorty's redescription of Nietzsche, a description that turns Nietzsche into a kind of fiction, serves Rorty's project well.

Rorty wants Nietzsche to play the role of a figure "whom the rest of us can use

as [an example] and as material in our own attempts to create a new self by writing a bildungsroman about our old self" (Rorty, 1989 119). Rorty's use of Nietzsche as an exemplification of self-creation is made possible by the sort of material Nietzsche provides him with. Just as Nietzsche uses Zarathustra to answer the question of what it might be like to take responsibility for historical contingency, Rorty uses Nietzsche to answer the question of what it looks like to take up the project of self-creation via redescription. In neither case do Rorty or Nietzsche accept these characters purely on the character's own terms. Both maintain a distance between themselves and their illustrations. That distance is the use they put their illustrations to in their respective attempts to, at the same time, both create themselves and describe what it is like to engage in that effort.

Rorty's use of Nietzsche involves paring away a number of Nietzsche's own illustrations (including much of what Zarathustra has to say) from the project of self-creation Rorty sees as basic to both of their projects. The Nietzsche Rorty describes in the essay "Self-creation and affiliation: Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger," the pared down version I want to look at, is a Nietzsche important to Rorty for two related, though distinct, reasons. First, he actually describes a project of self-creation similar to the project Rorty wants to both recommend and engage. Second, Nietzsche's engagement in the task of self-creation offers an exemplification of that project which Rorty can use as an illustration of his own description of self-creation. Putting a different spin on it, we might say that the content of what Nietzsche says, the philosophical position he actually articulates, is central to the use to which Rorty puts

him. But Rorty's use of Nietzsche is not ultimately constrained by the vocabulary Nietzsche uses to describe his own project.

Insofar as he is an ironist, Nietzsche is doing the same thing all ironists do -- attempting autonomy: "he is trying to get out from under inherited contingencies and make his own contingencies, get out from under an old final vocabulary and fashion one which will be his own" (Rorty, 1989 97). Insofar as Nietzsche is an ironist theorist, however, Rorty sees him as attempting to "understand the metaphysical urge, the urge to theorize, so well that one becomes entirely free of it" (ibid.). Rorty differentiates between ironist theorists and ironist novelists (the other sort of ironist Rorty takes a special interest in) on the basis of what they are interested in redescribing. Ironists in general are interested in an effort to re-create themselves, in redescribing those things which have had a significant impact on their lives. The ironist theorist, therefore, is intent on redescribing his relation to a past that "consists in a particular, rather narrowly defined, literary tradition -- roughly, the Plato-Kant canon, and footnotes to that canon. What he is looking for is a redescription of that canon which will cause it to lose the power it has over him" (ibid.). Rorty thinks that this is what Nietzsche is up to. As I have suggested, however, Nietzsche thinks that we need to pay attention to more than the books we read and the books our predecessors read when we confront the ways in which we are produced.

Rorty sees himself as attempting to affiliate himself with the same canon that Nietzsche affiliated himself with (one that now includes Nietzsche) but in a way that permits him to redescribe that canon without being a theorist. Ironist theorists,

Nietzsche included, Rorty claims, can be tempted toward and lapse into metaphysics. They strive after the **sublime** and end up trying to affiliate themselves with something larger than themselves -- in Nietzsche's case, it is what he calls (in The Twilight of the Idols and elsewhere) "Europe." Some ironist theorists, ironists who are not nominalist enough about the things they find in their final vocabularies and the things they place there of their own accord, "are not interested only in making themselves new. They also want to make this big thing new; their own autonomy will be a spin-off from this larger newness. They want the sublime and ineffable, not just the beautiful and novel -- something incommensurable with the past, not simply the past recaptured through rearrangement and redescription" (Rorty, 1989 101). Nietzsche, Rorty suggests, is one of those ironist theorists.

Rorty does not pin a particular ironist tag on the new ground his own sort of redescription is breaking. His project shares a great deal with Nietzsche (and Heidegger and the other ironist theorists he mentions) insofar as Rorty, like his predecessors, is interested in breaking the hold metaphysics has placed on him. Like Nietzsche he does this by redescribing metaphysicians. However, he wants to distance his project from Nietzsche's attempt at sublimity and subsequent relapse into metaphysics by affiliating himself with ironist novelists like Proust who nominally redescribe the contingencies from which they spring in an effort to create themselves. Novelists like Proust, unlike ironist theorists, tend not to try and hook their redescription up with anything larger than themselves. They are content to rearrange little things (like individual people or places) without being tempted to rearrange the

larger things (like History or Europe) that would entangle them in metaphysics. One becomes so entangled by projecting a metaphysical connection between one's efforts to create oneself and the way the world really is, or the way History moves, or, in Nietzsche's case, one's relationship to Europe as the creator of the teacher of the overman.

We might think of books like Contingency, irony, and solidarity then, as novels, as bildungsromanen even, of a peculiar sort. In this sort of book the author tries to create herself out the metaphysical descriptions she inherits without succumbing to the temptation to position her description in a place where both she and it cannot become fodder for further descriptions. If the author of one of these texts suggests that her description somehow manages to leap clear out of the range of future redescriptions then she will be making the suggestion that her book has gotten in touch with something larger than her own creative endeavor. She will have gone metaphysical.

Rorty doesn't think that Nietzsche means to end up doing metaphysics. He thinks that, like Heidegger, Nietzsche aims at the title of the last philosopher, the one who finally stopped doing metaphysics. However, "insofar as he claims to see deeper rather than differently, claims to be free rather than merely reactive, he betrays his own perspectivism and his own nominalism" (Rorty, 1989 105). When Nietzsche starts talking about the overman and the will to power, when he starts "explaining how to be wonderful and different and unlike anything that has ever existed," Rorty hears talk of "pure self-creation [and] pure spontaneity" (Rorty, 1989 106). That sort of

talk, Rorty thinks, is laced with metaphysics because of its pretensions to go beyond contingency and redescribability.

Rorty wants to learn what sorts of things to avoid from Nietzsche the metaphysician (the Nietzsche Heidegger describes). He wants to learn what sorts of things to pursue from the perspectivist Nietzsche Alexander Nehamas describes and models on Proust. Nehamas' nominalist Nietzsche is Rorty's positive model. He is the 'good' Nietzsche who is simply out to make use of time and chance and out to solve riddles and accidents. The Nietzsche Rorty admires wants to fabricate, out of his own contingency, an individual who has become a work of art that will be judged by the taste he has himself created. The boundaries of that admiration are, however, clearly defined. Nietzsche, he thinks, is only useful as a model for private projects of self-creation.

In order to see why Rorty thinks Nietzsche should be used only in the sphere of private projects of self-creation, we need to know why, in general, Rorty wants to keep self-creation separate from public life. We need to establish, therefore, what it is about projects of self-creation that threatens a political community. For Rorty is adamant that "[w]e should stop trying to combine self-creation and politics, especially if we are liberals. The part of a liberal ironist's final vocabulary which has to do with public action is never going to get subsumed under, or subsume, the rest of her final vocabulary" (Rorty, 1989 106).

What, then, are Rorty's general motivations for keeping the spheres of private

and public life apart? And what nominal division of private responsibilities from public responsibilities does he advocate? In response to the second question Rorty suggests that the citizens of a postmodern bourgeois liberal utopia (his own preferred utopian vision) have responsibilities of two distinct sorts. Taking up a description he attributes to Michael Oakshott, Rorty suggests that we think of a community as a group of eccentrics banding together for mutual protection where a citizen's responsibilities are divisible into private and public spheres (Rorty, 1989 59). Our first responsibility is to ourselves to not only speak the language of our tribe but to create our own words. The second is a competing social responsibility to the solidarity of our community. The first of these is the private responsibility to create ourselves through redescription -- the project that I have explored in some detail. The second is a public project that includes political activity and utopian description in the attempt to establish solidarity with other individuals and other communities in an effort to reduce suffering.

In response to the first question regarding the motivations for Rorty's private-public split we can distinguish three reasons that Rorty has for separating out private and public spheres of activity and responsibility. The first of these is a non-metaphysical philosophical commitment. The second and third he associates with liberalism. Rorty believes, first of all, that philosophical thought has exhausted itself in its attempt to bridge the gap between private commitments of epistemological, religious or existential sorts, and public commitments to better our political practices and visions. The historical effort to generate a philosophical foundation for our



politics, based on our epistemological commitments, is a failed project and one on which we should stop wasting our energy. Rorty claims that there is no way to bring Justice together with individual projects of self-creation at a theoretical level. He says that "[t]he vocabulary of self-creation is necessarily private, unshared, unsuited to argument. The vocabulary of justice is necessarily public and shared, a medium for argumentative exchange" (Rorty, 1989 xiv).

Rorty also believes that projects of self-creation which entail redescription must be relegated to the private sphere in order to avoid cruelty to some of the citizens of his utopia. In our attempt to understand and describe ourselves as historical and social creatures our self-descriptions will involve redescriptions of other people. To avoid humiliating our fellow citizens our redescriptions of them should be kept private. Only descriptions which allow us to better see our fellow citizens as capable of suffering are going to count as politically relevant, for it is these sorts of descriptions which promote solidarity. Redescription has the potential to humiliate the person described and humiliation, a particularly vicious sort of cruelty for Rorty, insofar as he is a liberal, should be avoided. He adopts the definition of a liberal stipulated by Judith Shklar, who says, in Rorty's words, that "liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do" (Rorty, 1989 xv). If the cost of avoiding humiliation is the separation of an individual's life into the two theoretically incommensurable spheres of private life and public life then that is not too high a price to pay. Our private commitments can be as important to us personally as we deem them but that does not merit them a place in the public political sphere.

