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NIETZSCHEAN TRANSFORMATION

AGAINST THE GRAIN OF RACE-RELATED PROBLEMS

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by

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ABSTRACT

Critical Race Theory to date has been largely “critical.” Theorists have produced analyses, descriptions, and diagnoses of race, racial identity, racism, and white privilege on multiple levels; especially noteworthy within the field of philosophy are analyses of racism and white privilege in terms of socialized limitations on knowledge (the “epistemology of ignorance”). Though theorists have left open the possibility of change even while establishing the difficulty of change, what they have not done is supply an account of how people change in this context. Given descriptions of white people in terms of ignorance and social psychology, what could drive change and how does change unfold?

I use Nietzsche to develop an account of transformation against the grain of race-related problems appropriate to the context provided by these Critical Race Theorists. Nietzsche’s understanding of how people change is built upon a thoroughgoing critique of the power of rationality to shape individuals’ lives. He includes as powerful facets of change the affective, the bodily, the psychological, and the social. He has an appreciation for the momentum of long-standing trajectories and yet recognizes the ever-present possibility of creative “self-overcoming.” With Nietzsche’s theoretical descriptions of change in place, I analyze examples of anti-racist self-change and draw out the complex social, psychological, and bodily dynamics of transformation.

Perhaps surprising to many critical race theorists is the usefulness of Nietzsche’s critique of morality. Using this critique, I show that approaching anti-racist change through a typical moral lens can encourage the demonizing of an other, resentment, or guilt—all of which are unhelpful as potential agents of change in this context. With some amendments, Nietzsche’s new normativity of health and vitality can provide a view of transformation against the grain of race-related problems as an affirmative, life-enhancing renaissance.

With this account of transformation in place, Critical Race Theory is ready to move on to strategizing, offering specific suggestions to white people to encourage them to change themselves and participate in wider efforts toward social change.
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INTRODUCTION

As I write this in the spring of 2008, a black man is a likely winner of the Democratic presidential nomination. We have come a long way indeed. But Barack Obama’s campaign has clearly shown that race has not yet become a non-issue, not yet a benign issue. Race has been a topic in the media nearly every week of Obama’s campaign. Early on in the campaign, we had Democratic Senator Joseph Biden saying, “I mean, you got the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy. I mean, that’s a storybook, man.”¹ More than a year later, another important Democrat, Geraldine Ferraro, said of Obama’s success against Hillary Clinton, “If Obama was a white man, he would not be in this position. And if he was a woman of any color, he would not be in this position. He happens to be very lucky to be who he is. And the country is caught up in the concept.”² Obama, on March 18th, 2008, responded to all the buzz about race by dedicating an entire speech to race. The theme of the speech? “…[R]ace is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now.” Stepping boldly but also very carefully into the issues, he urged unity and understanding and expressed his sympathy for both black anger and white anger. And he noted that his political success—even his possible presidency—does not mark the end of

¹ Democracy Now!  It is less well-known that less than a year before, Biden made another unfortunate remark: “In Delaware, the largest growth of population is Indian Americans, moving from India. You cannot go to a 7/11 or a Dunkin’ Donuts unless you have a slight Indian accent. I’m not joking.”
² Seelye and Bosman (New York Times). Ferraro responded to controversy over her remarks by displaying an all-too-common resentment toward minorities (something I explore in chapter three): “Every time that campaign is upset about something, they call it racist….I will not be discriminated against because I’m white. If they think they’re going to shut up Geraldine Ferraro with that kind of stuff, they don’t know me.”
racial divide in this country. “I have never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy—particularly a candidacy as imperfect as my own.”

We can hope that Obama’s political ascendancy will make a real difference in race relations in this country; yet a warning from Lewis Gordon’s reminds us not to let down our guard on this momentous occasion:

Although individuals within an oppressed group can at times acquire a great deal of power—for example…Colin Powell…—that power rarely translates into the group, for that individual stands as an exception instead of the rule. Because of this exceptionalism, the group remains limited in an insidious way: the exception stands as further rationalization of the supposed absence of limits.

We can hope that as Obama and other political figures (of any race) concerned about racial injustice gain sway, power will actually translate to the group instead of just broadcasting the illusion that it has. But we must beware of supposing that a few success stories spell the end of inequality.

We can look at studies of children in this country to gain a grasp of the racial problems that still exist. A 2007 study on children and race in the United States concludes that “[a]cross metropolitan America, black and Hispanic children face particularly severe challenges, especially compared to white and Asian children. Not only do black and Hispanic children live in families that experience many disadvantages, but disparities among individuals and families are exacerbated by vast inequalities in neighborhood and school environments.” The study goes on to make the important point that “[t]hese inequalities go far beyond what can be explained by income differences, as

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3 This speech, in audio format or as text, is widely available online.
4 “Critical Reflections” 180.
poor black and Hispanic children tend to encounter environments considerably worse than poor white and Asian children.” The inequalities show up in nearly every facet of life: “[f]or indicators of health, families’ own income and homeownership, the income and homeownership of their neighborhoods, residential and school segregation, and school poverty, black children fared most poorly. In most cases, Hispanic children were next, with Asians falling between Hispanics and whites, who consistently did the best.”\(^5\)

Another study from 2007 shows that 63% of American Indian children live in low-income families, compared to 61% of Latino children, 60% of Black children, 27% of Asian children, and 26% of white children.\(^6\) While only 78% of Hispanic children had health insurance coverage of some kind in 2006, 86% of black children did, 89% of Asian or Pacific Islander children did, and 93% of white children did.\(^7\) In 1999, less than 10 percent of white children had parents without a high school degree, while almost 50% of Hispanic children did.\(^8\) Another study shows that while 18.5% of white students in 2004 attended a school where more than half of the students qualified for free lunch, 62.0% of black students did.\(^9\) Black students also significantly exceed their white peers in being classified as emotionally disturbed, in repeating grades, in being suspended, and in being expelled.\(^10\)

Housing is an important indicator of inequality. In 2004, 26.1% of white adults rented (rather than owned) the home they lived in, while 53.6 (more than double) black

\(^5\) Avecedo-Garcia et al.
\(^6\) Douglas-Hall and Chau.
\(^7\) Child Trends Databank
\(^8\) Child Trends Databank
\(^9\) “Vital Signs,” issue 57 (no author given).
adults did. Because of discrimination in home lending practices, black people can expect to pay significantly more for a home than a white person would for the same home. George Lipsitz explains the significance of home ownership rates as indicators of inequality:

The appreciated value of owner-occupied homes constitutes the single greatest source of wealth for white Americans. It is the factor most responsible for the disparity between blacks and whites in respect to wealth—a disparity between the two groups much greater than their differences in income. It is the basis for intergenerational transfers of wealth that enable white parents to give their children financial advantages over the children of other groups. Housing plays a crucial role in determining educational opportunities as well, because school funding based on property tax assessments in most localities gives better opportunities to white children than to children from minority communities. Opportunities for employment are also affected by housing choices, especially given the location of new places of employment in suburbs and reduced funding for public transformation. In addition, housing affects health conditions, with environmental and health hazards disproportionately located in minority communities.

Even when income is the same, white and black families end up in unequal housing situations: “The average black family earning more than $60,000 a year lives in a neighborhood with a higher poverty rate and lower educational attainment than the average white family earning less than $30,000.” Lipsitz explains that discrimination occurs at the lending bank the day a person goes in; but also in play is a long history of economic discrimination: “Minorities are told in essence, ‘We can’t give you a loan today because we’ve discriminated against members of your race so effectively in the past that you have not been able to accumulate any equity from housing and to pass it down

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12 Lipsitz 32.
13 Lipsitz 32-33.
14 Housing Opportunities Made Equal, “HOME’s Case Statement.”
through the generations.” 15 And as Lipsitz noted above, housing is linked to neighborhoods and to schooling. A recent study concluded that “[r]ace is a key dimension of how whites define ‘good’ neighborhoods and ‘good’ schools, and the two are so intricately intertwined that they cannot be seen as separate choices.” 16 With white people choosing schools and neighborhoods in this way, the possibility that a well-funded education will be denied to many non-white children long into the future is very real.

Racial inequality is apparent in almost every sphere of life in the U.S. In the criminal “justice” system, investigation, arrest, imprisonment, and sentencing all reflect a bias toward white people and discrimination toward other races. 17 Even cancer survival rates show inequality—American Indians have the lowest survival rates, followed by blacks. 18 In virtually all positions of leadership or power, whites continue to be overrepresented. In 1981, 4.2% of college faculty members in the U.S. were black; in 2005, black people comprised 5.2% of the faculty. “At this rate of improvement, the number of years it will take for the black faculty percentage to reach parity with the black percentage of the U.S. population [is] 192 [years].” 19 We know that healthcare too reflects inequality, not only in the rates of coverage, but in the quality of care. For example, racial minorities entering an emergency room are less likely than white patients to receive pain medication (which is now popularly viewed by physicians as important to

15 Lipsitz 14.
16 Johnson and Shapiro 185.
17 See Yancy, “Introduction” and The Sentencing Project.
18 Clegg et al.
the healing process). In countless ways, we can see that our society has favored and continues to favor white people, while Latino people, black people, American Indians, and often Asians again and again are treated unjustly. In the near future, more studies will likely reveal significant discrimination against those perceived as Middle Eastern or Arab, given the state of world politics today, and may also show rising discrimination against East Asians.

Racial inequality? A thing of the past? Not quite. And what I have presented here is merely a brief overview of statistics in place of a full picture of the lived dimensions of racialized day-to-day existence in this society, which would fill up far more pages. Nevertheless, I would like to follow this grim picture with an appreciation of changes for the better that have occurred in our society, largely through the efforts of those whom our society has tried to deny power, strength, and health. I, perhaps like many doing work in Critical Race Theory, tend to focus much more on how much farther we have to go rather than how far we have come. This outlook shifted for me when I met Oliver Hill, Sr., one of the lawyers for the *Brown v. Board* case. When I first met him, he was 99. Like a revelation, I saw through him how very much things had indeed changed in this country since he was my age (29 and 30 during the time I knew him). I saw vividly how important the work was that he and many others like him had done, and understood at last that seeing only the remaining problems of our society was to fail to give due respect to those people and that work. It is a mistake to lose that vision of accomplishment in favor of the grimmer picture of the problems we still experience.

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20 Pletcher et al.
because these past victories are what can form for us the basis of our hope for the future. So, while in this dissertation, I do indeed address remaining problems more than I trace a history of strength and victory, my awareness of the latter is always in the background and frames my hopes for the future.

This project stems from several conversations I have had with other white people whom I am able to convince that racial inequality is still a problem today, but whom I have disappointed when the conversations gets to the point of “ok, fine, then tell me what to do.” I find myself at a loss at these points, without any handy tips for white enlightenment and engagement. “I can’t tell you what to do,” I want to say, “it’s just not that simple.” I want to tell them that there is no recipe for transformation, no set of instructions, no guarantee that if you do X you will suddenly see the racial terrain of our society and be ready to intervene. In a sense, this dissertation is simply an elaboration of the claim, “it’s just not that simple.” But instead of only stating the negative (it is not simple), I endeavor to offer a picture of transformation against the grain of race-related problems (a movement from greater complicity with race-related problems to greater resistance to race-related problems) in all of its complexity.

In chapter one, I bring together accounts by four prominent Critical Race Theorists (Charles Mills, Shannon Sullivan, Linda Martín Alcoff, and María Lugones) of white people’s tendencies in terms of limited awareness, ignorance, and unconscious habits. These insightful descriptions show that, in addressing racism and white privilege, we are not dealing with a mere matter of misunderstanding or common false beliefs that could be corrected simply by providing more information or better arguments.
In chapter two, I identify a gap in the literature on white tendencies. While excellent descriptive, analytical, critical work has been done, and while some theorists have begun to offer strategies for white people (attempting to answer the question “what should I do?”), accounts of how people actually change in this context are lacking. I argue that we have reason to think that Nietzsche, with amendments, may be able to supply such an account. But there is obviously much in Nietzsche that is inimical to a liberatory, anti-racist project, so that taking up his philosophy requires some reflection on how to approach both the helpful and unhelpful aspects of this work.

In chapter three, I put forth the building blocks needed in order to create a Nietzschean account of transformation against the grain of race-related problems. I present Nietzsche’s critique of reason and show how some common attitudes of white people toward race appear in light of that critique. These findings have implications for how change (movement away from these common ways of living one’s whiteness) can occur. I then present Nietzsche’s critique of morality and suggest that this thread of Nietzsche’s philosophy may actually be quite helpful in understanding race, white tendencies, and transformation. Finally, I address the issue of Nietzsche’s fatalism, which would lead some to suppose that Nietzsche’s philosophy does not really have room for the kind of self-transformation I am talking about.

Having the above philosophical resources ready (and the potential roadblock of fatalism cleared), I move on, in chapter four, to create a full account of Nietzschean transformation against the grain of race-related problems. Presenting the “mechanisms” of this change, the “dynamics,” and the “spirit,” I rely on Nietzsche’s notion of self-overcoming as well as scattered passages pertaining to change as an event that exceeds
rational thinking and argumentation. Showing how these mechanisms, dynamics, and spirit look in the context of race, I illustrate using examples of actual white people who have enacted and undergone significant transformations. Nietzschean transformation stands in contrast to the much more common cultural understanding of change as progress and gives us a vision of how people change that is well suited to this context (as an understanding of change as progress would not be).

In chapter five, I suggest a new normativity—a new way of valuing and evaluating—to guide transformation based on Nietzsche’s understanding of health and vitality. After explicating the latter, I offer critiques and amendments before showing how such a normativity could operate in the context of white people and transformation. The upshot of this discussion is that transformation can be seen as exciting, life-affirming, and vital rather than as a moral obligation fulfilled out of a sense of guilt. I end by presenting and amending Nietzsche’s understanding of the ideal self, showing the characteristics of a self ripe for transformation.

It is important to understand how white people change in the context of race, race relations, and resistance to racism and white privilege. White people can use this understanding to better initiate, encourage, and support transformation in themselves, and people of all races can use it to initiate, encourage, and support transformation in the white people who are part of their lives and communities. As I will show in much greater detail, complicity with racism and white privilege is usually not a matter of consciously espousing and announcing beliefs about race; therefore, if we (based on a misunderstanding of how people change in this context) attempt to persuade and support others or if white people fuel their own transformation only by thinking clearly and
offering rational arguments, we will not be very successful. As another example, guilt, as
I will show, often gets in the way of transformation; if we, instead of attempting to
impose guilt, persuade and encourage in line with an affirmative and vital normativity,
our persuasion and encouragement may be more powerful.

In discussing self-transformation, I am talking about, in a sense, “working on
oneself.” Thus I risk falling into what Philip Deloria calls “…the wistful fallacy that one
can engage in social struggle [merely] by working on oneself.”21 Too often white people
are given the impression that if they only change themselves and their attitudes, then they
are doing enough to address race-related problems. I would like to make it clear from the
beginning that I do not see working on oneself and engaging in social activism as
separate activities. When either one is attempted in the absence of the other, little is
accomplished. We could, in fact, look at self-transformation as the ongoing enhancement
of one’s abilities to engage in efforts toward social change more effectively and with
greater insight. To the extent that the transformation I am talking about is a working on
the self, it is much more a turn outward than inward—not an introspective contemplation
so much as a venturing beyond oneself.

Sometimes people are tempted to think that they must get themselves together
before they get involved in larger communities to promote social change. But because
there are so many ways of being complicit with race-related problems and so many ways
of being resistant, resistance is not some final state, an accomplished goal, perfection
achieved. There is, in other words, no end to transformation and no finish line to cross.

21 Playing Indian 177.
If we wait to engage in social change until we’ve finished our personal transformations, we will never engage. Furthermore, community involvement is among the best ways to feed, energize, and challenge one’s own transformation. We can see the necessity of social involvement if we attempt to think about personal transformation in its absence. Consider for example, Lewis Gordon’s criticism of the idea of white privilege: “…the notion of white privilege obscures the discussion of racism by making it impossible to do anything about it—how, after all, could one give up a privilege that is literally in one’s skin?...” While Gordon may be right that we need to think carefully about our use of “white privilege” in understanding race relations, he has indirectly made a different point. One cannot give up a privilege that she receives because of the color of her skin; her society will continue to favor her whether she wants it to or not. This does not mean that change is hopeless. Instead, it leads us again to the point that personal change must include social change—one must work to change the system that grants privileges based on race since simply opting out of the system is not actually an option.

A discussion of race requires some comments on terms and definitions. Like most Critical Race Theorists today, I see race as a social construction. But it is constructed out of bodies. Race may not be a biological classification, but it is a material construct. Our creation of races has relied on the genetic tendency of offspring to resemble their parents, yet race is not itself a genetic category. We see around us a wealth of phenotype variation; but we have not simply stood back and observed

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22 “Critical Reflections” 177.
naturally-occurring categories and lines of divisions within the variations—we have created categories and divisions. We draw lines instead of discovering lines through scientific observation. And humans lend themselves so poorly to such classification that it has had to be legally enforced. Among the most well-known laws is the “one-drop” rule that the United States long held (if a person had “one drop” of “Negro blood,” he or she was black, no matter how many white ancestors or ancestors of another race he or she had). Not only laws but general ways of classifying people have varied over time and in different places, which reinforces the fact that the racial classification of bodies has been established by human invention.

In discussing white people, I am referring simply to the group of people commonly considered white in the society of the United States in present and recent times. As our creation of the concept of race is suspect, so are the boundaries inexact. Some people may be identified as white in some settings and not others; some people may self-identify in a way different from how they are most often identified by others. Race, and with it, whiteness, are fuzzy concepts. Race continues, however, to be a useful concept in resisting and undermining the damage that its creation and mobilization has caused. In other words, in order to break down white supremacy, we need to be able to talk about this white identity, even though it is a fundamentally failed concept to begin with. In order to identify and address the damage that racial classification has wreaked, we need, for the meantime, to continue to speak in terms of race. As I indicate throughout, there are many ways for a white person to take up his or her whiteness. While many white people do not take up their identity with scrutiny and therefore tend to perpetuate the problems of white supremacy, others take up their white identities
reflectively and in resistance to exactly what being white has meant for many
generations. Even in resistance to racism, one who is identified as white can never shed a
white identity as long as her society continues to classify people according to race, but
she can nevertheless take on a more resistant rather than complicit white identity.

In this dissertation, I frequently use the term “non-white.” The term is helpful
because it quickly distinguishes between racially privileged people and people commonly
subject to discrimination. Though different groups experience discrimination in very
different ways, the pairing of “white” and “non-white” (all others) reflects the
unfortunate reality of whiteness alone as the empowered racial ideal. “Non-white”
avoids the problem of “people of color,” which suggests that “white” is not a color, that a
white racial identity isn’t a racial identity at all, that it is neutrality, lack of race. “Non-
white” also avoids the common black-white binary seen in Critical Race Theory literature
and is inclusive, as no short list of racial identities could be. Nevertheless, “non-white” is
a seriously flawed term, as I have seen most clearly through a discussion with a student in
an introductory philosophy class. Nearly all the students in my class identified as black
or as black and another racial identity. One day in class, I used the term “non-white.”
One of my students (who was bold, outspoken, and delightful), shouted out, “non-white?”
This term was so familiar to me from reading academic papers on race that her reaction
initially puzzled me, and my response was along the lines of “yeah…‘non-white.’” “You
mean ‘minorities,’” she said, “I’ve never heard of ‘non-white.’” I tried to convince her
(unsuccesfully) that “non-white” is a common and useful term. Eventually I gave in and
used “minorities” for the rest of the discussion (she smiled with satisfaction each time I
did). Though she was not able at the spur of the moment to articulate her opposition to
the term “non-white,” she was likely objecting to it because it defines people, “minorities,” against the backdrop of whiteness. And while “non” terms don’t necessarily imply that something is lacking, they do often suggest prioritization of whatever comes after the hyphen. Furthermore, “non” terms are rarely labels that people claim with pride. People might say “I’m proud to be gay” or “I’m proud to be Muslim,” but it’s hard to imagine a “non-heterosexual pride” movement or a “proud to be non-Christian” coalition. On the other hand, the term “minorities” also has its faults because technically it identifies a group that is numerically smaller than another and is always relative to a setting. On the campus of an HBCU, I, as a white person, am a minority; in the world population, white people are a minority; European colonizers were minorities in countries they colonized. Numbers aren’t the point; power and supremacy are the issue. “Non-white” does not speak directly to power, but does divide people between two groups: the racial identity that is empowered and the racial identities that bear the brunt of the former’s supremacy. In order to emphasize the issue of power, should we use a term like “racially oppressed people”? This term is flawed even more than the others as it labels people as oppressed, as if oppression were the only part of their identities. So, in the main, I use “non-white” while recognizing its problematic nature, though I also sometimes follow the lead of the various theorists I discuss, using whichever terms they use.

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23 This would be like thinking not of males and females, men and women, but males and “non-males.” See Marilyn Frye, “The Necessity of Differences” for reflections on this sort of “A, not A” logic in the context of gender.
24 Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
I use the vague term “race-related problems” as an umbrella term, referencing not only racism, but also white privilege, white supremacy, racial inequality, and racial injustice. Critical race theorists disagree on what constitutes racism and whether one of the other terms listed is more apt today. Since this debate is not my focus here, I use the vague umbrella term to gather all such problems together.

I am taking as a given that racism, white privilege, white supremacy, racial injustice, and racial inequality really are problematic. I am not arguing for this claim, but taking it as a starting point. In general, the people I write about are what are sometimes called “good will whites.” They are white people who agree that racism is undesirable and who are often very afraid of being called “racist,” but who may nevertheless be caught up in some habits and attitudes that support or acquiesce to white privilege more than resisting and attempting to overcome it. While I make occasional references to avowed racists, they are not my central subjects. The question of what would make a white person first become interested in opposing racism would also be a separate project—I assume some minimal level of interest. My question is how this minimal level of interest is extended, how a white person moves from a basic statement that racism is bad to an awareness of the actual racial terrain in this society and the ability to do something about it. Eventually we will also need some specific, concrete suggestions for white people, some recommended strategies for igniting personal transformation and social change; but first, as a basis for these suggestions and strategies, we need to understand how it is that white people change in this setting.
CHAPTER ONE

Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones: The Tendencies of White People

Race-related problems (as I claimed in the introduction) are not historical relics, or even contemporary shadows cast by the past, but enduring and persistent realities. As several Critical Race Theorists have claimed, overt racism—where individuals or groups believe in the inherent superiority of white people, spread messages of racial hatred, and/or knowingly discriminate against nonwhite people—is not the sole race-related problem in the U.S. and the world today. Racial inequality and injustice along with white privilege often operate without announcing themselves, even hidden behind anti-racist rhetoric. They operate as local and global political, economic, and social structures, and they operate as mind-sets, habits, and practices of white people. They often manifest themselves, within white people, as an ignorance of the social world and its racial stratification. In other words, not only are white people commonly ignorant of race-related social problems, but their ignorance itself is a problem which feeds into and perpetuates race-related social problems.

Charles Mills, Shannon Sullivan, Linda Martín Alcoff, and Maríá Lugones are four noteworthy Critical Race Theorists in the field of philosophy who have given accounts of the problematic tendencies of white people in terms of epistemic limitations (more specifically, ignorance born of and sustained by a relatively privileged social location). Their accounts are compatible with each other in many ways, as though they are describing something similar from differing angles with various ranges of breadth and depth. Many of their differences (or unique strengths) arise out of the philosophical
frameworks each takes up: while they all share roots in Feminist Theory, Mills draws upon Social Contract Theory, Sullivan takes up American Pragmatism and Psychoanalysis, Alcoff turns to Hermeneutics and Phenomenology, and Lugones situates herself within Postcolonial discourses of power and resistance. As I bring their work together in this chapter, a picture emerges of race-related problems as a racially stratified system of advantages and disadvantages of which white people tend to be ignorant due to socialized epistemic limitations. Unable to see the racialization of society, even well-meaning white people may reinforce the status quo through their everyday actions and interactions rather than offering resistance.

In this chapter, I do not explore solutions—I simply present the problem. In doing so, I put these authors into dialogue with one another and allow each to enhance the others, leaving us with as rich and nuanced a view as possible of racialized ignorance.25 In other words, rather than compartmentalizing them, I allow the four views to inform and enrich each other, yielding a view from many angles. In this way, I hope to achieve not a traditional standard of objectivity in my description of racialized ignorance, but Nietzschean objectivity: “…the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our

25 It is possible that, were we to go into the details of their world views, we would find some metaphysical conflicts. However, these metaphysical differences are not particularly relevant to my project. I am interested in a phenomenon of social psychology and epistemology, not a metaphysical world view. In other words, I am interested in what “horizon,” “contract,” “habit,” and “worlds” (philosophical terms that these four theorists create or borrow from other philosophers) can reveal about racialized ignorance; it is not my purpose to argue for a world-view according to Gadamer, Modern philosophers, Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, or any of the other philosophers whose ideas can be used as helpful metaphors for social, racial phenomena.
‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be.”26 I take these four theorists to be describing largely the same social phenomenon from different angles, with different eyes, using different metaphors. Letting the various angles inform each other gives us greater Nietzschean objectivity than putting them into quarantine can do. In this chapter, we will see that together the four theorists create a vivid and robust picture of racialized ignorance.

Charles Mills: Epistemology of Ignorance

Following Carol Pateman, Charles Mills critiques Social Contract philosophies, exposing that despite their purported generality, social contracts were actually contracts among a select group of people. While Pateman focuses on gender exclusivity, Mills highlights the racial exclusivity of the implicit contracts underlying Western societies. The “Social Contract,” now renamed the “Racial Contract,” is an implicit agreement among white people as to how society should function. In its inception, the Contract created “…not merely racial exploitation, but race itself….”27 Mills emphasizes that while not all white people today are “signatories” to the contract, all continue to be “beneficiaries.”28 Nonwhite people—who are neither signatories to nor beneficiaries of the contract—are subject to the contract.29 While the contract encompasses virtually all aspects of society, its most significant effect—its primary purpose, in fact—is a racialized

26 Genealogy of Morals III:12, page 119.
27 The Racial Contract 63.
28 The Racial Contract 11. See also Blackness Visible 105.
29 The Racial Contract 12.
distribution of economic opportunities and resources.\textsuperscript{30} As Mills says, “…the world is essentially dominated by white capital.”\textsuperscript{31} This contract, with its sources in European civilization and thought, is a global contract that developed hand-in-hand with European colonization.

The Racial Contract is, by now, a thoroughly entrenched aspect of U.S. and global society. It does not need individual white people to stand up, announce it, and endorse it in order for its force to perpetuate. Even if all whites were suddenly to disavow it, its effects, especially in terms of wealth distribution, would continue for generations. As Mills explains, even if wages were to equalize among racial groups, wealth, which is passed on through inheritance, would remain vastly unequal.\textsuperscript{32} And not only wealth is passed on from generation to generation and dependent on community—so are ideology, opportunity, and access to community resources and institutional support (a child’s educational opportunities, for example, often reflect the opportunities the parents had). In other words, racial inequality lies in social, political, and economic configurations that have their own momentum, so that no matter the “good intentions” white people may have, “…a system of consolidated structural advantage…will continue to exist unless active moves are made to dismantle it.”\textsuperscript{33}

Most white people today, who act and interact according to the dictates of the Racial Contract, are not even aware that it exists and functions. “…[W]hites’ dominance is, for the most part, no longer constitutionally and juridically enshrined but rather a

\textsuperscript{30} See The Racial Contract 32.
\textsuperscript{31} The Racial Contract 36.
\textsuperscript{32} The Racial Contract 37-39 and Blackness Visible 136.
\textsuperscript{33} Blackness Visible 146; see also 76.
matter of social, political, cultural, and economic privilege based on the legacy of the [colonialist] conquest.” In other words, we live these days mainly under “…de facto white supremacy…” rather than legally espoused supremacy, which does not mean that the Racial Contract has ceased to function, but that it “…has written itself out of formal existence.” Both our laws and the stated beliefs of a great many of us (including white people) speak of equality, and yet enormous disparities exist in wealth, social status, and political power. Beneath a “…formal extension of rights,” a contract continues to operate that grants rights and privileges differently according to racial classification.

Living under a contract that gives advantages and oppresses along racial lines—a contract that does so from under a cloak of invisibility, trying to keep hidden its own existence—has a significant epistemic impact on white people. Mills describes the epistemic effects of the Contract as a “…pattern of…cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.” It is important to note the significance of Mills’ claims without over-dramatizing them. Mills does not claim that all white people are in all ways ignorant and that no non-white people are ever

34 The Racial Contract 73.
35 The Racial Contract 73.
36 The Racial Contract 73.
37 The Racial Contract 18, italics removed. See also Racial Contract 93, Blackness Visible 28 and 34. We can look at Epistemology of Ignorance as a reversal of Standpoint Theory. While Standpoint Theory claims that some people occupy a privileged cognitive position by virtue of their under-privileged social position, Mills’ reversal claims that some people occupy an under-privileged cognitive position by virtue of their privileged social position.
He is claiming, instead, that the situation in which most white people live does not encourage them to notice or question certain workings of society. Non-white people are more likely to notice and question these aspects of society since these aspects present themselves as bumps or roadblocks—or, more to the point, as injustices and concrete harms. The Racial Contract, disguised beneath doctrines of formal equality, individualist ideology, and moral stances of “colorblindness,” is more apparent to those people who know, first hand, that the “equality” of the land in many ways is indeed merely formal. White people, as those favored by a social and political system they cannot see, “…are able to think of themselves as innocent, since the notion that they are collectively the group beneficiaries of a system of domination is alien to the individualist framework that writes race out of the polity.” In sum, the Racial Contract both favors white people and leaves them unaware of the benefits they receive in contrast to nonwhite members of the polity.

According to Mills, social ignorance generated from racial privilege often manifests itself as “…simply the failure to ask certain questions…. For example, our laws (in the U.S.) say that we are all equal and that discriminating against racial minorities is illegal, and from this, many white people assume that we all really are equal; such an assumption represents a failure to look around us and question whether changes

38 It is worth noting in this context that despite the common social ignorances of white people, white people on the whole have also had epistemic privileges that have been denied other people, especially in terms of access to education. See Blackness Visible 75.
40 Blackness Visible 196.
41 The Racial Contract 73.
in legislation really have solved all the problems they supposedly set out to address. Failing to scrutinize more deeply, one accepts “…the pretense that formal, juridical equality is sufficient to remedy inequities created on a foundation of several hundred years of racial privilege.”\textsuperscript{42} The acceptance of legislated equality as sufficient ignores historical legacies and neglects complicated questions about how things have come to be as they are. Too many white people are eager to leave these pages of history “in the past,” mysteriously discontinuous with our present. For example, many white people believe that since they did not directly and obviously participate in acts of gross injustice or racial violence, they are not in any way responsible for whatever problems racial minorities may have today. This belief reveals a failure to question how one, as a white person, is benefiting from the legacy of injustice and violence, a failure to look for less obvious injustice and violence going on today, and a failure to examine how one may be, intentionally or otherwise, complicit with rather than resistant to these continuing trends. Some white people go so far as to believe that minorities do not simply enjoy equal treatment and equal opportunity today, but are actually at an advantage compared to white men because of affirmative action policies and a culture demanding “political correctness.” Such a reaction to affirmative action policies and efforts toward cultural change (whatever the merits or shortfalls of such efforts and policies) reveals a failure to ask about the myriad advantages and disadvantages people encounter because of their race during all the days of their lives leading up to a single job interview. A lack of critical investigation into racial issues occurs frequently among white people because

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{The Racial Contract} 73.
most white people have implicitly accepted an unrecognized but potent Racial Contract that stipulates that white people are entitled to certain rights that others are not.

The racial dynamics and the patterns of racialization that Mills describes in terms of economics and epistemology are, he claims, written onto both our bodies and the spaces through which our bodies move. Parallel to epistemic limitations, in other words, run bodily and spatial limitations. In cross-racial encounters, racialization plays itself out as body postures, body language, and facial expressions (including eye movements and careful control of “the gaze”). Unspoken codes determine who occupies which spaces, whose presence is acknowledged and in which ways, how close together two people can be in various spaces, and, finally, who defers to whom (spatially, not only in words) in an encounter. 43 Addressing the issue of cause and effect, Mills says that we are caught in “…a circular indictment: ‘You are what you are in part because you originate from a certain kind of space, and that space has those properties in part because it is inhabited by creatures like yourself.’” 44

Americans, especially white Americans, may imagine racialized spaces to be those violent zones on other continents—the Darfur region of Sudan or Israel and

43 The Racial Contract 41-53, especially page 52.
44 The Racial Contract 41. The racing of spaces and bodies, according to Mills, came into its full force with European colonialism. As European explorers, conquerors, and settlers mapped the world literally, they also created “…a moral cartography…so that entire regions, countries, indeed continents, are invested with moral qualities” (The Racial Contract 46). These spaces, like the bodies inhabiting them, were “dark”: “…the journey upriver or in general the journey into the interior in imperial literature…acquires deep symbolic significance, for it is the expedition into both the geographic and the personal heart of darkness…” (The Racial Contract 47). These “hearts of darkness” continue to exist today—for example, in many inner cities. “In entering these (dark) spaces, one is entering a region normatively discontinuous with white political space, where the rules are different in ways ranging from differential funding (school resources, garbage collection, infrastructural repair) to the absence of police protection” (The Racial Contract 51). One racist way of racing space, then, is to map it in moral terms, where the darkness of inhabitants’ skin measures a space’s distance from the light of moral purity and civilization.
Palestine, for example. But as we (Americans) engage in international politics and look for solutions to conflicts that are (at least in part) based on race, it is important to understand that our own land is far from racially neutral. As an example of a racially stratified and violent space within the U.S., we can look at prisons. California’s prisons in particular are notorious for their race-based gangs and the violence that occurs between gangs. For many years, California prisons have practiced race-based segregation of inmates, a practice challenged in a 2005 court case as exacerbating racial division rather than reducing violence as was its purported purpose. Such prison spaces demonstrate Mills’ claims that bodies and spaces “race” each other. As one report explains, “[i]f one is not racist on entry into prison, it is likely that imprisonment will foster racism by exit. Individuals are forced to take sides for safety and for access to goods and services.”45

While the situation of incarceration exacerbates and intensifies racial division and violence, the bodies who enter these spaces (as employees or inmates) come from the larger society and filter back into it, so that the racialization of prison space, while perhaps at an extreme intensity, is not an anomaly within our country.

Another obviously racialized space in the U.S. and internationally is that of airport and airplane. Far from racially neutral, this space handles bodies perceived as Middle Eastern or Arab in ways very different from the ways it handles other bodies, and so those bodies perceived as Middle Eastern or Arab move through (or are moved through) this space very differently, and their interaction with other bodies (fellow

45 California Prison Focus, “Race Relations in Prison.”
travelers, for instance) is marked by the perception of race. The fear of people perceived as Middle Eastern or Arab may propagate in the space of airports and planes, but the identifications, divisions, mistrust, and fear between people travel with racialized bodies outside of this space and into others. Bodies leave the space with “whiteness” reinforced as normative and harmless and “otherness” accentuated and feared.

In summary, according to Mills, European expansion, conquest, and colonization brought about the racialization of bodies and spaces, making racial exploitation possible for the sake of economic profit. While a Racial Contract was quite explicit and intentional in former times, it now often operates systematically beneath a rhetoric of racial equality and justice. Those subject to the Contract may see it working, but its beneficiaries tend to be unable to see its mechanisms and effects. Announcing good intentions, white people tend not to ask the sorts of questions that would unearth the Racial Contract and expose it to critical examination. Hence, a mapping of spaces

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46 In 2003, two Israelis were removed from a plane before takeoff after “speaking loudly in a non-English language.” A third passenger, of Portuguese descent, was also removed because his “color and physical appearance” were similar to the two Israelis. The third passenger won a lawsuit against the airline in 2007 (Malone, “Man wins suit in Airline Race-Profiling Case”). While this person was able to identify clearly an isolated incidence of racial profiling by employees of a corporation that could be held to task in a court of law, thousands of people pass through airports and planes on a regular basis who are identified by others (and by the space itself) as possible maniacal terrorists because of (at least in part) skin color and facial features.

