

Praise for *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy*

"The scholarship that has gone into Lemmi's work is both thorough and impressive."
—Steven Hicks, Queens College

"Vanessa Lemmi's study of the animals populating Nietzsche's work is careful, scholarly, and splendidly imaginative. It will alter received understandings of Nietzsche's humanism and anti-humanism and contribute as well to contemporary theoretical inquiries into human/animal boundary breaches. The prose features beautiful combinations of gravitas and whimsy, philosophical abstraction and figurative concreteness—combinations that befit the subject and provide rare pleasure for the reader."
—Wendy Brown, University of California, Berkeley

"Vanessa Lemmi's book is a wide-ranging and richly insightful work that quite persuasively ties Nietzsche's treatment of the theme of animality to his political thought and to his engagement with the topics of decadence, the body, and the *Übermensch*. It is an outstanding addition to contemporary Nietzsche scholarship and a major contribution to the growing literature on Nietzsche's significance as a philosopher of culture. I highly recommend it!"
—Robert Gooding-Williams, The University of Chicago

"Vanessa Lemmi's book is not only an original and convincing interpretation of Nietzsche's thought but it also opens up a new perspective on the meaning and future of an affirmative biopolitics. Contrary to what an old humanist tradition has asserted, it is precisely the biological continuity between human being and animal that withholds the secret of a resistance to disciplinary mechanisms as well as the potential for a radically new development of individual creativity."
—Roberto Esposito, Italian Institute of Human Sciences

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PERSPECTIVES IN CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

John D. Caputo, Series Editor

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York

www.fordhampress.com

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ISBN 978-0-8232-3028-0

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Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy
*Animals, Politics, and the
Humanity of the Human Being*



Culture and Civilization

This chapter investigates the formations and transformations of human life and culture through a reevaluation of Nietzsche's discourse on culture and civilization. The key to this discourse is to understand culture and civilization as antagonists: "*Civilization and Culture: an antagonism*" (KSA 13:16[73]). In my view, the antagonism between culture and civilization has not been emphasized enough in discussions of Nietzsche's philosophy of culture. One reason for this is that commentators have interpreted the significance of the dualism of culture and civilization only within the context of its nationalistic use in the German academic and political debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which discussed Germany's self-understanding as a *Kultur* nation. As a result of this debate, the notion of *Kultur* became discredited in the latter part of the twentieth century because of its appropriation by conservative and reactionary thinkers.¹ Another reason is that Nietzsche's notions of culture and civilization have often been collapsed into one another.² An analysis of their antagonism is crucial, however, because it is through such an analysis that Nietzsche puts forth a critique of civilization that does not imply a "return to nature" but, instead, predicts the eventual rule of culture over civilization.

My argument begins by showing that the antagonism between culture and civilization reflects an antagonism between human and animal life forces. In this antagonism, culture is defined as cultivation and is distinct from civilization, which is defined as taming and breeding. Whereas civilization distinguishes itself as the forgetting of the animal and of animal

forgetfulness, culture distinguishes itself as the memory of the animal and of animal forgetfulness. The process of civilization aims at the moral and rational improvement of the human being. In contrast, the task of culture is primarily a critical one: Its function is to show that rationalization and moralization are techniques of domination directed against the animality of the human being. Culture, in its critical function, reveals that the "improvements" of civilization are "false overcomings."³ The second task of culture is that of liberation: Its function is to overcome the domination of civilization. The challenge of culture is to bring forth not forms of life that are forms of power over life, but forms of life that are themselves full of life, overflowing with life. I argue that culture recovers this fullness of life in the dreams, illusions, and passions of the animal. The chapter ends with a discussion of Nietzsche's figure of the *Umgekehrte* (the subverted and subverting one) as an example of such a fullness of life. This chapter also discusses other figures in Nietzsche's work that reflect such a fullness of life, such as the overhuman and the genius of culture.

The Antagonism of Culture and Civilization

In Nietzsche's work, the formations and transformations of human animal life and culture are characterized in terms of the fundamental antagonism between culture and civilization (KSA 13:16[73]). A note written during the Spring–Summer of 1888 illustrates this idea:

The highpoints of culture and civilization lie far apart: one should not be misled by the abyssal antagonism between culture and civilization. The great moments of culture have always been, morally speaking, times of corruption; and conversely the epochs of willed and forced animal taming ("civilization") of the human being have been times of intolerance of the spiritual and most bold natures. What civilization wants is something different from what culture wants: maybe the opposite [*etwas Umgekehrtes*]. (KSA 13:16[10])⁴

Nietzsche underlines the difference between culture and civilization as not only a difference in their opposing aims but also a difference in their highpoints. The highpoints of culture and of civilization alternate. In their continual competition only one of them may rule: When culture is at its height, it rules over civilization; conversely, when civilization is at its height, it rules over culture. Nietzsche conceives civilization as a moral and, therefore, as a forced and willed project. At its height, civilization manifests itself in the violence directed against the animality of the human being and, also, in its intolerance toward "the spiritual and most bold

natures.” That civilization sees its enemy in animal as well as in spiritual and free natures reveals the intimate affinity Nietzsche sees between the freedom of the animal and the freedom of the spirit. In contrast to civilization, culture is explicitly immoral and corrupt. What defines culture is freedom from moralization, from the “willed and forced animal taming” of civilization, and from its intolerance toward “free spirits.” When culture rules over civilization, what rules is the freedom of the animal and of the spirit.