Thirdly, although we inherit much of what is found in our respective final vocabularies our autonomy depends on being left space to generate the specific words in that vocabulary. We need to be left room to make what we inherit our own. Rorty does not want the public sphere intruding in on this sort of individualistic and creative pursuit. The sort of self-description going on in the private sphere is an activity that he wants kept free of public moralizing and censoring. Keeping the private sphere free of public interference as much as possible is a traditional liberal commitment. The public sphere, defined negatively, is what constrains our private liberty -- that which we don't want interfering in these private pursuits of self-creation. Liberalism offers a political tradition that purports to keep the various institutions of government in check and out of, as much as possible, the private sphere. A fundamental tenet of the liberal tradition holds that these various institutions of government may interfere in private life only if it can be shown that without such an interference the liberty of all is impinged upon by the liberty of one. The onus is on those who would interfere in the private sphere to establish that that interference is required to preserve as much liberty for each as is compatible with equal liberty for all.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>In "The priority of democracy to philosophy," Rorty aims at providing philosophy with a non-foundational role in its relationship to politics. He pursues an account of the relationship between liberal democracy and philosophy which establishes philosophy as a private project potentially useful in the effort to create oneself. Philosophy, then, would be distinct from the public workings of a liberal politic. Rorty's understanding of liberalism is, he explains in this article, largely informed by John Rawls. Rawls' two principles of justice (seen in light of his later explicit historicization of his account of justice) have shaped Rorty's vision of a politic that provides a private sphere in which one can fairly and freely pursue a philosophically inclined effort at self-creation. Rawls suggests, first, that "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar

The particular separation Rorty the ironist advocates as a liberal is, like the contents of a final vocabulary, historically contingent. That is, some commitments found in a final vocabulary come to be private concerns and some become public concerns, projects, activities or responsibilities. Which become which is a matter of what we do with our historically contingent inheritance. There is no ahistorical, transcendental or otherwise metaphysical possibility of distinguishing **a priori** a private concern from a public concern, just as there is no possibility of determining what constitutes the right sort of space for projects of self-creation or what is going to count as justice in the public sphere. The division between public responsibility and private responsibility is a sort of pragmatic valuation. The separation of private projects of self-creation from the public sphere advocated by Rorty is, simply, a heavily weighted "thick" commitment. It is, however, a commitment rooted in a political tradition and one that finds support in the principles of liberalism.

If we accept the nominal self-consistency of Rorty's recommendation that we bifurcate our lives into private and public spheres as well as the admirability of the motivations behind it, then what is there to object to in Rorty's privatization of self-creation? The

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liberty for others," and second, that "social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, (b) attached to positions and offices open to all" (Rawls, 1971: 60). Rorty thinks that this balancing act between liberty and fairness provides us with a conceptual and traditionally liberal basis for his own suggestion that self-creation (hence philosophy) be nominally separated from pragmatic liberal politics. Among Rorty's foremost concerns are, after all, that our projects of self-creation not interfere too much in other people's lives and that everyone have the opportunity to pursue the project of self-creation. These concerns are reflected, respectively, in Rawl's two principles.

objection Nancy Fraser raises against Rorty's nominal separation of private and public spheres of responsibility does not challenge the validity of his reasons for advocating such a split. She does not wish to suggest that projects of self-creation and Justice can be brought together with a metaphysical linch-pin. Neither does she advocate the pursuit of cruelty or heavy-handed government interference in people's lives. Her objection to Rorty's description of self-creation is, in a nutshell, that Rorty's privatization of that task does not adequately take into account the ways in which a social fabric which produces individuals impinges on those individuals' possibilities for self-creation. Rorty's privatization of self-creation effectively disallows lots of people from pursuing the creation of themselves -- those who would require changes in the public sphere in order to create themselves. Although Fraser is presumably not interested in doing so, her suggestion could be transcribed into traditional liberal terms. We might see her claim as the suggestion that the private-public split fails to capture important ways in which liberty (here the liberty to pursue projects of self-creation) is, in practice, denied some and allowed others.

The scope of this objection, however, needs to be made clear. In taking up Fraser's criticisms of Rortian self-creation I do not mean to suggest that all attempts to distinguish between the private and public spheres of people's lives on whatever basis have to be abandoned. Nor do I see this objection as a knockdown argument against liberalism *per se*. I intend, rather, to try and make clear the tremendous strain Rorty's attempt to privatize self-creation comes under if we pay attention to the way a social fabric produces different subjects differently. I intend, also, to try and disentangle a

related confusion in Rorty's description of the ironist intellectual's temptation toward the sublime. Rorty's attempt to block the intellectual's political pursuit of the sublime by privatizing self-creation is, I will argue, overkill.

So what, again, does Rorty mean by "sublime"? Ironist theorists (like Nietzsche) who are tempted toward the sublime

are not interested only in making themselves new. They also want to make this big thing new; their own autonomy will be a spin-off from this larger newness. They want the sublime and ineffable, not just the beautiful and novel -- something incommensurable with the past, not simply the past recaptured through rearrangement and redescription. They want not just the effable and relative beauty of rearrangement but the ineffable and absolute sublimity of the Wholly Other; they want Total Revolution (Rorty, 1989 101).

Rorty also says that

[t]he ironist theorist . . . is continually tempted to try for sublimity, not just beauty. That is why he is continually tempted to relapse into metaphysics, to try for one big hidden reality rather than for a pattern among appearances -- to hint at the the existence of somebody larger than himself called "Europe" or "History" or "Being" whom he incarnates (Rorty, 1989 105).

We can distinguish three important features of sublimity. First, to strive for the sublime is to attempt to connect oneself to something larger than oneself -- something outside of one's private sphere. This would be true even if one sees oneself as the incarnation of this larger something. Second, the connection between the subject creating herself and this larger something is of a metaphysical nature. And third, the metaphysical nature of this connection demands of other people that they sit up, take notice, and adopt the same view as the theorist (who has recently lost her irony).

Rorty's solution to the danger of the ironist's temptation toward the sublime is to separate the task of self-creation from the political sphere. He wants to nip in the

but the danger of an intellectual imposing her view of herself as the incarnation of something larger on other people. But why is this imposition so dangerous? Why does Rorty go to the measures he does to contain sublime attempts at self-creation? Fraser suspects that something like what she calls a Sorelian nightmare keeps Rorty awake at night. The impulse to create oneself, she suggests, is already individualist, elitist, and aestheticizing:

It takes only the squint of an eye to see here the vision of a Georges Sorel: a "sociology" that classifies humanity into "leaders" and "masses," a "theory of action" whereby the former mold the latter by means of a sheer "triumph of the will," a "philosophy of history" as an empty canvas awaiting the unfettered designs of the poet-leader (Fraser, 1989 96).

In the mind of someone like Sorel the attempt to create oneself is fused with the metaphysical necessity of imposing the effects of that attempt on other people. In an effort to block the public dimension of this sort of self-creation Rorty advocates splitting our lives into two parts. His suggestion that the vocabularies of self-creation and politics cannot be fused in a metaphysic, his belief that cruelty is the worst thing we do, and his view that everybody should be given privacy to create themselves are all in deep antagonism to the sort of Sorelian nightmare Fraser describes.

Rorty's safeguard against the nightmarish vision of Sorelian self-creation also safeguards the public sphere against projects of self-creation of the sort Nietzsche engages in. We can see Nietzsche's temptation toward the sublime, Rorty thinks, in his views on the destiny of Europe, and his creation of the teacher of the overman

etc.<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche's aristocratic yearnings, his admiration of some forms of cruelty, and the order of rank he espouses are all examples of things we should be wary of in his thought. Rorty says of Nietzsche that as soon as he "tries to put forward a view about modern society, or the destiny of Europe, or contemporary politics, he becomes at best vapid, and at worst sadistic" (Rorty, 1989 119-120). Rorty's suggestion is, therefore, that we see Nietzsche as useful to us only as a model and material for our own attempts at self-creation. This keeps both his aristocratic political views and his attempt at sublimity tidily contained.

There is, however, a difficulty in Rorty's response to the Sorelian (and Nietzschean) nightmare. Rorty fails to separate the metaphysical pretensions in an intellectual's fall into sublimity from the political pretensions such a person has. Somebody like Sorel might run these two together, but we need not. The Sorelian nightmare is made up, after all, of two parts. The first is the description of the attempt at self-creation as metaphysically tied to something larger than oneself. The second is the imposition of the effects of one's attempt at self-creation on everybody

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<sup>14</sup>Although I will not try to explicitly refute Rorty's description of Nietzsche as an ironist who lapses into metaphysics I am not convinced by that description. Nietzsche described himself and his project in enough ways that one never feels entirely certain about whether he remained an ironist or strayed into metaphysics. The descriptions I offer of his views on the subject and self-creation in Part I, however, certainly play up his ironist tendencies. More specifically, it would be wrong to see his description of Zarathustra's self-creation as a lapse into metaphysics if one accepts the connections I make between that effort and Zarathustra's despair at his contingency on the small man. Moreover, the discussion of Nietzsche's views on perspectivism which I will juxtapose with Rorty's in Chapter IV also highlight Nietzsche's non-metaphysical side. Rorty's characterization of Nietzsche as a philosopher who succumbs to the temptation toward the sublime should, therefore, be seen as a contrast to the description I offer of him.

else. The vision is nightmarish only if the latter effort succeeds. Otherwise, the self-creating person in question is really only unpleasant (though, perhaps, exceptionally so) to be around.