47 The racialization of a space does not necessarily foster division, incite violence, or reinforce oppression. In opposition to spaces in which whiteness dominates and racialization bolsters division and oppression, many nonwhite communities have created relatively separate spaces. As an example of a racist space, we can consider white-dominated universities: while university classrooms are not “white only” spaces as they once were, a majority of them continue to be spaces in which white counts as neutral, so that what those perceived as white do and say has no bearing on their race (unless race is explicitly addressed) while the words and actions of Asian, Hispanic, and Black students are often perceived (by students and faculty) as being somehow racially salient. The atmosphere is different at an HBCU (Historically Black College or University) and, discussing the same material, a person (whether identifying as black, white, or neither) will occupy this classroom space and interact with his environment differently than he would in a predominantly white classroom space. Like many black institutions in the U.S., HBCU’s generally emerged as efforts to combat racism, racial division, and inequality rather than to further them. Hence, they may be raced spaces, but not necessarily racist spaces.
according to the bodies that inhabit them persists, unquestioned by those who find themselves in geographies of “civilization.”

Shannon Sullivan: Unconscious Habits of White Privilege

In 1940, W. E. B. Du Bois attempted to account for the following apparent contradiction:

Negroes in Africa, Indians in Asia, mulattoes and mestizoes in the West Indies, Central and South America, all explain the attitude of the white world as sheer malevolence; while the white people of the leading European countries honestly regard themselves as among the great benefactors of mankind and especially of colored mankind.  

How is it possible, Du Bois asks, that whites and Africans, Asians, and West Indians have such different assessments of the relation of whites to the rest of the world? Du Bois argues that whites neither are absolutely malevolent nor are they “great benefactors”; rather, white people often act in racist ways and contribute to injustice without consciously setting out to do harm. “The present attitude and action of the white world is not based solely upon rational deliberate intent. It is a matter of conditioned reflexes; of long followed habits, customs and folkways; of subconscious trains of reasoning and unconscious nervous reflexes.” While many white people may find in themselves only good intentions, racism is nevertheless coded into their bodily, psychological, cognitive, and social habits.

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48 Dusk of Dawn 678.
49 Dusk of Dawn 679.
Shannon Sullivan’s work on racialized habits takes Du Bois’ philosophy of racism as its point of departure. Sullivan explains that Du Bois’ philosophy brings together a Pragmatist understanding of habit and a Freudian notion of the unconscious to create an account of racism as unconscious habit. While many of us think of habits as trifling, incidental matters, a Pragmatist framework takes habits to be “constitutive of the self.” Habits, in other words, are not quirks, but the very structure of one’s character, the shape of one’s agency, the formula of one’s interaction with the world. And habits are patterns of which we are generally unaware or only vaguely aware. Our awareness of these fundamental ways of being is further attenuated, according to Du Bois, by the power of the unconscious. Following Freud, Du Bois explains that what is unconscious is not simply the unknown that could become known at any moment, but instead is resistant to becoming exposed and known. The conscious self does not want to see what is unconscious since awareness would in some way be costly for the self. A great deal stands in the way of becoming aware of our most basic ways of being and of interacting (or “transacting,” to use the Pragmatist term Sullivan prefers) with the world around us.

While Du Bois writes about the unconscious, habitual nature of racism, Sullivan’s focus is on white privilege. While racism may connote beliefs regarding inferiority and discriminatory actions, white privilege refers to a wide variety of social, psychological,

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50 Revealing Whiteness 21-22.
51 Revealing Whiteness 2.
53 Revealing Whiteness 21-22.
54 Sullivan finds that “interaction” connotes an atomism that “transaction” avoids. “[T]he term ‘transaction’ reflects a rejection of sharp dualisms between subject and object, and self and world, as well as a rejection of the atomistic, compartmentalized conceptions of subject and self that often accompany such dualisms” (Living Across and Through Skins 1; see also 7 and 12-13).
political, and economic advantages that white people receive in a racially stratified society.\textsuperscript{55} The habits of white privilege that Sullivan discusses are cognitive, psychological, and bodily. They include tendencies to judge in certain ways, patterns of understanding, typical emotional reactions to situations, ways of perceiving others, as well as common bodily stances and gestures, typical facial expressions, tendencies to enter into certain spaces and inhabit them in certain ways, postures of openness or hostility in interaction, even the almost automatic association of scents or sounds with certain groups of people.\textsuperscript{56}

With a focus on white privilege, Sullivan avoids treating race-related problems as merely attitudinal (conscious or otherwise) and is able to examine the individual always in relation to a larger realm in which race-related problems are systemic and transcend individuals. For Sullivan, selves and their environments are always in “transaction” with one another. This means that selves and environments are not entities that develop independently and simply brush up against each other, but instead develop together with “…constitutive permeability…” such that each creates and simultaneously is created by the other.\textsuperscript{57} Habits of white privilege, then, do not arise independently within an individual and her unique psyche, but rather emerge through and as transactions among selves and environments.

Since habits are formed through transaction with the world and since habits compose the self, habit at once is intensely personal and involves much more than

\textsuperscript{55} For an introduction to the idea of white privilege, see McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege,” and Wise, \textit{White Like Me}.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Revealing Whiteness} 3, 68, and throughout; see also \textit{Living Across and Through Skins}.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Revealing Whiteness} 2; \textit{Living Across and Through Skins} 14. Sullivan relies primarily on John Dewey for her understanding of transaction.
the mere individual. In a world filled with white privilege, habits that privilege whiteness will result, and these habits in turn will tend to reinforce the social, political, economic, and other privileges that white people have.\footnote{58}

We could say that an individual’s habits are in communication and in partnership with the “habits” of economic systems, cultural forces, political structures, the media, industries, literature, family, etc.\footnote{59} Such transactions among selves and their settings create and sustain racialized selves—that is, racialized bodies and bodily habits—as well as racialized environments or spaces. With the Pragmatist concept of “transaction” in the background, Sullivan restates Mills’ “circular indictment” of bodies and spaces:

\ldots bodies produced raced spaces through their inhabiting of them. \ldots At the same time, those spaces raced the bodies existing in them. \ldots[T]here exists a co-constitutive relationship between the racing of bodies by means of space and the racing of spaces by means of bodies. Each reinforces and makes possible the other such that the causal relationship between them is circular, not linear.\footnote{60}

\footnote{58} Revealing Whiteness 4. As mentioned above in the context of Mills, not all racializations of space are negative. While predominantly white spaces, because they are hegemonic, are generally limiting and sometimes hostile for people who are not white, some racialized spaces resist the hegemony of white spaces. Sullivan joins Du Bois in supporting (in some instances anyway) self-segregation and separatism of minority groups as strategies for building community strength and resisting a racially unequal society. In Sullivan’s words, “[u]nderstood transactionally, self-segregation and separatism…[can] be practices that attempt to make greater room for the voices of dominated and oppressed groups in their transactions with dominant culture” (Revealing Whiteness 177).

\footnote{59} Transactions with parents or care-givers (with the “environment” or “space” of the family) are among the most influential, so that habits are “transgenerational” (Revealing Whiteness 69 and 94).

\footnote{60} Revealing Whiteness 150; see also 88-89, 147, 151, and 186. To gain a clearer understanding of how spaces (both literal and metaphoric) racialize the bodies that inhabit them (beyond simply labeling and designating), we can think of spaces as animated by characters and narratives. Spaces then are not made up of inert physical objects but are dynamic, alive, and ignited by creative and contentious forces. One who inhabits or moves through a space is not necessarily forced to take on any one character or to organize her life and identity according to any one narrative, but she cannot help but be in dialogue (or “transaction”) with these characters and narratives. For example, a woman in Western society, however she ends up carrying herself and interacting with others, is in dialogue with narratives such as the submissive woman, the seductive sex kitten, and the “femi-nazi,” as well as many race- and class-specific female characters, even if she rejects rather than animates such narratives and works, through her own creation of her self, to subvert them. This “dialogue,” furthermore, is not merely thought concerning identity and self-image, but is a bodily conversation. A woman responds with her body—posturing, gesturing, expressing, dressing, eating, exercising, inching closer to this body and drawing away from that, going here and staying there—to these social narratives that vary from space to space. Like gender, race is a site populated by narratives and characters with whom we must negotiate. For example, the hegemonic culture of the U.S. imprints “threatening” (among several other characterizations) onto the black, male body. While this does not entail
Though Sullivan makes more amendments to the Freudian notion of the unconscious than Du Bois does, the psychoanalytic element is likewise crucial to her theory of the habits of white privilege. Rejecting any notion of the unconscious as an entity lodged in an individual psyche, Sullivan uses “unconscious” as an adjective describing many of the transactions among bodies and spaces and the habits that develop through these transactions. It is not only thoughts, emotions, and desires that are unconscious—and not merely nonconscious—but bodily habits as well. As Sullivan explains, “…bodily habits are not merely the nonreflective backdrop to lived that a black man must animate this identity, he can hardly avoid it. In conversation with it, he could choose to use it to his advantage, strategically aiming to acquire some sort of social power through it, or he may work to counteract it with acts of friendliness, gestures of politeness, expressions of warmth. Regardless, this self is formed in conversation with this narrative (though this is not to say that the self is nothing but response to hostile environments). As another example, some spaces in which whiteness does not dominate imprint on white bodies “uptight,” “dry,” or “prudish.” In response, white people sometimes reveal a self-conscious awkwardness or a strange flamboyance as they, in thought, emotion, and body, try to discern or establish the nature of the relation between their identity and the narrative buzz in this space. Finally, in many spaces in the U.S. (not only predominantly white spaces), “Hispanic” is marked “illegitimate.” A narrative attempts to direct all the bodies that enter the space into one of two directions: “either American or Hispanic.” In response, a Hispanic-American may choose one or the other path, reject them both, or animate a mestizaje—but whatever the creation, it is informed by the milieu of the spaces in which it is created. And the response here too is not only in thought, but might play out in the voice, in clothing, in bodily interactions with others, or in bodily choices and tendencies to enter certain spaces and avoid others. Through these dialogues with spaces, habits emerge, habits that constitute selves, selves which through their habits constitute spaces.

61 Revealing Whiteness 46-47 and 62.

62 In distinguishing “unconscious” from “nonconscious,” Sullivan gives two examples of nonconscious things. First, she says, something is nonconscious if one is not focusing on it at the moment (so that it is not within one’s range of awareness) but, should one turn one’s attention to it (or should someone else direct one’s attention to it), it would be immediately noticeable, that is, accessible to consciousness. Sullivan also identifies bodily functions such as the operation of internal organs as nonconscious; one cannot access such operations except with the aid of technological instruments that measure and report. In contrast, what is unconscious is difficult or impossible to access (which distinguishes it from the first sort of nonconscious thing above); and the barrier to access is repression (which distinguishes it from the second sort of nonconscious thing above). In other words, if one’s attention is directed to what is unconscious, she may yet be unable to grasp it since blocks and defenses work against the revelation of what is repressed. The self has an investment in not acknowledging certain desires, habits, or character traits and so resists efforts to bring such things to light. In the case of the nonconscious, the self has no such investment, and so readily allows the nonconscious to become conscious. (See Sullivan 5-6, 8-9, and 186-87.)
experience….They instead are a site of repression that actively…[prevents] bringing the traumatic event or shameful values to conscious attention.”

Du Bois and Sullivan agree that what is habitual and unconscious strongly resists being brought to light. In Sullivan’s words, “[w]hile all habits tend to go unnoticed—at least when they are functioning smoothly—‘forbidden’ habits, such as those of white privilege, tend to be not just nonconscious, but unconscious.”

Because so many white people in the U.S. today espouse an anti-racist rhetoric, the discovery in themselves of habits of white privilege—if such a discovery does actually make it to the surface—is contradictory, confounding, and shameful. The self (psychological and bodily) puts up “…forceful but evasive psychosomatic resistance to conscious examination of [such “ugly” habits].”

To better understand the cost to the self of exposing unconscious habits of white privilege, we can look at some of the beliefs that tend to stand as barriers to critical examinations of race and inequality. For example, consider the belief that all people in the U.S. today have equal opportunities. If a person, after long holding such a belief, begins to see it crumble, this can open the self to threats—such as doubts about one’s accomplishments, hitherto taken as points of pride, doubts about whether they really represent worthy individual accomplishments or are manifestations of undeserved privilege. As another example, imagine a person who says “I don’t see race; I treat everyone the same.” Suppose this person came to understand that she does actually notice race and that she does not exactly treat everyone the same. After having prided

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63 Revealing Whiteness 8.
64 Revealing Whiteness 186.
65 Revealing Whiteness 9.
herself on her neutrality and fairness, she may feel a deep shame. In sum, breaking through to one’s habits of white privilege, as Sullivan says, can be a very difficult psychological and emotional experience against which the self, by means of defenses and blocks, might guard itself.  

A good deal of Sullivan’s work on white privilege is clearly not only similar to Mills’ philosophy, but derives from many of Mills’ fundamental insights, including his epistemology of ignorance and his “circular indictment” of bodies and spaces. Neither body of work, however, can stand as a replacement for the other, and a “both-and” approach of reading them together gives the richest picture of race-related problems.  

Mills presents an analysis of political and economic structures, a social epistemology, and a social psychology. Mills’ work importantly never loses sight of the fact that race-related problems are large-scale, systemic problems, not a collection of individual matters. His analysis is a global, historical analysis throughout that emphasizes, in particular, the economic dimensions of racial inequality. The large-scale structures and dynamics that Mills exposes are also present and significant in Sullivan’s work, but her focus is on a more intimate level as she describes the psychology and habitual (bodily) activities of individuals in transaction with their environments (including social groups, political atmospheres, and economic patterns). In other words, though “individuals” (or “organisms” or “body-minds,” to use Deweyan terms that

Sullivan warns white people that “…the purpose of critical race theory and other antiracist work is not to protect [white people’s] fragile psyches, and so white people should not expect such protection if they are to participate in that work” (Revealing Whiteness 184).
Sullivan sometimes borrows\textsuperscript{67} are far from independent and atomistic according to Sullivan, it is on the level of these transacting individuals/organisms/body-minds that her account roams. Thus, while Mills posits social ignorance, Sullivan shows social ignorance in action, as it were, on the micro-level of everyday habits and transactions. Likewise, Mills posits the mutually constitutive relationship between bodies and spaces, and Sullivan draws on Pragmatist philosophy to explain in more detail how the relationship plays out.

If we think of individuals and social structures as two sides of a coin, we could say that Mills and Sullivan are describing virtually the same thing, namely the dynamic relationship between individuals and structures, from opposite sides. While Sullivan is looking at the individual and how he transacts with the various environments he inhabits or moves through, Mills is looking at social spaces and economic patterns, that is, at the environments that are created by and in turn create individuals.

Despite the great value of the psychological element in Sullivan’s philosophy, it has the potential to lead to the unwanted effect of overshadowing the structural elements of racial inequality. For example, Sullivan includes economics as one of the significant environments or spaces involved in racialized transactions, but, as the following quote suggests, her emphasis is on “ownership” in a psychological rather than literal sense:

The economic reasons for white habits of ownership cannot be understood apart from the onto-psychological….Whiteness as possession describes not just the act of owning, but also the obsessive psychosomatic state of white owners. Commodifying non-white peoples and cultures, unconscious habits of white privilege tend to transform them into objects for white appropriation and use. The benefits accrued to white people through this process include not merely

\textsuperscript{67} Living Across and Through Skins 24.
economic gain, but also increased ontological security and satisfaction of unconscious desires.⁶⁸

Sullivan is here introducing a real and important issue—the psycho-ontological aspects of ownership. However, the “transactive” relationship between psycho-ontological ownership and literal ownership of wealth and capital is best communicated by coupling Sullivan’s emphasis with Mills’:

…the world is essentially dominated by white capital…. [W]hites control a percentage of the world’s wealth grossly disproportionate to their numbers…. [I]t seems undeniable that for years to come, the planet will be white dominated…. Economic structures have been set in place, causal processes established… which will continue to work largely independently of the ill will/good will, racist/antiracist feelings of particular individuals.⁶⁹

At one point in her work, Sullivan reflects on the possible negative connotations of the term “transaction,” noting that the term’s “…everyday usage can suggest monetary matters.” She explains that “…Dewey did not, nor do I use the term to apply to, represent, or be a metaphor for economic exchange.”⁷⁰ In the context of racial inequality and white privilege, however, perhaps these economic connotations are not so inimical to the project.⁷¹ On the topic of white ownership, Mills and Sullivan together present a rich account that includes analysis of global institutions and the microprocesses of individuals, leaving us with a picture of white ownership of the earth as both literal (ownership of wealth and resources) and psychological (a commodifying and appropriating relation to others and otherness).

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⁶⁸ Revealing Whiteness 122.
⁶⁹ Racial Contract 36.
⁷⁰ Living Across and Through Skins 7-8.
⁷¹ For more on the importance of economics in anti-racist efforts, see Yancy, “Introduction,” pages 16-17.
⁷² In Darkwater, W. E. B. Du Bois declares that “…whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!” (22).
Granted the importance of staying attuned to the significance of large-scale structures that carry enough momentum to perpetuate themselves without intent, on the other hand, Sullivan’s incorporation of a psychological element adds an important dimension to Mills’ epistemology of ignorance. While Mills identifies the epistemic limitations of white people and notes that this ignorance comes with psychological benefits, Sullivan shows the intense drama that plays out in both individual and collective psyches, giving particular emphasis to resistances, blocks, and defenses that reveal a vague awareness, on some level, of the “ugliness” of white privilege. An understanding of this emotional and psychological drama is crucial as we move on to consider ways of creating change. Furthermore, Sullivan’s look into the operations of white privilege as everyday transactions between individuals and environments producing unconscious habits is always, even during long stretches of explication and analysis, attuned to the possibility and the difficulty of change. A sense of individual agency pervades her work despite the limitations she places on an individual’s power to enact change in herself and her environments. Her analysis thus sets her up for a discussion of what should or could be done to combat white privilege and especially one’s own participation in it.

Linda Martín Alcoff: Social Horizons and Habitual Bodies

Against those who claim either that social identities are fictions that do not describe anything real, that social identities are oppressive for those who fall under their rubric, or that social identities inevitably cause conflict and divisiveness among groups, Linda Martín Alcoff argues that identities including race and gender are real, often
enabling rather than oppressive, and not intrinsically divisive. Acknowledging that identities are “…socially constructed, historically malleable, [and] culturally contextual…,”\textsuperscript{73} Alcoff points out that they are, nevertheless, “…epistemologically salient and ontologically real ent[i]es”;\textsuperscript{74} that “…remain the most telling predictors of social power and success….”\textsuperscript{75} Identities such as race and gender are, furthermore, visible identities, attributed and taken up based on a cultural coding of morphology and appearance, that etch their reality onto bodies.\textsuperscript{76} While imposed social identities can certainly be oppressive, Alcoff says, identities that “…resonate with and unify lived experience…” can be a site of agency, “…a way of inhabiting, interpreting, and working through, both collectively and individually, an objective social location and group history.”\textsuperscript{77} Only when one assumes that agency arises in a solitary individual and that community and society are therefore detrimental to agency does the conclusion follow that social identities are threats to rather than vehicles of agency.\textsuperscript{78} The belief that social identities are divisive similarly rests on mistaken assumptions, according to Alcoff, namely, that “…identities represent discrete and specifiable sets of interests”\textsuperscript{79} and that cultures are “…closed systems with no intersections.”\textsuperscript{80} Alcoff, who sees cultures and

\textsuperscript{73} Visible Identities 182.
\textsuperscript{74} Visible Identities 5.
\textsuperscript{75} Visible Identities viii. For more details on what Alcoff means by “social power and success,” see viii, x, and 181. For a recent statistical analysis that supports Alcoff’s claims, see Acevedo-Garcia et al.
\textsuperscript{76} Visible Identities ix, 5-7, 102-103, and 191-92. Alcoff notes that those people who are not easily classifiable based on appearance (according to a dominant cultural code of classification) do not disprove the reality of identities; instead, the reaction of agitation that people tend to have toward those not easily classifiable gives further evidence of the force of identities.
\textsuperscript{77} Visible Identities 42.
\textsuperscript{78} Visible Identities 80-81.
\textsuperscript{79} Visible Identities 41.
\textsuperscript{80} Visible Identities 46.
identities as fluid, internally diverse, and overlapping with or sharing in other cultures and identities, argues that “…it is the refusal to acknowledge the importance of the differences in our identities that has led to distrust, miscommunication, and thus disunity.”81

In order to counter the myriad misunderstandings of social identities based on mistaken assumptions, Alcoff realizes that she needs to develop a new model of identity that is more responsive to the lived experience of social identity. Her account needs to reconfigure identity as “…fluid, complex, open-ended, and dynamic…”, as overlapping with (rather than exclusive of) other identities; as “…pluritopic and multicultural, constituted by sometimes contradictory background meanings or value assumptions,” and as subjective and lived (not merely externally imposed).84 To create this account, Alcoff turns to the Hermeneutic concept of “horizon” (primarily as developed by Gadamer).

Philosophers in the Hermeneutic tradition have attempted to subvert models of perception that assume that perceivers are neutral vessels that take in the same things in identical ways. A horizon, literally, is a limit to one’s field of vision, but it is not a limit in the sense of a clear and distinct border; things simply become less distinct and fade away at the edge of one’s horizon of vision. The general situatedness of one’s visual horizon, of course, depends on where she is and changes as she moves. Hermeneutics takes up the idea of a visual horizon and puts it to work in an epistemology, so that a

81 Visible Identities 6.
82 Visible Identities 112.
83 Visible Identities 125.
84 Visible Identities 42 and 93.
“horizon” is not simply what one can (literally) see, but rather what one can perceive, know, and understand. Since Alcoff is using the notion of “horizon” as a model of social identity, she is particularly interested in the social dimensions of “horizon,” so that in her account, a horizon signifies “…the effect of social location on the self, what is visible from this location, and thus what the self can know.”85 Social horizons are shaped by “…background assumptions, form of life, and social location or position within the social structure and hierarchy.”86 They develop collectively through “…the sedimentation of past historical beliefs and practices of a given society or culture.”87 Because cultural beliefs and perspectives have so gradually sedimented and enjoy “consensus or near consensus” within a social group, they are experienced as simply and obviously true, as “common sense,” as unquestionable.88 This “common sense,” as the most basic shape or range of a horizon, both enables and constrains what a person can see, know, and understand,89 and thus who she is and how she experiences the world.

While identity as horizon leads us away from many misconceptions about social identities, Alcoff is not entirely satisfied with this Hermeneutic account. Alcoff wants to extend the notion of horizon as an epistemological field to a notion of horizon as also a “range of agency,”90 including bodily agency. The location in space that the concept of horizon implies—that is, the particular perspective that extends out toward a horizon—is,

85 Visible Identities 88.
86 Visible Identities 96.
87 Visible Identities 185.
88 Visible Identities 185. Alcoff borrows this idea of “common sense” from Gramsci.
89 Visible Identities 42-43.
90 Visible Identities 92-93.
according to Alcoff, nothing other than a person’s bodily existence. A horizon, as an epistemological field as well as a range of bodily agency, roughly demarcates not only what is visible to us (knowable, understandable, what makes sense), but also what we can envision doing (what we are able to do, what we do habitually, what makes sense to do). To enhance in this way the Hermeneutic notion of horizon, Alcoff turns to Phenomenology (primarily the work of Merleau-Ponty) for an account of body.

Just as beliefs and judgments can become sedimented into “common sense,” acts, activities, and practices can become sedimented into bodily habits. As Mills and Sullivan also point out, in cross-racial encounters people tend to fall back on certain gestures, body postures, facial expressions, and tones of voice—that is, on racialized body habits. Because these body habits are so familiar to us and because we fall into them without thought or deliberation, they feel “natural” and are difficult for us to notice. To account for the sedimentation of bodily habits, Alcoff introduces Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “the habitual body.” As Alcoff explains, the habitual body is “…a default position the body assumes in various commonly experienced circumstances that integrates and unifies our movements through a kind of unconscious physical shorthand.”

Bridging the philosophical gap between cognition and bodily activity, Alcoff explores perception, as an epistemological, psychological, social, and bodily activity, through the lens of Merleau-Ponty’s “habitual body.”

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91 Visible Identities 102.
92 Visible Identities 108. This point goes beyond Mills’ and Sullivan’s accounts of bodily habit by pointing out how our habits seem to us simply “natural.” A white person is likely to see her racialized habits as just “what a person does” (rather than what a white person does). So, for Alcoff, habits may be not noticed at all, or may be noticed and taken as normal, as a matter of course.
93 Visible Identities 184.
To explain the habitual nature of perception, Merleau-Ponty presents an example of a blind person using a stick in order to determine the contour of the ground and the location of objects. When the stick touches something, the person feels pressure from the stick against his hand; this pressure indicates that there is an object at the tip of the stick. Merleau-Ponty explains that this person, familiar with using a stick in this way, does not stop each time to interpret the pressures on his hand and think about what it must infer about objects on the ground. Habit, Merleau-Ponty says, “relieves us of the necessity” of interpreting. Similarly, when we perceive (in familiar situations), we do not need to go through each step of analysis and interpretation since habit fills in for us, doing the work of interpreting for us. Perception, then, is an activity of body patterned by “…sedimented contextual knowledges.” It is an activity that makes up part of our “common sense.” The habitual character of perception, which makes our conclusions about what we perceive feel “natural” or simply obvious, leaves us generally unaware that anything like interpretation has occurred. In other words, we experience ourselves as simply perceiving what is real, while in fact our modes of perception are already laden with “historico-cultural schemas of meaning.” Perception, then, creates the setting in which observation, analysis, and interpretation occur, while the mechanisms of perception itself are not observed, analyzed, or interpreted but simply taken up without reflection.

Providing examples of race as a condition of perception rather than something that is perceived—race, in other words, as the background or setting of one’s

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94 Visible Identities 188.
95 Visible Identities 184.
96 Visible Identities 188.
97 Visible Identities 126 and 188.
interpretation of the world that is not itself subject to reflection—Alcoff explains that “[a] fear of African Americans or a condescension toward Latinos is seen [by many white people] as simple perception of the real, justified by the nature of things in themselves without need of an interpretive intermediary of historico-cultural schemas of meaning.”

In other words, white people encountering a “suspicious” black person or group of black people may believe that their apprehension is a normal and sensible response to a situation in which there is clear evidence of a threat. Writing race out of the scenario, they believe themselves to be responding simply to this single (black) individual or this particular group of (black) individuals who are displaying shady behavior, whose actions or speech or stance is somehow aggressive. What the perceivers do not see is that their perception is animated in part by an entrenched cultural narrative of black people as threatening, as more aggressive than white people. The perceivers are unable to isolate the actual “behavior,” judge it according to its threatening potential, and consider how they would respond if the race of those behaving in this way were different. Similarly, in an encounter with a Latino/a (or a group of Latino/as), white people may believe that there is clear evidence that the person (or people) before them is actually incompetent. The perceivers do not perceive white cultural and racial superiority as the background to their perception. Perceptions of Latino/as and Hispanics can also be animated by narratives of “authentic” Americans versus immigrants, especially if the person or people perceived speak with a Spanish-language accent. Hearing these voices, the white perceiver may leave the encounter believing there was clear evidence in what was said.

98 Visible Identities 188.
and how the people presented themselves of their lack of qualification, intelligence, or
general competence. The unseen interpretation for which habit is shorthand includes a
vision of white people as real Americans and the idea that certain accents are not accents
at all, but “normal” English. That the text behind this encounter is racial becomes clear
when we compare reactions to, on the one hand, a white person with a European accent,
and, on the other hand, an East Asian, Indian, African, or Hispanic accent. In such
questions of legitimacy and competence, language, ethnicity, class, and race intersect to
create a web of meaning setting the scene for the act of perception.

Bringing together Alcoff’s remarks on identity, horizon, and the habitual body,
we could say that one’s “location” in space (intersections of social spaces that include
literal spaces) is her habituated body whose movements, postures, and modes of
perception are continuations of cultural sedimentations (though not strictly determined,
uniform, nor unalterable). This location—these habitual movements, postures, and
modes of perception—offer her a view of the world and establish her horizon (what she
can notice, know, and do). One’s location and the horizon it affords constitute one’s
identity. A horizon, then, is the indistinct and fluid edge of one’s self, one’s evolving
social identity formed from within and from without, one’s location in historical and
cultural narratives, as well as the range of one’s agency.

While Sullivan’s and Alcoff’s accounts clearly bear similarity to each other in that
each discusses bodily habits, their philosophical underpinnings lead them in different
directions. With Pragmatist “transaction” always in the background, Sullivan emphasizes
the dynamic, two-way influence of bodily/psychical habits and environments including
literal spaces and places as well as metaphorical spaces such as social circles, family, profession, leisure activities, media, and literature. While both Sullivan and Alcoff would say that people and environments inform each other, “transaction” captures the continual movement and activity of co-constituting whereas “sedimentation,” with its connotation of “set in stone,” does not reveal as effectively the on-going forces that sustain and perpetuate these historico-cultural patterns.

As noted in the previous section, Sullivan, by looking at habits through the lens of Psychoanalysis, is able to explain the difficulty of change and our common resistance to change. It is not simply the inertia of habit nor the strong force of environment that gives endurance to our ways of being, but also our psychological (that is, largely unconscious) investments in our ways of being. As quoted above, Sullivan says that “…bodily habits are not merely the nonreflective backdrop to lived experience [as Merleau-Ponty

99 Sullivan is, in general, skeptical about the usefulness of Merleau-Ponty for critical race theory. According to Merleau-Ponty, a person “…projects meaning onto the world…”; this is what Merleau-Ponty calls “projective intentionality.” This extension of the self outward, the self as the source of meaning writing itself onto the world, is, in Sullivan’s eyes, “unidirectional” instead of transactional (Revealing Whiteness 163). Merleau-Ponty fails to appreciate, in other words, the role of environments (including social spaces and interactions among people) in shaping individuals and making their lives meaningful. Furthermore, when Merleau-Ponty discusses communication and the possibility of understanding others’ intentionality, he posits the body as a shared, neutral substratum that links us to others. Observing others’ bodily behavior, we liken it to our own and then are able to associate the behavior with intentionality. Here too, Sullivan finds Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the self too projective. Protesting that there is no such neutral (“anonymous,” to use Merleau-Ponty’s term) body, independent of gender, race, class, and upbringing, that unites us all, Sullivan warns us that “…one cannot merely assume that one has understood another’s bodily activities and habits correctly by projecting one’s own intentionality onto them” (Living Across and Through Skins 73; see also 65-72). I believe that Alcoff’s use of Merleau-Ponty avoids this criticism. To begin with, Alcoff’s use of Merleau-Ponty is limited and does not take up his theories of intentionality and communication. More importantly, Alcoff transforms Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of habitual perception into an account of socialized perception, where habits are not developed individually, but are historically and culturally formed. Alcoff thus acknowledges the power of environments to shape individuals. When discussing communication across difference, Alcoff uses the Hermeneutic notion of horizon rather than Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the anonymous body. She suggests that genuine and effective communication occurs only when the individuals or groups involved have some sense of the other’s horizon—when they acknowledge differences in identities and perspectives (Visible Identities 96). Hence, Alcoff may be closer to Sullivan than one might think upon considering her use of Merleau-Ponty and Sullivan’s critique of Merleau-Ponty.
suggests], nor do they continue unchanged solely because of inertia. They instead are a site of repression that actively subverts attempts at transformation because such transformation would risk bringing the traumatic event or shameful values to conscious attention.\textsuperscript{100} Incorporating Sullivan’s psychoanalytic insights into Alcoff’s notion of horizon, we could say that while our horizons in some cases simply fade into the distance with gradually cloudier levels of awareness, in other cases, we seal off our horizons by constructing border fences and walls that obstruct both vision and travel. It is not, in other words, that we simply do not see what is distant and different—we sometimes prevent ourselves from seeing.

Especially when enhanced with a Psychoanalytic understanding, Alcoff’s epistemology of ignorance in terms of horizon is a particularly useful depiction of the possibility of both understanding across differences and failures to understand. Social horizons can have very little overlap and can establish and guard their borders carefully. On the other hand, horizons do not in themselves have clear and distinct boundaries, are not permanently established, can stretch and evolve, and can overlap with other horizons. Alcoff thus offers a tangible visual model of disconnect and misunderstanding that still allows for connection and understanding. Further accounting for misunderstanding and disunity, Alcoff shows (through her use of Merleau-Ponty) how habit takes the place of interpretation. With the disappearance of interpretation, we lose an analytical site of entry into our convictions and actions. Habit then functions as interpretation, as a repetition of interpretation, but without recognizing itself as interpretation and therefore

\textsuperscript{100} Revealing Whiteness 8.
is invulnerable to scrutiny and reinterpretation. Lacking a grasp of our own horizons and replacing the contemplative, interpretive step in perception with habit, we experience ourselves as simply perceiving what’s real or true, and we fail to understand each other, that is, to see what the other sees in the way the other sees (or even to acknowledge that other things may be seen or that things may be seen in different ways).

Although Alcoff’s account is very valuable in that it reveals the substitution of habit for interpretation, it could be misleading since one could take it to imply that what is now habitual for an individual was once a conscious and deliberate process of interpretation akin to a blind person initially learning how to navigate with a cane. This can’t be Alcoff’s intended meaning since the “sedimented knowledge” that she claims makes up habit is a cultural rather than a merely individual knowledge. In other words, while one may have some childhood experiences of puzzling out “race,” many of our race-related attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and habits are formed within our contexts and communities without our awareness of the formation process. In order to solidify this point, we can bring Sullivan into the account again. Drawing on the work of psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche, Sullivan claims that “enigmatic messages” pertaining to race are transmitted from parent (or care-taker or other prominent adult figure) to child.\footnote{Revealing Whiteness 64-65.} The messages are enigmatic in part because the child cannot understand them, but also because the adult does not fully understand them.\footnote{Revealing Whiteness 70.} As an example, Sullivan retells a story from Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye about a young black girl receiving as a gift a “beautiful” white doll. She is puzzled by the doll that all the adults are calling

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\textsuperscript{101} Revealing Whiteness 64-65.  
\textsuperscript{102} Revealing Whiteness 70.
“beautiful,” though later in life she has fully internalized the association of whiteness and beauty. This aesthetic evaluation (whiteness as beauty), initially stimulated by enigmatic messages like the one accompanying the doll, becomes habitual without ever having been fully understood or thoroughly and critically examined. In the same way, habits of perception, as Alcoff describes them, replace interpretation, but the prior interpretation is, in most cases, a collective and gradual formation rather than the conscious work of an individual agent. The collective interpretation infects an individual more often as already a habit.

Bringing the erasure of interpretation—or habits as (repetition of) interpretation—to bear on Mills’ account of the epistemology of ignorance, we see the reason behind white people’s common “failure to ask certain questions”: namely, the questions are already answered in the form of habits. But because interpretation as habit (unlike more explicit, contemplative forms of interpretation) answers a question without genuinely posing the question anew, it enters the world as a statement of fact or as response to reality—rather than presenting itself as interpretation. Then we could say that one’s social identity is not only a matter of what appears in one’s horizon, but how it appears—

103 Sullivan explains the awareness (or lack thereof) that the adults and the girl, Claudia, have of the message being transmitted:

The adults…transmit an enigmatic message to Claudia about the importance and power of whiteness in the adult world. The message is unknown to the adults in that while they certainly are conscious of the existence of white racism against black people, they are not fully aware of how their intense desire to share in whiteness proudly swells in their voice as they speak of the blue-eyed doll. And the message is equally opaque to Claudia. She is able to translate the part of it that says that the doll is very precious, but she [is] not able to translate its larger, more significant part, which is that whiteness is something desirable and that white standards of beauty are something that black females in particular should strive to achieve. (Revealing Whiteness 72)

104 Revealing Whiteness 71-72.
whether it appears as a settled matter of fact or as questionable, that is, open to (re)interpretation.

María Lugones: Tension and Interaction in the Power Map

María Lugones identifies the limitations of white people’s understanding of social, racial dynamics (actually, in this case, white women’s understanding of social, racial dynamics since she is creating a critique of white feminist theorists) as solipsism and isolation. There are two layers to this critique (which may sound contradictory at first). First is Lugones’ claim that white women really do fail to interact richly with women of color. Secondly, Lugones describes white women as believing themselves to be separate from other women and from social dynamics when in fact they are involved. To understand this second sense of “isolation,” we have to turn to Lugones’ description of a “tension.” On the one side of the tension is oppression—or, to use her words, “oppressing/being oppressed”—and on the other side of the tension is resistance—or “resisting.” The tension can be depicted like this:

“oppressing/being oppressed ⇔ resisting.”