The antagonism between culture and civilization is also reflected in the claim that “error has transformed animals into humans” and in the question that Nietzsche poses as to whether “truth is perhaps capable of returning humans into animals” (*HH* 519). In this antagonism, civilization represents the perspective of error that turns animals into humans, while culture represents the perspective of truth that turns humans back into animals. Whereas civilization claims that the truth of the human being consists of its moral and rational nature, culture shows that this truth is part of the set of errors that has turned animals into humans. From the perspective of civilization, what gives rise to error and illusion is the forgetfulness of the animal. Civilization understands itself as the process of improvement of the human being through the imposition of its truth as a corrective to its animal forgetfulness. Civilization corrects the human being’s animal nature through the breeding of a specific kind of memory, a “memory of the will” (*Gedächtnis des Willens*) that remembers the truth of civilization and all its moral and rational norms and forgets all the rest (*GM* II: 1).⁵ While civilization reflects the domination of the human animal through the imposition of another, supposedly morally superior, nature upon it, culture reflects the resistance to and the liberation from the oppressiveness of civilization.⁶

From the perspective of culture, the imposition of the truth (memory) of civilization on the human animal is itself based on error and illusion (*GS* 121). In contrast to the memory of civilization, culture brings forth a “counter-memory” that unveils the illusory character of the truth of civilization.⁷ This counter-memory undoes the memory as well as the forgetfulness found in civilization. Under the rule of culture, the human animal forgets the moral and rational norms of civilization, and this animal forgetfulness, in turn, brings back to the human being the forgotten freedom of the animal and of the spirit. The liberation of the human animal through culture defines what Nietzsche calls cultivation in contrast to the taming and breeding that define civilizational practices. The practices of taming and breeding are primarily characterized by the desire to impose a form on human animal life. Instead, the cultural practice of cultivation

reflects a desire to embrace life in all its forms: “Give me life and I will create a culture out of it for you” (*HL* 10). The practice of cultivation is, in this sense, a practice of hospitality, receiving and giving life. Rather than imposing one universal form on life, culture as cultivation is directed toward the pluralization of forms of life that are inherently singular and are irreducible to each other.

The imposition of memory on the precivilized animal functions as a corrective to its forgetfulness and irrationality. But, ultimately, this process of so-called improvement succeeds only because of forgetfulness—that is, because of the forgetting of the human being’s animality. Despite the attempt by civilization to set itself apart from the forgetfulness of the precivilized animal, it reveals these very same features: forgetfulness, bad reasoning, error, and illusion. The memory of civilization cannot hide the “bestiality” of its forgetting of the animal. Nietzsche turns the prejudices of civilization against civilization itself and shows the alleged distance between civilization and animality to be a mere pretense. From the perspective of the animals, the illusion harbored by the human being that it is a moral and rational being does not make this animal any more moral, rational, or human, but only more prejudiced:

‘Humanity’.—We do not regard the animals as moral beings. But do you suppose the animals regard us as moral beings?—An animal which could speak said: “Humanity is a prejudice of which we animals at least are free.” (*D* 333)

The task of culture is to free the human animal from the prejudices of civilization—that is, to lead the human animal beyond a moral and rational conception of its becoming toward the affirmation of life as inherently amoral, a-rational, and innocent. The innocence of life is an expression of its fullness: Life emerges and overflows, indifferent to the rationality and morality of its forms and, hence, powerful in its generosity and creativity (*WP* 1027).

Nietzsche’s conception of human becoming and self-overcoming is incompatible with the optimism found in the project of civilization. More precisely, it conflicts with the belief that the human being’s progressive emancipation from the animals will lead to greater freedom and autonomy. Nietzsche defines his own position as inherently pessimistic, claiming that true liberation can be achieved not through the overcoming of animality but rather through the overcoming of all-too-human forms of morality and of rationality as vehicles of civilization. Nietzsche confirms [*feststellen*] the human being’s animality, and, in an attempt to restore

their “animal common sense,”⁸ he places humans back amid the other animals.

We have learnt better. We have become more modest in every respect. We no longer trace the origin of the human being in the “spirit,” in the “divinity,” we have placed it back among the animals. We consider it the strongest animal because it is the most cunning: its spirituality is a consequence of this. On the other hand, we guard ourselves against a vanity which would like to find expression even here: the vanity that human being is the great secret objective of animal evolution. The human being is absolutely not the crown of creation: every creature stands beside him at the same stage of perfection. . . . And even in asserting that we assert too much: the human being is, relatively speaking, the most unsuccessful animal, the sickliest, the one most dangerously strayed from its instincts—with all that, to be sure, the most *interesting*! (A 14)

Nietzsche denies the modern belief in progress without advocating anything like a “return to nature” and dismisses the romantic longing for a return to a “higher” and more “human” origin as this belief is exemplified by Rousseau (*TI* “Skirmishes” 48). In contrast to the optimistic view that, at the beginning, one finds “good nature” (*D* 17), beauty, innocence, and harmony, Nietzsche holds the pessimistic view that every return to the beginning is a return to the cruel and the crude (*PTA* 1). These overly optimistic and naïve positions, one returning to the past and the other progressing toward the future, are symptomatic of weakness and of a denial of life. They reject life in favor of another, supposedly better life, projected either into the past or into the future. In opposition to this, pessimism reveals strength, health and ascending life, which result from embracing life here and now, affirming it in all its forms: human, animal, and other (“An Attempt at Self-Criticism” 2).⁹