We need to worry about cruelty being done to others and the infringement on other people's possibilities for self-creation only if the intellectual attempting sublimity has the means to impose her attempt to create herself on other people. Those means are not, however, of a metaphysical nature. The Sorelian might see the metaphysical connection between her attempt at self-creation and the larger something of which she is an incarnation as demanding of other people that they share her view. Other people, however, need not buy the metaphysical connection. They only have to accept the nightmare if the Sorelian has some concrete means of imposing it. A metaphysical view might accompany such an imposition but it will not succeed in fashioning a nightmare by itself.

Fraser, like Rorty, wants to avoid the Sorelian nightmare. However, the separation of that nightmare into its two parts (that a person might exist who holds a frightening view of the metaphysical implications of her attempts to create herself and the imposition of that view on other people) allows her to call into question the necessity of entirely cutting off all attempts at self-creation from the public sphere. She suggests, first, that self-creation can be political without being sublime. And second, that the only possibility for self-creation for lots of people lies in a political engagement of that task in the public sphere. She sees Rorty's error as the conflation of a metaphysical pretension on the part of the Sorelian with the imposition of their



creation of themselves on the public sphere. Fraser, then, wants to avoid giving legitimacy to that pretension while allowing for the possibility of political self-creation.

But why is Fraser willing to risk politicizing self-creation? Why does she reject the heavy handed privatization of self-creation Rorty recommends to safeguard against the Sorelian nightmare?<sup>15</sup> A part of Fraser's answer to these questions is an appeal to the political relevance of the history of critical theory -- a praxis which Rorty would consign to the private sphere along with other practices of self-creation. For on Rorty's view, as Fraser points out, "the sole use of ironist theory is a private one: to bolster the self-image and aid the self-fashioning of the literary intelligentsia" (Fraser, 1989 101). Fraser, contra Rorty, suggests that there may, in fact, be deep social cleavages among people -- cleavages which, if illuminated by critical theory, might explain why some people need to create themselves in the public sphere, via politics, rather than in the confines of the private sphere. As she says:

the social movements of the last hundred or so years have taught us to see the power-laden, and therefore political, character of interactions that classical liberalism considered private. Worker's movements, for example, especially as clarified by Marxist theory, have taught us that the economic is political. Likewise, women's movements, as illuminated by feminist theory, have taught us that the domestic and the personal are political. . . . Yet Rorty's partition position [the separation of our lives into the spheres of

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<sup>15</sup>Another question should also be asked. Namely, what will Fraser do if a Sorelian comes along who is cruel and powerful and set on imposing her attempt to create herself on other people? While Fraser's answer to this question lies beyond the scope of this thesis the critical theory she describes as a "radical democratic-socialist-feminist politics" is aimed, in part, at providing an answer to this question (Fraser, 1989 106). See the last section of "Solidarity or Singularity?" in *Unruly Practices*, "Recipe for a Democratic-Socialist-Feminist Pragmatism," for a sketch of her answer.

private and public] requires us to bury these insights, to turn our backs on the last hundred years of social history.(Fraser, 1989 102)

This appeal to the history of critical theory does not, by itself, give us a reason to abandon Rorty's recommendation that we privatize self-creation. Nor does it explain why self-creation must be seen as a political project. Nor does it guarantee that critical theory will always avoid the temptation to try and metaphysically link the vocabulary of self-creation with that of Justice. The history of critical theory does, however, provide an appropriate setting for the description of the subject's production by a social fabric which I will pursue in the next chapter. I will, there, turn to Foucault's account of the subject as an interstice of power relations. Foucault's genealogies describe how subjects are produced by power and knowledge. I will explore the relation between the description of the subject he provides as well as a politicized account of self-creation which Foucault's account of the self suggests.

Before turning our attention in that direction, however, I need to say a little more about the nature of the conflict I have pointed to between Rorty and Fraser. Rorty cautiously suggests that he suspects that his "differences with Fraser are concrete and political rather than abstract and philosophical" (Rorty, "Feminism and Pragmatism," 1991 11). If Rorty meant by this that his differences with Fraser are of a theoretical rather than a metaphysical nature, then I would agree with his suggestion. Unfortunately, however, the source of their disagreement is conceptual. They disagree over the political significance of critical theory. Fraser wants to see critical theory as inherently political and, therefore, relevant to public political practice. Rorty wants to see it as ultimately private and non-political -- at least insofar as it is not public.

Rorty's commitment to a division of our lives into private and public spheres "requires us," Fraser says, "to privatize theory. Feminists, especially, will want to resist this last requirement, lest we see our theory go the way of our housework" (Fraser, 1989 102).

I have explained that we can see Rorty's division of our lives and responsibilities into distinct private and public spheres as, in part at least, motivated by fears of a Sorelian nightmare. That is, Rorty wants to suggest that we nominally distinguish between these spheres of our lives in order to protect against the imposition of a sublime attempt at self-creation by one citizen on her fellow citizens. The separation Rorty advocates can be seen, therefore, as itself a pragmatic political move. Rorty wants to create private spaces for self-creative pursuits for all of the citizens of his liberal democracy. In order to preserve these spaces he suggests that we stake our claim by the institutions of liberal democracy. He thinks, moreover, that the conceptual balancing act between liberty and fairness which informs the institutions of liberal democracy pretty well offers us all the theory we need for maintaining and fine tuning those institutions. Liberal institutions, Rorty further suggests, are the best political instruments we have come up with yet for balancing the liberty of the few off the liberty of the rest.

Rorty wants conceptual or theoretical confrontations with the liberal theory which informs these institutions of liberal democracy to take place only within those private spheres the institutions of liberal democracy protect. In so confining theory Rorty prevents the possibility of a public confrontation between critical theory and the institutions of liberal democracy. By preserving a place for this sort of theory in the

private sphere Rorty can allow the free pursuit of this sort of descriptive practice while curtailing its effects -- including the possibility of a Sorelian nightmare. However, as Fraser points out, Rorty's privatization of theory denies political significance to the radical critique of those social cleavages which she is concerned to illuminate. If we accept, however, that deep social cleavages might exist and that they might be illuminated by critical theory without the aid of metaphysics, then Rorty's privatization of theory looks rather heavy handed. But why?

Rorty's aim in privatizing self-creation and in privatizing theoretical attempts to create oneself is to prevent a metaphysically inclined attempt at self-creation of the Sorelian variety from gaining a political foothold in the public sphere. However, the onus is on Rorty to show that there is something so dangerous about **all** theoretical descriptions of deep social cleavages and the political attempts at self-creation which they inform that it demands that these descriptions and practices be confined to the private sphere. Unless Rorty can show that theoretical attempts at self-creation are **necessarily** metaphysical, then he has no cause for denying these descriptions political relevance.

In the next chapter I will be suggesting, following Fraser and with the help of Foucault, that we see self-creation as an inherently political task. For on Foucault's account of the subject, we are informed and produced by a social fabric in a thoroughly political way. Foucault's account of the self provides an illuminating correlative to Fraser's and my suggestion that self-creation be seen as extending into the public sphere. We will see, for instance, how Foucault's account of the subject's

production by power might illuminate how those institutions of liberal democracy which Rorty sees as freeing a private sphere for self-creative pursuits, in fact produce a private sphere entrenched in relations of power. We should see self-creation, I will suggest, as a political attempt to re-configure our relationships with, quite possibly and among other things, those institutions of liberal democracy which Rorty wants to preserve as strictly and pragmatically public.

## CHAPTER IV

### FOUCAULT'S NIETZSCHE AND THE POLITICS OF SELF-CREATION

In Chapter III I suggested that Nancy Fraser's analysis of Rorty's account of self-creation places his commitment to a privatization of that task under serious strain. Her redescription of Rorty's Sorelian nightmare helps to explain how Rorty has gotten himself into a situation where he is compelled to advocate the separation of our lives into the distinct spheres of private and public responsibilities. I have shown, moreover, how Rorty's nightmare is actually fueled by his conflation of an ironist intellectual's attempt at self-creative sublimity with the incursion of that attempt into public political life. With these distinctions established and Rorty's privatization of self-creation called into question, I suggested that we return to a Nietzschean account of the subject as the product of a social fabric in order to fashion a better account of self-creation.

We will see, in this chapter, how an account of a subject's production by her *milieu* impacts both on Rorty's account of self-creation and on his relegation of this task to the private sphere. I will sketch out a view of self-creation that is tied to an analysis of a subject's place in a social fabric. This account of self-creation will rely on Michel Foucault's Nietzschean account of the subject as an interstice of relations of power. The aim here is to lay out, albeit in fairly rough form, a Nietzschean account of self-creation that might provide an alternative to Rorty's privatized account of self-creation. A Foucaultian account of self-creation, I will suggest, cuts across Rorty's

division of our lives into distinct spheres of private and public responsibilities.