In the introduction to Pilgrimages / Peregrinajes, Lugones signifies the tension as “oppressing/being oppressed ⇔ resisting” (see pages 11-12). In the book chapters, which were written prior to the introduction, she identifies the tension as “oppressing ⇔ resisting” or vice versa (see, for example, chapter 10—pages 207-231—and chapter summaries on pages 31-32 and 34). I think the addition of “being oppressed” adds a valuable complication to her account of tension. As Lugones herself describes in several places, there tends to be within a person who is oppressed a dynamic tension between, on the one hand, acting according to the (or a) logic of oppression, and, on the other, acting according to a logic of resistance.
In the case of race-relations, most white women are on the oppression side of the tension, in the role of “oppressing,” though they frequently do not see themselves there. They may even see the “being oppressed” dimension of women of color without understanding that they (white women) are interactively a part of the “oppression” side of the tension. Further, some white feminists acknowledge the “resisting” without really understanding either the resisting itself or that which it is resisting, namely, the dynamics of oppression.\textsuperscript{106}

Giving an example of white women’s misunderstanding of women of color, Lugones says that many white feminists listen to critiques from women of color enough to become concerned about “the problem of difference,” that is, the dilemma that theory seems to be intrinsically general and yet its generalizing (in this case, the generalizing of feminist theory) excludes particular people (such as women of color). But being concerned about this theoretical dilemma is a far cry from being concerned about women of color. This misplaced concern is highlighted by the strategies several white feminists use to deal with the “problem of difference.” Instead of developing an inclusive and pluralistic feminism (in theory and practice), these theorists expound the same theories as always, but precede them with a disclaimer along the lines of “this may not apply to all women.” This is most obviously dissatisfying because it fails to create a pluralistic feminism and because it has very little to offer to women of color. It is further dissatisfying, Lugones explains, because it implies that women of color must respond to

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes} 13.
the theory with their own narratives and critiques; in this way, the theory sets the agenda and in essence says: if you don’t like it, you’ll have to fix it, because I’m not going to.  

What many white feminists skip in their attempts to deal with “the problem of difference” is what Lugones names “…the interactive step.” White women, she is saying, need to understand that oppression and resistance occur as tensions—interactions—and, secondly, they need to understand that when women of color critique white women, they are opening up a possibility for dialogue—interaction in a richer and more deliberate sense—which white women close down when they insert disclaimers rather than learning from and thinking together with women of color. This is what Lugones means with her dual claims that white women are involved, implicated, interactive, in a dynamic tension, with women of color whether they acknowledge it or not and that white women generally turn down the invitation to interact in a much richer and more deliberate sense.

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107 *Pilgrimages /Peregrinajes* 68-69. This sort of acceptance and affirmation in the abstract which fails to include women of color and address their concerns has plagued largely white, middle-class feminist groups from the start. In her history of Bread and Roses and other socialist feminist organizations in the late 60s and early 70s, Winifred Breines says, “…they intellectually recognized class and race as barriers to feminist solidarity but were not yet fully aware that…their middle-class whiteness inflected their politics as profoundly as race did black women’s politics” (*The Trouble Between Us*, 95). Breines here is making a distinction between “recognizing intellectually” and being “fully aware.” While she does not elaborate on the differences, we can surmise that “full awareness” includes a knowing-in-practice and an interactive knowing, in which one’s politics are formed in dialogue and coalition with people of various classes and races and those politics pursue in action the interests of these other groups, not only one’s own immediate interests. To put it differently, we could say that with “full awareness,” one’s own interests expand, as she comes to care intimately not only about the liberation of middle-class white women (who, for example, often found family life oppressive as it prepared women for the isolating domestic work of supporting a husband and children), but also the liberation of other races and classes including black, lower-class women (who generally worked outside of the home and saw the family as one of several important communal units in the fight against racism and injustice) (Breines 88-92). The liberation of black, lower-class women becomes not simply a just cause for the “fully aware,” white, middle-class feminist, but something in which she is personally invested. This sort of “full awareness,” Lugones would say, can only be developed through a genuine interaction that can be difficult to achieve.

108 *Pilgrimages /Peregrinajes* 69.
sense with women of color, a sense that has the potential to transform the tension between oppressing/being oppressed and resisting.

Lugones develops her account of interaction between white women and women of color into a spatial account by describing an experience with which most women of color in the U.S. are quite familiar: one says or does something that would make sense in her community and would be understood without effort by her peers, but in a gathering of white people, her words or actions come across as bizarre, obtuse, nonsensical, or as offensive, “over-the-top,” bitter, etc. It is through this experience of making sense in some settings and not making sense in other settings that Lugones develops her concept of “worlds.” In some “worlds,” Lugones explains, she makes sense; in others, she does not, unless she bends herself to the tendencies of these foreign-feeling worlds.

When a person is in her own world—that is, the world where she is “at home” and has a strong sense of herself and her agency—she makes sense because she has the “backing” of a community and a context that renders her sensible. White women, more than women of color, tend to fit well and make sense in worlds that include the dominant institutions of the U.S.; that is, hegemonic cultural understandings, political atmospheres, and economic patterns give white women, more than women of color, a backing that renders them sensible.

In contexts where whiteness prevails, women of color—assuming their words and actions are noticed at all—are more likely to be taken as “not making sense”

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109 Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes 13, 15, and 86-69.
110 For a more nuanced explanation of what may lead one to claim a certain world as her world, see pages 90-91.
111 Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes 219.
112 White feminists (male or female) will be distanced from dominant worlds insofar as these worlds are characterized by patriarchy and/or sexism, but not as distant as most women of color will be.
or “off the mark” or “acting out.” Because women of color often “travel,” to use Lugones’ word, from world to world (sometimes by choice, often by necessity) and see their differing selves in each world, they are more likely to be aware of the backing that renders a person sensible. White women, in contrast, are often unaware of their institutional backing because they are less likely to travel to worlds where they lack this backing. Hence, white women as feminist theorists too often see their thoughts, actions, and projects as very much their own and as “just making sense,” whereas women of color, as critics, can see the backing behind white feminists’ theories.

Crucial to Lugones’ idea of “worlds” is that the various “worlds” in which people live and through which people travel are neither neutral in terms of power nor equivalent to one another in terms of power. A white feminist’s world carries more institutional backing in the U.S. than a Hispanic, Asian, or black feminist’s world. Imagining “maps” of these “worlds,” Lugones sees a geography of power. Our lives, she says, are “…spatially mapped by power.” Power tells us in which spaces we are welcome and from which we should “keep out.” We encounter “signs” that indicate which type of people are supposed to take which roads and arrive in which spaces. Along with telling us where to go and where to stay, power also dictates how we occupy various spaces. For example, Lugones explains that although an empowered person can move

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113 Again, an exception to this would be feminists operating in patriarchal worlds. But Lugones seems to be saying that white feminists have created a dominant world of their own, governed not by white patriarchy but by white feminism, and that few white feminists “travel” outside of this dominant—or perhaps sub-dominant?—world.
114 Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes 86-89 and 219.
115 Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes 8.
116 Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes 9.
about freely to almost any space, he “…may not go there *in resistance* to domination; that occupation of space is not mapped in this map. [He] may go places as boss, pleasure seeker on the labor of others, tourist, colonizer, and user of people’s lives and labor…, and [he is] ideologically constructed as having deserved [his] spot.” If we want to be other than how a space constructs us to be, we have to somehow thwart the power map rather than travel around within it. Because the map channels people into complicity, resistance can be achieved only through a confrontation with the map itself. In other words, a white person cannot simply show up in a non-white-dominated space and say, “I’m here, aren’t I? So I’m one of the good guys!” Instead, she must join the group’s effort to interfere with social mappings of racialized spaces and rewrite the roles assigned to people according to races in these spaces.

Lugones’ notion of a tension between oppressing/being oppressed and resisting lends a dynamism to Mills, Sullivan, and Alcoff’s accounts. Mills writes of the inertia of systemic structures and the persistence of the effects of the Racial Contract. Sullivan emphasizes the stubborn resilience of habits of white privilege. Alcoff describes habit in terms of sedimentation. These are all valid and important claims. On the other hand, while noting entrenched patterns and steadfast institutions, we need also to see that no matter how invulnerable and sovereign patterns and institutions may sometimes appear, they are—and always have been—in contest with resistance. So we may agree with Mills, for example, that nonwhite people are “subject to” the Racial Contract, but we

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117 *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes* 9.
must also keep sight of the resistance that nonwhite people (and some white people) have
pulled to the contract. Similarly, while noting the hegemony of white habits and white
spaces, we cannot be seduced into thinking that other forces have had no power at all in
resisting and shaping bodies and spaces. Lugones’ “tension” serves as a welcome
reminder that wherever there has been oppression, exploitation, or inequality, it has been
in a dynamic tension with resistance.

Lugones’ analysis of space in terms of *power* makes explicit an important aspect
of the racialization of space that is implicit in Mills and Sullivan’s accounts. For
example, Mills traces the origins of the racing of space to colonial conquest. Power, in
other words, has imposed race on both bodies and spaces, creating zones of “purity” and
“hearts of darkness.” The racing of spaces that has continued since colonialism has
occurred not as an innocent “rubbing off” of bodies on spaces, but as strategic ways of
taking up race in order to accumulate, maintain, acquire, or resist power. As another
example, Sullivan describes white people as “ontologically expansive”—that is, as
believing that all spaces are theirs for the occupying. And in fact white people *can*
move easily through many spaces that others cannot. White people are, we could say,
“spatially empowered”—which means that the power map not only allows them to access
many spaces, but also to exercise their power in those spaces. Then inhabiting certain
environments—whether in collusion with or as a trespass against the habits of white
privilege—means lining oneself up in relation to *power* in certain ways. The habits,

118 *Revealing Whiteness* 25, 143-44, and 177.
are acts of power: they are not only methods of cashing in on socially granted privileges, but are impositions of one’s agency on the world.

While Lugones may in these ways contribute to Mills, Sullivan, and Alcoff’s accounts, her account can in turn be filled out by contributions from Mills, Sullivan, and Alcoff. Lugones says that white women remain solipsistic, failing to take the interactive step. To account for this phenomenon, we can turn to the epistemologies of ignorance developed by Mills, Sullivan, and Alcoff that give insightful analysis to the social, epistemological, and psychological isolation of white people. They show, in other words, what stands in the way of that interactive step, the layers of socialized ignorance, sedimented habits, closed horizons, and psychological resistance that must be “stepped over.” They also point the way toward that “stepping over,” showing the flexibility and impermanence of these divisions, stubborn though they may be. Then Lugones is ready with a sense of the possibility of coalition with those already engaged in resistance, reminding us that anti-racist change is not a new project that white people must build from the ground up.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have given a “both-and” (or “all together”) reading of Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones, allowing each to come into dialogue with the others, using each account to enhance the others. By approaching race, racialization, racism, race relations, and the problematic tendencies of white people from several angles, we can attain a multidimensional understanding of these complex and multivalent
themes. To an understanding of the problematic tendencies of white people in terms of social and epistemic limitations, Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones each contribute unique resources. Beginning our account with Mills, we keep sight of large-scale structures such as global economic patterns that favor, and will continue to favor, white people and largely white societies. We also have the introduction of an “epistemology of ignorance” and the notion that bodies and spaces shape one another. Sullivan’s understanding of habit as an individual’s engrained bodily and psychical patterns—which, though identifiable as “an individual’s” are in constant transaction with various “others” and environments—allows us to see racialization and white privilege operating in concrete, everyday ways and, further, reveals the great difficulty one faces in becoming aware of and changing her racialized ways of living. Sullivan’s emphasis on the unconscious (not merely non-conscious) dimension of habit shows what a deep hold our racialized habits have in us and reveals what we may be up against in attempting transformation. Alcoff’s account of horizon uses a spatial metaphor to illustrate, on the one hand, misunderstanding and failures to communicate and, on the other, the possibility of greater understanding and better communication across lines of difference as horizons shift. Furthermore, through her use of Merleau-Ponty, Alcoff identifies that which habit replaces in perception—namely, interpretation—thereby revealing the inaccessibility of our perceptual evaluations. Lugones keeps resistance in view and reminds us that habits are acts of power. She draws lines of power, oppression, and resistance into the mapping of racialized spaces. Reading all four theorists together, we have a properly complex understanding of the problematic tendencies of white people on the basis of which we are ready to consider possibilities for change.
CHAPTER TWO

The Need for an Account of Transformation: How Nietzsche Answers the Call

As I have shown in chapter one, theorists such as Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones have provided a complex understanding of the tendencies of white people in terms of epistemic limitations, habits, and bodily-spatial-social isolation. It is my claim that, after the foundational critical work these theorists have done, the next step is to develop an account of how people change in this context—an account of transformation against the grain of race-related problems. It is this crucial step that can lead us, later on, to fully strategic, constructive work in this setting. After establishing the need for this account, I suggest that a *Nietzschean* account of transformation would be appropriate to the case of white people as Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones describe them. While this claim is supported in full in subsequent chapters, I here present a few of the potential resources in Nietzsche and indicate how they line up with several of the claims that Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones make. But, as anyone with a passing acquaintance of Nietzsche knows, there are many aspects of his thought that would be inimical to a liberatory project. As I present such drawbacks, I argue that they cannot be passed over and ignored in favor of the more attractive elements of Nietzsche’s philosophy. While few theorists have made use of Nietzsche for anti-racist projects, many have taken up Nietzsche for feminist projects. It is through an examination of these feminist uses of Nietzsche that I chart out a method for navigating Nietzsche’s thought that will allow me, in chapters three through five, to take up much of Nietzsche’s philosophy without
ignoring the aspects of his thought that are detrimental to an anti-racist project nor treating them as if they were incidental to his overall philosophy.

From Critique to Prescription and Strategy: The Intermediate Step

The field of Critical Race Theory to date has been largely “critical.” In other words, theorists have produced analyses, descriptions, and diagnoses of race, racial identity, race relations, and racism. The accounts have encompassed current local, national, and global situations and have traced historical trends as well. The investigations have occurred on multiple levels including the biological, the social, the psychological, and the economic. Among these accounts are Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ descriptions of the problematic tendencies and socio-epistemic limitations of white people. While criticism is itself productive and both directly and indirectly promotes change, still, it needs to be linked up with discussions about future possibilities. Given these historical trends and current situations, what can we expect, hope for, and work towards? How can we disrupt the problematic trends and situations that theorists have identified? With these questions, we move from the descriptive to the prescriptive—to the constructive work of creating strategies for resistance and change. The question then becomes: how can white people move from a form of *complicit whiteness* to a form of *resistant whiteness*?  

119 Although these terms are helpful in quickly distinguishing ways of living one’s whiteness, it is important to keep in mind, first, that there are all sorts of ways of being complicit with—and likewise resistant to—race-related problems, and secondly, that one can be complicit in some ways and resistant in
While Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones all highlight, in various ways, the difficulty of change in relation to whiteness and race-related problems, none forecloses the possibility. Although Mills says that white people are likely to be socially ignorant, he nowhere says that they are necessarily ignorant. Sullivan may claim that great obstacles stand in the way of transforming one’s habits, but she does not think of habits as permanent patterns. Though horizons can, on Alcoff’s account, isolate people from each other, horizons are not impenetrable, wholly distinct bubbles. Lugones locates most white women on the “oppressing” side of the tension, but nothing absolutely prevents them from migrating toward the “resisting” side. Put simply, change is possible even while white individuals are pulled forcefully into complicity.

Though Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones have left open the possibility of change even while establishing the difficulty of change, what they have not done is supply an account of how people change in this context. Given Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ descriptions of white people in terms of ignorance, habit, and social isolation, what drives change and how does change unfold? This is not the same as asking what specific things a white person should do in order to change herself. It is not a call for strategic planning, but for an understanding of the mechanisms and dynamics of transformation. Had we not first had Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ descriptions of white people, we may have assumed that change is a matter of careful rational reconsideration and argumentation (perhaps in conjunction with the gathering of evidence and the use of will power). But as we will see, this common notion of change is others. These are not pure terms, and while they are not empty terms, they are also not terms that delineate with clear and distinct borders.
unworkable in the context Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones have given us. Then what will transformation in this context look like?

The account of transformation that I develop in this dissertation is an intermediate step: behind it lies the critical work of theorists like Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones. Beyond it is the realm of the fully constructive and strategic, the philosophical work of developing specific strategies and techniques for white people to fuel their own transformation and for all people to urge and support white people’s transformation against the grain of race-related problems. It is important that we not jump to this final step before we have a rich understanding of how people change in this context. Our strategic work could be jeopardized if it is built on a misunderstanding of how people change. As we move from Mills, through Sullivan and Alcoff, to Lugones, we see an increasing focus on the constructive and strategic; yet it’s fair to say that all four focus more on the descriptive. What they do offer as constructive, strategic beginnings may be valuable beginnings, but they require an understanding of transformation behind them in order to bring these buds to fruition.

The account of transformation we are looking for is one suitable to the context of white people as described by Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones. To ensure this suitability, we can scan their critical work for clues about which kinds of change are possible in this context and which are not. In other words, based on the descriptions that Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones give of the problematic tendencies of white people, we can eliminate some modes of transformation as viable possibilities in this setting and we can make some preliminary statements about the sort of transformation that could be effective.
Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones describe racism and white privilege as social ignorance, a failure to ask certain questions, a bodily and spatial matter, unconscious habits, perceiving within a limited horizon, pre-established interpretation, a lack of awareness of one’s role in a relation, an inability to notice other “worlds,” and an unacknowledged refusal to interact. To move beyond these social-epistemic limitations, a person must learn somehow to ask the questions he has so far failed to ask. Instead of perceiving with “common sense,” a person needs to perceive his “common sense.” He needs to disrupt his unconscious habits, and he has to begin seeing the “power map.”

Given these descriptions of the “problem,” reason, clear thinking, and rational argumentation can play only limited roles in the “solution”; they may serve as useful tools but may not be the primary mechanism of change. If racism and white privilege are not results of faulty reasoning and mistaken judgments, then sitting down in one’s Cartesian armchair to deliberate rationally about race and race relations won’t address the problem. After all, if part of the problem is a failure to ask certain questions, then when one begins deliberating, how will one be able to ask the relevant questions? Since much of what is involved in racial discrimination and white supremacy operates on the level of “common sense” (for those who are favored by these arrangements), clear thinking won’t be able to bring discrimination and supremacy to light, as the thinking itself will be structured by this racialized “common sense” framework. A determination to think rationally may elucidate what is already within one’s horizon, but will not enable one suddenly to see beyond the horizon. Even a consideration of others’ rational arguments has limited effectiveness if one has an unacknowledged tendency to dismiss different perspectives as not making sense, as over the top, or as instances of self-victimization.
Often one must be *ready* to hear others’ perspectives and won’t benefit a great deal from their wisdom until after already undergoing a significant transformation. Furthermore, if racialized habits are unconscious (not merely non-conscious) and we therefore have reason not to expose them to examination, a variety of blocks, defenses, and resistances will stand between rational thinking and the issues to be analyzed. In sum, for one who is ignorant of the racialized structures and dynamics of society as well as her own participation in them, rational thinking standing on its own will prove a weak method of transformation.

Suppose that, *after* coming to insights and reeducating one’s perceptions, one then turns to rational thinking, in consideration of evidence, to work toward better ways of living? Although changes in thinking do sometimes ignite changes in doing, acting, and interacting, transforming our ways of living often is not so simple. Just as a person with a deep fear or anxiety can acknowledge that, rationally speaking, there is nothing to be scared or worried about and yet will persist in the fear or anxiety, so too will we be unable simply to talk ourselves out of our race-related stances. I may believe that white Americans are often condescending toward Hispanic people, and I may believe that we should not be, and still I could fail to transform my patterns of condescension. Since, as Sullivan says, habits are not merely cognitive, transformation is not simply a matter of thinking differently, but rather includes retraining my body (my gestures), my face (my expressions), my voice (my intonation), and even my nose (my association of types of people with scents).\(^{120}\) So again, while we will certainly not cease to reason and use

\(^{120}\) *Revealing Whiteness* 68.
rational thinking, we cannot rely on their force alone either to alter our ways of perceiving or to reform our habitual ways of living and interacting. In Sullivan’s words, “[e]ven though logical arguments about race might lead a person to consciously decide to endorse non-racist ideas, such a decision does not necessarily have much, if any, impact on his or her unconscious habits.”

Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones are presenting—through their descriptions of the tendencies of white people in terms of ignorance, habit, “horizon,” and the unconscious—an implicit critique of the power of rationality to effect change. An account of transformation responsive to their descriptions should therefore be founded on a critique of rationality.

We now know something about what transformation against the grain of race-related problems is not. It is not a matter of using reason (along with gathering evidence and calling forth will power) to work one’s way to new conclusions. (Again, this is not to say that reason, evidence, and will power can have no role at all within the process of change, only that they cannot be the primary and guiding force.) We therefore need a model of transformation that is attuned to the various non-rational forces that support beliefs, attitudes, habits, and ways of living and interacting. As Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones indicate, efforts to resist race-related problems must be epistemic, spatial, and bodily. Our account of transformation, then, will need to recognize that transformation is complex; is non-rational in significant ways; involves cognitive,

121 Revealing Whiteness 22.
Why Use Nietzsche? A Different Understanding of Humans

As I claimed above, Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ accounts of white people’s tendencies implicitly call for an account of transformation that is not based on rational reconsideration. Transformation against the grain of race-related problems is not a mere change in beliefs or opinions, but is a more global change involving many diverse aspects of the self, operating on various levels of consciousness. Nietzsche can provide just such an account of transformation, in no small part because he presents, throughout his work, a robust and thoroughgoing critique of the power of rationality.

As I will explain in much more detail in chapter three, Nietzsche stands as a vehement critic of philosophers who inflate the value, effectiveness, and purity of reason and rationality. He finds rational argumentation to be all too often a support called to the scene after the fact to defend a conviction whose origins lie elsewhere than in reason.122 Nietzsche finds that philosophers, by attributing so much of what humans do and believe to rationality, have failed to explore the complex web of human drive and motivation which includes needs, desires, affects, instincts, physiological drives, strengths, weaknesses, socialization, environmental influences, personal histories, and communal histories. Given the limited power Nietzsche thus grants reasoning and rational

122 Beyond Good and Evil V:191, page 104.
argumentation in the formation and direction of the self, we can expect that
transformation, according to Nietzsche, will not be a simple matter of rethinking one’s
beliefs and coming to new, more reasonable views. Just as Nietzsche looks at beliefs as a
surface phenomenon (revealing something but concealing even more\textsuperscript{123}), he considers a
change in beliefs to be a sign of deeper changes in a person. Transformation, in other
words, is not about “changing your mind,” but involves a changing life and self. Led not
by a clear goal and an organized plan of action, this path of growth and change must be
experimental (though not reckless or random).

Because Nietzsche’s idea of transformation accounts for epistemic and social
limitations and addresses the many non-rational forces that shape individuals and groups,
it has the potential to describe how change is possible for the kind of white person that
Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones describe. Since Nietzsche gives attention to aspects
of the self other than reason and rationality, he may provide an understanding of
transformation that is complex; is non-rational in significant ways; and involves
cognitive, psychological, social, and bodily change. Furthermore, because the person
Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones describe is epistemically and socially limited, the
“solution” to the problem—in other words, the goal of transformation—cannot be seen
and charted out in advance. The transformation will have to be, as Nietzsche suggests,
experimental and unpredictable. While Nietzsche may not be the only philosopher who
can offer a helpful notion of transformation for the case of race-related problems, his is
particularly relevant given its roots in one of the most thoroughgoing critiques of the

\textsuperscript{123} Beyond Good and Evil II:32, page 44.
typical philosophical esteem for rational argumentation as the solution to all moral, social, political, and personal dilemmas as well as its incorporation of the bodily, the psychological, and the social into all of its philosophical investigations of individuals.

One other theme within Nietzsche’s thought offers potential for the development of an account of transformation. Nietzsche is famous for his critique of morality, in which he exposes the contingency of the prevailing moral standards and advocates doing away with them. In many philosophical circles, this is reason enough not to use Nietzsche’s philosophy at all, and many contemporary philosophers would assume that Nietzsche’s critique of morality would fit under the rubric “Why Not Use Nietzsche.” In other words, many philosophers today would claim that an anti-racist project must be grounded by a normative, moral framework, and that Nietzsche’s “anti-morality” is therefore a hindrance rather than a help to an anti-racist project. Such a dismissal of Nietzsche’s philosophy of morality, however, is premature. Some aspects of Nietzsche’s moral and anti-moral thought, as I will show in more detail in chapters three and five, may actually be quite helpful to an anti-racist project, especially one concerned with white people and transformation. First of all, Nietzsche does not, as many suppose, dispense with normativity altogether—instead, he offers an alternative normativity that proves interesting in the context of anti-racist change. Furthermore, I will claim that some measure of suspicion of our traditional and popular normative frameworks such as Nietzsche promotes may further rather than undermine an anti-racist project. For example, certain aspects of Nietzsche’s critique of morality have the potential to be
helpful in making inroads against the moral justification of, or the covering over of, racism and white supremacy.

Much of Nietzsche’s critique of morality is similar to his critique of rationality. Just as rational justification, according to Nietzsche, is often called to the scene after the fact to lend support to a conviction, so too is moral justification frequently an aftereffect rather than an aid to open-ended deliberation. Morality, like reason, is an instrument that serves some sort of purpose, Nietzsche says, so that the particular moral configuration that one adopts has less to do with either reason or benevolence than with individual and social psychology. Furthermore, rather than daring to challenge a status quo, moral thinking, according to Nietzsche, tends to be conservative. It is here that the value of Nietzsche’s moral skepticism becomes clear: by critiquing prevailing uses of moral thinking, which too often bolster the status quo, Nietzsche makes room for the creation of new values and new ideals.¹²⁴

Nietzsche replaces the moral standards, “good” and “evil,” with a “good” and “bad” based on notions of health and vitality. Vitality, in contrast to the dualism of good and evil, is ambiguous, unclear, and a matter of degree. While Nietzsche finds that traditional morality with its systematized rules, its confidence in diagnosing good and evil, and its notion of guilt, often prescribes or leads to demonizing others, resentment of others, self-denial, and an enervating self-punishing, Nietzsche’s own normative prescription aims to be affirmative and encourages creativity and the energetic

¹²⁴ Though Nietzsche opens up this space, the actual extent to which he introduced new specific values into culture is debatable. (See Alcoff, “Schutte’s Nietzschean Postcolonial Politics,” 150-51.)
enhancement of the self. Such an affirmative approach to self-overcoming with a focus on health and vitality may be able to rescue white, anti-racist self-transformation from the grips of guilt, shame, obligation, dread, and defeatism. Anti-racist transformation, in this light, would be (as I will show in chapter five) a vital process full of promise and certainly not a matter of sacrificing oneself out of moral obligation.

While I have here highlighted aspects of Nietzsche’s normative philosophy that have potential for furthering an anti-racist project, we will see in the following section that Nietzsche’s specific evaluations of humans in terms of health and sickliness quite often support rather than thwart prejudice, oppression, and exploitation. Making use of Nietzsche’s normative philosophy for a liberatory project, then, will require some degree of navigation, negotiation, criticism, and amendment.

Why Not Use Nietzsche? Nietzsche’s Social Philosophy and Philosophy of Race

While Nietzsche’s critique of rationality, his corresponding understanding of transformation, his critique of morality, and his notion of vitality all have potential to further a liberatory project, his basic social philosophy and his philosophy of race are dangerous at their best and clearly inimical to the project at their worst. But as I will argue (after presenting an overview of Nietzsche’s social philosophy and his philosophy of race), we can’t simply ignore these features of Nietzsche’s thought with the

125 For an illustration of this difference in tenor, see Gay Science IV:304, page 244.
presumption that they have nothing to do with the core of Nietzsche’s philosophy or the elements of it we want to use.

In his role of “philosophical physician,” Nietzsche diagnoses the Europeans of his time as decadent, degenerate, declining, decaying, succumbing to a great weariness. Too weak to affirm life, the people are falling into nihilism, which for Nietzsche means a denial of this life and this world, usually in favor of some supposed “beyond” (a better life, a better world) or some “ideal” that stands opposed to and is inimical to life, growth, and health in humanity. Nietzsche identifies several cultural forces and political arrangements associated with decadence, sickliness, and nihilism. For example, democracy and the sentiment that underlies it—namely, a desire for equality—are, according to Nietzsche, symptoms of decline as well as further incitements to degeneracy. In Nietzsche’s eyes, the drive to make society conform to a democratic ideal amounts to a “leveling”—in which the weak join forces to mow down greatness and reduce all to mediocrity—as well as the elimination of the classes of servants and slaves that, according to Nietzsche, are simply necessary for a healthy society. Speaking for the


few great individuals capable of identifying and resisting\textsuperscript{128} the decadence that is overwhelming the “herd,” Nietzsche says:

\ldots[the] song about ‘equal rights,’ ‘a free society,’ ‘no more masters and no servants’ has no allure for us. We simply do not consider it desirable that a realm of justice and concord should be established on earth (because it would certainly be the realm of the deepest leveling\ldots); we are delighted with all who love, as we do, danger, war, and adventures, who refuse to compromise, to be captured, reconciled, and castrated; we count ourselves among conquerors; we think about the necessity for new orders, also for a new slavery—for every strengthening and enhancement of the human type also involves a new kind of enslavement.\textsuperscript{129}

Addressing more directly the particular political discussions of his time, Nietzsche weighs in on “the labor question”:

I simply cannot see what one proposed to do with the European worker now that one has made a question of him. He is far too well off not to ask for more and more, not to ask more immodestly…The worker was qualified for military service, granted the right to organize and to vote: is it any wonder that the worker today experiences his own existence as distressing—morally speaking, as an injustice? But what is \textit{wanted}? I ask once more. If one wants an end, one must also want the means: if one wants slaves, then one is a fool if one educates them to be masters.\textsuperscript{130}

Members of the herd, in Nietzsche’s estimation, will forever be members of the herd. In various ways, Nietzsche admits the possibility of personal change, even

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{128} According to Daniel Conway’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s discussion of decadence, “[a]ll that we are free to do in late modernity is to enact our ineluctable historical destiny as decadent epigones” (“The Politics of Decadence” 28). But, as Lawrence Hatab points out in his commentary on Conway’s article “Nietzsche certainly \textit{seems} to be charting new possibilities in morality and politics, rather than simply deferring passively to a possible age to come\ldots” (“Time-Sharing in the Bestiary” 37) Hatab’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s discussion of decadence “…moves us from a picture of epochal totality to a more ambiguous cohabitation of decadence and resistance” (38).
\bibitem{130} Twilight of the Idols, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 40, page 545.
\end{thebibliography}
demands self-overcoming and personal development of those to whom he writes, and he
never advocates a strict determinism in which all choice and openness of the future are
foreclosed. However, he seems to think that some of the most basic characters of
individuals are permanent; overall strength and weakness (or nobility and slavishness),
for example, are apparently not subject to change in his view. In fact, the very capacity
for significant change seems to be the domain only of strong individuals, while weaker
individuals are doomed to reiterate their basic character traits and instincts throughout
life. Nietzsche refers to “weak, hopelessly sick people” who are “failures from the
start.” 131 Strong people he refers to as “born masters” 132 whose great strivings and self-
overcomings are themselves an unfolding of fate: “He flows out, he overflows…and this
is a[n]…involuntary fatality, no less than a river’s flooding the land.” 133 In his most
striking statement, Nietzsche says, “[t]he single human being is a piece of fatum from the
front and from the rear, one law more, one necessity more for all that is yet to come and
to be. To say to him, ‘Change yourself!’ is to demand that everything be changed, even
retroactively.” 134 Nietzsche does not always speak so fatalistically (and retains an
important notion of will), but his fatalistic tendencies are strong enough that the issue
must be taken into consideration.

133 Twilight of the Idols “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 44, page 548; see also Nietzsche’s discussion of
himself in Ecce Homo “Why I am so Wise” 6, pages 230-31, and “Why I am so Clever” 9-10, pages 253-
58.
134 Twilight of the Idols “Morality as Anti-Nature” 6, page 491. Similarly, Nietzsche says “…at the bottom
of us, really ‘deep down,’ there is…something unteachable, some granite of spiritual fatum, of
predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions” (Beyond Good and Evil VII:231,
page 162).
This fatal sense of character, especially weak characters, leads Nietzsche to recommend to the strong and healthy that they isolate themselves from the weak and sick to avoid contagion, which again indicates that Nietzsche holds little to no hope that the weak and sick could ever become healthier. “That the sick should not make the healthy sick…should surely be our supreme concern on earth; but this requires above all that the healthy should be segregated from the sick, guarded even from the sight of the sick, that they may not confound themselves with the sick.” Yet this suggested quarantine also indicates that the strong and healthy could be corrupted by the sick, which is an admission of the possibility of change. But again, change is reserved for an elite few—the strong have a flexibility, and one could say, a vulnerability, that the weak and sick, as already lost from the start, do not.

Nietzsche’s elitism is often expressed as “an order of rank” among individuals. With this idea of rank, Nietzsche is not suggesting merely that some people have achieved more than others, that some are at this time more virtuous (in a Nietzschan sense) than others, or that some are better in certain ways than others. He is, instead, making evaluations of the overall, fixed worth of various human beings. Declaring himself the most capable diagnostician of this time, he says, in Ecce Homo (a book not lacking in specious declarations about himself), “I have a subtler sense of smell for the

135 Genealogy of Morals III:14, page 124; see also page 121.
sights of ascent and decline than any other human being before me…[A] ‘revaluation of values’ is perhaps possible for me alone.’”

Since, according to Nietzsche, most people are mere members of the herd and the hope for humanity lies in an elite collection of a few great individuals of higher rank, it’s not surprising that he proposes aristocracy in place of democracy. A stratified society can provide the elite with the resources they need—such as freedom from everyday toil as well as the necessary social barriers to isolate them from the contagion of the sickly herd—and so enhance their greatness even further. Such stratification can help ensure the future of humanity:

Every enhancement of the type ‘man’ has so far been the work of an aristocratic society—and it will be so again and again—a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other.

Nietzsche goes on to clarify the role of an aristocratic class within a “healthy” society and its relation to those who serve it:

The essential characteristic of a good and healthy aristocracy…is that it experiences itself not as a function (whether of the monarchy or the commonwealth) but as their meaning and highest justification—that it therefore accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, for its sake, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments.”

Again, Nietzsche expresses no hope that weaker, lower, sickly human beings could become stronger, higher, healthier, so that categorization as servant/slave versus aristocrat is fixed. The best that the former can do, according to Nietzsche, is get out of

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137 “Why I am so Wise” 1, pages 222-23; see also “Why I am a Destiny” 1, page 326.
138 Beyond Good and Evil IX:257, page 201.
the way of those who are superior: “Every individual may be scrutinized to see whether he represents the ascending or the descending line of life….If he represents the descending development, decay, chronic degeneration, and sickness…., then he has small worth, and the minimum of decency requires that he take away as little as possible from those who have turned out well. He is merely their parasite.” Only if the weak and decadent keep out of view of the strong and avoid infecting them or resentfully dragging them down can “parasites” turn into useful elements of an aristocratic society.

In sum, Nietzsche identifies, as the source of social ills and the peril of mankind, the decadence and decay that both leads to and follows from a democratic leveling which refuses to acknowledge inequality—or “order of rank”—among humans and thus fails to structure society in a way that would foster what little greatness and hope for the future remains. But despite Nietzsche’s association of decadence and politics, he ultimately locates the cause of decadence in the physiological rather than the political. It is at this point that Nietzsche’s theory of race proves to be crucial to his entire philosophical project.

A race for Nietzsche is not something descending from an original, pure source, but is instead something that develops as people live together under similar conditions for many generations. A group of people becomes a race, and it takes a great deal of time before a group that once came together develops into a race. A race develops through

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140 Twilight of the Idols “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 33, page 534; see also “Skirmishes” 43, page 547, where Nietzsche says it would best if such parasites would die.

141 For further discussion of Nietzsche’s view of political aristocracy, see Maudemarie Clark’s article, “Nietzsche’s Antidemocratic Rhetoric,” and the cogent reply to it, “The Political Implications of Nietzsche’s Aristocratic Radicalism,” by A. Todd Franklin. See also “The Relevance of Nietzsche to Democratic Theory: Micropolitics and the Affirmation of Difference” by Nathan Widder, which, besides presenting Widder’s own view, summarizes the positions of several of Nietzsche’s commentators.
interbreeding, but also through on-going interaction with the environment. A race includes not only physical resemblance among its members, but also similarity in predominant character traits and values. Inheritance, then, is not simply a matter of genes; the spirit and values that a people develops in response to conditions are also passed on through generations, and not only because culture and morality are taught to each new generation. In Nietzsche’s words,

One cannot erase from the soul of a human being what his ancestors liked most to do and did most constantly: whether they were, for example, assiduous savers…, modest and bourgeois in their desires, modest also in their virtues; or whether they lived accustomed to commanding from dawn to dusk, fond of rough amusements and also perhaps of even rougher duties and responsibilities; or whether, finally, at some point they sacrificed ancient prerogatives of birth and possessions in order to live entirely for their faith….It is simply not possible that a human being should not have the qualities and preferences of his parents and ancestors in his body, whatever appearances may suggest to the contrary. This is the problem of race.