The antagonism between culture and civilization is manifest in the agnostic “crossing” of Dionysus and Apollo in *The Birth of Tragedy*.¹⁰ In this crossing, the Apollonian reflects the perspective of civilization, with its illusions of a rational and moral (also political) world order, and the Dionysian reflects the perspective of culture, seeing the world as an abyss with no orderly structure, no ultimate ground. The Dionysian vision of the world as chaotic, irrational, and purposeless triggers vertigo in those who contemplate this vision, which is disconcerting, unsettling, and terrifying. However, the destructive force that the Dionysian directs against the Apollonian order is not merely destructive, for it also gives rise to the creativity and freedom associated with culture. Depending on whether the

Dionysian or the Apollonian perspective of life prevails, the human being understands itself as either an artistic and creative or a rational and moral being and conceives of culture as either tragic and Dionysian (which is the sense I give to the term “culture”) or scientific and Apollonian (which is the sense I give to the term “civilization”).

The hegemony of one perspective over the other requires a form of forgetfulness. Under the rule of Apollonian illusion and dream, the human being forgets itself as animal and as creative. Under the rule of Dionysian frenzy (*Rausch*), the human animal forgets the moral and rational settings of Apollonian illusion: “The Individual, with all his limits and measures, became submerged here in the self-oblivion of the Dionysian condition and forgot the statutes of Apollo” (*BT* 4). Nietzsche privileges Dionysian forgetfulness because it is more fundamental than Apollonian forgetfulness, just as he privileges animal forgetfulness over the civilizational forgetfulness of the human being. Although Nietzsche praises the healing force of the Apollonian dream as it transfigures the unbearable vision of the world as an abyss, ultimately what reconciles humans with life, nature, and one another is the “magic of the Dionysian”:

Not only is the bond between human beings renewed by the magic of the Dionysian, but nature, alienated, inimical, or subjugated, celebrated once more her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, humankind. (*BT* 1)¹¹

Under the impact of Dionysian magic, the human animal affirms and celebrates its animality as a source of life and culture. Only when surrounded by the Dionysian myth can the Apollonian dream preserve itself and be given a direction (*BT* 23).¹² The Dionysian (culture) leads the Apollonian (civilization) just as the animal leads the human being, giving the human being an aim: to produce the genius of culture, or what Nietzsche eventually calls the overhuman.

The affinity between the figure of the genius of culture in Nietzsche’s early work and the figure of the overhuman in his later work is expressed, first, by their constituting the aim of culture and, second, by their achievement of this aim through an overcoming of the human: “[N]ot ‘human-kind’ but overhuman is the goal!” (*WP* 1001). Examples from Nietzsche’s early and late work confirm that, throughout his work, he holds on to the idea that it is the animal in the human which promises the further refinement of culture. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche draws on the image of Zarathustra, who is led by the animals toward the overhuman—that is, toward the overcoming of the human (*Z*: 10 “Zarathustra’s Prologue”). In accordance with this image, a citation from Nietzsche’s early

work suggests the same idea, namely that culture means, first, a following of the animal and, second, an overcoming of the human:

If we speak of *humanity*, it is on the basic assumption that it should be that which *separates* the human being from nature and is its mark of distinction. But in reality there is no separation: “natural” characteristics and those called specifically “human” are grown together inextricably. The human being, in its highest, finest powers, is all nature and carries nature’s uncanny dual character in itself. Those capacities of it that are terrible and are viewed as inhuman are perhaps, indeed, the fertile soil from which alone all humanity, in feelings, deeds and works, can grow forth. (HC)

Weighing the “human” against the “inhuman,” Nietzsche asks whether priority should not be given to animality over humanity, as that is the aspect of the human being which provides the most favorable ground on which to foster greatness and virtue.¹³ Nietzsche returns to the Greeks, the “models of all future cultured nations” and the heralds of agonistic competition, in order to gain further insight into the relationship between animality and culture (HL 10). The genius of Greek culture is contained in its knowledge of how to preserve and entertain a fruitful relationship with animality.¹⁴ In the “cruelty” of the animal, the Greeks see not a lack of justice or morality but rather, a stimulant to agonistic competition and to the refinement of culture:

Thus the Greeks, the most humane people of ancient time, have a trait of cruelty, of tiger-like pleasure in destruction, in them. . . . Without envy, jealousy and competitive ambition, the Hellenic state, like Hellenic man, deteriorates. (HC)

What Nietzsche finds remarkable is not only that humanity and animality lie side by side in the Greeks but, more important, that animality is a source of their humanity. The Greeks celebrate their animal instincts as inherently cultural forces, as carriers of life and artistic inspiration. Greek culture “teaches,” first, that only those who follow the animal will attain a higher level of culture and, second, that only those who fully embrace life in all its forms—human, animal, and other—will be successful in bringing forth new, future promising forms of life and thought.

Still, for Nietzsche, one cannot, strictly speaking, “learn” from or be “led” by the animals, just as one cannot “learn” anything from the Greeks. Both are too futile, too fluid, too strange, too other:

I received absolutely no strong impressions from the Greeks; and, not to mince words, they *cannot* be to us what the Romans are. One

does not *learn* from the Greeks—their manner is too strange, it is also too fluid to produce an imperative, a “classical” effect. Who would have ever learned to write from a Greek! Who would have learnt it *without* the Romans! (TI “Ancients” 2)

The difference between Greek and Roman culture reflects what I call the antagonism between culture and civilization. Whereas culture finds its exemplar in the Greeks, civilization finds it in the Romans. Nietzsche is interested in how the animals and the Greeks are inimitable.¹⁵ Following their example means becoming an inimitable example of life and virtue.