Keeping this end in mind I begin with an examination of Daniel Conway's suggestion that Rorty's view of the subject is disembodied. Conway suggests that Rorty's account of self-creation leaves no self to which a subject's perspectives might attach. He concludes, therefore, that Rorty's account of self-creation is overly voluntaristic. He means by this term that Rorty's view of self-creation permits subjects to acquire or abandon perspectives without constraint. Conway suggests, to the contrary, that subjects are, for Nietzsche, constrained by something "really deep down" and proposes that Rorty adopt a "thin" metaphysics like the one he purports Nietzsche adopts. It will be helpful here to juxtapose Rorty's suggestion that Zarathustra's exemplification of self-creation is excessively voluntaristic with Conway's suggestion that it is Rorty who offers the overly voluntaristic conception of self-creation.

Although I am in disagreement with Rorty's reading of Zarathustra I do not pursue an extended analysis of Zarathustra's attempt to create himself here. The description of free-spirited self-creation I pursued in Part I offers an account of Nietzsche's description of self-creation which examines how self-creation meshes with his description of the subject as the product of a social fabric. This description clearly shows that Zarathustra's attempt to become the creator of himself is tied to his embodied existence as the product of a larger milieu. Neither, however, do I accept Conway's suggestion that either we or Nietzsche need to appeal to a "thin" metaphysics of the subject. I suggest, instead, that we return to a genealogical account

of the subject in order to explain how a subject's perspectives are embodied in her. For if we can explain this connection, then we have no need for Conway's metaphysical corrective to Rorty's excessive voluntarism. Such an account is precisely what Foucault offers us.

However, Foucault's account of the subject poses a threat to Rorty's account of self-creation. The Foucaultian subject is an interstice in a web of relations of power. She is produced by power. Foucault's perspectival account of the subject is inherently political, for the relations of power which produce his subject are embedded in, for example, economic, legal, sexual, medical and penal relations. Rorty is alive to the danger Foucault's account poses to his own suggestion that self-creation be seen exclusively as a private affair. For Rorty's suggestion entails that an individual's life be nominally split into distinct private and public spheres. Foucault's account of the subject undercuts this suggestion. But we should not see Foucault as undercutting Rorty by offering an essentializing metaphysical account of the subject. Foucault's descriptions, like Rorty's, are only offered as descriptions to be played off other descriptions. Foucault's account of the subject undercuts Rorty's nominal separation of our lives into private and public spheres only because Foucault offers us a compelling description of the inter-relatedness of private and public which does not, if we accept it, allow us to hang on to Rorty's nominal separation. I will argue that if we accept Foucault's account of the subject then we cannot preserve the particular distinction between private and public spheres of responsibility which Rorty advocates.

In an effort to block a confrontation with Foucault's account of the subject we



will see that Rorty suggests that Foucault's genealogical descriptions of the subject as a product of power are bound to metaphysics. Rorty argues that Foucault's genealogies are primarily useful to Foucault's own attempts at self-creation and only occasionally and incidentally relevant to politics. He suggests, that Foucault is of little political use and is, in fact, dangerously tempted toward the sublime in much the same way as Nietzsche is. We will see, however, that Rorty provides little in the way of argument to substantiate this claim. In response to Rorty's claim that Foucault's account of the subject has metaphysical pretensions I will offer a sketch of Foucault's account of the subject which is not metaphysical. I wish to suggest that Foucault's account of the subject and the roots for an account of self-creation which we find there are of significant political concern.

We will see that Foucault's account of the subject as an interstice of power relations echoes Nietzsche's account of the subject as an expression of the will to power. Foucault's genealogical descriptions of the subject explain how a peculiarly modern subject has been produced by power -- a subject which holds the perspectives she does. He allows us to see the subject as produced by and productive of the truths and practices which hold her in place in a social fabric and in so doing lends a non-metaphysical intelligibility to Nietzsche's talk of the "really deep down." Foucault's account of the subject suggests that we are, in fact, this interstice of relations of power.

When I speak of subject's production by a social fabric I do not mean to invoke associations with determinism. This latter concept has, as its correlative,

voluntarism; the histories of these two terms are deeply embedded in a long-standing philosophical conversation wedded to metaphysics. However, Foucault's description of a subject's production by power is not meant to hook up with the way a subject **really** is. Like Nietzsche and Rorty, Foucault would have us see descriptions as things to be played off one another rather than checked against the Real world. Foucault's contribution to the description of the inter-play of descriptions is his attempt to see this inter-play as an expression of power. But this contribution, while significant to our understanding of the practice of description, remains just another description. Even if Foucault, like Nietzsche, sometimes sounds like he might be trying to get at an essential account of the subject, there is no basis, I will argue, for suggesting that there is a necessary connection between Foucault's account of the subject's production by power and metaphysics.

Foucault, like Nietzsche, sees subjects as capable of self-creation. I will pursue a Foucaultian account of self-creation which sees this task as an attempt to manipulate the contingencies from which we spring by manipulating the relations of power which tie us into the truths and practices which produce us. Or, more colourfully, I suggest that we view the task of self-creation as an attempt to pull at the threads of the social fabric which intersect to produce us. This would be an effort to weave those threads into a pattern of our own creation. We will see that Foucault's account of the subject and the possibilities for self-creation which he exposes might be of tactical use to subjects who wish to pursue self-creation in the public sphere. A Foucaultian account of the subject potentially reinforces, contra Rorty, Fraser's suggestion that self-creation

must take place in the public sphere for many individuals if they are to pursue that project at all. Rorty's attempt to separate the private sphere from the public sphere is, therefore, shown to be under strain regardless of his admirable motivations for suggesting such a division.

What, we might ask by way of a beginning, is wrong with Rorty's account of self-creation? Daniel Conway's defense of Nietzschean self-creation in "Disembodied Perspectives" aims to show that Rorty's account of self-creation suggests an excessive voluntarism. Conway suggests that the disembodied quality of Rorty's brand of perspectivism stems from a confused reading of Nietzsche's account of perspectivism. In particular, it arises from a mistaken view of the free-spirited self-creation exemplified by Zarathustra.

Rorty reads the close of Zarathustra as a prelude to a complete rebirth. Rorty seems to think that Zarathustra, in becoming who he is, becomes someone entirely different from the contingencies he springs from (Rorty, 1989 112). In Zarathustra's effort to become the child of his own parable Rorty sees Zarathustra as attempting to break free of mere contingency and re-create himself beyond contingency.<sup>16</sup> Rorty charges Nietzsche with an attempt to get beyond the beautiful to the sublime with his account of Zarathustra. He finds in Zarathustra's exemplification of self-creation both an excessive voluntarism and a lapse, on Nietzsche's part, into metaphysics -- an

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<sup>16</sup>The child is Nietzsche's image of the creator of new values. She is the successor to the lion, destroyer of old values, who succeeded, in turn, the camel that bore those old values.

attempt to get beyond mere description to something other than just another description.

However, Nietzsche's account of self-creation, insofar as it involves creating new values, does not involve a move beyond contingency. It suggests, rather, as I showed in Chapter II, the attempt to take responsibility for all contingency. That attempt, exemplified in Zarathustra's saying of the past, "Thus I willed it," is not an excessive voluntarism if we take excessive voluntarism to indicate a rupture between who one is as the product of a social fabric and one's perspective. Zarathustra's willing of the past is an expression, rather, of immense human strength -- an expression of the will to power we cannot imagine finding in ourselves, perhaps, but not, therefore, metaphysical. Zarathustra does not, at the close of his tale, abandon all that he has taken responsibility for. He has, rather, become who he is, insofar as he has made the contingencies from which he springs his own. He has become something more than a passive interstice of historical contingencies, practices and values by taking on the responsibility of creating those values. He has, in Nietzsche's lights, become the creator of himself.

Conway argues that Rorty's perspectivism differs from Nietzsche's, not because Rorty successfully strips Nietzsche's perspectivism of its vestigial metaphysics and replaces that kind of talk with the vocabulary of redescription, but because for Rorty perspectives are disembodied points of view. Conway prefers Nietzsche's account of perspectives as "particular expressions of affective engagement," where Nietzsche means by **affects** the "active and interpreting forces' responsible for perspectival

knowledge" (Conway, "Disembodied Perspectives" 284-285). As I suggested in Chapter I, we should see perspectives as expressions of a subject's will to power. Perspectives are, therefore, rooted in the drives and affects which tie the subject to her milieu. According to Conway, the difference in these accounts of perspectivism amounts to a difference between perspectives which are attached to individuals (Nietzsche's) and perspectives which, though Rorty would have them be, are not.

For the perspectivist something is known by a **particular** subject, not some ephemeral and generic knowing self, but a subject embedded in the world in a particular way with a particular perspective. Rorty, according to Conway, sees perspectives as disposable: "the self is a historically contingent construct that admits of no metaphysical properties whereby perspectives might be permanently tethered" (Conway, "Disembodied Perspectives" 283). Conway goes on to say, quoting Rorty, that "'the world does not provide us with any criterion of choice between alternative metaphors.' Hence we are in principle free, if we can fashion an enabling vocabulary, to adopt at will a new perspective of our own choosing" (Conway, "Disembodied Perspectives" 283).