Nietzsche claims that Europe (in his time) has recently suffered from a sudden mixing of races—that is, several races coming together and breeding, producing Europeans who do not (yet) constitute a race. This mixture of races causes the offspring to have within themselves characteristics, or to use more Nietzschean terminology, “drives,” that clash with one another, resulting in an internal chaos that leads to “sickliness” and “exhaustion”—that is, to decadence. The social and political

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142 Daybreak 272, page 274; and Beyond Good and Evil VII:251, pages 187-189; IX:262, pages 210-211; IX:268, page 216.
movement of democratization as “leveling,” according to Nietzsche, is merely an attempt
to calm and stifle this internal chaos—it is, in other words, palliative, but not curative.145
(In fact, as a sort of “sedative,” it may encourage a dull contentedness and stem desire for
a cure.)

The mixing of races that Nietzsche pinpoints as the cause of Europe’s
degeneration and decay is simultaneously the best hope for the creation of a new, greater,
stronger, more spectacular individual, he claims. The internal diversity that exhausts
most people, Nietzsche says, could lead to greatness in an individual strong enough to
discipline and harness these eclectic drives, who could then, in the peace of a “level”
society, climb over others and flourish above them.146 In other words, physiological
chaos and democratization are not only the greatest threats to humanity, but also the very
conditions from which a new stronger, healthier, more magnificent type of human could
emerge.147

The great (though shaky) hope for humanity represented by a new physiological
type leads Nietzsche to explore, in his words, “…what is serious for me, the ‘European
problem’ as I understand it, the cultivation [or ‘breeding’] of a new caste that will rule
Europe.”148 In other words, having identified a physiological problem and the possibility
of a physiological solution, Nietzsche begins speculating on how this new caste could be

145 Beyond Good Evil VIII:242, pages 176-177.
146 Beyond Good and Evil V:200, page 112; VII:224, pages 151-152; VII:242, pages 176-177; and IX:262,
pages 210-211.
147 This consideration might lead us to conclude that democracy, as an unfavorable environment, is
actually preferable to a social coddling of aristocrats.
148 Beyond Good and Evil VII:251, pages 187-189. See also Daybreak III:150, page 97; Beyond Good and
Evil IX:262, page 210-211; and Antichrist 3, pages 570-71.
bred from the human stock now available. He proposes that a mixing of German
aristocrats with Jews could create a human type truly capable of ruling. Germans, who
do not yet constitute a race but are instead a people created by a chaotic mixture of races,
supposedly have a manifold soul, and the stronger among them possess the “hereditary
art of commanding and obeying”; Jews, who are “the strongest, toughest, and purest race
now living in Europe,” do not have the openness and internal diversity of Germans, but
possess what Germans lack, namely, “spirituality” and “the genius of money and
patience.”

Nietzsche’s ideas regarding race and breeding, as well as his social/political
philosophy in general, are clearly at odds with a project concerned with liberation from
oppression and resistance to racism. Believing in “an order of rank” among human
beings, Nietzsche classifies and determines the ultimate worth of whole groups of
people. He urges us to design a society in which the less worthy will sacrifice

149 James Winchester interprets Nietzsche’s comments about mixing Germans and Jews as more playful
than sincere. Regardless of how serious Nietzsche was about this particular proposal, the general project of
“cultivating” or “breeding” was an important part of Nietzsche’s social philosophy, as Winchester himself
acknowledges. (See Winchester, page 266.)
150 Beyond Good and Evil VII:251, pages 187-189; see also Human, All-Too-Human I:475, page 175. As
several commentators point out, even when Nietzsche praises a people or a race, he frequently utilizes
common stereotypes, making his “praise” much less complimentary than he may have supposed. (For
example, see Winchester, page 266 and J. Scott, page 60.)
151 When he does so in terms of “race,” he reserves most of his rancor for the English (see Schutte,
“Nietzsche’s Politics,” page 284). But he also reproduces stereotypes of Africans and of American Indians
(along with Jews, whom, as we saw above, he both praises and stereotypes along all-too-common lines):
“There is something of the American Indians, something of the ferocity peculiar to the Indian blood, in the
American lust for gold…” (Gay Science IV:329, page 258); “Perhaps in [bygone] days…pain did not hurt
as much as it does now; at least that is the conclusion a doctor may arrive at who has treated Negroes (taken
as representatives of prehistoric man—-) for severe internal inflammations that would drive even the best
constituted European to distraction—in the case of Negroes they do not do so.” (Genealogy of Morals II:7,
page 68).
themselves to allow those of higher rank to flourish. He believes that the strengths and weaknesses that determine our worth are, to a large degree, inherited—are racial characteristics. He advocates a program of breeding human beings based on his assessments of various races.

Nietzsche does sometimes oppose racism, but not because racism per se (as a value-laden classification of whole peoples or as unequal treatment of people based on race) is a problem. For example, Nietzsche criticizes anti-Semitism because it is based on a mistaken view of Jewish people (that fails to see the great potential within the Jewish people) and because it is a petty ressentiment characteristic of weak and sickly people. But if Nietzsche had seen Jews as a weak people or as harmful for the future of Europe rather than as offering great potential, nothing would have stopped him from supporting a project of exploitation, slavery, or extermination of Jews. No sacrifice, after all, is too great for the cultivation of a new, stronger, more vibrant type of human according to Nietzsche, and those who may be the “bridge” to that type must see themselves as the meaning of society for whom untold sacrifice will justly be made. As Ofelia Schutte says, “…Nietzsche can be defended specifically against charges of anti-Semitism, but not against the view, which he strongly held, that some ‘peoples’ were inferior to others and therefore ought to be subjected to domination.”

It won’t be possible, then, to use Nietzsche’s diagnosis of and prescription for his society as a basis

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152 Beyond Good and Evil VII:251, page 188.
153 “Nietzsche’s Politics,” 289. Schutte also says that “…a careful reading of Nietzsche’s unpublished notes shows that on occasion Nietzsche suggested that entire races (judged decadent) ought to be exterminated and/or bred out of existence” (page 284).
for a project focused on transformation against the grain of race-related problems (however useful other aspects of his thought may remain).

On the other hand, it is not enough simply to dismiss Nietzsche’s philosophy of race and hierarchy as an unimportant aspect of his thought and proceed immediately to use the more helpful aspects of his thought. Nietzsche’s most fundamental philosophical concerns include the decadence and nihilism of his society and his hope for a greater type of human. We have seen that these are not merely political matters, but also issues of race and breeding. Nietzsche’s philosophy of race, therefore, is not a side issue, an unimportant element of his thought, nor something that can easily be amputated from his larger philosophical project. Instead, his philosophy of race is embedded in those concerns that are at the crux of his philosophical project. Hence, a liberatory philosophy that makes use of Nietzsche’s philosophy requires a meta-narrative that navigates the terrain, enabling us to use Nietzschean resources without inadvertently drawing in the unwanted implications of the more attractive elements of Nietzsche’s thought.

Exploring Feminists’ Uses of Nietzsche

In this section, I present and critique four feminist approaches to Nietzsche’s philosophy. Approaches parallel to these feminist approaches could be taken to Nietzsche’s philosophy in the context of Critical Race Theory. By reviewing and analyzing these feminist philosophies, I am able to develop an approach to Nietzsche’s philosophy (presented in the final section of this chapter) that allows me to navigate the favorable and inimical aspects of Nietzsche’s thought and use Nietzsche for an anti-racist
project without intentionally or unintentionally integrating Nietzsche’s hierarchical social/political philosophy and racist theories of degeneracy and breeding into the liberatory text.

Nietzsche is not an obvious resource for feminism. He describes women as (by nature) petty, cunning, seductive, vengeful, and egoistic.\footnote{For example, see Human, All Too Human I:401, page 152; I:412, page 154; II:290-91, page 280; Thus Spoke Zarathustra I “On Little Old and Young Women,” pages 178-79; Beyond Good and Evil VII:232, page 163; and Ecce Homo “Why I Am So Wise” 7, page 232; “Why I Write Such Good Books” 5, pages 266-67. While not all of the characteristics listed are necessarily insults in Nietzsche’s book, they are nevertheless an all-too-common set of traits ascribed to women that limit women’s possibilities.} A woman’s possibility for greatness, he says, lies in her ability to give birth to a great man.\footnote{Beyond Good and Evil VII:239, page 169; Thus Spoke Zarathustra I “On Little Old and Young Women,” page 178; and Ecce Homo, “Why I Write Such Good Books” 5, page 267. Nietzsche frequently uses the metaphor of pregnancy when discussing the (male) genius, creative artist, or free spirit. But women are limited to literal pregnancies.} Nietzsche opposes the emancipation of women, equal rights for women, and education for women.\footnote{Beyond Good and Evil VII:232, page 163; Beyond Good and Evil VII:238, page 166; Beyond Good and Evil VII:239, page 167; Beyond Good and Evil VII:239, pages 168-69; Genealogy of Morals III:25, page 154; and Ecce Homo “Why I Write Such Good Books” 5, page 267.} When discussing relationships between men and women, Nietzsche makes it clear that women should be—and even desire to be—“possessions” of men.\footnote{The Gay Science V:363, page 319; Beyond Good and Evil VII:238, page 67; and Twilight of the Idols “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 39, page 544. See also Human, All Too Human I:432, page 159, and I:435, pages 159-160.} He even goes so far as to say that women are, and should be, slave-like in relation to men.\footnote{The Gay Science V:363, page 319; Beyond Good and Evil VII:239, page 168; Thus Spoke Zarathustra I “On the Friend,” page 169; and Antichrist 54, page 639.} Far from finding love and peace between men and women, Nietzsche refers to “…the most abysmal antagonism between [men and women]…,” “…the necessity of an eternally hostile tension…,” “…the eternal war between the sexes…,” and “…the deadly hatred of the sexes.”\footnote{Beyond Good and Evil VII:238, page 166 and Ecce Homo “Why I Write Such Good Books” 5, page 267.}
top things off, Nietzsche claims that it is only women and not men who oppress and despise women.\textsuperscript{160} Such claims about women lead many feminists, as may be expected, to reject Nietzsche and look for their philosophical resources elsewhere.\textsuperscript{161}

But despite Nietzsche’s apparent allegiance to so much of what feminism has opposed, several feminist theorists have found inspiration in Nietzsche’s moves to deconstruct essences (in the realms of truth, knowledge, and identity), his upset of long-standing dualisms, his attunement to becoming rather than being, his rejection of the supposed universality and objectivity of past philosophers, his drive toward the “revaluation of values,” his sometimes scathing cultural critique, his attention to body, his philosophical considerations of “affect” (rather than reason alone), and his treatment of the everyday as worthy of philosophical attention. Feminists have developed various ways of making use of Nietzsche’s resources while dealing with his—at least seemingly—very misogynistic remarks. In what follows, I present four common feminist approaches to Nietzsche (often taken up in combination by feminists), discussing the merits and limitations of each.

According to some feminist interpreters, Nietzsche is not, upon closer examination, nearly as misogynistic as he seems to be at first glance. One’s interpretation of Nietzsche, according to this approach, needs to run deeper, not stopping at the surface where Nietzsche’s rhetoric can be misleading. Once read carefully and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{160} \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} IV:86, page 82; \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} VII:232, page 164; and \textit{Ecce Homo} “Why I Write Such Good Books” 5, page 267. Nietzsche may indeed be right that women too often oppress other women, but to claim men’s innocence in women’s oppression is clearly ridiculous.
\item \textsuperscript{161} See Singer, “Nietzschean Mythologies.”
\end{itemize}
insightfully, then, Nietzsche’s philosophy lends itself quite readily to feminism. To quote three feminist philosophers who take this approach, Nietzsche’s “…comments on feminism [are] not…a rejection of feminism…,” Nietzsche’s work is “…a harbinger of a radical postcolonial feminist politics…,” and, “[m]ore than most of his contemporaries, [Nietzsche] seems committed to the notion that the roles and relations possible for members of different sexes are subject to change and that change of this sort is desirable.”

Various lines of argumentation can support this interpretation of Nietzsche. Some feminists claim that what many of Nietzsche’s readers take to be a criticism of women in general or feminism in general is actually a narrower, more specific critique. For example, Debra Bergoffen claims that Nietzsche does not reject feminism wholesale, but rather criticizes what Bergoffen calls “equality feminism.” Nietzsche’s rejection of a feminism founded on a notion of equality and characterized by *ressentiment* leaves open the possibility of a feminism that includes and emphasizes difference and is characterized by joyfulness. Similarly, Kathleen Higgens says that when Nietzsche opposes the right of women to vote, he is criticizing the practice of voting, not women. Maudemarie Clark claims that when Nietzsche seems to be criticizing women—saying that women don’t want truth, that women should be considered possessions, that between men and women is an eternal hostility, and that women should not be emancipated and educated—

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162 Maudemarie Clark, “Nietzsche’s Misogyny” 189.
163 Debra Bergoffen, “Engaging Nietzsche’s Women” 166.
164 Kathleen Higgens, “Gender in the Gay Science” 147. Like Bergoffen, Higgens considers Nietzsche to be “…a forbear of feminist philosophy” (“Gender in the Gay Science” 146).
165 “Nietzsche Was No Feminist…” and “Engaging Nietzsche’s Women.”
166 “Gender in the Gay Science” 134-36.
he is actually criticizing “the eternal feminine” (a term Nietzsche does use, but certainly not in every criticism of women). According to Clark, “the eternal feminine” refers to “…the feminine essence, a social construction that individual women need not exemplify.”

Support for the claim that Nietzsche’s philosophy, when read carefully, is not so misogynistic and lends itself readily to feminism also appears as interpretations of some of Nietzsche’s more ambiguous and enigmatic statements about women, such as his notorious question, “Supposing truth were a woman?” According to Bergoffen, for example, this passage, as well as several others in which Nietzsche associates women with central philosophical concepts “…points to the ways in which the question of woman, far from being at the margins of philosophy, lies close to its heart.” This recognition of the philosophical importance of “woman” and “the feminine,” according to Bergoffen, locates Nietzsche at the emergence of feminist philosophy. Kelly Oliver similarly looks at ambiguous passages on woman and Nietzsche’s association of women and truth and is able to spin a feminist philosophy out of what most readers would see as Nietzsche’s sexism. Feminists also defend their claims of Nietzsche’s pro-feminist tendencies by pointing to passages in which he appears to praise women, to use “the feminine” metaphorically in a positive light, or to sympathize with women in a patriarchal society. Often the passages feminists point to come from the Gay Science

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167 “Nietzsche’s Misogyny” 192-96.
168 “Nietzsche’s Misogyny” 192.
169 “Nietzsche Was No Feminist…” 225-26.
170 “Woman as Truth in Nietzsche’s Writing.”
(especially sections 68 and 71), though feminists have picked up on potentially positive passages from throughout Nietzsche’s work.\textsuperscript{171}

There is certainly some value in this approach to Nietzsche, but I am skeptical of several aspects of the arguments. To begin with, Nietzsche’s remarks on women are far-ranging (they go beyond, in other words, topics of equality and voting), and it becomes untenable to argue in every case that, although Nietzsche purportedly speaks of women, he is actually critiquing something else. Similarly, one must wonder why, if all of Nietzsche’s criticisms of women and feminism are actually critiques of the “eternal feminine,” he only occasionally expressed the critique using this term. Furthermore, while Clark may be right that “the eternal feminine” is a social construct that individual women are free not to embody, Nietzsche would not make this point, especially since, as we saw above, he treats characters as matters of fatality.

While the feminists who use this first approach to Nietzsche are right to point out the ambiguity and malleability of Nietzsche’s thought—that is, undercurrents below simple surfaces—I find in such interpretations too great a hesitance to accept many of Nietzsche’s more obvious and explicit statements and confront him on the pertinent issues. To quote a commentary on Nietzsche from a different context, “With the knowledge of the ground and the underground of surfaces the latter certainly do not disappear!”\textsuperscript{172} Indeed, the complexity of Nietzsche’s philosophy, his playfulness, and his attunement to “masks” and depths presents interpreters with ample opportunities for

\textsuperscript{171} Tirrell (“Sexual Dualism and Women’s Self-Creation”) and Higgens (“Gender in the Gay Science”) refer to Gay Science passages; Clark (“Nietzsche’s Misogyny”) uses Beyond Good and Evil; and Bergoffen (“Nietzsche Was No Feminist…”) discusses Zarathustra.

\textsuperscript{172} Volker Gerhardt, “Self-Grounding” 288.
subversion, but while seeking ways to use Nietzsche’s more subtle threads against his more obvious misogyny, we need not avoid encounter with the sexist and anti-feminist statements that clearly do occur regularly in Nietzsche’s work.

We may also need to pay heed to the differences between Nietzsche’s metaphorical uses of “woman”—which tend to appear as more enigmatic aphorisms—and his more straightforward discussions of actual women and women’s social roles. When speaking metaphorically of woman as truth, life, or wisdom, Nietzsche may present a mystical, intriguing, powerful figure, but when discussing actual women in society, Nietzsche depicts a shallow, childish, and vengeful figure best off in a man’s possession bearing children. And even when speaking of these intriguing metaphorical women, Nietzsche presents them always in relation to men whom they seduce, tease, and reject if the men are not warrior-like enough. Apart from his metaphorical usage, “feminine” is one of Nietzsche’s favorite insults; he associates “feminism” with “weakness,” “mendaciousness,” “cowardice,” “hypersentimentality,” “moral mawkishness,” and “falseness.” Even the rare cases in which Nietzsche seems to praise women should give us pause, as when he celebrates woman’s evil, clever, beast-of-prey, “more natural” nature which allows her first rank in the war between the sexes

173 Ofelia Schutte makes this distinction in “Nietzsche’s Politics,” pages 294-95.
175 Tasmin Lorraine makes this point in a discussion of Nietzsche’s discussion of “Life” as a woman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “…even if Life is willful and scarcely faithful to man, she is still depicted here in relationship to him….Representing and valorizing life as the feminine and undecideable, that which forever eludes us and incites us to creative self-overcoming, does nothing for women in their struggle for recognition and respect” (“Nietzsche and Feminism” 125-26).
through her use of wiles (which would be spoiled by equal rights and education).\textsuperscript{177}

Whatever mysterious qualities Nietzsche may attribute to women in such passages, he also puts forth significant practical limitations. In conclusion, feminists taking this first approach to Nietzsche (claiming that he is not as misogynistic as he seems and is even a precursor to feminism) may have uncovered (or created?) some interesting and fruitful insights beneath Nietzsche’s surface misogyny, but while valuing such insights, we should pay heed to the surface as well, negotiating its truths as well as the truths it may cover.

While the above approach to Nietzsche makes claims about what Nietzsche meant to say about women and feminism, a second approach acknowledges that he said (and meant to say) many hostile things but claims that he \textit{should have} said different things in order for his account of women to be philosophically consistent with the \textit{rest} of his work. In the words of feminist Lynn Tirrell, Nietzsche’s assessment of women (at least in most of his works) is at odds with his “usual philosophical method.”\textsuperscript{178} Had Nietzsche stayed philosophically consistent, he would have presented an argument that undermined the prevailing man-woman dualism and its accompanying valuations (which favor men, of course), just as he did with so many other dualisms and valuations, Tirrell claims, identifying this as “…clearly an argument Nietzsche should have made.”\textsuperscript{179} Likewise, Bergoffen, who sees Nietzsche as far less misogynistic than is usually thought but who

\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} VII:239, page 169 and \textit{Ecce Homo} “Why I Write Such Good Books” 5, page 266-67.

\textsuperscript{178} “Sexual Dualism and Women’s Self-Creation” 200.

\textsuperscript{179} “Sexual Dualism and Women’s Self-Creation” 208.
does admit that Nietzsche did not supply an adequate critique of patriarchy, claims that Nietzsche should have supplied a critique of patriarchy since patriarchy is a key component of the Western culture he critiqued. In short, according to this approach, Nietzsche’s misogynistic statements about women are invalid within his own philosophy and he “should have” said something different about women. Once excised of its errors and inconsistencies, proponents of this approach would say, we can use Nietzsche’s philosophy for feminism.

The argument that Tirrell says that Nietzsche “should have” made is an interesting argument, an interesting way of turning Nietzsche’s philosophy back on itself, and Bergoffen’s suggestion that we do what Nietzsche did not—namely, extend his critique of Western culture to a critique of patriarchy—is rich with philosophical potential. However, by claiming that Nietzsche’s fundamental problem is an occasional inconsistency that can be repaired by making a few amendments, feminists taking this second approach to Nietzsche fail to address, head-on, the problematic threads that pervade Nietzsche’s philosophy. Tirrell and Bergoffen attempt to “save” Nietzsche by pointing out a few blind-spots that, they claim, can be cured merely by extending Nietzsche’s core philosophy to those areas where he failed to carry his analysis. In Tirrell’s words, we need to take Nietzsche’s “usual method” further. It is my claim that this is not a thorough enough critique of Nietzsche—that, in other words, we may need to go right into this core in our critiques of Nietzsche. The problems in Nietzsche’s philosophy go beyond a few blind-spots (as I will argue in more detail below).

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180 “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of Nietzsche for Women” 77.
Furthermore, we cannot rely on a “usual method” to clear out any problems we encounter in Nietzsche. Nietzsche does not have “a” philosophical method; he has manifold, diverse, and sometimes conflicting “methods.” For example, he does indeed undermine many dualisms (in various ways), but he also employs dualisms when it suits his purposes. We can often use Nietzschean strategies (a better word in this context that “method”) to undermine Nietzsche himself, but we cannot trust that by simply extending a Nietzschean analysis we will be led out of the problematic aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Using Nietzsche against himself is not a matter of whether Nietzsche was right or wrong on specific points, nor whether he was philosophically consistent, but rather is a matter of what philosophical strategies he used to confront what was problematic in his society (according to his view) that we could take up, recreate (not simply reproduce), and put to our own uses in confronting what we see as problematic in our societies (such as sexism and racism). We would be borrowing strategies, then, more than convictions, truths, doctrines, goals, or methods. We would stand far enough from Nietzsche to be able to transform his strategies, bring our own analyses to bear, and declare ourselves non-Nietzschean or anti-Nietzschean when need be rather than rescuing Nietzsche from himself and attempting to excise his philosophy of its errors in a piecemeal fashion.

\[181\] His use of the dualism of man and woman is not far removed from his dualism of the noble type and the slavish type; the latter dualism was clearly not an oversight and the former may have been equally deliberate.
Some commentators who agree with the above approach that Nietzsche’s scathing remarks on women are an error and inconsistency account for them by looking at Nietzsche’s personal life. This third approach gives a psychoanalytic reading of Nietzsche’s writings, attributing his misogyny to his relationships with various women in his life. Jean Graybeal, for example, identifies Nietzsche’s troubled relationships with both his mother and his sister as the source of his sexism, quoting *Ecce Homo*: “‘…I confess that the most profound objection to the ‘eternal recurrence,’ my truly abysmal thought, is always mother and sister.’” Building on Graybeal’s work, Kelly Oliver uses Julia Kristeva’s theory of “abjection” (in which a child must achieve independence by “abjecting” the mother) to account for Nietzsche’s remarks on women, the feminine, and the maternal. Put simply, Nietzsche dealt with his traumatic relationship with his mother by unleashing his fury on all women. Kathleen Higgens points to yet another unsatisfying relation to a woman in Nietzsche’s life—Lou Salomé—to explain Nietzsche’s misogyny. Nietzsche’s painful break with Salomé, Higgens says, marks the break between a philosophy (as in *The Gay Science*) that points to “new possibilities in woman’s identity” and the misogyny for which Nietzsche is more famous.

In a vein similar to the more explicitly psychoanalytic readings, Maudemarie Clark, based on a passage in *Beyond Good and Evil* that precedes Nietzsche’s most

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182 “*Ecce Homo*: Abjection and the Feminine” 162.
183 In Oliver’s words: “Perhaps behind all of the masks of Nietzsche’s women we find the mother with whom Nietzsche struggles. Perhaps it is Nietzsche’s inability to separate from the mother that troubles his writing on the feminine and woman….Nietzsche abj ects all women and femininity because he cannot abject the maternal” (“Nietzsche’s Abjection” 62-63).
vitriolic passages on women,\(^{185}\) concludes that when Nietzsche is disparaging women, he is expressing his anger and resentment and not positing truths. Nietzsche’s misogyny, in other words, “…is on the level of sentiment, not belief….”\(^{186}\) Kathleen Higgens similarly claims that Nietzsche “…was, at least sometimes, too willing to rest content with truisms about women and to vent personal rage in the guise of philosophy.”\(^{187}\) In sum, according to this third approach, Nietzsche’s philosophical vision was tainted when it comes to the topic of women because of his personal traumas. If we, as feminists, would like to draw from Nietzsche, we merely need to excise the portion of his work that directly addresses women, which, after all, does not represent his true philosophical vision anyway.

While it certainly could be true that troubled relationships with women (and an absence of fulfilling relationships) in Nietzsche’s life may have exacerbated his rancor toward women, this third approach to Nietzsche’s philosophy of gender risks evading what is problematic in Nietzsche rather than wrestling with it. To begin with, separating off Nietzsche’s statements against women by use of the supposed distinction of sentiment versus belief, or emotional expression versus truth, does not hold much traction since these distinctions are some of the many dualisms Nietzsche sought to undermine.\(^{188}\) More significantly, in using a “division and extraction” approach, one accounts for Nietzsche’s highly anti-feminist remarks by isolating them from the rest of his philosophy and claiming that, on this one issue, Nietzsche’s vision was cloudy due to

\(^{185}\) VII:231, page 162.
\(^{186}\) “Nietzsche’s Misogyny” 189.
\(^{187}\) “Gender in The Gay Science” 131.
\(^{188}\) As mentioned above, it is precisely this refusal to separate the affective from the cognitive that makes some commentators find Nietzsche useful for feminist projects. For example see David Owen, “Nietzsche’s Squandered Seductions,” page 315-17.
personal traumas. This ignores the fact that whatever Nietzsche may have believed about women, whatever feminist or anti-feminist threads run through his texts, and whatever the sources of his attitude toward women, he regularly classifies people into groups (sometimes based on things like political loyalties or religious ideology, sometimes based on race, nationality, gender, or class) and establishes the worth or value of these group members as less than that of other groups. After thus evaluating and ranking humans, Nietzsche often suggests what should be done about the “lower” ones in order to enhance humanity and prevent these sickly people from becoming parasites or infectious blights on humanity. Sometimes he advises that they be kept disempowered or uneducated so they can’t make as much trouble; sometimes he recommends servitude or slavery so they can be useful to “higher” humans instead of being burdensome; and sometimes he claims that it would be best if they would die. So, there is a bigger issue here than Nietzsche’s view of women. Nietzsche’s argument about women runs like this: women are superficial, petty, naïve, slave-like, weak, and vengeful, and they want to be possessed; therefore women should be possessed by men, denied equal rights and education, made fit to serve men, and relegated to giving birth.189 Similarly, laborers, as we saw above, should be kept uneducated to preserve their usefulness, according to Nietzsche.190 More broadly, Nietzsche argues that people who are weak or slavish—according to his diagnosis, of course—should be reduced to incomplete human beings, slaves, sacrifices,

190 Twilight of the Idols “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 40, page 545.
instruments for the aristocracy. The point here is that Nietzsche’s view of women is one manifestation of an overarching view characterized by Nietzsche’s desire for “…a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other.” The misogyny in Nietzsche’s work, in other words, is not an anomaly, but rather is quite in line with many of Nietzsche’s other social and political views. Likewise, Nietzsche’s racist remarks and proposals for breeding are not anomalistic—as I argued above—but represent another case of a general social philosophy of diagnosis and prescription in support of an elite aristocracy.

Although the “personal traumas” approach to Nietzsche’s view of women goes farthest in giving the impression that Nietzsche’s misogyny is an anomaly within his thought, both the first approach (the claim that Nietzsche’s philosophy is actually a harbinger of radical feminism) and the second (the claim that Nietzsche should have critiqued patriarchy and the man-woman dualism) focus their interpretations of Nietzsche specifically on his comments on women without adequately addressing the larger issue described above.

A fourth feminist approach to Nietzsche, then, is characterized first of all by mindfulness of the connections between Nietzsche’s comments on women and many other aspects of his philosophy, particularly his social philosophy. This approach does

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192 *Beyond Good and Evil* IX:257, page 201. The family, where men dominate women is simply, in Nietzsche’s own words, “…the smallest structure of domination…” (*Twilight of the Idols* “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 39, page 544).
not shy away from exposing the elements of Nietzsche’s thought that are unhelpful or even detrimental to a feminist project. Refusing to mitigate the sting of some of Nietzsche’s remarks and ideas, one confronts them openly. One may use Nietzschean strategies or lines of argumentation against Nietzsche, but without claiming either that Nietzsche actually intended such arguments or that he “should have” made them for the sake of consistency. While seeing much value within Nietzsche’s thought, one does not hesitate simply to disagree with Nietzsche on certain key premises, nor to redirect Nietzschean trajectories in directions Nietzsche would not have pursued.

This approach is best exemplified by Ofelia Schutte. In her work on feminism and Nietzsche, Schutte both understands and emphasizes that there is a larger issue at stake.\(^{193}\) She exposes the “…connection between Nietzsche’s defense of intolerance, Nietzsche’s defense of aristocratic privilege, and Nietzsche’s defense of a sexist and authoritarian social and family structure.”\(^{194}\) Her interpretation of Nietzsche’s philosophy of gender thus occurs within a larger project of examining Nietzsche’s philosophy of aristocracy, hierarchy, “rank,” and race.

Like Nietzsche, Schutte aims to create a life-affirming, anti-nihilistic philosophy. She claims that Nietzsche’s ontology (especially his attack on dualism and his “undermining of absolutes”\(^ {195}\)) and his critique of culture can support a liberatory, life-

\(^{193}\) Schutte identifies the “larger issue” as “Nietzsche’s obsession with the issue of cultural superiority and with the binary opposition superior / inferior [which] represents a major flaw in his cultural politics” (“Nietzsche’s Cultural Politics” 69).

\(^{194}\) Nietzsche’s Politics 294; see also 297.

\(^{195}\) Schutte, “Response to Alcoff, Ferguson, and Bergoffen” 183.
affirming social and political philosophy. But despite the promise that Schutte finds in Nietzsche’s ontology and cultural critique, she says that Nietzsche himself stops short of a truly life-affirming, anti-nihilistic philosophy. More specifically, Schutte says, “Nietzsche is right in claiming that nihilism must be overcome in order for human beings to lead creative and resourceful lives. On the other hand, when he associates the latter values with the creation of a strong and majestic culture, he delimits the meaning of creativity.” Concerning gender relations, race relations, class relations, and international politics, Schutte claims, Nietzsche falls into the very nihilism he set out to fight. Therefore, in order to pursue Nietzsche’s goal of creating a life-affirming, anti-nihilistic philosophy, we have to depart from his social and political philosophy and take his anti-dualistic critical philosophy into territories he failed to revolutionize. In contrast to Nietzsche, Schutte finds the ideals of equality and democracy to be quite life-affirming, and she appreciates Nietzsche’s critiques of these ideals only because such

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196 Nietzsche’s dynamic and non-dualistic ontology, Schutte says, “…gives tribute to what may be referred to metaphorically as the ‘innocence of becoming’ or the dance of life. His unwillingness to reify such categories as substance and permanence and thereby to negate the vitality of the flux of becoming indicates that, at least in some areas of philosophical study, he denied some of the most basic principles of authoritarian world-conceptions inherited from the past” (“Nietzsche’s Politics” 303). Schutte appreciates Nietzsche’s cultural critique (which stems from his upset of dualisms) for its challenges to “…the so-called ‘moral’ system of rewards and punishments, the dualism between good and evil, the alienation of human consciousness from the earth, the nihilism inherent in many of our highest values, the false models of the individualism to which we have subscribed both philosophically and politically, and the inauthenticity of mass consciousness in our times” (“Nietzsche’s Politics” 303).

197 Beyond Nihilism 190.

198 In Schutte’s words, “…Nietzsche makes extremely sharp critiques of the highest values of Western culture and at the same time exhibits a blatant suspension of the critical method when discussing certain political, ethical, and social values” (“Nietzsche’s Politics 293). In another work, Schutte claims that Nietzsche has critical tendencies as well as authoritarian tendencies, and that “…whenever Nietzsche followed the authoritarian mode of reasoning, both the resentment and nihilism he sought to cure become reinstated in his own thoughts and teachings” (Beyond Nihilism 4; see also 132).

199 Beyond Nihilism 108, 190.
critiques “...keep us from sinking into a complacency and self-righteousness...”

By taking up some of Nietzsche’s strategies while reversing many of his specific aims, Schutte develops an anti-dualistic philosophy that attacks not equality but impediments to (political) equality.

I find this fourth approach to Nietzsche’s work to be by far the most helpful. Exposing and confronting the prejudicial intolerance and the support for oppression integrated into Nietzsche’s philosophy is not a mere matter of giving a true, authentic, or plausible reading of Nietzsche. Rather, it is an issue of revealing assumptions, convictions, and frameworks (or “horizons”) embedded in a philosophy that we intend to take up in some matter for our own purposes; and this exposure and confrontation is also part of a larger critical look into European and Western culture and philosophy, of which tradition and legacy Nietzsche certainly remains a part despite the mischief he stirred up and the new philosophical paths he opened up. Schutte stands out among Nietzschean feminists in showing carefully the links between Nietzsche’s misogyny and his notion of rank, his practice of diagnosing and evaluating groups of people, and his endorsement of servitude and slavery. However, Schutte’s frank acknowledgement of the problems within Nietzsche’s philosophy does not stop her from making use of Nietzsche in her feminist pursuits—she is simply mindful of just what she may be borrowing from Nietzsche. This fourth approach, then, takes up Nietzschean insights, philosophical ideas, or strategies of reasoning and argumentation in order to further a feminist project, but explicitly proclaims no loyalty to Nietzsche, or to his particular goals and valuations.

200 “Nietzsche’s Cultural Politics” 69.
Despite my preference for this fourth approach to Nietzsche, the other three interpretations of Nietzsche’s work make important contributions as well. As a collection of rather diverse interpretations of Nietzsche’s philosophy of gender, these accounts remind us of the pervasive ambivalence and ambiguity in Nietzsche’s thought. It is this characteristic of Nietzsche’s philosophy that makes it possible for one competent interpreter to conclude that Nietzsche’s texts are thoroughly misogynistic and another to conclude that they are a precursor to feminist philosophy. And it is, of course, not only on the topic of women that Nietzsche is ambivalent and ambiguous. No matter what he is evaluating, Nietzsche rarely has a single line of argumentation. Much of what Nietzsche says can be thought of as “experimental,” as though he is trying out a thought to see how it plays out and how far it takes him. This great flexibility—a playfulness, almost—makes Nietzsche’s thought tricky, slippery, even aggravating, but also excitingly malleable and overflowing with possibilities. Perhaps more than any other philosophy, Nietzsche’s philosophy is ripe for self-undermining—or self-overcoming. We can use its criticisms of culture as they stand, and we can also turn this critical philosophy in on itself in our creation of new critical philosophies and our creation of new cultures.