The Forgetfulness of Civilization

Whereas culture is the memory of animality and the affirming and holding onto the human beings’ continuity with the animals, civilization coincides with the forgetting of animality, the silencing of the animal within the human:

The forgetful.—In the outbursts of passion, and in the fantasizing of dreams and insanity, the human being re-discovers its own and the humans’ prehistory: *animality* with its savage grimaces; on these occasions its memory goes sufficiently far back, while its civilized condition evolves out of a forgetting of these primal experiences, that is to say out of a relaxation of its memory. The one who, as a forgetful one on a grand scale, is wholly unfamiliar with all this, *does not understand the humans*,—but it is to the advantage of all if here and there such forgetful ones appear as those who “do not understand the humans” and who are as it were begotten by divine seeds and born of reason. (D 312)

The forgetfulness of civilization displaces the memory of continuity between humans and animals. Under the rule of civilization, the human animal forgets what it was and what it is—an animal—in order to become what it is not yet—a moral and rational being. In this sense, the becoming rational and moral of the human animal depends on the gradual increase of the forgetting of the human beings’ animality, or, as Nietzsche puts it, a “relaxation of its memory” (D 312). Civilization and forgetfulness belong together insofar as it is only because of the forgetfulness of the human being’s animal beginning (animal origin) that it can come to understand itself as a moral and rational being, “begotten by divine seeds and born of reason” (ibid.). Furthermore, civilization and forgetfulness belong together insofar as continued forgetfulness is required to preserve the dominance of civilization.¹⁶

Nietzsche values the achievements of civilizational forgetting. Civilizational forgetfulness separates humans and animals and sets them against each other. It thus achieves a radical break with prior forms of human animal life, allowing the human animal to transform itself into something distinctly human and not animal. However, Nietzsche is also aware that civilization does not stand for the “smooth” forgetting of animality: It aggressively denies the animality of the human being and thereby destroys the “fertile soil” out of which humanity grows and keeps on growing:

What in the competition against the animals brought about the humans their victory, at the same time brought about the difficult and dangerous sickness like development of the human being: the human being is the *not yet confirmed animal*. (KSA 11:25[428])¹⁷

Nietzsche warns that the denial of animality found in civilization provokes the degeneration of human life and culture. It leads to the inevitable decline (*Untergang*) of the rule of civilization.

The task of culture is to reconfirm the animality of the human being. Culture is in this sense a “return to nature” that cures the sickness of civilization by restoring a fruitful antagonism between human and animal life forces. What is important, for Nietzsche, is the preservation not of civilization (sickness) or of culture (health) as such but the preservation of the antagonism between civilization (sickness) and culture (health). Nietzsche acknowledges that it is the sickness of civilization which turns the human animal into an interesting and promising animal (A 14). This, however, is only because he believes that the sickening effect of civilization will eventually lead to the attainment of greater health under the rule of culture.

In Nietzsche’s antagonistic account of the relationship between culture and civilization, the decline (*Untergang*) of civilization coincides with a transition (*Übergang*) to culture.¹⁸ When Nietzsche praises the accomplishments of (the forgetfulness of) civilization (D 312), what he finds valuable is not what civilization brings forth by itself (if such a thing is possible), but what it brings forth in opposition to culture (nature). The danger of civilizational forgetting (denial) is, strictly speaking, not that it destroys that *out of* which it grows, but that *against* which it grows. Nietzsche wants to preserve the antagonism between human and animal forces because he believes that culture and civilization, just like human and animal life forces, cannot be viewed apart from each other. They are not autonomous and self-sufficient; rather, they are dependent upon each other. Another reason Nietzsche wants to preserve antagonism is that he sees, in the latter, a stimulant to the cultivation of a plurality of inherently

singular forms of life. In “Homer’s Contest,” Nietzsche claims that once the Greeks had destroyed their enemy’s independence, once they “made their superior strength felt,” they destroyed the fruitful antagonism that was responsible for their culture’s greatness. Accordingly, Nietzsche approves of certain doses of aggression against animality (nature) but rejects overdoses of civilizational aggression. The key is to maintain a fruitful conflict and tension between culture and civilization, animal and human life forces.

Morality as a False Overcoming

When civilization cuts off the human being from its animal beginning, this leaves a gap that civilization tries to fill with a narrative on the creation of the human being. In this narrative, the human being’s origin is construed as a beginning (a substantial nature) that causally determines the future as that toward which history evolves (teleology). According to civilization’s narrative of creation, the world constitutes a rational and moral order whose architecture is transparent to humans only when humans are conceived of as beings who are themselves inherently rational and moral, a reflection of their origin. In the Western tradition this narrative is intimately tied up with a religious and moral discourse, in particular with that of the Judeo-Christian doctrine:

The presupposition that things are, at bottom, ordered so morally that human reason must be justified . . . is the after-effect of belief in God’s veracity—God understood as the creator of things. (WP 471)

The discourses of civilization and Christianity are distinguished by their mutual interest in the moral improvement of the human being (TI “Improvers”). In this capacity, both discourses betray a hostility toward life: “For before the court of morality (especially Christian, which is to say unconditional, morality) life *must* constantly and inevitably be proved wrong because life is essentially something amoral” (“An Attempt at Self-Criticism” 5). This hostility toward life is reflected in the general belief that this life must be rejected in favor of another, better, improved life (TI “Anti-Nature” 1).¹⁹ Furthermore, both discourses, insofar as they articulate a project of moral improvement, are discourses of domination. The desire to gain mastery over life is dominant in both the beliefs and practices of the Christian church (TI “Anti-Nature” 1, 2). The latter have not improved life, but rather weakened, sickened, and aggravated the human animal’s condition:

To call the taming of an animal its “improvement” is in our ears almost a joke. Whoever knows what goes on in menageries is doubtful whether the beasts in them are “improved.” They are weakened, they are made less harmful, they become *sickly* beasts through the depressive emotion of fear, through pain, through injuries, through hunger.—It is no different with the tamed human being whom the priest has “improved.” (*TI* “Improvers” 2)

Christian morality reflects the hatred and resentment of the animal within the human that is found in the project of civilization. It stands for the erroneous and optimistic belief in the human being’s superiority over the animals and all other forms of life. This stance leads not only to the belief that reason, language, and morality are the truly “superhuman” features of the human being but also to the belief that, in the name of God, one is justified in using and abusing animal life as a means toward the perfection of “higher” forms of human life. Nietzsche is particularly critical of this last trait of Christianity and compares favorably Eastern religions, which, despite an obsession with moral improvement, still respect and protect the animals as gifted (*WS* 57).

Nietzsche understands Christian morality as the process of turning the human animal against itself, that is, against its animality. Due to its overly aggressive denial of animality, however, this morality cannot succeed in generating the fruitful antagonism between human and animal life forces that can lead the human being beyond itself. Christian moralities’ struggle against animality is the struggle of weak and declining life:

The over-animal.—The beast in us wants to be lied to; morality is a necessary lie told so that it shall not tear us to pieces. Without the errors that repose in the assumptions of morality the human being would have remained animal. As it is, it has taken itself for something higher and imposed sterner laws upon itself. That is why it feels a hatred for the grades that have remained closer to animality: which is the explanation of the contempt formally felt for the slave as a non-human, as a thing. (*HH* 40)

The moral and civilized human being’s claim that it has surpassed the animal does not, in the Nietzschean sense, reflect an instance of overcoming as the result of an agonistic encounter with the animals, but, on the contrary, signals the escape from open and honest competition. The attempt to rise above and beyond the animals, to become an over-animal, reveals a weakness and lack of courage. The over-animal is an animal that cannot afford to “confirm” its animality. It resembles the priestly type of

man that Nietzsche describes in *Twilight of the Idols*; he is too weak to confront his animal passions and instincts. The priestly man’s weaknesses make him resent and hate animal passions so much that he cannot but exterminate them. Because he lacks the strength to live with and in opposition to these animal passions, castration and extirpation of his animality are his only options. The priestly man’s attitude toward his animal instincts is revelatory of his general hostility toward life, for “to attack the passions at their root is to attack life at its root” (*TI* “Morality” 1). In the end, Christian morality does not improve the human being but, rather, bestializes the animal within the human:

Morality is a menagerie; its premise, that iron bars are more useful than freedom, even for the captive; its other premise, that there are animal tamers who do not shrink from frightful means, who know how to handle red-hot iron. This horrific species, which accepts battle with the wild animal, calls itself “priest.” (*KSA* 13:15[72])²⁰

Whereas violence has been traditionally attributed to the animal, Nietzsche attributes it to the human and, in particular, to the project of civilization and moralization. This reversal restores the so-called cruelty of the animal to its amoral innocence.

The prefix “over-” in the term “over-animal” designates the attempt to establish a hierarchical ordering of the human as superior to the animal. This superiority separates the human from the animal and thereby forecloses the possibility of an agonistic encounter. The over-animal exemplifies an animal whose feelings of “envy, jealousy, and competitive ambition” (*HC*) have been “exterminated.” The meaning of the prefix “over-” in the term “over-animal” therefore is exactly the opposite of the meaning of the prefix “over-” in the terms “overhuman” and “overcoming,” where “over” denotes the human’s ability to overcome itself. While in the over-animal the prefix “over-” refers to a vertical relationship that establishes a hierarchy of the human ruling “over” the animal, in the overhuman the prefix “over-” refers to a horizontal relationship that establishes a “face-to-face” meeting of the animal and the human in which the animal and the human are recognized as equals. The horizontality of the overcoming of the human is expressed in the metaphor of the bridge and in the image of the wind (*Überwindung*) blowing over the horizon. In the Nietzschean term “overhuman,” the prefix “over-” is used neither to separate the human from the animal, nor to set one above the other, but to establish just enough distance (*Pathos der Distanz*) so as to open up the space for an agonistic encounter.

The figure of the overhuman, in contrast to the over-animal, is imbued with the courage to surround oneself with animals, for it is only in the eyes of the animals that one can detect whether one's will to power is rising or declining: "Must I look down on them today and fear them? And will the hour return when they look up at me in fear?" (*GS* 314). It is important to recognize the upward/downward perspective of the noble and powerful as distinct from the upward/downward perspective of the enslaved and weak. While the former is an expression of reverence and respect for the other, the latter is an expression of hierarchy and domination over others. In the noble and powerful, the respect and reverence for the other (including oneself) opens up a horizontal perspective, the perspective of agonistic struggle, *par excellence* (*BGE* 265).²¹

Nietzsche's vision of the antagonism between human and animal life forces in the self-overcoming (becoming overhuman) of the human being is in this sense continuous with his more general view that all forms of life are constituted by struggle. For Nietzsche, the organism reflects struggle as much as order (*KSA* 11:40[55]; 37[4]) and an organism is the "order of thousands of obedient forces" but of obedient forces that resist:

Life would have to be defined as a continuous process of sizing up one's strength [*Kraftstellungen*], where the antagonists grow in unequal measure. Even in obedience a resistance [*Widerstreben*] subsists; one's power [*Eigenmacht*] is not given up. Similarly, in commanding there exists a concession that the absolute power of the rival is not defeated, not incorporated, not dissolved. "To obey" and "to command" are forms of competitive play [*Kampfspiel*]. (*KSA* 11:36[22])

Nietzsche's conception of order and of elevation should not be confused with the traditional understanding of hierarchy. Instead, his conception of order points to a relationship between forces where the commanding force does not oppress the obeying force and where the obeying force does not submit to the commanding force.²² In the relationship between commanding and obeying forces, their respective differences are not given up, but persist and resist one another. The relationship between commanding and obeying forces in the overhuman animal is, therefore, not the site of domination, of one force setting itself above the other, but rather a rivalry between equal forces:²³

The highest human being would have the greatest plurality of instincts, and also in the greatest relative measure that can still be endured. Indeed: where the human plant shows itself strong, there we

find the instincts powerfully acting against each other. (*KSA* 11:27[59])

Whereas the so-called strength of the over-animal is reflected in its practice of extirpation and castration of animal passions, the strength of the overhuman is reflected in its ability to contain within itself an increasing degree of struggle between the greatest plurality of animal passions:

The great human being is great because it opens up a space for the free play of its lusts: the great one is strong enough to make out of these animals [*Unthieren*] its domestic animals [*Haustiere*]. (*KSA* 13:16[7])

When Nietzsche here speaks of "domestic animals," he is not referring to the "type Christian" (*WP* 684) but to the animal as a friend, a companion, and a competitor.

The notion of the overhuman stands for an understanding of human life as something that becomes (*Werden*) rather than as something that is (*Sein*).²⁴ Being human means being in becoming (*ein Auf-dem-Weg sein*) and overcoming (*Übergang* and *Untergang*): "not an end but just a path, an episode, a bridge, a great promise" (*GM* II: 16). The possibility of the human self-overcoming (becoming overhuman) reflects the idea that the human being is not a function of what it is, moral or rational, but of what else it could become, if only it keeps overcoming itself. In other words, what is promising about the human being is the possibility of its infinite self-overcomings. Becoming overhuman, therefore, does not reflect an attempt to stabilize human life into some sort of ideal superhuman form but, rather, to provoke a counter-movement against that which stabilizes itself into a fixed identity and nature. It does not entail remaining identical to oneself, but altering oneself, becoming untruthful to oneself.²⁵ Nietzsche welcomes the return of the animal because he sees, in animality, a force that disrupts the human being's identity. It is a return that destabilizes what is in view of what shall be. Rather than reducing the future to one and only one all-too-human form of life, becoming overhuman points to a movement of excess and an extension of the human that leads it beyond its all-too-human form. It stands for a return of the animal in the human that opens up the possibility for the cultivation of a plurality of irreducibly singular forms of life.²⁶

The Memory of Culture

The memory of culture is the memory of the continuity of animal and human life forces (*D* 312), but this continuity does not collapse humans

and animals into sameness and identity (*BT* 8).²⁷ Humans are animals, but they are unlike any other animal. From the perspective of culture, human animals are distinguished not only by their illusions of morality, rationality, and the use of the intellect as an instrument of truth (*TL*), but also by their ability to overcome these all-too-human illusions to become what Nietzsche calls overhuman.²⁸ The overcoming of the human depends on a return to the beginning, a return to animality and animal forgetfulness, but it does not call for a “return to nature” in the Rousseauian sense or for a fusion of the human animal with nature and the animals. Rather, the overcoming of the human depends on keeping alive the struggle against nature. This struggle for distance from the origin, to become unfaithful to it, is what Nietzsche defines as the liberating task of culture in *Untimely Considerations*: “Educate oneself, that is, by oneself against one’s self, to a new habit and nature, out of an old first nature and habit” (*HL* 10). The aim of culture is to educate the human animal so as to “twist free” a “second nature,” a “more natural nature” that betrays the features of its irreducible singularity. In *Nietzsche et la scène philosophique*, Sarah Kofman argues that nature does not precede culture and that nature is always already taken up by culture, because nature imposes itself as the task of culture to form and transform, to invent and reinvent nature.²⁹ But if nature is always already culture, then the nature contested by culture is not nature itself, but an interpretation of nature. What culture contests is a civilizational interpretation of (human animal) nature as moral and rational in favor of an interpretation of (human animal) nature as artistic and creative.

The question of whether culture is able to reverse the interpretations of civilization is inseparable from the question of whether truth has the capacity to turn humans back into animals (*HH* 519). Nietzsche associates this concept of truth with the figure of Circe, truth as seduction. This truth seduces the human being back to its origin, where it discovers (*sucht und versucht*) the illusion of its beginning. Nietzsche investigates the human being’s beginning from the perspective of the animals. From that perspective, the very idea of such a thing as “the human being” seems dubious: “Human beings do not exist, for there was no first ‘human being’: thus infer the animals” (*KSA* 10:12[1].95). Analogously, he also rejects the idea of organic life having a beginning: “I do not see why the organic should be thought of as something that has an *origin* [*entstanden sein muss*]” (*KSA* 11:34[50]). Nietzsche questions the notion of a beginning that constitutes a given, stable, and unalterable origin that determines all future becoming. The truth about the beginning is not the truth of the origin, but a truth that dissolves the beginning.