However, the world as we live it as socially produced subjects restricts the descriptions we can impose on it just as it restricts the descriptions we can offer of ourselves. Conway argues that the ties Nietzsche establishes between affects and perspectives allow him to account for these restrictions. This, after all, is precisely what Nietzsche is up to in his genealogies of the moral subject and in his account of the will to power. We are, for Nietzsche, expressions of the will to power in constant

struggle with other subjects and objects which express their will to power. We are constrained and produced by other individuals and other objects. Rorty, conversely according to Conway, advises that no such extra-linguistic anchorage restricts our capacity for self-creation. His account turns out to be anti-affective in practice. Rorty cannot tell us much about how subjects are related to their particular perspectives.<sup>17</sup>

Conway wants to think of Nietzsche's description of affect as a "thin metaphysical" commitment -- a commitment to subjectivity and to a world which, for all intents and purposes, constrains us in much the same way as talk of "human nature" and the old "world" of metaphysical realism constrains us. In support of this attitude he quotes from an oft-cited passage in Beyond Good and Evil where Nietzsche suggests that "at the bottom of us, really 'deep down,' there is, of course, something unteachable, some granite of spiritual fatum, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions" (BGE 231). Nietzsche certainly sounds like a metaphysician here and, admittedly, the immediate context in which this passage occurs does not unquestionably save him from that title.

I think, however, that in adopting the attitude of resignation to a thin

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<sup>17</sup>Rorty can tell us something about what it is like to be a theorist lodged in a philosophical tradition but this is a highly restricted description of use to only a few individuals. Rorty also suggests that our relation to "brute power and to naked pain" is different in kind to our relation to persons and descriptions (Rorty, 1989 40). The tactic of appropriation and redescription is not open to us here. All we can do is attempt to recognize pain. The ability to recognize different ways people can suffer is a capacity he wants to promote insofar as he is a **liberal** ironist. The greater our capacity to recognize pain in other people, Rorty thinks, the greater our solidarity will be with those people. This amendment to Conway's claim, although important in its own right and important to Rorty's larger project, is not going to make Conway's basic criticism of Rorty's account of self-creation go away.

metaphysics and attributing it to Nietzsche, Conway makes a serious mistake. He concludes his paper with the observation that "we can never know if a 'world' that eludes our various descriptions of 'it' exerts a causal influence on us. It may occasionally be in our interest, however, to behave as if 'it' does" (Conway, "Disembodied Perspectives" 289). Both Nietzsche and Rorty are as interested in breaking from this attitude as they are in breaking from the epistemological position articulated by metaphysical realism. To construe the above passage as an indication of a commitment to a thin metaphysics rather than a commitment to a description of the subject as a product of her social fabric flies in the face of the affirmative attitude toward self-creation Nietzsche exhorts us to adopt.

Conway's last words betray, not the affirmative tone of Nietzsche's perspectivism, but a resigned scepticism. Conway buys the real world back with a return to talk of a "human nature," for he suggests that we may be incapable of abandoning the metaphysical urge to tether our descriptions to something firm (an urge Rorty's excessively voluntary talk of redescription tries to overcome). However, Conway's lapse at the close of his paper does not get Rorty off the hook even if Conway's adoption of a thin metaphysics and talk of human nature should warn us off the path he takes. We need another way of making sense of Nietzsche's talk of the "really deep down" -- another way of accounting for the ways perspectives become embodied in subjects.

Another glance at Rorty's account of self-creation will get us part way there. Rorty's perspectivism and his account of the subject need not collapse into

incomprehensibility or metaphysics in the way that Conway's rather uncharitable reading of him suggests. We should instead, following the line of criticism we heard Fraser pursue at the close of the last chapter, think of Rorty as simply having paid too little attention to the specific nature of a subject's involvement in the web of contingencies of which she is a part. If we see Rorty's excessive voluntarism as naive in this way, or sloppy, or perhaps very slippery, then his position can be seen as politically problematic rather than philosophically nonsensical. A better corrective to Rorty's account of self-creation comes from Foucault. For, Foucault offers us a way to see the subject that gives sense to Nietzsche's talk of predetermination and the "really deep down" without the thin metaphysical commitments that Conway sees as unavoidable. Foucault's take on the Nietzschean subject suggests that she is a product not only of time and chance but of relations of power and knowledge. It is these that constitute that subject "really deep down" and not something called "human nature."

Rorty, quite rightly, perceives a threat to his privatization of self-creation in Foucault's account of the subject. Foucault wants to explain how subjects are constituted "really deep down" by offering a description of the subject as an interstice of relations of power. Foucault's account of the subject, as we shall see, is inherently political. In an effort to ward off this description of the subject, a description which would undercut his own suggestion that we divide our lives into distinct private and public spheres, Rorty launches a pre-emptive strike at Foucault. He wants to show that Foucault's account of the subject is bound to a metaphysical pretension -- a drive for



sublimity on Foucault's part which would deny his genealogies of the subject anything but incidental political relevance. In a nutshell, Rorty wants to think of Foucault as an ironist intellectual engaged in a sublime attempt at self-creation.

Rorty sees Foucault's descriptions of the subject's production by power as entirely relevant to Foucault's project of self-creation but of limited relevance to politics and the public sphere. Rorty suggests, on one hand, that Foucault "is pretty much useless when it comes to politics" (Rorty, 1989 83). He suggests, on the other hand however, that Foucault served "democratic societies well by telling them about tendencies and patterns that they needed to watch out for" (Rorty, 1991 Vol II 195). This flagrant contradiction can be resolved, Rorty would have us believe, if we think of Foucault as a self-creating ironist intellectual who succumbed to the temptation of the sublime. Rorty suggests that Foucault belongs to that illustrious group of ironists who harbour dangerous metaphysical pretensions to impose their attempts at self-creation on the public sphere. Foucault has for company, in his fall, people like Heidegger, Nietzsche and Georges Sorel.

Rorty wants, therefore, to saddle Foucault's insights into the subject's production by relations of power with metaphysical commitments in order to show how Foucault betrays his irony. Rorty claims that Foucault's anarchistic leanings, specifically Foucault's "refusal to be 'complicit' with 'power'" and his attempt to "envisage a society as free of its historical past as the Romantic intellectual hopes to be free of her private past" suggest a metaphysical yearning (Rorty, 1991 Vol II 196). He wants to find in the radically historicized description of the subject Foucault offers

in his genealogies (a subject produced by truth and power) a nostalgia for "something deep within human beings, which is deformed by acculturation" (Rorty, 1989 64). Such a nostalgia would point to a "'longing for total revolution,' and the 'demand that our autonomy be embodied in our institutions'" (Rorty, 1989 65). Rorty would describe each of these desires as yearnings for a subject and a politic that might transcend mere contingency -- a yearning reminiscent of the attempt at sublimity he claims to see in Nietzsche. Rorty's argument here seems to be of an **ad hominem** variety. For he offers very little in the way of compelling textual proof for his claims -- perhaps because Foucault never expressed the metaphysical yearning Rorty wants to find in him.

All Rorty manages to come up with to support his claim is the vague suggestion that Foucault wants to find a "societal counterpart to the desire for autonomy" and that, to this end, he dreams of a society which has "gone beyond mere social democracy" (Rorty, 1991 Vol II 196). My suspicion here, and it is only a suspicion, is that Rorty's own suspicion that "western social and political thought may have had the last **conceptual** revolution it needs" (Rorty, 1989 63) has blinded him to the possibility that Foucault may simply be dropping cryptic hints (he does this sort of thing) that a further conceptual revolution is required. If this is what these phrases which trouble Rorty refer to then one part of Rorty's worry about Foucault goes away. For a conceptual revolution need not require any footing in metaphysics. The burden of proof here is on Rorty to either better support his claim that Foucault has gone metaphysical in his attempt to create himself or show that in going anarchistic in his

politics he has gone metaphysical.

If Rorty had been successful in saddling the self-creative dimensions of Foucault's genealogies with a metaphysical inclination to impose his project of self-creation and private autonomy on the public sphere, then Rorty would, on his own terms at least, have grounds to refuse to recognize Foucault's political relevance. He could base his refusal to take seriously the political implications of Foucault's account of the subject's relation to power on the line of thought we heard him espouse in the last chapter. We heard Rorty suggest there that metaphysically inclined projects of self-creation, like all attempts at self-creation, belong in the private sphere. I think, however, that Rorty's description of Foucault as a political thinker longing for "total revolution" should be abandoned, as should Rorty's description of him as a crypto-metaphysician who pines for something essential to human beings. If we do abandon both of these descriptions in favour of the politicized descriptions of Foucault's account of the subject and self-creation which I will soon sketch, then Rorty's further suggestion that Foucault is "pretty much useless when it comes to politics" can also be scrapped (Rorty, 1989 83).

Rorty seems to take issue with Foucault, not at the latter's suggestion that there is a connection between truth and power, but, rather, in the political account of self-creation a Foucaultian might root in that connection. Rorty says, for instance, that his "favourite passages in [Catherine] MacKinnon are ones in which she says things like . . . [w]e [feminists] are not attempting the impossible task of developing a non-hegemonic discourse, one in which truth is no longer connected to power" (Rorty,

"Feminism and Pragmatism" 5). Rorty's approbation of this sort of phrase would seem to indicate that he is also in agreement, to some degree at least, with the sort of political connections Foucault wants to draw between power and knowledge. For Foucault, we will see, suggests that knowledge is thoroughly imbued with power and that the relation between them, exercised in relations of power, produces the subject. Unless Rorty can establish that there is something metaphysical going on at this level of description, it is going to be very difficult for him to establish that there is either something inherently metaphysical about Foucault's description of the subject or about the Foucaultian account of self-creation I will suggest. My aim, then, will be to establish a Foucaultian account of politicized self-creation which borrows heavily from the conception of a subject produced by relations of power and knowledge (a conception of the self which Rorty has some agreement with) without tending toward sublimity.