201 For example, as we saw above, democracy as an effort to make equal is both the cause of degeneracy and the potential for an upsurge of greatness. And as we also saw above, the same “racial” conditions that lead to degeneracy are the requisites for greatness in an individual. Nietzsche similarly claims that the same forces that created the unhealthy suppression of instincts and “bad conscience” also brought about “…a tension, a hope, almost a certainty, as if…man were…a great promise” (Genealogy of Morals II:16, page 85; see also I:6, page 33; II:18, pages 87-88; II:19, page 88; and III:10, page 116). Even in his most polarized figures, the noble (or master) and the slave, Nietzsche’s evaluation is bivalent; though he generally presents the “noble” as heroic and the “slave” as despicable, he also characterizes the noble as naive and the slave as clever (Genealogy of Morals I:10, page 38). Even Christianity, one of Nietzsche’s most hated historical phenomena, occasionally stirs up in Nietzsche a tone of admiration since it was, in his eyes, a marvelous “revaluing of values” (Beyond Good and Evil III:46, page 60).
It is not surprising, given such ambiguity and ambivalence, that we can find in Nietzsche both a ridiculous and vehement misogyny *and* some ideas that are potentially powerful when taken up in a radical feminist theory. This combination of elements in Nietzsche’s work should not make us think that Nietzsche was unusually confounded on the topic of women, that only one of these elements is sincerely meant, or that we should be more hesitant in this case to take his remarks at face value than in other cases. Given that Nietzsche’s view of women and his entire social philosophy are ambiguous, it only makes sense that our reception and use of Nietzsche would also be quite ambiguous. Feminists taking up the first two approaches remind us to look for, in Nietzsche’s cacophony of perspectives, subversive potential—even in those regions of inquiry where Nietzsche seems most appalling. In the end, we might do best with a multi-layered approach that combines an exposure of the undesirable aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy—which extend far beyond his statements on women—with a mischievous spinning of subversive threads into new directions that counter Nietzsche’s more obvious misogyny, directions that Nietzsche himself may never have imagined. In this way, we avoid treating what is undesirable in Nietzsche’s philosophy as anomalous; we pay attention to the implications of whatever attractive elements we borrow; we pay heed to the ambiguity in Nietzsche that scatters potential lines of inquiry; and we make use of Nietzsche’s strategies without adopting Nietzschean doctrine.
Agreements and Disagreements: Taking Up and Rejecting Nietzsche

As I have argued above, neither Nietzsche’s misogyny nor his racial characterization of peoples and his advocacy of “breeding” are anomalistic. His racial philosophy is, rather, intertwined with his social and political philosophy and with his overarching concern for the future of humanity. Therefore, when using Nietzsche for an anti-racist philosophy, it is not enough to announce that one does not espouse his particular racial classifications of various peoples (though that can be an important starting point). One must consider the implications of Nietzsche’s more attractive concepts and explore possible connections not only to Nietzsche’s racial philosophy but also to his philosophy of rank, aristocracy, and decadence and his endorsement of violence, cruelty, and exploitation.

In chapters three through five, I will be taking Nietzsche’s critique of rationality and his corresponding account of transformation, putting them in a new context, and developing them into something new in this context. The context in this case is the description of race-related problems and the tendencies of white people presented by Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones. As we will see, transformation in the Nietzschean sense often begins as a negation: “not this,” “away from that.” Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ accounts of race-related problems and the tendencies of white people provide that which will be negated in this case, that which is to be overcome in transformation. I will not be importing into my account Nietzsche’s goals for humanity nor his ideals such as the cold, cruel, independent warrior. In other words, though I will be working with a Nietzschean description of how transformation happens, Nietzsche and
I will differ greatly on what we hope transformation would overcome and make possible. However, since a clean separation in Nietzsche’s philosophy is not possible, I will be watching for unwanted implications of his critique of rationality and his account of transformation including his elitism, his individualism, and his endorsement of violence. I will point out some basic disagreements that lead me away from several of Nietzsche’s specific aims and I will turn Nietzschean strategies back against Nietzsche. Such arguments with Nietzsche occur in a context of using Nietzsche subversively, in the spirit of feminists who spin feminist texts out of Nietzsche’s very misogyny. Compared to such feminists, however, I more readily declare that while the account I develop may be Nietzschean, it is not a project that Nietzsche himself would have taken up (or even “should have” in order to be philosophically consistent).

As I develop this Nietzschean account of transformation, I look more deeply into Nietzsche’s critique of morality and the implications it may have for an anti-racist project. Suppose we look at social philosophy and race relations through the lens of vitality instead of those normative frameworks that Nietzsche rejects. If we take up Nietzsche’s understanding of vitality unaltered, we are stuck with his claim that we should let the “decadent” peoples die out and protect the few great, strong, individuals

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202 This Nietzschean account of transformation, developed into an account of transformation against the grain of race-related problems (in chapters three and four), is potentially compatible with various normative frameworks—even of the sort Nietzsche would critique—that establish claims related to social justice and ethical treatment of others, as long as such frameworks can acknowledge that we are often not transparent to ourselves and that much may underlie our moral beliefs and moral motivations. In other words, however we arrive at the belief that there is something problematic about racism, white privilege, white supremacy, and racial inequality—whether through a normative argument, a Nietzschean diagnosis in terms of health, or the acceptance of it as a simple bedrock belief—a Nietzschean account of transformation can be helpful in showing how a person can move from being complicit with these problems to resisting them. To make some use of this account, one need only grant that humans are not supremely rational creatures.
from the infectious “herd.” But this prescription of Nietzsche’s rests on some underlying claims that we may not agree with—for example, that human relations are fundamentally competitive, combative, aggressive, and parasitic; that caring for others weakens, enervates, or infects the one caring; and that there are no communities today that cultivate vitality (that the only hope is in a future community of free spirits). Supposing we take Nietzsche’s overturning of moral systems, his turn to the idea of vitality as a criterion of evaluation, and his affirmative approach to self-change, but alter the accompanying beliefs that play into Nietzsche’s prescription? Such an approach plays on the ambiguity in Nietzsche, playing him against himself, until a new vision of “vitality” arises.

Although I will end up fairly far from Nietzsche because of disagreements about the current conditions of our respective societies, what vaguely constitutes vitality, and how vitality can be cultivated, it is through Nietzsche’s critique of morality and proposed alternative that I will arrive at what I claim is a “healthier” way to view anti-racist transformation than more traditional and popular normative frameworks can offer.

In looking at transformation against the grain of race-related problems through the lens of vitality, I am, in a way, bringing in a new line of reasoning to support a prior conviction, just as Nietzsche accuses virtually all philosophers of doing. It is admittedly not my purpose here to question or defend a basic anti-racist commitment, nor is it my purpose to convince someone else of the worth of such a commitment. Then what is the purpose of bringing in what seems to be an after-the-fact support for a conviction that is already firm? When introduced to a semi-Nietzschean sense of vitality, the conviction itself, and even more so the transformation springing from it, take on a very different form. Anti-racism, seen as a matter of vitality, is no longer, from the point of view of
racially privileged people, an obligation that one must take on in order to avoid moral censure or feelings of guilt. It is instead a vibrant and energetic enhancement of self and communities that opens up unforeseen possibilities. It is not a practice of self-control and harshly disciplining the unruly, racist self in order to achieve self-satisfaction and others’ approval, but a practice of expanding oneself, seeing beyond oneself, and becoming part of vital communities. By taking up many of Nietzsche’s strategies while reversing many of his specific aims, we can develop an understanding of transformation against the grain of race-related problems as an affirmative, vibrant, and open-ended growth of the self and communities.
CHAPTER THREE
Rationality, Morality, and Fatality: Nietzschean Groundwork

Having established the need for a Nietzschean account of transformation against the grain of race-related problems in chapter two, I here develop the philosophical foundation on which a Nietzschean account of transformation rests. I first explicate Nietzsche’s critique of reason, showing what it lends to a description of white people in terms of epistemic limitations, unconscious habits, and social sedimentation (beyond what Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones have already offered). I indicate what Nietzsche’s critique shows us about how transformation can occur. Next, I present Nietzsche’s critique of morality, focusing on his account of guilt (or “the bad conscience”) and the decrease in vitality to which guilt leads. This enables me to create a critique of guilt as a motivating force in white, anti-racist transformation. Seeing the problems with using guilt as a motivator, we have indications of the sort of normative framework that would be helpful in this context. Finally, I address Nietzsche’s fatalism, which has led several commentators to question the degree to which self-change is actually possible within a Nietzschean world view. Through the presentation of my interpretation of Nietzsche’s fatalism, I reveal the more significant problem of Nietzsche’s diagnostic arrogance and readiness to condemn individuals and groups of people to hopeless futures. Noting the needfulness of avoiding Nietzsche’s mistake, we are ready to build on this philosophical foundation, continuing the project of developing a Nietzsche account of transformation.
I have already shown in chapter two that Nietzsche’s critique of reason and rationality resonates with the descriptions of white people that Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones give. As we will see here, Nietzsche’s critique of rationality is more thorough and explicit than what can be found in Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ work. Nietzsche suggests what, if not reason and rationality, may produce, support, and sustain beliefs and habits. In addition, Nietzsche introduces the notion of beliefs as “symptoms,” so that beliefs are not meaningless, but their significance is also not immediately obvious. Finally, Nietzsche shows how reason often does its work after the fact, buttressing prior convictions while also veiling their source. As he makes such claims, Nietzsche simultaneously recognizes the limited force that reason and rationality do carry—he does not, in other words, treat them as merely a hollow farce. Perhaps most importantly, in Nietzsche’s eyes, it is not a shame that humans are so non-rational. The real shame would be if we were to restrict ourselves only to reason and rationality and refuse to let other dimensions of ourselves come into play. This implies, as we will see, that the non-rational mechanisms of Nietzschean transformation are not a “second-best” solution called in only when it is discovered that reason and rationality unfortunately cannot get the job done.

Much of Nietzsche’s critique of rationality emerges in the context of his confrontation with philosophy and philosophers. As the latter exalt reason and aspire to objectivity, Nietzsche says to them, “[g]radually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind
of involuntary and unconscious memoir….”

Reminding philosophers of their humanity, he says, “[w]e are not…objectifying and registering mechanisms with their innards removed.” Philosophies, like all human beliefs, are branches of the self, not impersonal clouds floating above humanity. Philosophies are not merely “attached” to a person, but grow out of persons. As Nietzsche says, “…assuming that one is a person, one necessarily also has the philosophy that belongs to that person….” Nietzsche, then, is urging philosophers to put the person back into philosophy and let go of the dream of timeless, universal truths at which a thinker arrives uninfluenced by personal interest. This means recognizing the power of unconscious, affective, and bodily forces alongside conscious and rational forces. It also means looking at beliefs and philosophies as developments in time. According to Nietzsche, “…philosophers have the common failing of starting out from man as he is now and thinking they can reach their goal through an analysis of him…. [W]hat is needed from now on is historical philosophizing….”

203 *Beyond Good and Evil* I:6, page 13. Similarly, in *Daybreak* (V:553, page 223-224), Nietzsche says, “…this whole philosophy….Does it do more than translate…into reason a strong and constant drive…? A philosophy which is at bottom the instinct for a personal diet? An instinct which seeks my own air, my own heights, my own kind of health and weather, by the circuitous path of my head?…[T]he intellectual circuitous paths of…personal drives?” See also *Gay Science* Preface to the Second Edition: 2, page 33-34; *Gay Science* IV:333, page 262; *Gay Science* V:370, page 328; and *Beyond Good and Evil* I:5, pages 12-13.


205 *Human, All Too Human* I:2, pages 12-13. Similarly, in *Twilight of the Idols* (“‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” page 479), Nietzsche says that philosophers share a “…lack of historical sense, [a] hatred of the very idea of becoming….” See also Hinz page 123.
If reason and rational argument do not alone bolster our beliefs and habits, then what forces do? Nietzsche identifies many possible sources. In his discussions of philosophy and philosophers, Nietzsche identifies need, desire, fear, instinct, and weakness as possible grounds out of which philosophies grow. For example, Nietzsche explains that “…those who suffer most and are poorest in life…need…logic, the conceptual understandability of existence—for logic calms and gives confidence…” Nietzsche is here indicating that our beliefs make the world navigable for us and allow us to be effective in it. A philosophy “…creates the world in its own image…” and thereby serves its author. Finally, reminding humans that they are more than just intellect or spirit, Nietzsche wonders if perhaps philosophy, the most cognitive of enterprises, can

208 An instinct, for Nietzsche, is not something shared by all members of the human species. Rather, the instincts a person has depend on her physiological makeup, and instincts can be acquired. That is, something routine can, over time, in an individual or a “line” of individuals, become instinct. 


211 Beyond Good and Evil I:9, page 16.
be traced finally back to “...merely an interpretation of the body and a misunderstanding of the body.”

Nietzsche’s discussion of moral convictions is the other place where he identifies possible sources of belief. “Your judgment ‘this is right,’” he says, “has a pre-history in your instincts, likes, dislikes, experiences, and lack of experiences.”

Elsewhere, he says that “[o]ur virtues are conditional on, are provoked by, our weaknesses” and that “[t]o our strongest drive, the tyrant in us, not only our reason bows but also our conscience.” Nietzsche also links convictions, including moral convictions, to affects “...such as fear, love, hatred, including the passive affects of laziness”; he says that “we are all irrational” in that “[w]e still draw the conclusions of judgments we consider false, of teachings in which we no longer believe—our feelings make us do it.”

Humans are, according to Nietzsche, “believers” who “...need to believe.” Need makes us believe despite good reasons not to and despite evidence that contradicts our beliefs: “...this is how man is: An article of faith could be refuted before him a thousand times—if he needed it, he would consider it ‘true’ again and again....” Finally, Nietzsche

213 Gay Science IV: 335, pages 263-64, emphasis added.
214 Twilight of the Idols “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 37, page 540.
215 Beyond Good and Evil IV:158, page 91.
216 Beyond Good and Evil V:192, page 105. See also Gay Science III:197, page 203: “Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings—always darker, emptier, and simpler”; and Beyond Good and Evil V:187, page 100: “...moraleeies are...merely a sign language of the affects.”
218 Gay Science V:347, page 287, italics altered. Immunity to reasoning and evidence is especially strong, Nietzsche says, in those who are powerfully guided by some project, ambition, or idea. “He who has much to do preserves his general opinions and points of view almost unaltered. Likewise anyone who works in the service of an idea: he will cease to examine even the idea itself, for he has no time for that; indeed it is against his interest to regard it as so much as discussable” (Human, All Too Human I:511, page 181).
claims that we use our reasoning in service of the preservation of our form of life\textsuperscript{219} and that we hold tight to beliefs that are “life-promoting.”\textsuperscript{220} We want the world, in other words, to be amenable to our ways of living. We not only adapt to our surroundings in order to be effective, but also construct the world (in imagination and actuality) in ways that support our projects, convince us that our existence is justified, protect our particular ways of being, and increase our capacities to do and make.

Although beliefs, according to Nietzsche, may not say a lot about truth or objectivity, they do say a lot about the person who espouses them. Instead of taking convictions at face value, in other words, Nietzsche views them as “symptoms.”\textsuperscript{221} Beliefs are an outgrowth of the self and its social location but have to be interpreted if one wants to understand their meaning.\textsuperscript{222} In a related vein and using another physiological metaphor, Nietzsche says that our conscious intentions (our reasons for doing something) are like a skin over our actions “…which, like every skin, betrays something but conceals even more.”\textsuperscript{223} So, while Nietzsche is discrediting the supposed objective and rational foundations of our beliefs, he is not concluding that beliefs are

\textsuperscript{219} Beyond Good and Evil I:3, page 11, and I:11, page 19; see also Genealogy of Morals III:13, page 120. Nietzsche uses this term without defining it; in my discussion below of forms of life in the context of race, I will fill out the term with a description.

\textsuperscript{220} Beyond Good and Evil I:4, page 11.


\textsuperscript{222} For all his talk about symptoms, interpretations, and being a philosophical physician, Nietzsche also says that it was enormous benefit not to be transparent to himself (Ecce Homo “Why I am so Clever” 9, page 255). Hence, in describing beliefs as symptoms, Nietzsche is not necessarily telling us to analyze ourselves at every turn, diagnosing all of our diseases as we search for the “truth” of ourselves. He seems to value to a high degree a general awareness of one’s multifaceted nature and a suspicion of one’s own rational justifications without claiming that one must know definitively exactly what is going on in the realm of the affective, bodily, instinctual, etc.

\textsuperscript{223} Beyond Good and Evil II:32, page 44.
therefore insignificant or meaningless. Like philosophies to philosophers, beliefs “belong” to people and are as personal (and simultaneously as social) as emotions.

In his look into humans and their beliefs, Nietzsche exposes a drive to be rational (we could call it a “will to rationality”). Most humans want to appear perfectly rational and reasonable to others, he says, and also want to believe themselves to be rational in their beliefs and reasonable in what they do. Fulfilling this drive, humans “seek reasons after the fact”—that is, we do, believe, or are something out of need (etc.) and then construct arguments for doing, believing, or being that. In Nietzsche’s words, “…one must follow the instincts but persuade reason to assist them with good reasons.”

Having arguments for everything we do and believe justifies us before others and ourselves. (We may be in such a habit of “being rational” that we form a vague idea that, in general, what we do makes sense, and we may not even feel a need to produce an actual argument in each case—we are sure that there is one.) While affect, as an example, may originally establish humans’ positions, prejudices, or convictions, we find ourselves

…full of these acquired and well-exercised affects and consider it only decent to try to account for and justify them. This ‘accounting’, however, has nothing to do with either the origin or the degree of intensity of the feeling: all one is doing is complying with the rule that, as a rational being, one has to have reasons for one’s For and Against, and that they have to be adducible and acceptable reasons. To this extent the history of…feelings is quite different from the history of…concepts. The former are powerful before the action, the latter especially after the action in face of the need to pronounce upon it.

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225 Beyond Good and Evil V:191, page 104.
226 Daybreak I:34, page 25. The full passage discusses the transmission of moral affects from adults to children who later justify their feelings with moral concepts (yet the point about reason and affect has more
Such reasoning-after-the-fact hides the non-rational sources of beliefs. Especially with the most familiar and commonplace topics, beliefs eventually seem disconnected from persons altogether, standing on a foundation of reason alone. In Nietzsche’s words, “All things that live long are gradually so saturated with reason that their origin in unreason thereby becomes improbable.” So, along with serving purposes such as need or the preservation of a form of life, beliefs also, with their accompanying arguments and reasons, hide the fact that they are serving purposes.

After looking into Nietzsche’s critique of reason and rationality, whether in the context of philosophical world-views or moral convictions, one may wonder if reasoning and rational argumentation are, for Nietzsche, mere decoration and of no actual value or utility at all. In fact, Nietzsche does not go so far as to say reason has absolutely no role in the establishment of our convictions. Despite his often emphatic critiques of reason and philosophers’ pretensions, Nietzsche does not consider reason to be worthless, nor does he advise us to stop reasoning altogether (as if we could). In fact, after criticizing religiously inspired people who jump to conclusions instead of using reason to scrutinize their experiences, Nietzsche calls himself and those like him “…we others who thirst after reason…..”228 In his barbed remarks against philosophers and his frequent general application). This is similar to Sullivan’s use of Laplanche in her analysis of *The Bluest Eye* (see chapter one). However, Nietzsche goes beyond positing the transmission of values through non-explicit means and shows the *ex post facto* role that reason and argument play.

227 *Daybreak* I:1, page 9; also quoted in *Genealogy of Morals* “Seventy-five Aphorisms: Dawn 1,” page 186.

228 *The Gay Science* IV:319, page 253. Similarly, while Nietzsche does often valorize the denigrated instincts, he does not urge us to fall whimsically to all of our instincts. He considers it weakness, in fact, to be unable not to respond to every stimulus (*Twilight of the Idols* “What the Germans Lack” 6, pages 511-
discussions of the instincts, affects, and psychology, Nietzsche is merely trying to humble reason (and those who lean so heavily upon it). Reason—and conscious thought in general—is one human capability among many, one cooperating power that lends assistance to a living, embodied, vital self. Rather than being the essence of what is human, “…reason is merely an instrument….” Furthermore, Nietzsche does not see reason as the opposite of or a counter-force to what is unconscious or instinctive. After all, our very processes and methods of reasoning, our sense of rationality, can be “guided” by our instincts and unconscious drives. So, Nietzsche is not scolding philosophers, or anyone else, for using reason; rather, he is pointing out to them how little they actually do use reason to arrive at their conclusions, he is calling on them to reevaluate the inflated value they have placed on reason, and he is bringing forward those non-rational aspects of humans that philosophers have ignored.

Viewing conscious beliefs with a consideration of factors such as need, desire, affect, body, and the preservation or promotion of a certain form of life puts those beliefs associated with racism and white privilege in a new light and indicates what we may be

512), and he warns that the instincts themselves can be degenerate, in which case following them is “…one calamity more” (Twilight of the Idols “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 41, page 545).

229 Beyond Good and Evil V:191, page 104.

230 “…[B]eing conscious’ is not in any decisive sense the opposite of what is instinctive…” (Beyond Good and Evil I:3, page 11). See also Gay Science IV:333, page 261.

231 Beyond Good and Evil I:3, page 11. See also Human, All Too Human “The Wanderer and his Shadow” 2, page 302.

232 Michael Hinz makes similar claims about Nietzsche’s position on reason. Hinz explains that Nietzsche does not criticize the use of reason in itself, but rather the way reason “…has been exalted and assumed a certain tyranny over the self. In this way, reactive/ascetic valuation encourages the neglect and even disparagement of the other activities vital to self-creation” (81). Hinz further claims, correctly in my view, that reason can even be used in support of self-overcoming, particularly as a tool for attacking and dismantling prevailing convictions (82).
dealing with in discussing transformation. Below are seven convictions or attitudes that can hinder transformation against the grain of race-related problems (but could also be phases, giving way to further transformation).

• “I don’t see race, I only see people”
• “We have class problems today, not race problems”
• “Whites are becoming the real victims of racism now”
• Shallow Multiculturalism
• Avoidance Behavior
• Exoticism
• “They don’t want my help”

While each of these positions may be indicated by the stated belief, behavior, or attitude, we could say (using Nietzsche’s terminology) that each is actually a “form of life,” and that the stated belief, behavior, or attitude is a symptom of that form of life. While Nietzsche often refers to a “form of life,” he does not define the term. As I use this borrowed notion, “form of life” stands as a catch-all term conjuring up not just beliefs or attitudes, but also activities, ways of living, emotions, perceptions, tendencies, habits, passions, priorities, commitments, social relationships, ways of interacting, needs, strengths, and weaknesses. The term “form of life,” in other words, stands as a contrast to “a set of beliefs.” I look at complicity with racism and white privilege—or, to be more precise, the *multiple ways* of being complicit—as a form—or *forms*—of life. The multiple ways of being resistant to racism and white privilege are, similarly, forms of life. And, since virtually no one is purely complicit or purely resistant, there are many forms of life in between those characterized by the extreme of complicity and the extreme of
resistance. While the beliefs and attitudes listed above are generally closer to complicity than resistance, none is an overtly racist position and each has a kernel of potential to give way to resistance.

Nietzsche would say that each conviction or attitude listed above, symptomatic of a form of life, is personal. It “belongs,” in other words, to the person who espouses it. Hence it may say quite a bit about that person. But as a “symptom,” it cannot be taken at face value; the affective or psychological attachment to a belief will likely not be announced as one accounts for her own beliefs. In fact, the account—the “argument after the fact”—tends to cover over and disguise the underlying grounds of belief. In what follows, I will give an explanation of each belief or attitude, indicating very briefly some

233 In discussing forms of life and transformation as coming to a new form of life, what I am doing here bears similarity to work psychologists (along with researchers in the field of education) have done in creating models of “white identity development.” These models describe the development path, in stages, that a white person takes in moving from a lack of awareness of race and racism (and a lack of awareness that there might be such a thing as a white identity) to, finally, the integration of an anti-racist white identity. (See Janet E. Helms, “Toward a Theoretical, Explanation of the Effects of Race on Counseling; Helms, Black and White Racial Identity; Helms, “An Update of Helm’s White and People of Color Racial Identity Models”; Rita Hardiman, “Reflections on White Identity Development Theory”; Beverly D. Tatum, “Teaching White Students about Racism”; Tatum, “Lighting Candles in the Dark”; and Becky Thompson, “Subverting Racism from Within.”) While such models are generally described in stages characterized by attitudes toward race, conceptions of white identity, or relations to non-white populations, most psychologists agree that the “stages” are not discrete and pure and that one can move back and forth between stages even though the stages may be progressive—that is, developmental. One author has criticized her own early model and others because they “… imply that they represent the identity development process of all White Americans. This is a major limitation of the models—they are too simplistic in explaining the diverse experiences of Whites and the ways in which they respond to or create their racial identity” (Hardiman 116). Psychologists are currently attempting to diversify their models based on this and other criticisms. My account of transformation, while looking into similar phenomena, does not posit a developmental trajectory and does not assume an organized hierarchy of better and better (progressive) stances toward race or white racial identities. While the valuable work within psychology and education has the benefit of empirical research and testing (in educational settings and psychotherapy settings), it is my view that a philosophical, Nietzschean perspective on white, anti-racist transformation can open up new, helpful lines of inquiry. Nietzsche’s notion of self-overcoming (which I present in chapter four) brings to the table a discussion of the mechanisms of transformation that could add productively to development models. Nietzsche furthermore has a robust normative philosophy (which I present in chapter five) that can help us envision new possibilities for white, anti-racist transformation. Finally, Nietzsche’s theories are flexible enough that they can be put to work in various (though I would not claim all) social and historical contexts—a concern that several commentators have voiced regarding early white identity development models (for example, see Thompson).
of the more obvious faults of each, and then, in a Nietzschean spirit, surmising what personal or social purposes each might serve.

The attitude of colorblindness is characterized by the claim that one does not “see” race and therefore treats all people the same. As Ruth Frankenburg explains, in the minds of many people, especially white people, to see race is to be racist and to be racist is bad.\(^\text{234}\) But, whatever people may claim about their “blindness,” in a racialized society, not “seeing” race is simply impossible. In Frankenburg’s words, “[a] generous interpretation of this color-blind discourse might see these [people] as confusing desire with reality, ‘ought’ with ‘is.’ A more cynical view might see intentional evasion or denial.”\(^\text{235}\) Nietzsche might say that an attitude of colorblindness fulfills the desire to appear morally upright, protects against the fear of self-examination (if one cannot see race, after all, she cannot see her own racialization either), or attends to a need to believe that body and appearance do not significantly influence who we are. In these ways, it can serve the self and create efficacy despite the fact that what it claims isn’t really possible.\(^\text{236}\) The kernel of hope within the attitude of colorblindness is that one who

\(^\text{234}\) White Women, Race Matters 142-49.


\(^\text{236}\) Frankenburg’s explanation of the harm of “colorblindness” has to do with the suppression of race discourse that it invokes: “…within this discursive repertoire, people of color are ‘good’ only insofar as their ‘coloredness’ can be bracketed and ignored, and this bracketing is contingent on the ability or the decision—in fact the virtue—of a ‘noncolored’—or white—self. Colorblindness, despite the best intentions of its adherents, in this sense preserves the power structure inherent in essentialist racism” (147). Frankenburg further notes that one who espouses colorblindness will likely oppose affirmative action or reparations and may be particularly concerned with “reverse discrimination” since each of these names and “sees” race (148-49). DiTomaso et al also make this connection between colorblindness and concern with reverse discrimination.
espouses colorblindness is at least concerned with racial prejudice and discrimination—to recall Frankenburg’s terms, such a person thinks that we at least “ought” to have a society without racism. Colorblindness, then, does have potential to develop into a more helpful attitude toward race even while it is not in itself a helpful approach to race and racism.

Since the 1960s, debates have raged about whether race or class is a more significant factor in one’s opportunities and limitations. What is clear in these discussions is that poverty is racialized—that, in other words, wealth and capital are dramatically disproportionately spread among racial groups in the U.S. and globally. Hence, the claim that we have class problems rather than race problems is untenable. But, as implausible as the claim may be, it nevertheless can be useful to the self. Nietzsche might say that dismissing racial problems as class prejudice and economic injustice can protect white people from the unpleasant affect of shame, since class prejudice seems to be a less shameful prejudice than race in the minds of many white Americans. It also could allow white people who are less well off economically to maintain innocence rather than forcing a recognition of complicity (albeit a complicity differing from that of economically empowered white people). But here too we can find a kernel of hope: a concern about class problems is a social concern—it could serve as a good starting point if it could be stretched to include other social concerns as well.

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A focus on reverse discrimination generally highlights one incident in a white person’s life and fails to recognize the much more common and powerful discrimination that continues to affect minorities from birth on. The significance of reverse discrimination is exaggerated and the significance of more common patterns of discrimination is minimized; also minimized is the significance of the advantages that the white person in question has likely had due to race or “connections” to other socially and economically empowered white people. Nietzsche would likely say that such a claim to victimhood can allow white people to turn the other—racial minorities—into the supposed oppressors. Such a reversal can in turn allow white people to believe in their own basic goodness, an important source of self-esteem, just as it excuses them from doing anything about their participation in racial injustice. As skewed as it is, this concern for equality, however, could be diverted into an anti-racist energy if an expanded socio-epistemological awareness were brought to bear on it.

A shallow multiculturalism “appreciates” or “celebrates” diversity without addressing issues of power, oppression, and resistance. For example, a white American with this form of life might enjoy American Indian dancing at a powwow, but be annoyed when the fun is interrupted by talk of political, economic issues that are important to many American Indians today. Or a white American may decorate with

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238 For more on white individuals’ exaggerated concern with reverse discrimination, see Pincus, “Reverse Discrimination vs White Privilege”; Oliver, Witnessing, 19 and 107-132; Tochluk, Witnessing Whiteness, 32; and DiTomaso et al, “White Views of Civil Rights.” Oliver insightfully reveals a mistaken belief implicit in concerns with reverse discrimination and affirmative action, namely “…that identity is bought at the expense of others, that empowering one group means disempowering another…” (113).

239 Discussing a parallel phenomenon, “tokenism,” Ann Russo critiques feminists who respond to racism by tossing into their courses or reading lists a few things written by women of color or inviting a woman of color to join panel discussion—without actually changing their basic perspective or approach to feminism (“‘We Cannot Live Without Our Lives’” 301).
Asian-inspired art and design but be dismissive of Asian-Americans’ perspectives on U.S. society and politics. Ignoring power differences, a shallow multiculturalism treats all non-white races and non-Euro-American cultures as interesting artifacts. Comparing this attitude to colorblindness (or “color evasion”), Frankenburg says:

If the sharp edge of color evasion resides in its repression or denial of the differences that race makes in people’s lives, power evasion is a permutation of that repression: rather than complete nonacknowledgment of any kind of difference, power evasion involves a selective attention to difference, allowing into conscious scrutiny—even conscious embrace—those differences that make the speaker feel good but continuing to evade by means of partial description, euphemism, and self-contradiction those that make the speaker feel bad.\(^\text{240}\)

Shallow multiculturalism as a form of life could serve the self by giving one, as does colorblindness, the moral high-ground without forcing a genuine examination of one’s role in power relations. Appearing noble before others, one actually may do next to nothing to expose the struggles of the people one “celebrates” or support their efforts toward change. But, like others of the convictions listed here—or even more so—this can be an intermediate phase: as an interest in other people and diversity, shallow multiculturalism may grow into an interest in not only music, art, and food, but also living conditions and political power or lack thereof.\(^\text{241}\)

Simply avoiding uncomfortable, racially charged situations keeps one from committing overtly racist acts, but does not eliminate one’s own racialization and doesn’t

\(^{240}\) *White Women, Race Matters* 156-57.

\(^{241}\) Frankenburg comes to a similar conclusion after presenting her interviews of women using the “power evasive” discourses: “As with color evasion, one senses in some of these narratives a desire to overcome interracial hostility behind the impulse toward power-blindness. The outcome of this attempt, however, was frequently a lack of attention to the areas of power imbalance that in fact generate hostility, social distance and ‘bad feelings’ in general” (157).
do anything to address racial problems. Avoidance behaviors serve the self by keeping one from feeling uncomfortable and from confronting disturbing things in oneself and society. Avoidance may be deliberate, but may also be an almost instinctual, partially bodily reaction to discomfort. Yet the very presence of discomfort signals that there may be energies, feelings, and ideas swirling beneath the surface that could eventually give way to an investigation into rather than avoidance of race and one’s own racialization.

Exoticism, fascination with the other, is a maintenance of white privilege in the form of the power to “consume” the other for one’s own enjoyment. By lavishing praise on other races and cultures, exoticism disguises its desire to take power over the other and consume the other as if the other were a product exported by a colonized nation. Often exoticism involves a conscious or unconscious effort to establish one’s own identity by playing it off of the identities of others—the other’s perceived identity can serve the useful role of creating a contrasting positive identity for the self. If a white person goes further and adopts an “ethnic” identity himself (as if only non-white people are “ethnic”), he is freed from negotiating his white identity and can pretend that others do not “see” his white body. While often more insidious than a shallow multiculturalism, this desire to consume or become the other likewise at least shows an interest in otherness that could develop into a less appropriative relation to others.

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242 Russo describes an avoidance response among academic feminists—see “‘We Cannot Live Without Our Lives’” 301.

243 For extended analyses of exoticism, see Philip J. Deloria, Playing Indian; bell hooks, Black Looks; Ward Churchill, Fantasies of the Master Race and Indians are Us?; Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark; and John Hutnyk, Critique of Exotica.
The belief that “they” don’t want white people’s help can be a reaction to disappointment and feelings of rejection. For example, Winifred Breines finds that many white feminists, in revisiting their academic and activist work in the 1960s, “…recall making overtures to African Americans and being rejected,” and Breines finds this to be one of the causes of “the trouble between us” (the title of her book). This response is common among white people who do not feel they are enthusiastically welcomed in a community organization or activist group that is not predominantly white. The response can be either a genuine belief that one’s help is not wanted (and in some cases it may indeed be true that one’s help is not wanted), or it can be an excuse to stop entering into an uncomfortable environment. In any case, reacting (without careful consideration) in this way amounts to a refusal to examine the sort of “help” one offered and ask whether one might better participate in social reform in different ways. It is a relieving and preserving tactic; feeling frustrated or hurt, the belief that others have requested one’s total lack of involvement means that there is no need to change into a more capable ally and take an honest, vulnerable look into the grounds for rejection. One can hope, however, that after wounds begin to heal, the interest in reaching out will resume.

While it is difficult to say definitively in any one case exactly what the personal factors are that underlie the above convictions, behaviors, and attitudes that arrive late on the scene, the affects, needs, desires, bodily reactions, and fears that I have here identified are probable factors, as they all serve the self in some way while conveniently disguising the self’s needs and purposes. We must also keep in mind that “personal factors” are

244 The Trouble Between Us 9.
simultaneously social and historical. A white-dominated society has constructed that
society to further accommodate white domination. It has created and reified over time
roles for white people that encourage them to take advantage of their racial privilege, and,
in more recent times when that privilege has been threatened, to veil its very existence
and operation. Personal factors such as need or desire, then, are often socially supported.
A “form of life” is general enough to be shared by many people, and it is amongst others
that we absorb and create our forms of life.

In the case of each of the seven convictions and attitudes listed above, no matter
which particular personal factors are operative, four important Nietzschean points apply:
the conviction or attitude justifies the individual (justifies his actions, interactions, and
ways of living in his society); helps the individual to be effective in the world (to have an
influence over his environment and guide his future); protects the individual from self-
examination and from the work of self-change (“preserves his form of life”); and, if
communicated to others, goes beyond “preserving” a form of life and “promotes” that
form of life (the form of life being, most generally, white privilege, or more specifically,
any of those forms whose symptoms include the seven convictions and attitudes listed
above). To take just one example, the claim that others do not want one’s help first of all
justifies one’s lack of participation in efforts toward social change; allows the individual
to return to a white-dominated environment in which he moves about easily and uses his
privileges to direct his life; wards off the self-examination and self-change that would
need to occur were he to join a coalition of social actors and thus supports the
continuation of his narrow, privileged ways of living; and, if the message is spread,
encourages others to join him in withdrawing into whiteness instead of confronting it.
We needn’t conclude, based on this analysis, that transformation entails that one will end up not justified, not effective, and having no particular form of life to promote. Rather, transformation implies a new form of life, a new efficacy, and new terms of justification. Convictions and attitudes certainly change as a part of transformation, but change must also occur on the level of needs, desires, emotions, and bodily responses. Change, then, will occur as an interchange between the cognitive/rational and the other parts of the socialized self, and the change in convictions will often follow other changes. A change in convictions alone would likely be only a new protective measure for a self that is basically unchanged. Transformation, then, really is about a new form of life and not a new conviction. A new form of life means new justifications and a new efficacy which will be supported by new lines of reasoning.

Although I am speaking critically of the above seven responses to racism and white privilege, each situation can in fact be a valuable phase of a transformation. If each situation and one’s stance within it could be taken up (after some time) critically, openly, and sensitively, one could understand (with the help of others) the shortcomings of where she is now and find an opening to further transformation. These situations and stances can be like Nietzsche’s “steps” that he climbs over though the “steps” may have “thought that [he] wanted to retire on them.” Describing the steps of her process of coming to awareness about racism and other ignorances, Mab Segrest says,

…I begin to see the false status that I get from my race and class and Christian privilege. And as soon as I do, I begin to see lies everywhere and everywhere my own responsibility, my own complicity. As I begin to feel what slavery did to Black people, I look up and see—God, we killed the Indians too. Then I hit the

245 Twilight of the Idols “Maxims and Arrows” 42, page 472.
third stage of intense self-hatred which is the reality beneath the false self-love all along. I think the reason why white women avoid their racism so much and can act so weird around women of color is because deep down we are afraid that this third level is all that there is. That we will end up stuck in despair and self-hatred and suicide. But I believe that underneath there is another level. 246

In the best of circumstances, this “third stage” Segrest describes can be an illness or struggle from which one emerges “newborn,” as Nietzsche says, and with new strengths, new energies, new visions.