Truth as Circe signifies that human life is not only deeply involved and dissolved in dream and illusion, but also that dreams and illusions are the only conditions under which life can strive and thrive.³⁰ Nietzsche gains this insight when he awakens within a dream to the consciousness that not only is life a dream, but also that dreams and illusions are essential to life, for to be alive means to dream and to fantasize (*GS* 54).³¹ In a fragment from the *Nachlass*, Nietzsche defines the whole organic world as a “being with the habit of ordering in dreaming”:

The whole organic world is the weaving together of beings, each with their little imaginary world around themselves: their force, their lust, their habits are found in their experiences, projected as their *outside world*. The ability [*Fähigkeit*] for creation (formation, invention, imagination) is their fundamental capacity: of themselves, these beings have, of course, likewise only an erroneous, imaginary, simplified representation. “A being with the habit of ordering in dreaming”—that is a living being. Immense amounts of such habits have finally become so solid, that *species* live in accordance with these orders. Probably these habits are favorable to the conditions of their survival. (*KSA* 11:34[247])

It is interesting to note that, in Nietzsche, dreams and the imagination do not belong exclusively to the human, but are constitutive of the whole organic world.³² Nietzsche identifies dreaming as the fundamental ability of all living beings in the sense that it not only preserves, but also enhances life (*BT* 1).³³ What defines the ability to dream is the ability to create. For a living being to be alive it must create, form, invent, and imagine. As dreaming beings, all living beings imagine, invent, and create for themselves a form of life and an imaginary outside world. As such, they are not only continuously dreaming but, more importantly, living in dreams of their own creation. Life is a dream that keeps on imagining and reimagining and creating and recreating itself through dreaming. But if life is a dream in which one comes to life through dreaming, then the consciousness Nietzsche awakens to must be understood as “just” another dream:

Waking life does not have the *freedom* of interpretation possessed by the life of dreams, it is less inventive and unbridled—but do I have to add that when we are awake our drives likewise do nothing but interpret nervous stimuli and, according to their requirement, posit their “causes”? that there is no essential difference between waking and dreaming? that our moral judgments and evaluations too are fantasies based on a physiological process unknown to us, a kind of

acquired language for designating certain nerve stimuli? that all our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text? (*D* 119)

Although Nietzsche holds that, strictly speaking, there is no difference between waking and dreaming, he observes that it is while dreaming and sleeping that the animal returns to the human being (*HH* 13).³⁴ That the animal returns during dreaming and sleeping, rather than during waking life, might be related to the greater “freedom of interpretation” that Nietzsche attributes to the life of dreams. Waking life is, in this sense, comparable to a state of civilization. While the freedom to affirm and interpret oneself as an animal is possible within the life of dreams, this possibility is foreclosed under the conditions of civilization. Civilization’s attempt to awaken and to enlighten the human being is, here, inseparable from the attempt to keep the animal within the human being asleep. The return of the animal to the human in dream life reveals that civilization’s efforts to tame the animal and frighten away the ghosts of the past are in vain for, in the fragile states of dream and illusion, the animal returns. The “savage grimaces” of the animal haunt the civilized human being (*D* 312).³⁵ Nietzsche’s approach is comparable to that of Freud, for both see in the dream-state the dissolution of the memory of civilization and of consciousness.³⁶ Dreams are the space for the free expression of the human being’s forgotten animality.

Forgetfulness is one of the primary features of the human being’s animality, for Nietzsche holds that dreaming is comparable to animal forgetfulness (*HH* 12).³⁷ Nietzsche views animal forgetfulness as the force that brings back to the human being the creativity and freedom that enhances its dream life. On these grounds, Nietzsche thinks that it is necessary for the human being to affirm itself as an animal. In “On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life,” for example, Nietzsche places animal forgetfulness in contrast to human memory in order to show that the former is necessary to the enhancement of life as a protection against an overdose of civilization and consciousness (history). Nietzsche, however, simultaneously shows that forgetfulness, because it is a carrier of freedom and of creativity, is the source of all noble and great actions (*HL* 1).³⁸

What distinguishes the memory of culture from the forgetfulness of civilization is that it remembers the dream life of the animal. Culture understood as a memory of the animal should not to be confused with a voluntary act of bringing back the animal: it is an openness of the human being to the possibility of a return of the animal.³⁹ The memory of culture is not a means of mastery and domination over the past (and over life);

rather, it is the dream life of the animal, the animal’s freedom and creativity, which erupts in memory beyond its control. Remembering is surprised by what exceeds the capacity to remember. Accordingly, culture does not understand memory as yet another capacity within the human being’s conscious control, but sees in memory a form of attentiveness, a readiness to grasp the dream life of the animal when it comes forward to its encounter.