If we can establish that Foucault's account of the subject explains how subjects are embedded in and produced by a social fabric via relations of power, without straying into metaphysics, then we will have a politically charged account of the subject which provides a compelling alternative to the account of the subject Rorty suggests. We will have given non-metaphysical sense to what Nietzsche has called the "really deep down" of a subject. We will also have a description of a subject which does not easily divide into private and public spheres of activity and responsibility. Foucault's account of the subject suggests, contra Rorty, roots for an account of self-creation which is inherently political. Foucault's description of the subject does not,

we will see, **merely** provide an alternative to Rorty's privatized account of self-creation. Foucault's account of the subject suggests that Rorty's privatized version of self-creation is deeply flawed insofar as it privatizes a task which is inherently political. Rorty refuses to take seriously the intricacy with which even this private sphere is embedded in relations of power.

So what does Foucault's account of the subject look like? I think we should read Foucault's account of the subject like I read Nietzsche's -- as an attempt to describe individuals as both the product of historical contingencies and as subjects capable of originality and self-creation. Foucault, like both Nietzsche and Rorty, wants to break with the suggestion that there is an essential self that holds these two descriptions of the subject together. Unlike Rorty, however, Foucault thinks that we need to pay a great deal of attention to the ways in which subjects get produced by their historical contingencies. Foucault is not content to think of the individuals who inhabit Rorty's liberal democracies as involved in distinctly separated private projects of self-creation and public political encounters.

Foucault's genealogical descriptions of the subject and power are aimed at offering an account of how different practices and discourses have established us as the peculiarly modern sorts of subjects we are -- subjects who hold the truths we do. Practice, discourse, truth and knowledge can all be described in terms of power. Each can be seen, Foucault suggests, as involving relations of power. So while nominalist and ironist liberals like Rorty are content to "call 'true' (or 'right' or 'just') whatever

the outcome of undistorted communication happens to be, whatever view 'wins in a free and open encounter'" (Rorty, 1989 67), Foucault wants to know what relations of power worked to produce the truth of a "free and open encounter." For Foucault does not believe that a "free and open encounter" is a particularly useful concept. Truth, he suggests is embedded in power; it is produced in relations of power and in the discourses those relations of power generate. And vice versa. The relations of power that individuals hold with other individuals (economic, sexual, professional, medical etc.) are entrenched, normalized and produced by truth.

The reciprocal relationship between truth and power has produced a peculiarly modern subject -- a subject rendered docile and submissive (a "disciplined" subject in Foucault's terms). This is a subject useful to the perpetuation of institutions (prisons, hospitals, asylums, universities, the police etc.) in which diverse relations of power have solidified. It is also a subject that bears a remarkable resemblance to the "bland, calculating, petty and unheroic" individuals of bourgeois liberal democracies for whom Rorty apologizes (Rorty, Vol I 1991 190).

Foucault does not suggest that we might ever be rid of power, or step outside of it. We should not think that we might escape from power into freedom and openness. Nor should we think of power in straight-forwardly pejorative terms. Our entrenchment in power is, rather, something Foucault wants us to be alive to. We should pay attention to the fact that what might look like an open encounter between politically free individuals in a liberal democracy under Rorty's description can be redescribed in terms that reveal the situatedness of that encounter within a complex

web of relations which produces those particular sorts of subjects in subtle and ongoing ways. Foucault explained in conversation with Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (in refreshingly non-technical language) that "[p]eople know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 187). Foucault's genealogies aim to offer an account of this last point. They describe how subjects, as the vehicles in relations of power and as the speakers of particular discourses, produce, entrench and transform their practices, their truths and, subsequently, themselves.

Foucault suggests to us that the modern subject has been disciplined into usefulness by normalizing practices and discourses on a myriad of fronts. His genealogies aim at exposing how the present has been produced by the past. He wants to offer an account of how the practices and truths of contemporary subjects have sprung from the historical contingencies which produced us. More specifically, Foucault wants to render our practices and truths intelligible by offering a historical account of them in terms of power. Power, he explains

is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And "Power," insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks to arrest their movement. One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are all endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (Foucault, History of Sexuality 93).

We should think of power, Foucault says, as "exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, History of Sexuality 94). Power, therefore, is not a quantifiable substance that can be possessed. Although

we speak in terms of people having power this is actually a misnomer. Foucault wants us to view powerful people as people who are entrenched in the social fabric (via relations of power) in ways that are favourable to them. The upper hand they have in their relations with less favourably entrenched subjects might be accounted for sexually, economically or in some other way. But they are not more powerful because they have lots of something called "Power."

Foucault's account of power here echoes Nietzsche's description of the will to power. The difference between them is largely one of emphasis. Whereas Nietzsche's emphasizes the psychology of power (hence his interest in the drives and affects of a subject) and its relation to valuation, Foucault emphasizes the social relations of power that bind us to other individuals. Both should be seen as attempts to avoid an essentializing account of the self. Both, moreover, explore the dynamic quality of a person's production by power. We should not see these accounts as inherently incompatible. Foucault's account of power is deeply indebted to Nietzsche. He is not out to disagree with Nietzsche so much as he wants to push Nietzsche's suggestion that we are produced by power into areas Nietzsche did not explore.

Relations of power, Foucault suggests, are immanent in other types of relationships, they are the immediate effects of the "divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums" which occur in those other types of relationships (Foucault, History of Sexuality 94). Where we tend to think of some institutions and individuals as having "Power" (things like large corporations and banks and people like rich, white men), Foucault wants to see the hegemonic effects of "micro-relations" of power productive



of these sorts of institutions and individuals. These hegemonic effects of micro-relations of power would be the broadly recognizable effects sustained by the "manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups and institutions. [These] are the basis for wide ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole" (Foucault, History of Sexuality 94).

Foucault's suggestion here is that power is involved in the very mundane activities and references to truth and knowledge which occupy us in our daily lives. The relations we have with other people, doctors, teachers, lovers, parents, children and friends can be thought of as involving power. Our deference to one person, our contempt for another, our attention to the requests of one and our deafness to another are all expressions of power running through relationships we tend to think of as economic, familial, sexual, legal, etc. Foucault wants to suggest that, in fact, these micro-relations of power are both produced by and productive of the broadly recognizable hegemonic effects of power. There is a reciprocal relation between these two. We should not, therefore, think of power as exercised only from the top down by people with lots of power on people with less.

Finally, power **relationships** are precisely that: relational. "Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network" (Foucault, History of Sexuality 95). Foucault's suggestion here is that it makes no sense to think of power existing in a void. This

suggestion again echoes Nietzsche's conception of the will to power. Power is relational insofar as its expression requires that it bump into something. Power produces effects in things only insofar as it meets resistance in the thing it imposes an effect on. Or, more accurately, the resistance offered by one subject to another subject informs the nature of the relation between them. One might, for example, describe a power relation of a medical and sexual nature between two subjects where one subject is able to dictate the terms in which the other subject understands her sexuality as in the case of a psychiatrist and her 'hysterical' patient.

In summary, power, according to Foucault manifests itself at a "local" level. The relations of power between individuals exercised at the micro-level become sedimented in widespread practices and centralized institutions. Power generates truths and knowledges which normalize the practices it perpetuates -- truths and knowledges which, in turn, re-entrench the relations of power exercised at the local level. This is the level where individuals bump into one another (often quite innocuously) and meet with the other's resistance. Foucault describes the network of relations of power thus: "Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities" (Foucault, History of Sexuality 96).

What, however, would Foucault have us do with this general account of power? Foucault suggests that we take these propositions about power as general recommendations for framing more specific analyses of particularly dense areas of the

social fabric in which subjects are embedded. Sexuality is, for example, "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power" (Foucault, History of Sexuality 103). A genealogy, such as The History of Sexuality, therefore, aims at answering very specific historical questions about the relationship between knowledge and power. The strategy here is, once again, reminiscent of Nietzsche. Whereas Nietzsche wants to account for the production of moral subjects in particular social and historical situations Foucault wants to know how the relationship between knowledge and power produced the sorts of sexual subjects it did under particular historical and social situations. To this end Foucault asks questions like:

In a specific type of discourse on sex, in a specific form of extortion of truth, appearing historically and in specific places (around the child's body, apropos of women's sex, in connection with practices restricting births, and so on) what were the most immediate, the most local power relations at work? How did they make possible these kinds of discourses, and conversely, how were these discourses used to support power relations?(Foucault, History of Sexuality 97)

The effort of a genealogy is to reveal, first, "what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge [various discourses] ensure," and second, "what conjunction and what force relationship make their utilization necessary in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur" (Foucault, History of Sexuality 102). Foucault's genealogies are the attempt to lend an intelligibility to the historical contingencies which have produced us. Genealogy is the attempt to describe how we have sprung from a web of historical contingencies in the way that we have.

However, the "how" of this and the "in the way that we have" is a matter of interpretation. A genealogist like Foucault, who is also a perspectivist, realizes that he

is produced by what he genealogizes and cannot, therefore, stand outside of his interpretation. Like Rorty, and like Nietzsche before them both, Foucault recognizes the contingency of his own description as an essential element of his perspectivism. The nonessentializing tendency in his descriptions does not, however, prevent him from offering tactically useful and sophisticated accounts (on a number of fronts) of how various groups of individuals have come to be the sorts of subjects that they are. The descriptions that Foucault offers are, he suggests, capable of impacting on the relations and discourses a genealogy describes. For genealogy exposes to us what what we do does.