It is important to keep in mind the tenor of Nietzsche’s critique of rationality. He is not saying that we are non-rational in many ways and should be more rational. Unlike most philosophers, Nietzsche would not see a lack of rational control over oneself and one’s life as something to be ashamed of. As he takes a genealogical and “symptomological” approach to beliefs and philosophies, he does not say that because a belief, conviction, or habit has a history and an origin in feeling, need, desire, or instinct, it is thereby wrong, false, harmful, or illegitimate. What is “wrong” or “false” is the belief that we are supremely rational creatures, capable of rising above our physical, psychological, and social selves. The very idea that such a pure rising would be desirable is itself a prejudice of reason. So, while we may wish to overcome particular needs, certain ways of fulfilling our desires, various ways of dealing with our affects, some aspects of social influence, particular forms of the drive to be effective in the world, we certainly do not need to strive to become completely independent, self-sufficient, emotionless reasoners. The affective, for example, may be the home of forces that are

246 My Mama’s Dead Squirrel 171-72; see also Segrest’s Memoir of a Race Traitor.
holding us back, but may also be the site with the greatest potential for transformation; our psyches, bodies, and communities can be routes out of racial inequality and white privilege as much as they can be sites of the latter. Nietzsche’s motives for making these corrections to humans’ overestimations of reason and rationality (at least his conscious motives!) have to do with his suspicion that humanity may be restricting its potential by trying to stifle and disguise our non-rational selves. As we attribute so much of our motivation, actions, and convictions to our reasoning, we fail to see all of the other capabilities and forces that interface with conscious thought and impel us, often more powerfully than reason, toward certain actions and conclusions. If we stop at the rational surfaces of our multidimensional selves—that is, if we address ourselves and our convictions exclusively as matters of reasoning—we have little hope for truly significant self-transformation and cultural transformation. So, transformation, as we will further see, is not about substituting one set of beliefs with another; replacing beliefs built on non-rational forces with rational beliefs; nor changing on the level of the non-rational only because a strictly rational approach unfortunately won’t work. It is instead a holistic transformation of the self that involves rational thinking and argument, but joyously embraces all the other facets of the self as well.

Nietzsche’s critique of rationality goes beyond Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ critique in explaining with more detail how social ignorance or a limited horizon serves the self and addresses the needs, desires, and affects of the self. Nietzsche shows the work that ignorance does for us in terms of justifying our beliefs and actions, constructing ourselves and the world around us to increase our efficacy, protecting ourselves from the enormous effort needed to thwart personal and social trajectories, and
both preserving and promoting white privilege as a form of life. Most significantly, however, Nietzsche’s critique is neither a critique of reason *in toto* nor a critique of humans’ pathetically limited use of reason. It is a critique of our *estimation* of reason that encourages us to accept reason as one instrument among many that we will take up along with many others in our efforts toward transformation.

**Critique of Morality**

Nietzsche’s critique of morality can serve as a valuable resource in the development of an account of transformation against the grain of race-related problems. As I will explain in what follows, Nietzsche shows how morality, like reason, serves particular personal and social purposes whatever its openly expressed purposes and justifications. Looking at the tendencies of both the prevailing social morality of his time and many of the prominent theories of ethics within modern philosophy, Nietzsche locates the harm of such moralities in their underlying structure, which he identifies as a dichotomy of “good and evil,” and, correspondingly, in their reliance on guilt (or, as Nietzsche more often says, “bad conscience”). Most importantly for my purposes, however, Nietzsche does not dispense with normativity altogether but rather advocates a different kind of normativity. The discussion in this chapter of Nietzsche’s critique of morality will set us up for a full discussion of his *different* normativity in chapter five.

Following my discussion of Nietzsche’s critique of morality, I show below how the use of guilt (stemming from moralities with something like a good-and-evil dichotomy that may deliberately or unintentionally invoke such guilt) as an instrument of
self-change is counter-productive in the case of white people and transformation against
the grain of race-related problems. While my critique is specific, centering on the use of
guilt in white, anti-racist transformation, Nietzsche’s critique of morality is far more
general than mine. Through an examination of Nietzsche’s critique, I am able to
highlight the harm caused by guilt as a supposedly motivating force, again charting the
way toward a different normativity for transformation against the grain of race-related
problems.

In his critique of morality, Nietzsche objects to many philosophers’ contention
that moral theory is a matter of objectivity and universality, that moral rules are
irrefutable, and that the system of morality is built upon an unshakeable foundation
(whether pure reason or the pursuit of personal happiness or the greatest happiness for the
greatest number). According to Nietzsche, what actually grounds moral theory (and
social morality as well) is the interest of an individual or group. Morality, originating
in such interests, is then clothed in universal, objective terms, which makes it plausible to
force others to heed particular moral laws and disguises the purposes the systems serve.
So, just like purportedly rational beliefs about the world, moral beliefs help justify one’s

247 Like rational arguments, moralities are most valuable when viewed as symptoms: “Moral judgments
are…never to be taken literally: so understood they always contain mere absurdity. Semiotically,
however, they remain invaluable: they reveal, at least for those who know, the most valuable realities of
cultures and inwardnesses which did not know enough to ‘understand’ themselves. Morality is mere sign
language, mere symptomatology: one must know what it is all about to be able to profit from it” (Twilight
existence, make one effective in the world, and preserve and promote one’s form of life.248

According to Nietzsche, most moral philosophers, under the guise of a radical examination of morality, simply aim to provide a stronger foundation for a prevailing social morality. Their ethical theories are

…merely a scholarly variation of the common faith in the prevalent morality; a new means of expression for this faith; and thus just another fact within a particular morality; indeed, in the last analysis a kind of denial that this morality might ever be considered problematic—certainly the very opposite of an examination, analysis, questioning, and vivisection of this very faith.249

Far from radical then, ethical theory is usually, according to Nietzsche, an abstraction of the dominant, prevailing social morality of the times (hence Nietzsche’s deliberate conflation in many works of social morality and ethical theory). Nietzsche, in contrast to

248 Nietzsche would not object with such vehemence to a very personal moral outlook if it were not presented as valid for all and forced upon others for whom it may function very poorly. Convinced that no single set of moral laws can suit all individuals, Nietzsche rejects systematic moral philosophies and attempts to show the harm they have done. For example, Nietzsche says,

…that you take this or that judgment for the voice of conscience—in other words, that you feel something to be right—may be due to the fact that you have never thought much about yourself and simply have accepted blindly that what you had been told ever since your childhood was right; or it may be due to the fact that what you call your duty has up to this point brought you sustenance and honors—and you consider it ‘right’ because it appears to you as your own ‘condition of existence’. …[T]he firmness of your moral judgment could be evidence of your personal abjectness, of impersonality: your ‘moral strength’ might have its source in your stubbornness—or in your inability to envisage new ideals. (Gay Science IV:336, pages 263-64)

249 Similarly, Nietzsche claims that

[t]here are moralities which are meant to justify their creator before others. Other moralities are meant to calm him and lead him to be satisfied with himself. With yet others he wants to crucify himself and humiliate himself. With others he wants to wreak revenge, with others conceal himself, with others transfigure himself and place himself way up, at a distance. This morality is used by its creator to forget, that one to have others forget him or something about him. (Beyond Good and Evil V:187, page 99)

Nietzsche accuses Kant, among others, of “…suggest[ing] with [his] morality: ‘What deserves respect in me is that I can obey—and you ought not to be different from me’” (Beyond Good and Evil V:187, pages 99-100). He says to those who thus impose their morality: “You admire the categorical imperative within you? This ‘firmness’ of your so-called moral judgment? This ‘unconditional’ feeling that ‘here everyone must judge as I do’? Rather admire your selfishness at this point….For it is selfish to experience one’s own judgment as a universal law…” (Gay Science IV:336, pages 263-66).
the moral theorists he critiques, proposes to undertake a genuine examination of morality by asking about the value of various moral systems—in other words, the value of values. He is particularly interested in understanding and critiquing what he calls moralities of “good and evil” (which I will clarify below):

“…under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? and what value do they themselves possess? Have they hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plentitude, force, and will of life, its courage, certainty, future?”

As one can expect, Nietzsche’s answer is that the moral systems he sees operating around him (in practice and in philosophers’ texts)—which he identifies as moralities of good and evil—are indeed signs of distress, impoverishment, and degeneration. So what characterizes such moralities and why does Nietzsche find them to be life-negating?

We can answer these questions in a roundabout way: in contrast to moralities of “good and evil” (which Nietzsche associates with weak people) are noble moralities of “good and bad.” Nietzsche explains that strong, noble types spontaneously declare themselves good, beautiful, and happy. Then, almost as an afterthought, they define others who are not like them as bad. On the other hand, impotent, hateful types first focus on others (usually the nobles) and declare them evil, and then afterwards establish themselves (the weak) as the good. Moralities of good and evil, then, are based on resentment of the other while noble morality is based on the affirmation of oneself.

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250 Genealogy of Morals Preface 3, page 17; see also Genealogy of Morals I:17 “Note,” page 55.  
According to Nietzsche, the weak, resentful way of valuing has prevailed. The details of Nietzsche’s history of morality are not particularly relevant to my purposes as I take aspects of Nietzsche to the context of race below; what is especially useful is Nietzsche’s diagnosis of the harm done to people by resentful moralities of good and evil, especially because of the reliance of such moralities on guilt—or “bad conscience.”

Again we can get to the heart of the “bad conscience” in a roundabout way: from a discussion of moralities of good and evil, through a discussion of guilt and bad conscience, Nietzsche completes the *Genealogy* with a discussion of the ascetic ideal, the particular set of values that the moralities of Nietzsche’s time (moralities of good and evil) hold high, the ideal that drives the bad conscience in its journeys of self-abuse.

Nietzsche explains that the ascetic ideal came to prevail as Christianity achieved a powerful feat: with the advent of Christian priests leading the weak, “…the direction of ressentiment is altered.” The ascetic ideal, a moral valuation characterized by self-denial, extreme self-discipline, and self-abasement before others represents ressentiment turned inward. Nietzsche likewise identifies the bad conscience with hostilities and violence turned inward, “internalized.” If asceticism is the ideal of ressentiment turned inward, the moral archetype that forces the turn, then bad conscience is the actual operation of ressentiment turned inward. In short, guilt, as bad conscience, is resentment.

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252 While Nietzsche’s tone often reveals a nostalgia for ages in which a noble valuation ruled and an utter condemnation of the “slavish” morality of his time, Nietzsche’s own valuing is not a return to noble valuation, but something beyond both of these ways of valuing that, while more in the spirit of noble valuation, even takes up the surprising advantages that, Nietzsche admits, slavish value systems have afforded humanity. In chapter five, I will present and critique Nietzsche’s own valuations, including his “noble” celebration of strength as warlike mastery over others.

253 *Genealogy of Morals* III:15, page 128.

254 *Genealogy of Morals* II:16, page 85.
of oneself, and in this sense goes well beyond being a helpful moral compass or useful guidance in navigating relationships (as we could imagine less vitriolic and resentful forms of guilt to be). The problems of ressentiment, then, are also the problems of the bad conscience: its festering nature, the lack of a possible or plausible resolution, the wasted energies devoted to “nursing” wounds without actually treating and healing them.\(^{255}\) And, unlike ressentiment directed outward, the agent of bad conscience does have ample opportunity to make the object of its hatred (itself) suffer. Guilt, in this sense, is harm done to oneself in spiteful ways, always picking away, diminishing the self. Here then is the real problem with overwhelming feelings of guilt: they deprive the self of the strength and joy necessary to go forward with creative work for change.

In a discussion of the purposes of punishment, Nietzsche again (indirectly) makes the point that a deflated self gnawing away at itself can do and create very little:

> Punishment is supposed to possess the value of awakening the feeling of guilt in the guilty person….\([\text{H}]e\) generally speaking, punishment makes men hard and cold; it concentrates; it sharpens the feeling of alienation; it strengthens the power of resistance. If it happens that punishment destroys the vital energy and brings about a miserable prostration and self-abasement, such a result is certainly even less pleasant….\(^ {256}\)

The attempt to impose guilt on a person, in other words, has two likely outcomes: either a strengthening of alienation and tenacity or a collapse of vital energy. Hence, if we want people to grow, change, and have the resources to change the social world around them, attempting to impose guilt (whether on others or on oneself) will likely backfire, leaving

\(^{255}\) Nietzsche accuses the “ascetic priest” in particular of “…combat[ing] only the suffering itself…not the real sickness [in his followers]: this must be our most fundamental objection to the priestly medication” \((\text{Genealogy of Morals III:17, pages 129-130}).\)

\(^{256}\) \textit{Genealogy of Morals} II:14, page 81.
people either strengthened in their resolve or so dispirited as to be unable to contribute meaningfully to change. In this way, guilt (and punishment intended to impose guilt), for Nietzsche, is generally a life-negating force that diminishes rather than enhances a person.

Nietzsche explains that the bad conscience becomes especially pernicious with the invention of the Christian God, the idea that one is guilty before God, and the notion of original sin. The sinister aspect of this formula lies in the utter impossibility of atoning for one’s wrongdoings. In Nietzsche’s words, this Christian formulation represents “…the will of man to find himself guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for….Here is sickness, beyond any doubt, the most terrible sickness that has ever raged in man….“\textsuperscript{257} When resolution of guilt is simply not possible no matter how long one lives, no matter how hard one works, no matter how much one sacrifices, the life-negating self-relation of the bad conscience will simply eat away at the self, leaving less and less of it there for other projects. While guilt without possibility of atonement may have emerged as a characteristically Christian, religious notion, Nietzsche says that it has seeped beyond its religious bounds into popular morality—it has become a moral concept even in the absence of God before whom one is supposedly guilty.\textsuperscript{258} As in its religious context, guilt without the possibility of atonement also, in its moral context, encourages self-defeat and an overall decrease in the vitality of a population that espouses such a morality. Nietzsche implies that while ethical theorists may not advocate a notion of

\textsuperscript{257} Genealogy of Morals II:23, page 93.
\textsuperscript{258} Genealogy of Morals II:21, page 91; Gay Science III:108, page 167; Gay Science V:343, page 279.
guilt without the possibility of atonement, the Christian-inspired theorists well-known in
his time do not take active steps to eradicate this poison from their ethical theories.

Despite his strong condemnation of the bad conscience as a life-negating force
used primarily by the weak, Nietzsche does actually admit that, even for those not
condemned to be forever weak, it can indirectly be a life-affirming force: “The bad
conscience is an illness, there is no doubt about that, but an illness as pregnancy is an
illness.” This passage suggests that guilt could serve some ultimately productive
purposes if it is only an intermediate step, a temporary disturbance that gives way to
something else. Nietzsche explains that philosophers, for example, in order to emerge
from the shadow of ascetic priests, had to use asceticism itself—they practiced “…cruelty
toward themselves, inventive self-castigation…” in order to “…overcome the gods and
tradition in themselves, so as to be able to believe in their own innovations.”

So, Nietzsche’s denunciation of the bad conscience is not wholesale. Nevertheless, the bad
conscience wears out its usefulness quickly, and if allowed to fester, becomes the
overwhelming, intractable guilt that, Nietzsche says, saps the self of its creative powers.

While I do not purport to create a critique of morality as wide-sweeping as
Nietzsche’s, I do here follow his lead and show some of the personal, social—and,
specific to this context, racist—factors caught up in some common notions of morality.
My intention here is simply to destabilize faith in the commitment and ability of some

259 “Pregnancy” is one of Nietzsche’s favorite metaphors—see chapter two for a brief discussion and
critique.
260 Genealogy of Morals II:19, page 88; see also II:18, pages 87-88.
261 Genealogy of Morals III:10, page 115.
moralities to combat racism. Having destabilized that faith, we can move on to discuss a more specific problem—the reliance of many moralities on guilt as a motivating factor and the harm such reliance does in the context of white, anti-racist change.

Though moral frameworks have indeed been used at times to challenge racism, they are far from reliable in this regard since they have also been used—at least as often—to justify racist and oppressive institutions. As W. E. B. Du Bois explains, racism is built right into the moral practices of the majority of white people and the institutions of the U.S. nation as a whole:

Are we not coming more and more, day by day, to making the statement ‘I am white,’ the one fundamental tenet of our practical morality?…. Murder may swagger, theft may rule and prostitution may flourish and the nation gives but spasmodic, intermittent and lukewarm attention. But let the murderer be black or the thief brown or the violator of womanhood have a drop of Negro blood, and the righteousness of the indignation sweeps the world. Nor would this fact make the indignation less justifiable did not we all know that it was blackness that was condemned and not crime.262

Without actually declaring that being black or brown is a crime, moral systems in the U.S. have operated according to such a tenet. Seeing disparities in prison sentences today, we can see that being black or brown is still a “crime.”263

Attitudes and actions that furthered racism and oppression have sometimes historically been taken up by white people as their moral duty. As an extreme example, we can look at the Prescripts of the Ku Klux Klan of 1886, which are expressed in disturbingly moralistic, heroic terms:

262 Darkwater 25.
This is an institution of Chivalry, Humanity, Mercy, and Patriotism; embodying in its genius and principles all that is chivalric in conduct, noble in sentiment, generous in manhood, and patriotic in purpose; its peculiar objects being... First: to protect the weak, the innocent, and the defenceless [sic], from the indignities, wrongs, and outrages of the lawless, the violent, and the brutal; to relieve the injured and oppressed; to succor the suffering and unfortunate....

Charles Mills provides a list of examples of racism disguised in moral terms historically common among “good-will” whites (rather than avowed racists):

A white person has feelings of good-will toward Native Americans (whom he wants to see successfully assimilate), to black slaves in the U.S. (whom he wants to take care of, since they are incapable of taking care of themselves), to blacks, browns, and yellows in the colonial world (whom he wants to civilize). His feelings of benevolence seem quite real, but in each case they are predicated on his belief in the inferiority to whites, whether biological and/or cultural, of the nonwhite racial groups.

One can, in other words, even exceed the moral demands of one’s (racist) society and yet be supporting racism, because racism is built right into those social moral demands.

These days in the popular moral discourse of the U.S., racism is most likely disguised by a moral language of universalism—“everyone should be treated the same”—that, as a form of colorblindness, fails to address and undermine racial problems. By participating in such moralities, one would justify himself (his decisions, his actions and lack of action), make himself effective in the world (maintaining his privileges as a white person), and preserve and promote his form of life.

Given the above evidence of the frequent complicity of moral claims with racism and white privilege, we cannot trust, by default, popular moralities to show us routes out of racism and white privilege. While they could be deployed against racism and white

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264 Included in Ku Klux Klan by John C. Lester, page 155.
265 “‘Heart’ Attack: A Critique of Jorge Garcia’s Volitional Conception of Racism” 51.
privilege, many may just as easily reinforce racism and white privilege, and may
unhelpfully quell the conscience of those who stand with the oppressors rather than with
the oppressed or the resistant. My claim here is simply that we have reason to be
suspicious of moral systems and need to look carefully at just what sort of moral values
we use to guide our antiracist transformation and practice.

Nietzsche warns us to be especially careful of moralities with strong, inflexible,
dichotomous notions of right and wrong. Even more importantly, he advises us to steer
clear of moralities that, fraught with resentment, demonize an other. While Nietzsche
was unfortunately not concerned with racism per se, the moral rhetoric of the Ku Klux
Klan, as presented above, would have likely raised flags for him (just as the anti-Semitic
rhetoric of his time did\textsuperscript{266}); while this morality does not explicitly, in its statement, found
itself on a demonization of the other, it takes little analysis to uncover that basis.
Resentful demonization of an other continues today in the rhetoric of white victimization
(“minorities get unfair advantages now and white men suffer”). As Jeffrey Nealon points
out, although “angry white males” may take themselves to be like Nietzsche’s strong
types, that is, “‘great birds of prey,’” they are in fact Nietzsche’s “…‘little lambs,’
bleating the refrain ‘you are evil; therefore, I am good.’”\textsuperscript{267} Nealon argues that white,
angry male rhetoric (which is actually white, resentful male rhetoric, he says\textsuperscript{268}) engages
in “othering,” that is, in “…creating enemies solely to bolster the WAM’s [white angry

\textsuperscript{266} \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} VII:251, page 188.
\textsuperscript{267} “Performing Resentment” 275.
\textsuperscript{268} See pages 276-277 for Nealon’s distinction between anger and resentment.
male’s own sense of inherent goodness.” As we saw above, Nietzsche diagnoses such resentmentful moralities as, overall, life-negating and not vitalizing.

It is not only such obviously resentful moralities that are life-negating; one of the life-negating forces of many moralities, according to Nietzsche, is guilt, the bad conscience, resentment turned inward. Guilt is a strong operator in many popular moralities associated with liberal white identities and personal change, and has been argued by some theorists to be a helpful force in some forms. I claim in what follows that guilt is generally an unhelpful force in transformation against the grain of race-related problems, and, except when temporary and limited, is ultimately life-negating, diminishing the strength and energy needed for personal transformation and social change. This point is important to make, as it will guide the creation, in chapter five, of an alternative Nietzschean normativity that does not rely on guilt to push transformation.

Guilt is an unhelpful concept in the context of racism and white privilege most of all because, given the enormity of racism and white privilege (past and present, here and globally), “white guilt” is often overwhelming and can leave one defeated and unable to take action for social change. Dimly sensing “white guilt” on the horizon, it is likely that one either defends himself against a real encounter with it, or, having encountered it, drowns in it. As James Baldwin eloquently states,

What [white Americans] see [and try to push away] is a disastrous, continuing, present condition which menaces them, and for which they bear an inescapable responsibility. But since in the main they seem to lack the energy to change this condition they would rather not be reminded of it....[W]hatever they bring to one another [in conversations about race], it is certainly not freedom from guilt. The guilt remains, more deeply rooted, more securely lodged, than the oldest of old

269 275.
fears…. [T]hey, with a really dazzling ingenuity, a tireless agility, are perpetually defending themselves against charges which one, disagreeable though one may be, has not really, for the moment, made. One does not have to make them. The record is there for all to read. It resounds all over the world. It might as well be written in the sky. One wishes that Americans—white Americans—would read, for their own sakes, this record and stop defending themselves against it. Only then will they be enabled to change their lives. / The fact that they have not yet been able to do this—to face their history, to change their lives—hideously menaces this country. Indeed, it menaces the entire world. 270

Although Baldwin captures the enormity of white guilt and identifies a desperate avoidance of it, what he does not say is that when such defenses against guilt are penetrated, many people are crushed beneath the weight of that guilt and thus remain unable to change their society or even their own participation within it. As psychologists Spanierman and Heppner say, “Sadness and helplessness might be particularly salient when White individuals begin to realize the pervasiveness and insidiousness of racism in the United States on an institutional level, which might also be related to a perceived inability to eliminate racism.” 271

Recent psychological research pertaining to guilt is both helpful and limited. Psychologists are only beginning to trace the contours of white guilt. While some have assumed such collective guilt to be analogous to personal guilt (where one clearly bears personal responsibility for a specific act or behavior perceived as morally wrong), some have wondered if what we call “white guilt” bears more resemblance to shame than guilt, some look at collective guilt as an affective category of its own, some posit distinctions between collective guilt and collective shame, and some claim that white guilt is not a single phenomenon but comes in various forms and is associated with various beliefs and

affects pertaining to race.272 It is commonly agreed in contemporary psychological research that personal guilt is an affect pertaining to a single act or behavior, while shame has to do with the self more generally: “…shame involves a negative evaluation of the global self; guilt involves a negative evaluation of a specific behavior.” 273 Shame targets a failure perceived to be “stable” (enduring and pervasive) and beyond the self’s control, while guilt reflects an isolated failure that the self can amend.274 Since “white guilt” or collective guilt more generally does not pertain to a single behavior or action—though it does pertain to a long history and continuing pattern of behaviors and actions—and focuses on moral wrongs that an individual cannot easily amend, it may be that what we commonly call “white guilt” is exactly parallel neither to personal guilt nor personal shame though it bears resemblance to both.

Although, as we will see, psychological research reveals some interesting common effects of various affects such as collective guilt, shame, anger, and empathy, its study of white guilt is limited in that these studies are almost always of fairly general white populations, among whom the incidence of white guilt is actually quite low.275

Defensiveness against white guilt is quite common.276 To learn more about the causes, dynamics, and consequences of white guilt, we would need longitudinal studies of specifically those white people who report strong and on-going experiences of white

273 Tangney et al 349.
274 Tangney et al 359.
275 Swim and Miller 500 511; Leach et al (2006) 1238; and Harth et al 127.
guilt. To understand the latter experience, we can also supplement empirical results with testimonies written by people who have observed themselves and those around them wrestling with white guilt. Ann Russo reflects the testimonies of many white people writing about race (especially white feminists) when she explains that many white people “…may feel genuinely bad about racism, but do not know what to do—our guilt and feelings of hopeless responsibility lead many of us to passivity and/or defensiveness, both of which maintain our position of power.”

Similarly, one participant in a psychological study on white Australians’ attitudes and feelings regarding Aborigines (a participant who likely had experienced guilt for quite some time) wrote, “[s]ometimes I simply don’t know the right things to do. My main…feeling about Aboriginal issues is futility.”

If facing history in terms of guilt does not necessarily motivate and mobilize, but often enervates and immobilizes, then perhaps Baldwin is correct that white Americans must, for everyone’s sake, face their history, but it is perhaps not in terms of guilt that one should view this terrible record. Recall Nietzsche’s explanation of the two most likely effects of punishment: either the “guilty” party simply strengthens his resolve or, letting the guilt seep into him, he loses his vitality and ends up in a “miserable prostration.” So too with the imposition of guilt in the context of white privilege—most likely, one either builds up defenses when sensing that guilt is being cast or, if open to it,

277 “We Cannot Live Without Our Lives” 308. Similarly, Beverly Tatum says, “…the internal focus on one’s own ‘guilt by association’ can be immobilizing, and therefore interferes with one’s ability to take effective action to interrupt expressions of racism. It is for this reason that people of color will often express impatience at what might be viewed as self-indulgent expressions of white guilt” (“Teaching White Students about Racism” 471). See also Tochluk (53-56) on the problems that arise when social justice and anti-racism work are driven by a guilty conscience.

278 Pedersen et al 247.
one is flooded by it. Research in psychology shows that, as one would expect, the more highly identified an individual is with his or her group—whether race or nationality—the more defensive his or her reaction to narratives that cast that group in a negative light.\textsuperscript{279} As for those who \textit{do} feel guilt, studies show that while \textit{personal} guilt is usually effective—that is, it motivates people to do something about the immoral act they believe they committed—collective guilt does not prove to be so productive. While those who report feelings of collective guilt often express support in the abstract for affirmative action, official apologies, or financial restitution of some sort, guilt is \textit{not} a predictor of the personal willingness to actually do something about the problems.\textsuperscript{280} Guilt, in other words, correlates with an attitude of “yes, someone should do something about that,” but not with community involvement, participation in activist efforts, or even willingness to write letters to representatives. (Sympathy, empathy, and especially anger are better predictors of white people’s willingness to do something about racism.)\textsuperscript{281} Recent empirical research thus supports Nietzsche’s theory that guilt is more likely to lead to aim inhibition and a deflation of vigor rather than the motivation and energy to act.

\textsuperscript{280} See especially Leach (2006) 1233, 1242, and 1243. In one phase of this study, researchers interviewed non-Aboriginal Australians who considered themselves to be “‘strongly supportive of social justice’” (and thus this study is rare among studies pertaining to white guilt which tend to look at a more general slice of the white, or in this case, non-Aboriginal, population). The researchers found that “[a]lthough these [study] participants were very willing to act, it was not their guilt that predicted this willingness” (1240). See also Doosje et al (1998) 878 and 884 and Iyer et al (2003) 117-118, which show evidence of some efficacy of collective guilt. See also Leach (2006) 1232; Iyer (2007) 572 and 584; and Harth 115, 123, 126, and 127, which show collective guilt \textit{not} to be very productive. On the generally agreed-upon efficacy of personal (versus collective) guilt, see Tangney et al 349-350 and 352-354.
I agree with Nietzsche that guilt or bad conscience can sometimes end up being ultimately life-affirming, even in the context of white, antiracist change. The gnawing bad conscience, resentment turned inward, may be a phase, an “illness,” as Nietzsche would say, from which one emerges reborn. In the words of Goldberg and Levin, white guilt is “…a place to visit, not a place to live.” While I agree that guilt could indeed be a transitional phase giving way to more productive transformations, I nevertheless would not encourage guilt in this context. In most cases, either it comes quite spontaneously (for those susceptible to self-criticism) and therefore needs no encouragement, or it is resisted (by those who protect themselves against self-criticism) and resisted, as Nietzsche says, more strenuously the more others try to encourage or impose it. In the end, we need not look at a time spent under the spell of guilt as categorically destructive or somehow “wrong” or “bad.” Yet, in our theorizing about white anti-racist change, our focus should be on finding routes other than, beyond, and counter to guilt.

Part of the reason that white guilt overwhelms and inhibits the individual is that responsibility is a notion invoked in conversations about guilt—responsibility in the sense of, “I caused that to happen, it is my fault, I am to blame”—but the question of for what one is personally responsible (and therefore guilty) is virtually impossible to answer in this context. Historically speaking, white people as a population are undoubtedly responsible for unquantifiable oppression and violence against non-white people. But, on the individual level, sorting out just exactly that for which one is personally responsible (and should feel guilty about) and that into which one was thrown by birth (and therefore

282 Page 3.
should not feel guilty about?) is impossible to accomplish—precisely because of the collective and structural nature of racism and white privilege. If there were no individuals, there would be no racism and white privilege; and yet the latter take on a life of their own in structures, patterns, and institutions which are, of course, supported by individuals, but often without them even being aware of their participation in racism and white privilege. So while all white people are undoubtedly implicated in racism and white supremacy, determining just which results are an individual’s fault is untenable pursuit. A white person with the cultural inheritance of white supremacy neither is individually responsible for her privileges and her conditioned responses nor is free from responsibility. And no matter one’s choices, one can never fully “opt out” of systemic privileges and prejudices that classify her based on race whether or not she wants to be so classified.

Psychological research on responsibility and collective guilt yields mixed results. One study claims to show that people can feel collective guilt specifically for past actions of their government for which these individuals could not possibly have been responsible. \(^{283}\) Feelings of guilt, in other words, occur even in the clear absence of responsibility. Another study surmises that the general occurrence of white guilt is low because white people rarely feel personally responsible for racial inequality, thus suggesting that in the absence of feelings of responsibility, guilt is not likely to occur. \(^{284}\) Yet another study claims that individuals feel collective guilt in part because they do feel personally involved—“‘responsible’ and ‘blameworthy.’” The authors of the latter study

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\(^{284}\) Swim and Miller 511.
conclude that “[t]his illustrates how the individual’s inclusion in the ingroup implies his or her personal share of the collective responsibility for ingroup advantage.” Together these studies show that the issue of responsibility in relation to collective guilt is anything but clear, and the experience of responsibility among those who feel collective guilt is not universal. Furthermore, while personal guilt in contrast to collective guilt is, as we saw above, generally seen to be effective, psychologists agree that even personal guilt fails to be useful to the self when questions of responsibility are not clear. “Problems are likely to arise when people develop[] an exaggerated or distorted sense of responsibility for events beyond their control or for which they have no personal involvement…. [A study] found a positive relationship between internalizing symptoms (e.g., depression) and proneness to guilt specifically in situations where responsibility was ambiguous.” We have even more reason, then, to doubt the efficacy and motivational potential of collective guilt, where questions of responsibility are without a doubt “ambiguous.”

The problem with white guilt, then, is that individuals sensing the enormity of white guilt either avoid all responsibility (I’m not individually at fault, therefore I’m innocent) or take on so much of it—responsibility for the entirety of structural racism and white supremacy—that they can never possibly atone for their wrongs and relieve themselves of their burden. As Nietzsche said, and as empirical research reinforces, guilt that cannot be relieved by atonement eats away at the self instead of helpfully pointing

286 Tangney et al 353; see also 355. Personal guilt is likewise no longer helpful when guilt “…is magnified and generalized to the self…” (353) as would be the case in the context of white guilt as one’s whiteness is certainly not restricted to a single incident or behavior.
out to the self what it should do. Exposing the problem with positing structural racism
and individual responsibility, Lewis Gordon explains that

...whites are expected to respond to a situation for which they are claimed
responsible while facing structural arguments that militate against the agency
required for such responsibility. The result in such an aim-inhibiting situation is
one, as Du Bois observed little more than half a century ago..., of standing still in
many forms—a condition wrought, inevitably, with guilt. 287

Like many other theorists, Gordon here comes back around to the fundamental
undesirable outcome of attempting to motivate change with recourse to responsibility and
guilt—“aim inhibition,” the inability to use one’s agency for actual work and change, in
Nietzsche’s terms, a loss of vital energy.

Some Critical Race Theorists and psychologists have attempted to solve the issue
of individual responsibility by drawing lines between that for which an individual is
responsible and that which exceeds individual responsibility, thus claiming that
appropriate feelings of guilt are possible and desirable. Clare Holzman, for example,
urges us to distinguish between “rational guilt” and “irrational guilt.” Rational guilt, she
says, “…tells me that I have done something wrong and need to correct it or make
reparation. Irrational guilt is either guilt over something I am not actually responsible
for, or guilt whose intensity is disproportionate to the offense.”288 Delineating
appropriate subjects for rational guilt, Holzman explains that “…I am responsible for my
own actions or failures to act, but I am not responsible for the actions of my ancestors or

287 “Critical Reflections” 173.
288 “Rethinking the Role of Guilt and Shame in White Women’s Antiracism Work” 326.
for the existence of the entire structure of institutionalized racism.”

More specifically, Holzman says, a white person may feel rationally guilty in the following ways:

As a white woman living in a racially oppressive society, I have much to feel realistically guilty about. I benefit daily from racial oppression without even having to be aware of it. To the extent that I passively accept the fruits of my white privilege, I am guilty of colluding with racism to harm its targets for my own benefit. Furthermore, because I have internalized the racist attitudes and beliefs of my society, I often speak and act in racist ways that directly or indirectly harm people of color. When I become aware of a specific way in which I have been passively or actively racist, I feel guilty. I can never be free of this guilt until I live in a society that is no longer racist and until I have overcome my own racism.

Holzman here has created a very large category of “rational guilt.” If one can be responsible and guilty for passively accepting fruits of white privilege and internalizing social attitudes without being aware that one has done so, wouldn’t we have to conclude that a white three-year-old is responsible for racism and white privilege and should feel guilty about it? Holzman’s understanding of rational guilt also makes atonement within one’s lifetime impossible, since the conditions of relieving oneself of guilt and responsibility are that one completely rids herself of internalized racism and lives in a fully just, race-neutral society. And yet Holzman later claims that “…the only lasting way to be free of rational guilt is to make reparation.”

Holzman and I agree, then, that “…guilt is unproductive when…it is so intense that it immobilizes me instead of motivating me,” but she has claimed such an enormous scope of things for which a white person should legitimately feel guilty that immobilization is the only likely result.

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289 327.
290 326, my emphasis.
291 327.
292 326.
She has furthermore claimed that atonement is the only way out of this enormous weight of “rational guilt” all the while making atonement impossible. And again, as Nietzsche says, the bad conscience reaches damaging extremes of illness when there is no possibility of atonement for one’s guilt.

Robert Jensen also attempts to delineate a range of things for which a white individual might legitimately feel guilty:

Guilt is an appropriate moral, political, and emotional response when one has wronged another….There have been plenty of times in my life when I have felt guilty about racist or sexist things I have said or done, even when they were done unconsciously. But that is guilt felt as a result of specific acts, not guilt for the color of my skin.\(^{293}\)

What we might first notice in this passage is that Jensen, like Holzman, has left open a very broad horizon of responsibility—it is appropriate for one to feel guilty for things done unconsciously. But there is a further problem with the delineations Jensen makes here: between “the color of my skin” and “specific acts” is an enormous array of race-related configurations, and Jensen has here not told us whether they are appropriate material for guilt and responsibility. Later, Jensen makes distinctions by relying on George Lipsitz’s notion of “the possessive investment in whiteness.” Coming from many different angles, Lipsitz makes the point that white people do not actually accept the benefits of whiteness passively, but are psychologically and economically invested in them and work, consciously or otherwise, for the continuance of the status quo.\(^{294}\)

\[\text{\textsuperscript{293} “Black and White” 147, my emphasis.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{294} The Possessive Investment in Whiteness.}\]
I did not choose my skin color, hence I can’t be responsible for it. But I am responsible for how I choose to deal with being white and the privilege that brings to me. I am, to borrow George Lipsitz’s term, responsible for whether I make a ‘possessive investment in whiteness’ or [on the other hand] consciously take on an antiracist identity and work to dismantle white supremacy.  