The figure of the genius of culture illustrates that the memory of culture is as much a return *to* the past as it is a return *of* the past. The genius of culture also encounters the dream life of the animal as much as it is being encountered by it:

If anyone wanted to imagine a genius of culture, what would the latter be like? He would manipulate [*handhabt*] falsehood [*Lüge*], force [*Gewalt*], the most ruthless self-interest as his instruments [*Werkzeuge*] so skillfully he could only be called an evil, demonic being; but his objectives, which here and there shine through, would be great and good. He would be a centaur, half animal [*Tier*], half human [*Mensch*], and with angel’s wings attached to his head in addition. (*HH* 241)

Nietzsche models the genius of culture after the figure of the Greek Centaur (Chiron), “half-animal, half-human,” and the Roman figure of Genius, “with angel’s wings attached to his head in addition” (*HH* 241). What distinguishes the virtue of the Centaur (Chiron) is his tactile sensibility. His hands (*chira*) master the art of grasping the occasion (*kairos*), the instant when animality comes forward through this encounter.⁴⁰ The tactile sensibility of the genius of culture is reflected in the terms Nietzsche uses to describe his skills: he uses “tools” (*Werkzeuge*) and “manipulates” (*handhabt*) his virtues. Whereas the Greek Centaur (Chiron) has the sensibility to grasp the singularity of the moment, the instant in time, Genius in the Romans has the ability to reveal the irreducible singularity of each individual. Genius unveils the inner, most intimate distinction of the individual self as the presence of something that does not belong to the self, something that comes to the self from another.⁴¹ The term “genius” refers both to each individual’s creative uniqueness and to something that comes to the individual and without which the individual’s uniqueness could not become creative. A genius of culture, as Nietzsche imagines him or her, must therefore be like a Centaur (Chiron), that is, like someone who is able to grasp that which comes to the singular self, impregnating its singularity with life, turning that singularity into a source of life. What makes the self’s irreducible singularity productive is

the return of animality, the return of the freedom and creativity as they define the dream life of the animal.

From the perspective of civilization, the genius appears to be “an evil and demonic being,” but from the perspective of culture his objectives are “great and good” (ibid.). The genius of culture contains a fullness of life that flows over to others and has a liberating and invigorating effect on them (AOM 407). The objectives of the genius are, therefore, not egoistic and narrow but “great and good.” It is important to point out that the “objectives” of the genius are not intentional and explicit, but “here and there shine through” (HH 241). The genius of culture benefits others not as a matter of design or of will. She benefits others despite herself, giving to the other, unable to hold back (TI “Skirmishes” 44).⁴² What is “good and great” in the genius of culture, what distinguishes her virtuosity and generosity, is not her morality, but her explicit immorality. In this respect, the genius of culture signifies an overcoming of the norms and values that define the rule of civilization.

The Subversions of Culture

The overcoming of civilization through culture is also expressed by the Nietzschean figure of the *Umgekehrten*. The *Umgekehrten* are those whose artistic and acrobatic twists and turns are inherently life-enhancing and life-affirming:

We opposite human beings [*Umgekehrten*] having opened our eyes and conscience to the question where and how the plant “human being” has so far grown most vigorously to a height—we think that this has happened every time under the opposite [*umgekehrten*] conditions, that to this end the dangerousness of its situation must first grow to the point of enormity, its power of invention and simulation (its “spirit”) had to develop under prolonged pressure and constraint into refinement and audacity, its life-will had to be enhanced into an unconditional power-will. We think that hardness, forcefulness, slavery, danger in the alley and in the heart, life in hiding, stoicism, the art of experiment and delivery of every kind, that everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in the human being, everything in the human being that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents, serves the enhancement of the species “human being” as much as its opposite [*Gegensatz*] does. (BGE 44)⁴³

The task of the *Umgekehrten* is the *Umwertung aller Werte*, or the reversal of the whole hierarchy of civilizational evaluations. The *Umgekehrten*’s subversion of the values of civilization occurs through a becoming-animal of the human being, which indicates that the human being has again

become strong enough to confirm its animality, its creative and artistic powers of life. The *Umgekehrten*’s subversion of the values of civilization has to be understood as a radical turn. Under suspicion are not simply some values, but all of them. It is impossible to overturn only one value. Rather, one must overturn the entire hierarchy of evaluations that define the project of civilization. Moreover, the *Umgekehrten*’s twists and turns do not simply proclaim a good where the discourse of civilization proclaims an evil, or proclaim an evil where civilization proclaims a good. Instead, the *Umgekehrten* twists free the idea of values from the dualism proper to a moral discourse of civilization, which sees either good or evil in everything; a metaphysical discourse, which sees either error or truth in everything; and a discourse of human nature, which sees either the animal or the human in everything. In place of the logic of the excluded third, the *Umgekehrten* counters with a logic of the inclusive “and . . . and.” *Umkehrung* involves the opposite poles of dualistic evaluations for and against each other, so as to show that good and evil, error and truth, human and animal are inseparable parts of a continuum of life, human, animal, and other.

Nietzsche legitimately questions whether such free and subverting spirits still exist (GS 347).⁴⁴ He turns to the past for encouragement, seeking the company of the geniuses of culture: Goethe, Schopenhauer, and all those who promise that the animal cannot be finally tamed and bred, just as forgetfulness and life cannot be finally mastered (D 126). Their examples show that the animality of the human being resists the mnemotechnics of civilization and exceeds the rational and moral grid of civilizational evaluations.⁴⁵ The animal’s ability to resist in the past promises its return in the future. The thought of the animal’s return is an encouraging thought because it promises to bring forth lighter and freer forms of life. It is this effect that Nietzsche tries to achieve through his own narrative of natural history:

How natural history should be narrated.—Natural history as the history of the war of the spiritual-moral forces against fear, imaginings, inertia, superstition, foolishness, and their victory over them, ought to be narrated in such a way that everyone who hears it is irresistibly inspired to strive after spiritual and bodily health and vigor, to the glad feeling of being the heir and continuator of the human, and to an ever nobler desire for new undertakings. (AOM 184)