Foucault suggests that:

a genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from . . . subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse (Foucault, Power/Knowledge 85).

Subjugated knowledges are those bodies of knowledge which have been lost, displaced or buried by a dominant hegemonic effect of power. They are knowledges which "have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault, Power/Knowledge 82).

Foucault is thinking here of such low ranking knowledges as those of the medical patient as opposed to the knowledge of medicine; the knowledge of the prisoner rather than the knowledge in which an institution like Corrections Canada embeds its penal policies. Foucault is also thinking here of buried "knowledges of erudition": "those blocks of historical knowledge which were present but disguised

within the body of functionalist and systematising theory" (ibid.). Genealogy is aimed at reviving both buried and illegitimate knowledge. For, Foucault suggests, these subjugated knowledges

were concerned with a **historical knowledge of struggles**. In the specialised areas of erudition as in the disqualified, popular knowledges there lay the memory of hostile encounters which even up to this day have been confined to the margins of knowledge.

What emerges out of this [attempt to dig up subjugated knowledges] is something one might call a genealogy, or rather a multiplicity of genealogical researches, a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts (Foucault, Power/Knowledge 83).

We should see Foucault, therefore, as trying to "establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today" (ibid.).

Foucault suggests to us, then, an account of the relation between power and knowledge which describes how subjects are produced by relations of power.

Genealogy is the scholarly attempt to put some flesh on this claim. The History of Sexuality, for instance, describes how specific sorts of sexual subjects have been produced by relations of power in particular social and historical situations. A part of this task is the attempt to describe how relations of power are informed by knowledge and productive of knowledge. This facet of genealogy aims at laying bare how subjects have come to be the sorts of subjects they are as well as, and this is important, accounting for how those subjects understand themselves. Foucault's hope is that subjects armed with genealogies -- with a description of what what they do does -- might attempt to become something different than who they are. He hopes that a subject, with the help of genealogy, might come to see herself differently and attempt to become something more than a passive interstice of relations of power.

The tactics of power that Foucault's genealogies explore offer, to individuals who are interested, a kind of map, a tool that might be used to disrupt relations of power. Foucault's genealogies expose ways in which relations of power exercised at a micro level are entrenched in hegemonic practices and institutions. The possibilities he reveals, then, are possibilities for disrupting relations of power at the local level. And relations of power at the micro level, he has suggested, inform the character of "Power" at the macro level -- the hegemonic effects of power. Foucault's genealogies reveal how relations of power have produced subjects. They have the potential, therefore, to reveal to a subject how she has been produced into a docile and useful subject, an individual whose practices perpetuate the hegemonic effects of power. It may be, however, that this is somebody which she would rather not be. She might, in fact, wish to become someone other than the passive interstice this description suggests she is.

If we accept Foucault's genealogical account of truth and power as productive of the subject, then what are projects of self-creation going to look like for a Foucaultian?<sup>18</sup> We need, to answer this question, to explore Foucault's suggestion that the genealogical account of the subject's production by the relations of power in a social

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<sup>18</sup>I will switch from talking about Foucault here to talking about a Foucaultian. The description I will be offering of self-creation though tied in a number of places to things Foucault says, is a view that I cannot directly attribute to him. He does not join up the various things he says in the particular way that I do. The configuration of his views which I offer here is, however, deeply indebted enough to the things Foucault does say to warrant calling this sketch of self-creation Foucaultian.

fabric are, potentially, tactically useful. I want to suggest that we might think of self-creation as the attempt to manipulate the contingencies from which we spring by disrupting and realigning the relations of power which tie us into the truths and practices which produce us.

To adopt this view of self-creation is to suggest that a subject which is produced by a web of power relations might, insofar as she is an interstice in this web, generate changes in that web. These changes would be the result of her disrupting old relations of power and establishing new sorts of relations of power. Because relations of power are implicit in other sorts of relations (economic, sexual, legal, clinical, etc.) a Foucaultian account of self-creation, in contrast to Rorty's privatization of this project, describes a task which cuts across the traditional liberal separation of our lives into private and public spheres. Self-creation understood as the manipulation of relations of power would, therefore, involve the attempt to influence Rorty's public sphere -- the realm of pragmatic liberal politics. The Foucaultian account of self-creation I am suggesting is, like Foucault's own account of the production of a subject, rooted in a view of the self as a location or interstice in a larger web. This is a view of self-creation that cannot be neatly folded into Rorty's private sphere.

Rorty's suggestion is, of course, that this Foucaultian version of self-creation, due to its sublime nature, has to be de-politicized to fit into his bifurcation of our lives into private and public spheres. I hope to have established, however, that there is no necessary metaphysical pretension in the political account of self-creation I am offering. Rorty's attempt to deny political significance to a Foucaultian description of

self-creation fails, therefore, because he fails to establish a connection between a potential political use of Foucault's account of the subject and metaphysics. Rorty's containment strategy is only effective if that connection holds. It doesn't. The Foucaultian task of self-creation might better be thought of as an inversion of the production of the subject Foucault describes. That is, the same channels which produce a subject (relations of power) might be exercised by a subject to re-create herself in the social fabric of which she is a part. We might, more colourfully, see the task of self-creation as an attempt to pull at the threads of the social fabric which intersect to produce us in the effort we weave those threads into a pattern of our own creation.

Foucault's genealogies would be of strategic and tactical use in this description of self-creation. They would serve, potentially, two purposes. On one hand the account of power which informs Foucault's genealogies offers us some general warnings: look at **how** the subject is produced by relations of power and discourse; be careful of the relationship between, on one hand, micro-relations of power and discourse, and widespread practices and institutions on the other; don't be lulled into thinking that subjects can neatly and vountarily separate themselves from the power structures and ways of speaking which have created them. These general strategic warnings are supported, on the other hand, by detailed genealogies which suggest specific tactics and particular ways in which the pitfalls he warns us against might be avoided.

Foucault is often at his clearest, or at least his most accessible, in interviews.



He explains, in one such interview, the strategy his genealogies aim at:

In reality, what I want to do, and here is the difficulty of trying to do it, is to solve this problem: to work out an interpretation, a reading of a certain reality, which might be such that, on the one hand, this interpretation could produce some of the effects of truth; and on the other hand, these effects of truth could become implements within possible struggles. Telling the truth so that it might be acceptable. Deciphering a layer of reality in such a way that the lines of force and the lines of fragility come forth; the points of resistance and the possible points of attack; the paths marked out and the shortcuts. It is the reality of possible struggles that I wish to bring to light (Foucault, 1989 189).

This passage echoes the suggestion that we think of genealogies as maps. They illuminate fragile areas in the web of relations which produce us as well as avenues for action and possibilities for recovering and utilizing subjugated knowledges. We should think of genealogical descriptions as presenting opportunities to us for reweaving the social fabric -- a reweaving of our own design. We would become, on such a reweaving, something more than a passive interstice in that web -- more than a passively produced subject.

Foucault, however, does not tell us that genealogies have to be used in one way rather than another. His quietness on this point can, wrongly, be taken for quietism -- a denial of responsibility for the descriptions he offers. I believe, rather, that Foucault's silence about the particular use he intends for his genealogies aims at leaving the way open for individuals to **do** something with the descriptions he has offered. Foucault says something to this effect later in the same interview:

At this point I think we need to bring into the discussion the problem of the function of the intellectual. It is absolutely true that when I write a book I refuse to take a prophetic stance, that is, the one of saying to people: here is what you must do -- and also: this is good and this is not. I say to them: roughly speaking, it seems to me that things have gone this way; but I

describe those things in such a way that the possible paths of attack are delineated. Yet even with this approach I do not force or compel anyone to attack. So then, it becomes a completely personal question when I choose, if I want, to take certain courses of action with reference to prisons, psychiatric asylums, this or that issue (Foucault, 1989 191).

Foucault's silence is not an abdication of responsibility for his descriptions. It is a silence that should remind us of Nietzsche's silence and Zarathustra's silence when called upon to articulate the values we should live by. Foucault will not tell us what, in particular, we should do with the genealogies he offers. He will not tell us what to make out of ourselves.

The account of Foucaultian self-creation I have described involves a pulling at the strings which produce the subject -- a manipulation of the relations of power and discourses which constrain that subject. Self-creation will, on this account, have its roots in strategic resistance to the effects of power which render the subject docile and submissive. Neither Foucault nor the Foucaultian can claim that it is inherently wrong to be a docile and submissive subject. But the inheritor of Foucault's genealogies may choose to struggle, with the aid of these genealogies, to become something other than that sort of subject.

In "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," Foucault looks to Nietzsche's image of life as art to link his views on the subject as a product of power with his views on the subject's attempt to create herself. "From the idea that the self is not given to us," Foucault says, "I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 237). Nietzsche suggests in The Gay Science, as we have already heard, that:

**One thing is needful.** -- To "give style" to one's character -- a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. . . . In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste!(GS 290)

This image of life as art is, I think, consistent with Foucault's account of the subject. Nietzsche's refusal to declare, for any one but himself, what is good and what is bad is echoed in Foucault's refusal to declare, universally, how his genealogies are to be used.

The image of life as art is also a fitting correlative to Foucault's account of the subject as a product of power and knowledge. But it would be a mistake to think that the fabric on which the individual works ends at the outskirts of her descriptions of herself. The subject both as a product of power and as a work of art can create herself only by pulling at the relations of power and discourses which tie her to the individuals and institutions of which she is a part. For the Foucaultian, the loom on which a subject works in the attempt to create herself encompasses the entire social fabric -- an attempt to weave herself into that social fabric in such a way that she would be able to see the effects of power which produce her as, in part at least, a pattern of her own artistry.