Here too, I find Jensen’s distinction to be not particularly helpful in practice. We are clear that one is not responsible for the mere color of his skin—for the phenotype his genetics have produced. And we are clear that white people are not utterly innocent. But not a lot has been clarified in between.

Where Jensen is helpful is in moving us away from a focus on past blameworthiness and to a consideration of future action (‘how I choose to deal with’ white privilege, ‘whether I make a ‘possessive investment,’’ whether I “take on an antiracist identity,” whether I “work to dismantle white supremacy”). In this sense, Jensen is shifting the meaning of “responsible,” actually using two different senses of the word. In saying that one is not responsible for his or her skin color, Jensen means that one is not blameworthy; but in talking about responsibility to act, he is talking about what Kelly Oliver calls “response-ability.” Within the context of developing a philosophical notion of inter-subjectivity, Oliver says, “[t]he responsibility inherent in subjectivity has the double sense of the condition of possibility of response, response-ability, on the one hand, and the ethical obligation to respond and to enable response-ability from others born out of that founding possibility, on the other.”

Responsibility here is not about

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295 “Black and White” 147.
296 *Witnessing* 15. Shelley Tochluck borrows Oliver’s notion of responsibility as well as the idea of “witnessing” to discuss white privilege and possible responses (see *Witnessing Whiteness*).
who caused what and who is to blame for what, but is a way of emphasizing the choices we all have in “responding to” people and situations around us.

As we make the move to considerations of response rather than cause and blame, we avoid another problem of guilt: its excessive self-focus. Within psychological research, guilt is agreed to be a “self focused” or “in-group focused” emotion. Authors of one study suggest that “…guilt, as an IGF [in-group focused] emotion, seems to motivate positive behavior toward a disadvantaged outgroup only insofar as it provides redemption from the unpleasant guilt feeling.” In an even stronger statement, authors of another study say that “[g]iven the extremely noxious self-recrimination characteristic of guilt, it may lead people to focus on restitution as a self-focused route to ending their dysphoria. Thus, efforts at material compensation may reflect a somewhat selfish desire to assuage guilt rather than a genuine concern for equality or harm caused by the other.” Holzman herself admits that guilt is unhelpful when it “…shift[s] the focus from examining racism to taking care of me.” In less ambiguous terms, Jensen states that white guilt is unhelpful in that it leads one to seek sympathy and pardon, focusing on one’s own psychological pain instead of political responsibilities (in the sense of response-abilities). Each of these claims about guilt points to a single conclusion: while some self-examination is crucial to anti-racist work, the ability to look beyond oneself and be open and responsive to what is other is at least as important. We need a

298 Harth et al 127.
300 327.
301 Jensen 147.
way of addressing historical and current racism, injustice, and white privilege that
encourages not a vicious circle of self-obsession, but an open, questioning, critical spirit
deep down and an eagerness to engage with others in truly collaborative efforts. As
Nietzsche says, “…one must be able to lose oneself occasionally if one wants to learn
something from things different from oneself”—one must, in other words, not only
engage in self-reflection, but also be able to escape self-reflection in order to see
something new.

To be clear, I am not taking the position that white people are not responsible and
should not feel guilty for racism and white privilege; instead, I am proposing that we
change the terms of the debate. Is a white individual responsible (blameworthy) for
white privilege and racism and should he carry the weight of guilt for racism and white
privilege? The answer seems to come down each time to “yes and no,” and any line
drawn between them is rather arbitrary. The question of whether one could be living and
acting—“responding”—differently, however, is a much easier and more useful question
to answer. Instead of asking whether I am blameworthy and guilty, instead of being
burdened by the thought of impossible atonement, instead of centering my anti-racist
work on obsessive self-examination, I can ask what I need to do in order to expand my
awareness, learn from others, and begin to contribute in more helpful ways to social
change. To be clear once again, the goal in this shift is not to “let white people off the
hook,” but to find a conceptual framework that enables change rather than inhibiting it.

302 Gay Science IV:305, page 245.
A revised Nietzschean normativity of health and vitality, as we will see in chapter five, is one conceptual framework that can accomplish just that.

Is Transformation Really Possible?: Fate

One of the first concerns that may arise among Nietzscheans in a discussion of Nietzsche and transformation is his fatalism. While Nietzsche’s fatalism is expressed in various ways, it is the fate of the individual character—especially the claim that the weak simply are and will remain weak—that is especially relevant here. If Nietzsche thinks that a person’s basic character and life course are fated, then what sense does it make to speak of transforming oneself? The type of transformation that I am calling for assumes that a person can change some of her basic ways of living. Does a Nietzschean philosophy allow for this possibility of change? In answering these questions, I will first show that Nietzsche’s fatalism is often misinterpreted. According to the interpretation I argue for, Nietzsche’s fatalism is not necessarily opposed to the possibility of self-transformation. However, as I will show, the clarification of Nietzsche’s fatalism reveals a more significant problem: Nietzsche’s arrogance as a “philosophical physician.” It is this overblown diagnostic assurance that must be rejected in favor of a modesty that allows for surprise.

As we saw in chapter two, Nietzsche classifies some people as “weak,” “slavish,” or “decadent” and, based on his conviction that their futures are hopeless, says that it would be best if they would simply get out of the way of the strong, aristocratic people. While he seems to limit the possibility of change for all people, he is especially dismal in
his prognosis of the sicker individuals. Declaring that a person is “a piece of fatum” and that “[t]o say to him, ‘Change yourself!’ is to demand that everything be changed...”

Nietzsche seems to allow little room for the kind of transformation I’m discussing. On the other hand, Nietzsche also has an important concept of will (though not a notion common in the history of Western philosophy), he speaks of self-overcoming, and he writes in an overall spirit of encouraging others to change themselves and European culture. In Robert Solomon’s words, “Nietzsche has a strong sense of agency, even if he rejects the exaggerated notions of freedom that Kant and some existentialists attach to it. His whole philosophy is couched in terms of ‘tasks’ and difficulties to be overcome.”

This apparent contradiction between Nietzsche’s fatalism and his calls for change has led several commentators to attempt to puzzle out Nietzsche’s stance on agency and fate.

The first step toward understanding Nietzsche’s fatalism is to distinguish fatalism from determinism. The latter, as a metaphysical or scientific thesis positing strict causation of every moment and making human choice an empty concept, is not a doctrine Nietzsche ever endorses. Human decision-making, within a determinist framework, might be looked at purely as a matter of brain function, which would ultimately come down to explanations in terms of chemistry and physics (unless we are dealing with a

303 *Twilight of the Idols* “Morality as Anti-Nature” 6, page 491.
304 “Nietzsche as Existentialist and as Fatalist,” page 46. Kathleen Higgens also notes the sense of agency pervasive in Nietzsche’s philosophy, explaining that “[a]lthough both Nietzsche and the postmodernists advocate a fragmented, perspectivist orientation toward our experience, Nietzsche’s purpose distinguishes him from his alleged intellectual heirs. Nietzsche’s primary concern is the possibility of rich and meaningful subjective experience” (“Nietzsche and Postmodern Subjectivity,” page 191).
306 I am here borrowing from Solomon’s interpretation of Nietzsche (“Nietzsche as Existentialist and as Fatalist,” pages 47-48).
religious determinist, in which case all explanations would come back to God). This is not a project Nietzsche takes up. So, we are looking for a sense of fatalism that does not collapse into a strict determinism.

It is my claim that central to understanding Nietzsche’s fatalism is a sense of “trajectories.” While Nietzsche does not explicitly present a “philosophy of trajectories,” a sense of trajectories—as forces in some direction, as powerful tendencies with momentum behind them—pervades his discussions of both individuals and cultures. If not confronted, a trajectory will continue as long as it has energy fueling it, unfolding according to its inner logic. In an individual, a trajectory may be a tendency that, reinforced with every instantiation, has become a character trait. In a society, a trajectory may be the prevailing ideology that determines governmental structure. *Ressentiment* could be an example of a personal or social force that drives forward and shapes events. Capitalism can be seen as a trajectory dynamically forming political structures. A psychological condition such as depression is an example of a powerful personal tendency with momentum behind it. By looking at individuals and the world in terms of trajectories rather than isolated events, Nietzsche is divorcing himself from a philosophical tradition that posits absolute freedom of the will, lacks an appreciation for the historical and the practice of genealogy, and treats each new occurrence as if it arose from nothing:

The *causa sui* [cause of itself] is the best self-contradiction that has been conceived so far, it is a sort of rape and perversion of logic; but the extravagant pride of man has managed to entangle itself profoundly and frightfully with just this nonsense. The desire for “freedom of the will” in the superlative metaphysical sense...; the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one’s actions oneself, and to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society involves nothing less than to be precisely this *causa sui* and, with more
than Münchhausen’s audacity, to pull oneself into existence by the hair, out of the swamps of nothingness.\textsuperscript{307}

Nietzsche’s “fatalism,” then, can be seen as simply a dynamic understanding of becoming within which the world (or a person or humanity) does not create itself anew each instant out of nothing.

So, Nietzsche does not believe in a strict determinism, but also rejects absolute freedom of will; he develops instead a position outside of the false dualism of free will and determinism. David Owen and Aaron Ridley illuminate this position by locating the roots of Nietzsche’s fatalism in Emerson. Referring to the force of fate as “water,” Emerson says, “[t]he water drowns ship and sailor, like a grain of dust. But learn to swim, trim your bark, and the wave which drowned it, will be cloven by it, and carry it, like its own foam, a plume and a power.”\textsuperscript{308} Owen and Ridley interpret this passage as saying that “…our fated powers become the material and means…for working out our own possibilities…”\textsuperscript{309} In other words, trajectories may be powerful and contain a lot of momentum, but they are not absolutely immovable. A person, for example, who has a fiery temper and a passionate sense of righteousness may never become meek and mild, but how she takes up that passion and makes use of it, the form she shapes it into, is not predetermined by the temperament itself. As another example, in the social sphere, during times of widespread discontent that will not be dispelled by optimistic messages, we see politicians trying to channel this energy of discontent to make it effective and productive (effective and productive especially for that politician or political party).

\textsuperscript{307} Beyond Good and Evil I:21, page 28.
\textsuperscript{308} Owen and Ridley, page 67.
\textsuperscript{309} Owen and Ridley, page 67.
Catastrophe can enter in and disrupt or disperse a social or personal force, but we can also sometimes bend very slightly and gradually a strong force within ourselves or society, little by little hoping to establish new habits, new trajectories. Quoting Nietzsche, Owen and Ridley reveal how close he is to Emerson: “One can dispose of one’s drives like a gardener and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as productively and profitably as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis.”

Interpreting Nietzsche, Owen and Ridley say, “[f]ate, or more precisely, the fateful constraints on human agency are, at the same time, the conditions of that agency—that is, the conditions of one’s capacity to act on and transform oneself and the world.” In other words, the very drives and tendencies that direct and constrain us (as individuals or societies) are, for better or for worse, simultaneously the material and energy we have to work with as we make choices and attempt to form the future. A fiery temper and passionate sense of righteousness, then, may be a tool as much as it is as limitation, but one must figure out how to cultivate it.

Robert Solomon explains Nietzsche’s fatalism as a narrative concept. I don’t find Nietzsche’s fatalism to be as wedded to an Ancient Greek tragic aesthetic as Solomon does, but I do find the general idea of narrative helpful: it is when we give life stories or social histories that we notice these powerful trajectories that we call fate. As Solomon explains, it is in “the look back” that someone’s history and the path traveled “makes sense” and we see indications long ago of more recent developments. However,

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310 Owen and Ridley 77, quoting Nietzsche’s *Daybreak* 560.
311 Owen and Ridley 76.
312 Solomon, page 48.
were we to predict at that moment long ago what would happen in the future, we may have gotten it wrong, not only because of our inability to predict an inevitable or likely outcome, but also because, given the current information, various paths could “make sense” (I am here departing from Solomon who claims that fatality implies that the outcome was necessary, even if the path leading to it was not). For example, we might look back at someone’s discontent wandering in earlier years and connect it to his current instability in life—“it makes sense; that’s just how he is.” We could also look back at discontent wandering, see how it eventually burned itself out, and connect that to a current need for stability—“it makes sense; he couldn’t go on like that forever.” As another example, we are familiar both with narratives in which a traumatized child becomes a traumatizing adult and narratives in which a traumatized child obsessively avoids doing things as her parents did. We aren’t really saying in these looks back that things absolutely had to go exactly as they did down to every detail; instead, we are simply tracing trajectories, with the understanding that who we become originates with who we were and that we are not free simply to choose a new self or a new life at any moment. As we become our future selves, we work with the material of past selves—this limits our possibilities but does not limit us to one outcome exclusively.

I would surmise that it is through such “looking back”—through observation—that Nietzsche decides we’re all fated to “become what we are.” However, viewing fatality as a narrative in which a person’s (or a society’s) life path “makes sense” upon

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313 In my view, this phrase of Nietzsche’s is connected with the Existentialist idea that our selves “become,” that they are not stable entities or essences that pre-exist our lives; but the phrase is also connected to Nietzsche’s fatalism: “becoming who we are” is a matter of living out these unfolding trajectories.
looking back leaves room for surprises—for twists and turns in the plot, as it were. Until we get to the end of the story, we do not know quite how “fate” will unfold, no matter how much sense the narrative makes after we do get to the end. (An aesthetic narrative that would not “make sense” is one in which trajectories are simply dropped rather than followed through.) And this is where Nietzsche falters: he fails to recognize, with modesty, his own inability to predict with great accuracy how a narrative will unfold, and he fails to be mindful of the ever-present possibility of surprise. Thus, it is not so much Nietzsche’s fatalistic view of humans—in which characters, physiology, psychology, situation, and other trajectories propel us forward and create a context (in contrast to a neutral space or a void) for our choice and establish a tendency or pattern of choice (a life narrative that “makes sense”)—that is problematic, but rather, his overblown confidence and arrogance. After gaining a sense of fatality, probably through observations of the powerful tendencies that guide individuals and societies (“looking back”), Nietzsche forecloses future possibilities for individuals, often leaving only one particular narrative open, thinking that he, the supreme physician of the soul, knows their narratives in advance. His observations do not support his conclusions; it is like watching films, predicting what will happen, and forgetting to notice when you’re wrong. Positing that one’s psychology will powerfully influence her life course, or saying that it’s ridiculous to tell another to change completely who she is, is not the same as declaring hopeless the futures of a whole category of people characterized by X (and here too, the diagnostics, the categorizations, display an extreme arrogance), and stating with confidence that, as they have nothing positive to contribute to the world, they might as well die. Nietzsche’s fatalism may be a sensible and, when distanced from determinism, not particularly earth-
shattering ideology (except in the context of philosophers who posited extreme freedom of the will and failed to recognize the limitations on choice); but his confidence in diagnosing, evaluating, and foreseeing is gravely misplaced.

As a parallel, I will admit that the type of transformation I describe is not possible for all white people. Any number of factors could pull a person away from this path. No matter a person’s “good intentions,” the broadcast of awareness campaigns, or techniques of persuasion, it simply is not going to happen for some people in this time and place. In fact, it would be naively optimistic to suppose that, if only the program were announced, all but the hardened racists would become socially aware partners in coalitions against racism and white privilege. It is beyond the potentials of some characters, or some forms of life, to transform in this way—the emotional/psychological capacity, the elasticity of perspective, the strengths required, the energy needed, the availability of challenging and nurturing environments, may simply be lacking for some people. However, this admission that some people in some situations are “fated” to be a persistent part of the problem is a far cry from categorizing people into the strong and weak (those capable of transformation who display characteristic X and those incapable who display characteristic Y), believing that I above all others can determine who is strong and weak, declaring that I can foresee the ascending and descending life paths of these people, foreclosing the possibility of any significant deviation from the path I envision, and advising the weak (whom I have picked out and characterized) to strive to do nothing but stay out of the way of the strong.

So, it is not a doctrine of radical free will that is needed here, but a philosophical modesty that, while admitting the power of personal and social trajectories, hesitates to
chart out another’s life path in advance. Nietzsche himself once called for something akin to this modesty in *Human, All Too Human*:

> [Philosophers] involuntarily think of ‘man’ as an *aeterna veritas* [something everlastingly true], as something that remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things. Everything the philosopher has declared about man is, however, at bottom no more than a testimony as to the man of a *very limited* period of time….They will not learn that man has become….But everything has become: there are *no eternal facts*, just as there are no absolute truths….[*W*]hat is needed…is…the virtue of modesty.\(^\text{314}\)

Nietzsche lost this modesty and came too quickly and readily to categorize and condemn many groups of individuals. But we, as theorists making use of Nietzsche, may heed his early warning, taking up his understanding of fatalism as something between free will and determinism without also taking on his role as the supreme philosophical physician. Being always open to the possibility of change, even quite unexpected changes, without being naively optimistic about the likelihood of dramatic change in individuals, groups, or societies, we can make use of Nietzsche’s fatalism as a plausible worldview as long as we do not tyrannize in our diagnostics and condemnations.

In this consideration of Nietzsche’s fatalism, I have followed the approach to Nietzsche developed in chapter two. Rather than setting aside what is problematic in Nietzsche, I have treated as a significant problem the claims Nietzsche makes about the impossibility of change for many people or groups. In wishing to borrow from Nietzsche’s understanding of how people change, the claims he makes that certain kinds of people *won’t* change is an implication needing attention. Digging into his claims, I have exposed the truly problematic element to be Nietzsche’s diagnostic arrogance and

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\(^{314}\) *Human, All Too Human I: 2*, page 13.
condemnation. Yet, I have been able to use his thought subversively, drawing threads out in directions that actually end up countering Nietzsche. In other words, I have made use of Nietzschean strategies—his critique of reason, his critique of morality (and, coming up, his notions of transformation founded on these critiques), and his ways of getting himself out of dualisms like free will versus determinism—without adopting Nietzschean doctrine—such as his declaration that the weak and decadent, whom he alone can accurately classify and identify, can do nothing but decline.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have created the groundwork for a Nietzschean account of transformation. Through Nietzsche’s critique of rationality and his critique of morality, we have already seen the beginnings of an account of transformation that will come into its fullness in the following chapters. While I will challenge and counter Nietzsche throughout, I have here cleared one major roadblock out of our way: namely, the claim made by some commentators that self-change is not a viable possibility within Nietzsche’s fatalistic view of humans. In chapter four, I will present an account of Nietzschean transformation built around Nietzsche’s concept of “self-overcoming” and bring it to bear on the case of white people and transformation against the grain of race-related problems. In chapter five, I will present Nietzsche’s normative vision in terms of health and vitality along with his ideal “type” or personality (which I will amend significantly) and illustrate the productive, creative, affirmative tenor this vision can grant transformation against the grain of race-related problems.
CHAPTER FOUR

Nietzschean Transformation Against the Grain of Race-Related Problems

Nietzsche:

Now something that you formerly loved as a truth or probability strikes you as an error; you shed it and fancy that this represents a victory for your reason. But perhaps this error was as necessary for you then, when you were still a different person—you are always a different person—as are all your present ‘truths,’ being a skin, as it were, that concealed and covered a great deal that you were not yet permitted to see. What killed that opinion for you was your new life and not your reason: you no longer need it, and now it collapses and unreason crawls out of it into the light like a worm. When we criticize something, this is no arbitrary and impersonal event; it is, at least very often, evidence of vital energies in us that are growing and shedding a skin. We negate and must negate because something in us wants to live and affirm—something that we perhaps do not know or see as yet.315

Minnie Bruce Pratt:

“…when I began to push through all this, I felt like my life was cracking around me. / I think this is what happens, to a more or less extreme degree, every time we expand our limited being: it is upheaval, not catastrophe: more like a snake shedding its skin than like death: the old constriction is sloughed off with difficulty, but there is an expansion: not a change in basic shape or color, but an expansion, some growth, and some reward for struggle and curiosity. Yet, if we are women who have gained privilege by our white skin or our Christian culture, but who are trying to free ourselves as women in a more complex way, we can experience this change as loss. Because it is: the old lies and ways of living, habitual, familiar, comfortable, fitting us like our skin, were ours. / Our fear of the losses can keep us from changing.”316

Having established, in chapter two, the need for a Nietzschean account of transformation, and having laid the philosophical groundwork for this account in chapter

three, I will here, in chapter four, present the core of a Nietzschean account of transformation against the grain of race-related problems. The first section of this chapter concerns the mechanisms of transformation—that is, the aspects of the self that function as agents of change. This material flows directly out of the critique of rationality presented in chapter three. In chapter three, I established that transformation involves affect, body, and need; that it doesn’t occur primarily as thinking rationally; and that it involves a changing form of life (no longer “preserving” the previous form), changing “justifications,” and a changing efficacy. As I claimed in chapter three, the same dimensions of the self that hold us back are also potential agents of change. While I have made these claims in chapter three, here I flesh them out, showing (in part by giving examples related to race) how these aspects of the self are changed in transformation and how they lead transformation.

The second section of this chapter concerns the dynamics of change—that is, the movements characteristic of transformation, the shape of the paths transformation may take. The heart of this account is Nietzsche’s concept of “self-overcoming.” However, Nietzsche’s mentions of “self-overcoming” are limited and brief—he never fully explains what he means by the term—and so we need to bring in other passages as well in order to create a full account of the dynamics of change. By the end of this section, we will be able to see a clear contrast between Nietzschean transformation and other common notions of change, such as change as “progress.”

The third section of this chapter pertains to the spirit of transformation. As we will see, transformation involves destruction, loss, and negation; nevertheless, its spirit is creative and affirmative. Destruction must occur so that creation can. Negation makes
room for affirmation. Losses allow for unexpected gains. As the quote leading this chapter indicates, Nietzschean transformation is matter of “vital energies” growing, expanding, pushing the self in new directions. Speaking of vitality, creativity, and affirmation leaves us right on the cusp of Nietzsche’s understanding of health and vitality, which will be the theme of chapter five.

Throughout this chapter, I use examples of actual white people who have gone through significant transformations in regard to race and race relations. Some of them begin from a position of overt racism while several others begin from a position of unconcern with race or a well-intentioned but uniformed attitude such as colorblindness. Both sorts of journeys can tell us something about how people change in regard to race. I do not intend to hold any of these individuals up as paragons of anti-racist whiteness, though I have selected examples in which people are moving from a more racist to a less racist position, or from greater to lesser participation in white privilege. In other words, were I to do a survey of white people, or a quantitative study, I would clearly find examples of people who do not change at all, people who attempt to change and accomplish little, and people who look into questions of race relations and move in a directions other than or opposite the direction I am considering (namely, against the grain of race-related problems). But since my purpose here is to illuminate transformation against the grain of race-related problems, I have selected examples of people who have moved in that direction and whose paths show us something significant about this sort of change, wherever each may end up by the end of the biographical story.
Nietzsche is deliberate when he refers to “something that you loved as a truth” rather than something you “believed” true or a truth you “espoused.” He here echoes his claim that our truths “belong” to us, that we are invested in them, body, psyche, and soul. It is no wonder, then, that when we turn on our truths, this is “no impersonal event.” As we move toward new opinions, we explore not only with rational scrutiny; we also look for something that appeals to us, striking a common chord, a common interest, need, desire, passion, or sensibility. A convincing theory is also a compelling picture. To be inspired by a belief or a philosophy is not only to find its argument sound—it is also to envision a new form of life for oneself. When Nietzsche refers to “your new life and not your reason,” he is contrasting two descriptions of change. First: you’ve rethought something and come to a different conclusion. Second: your life is changing. The former does not presuppose much growth—you simply look again at something, think through it again. You may have honed your reasoning skills or gathered more evidence to consider, but that can only be one dimension of personal change. The second description of change presupposes growth. You have a new life—that is, you are a different self—and so you have different needs, desires, and affects, which are satisfied or stimulated by a different set of convictions. In other words, your earlier philosophy no longer “belongs” to you—a new one does. You also now use reason (a helpful instrument) differently, as part of this more holistic transformation—you use it in pursuit of different goals, you enter into different areas of inquiry, you argue in order to persuade people in different directions.
In his book, *But Now I See: The White Southern Racial Conversion Narrative*, Fred Hobson reviews the memoirs of several white southerners (Lillian Smith, Katherine Du Pre Lumpkin, James McBride Dabbs, Sarah Patton Boyle, and Will Campbell) who were able to identify and reject the racism they were taught as children. He discovers that in these memoirs—which he terms “conversion narratives”—religious terminology appears again and again: “sin,” “blindness,” “seeing the light,” “repentance,” “redemption.” These southerners’ moves beyond their racist cultural heritage, in other words, is as profound and personal for them as a religious rebirth. They are not impartial scientists examining evidence; they are impassioned individuals undergoing spiritual awakening. In Nietzsche’s words, each one became “a different person.” But to some degree or another, “you are always a different person,” which suggests that as dramatic as conversion experiences may be, transformation against the grain of race-related problems is a long, ongoing change. As lifetime anti-racist Anne Braden came to believe, “…overcoming racism, for whites, [is] a lifelong process. ‘No white people in a society founded on racism ever totally free themselves of this prison….’” One becomes a new person in both dramatic and subtle ways, with an ever new form of life, as one sheds socialized, sedimented layers of racism and white privilege and severs the affective bonds that have held these layers firm.

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317 *But Now I See* 2.
318 In her model of white racial identity development, psychologist Janet Helms describes a similar phenomenon: as one comes to understand race and racism, he or she “…may begin to feel a euphoria perhaps akin to a religious rebirth. These positive feelings not only help to buttress the newly developing White identity, but provide the fuel by which the person can truly begin to tackle racism and oppression in its various forms” (*Black and White Racial Identity* 62).
319 Fosl 119.
We can see the personal, affective tangle of transformation that Nietzsche posits in the characters of Paul Hendrickson’s *Sons of Mississippi*. Hendrickson’s book centers around a famous photograph of white Mississippi lawmen admiring a billy club as they gathered on the Ole Miss campus the day James Meredith entered as the first black student. The book consists primarily of reports of interviews with the descendents of these lawmen. The personal dimension of race relations is especially obvious in the case of one man named Ty Ferrell, grandson of one of the Mississippi lawmen. At the time of his initial interviews with Hendrickson, Ferrell was following in the family tradition of law enforcement by working as a border guard in the southwest. He reports to Hendrickson that he loves working as a border guard and most of all is thrilled by the chase. He proudly displays a photograph of himself, his father, and his grandfather in his office, all in uniform and holding guns. He is not embarrassed by the famous Life photograph of his grandfather. When asked about racism, he says he thinks that he and his friends have been victims of reverse racism.320

Yet Ferrell’s inheritance is not so simple, so seemingly untroubled. He is sensitive and has a difficult time controlling his emotions; he’s liable to tear up at any moment (and even warned Hendrickson about this before the interview). And despite the pride he takes in his job, he asks, in reference to illegals attempting to cross,

“…what’s wrong with it, really? What’s wrong with trying to better your life, make a better world for your family? We’ve made it a crime, coming across the border illegally. It’s my job to stop it. I do. But wouldn’t I be doing exactly what they’re doing if the situation were reversed? Why shouldn’t these people have a moral right to make their lives better?”321

320 209-216 and 263-64.
321 209.
Ferrell even sympathizes with those who smuggle drugs or come to the U.S. to steal.

Explaining the desperation south of the border, he says,

“They don’t have toothbrushes over there—we’ve asked….They burn tires for their heat and light….No medicine over there….No sewage, no electricity, no running water….I don’t understand it. You would think with the two countries so close together, one would pull the other up. Somebody can be born right over there, and somebody else, born right over here, and living their lives so close.”

But despite such insights, Ferrell is not a subversive within his occupation—he does his job well and with passion. “‘I want to catch him…,’” he says, “‘I guess there’s a part of me that doesn’t want to do anything else after I catch him but cut him loose….Let him do what he has to do.’” But the illegals he captures are not just cut loose, of course.

“‘We’ll either process them and send them back or, if we’ve caught them many times before, we’ll put them in jail….None of it seems exactly fair, does it?’”

Trying to understand this emotional man’s sense of global injustice and simultaneous pride in the family lawman tradition, his passion for the pursuit and desire to let the pursued go, his recognition of living conditions over the border and his concern for reverse racism here, Hendrickson concludes,

It is as if…Ty [Ferrell] didn’t really know what he wanted from life. It was as if he’d somehow gotten all these feminine genes inside him. No one in the family [a decade before] had any idea [that]…Ty would be doing the family work in the racially complex American Southwest. Doing it very well, doing it with what seemed like existential torment, as if he were meant to be a roiling repository for so many unnamed, unclaimed Ferrell family shames."
We would have to wait and observe the rest of Ferrell’s life course to know to what this affective confusion would eventually give way. Simultaneously excited to chase illegal immigrants, compassionate toward poor people living across the border, proud of his family traditions, and liable to shed tears at any moment, Ferrell is in some ways stifled by polarized affects, but also displays an affective dynamism that may be ripe for transformation. As a “roiling repository,” he certainly has an affective energy—as well as a bodily energy that we see bound up in the thrill of the chase—that could serve as mechanisms of transformation, but, at least at the time of the interview, his affective energies push and pull against each other without (yet) giving way to a profound transformation.

If, as Nietzsche says, behind our convictions “…there stand…physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life,” then we can expect that as we take up new forms of life, our bodies will be among the personal, non-rational dimensions of transformation. And bodies are not only subject to change, but are also among the aspects of the self serving as agents of change. Nietzsche often speaks of involuntary aspects of the body that have to do with a person’s capacity for creativity and change, but also says a bit about deliberately using and manipulating physiological aspects of the self. For example, he speaks of diet and nutrition (in both literal and figurative terms) and of choosing the right environment for one’s physiology. He also

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326 Beyond Good and Evil I:3, page 11.
327 Ecce Homo “Why I am so Clever” 1-2, pages 237-240, and Daybreak III:203, pages 122-23. See also Thus Spoke Zarathustra I “On the Despisers of the Body,” pages 146-47, where Zarathustra says that the body “…does not say ‘I,’ but does ‘I,’” and declares that “[t]here is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom.”
recommends that one “sit as little as possible; give no credence to any thought that was not born outdoors while one moved about freely…."

It is easier to imagine how body is involved in racial identity than in transformation in regard to one’s role in a racialized society. Yet there is a great deal of agency within the body and there are things one can do to put bodily agency to work (beyond caring for and exercising the body for general health and conditioning). To better understand this, we can look at the story of Bob Zellner. Early on in his involvement with SNCC, Zellner joined other SNCC members and high school students in a nonviolent protest in McComb, Mississippi. At City Hall, the protestors were surrounded by a mob composed largely of members of the Ku Klux Klan, who were infuriated to see a white person—Zellner—in the protest. Zellner tells what happened:

A group of Klansmen gathered around me and started swinging at me. Bob Moses and Chuck McDew [black SNCC leaders], who hadn’t been arrested, came over and, in the nonviolent tradition, surrounded me to absorb some of this punishment. Then the police came over and hit them in the heads with billy sticks and blackjacks and took them off….I heard someone yell, ‘Bring him out here and we’ll kill him’…. I grabbed onto the City Hall railing….One guy got so frustrated that he came over the back of my head as I was holding on and started putting his fingers into my eye sockets to try and get ahold of my eyeball. He actually pushed it out onto my cheekbone by looping his finger in the muscle behind it with his thumb and forefinger. I would pay attention to that while I was paying attention to everything else. Just as he was about to get ahold of my eyeball I would move in such a way that it would pop back into my eye socket. As the muscle pulled it back in, it would actually make a thunk, and I remember thinking, ‘Boy, that’s a tough little muscle there, that eyeball.’ [Then]…someone kicked me in the head. I remember the rail getting slippery with my own blood…. 

328 Ecce Homo “Why I am so Clever” 1, pages 239-240. See also Gay Science V:366, page 322.
329 The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, one of the most significant civil rights groups of the 1960s.
Zellner was put into a car and driven out of town as the driver and other passengers hurled expletives and threatened to kill him. “They kept shouting at me and called me a ‘nigger-lovin’ communist Jew motherfucker from New York.’” Bleeding, bruised, and terrified, Zellner replied calmly: “‘Well, now nine out of ten is not bad, but I want you to know I’m not from New York.’ I had an Alabama accent at that time that would cut leather.” After arguing and deliberating and intimidating, the Klansmen eventually took Zellner to a jail where he was bailed out by one of the only two black lawyers in the state of Mississippi—who risked his life by bailing Zellner out—before another mob could set the jail on fire. “I was more terrified probably than I ever knew,” Zellner says, looking back. “Most of us were. One of the things that it did to me was it made it a lot easier later on to do even more dangerous things, because I figured that every day I had after October fourth was extra.” This event was not Zellner’s only experience of violence. He was wounded many times during nonviolent protests, shot at more than once, and tortured during a prison stay. “We were ready to die,” he explains, “and that gave us a power that was invincible.”

Body is involved in many ways in this example. First, Zellner’s whiteness within a crowd of black protesters carried a great deal of meaning, which is why the mob in this instance found him to be particularly threatening. Secondly, Zellner put his body on the line—that is, body did not only play a role in the situation but was a site of agency—and felt the physical pain of protest. Third, Moses and McDew, two important black leaders

331 Page 34.  
332 Page 35.  
333 Pages 35-40.  
334 Page 50.
of SNCC, put their own bodies around Zellner to try to protect him (and in a different way, the lawyer who bailed him out also risked his body and life for Zellner and the cause). Fourth, to put his identity in the face of his attackers, he not only existed in his white skin but used his voice to show them how close his background was to theirs, to show that he was working from the inside, not “infiltrating” from the north. Finally, the experience of having nearly died and yet to have survived brought a passion and courage to Zellner that made him able to dedicate himself fully to the movement despite the daily dangers. His efforts toward social change were bodily efforts (in part), and he was profoundly changed by his bodily experiences. Had he simply heard and evaluated the opinions of people on both sides of that event in McComb, he would not have become the person he did in fact become through embodiing his white body in the ways he did. Few white people are able to use their bodies for personal and social change as intensely and effectively as Zellner. Yet every single person in some way or another establishes, preserves, or changes personal identity and the social status quo by what he or she does with his or her body, or what happens to his or her body. As Tim Wise explains, “[a]lthough white Americans often think we’ve had few first-hand experiences with race—because most of us are so isolated from people of color in our day-to-day lives—the reality is that this isolation is our experience with race.”335 Whether we are suppressing sensations of anxiety and discomfort and keeping our bodies in largely white spaces or we are putting our bodies on the line, facing fear, and suffering violence—or anything in between—our bodies are establishing our racial identities and how we relate

335 White Like Me, viii.
to people of other races, and they are either reinforcing or challenging the social status quo.

Having emphasized the very personal factors of both convictions and transformation (factors which are simultaneously social), Nietzsche explains that our convictions “collapse” when their very personal (and simultaneously social) grounds are no longer there to support them. It is not that your opinion is dismantled (by you or others), but that it collapses. That which sustained it has crumbled, and so it falls. Just as Nietzsche reverses (as we saw in chapter three) the order of reasoning and conviction so that the conviction often comes first and reasoning then arrives to support it, so too, when convictions change, the new argument is often among the later facets of the gradual change. Reasoning may not be only an aftereffect, but it rarely precedes or introduces a transformation before it begins. Of course, we don’t ever “turn off” our reasoning—it operates throughout the course of change—but as Nietzsche says, it often plays its most important role after a conviction has already begun to take root. Minnie Bruce Pratt explains that her entrance into dedicated anti-racism was not something she thought out and arrived at as an ideological imperative; instead, she fell into anti-racist work after falling in love with a particular woman:

How do we begin to change, and then keep going, and act on this in the world? How do we want to be different from what we have been? Sometimes folks ask how I got started, and I must admit that I did not begin by reasoning out the gains: this came later and helped me keep going. / ...I began...for love:...for myself and for other women...falling in love with and becoming sexual with a particular woman; and this love led me directly, but by a complicated way, to work against racism and anti-Semitism.\(^{336}\)

\(^{336}\) “Identity” 19.
As Pratt began her life with her partner, her previous convictions lost their support and her new life called for new convictions and new pursuits.