If the Foucaultian account of self-creation and the description of the subject on which it rests prove compelling, then what, we can ask in closing, is the impact on Rorty's attempt to privatize Nietzschean self-creation? It is significant that the Foucaultian

account of self-creation which I have sketched is political. It rests on a view of the self as an interstice of relations of power. This is a view which explains, via genealogy rather than metaphysics, how the subject comes to spring from the web of contingencies she does in the way that she does. My suggestion is that we might see this subject's attempt at self-creation as an effort to weave herself anew out of the relations of power which intersect to produce her. Self-creation, understood in this way, would be the attempt to generate new and different relations of power with the help of a genealogical analysis of that portion of the social fabric in which one is attempting the task of self-creation.

A Foucaultian conception of self-creation provides, therefore, a viable alternative to the description of the project which Rorty suggests. This account of self-creation is, moreover, inherently antagonistic to Rorty's description of the project just insofar as it is political. Rorty suggests that politics belongs to the public sphere not the private sphere. There is, therefore, no way for Rorty to accept the Foucaultian account of self-creation without either abandoning his own claim that self-creation is exclusively a private concern or stripping the Foucaultian account of its political dimensions. Neither of these possibilities is an appealing strategy. The former is an option Rorty would reject. The latter is an option my interpretation of Foucault precludes.

The Foucaultian account of self-creation which I have sketched suggests that a subject's efforts to create herself will cut across the private-public split which Rorty advocates. The life of a Foucaultian subject is not readily divisible into private and

public spheres of responsibility. The relations of power which produce her are not inherently divisible into private and public relations. Neither is there an obvious way to give sense to a nominal division of a subject's life into these two spheres. For Foucault's genealogies explore how the relations of power in Rorty's private sphere are bound to those hegemonic effects of power visible in his public sphere. The private sphere, Foucault has shown, is as thoroughly imbued with politics as the public sphere.

If Rorty wished to pursue his privatized description of self-creation in light of Foucault's account of the subject then he would have to involve himself in a detailed analysis and critique of Foucault's genealogies. He could not, I have shown, continue to claim that Foucault's project is metaphysical and hope that that label will stick. The onus has, therefore, been shifted to Rorty to establish that his private sphere is as distinct from the public sphere as he would have us believe it to be. For Foucault has given us a way to see a subject's private responsibilities and practices as produced by, among other things, those very institutions of liberal democracy which protect that sphere. It is no longer appropriate, if we take Foucault's description of the subject seriously, to think of one part of our life as nominally divisible from either the rest of our life or from that area of the social fabric which Rorty has designated the sphere of pragmatic liberal politics. Foucault has given us a way of seeing the self as an intersection of relations of power which weave these spheres into one another.

I have also shown that Foucault's account of the subject resolves Conway's objection to the disembodied nature of Rorty's perspectivism. Foucault's subject is a

knot of relations of power and knowledge "really deep down." There is no need to appeal to a thin metaphysics to explain how a such a subject comes to hold the perspectives she does. For a subject's perspective is produced in her just insofar as she can be said to be a subject (an interstice of relations of power and knowledge) at all. Foucault suggests that the subject is this interstice of relations of power and knowledge **all the way down**.

For Foucault perspectives are produced in a subject by the relationship between relations of power and knowledge which produce her. A subject, as an interstice of relations of power, understands herself and her relation to the world in the context of those knowledges which her relations with other individuals and institutions produce. The interstice which she is is, in turn, informed and entrenched by those knowledges which her practices produce. Foucault's suggestion that "[we] are subject to the production of truth through power, and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" is, after all, the tension which drives his account of the subject (Foucault, Power/Knowledge 93).

Finally, Foucault's account of a subject produced by power and knowledge supports Fraser's suggestion that self-creation be seen as a political task to be engaged in the public sphere. Fraser's suggestion is that there may be deep social cleavages in a community which constrain some individuals' attempts at self-creation more than others. She suggests that we pay careful attention to the ways in which individuals are produced as members of a community in order to illuminate and bridge those cleavages which favour some individuals over others. Foucault offers Fraser a way of

explaining how some subjects in a community have been produced such that they are in either favourable or unfavourable positions for the manipulation of those relations of power which produce them. Foucault's account of the subject also echoes and reinforces Fraser's insofar as he can explain how those micro-relations of power in which a subject participates at a local level and in Rorty's private sphere produce (and are produced by) those hegemonic effects of power visible in Rorty's public sphere. Foucault's suggestion that relations among individuals are relations of power, regardless of whether those individuals are pursuing either private or public responsibilities, offers Fraser a way of linking the private task of self-creation with the attempt to transform the practices of pragmatic liberal politics in the public sphere. Under Foucault's description, the manipulation of relations of power which both of these efforts involve are potentially productive of one another.

We should hear in the Foucaultian account of self-creation I have sketched an echo of Nietzsche's free-spirited description of that task. A subject's attempt to become the creator of herself requires that she become the creator of a subject embedded in historical contingencies. Such a subject would become, as it were, the creator of patterns in a fabric stretching out to the very edges of that web of contingencies from which she springs.

## CONCLUSION

I will, by way of concluding, offer a short summary of the Nietzschean accounts of self-creation I have pursued. I have suggested that the description of the subject as both produced by the social fabric she participates in and the potential creator of herself informs the nature of Nietzsche's account of self-creation. For Nietzsche's subject is both produced by the will to power and an expression of that will. She is at once a bundle of malleable drives and affects and an expression of the effects a social fabric has produced in her. Her attempt to become the creator of herself begins with the effort to bring these affects under a single rule. This effort, we have heard Nietzsche suggest, is the attempt to give a style to oneself. To take on this task is to see oneself as a work of art -- it is to fashion oneself as a historically contingent bundle of affects and effects into an expression of one's own taste. Nietzsche names the subject who succeeds in this task the free spirit. Such a spirit has become who she is.

Free spirits, Nietzsche hopes, will be those individuals strong enough to not only master their own drives but spirits strong enough to accept ultimate responsibility for that web of contingencies from which they spring. Nietzsche offers Zarathustra as an illustration of a spirit strong and free and enough to say of all "It was," "Thus I willed it." I have suggested that Zarathustra reconciles Nietzsche's description of the subject as both the creator of herself and the product of history. Zarathustra becomes the creator of himself out of his confrontation with his most abysmal thought -- his



contingency on the small man of herd morality. He does not simply accept his contingency on the small man. He celebrates himself as the creator of himself and the creator of even the smallest man. For his redemption of the past, of all "It was," demands of him that he see all of his effects as the expression of his own creative will -- including those effects which the small man has produced in him. In seeing himself as the eternal Yes to all things Zarathustra becomes who he is.

In the second part of this thesis I pursued Richard Rorty's suggestion that we see self-creation as the private effort of redescription. Rorty suggests that we separate our lives into the distinct spheres of private attempts at self-creation and pragmatic liberal politics. Within the private sphere ironist intellectuals are free to play their descriptions of themselves and their predecessors off one another in the attempt to fashion a final vocabulary of their own creation. Success in this self-creative endeavour is measured by the extent to which such a poet succeeds in making the past bear her impress rather than only bearing the impresses of the past on herself.

I suggested, following a line pursued by Nancy Fraser, that it is something like a Sorelian nightmare that leads Rorty to privatize the self-creative efforts of his ironists. Rorty wants to pre-empt the possibility of an individual imposing her sublime attempt at self-creation on a politic without regard for the cruelty she would impose on the other members of her community. We have seen, however, that the fear which drives Rorty's bifurcation of our lives rests on a confusion he inherits from those very individuals whose metaphysics he sees as a threat to his politics. Rorty, I have argued, mistakenly weds the sublime to the political and is led, thereby, to a

heavy-handed privatization of self-creation.

In the last chapter of this thesis I moved to a sketch of Foucault's account of the subject. I suggested that by paying more careful attention to the ways in which subjects are produced by a social fabric we might be able to lay out an account of self-creation which avoids treating the subject as if she were unconstrained in her attempts to create herself. Foucault describes the subject as an interstice in a web of relations of power and knowledge. This description, I argued, meets Conway's suggestion that a perspectival description of the subject must be able to account for a subject's having the particular sorts of perspectives which she does. We saw that Foucault's genealogical descriptions of the subject offers an account not only of how a subject is embedded in a social fabric but offers, contra Rorty, roots for a political account of self-creation.

I have sketched out a Foucaultian account of self-creation which suggests that genealogies might be tactically employed in the effort to create oneself. Genealogies might be used as maps in a subject's efforts to strategically manipulate the relations of power and knowledges which produce her as a subject. This Foucaultian version of self-creation would involve the individual in an attempt to create a pattern in that web of contingencies from which she springs -- a pattern which she might see as an expression of her own artistic efforts. This description of self-creation is most my own.

## A NOTE ON THE NOTES

Nietzsche's own works are cited in the body of the text by the following abbreviations and the relevant section and/or note number. Other references are cited by author and date of publication. In a few cases I have included the title of the work to avoid confusion.

BGE Beyond Good and Evil  
EH Ecce Homo  
GM On the Genealogy of Morals  
GS The Gay Science  
TI Twilight of the Idols  
WP The Will to Power  
Z Thus Spoke Zarathustra

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