The moment of collapse arrives, Nietzsche says, when we “no longer need” our convictions. In chapter three, I identified certain common beliefs about race (for example, “I don’t see race,” “we have class rather than race problems,” or “whites are the victims now”) that fulfill needs, such as the need to establish one’s own moral goodness, innocence, and just desert (in one’s own eyes or in others’); the need to protect oneself against a potentially difficult, strenuous, or painful challenge; or the need to preserve or promote one’s privileged and insulated way of life. Nietzsche suggests that these “necessary” beliefs will not likely fall prey to strong arguments, but will instead fall away when they are no longer “necessary.” Put differently, we could say that arguments are able to penetrate and begin their work only when need has weakened and a person is ready to let her beliefs finally be genuinely challenged. In some cases, a need may be overcome altogether—such as the need to feel categorically superior to other people or the need to feel like an innocent victim. In other cases, the particular way in which a need is fulfilled, rather than the need itself, may be overcome. For example, the need for a community that is supportive of one’s convictions and ambitions can be fulfilled by a new, diverse, anti-racist community in place of a white, racist community. The need to be effective in the world can likewise find different means of fulfillment—instead of finding one’s efficacy within the ease and power of white privilege, one finds it in her efforts toward self-change, persuasion of others, and social change—in resistance rather than complicity.
Not only needs, but also desires, pains, fears, strengths and weaknesses may either fall away and make room for transformation or may be addressed in different, transforming ways. If exoticism, for example, comes from a desire to escape one’s own whiteness, this attitude will fall when one can face her situation and history as a white person and can envision ways of being anti-racist even while acknowledging one’s cultural configuration as a white, and therefore privileged, person. Similarly, when one is no longer so dependent on approval from others, or when one finds sources of affirmation from different people, one can overcome the hurt of rejection and continue her exploration into the possibility of becoming an ally. When one has the fortitude to face fears, the good-spirited willingness to make mistakes, and an openness to being vulnerable, avoidance is no longer necessary as a protective mechanism. It is such personal factors, such changing needs, desires, pains, fears, strengths, weaknesses, affects, and bodies that are powerfully “persuasive” and create the space where a reasonable argument might actually be able to take hold.

The Dynamics of Change: Self-Overcoming

Although Nietzsche uses the term “self-overcoming”\textsuperscript{337} fairly often, he never gives a definition of the term or explains what he means by it. But, gathering up his

\textsuperscript{337} This English term is generally used to translate either of two German terms: “Selbstüberwindung” and “Selbstaufhebung.” Nietzsche does not seem to distinguish between the two. They do, however, carry different connotations. “Aufheben” is the word Hegel used to describe the development of Spirit or Mind. It means both to lift up, raise, keep and to cancel, abolish, dissolve (Hegel played on this ambiguity to a large degree). By referring to “selbstaufheben” rather than “aufheben,” Nietzsche is alluding to Hegel, but making the movement of development self-reflexive. “Überwindung” is commonly translated.
several uses of the term, we can build up an understanding of what he meant by it. Self-overcoming, in Nietzsche’s philosophy, is a movement with a semi-Hegelian structure whereby the future develops out of the past. But self-overcoming, for Nietzsche, is not a rigid logic in which the past absolutely determines the future, nor is it a process of gradual perfection toward a final ideal. Nietzschean self-overcoming does not entail a smooth and continuous development, but involves breakages and leaps.\textsuperscript{338} But still, one leaps from somewhere, and so even in the case of breakage and a new upsurge, the future has sources in the past and cannot be understood without reference to the past. But unlike steady progress, self-overcoming sometimes pitches forward, sometimes falls back, sometimes jumps the track.

The lack of a strict determining logic to self-overcoming indicates that there is no set of instructions for transformation and no two people take identical paths. This means that anti-racist transformation can happen in a variety of ways, through a variety of avenues. There is no recipe, no guarantee that if you do X, you’ll understand and you’ll change. There is no one key thing common to all white people who have made great strides in overcoming the racism within or their participation in white privilege.\textsuperscript{339} Our

\textsuperscript{338} For example, in his description of the emergence of the “bad conscience,” Nietzsche says that the change “…was not a gradual or voluntary one and did not represent an organic adaptation to new conditions, but a break, a leap, a compulsion, an ineluctable disaster…” (\textit{Genealogy of Morals} II:17, page 86).

\textsuperscript{339} Many people report on experiences that changed them, but other people go through the same experiences without changing. Even when experiences do motivate self-overcoming, they are usually not instantly digested; the effect of an experience grows as one goes back to the experience, reliving it in light of other experiences and developments. Simple exposure to people of other races isn’t a guarantee—
self-overcoming can catch us off guard, stubbornly thwarting our deliberate efforts only to surprise us later on with an unexpected development. We may assign ourselves tasks aimed toward greater understanding of race and race relations and feel disappointed that we seem basically the same throughout. Meanwhile, we may be living out social relations and changing in the process but realize it only later. As we travel such winding paths, we may find answers to questions other than those we asked. This echoes Becky Thompson’s claim that “[t]he making of an activist consciousness is rarely, if ever, linear.”

The “self” of Nietzschean self-overcoming can be an individual, a cultural force (for example, Christianity, morality, justice, or “the will to truth”), humanity as a whole (“the self-overcoming of man”), or “life” itself. It is not only individual human selves, in other words, that overcome themselves.

European colonists along with American slave owners had plenty of contact with nonwhite people without understanding their realities. Karyn McKinney, in a sociological study of white college students’ “race autobiographies,” highlights the importance of interracial contact and interracial experiences, but complicates the analysis by referring to cases in which contact and experience fail to ignite transformation in attitudes toward race (see pages 25, 26, 29, 34, and 73).

As Schutte explains, “[t]he ‘I’ that speaks for life’s self does not refer exclusively to a human self. On the contrary, it expands the meaning of the self by referring to any aspect of nature or culture functioning as a principle of order and of relative stability in time. Though appearing now to be standing firm, such a structure of power will be overcome. Therefore the ‘I’ that speaks for life is not intended to match the human individual. What is overcome may be an aspect of an organism, a set of beliefs, a process, a goal. The ‘I’ refers to the dynamic process of life” (Beyond Nihilism 32-33).
reference, the “self” of self-overcoming designates a conjunction of “acting upon” and “undergoing.” The self’s energies are directed inward, only to travel through the self and emerge toward a beyond. Self-overcoming is a “turning on oneself,” where what had established the self now mischievously disrupts the self and draws it out into new shapes and into new directions. As Ladelle McWhorter describes, “[w]ithin the movement of self-overcoming, what is being overcome is the self, that selfsame structure that is doing the overcoming insofar as the energy of the overcoming is generated from within the structure that is undergoing transformation; in other words, the ‘agent’ and ‘patient’ are one in the movement of self-overcoming.”

No selves, according to Nietzsche, exist in isolation, free from the influence of environment and other selves, and yet the energy of transformation comes in large part from the self rather than some outside force. With greater and lesser degrees of intent, the self, in the movement of self-overcoming, pursues projects and goals that eventually lead the self to turn on itself in betrayal—and growth.

Nietzsche’s provides and discusses two examples of self-overcoming: the self-overcoming of justice and the self-overcoming of Christianity. What Nietzsche says about justice and Christianity themselves is not directly applicable to my project; however, in his discussion of these topics, he highlights dynamics of self-overcoming that I will apply to examples pertaining to race. Nietzsche locates the origin of justice in practices of buying, selling, and lending. From these economic practices arise concepts

346 “Self-Overcoming and the Will to Truth” 341; see also Bodies and Pleasures 55. McWhorter goes on to say that even better than conceiving of self-overcoming as a correspondence of agent and patient is to conceive of self-overcoming as a movement without agent or patient, something that might best be captured by the middle voice (without subject or object). However, I find her initial explanation of self-overcoming more helpful in capturing Nietzsche’s understanding of self-overcoming, particularly in the case of an individual (rather than cultural) self-overcoming. For another interpretation of the self-reflexive movement of self-overcoming, see C. Scott, “The Mask of Nietzsche’s Self Overcoming.”
of “...exchange,...right, obligation, [and] settlement...together with the custom
of...measuring...power against power.” Over time, Nietzsche claims, people come to see
that “...‘everything has its price; all things can be paid for’...” and then the concepts of
exchange, right, obligation, and settlement no longer apply only to purely economic
transactions.\textsuperscript{347} “Debt” is no longer strictly monetary—any harm done to another incurs
“debt,” and that debt must be paid, whether monetarily or in some other way. And just as
one individual stands as a creditor to a debtor, the community itself also stands as creditor
to all citizens. When a citizen does not “pay his dues” and uphold his contract—in other
words, when he breaks the law and harms the community—he is required to compensate
the community, to pay his “debt” to society, however he can. He is also denied future
benefits from the creditor-community and “...reminded what these benefits are really
worth”—he is, in other words, punished.\textsuperscript{348} Nietzsche claims that justice could
eventually outgrow itself (though this is not necessarily the course that cultural
conceptions of justice will take) and one day be no longer necessary:

As the power and self-confidence of a community increase, the penal law always
becomes more moderate....The ‘creditor’ always becomes more humane to the
extent that he has grown richer....It is not unthinkable that a society might attain
such a consciousness of power that it could allow itself the noblest luxury possible
to it—letting those who harm it go unpunished....The justice that began with
‘everything is dischargeable, everything must be discharged,’ ends by winking
and letting those incapable of discharging their debt go free: it ends, as does every
good thing on earth, by overcoming itself. This self-overcoming of justice: one
knows the beautiful name it has given itself—mercy....\textsuperscript{349}

\textsuperscript{347} Genealogy of Morals II:8, page 70-71.
\textsuperscript{348} Genealogy of Morals II:9, page 71.
\textsuperscript{349} Genealogy of Morals II:10, pages 72-73.
Through the practice of justice—that is, making citizens “pay” their creditor—the community grows so powerful and wealthy that it no longer needs to enact strict enforcement of “debt” payment. Justice as forcing debtors to pay (in whatever form) what they owe collapses when the creditor can afford to forget the debts of those who do not or cannot pay. Justice is not overcome by something foreign; through the very practice of justice, a community is led through and then out of justice.

This example reveals three important facets of self-overcoming. First, self-overcoming occurs not as a foreign force entering and taking over—hence, the justice example illustrates the “turning on oneself” explained above. Second, a practice, in this case, justice, is overcome not because of the instantiation of new practices, but through the very practice of justice. Third, something falls away (is overcome) when it is no longer needed, when the need that sustained its existence has dissipated. I take these not to be necessary conditions of self-overcoming, but ways in which self-overcoming can occur. Not all self-overcoming, in other words, will occur as the exhaustion of a practice taken to its extremes. While I will not use Nietzsche’s insights about justice per se, I will use these three dynamics of self-overcoming to analyze examples of white people and anti-racist transformation.

Nietzsche highlights a fourth dynamic of self-overcoming in his account of the self-overcoming of Christianity. Explaining how this great reversal happened, Nietzsche first says that, as the commandment to confess, the demand that one interrogate his own conscience, and the strict moral requirement of honesty, Christianity is a form of “the will to truth.” It is as the will to truth that Christianity is its own undoing: this “…catastrophe of two thousand years of training in truthfulness…finally forbids itself the lie involved in
belief in God.” The downfall of Christianity, in other words, is not attributable to something outside of Christianity (such as scientific thinking as alien to religion, or some other religion that combats Christianity and wins out). Rather, “…what…really triumphed over the Christian god…[was] Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was understood ever more rigorously, the father confessor’s refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price.” By thus turning against itself and “…bring[ing] about [its] own destruction…,” Christianity finally overcomes itself. As in the case of justice, Nietzsche here shows that self-overcoming is a reflexive movement of the self’s energies and not a matter of something succumbing to a foreign force. But in this example, Nietzsche also shows the role contradictions can play in self-overcoming. He indicates that Christianity was able for a long time to sustain a contradiction, namely, “the will to truth” and “the lie involved in belief in God.” But through the practice of the former, the sustained contradiction eventually became a productive contradiction, generating enough tension that something had to give. This moment of collapse is then the creative space from which a new way of thinking and living could emerge.

As an example of self-overcoming in the context of race, we can look at Bob Zellner’s story of his father’s transformation. Zellner’s father was a very conservative Methodist preacher (who named his son after Bob Jones) and, like his own father, his brothers, and his sisters, was an active member of the Ku Klux Klan. During World War

II, the senior Zellner went with Bob Jones to Europe. Their plan was to “save” the Jews by converting them to Christianity (and not in name only—that is, not just for strategic purposes of survival). While Hitler tried to rid the world of Jews through murder and concentration camps, Jones and the senior Zellner hoped to get rid of Jews by turning them into Christians. But an odd thing happened as he pushed his bigoted project forward, working through the Jewish underground in Europe: “…he came into conflict with the Nazis, who were his ideological soulmates…,” and, simultaneously, “…he began to identify with the Jews….” Next, he ended up working closely with members of a black gospel choir from the American South who were also working with the Jews in Europe (it is not said in what capacity). “They were together for months. They talked about the same kind of food and they liked the same hymns and music.” A foreigner in Europe, Zellner bonded with these people from his homeland. His son Bob Zellner tells what happened:

Years later, he said to me, “Bob, something very disconcerting began to happen to me. One day I forgot they were black.” / He said it ruined him as a Klansman…. / He truly changed. He began to see black people differently, Jews differently, the mission of the church differently. He became active in the Southern Conference Educational Fund, which prepared the ground for the civil rights movement.353

The senior Zellner was not confronted by an outside force that wrenched him out of his opinions, habits, and passions. Having taken his practice of making the world white and Christian to an extreme, he could no longer sustain it in the intense context of Nazis, Jews, and black Americans all pushing against each other and against Zellner with perplexing strains of violence, opposition, compassion, and companionship. Adrift in

Europe in the midst of a genocide created by people with similar ideology and with only black people to connect him to the comforts of his home, Zellner had taken his racist missionary zeal to its breaking point and emerged from it a new person. Once he had bonded with the group of black Americans and felt comfortable and “at home” in their company, he no longer needed the hateful ideology that would separate him from black people—or from Jewish people. His son Bob recalls running around his small southern town in shirts made from the white Klan robes his father no longer needed, a material symbol of his father’s conversion.

Writer Lillian Smith traces both her early confusion and her later anti-racist commitments to the contradictions about race prevalent in the south—contradictions that eventually became productive for her and fueled her self-overcoming. Early on in her memoir and discourse on the South (written in 1949), Smith presents the mixed messages that she and other white children received from their parents:

The mother who taught me what I know of tenderness and love and compassion taught me also the bleak rituals of keeping Negroes in their ‘place.’ The father who rebuked me for an air of superiority toward schoolmates from the mill and rounded out his rebuke by gravely reminding me that ‘all men are brothers,’ trained me in the steel-rigid decorums I must demand of every colored male.

Beginning as children, southerners negotiated such oppositions, according to Smith, by constructing walls within themselves, sealing one part of the self off from the other:

354 While I would certainly not go so far as to advocate the practices of racism and white privilege in the hopes that they would wear themselves out, it would nevertheless be important to attend to this dynamic of self-overcoming in doing constructive, strategic work on whiteness. The self-exhaustion of need may suggest to us not that we need to push deeper and deeper into ideologies in order to wear them out, but that we want to encourage a genealogical “looping back,” looking deeply into our past practices, in the hopes of traveling through them and emerging transformed.

355 Generation on Fire, ed. Kisseloff, 27.

356 Killers of the Dream 27.
From the day I was born, I began to learn my lessons….I learned it is possible to be a Christian and a white southerner simultaneously; to be a gentlewoman and an arrogant callous creature in the same moment; to pray at night and ride a Jim Crow car the next morning and to feel comfortable in doing both. I learned to believe in freedom, to glow when the word democracy was used, and to practice slavery from morning to night. I learned it the way all of my southern people learn it: by closing door after door until one’s mind and heart and conscience are blocked off from each other and from reality.  

But in Smith’s case, the divided parts of the self found their way through to each other and the contradictions became troubling—and productive. Explaining her early conformity and then dawning awareness, Smith says,

I closed the doors. Or perhaps they were closed for me. One day they began to open again. Why I had the desire or the strength to open them, or what strange accident or circumstance opened them for me would require in the answering an account too long, too particular, too stark to make here. And perhaps I should not have the wisdom that such an analysis would demand of me, nor the will to make it.

Later in her memoir, Smith gives a very general account of this transformation, saying that “[t]he raveling out of what had been woven so tightly was…a slow process. One thread at a time came loose. Then another. Sometimes a great hole was torn by a quick stabbing experience.” It is not surprising that Smith cannot account with precision for her transformation (few of us would have the self-transparency to do so), though she has noted that it was not a steady progression, but rather a sometimes gradual, sometimes sudden, untangling of contradictions. In this self-overcoming, Smith certainly uses reason to untangle contradictions, to identify things as contradictory. But these are not only contradictions of reason, but also affective contradictions, even bodily

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357 Killers of the Dream 29.
358 Killers of the Dream 29.
359 Killers of the Dream 114.
contradictions. As beliefs, practices, emotions, and ways of posturing the body break through walls and brush up against each other, their discordance becomes a turning on the self that gives way to something new.

While self-overcoming is an action of the self on the self, the action does not occur in a capsule sealed off from the wider world. The self, in other words, is not an isolated self (even “life” as the self of self-overcoming is always in relation to non-living things). As the self’s energies cycle back on themselves, the world is continually swept up and folded into the self, as the self simultaneously casts itself out into the world. The growth of the self’s energies is stimulated both by “external” factors that are taken in and by the energies’ own actions on each other and themselves. We could liken the self-overcoming of vital energies to plant growth where elements necessary to survival and growth are constantly cycling through the plant (from soil, water, and air), creating an exchange of old and new, in continual exchange with the environment. The primary

360 Not all self-overcoming occurs as growth and enhancement. A vital self-overcoming occurs as a tumultuous and fertile dance of destruction and creation, whereas an enervated self-overcoming may proceed through decadence and exhaustion—a winding down, a grudging change, a change upon the point of desperation, a change following a collapse. Nietzsche most often speaks of self-overcoming as something healthy, vital, and life-promoting, but decadence too is a way in which the self’s energies turn inward and draw out a new self. Self-overcoming, as either vital or decadent, is similar to the “revaluation of values”—while Nietzsche most often uses the latter phrase in relation to the great transformation he and his fellow free spirits will enact (Beyond Good and Evil V:203, page 117; Twilight of the Idols “Preface,” page 465; Antichrist “Preface,” pages 568-69; Ecce Homo “Why I am so Wise” 1, page 223; Ecce Homo “Dawn” 1, page 290; and Ecce Homo “Why I am a Destiny” 1, page 326. See also Genealogy of Morals “Preface” 3, page 17; “Preface” 6, page 20; and I:17 “Note,” pages 55-56), he also identifies the emergence of Christian morality as a revaluation of values, though a calamitous one resulting from and leading to decline (Beyond Good and Evil III:46, page 60; Beyond Good and Evil III:62, page 75; Twilight of the Idols “The ‘Improvem’ of Mankind” 4, page 505; and Ecce Homo “Why I am a Destiny” 7, page 333). For better or for worse, Nietzsche does not offer clear ways to distinguish between vital and decadent self-overcoming. At best, we might describe decadent self-overcoming as forced changes that are mourned or resented and vital self-overcoming as playful and stemming from “overflowing power and abundance” (Gay Science V:382, page 347). Like Nietzsche, I will generally use “self-overcoming” to mean a vital, life-promoting transformation, but it is worth noting that such an energetic change is not the only mode in which self-overcoming occurs.
life force may be the plant’s own, but it would die if it were sealed off from the world around it. In Nietzsche’s discussions of self-overcoming, the fluid edges of the self are most apparent when he identifies an individual (usually himself) as a site of or a vehicle for a much larger self-overcoming. The individual in such cases is overcoming himself while a cultural force is simultaneously overcoming itself through him.

Nietzsche’s observation of this phenomenon, however, does not lead him to temper his strident individualism. In other words, while Nietzsche recognizes the fluid edges of the self and the influence of the world surrounding the self, he simultaneously urges individuals (at least the great, strong ones) to separate themselves from society as much as possible, living a hermetic lifestyle if need be. He describes himself and his kind as “…born, sworn, jealous friends of solitude, of our own most midnightly, most middaily solitude: that is the type of man we are, we free spirits!” (This prescriptive individualism is only somewhat suspended when Nietzsche calls up a vague and elitist “we,” that is, “we few,” “we free spirits,” “we philosophers of tomorrow,” since these rare individuals only gather occasionally for specific purposes before returning to their solitude). Nietzsche does not encourage us, then, to join groups or communities in hopes

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361: *Daybreak* “Preface” 4, page 5; *Twilight of the Idols* “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 33, page 534; *Ecce Homo* “Why I am a Destiny” 3, page 328; and *Ecce Homo* “Why I am so Wise” 8, page 233. Along with glorifying himself, Nietzsche also identifies Goethe as “…a magnificent attempt to overcome the eighteenth century…” (*Twilight of the Idols* “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 49, page 553).

362: Gooding-Williams explains the simultaneity of individual and cultural self-overcoming like this: “In the wake of the self-destruction of the ascetic ideal, Zarathustra urges Christian-Platonic man to make overcoming man his highest goal. In order to realize that goal, a given individual would need to effect in his person a revaluation of at least some of his body’s passions—a process that would effect the overcoming of man (in a particular instance), precisely to the extent that it resulted in the creation of a self of a sort other than that of Christian-Platonic man” (122-123, italics removed).

that we might get caught up in and might further a larger self-overcoming, both
collaborating to it and making it our own. Nietzsche’s reasons for clinging to his
individualist virtues probably include his belief in the degeneracy of virtually all of those
around him and his conviction that degenerates can do nothing but decline. That is,
Nietzsche would not tell a strong, free-spirited person to join others since the others, as
the “sick herd,” could only infect him and spread their disease.\footnote{In the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche says, “The more normal sickness becomes among men…the
more we should protect the well-constituted from the worst kind of air, the air of the sickroom….The sick
represent the greatest danger for the healthy….That the sick should not make the healthy sick…should
surely be our supreme concern on earth; but this requires above all that the healthy should be segregated
from the sick, guarded even from the sight of the sick…” (III:14, pages 121 and 124). For references to the
“herd,” “rabble,” or “masses,” see Gay Science I:1, page 73; I:40, page 107; III:116, pages 174-75; III:149,
pages 195-96; III:174, page 202; IV:296, page 238; IV:328, page 258; V:368, page 326; Thus Spoke
Zarathustra I “Prologue” 5, page 130; I “Prologue” 9, page 135; I “On the Thousand and One Goals,” page
172; II “On the Rabble,” pages 208-211; Beyond Good and Evil II:44, page 54; III:49, page 64; III:61, page
Twilight of the Idols “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 38, page 541; Genealogy of Morals I:2, page 26;
I:9, pages 35-36; III:13, page 120; III:15, pages 125-128; III:18, pages 135-36; Ecce Homo “Why I am so
Wise” 8, page 234; “Why I am a Destiny” 4, page 330; “Why I am a Destiny” 5, page 330; and Antichrist
3, page 571.}

\footnote{Daybreak IV:323, page 160.}
for cleanliness which guesses how all contact, between man and man—‘in society’—
involved inevitable uncleanness. All community makes men—somehow, somewhere,
sometime ‘common.’”\textsuperscript{366} Explaining the damper that community puts on his
individuality, Nietzsche says, “[w]hen I am among the many I live as the many do, and I
do not think as I really think; after a time it always seems as though they want to banish
me from myself and rob me of my soul…”\textsuperscript{367}

We, as those taking up Nietzsche for our own purposes, need not follow him into
his hermetic individualism. If we find that vital communities \textit{do} exist, then self-
overcoming for “us” can be a communal rather than merely individualistic activity, even
while Nietzsche’s “we” keeps itself quarantined. The difference at this point is a simple
disagreement about whether vital communities exist. If they do, then joining them would
allow one better to pursue the very Nietzschean goal of vital self-overcoming. We must
also keep in mind that, as I argued in chapter three, we may not be able to assess with
quick accuracy the health of communities around us. Holding on to a philosophical
modesty and being open to finding vitality in surprising places, we can explore and get to
know various groups and communities rather then dismissing them with convictions of
their pathology.

As for the more sweeping claim that joining a community in general makes one
“common,” we can easily challenge Nietzsche. If one’s goal is to be a creative individual
growing and extending in many directions rather than conforming to a narrow set of
communal norms, then far better than living in solitude would be joining \textit{several}

\textsuperscript{366} \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} IX:283, page 226.
\textsuperscript{367} \textit{Daybreak} V:491, page 201.
communities, several different communities, each of which can show one something different from oneself. As Nietzsche himself says, “…one must be able to lose oneself occasionally if one wants to learn something from things different from oneself.”

Communal association with difference has much more potential to draw the self out of a narrow confinement than a life in isolation could do. Referring to healthy, strong men of the future like himself, Nietzsche speaks of “[w]hoever has a soul that craves to have experienced the whole range of values and desiderata to date…; whoever wants to know from the adventures of his own most authentic experience how a discoverer and conqueror of the ideal feels, and also an artist, a saint, a legislator, a sage, a scholar, a pious man….”

Imagine how many more ideals, roles, and feelings one could experience and understand after being a part of several communities—so many more than if one were to live as hermitically as possible. Thus, while Nietzsche admits that a larger self-overcoming can occur through an individual, we may deliberately set up this dynamic, seeking out and joining vital communities in order simultaneously to contribute to a larger self-overcoming and to fuel our own self-overcoming. (In chapter five, I will claim that, in some cases, even deliberately entering into a “sick” environment or engaging with a “sick” individual can end up being vitalizing and life-affirming rather than contagious and defeating; but for now, I am only advocating the joining of “healthy” communities.)


369 *Gay Science* V:382, page 346; also quoted in *Ecce Homo* “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” 2, page 298.
SNCC activist Sandra Cason\textsuperscript{370} was able to fuel her own self-overcoming through tapping into larger self-overcomings of the civil rights movement, by joining vital, transformative communities. Cason was one of the few white participants in SNCC, according to historian Wesley Hogan, who could handle race relations adeptly and really understand both the philosophy of nonviolence that characterized SNCC and what was at stake for the largely black community of SNCC. Hogan explains that several experiences prior to Cason’s participation in SNCC prepared her for SNCC’s work (and for work with SDS\textsuperscript{371} as well). As a student at the University of Texas, Cason was a member of an interracial, Christian community that lived together and participated in philosophical and theological seminars, including several on World War II and the problem of evil. Cason also held leadership roles in interracial YWCA groups in Texas and taught vacation bible school in largely black, urban areas in New York.

Needless to say, few young Americans had sustained such an intense experience—daily, for two or three years—of human relations work. Even fewer had engaged with members of another racial group. Cason’s efforts in this community [at the University] and her participation in the YWCA…gave her an unusually sophisticated understanding of the new interracial and intraracial terrain that was just becoming visible over the horizon. This understanding turned out to be extremely practical. Cason emerged from the Austin community well prepared to work within both the ‘act now’ environment of SNCC and the highly intellectualized, debate-dominated SDS.\textsuperscript{372}

Cason is a remarkable individual precisely because she did not attempt to accomplish either her work on herself or her social efforts alone—nor did she strive to be a heroic

\textsuperscript{370} Born Sandra Cason, she was known as “Casey” in the movement. She later married Tom Hayden—though they eventually divorced—and has used the name Casey Hayden to write about the movement (see Deep in our Hearts).

\textsuperscript{371} Students for a Democratic Society, a group operating more in the north and with a greater emphasis on theory than direct action in comparison to SNCC.

\textsuperscript{372} Hogan 98.
leader. Community was everything for her, she reports. She was not looking to be
known, to be an icon: “‘I didn’t want a place in the larger culture, I wanted a place in the
beloved community.’” She saw segregation as affecting her, limiting her: “‘...it just
seemed to me that the black community was morally superior.’” To not have access to
such a world was a restriction on her,” Hogan explains. “Segregation, [Cason] realized,
‘was about me.’” While being so personally invested in and loyal to an interracial, but
predominantly black, community, Cason nevertheless “…considered herself a guest in
the black community—that is, working under black leadership and within a black
framework.” She understood, in other words, issues of power in the changing
environment of U.S. race relations. Quoting Cason, Hogan explains the intimate
intertwining of the self-overcoming of society and Cason’s own self-overcoming: “Her
work in human relations ‘undermine[d] and defeat[ed] segregation on the personal level’
just as the wider civil rights movement crushed legal barriers that could defeat
segregation politically.” Especially for a white person interested in overcoming the
culturally constructed authority of whiteness and the narrowness of many white people’s
social awareness, tapping into communal self-overcoming is crucial to individual self-
overcoming.

An important dynamic of self-overcoming, or Nietzschean transformation more
generally, has to do with goals or aims—with the “forward-looking.” Nietzsche does not
discuss this in his remarks on self-overcoming, but presents it within the passage that led

373 Hogan 172.
374 Hogan 98.
375 Hogan 98
376 Hogan 104.
As we transform, we move toward “…something that we perhaps do not know or see as yet.” As a change begins, in other words, we may not realize it is happening; when we do realize it, we may still not see just where it is going, where we’ll end up, or what we’ll end up being. Nietzsche is here touching upon a critique of goals and hinting at a new understanding of how it is we forecast and plan our futures. It is not that Nietzsche thinks aiming for a goal is pointless; nor does he claim that it makes no difference toward which ends we aim. In fact, his philosophy is fundamentally future-oriented, looking ahead with a sense of rich possibility toward the dawn of a greater human type. He says that those who may be the bridge to this future are in need of “a new goal,” “a great goal”377; and Nietzsche defines his “formula of happiness” as “…a Yes, a No, a straight line, a goal.”378 However, Nietzsche also redefines the status and role of a goal (or purpose, aim, end, telos, etc.), usurping the particular power we tend to grant it. As we will see in what follows, he does this by describing ends as often unseen, by showing the transmutation of purposes, and by substituting “dammed-up energy” for “will power.”

As we transform, Nietzsche says, we are stretching out toward something, even if we do not know what. A transformation, in other words, is not random; rather, it is a trajectory, it is growing and expanding in some direction. But the end, telos, or goal may be hazy. We may be directed by something like an end, but we are not consciously aware of it. We may experience ourselves moving in some direction without knowing quite

where we’re headed. At its beginning, a transformation often does not seem to be a progression toward a goal at all, but simply a negation—*not* this, *away from* that—and gradually, through the negation, we come to see an affirmation. We then, at this late stage, both observe ourselves moving and consciously will ourselves to move not only away from something, but also toward something new.

After we begin to see an affirmation and a goal, we are not, despite Nietzsche’s “formula of happiness” locked into “a straight line.” The goals and purposes of a transformation undergo change too. Whether we are discussing “[t]he ‘evolution’ of a thing, a custom, [or] an organ…,” we are not looking at a simple and steady “…*progressus* toward a goal…” but rather a tumultuous dance of forces, trajectories, and paths that are defined by a multitude of purposes. “The form is fluid, but the ‘meaning’ is even more so.”379

As we move toward a goal, we see and know more, and the shortcomings of the goal become apparent—so we move in a different direction. We can also get side-tracked, thinking we’re going in the right direction to accomplish our goals, but then realizing we’ve been going about it all wrong. In these “errors,” there is great potential for opening up new possibilities, revealing new goals.

So, Nietzsche’s “straight line” is probably more of a curved, even spiraling line, or “a” line that diverges, fractures, leaps, and is occasionally joined by or overtaken by foreign lines. Never denying his strong will in pursuit of his goal of self-overcoming, Nietzsche says, “…whoever guesses what is my will should also guess on what *crooked*
paths it must proceed.”

Though this revised description of Nietzsche’s path may sound like a directionless wandering (which may explain why Nietzsche preferred to describe his forward momentum as “a straight line”), it can be just as energetic a stride—or perhaps more so—toward the future; it is simply less orderly and constricted. Describing the evolution of meaning and purpose, Nietzsche says:

…the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it….

In other words, even when we do pursue specific goals, they will likely change before we reach them—and to refuse to let them mutate would only be to constrain our own vital possibilities.

We can see the winding path of self-overcoming and the self-overcoming of the goals of transformation in the story of Jessie Ames, a white woman who founded the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching in 1930. Born in 1883, Ames “suffered deeply from a lack of self-confidence,” as her parents clearly favored her younger sister. “Fearful of spinsterhood,” Ames married a man she did not particularly love who spent most of his time in South America. When he died not long after, Ames found herself at age 31 needing to support herself and three children. She began work, in

380 Thus Spoke Zarathustra II “On Self-Overcoming,” page 227. In his interpretation of this passage, Gooding-Williams explains, “…life is a ‘becoming’ that proceeds on crooked and self-contradictory paths. When life goes-under and overcomes itself, Zarathustra suggests, it shows itself to be something other than the ‘smooth’ and static mirror that the wisest identify as life. Indeed, life that overcomes itself has more the look of an endlessly rotating funhouse mirror, a moving looking glass of crooked surfaces that produces ever-changing and contradictory appearances of the things it reflects” (174).

381 Genealogy of Morals II:12, page 77, emphasis altered. This passage goes on to give change an aggressive, violent tenor—a matter of forces “subduing” and “becoming master.” I will address this tendency of Nietzsche’s to equate change with violence in chapter five.
other words, out of necessity. As one among a fairly small number of working women, Ames became interested in women’s rights and women’s suffrage. It was through the Texas League of Women Voters that Ames became active in politics. When her feminist work revealed to her the impossibility of fighting politically in terms of gender while ignoring race, Ames enrolled in college courses on race and race-relations. Her anti-lynching organization, which relied on Ames’ own research on lynchings, fought against the justification of lynching as protection of southern women. So, Ames did not fall directly into anti-racism at a young age; it was, rather, first through economic necessity, then through women’s rights, and finally through a college education that Ames eventually found herself ready to research lynchings and dedicated to anti-racism. As one can imagine, Ames, by this time, had found her way to be effective in the world and no longer suffered from a lack of self-confidence. Unfortunately, Ames’ activist career came to an end due to her own failure to include black people in her organizations, to cooperate with largely black organizations, and to respect black leadership. “Though outraged by racially motivated violence, Ames failed to collaborate with black reformers…” Thus, this example further shows that there is no final goal that all white people undergoing transformation will necessary reach—or even set as a goal. As self-overcoming does not entail a singular logic, there are multiple paths, and there are various goals, beyond which are more goals, beyond which are more goals—and never a final resting point signaling the successful completion of self-overcoming. As there is no singular path or final resting place, there is also no guarantee at the beginning of

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382 Brinkley 12-14.  
383 Brinkley 15.
transformation against the grain of race-related problems that one will come out the other side a fully enlightened and powerfully effective social activist.

While many of us tend to think of a goal as that which energizes the movement toward it (so that one cannot hope to succeed in life without a firm practice of setting and pursuing goals), Nietzsche tells us that we are attributing far too much to a goal (and to our supposed “will power” that presumably drives us to that goal). To use one of Nietzsche’s favorite metaphors, the “tensed bow,”\textsuperscript{384} we are like archers who notice only the target and our own focused eyes, while thinking nothing of the great energy built up in the tension of the bow and bowstring, and even the arm and shoulder that hold it taut. In doing so, we mistakenly take the target to be responsible for the flight of the arrow.

As Nietzsche explains:

\begin{quote}
I have learned to distinguish the cause of acting from the cause of acting in a particular way, in a particular direction, with a particular goal. The first kind of cause is a quantum of dammed-up energy that is waiting to be used up somehow, for something, while the second kind is, compared to this energy, something quite insignificant, for the most part a little accident in accordance with which this quantum ‘discharges’ itself in one particular way—a match versus a ton of powder. Among these little accidents and ‘matches’ I include so-called ‘purposes’ as well as the even much more so-called ‘vocations’: They are relatively random, arbitrary, almost indifferent in relation to the tremendous quantum of energy that presses, as I have said, to be used up somehow. The usual view is different: People are accustomed to consider the goal (purposes, vocations, etc.) as the driving force…; but it is merely the directing force—one has mistaken the helmsman for the steam.\textsuperscript{385}
\end{quote}

Nietzsche goes on to say that in some cases, there may be no “helmsman” at all—or, more accurately, that the “helmsman” may be merely a fiction. In this case, the “ship” is not guided according to a human’s will, but “…is following the current into which it has

\textsuperscript{384} For example, see *Beyond Good and Evil* Preface, pages 2-3 and *Genealogy of Morals* I:12, page 44.  
\textsuperscript{385} *The Gay Science* V:360, pages 315-16.
entered accidentally.”386 In this case, there is no far-off goal toward which a transformation is headed, but only the flow of the transformation itself. In refocusing importance from the “match” or the “helmsman” to the “ton of powder” or the “current,” Nietzsche is revealing the significance of dammed-up energy generated by bodily, psychological, and social health. In the absence of the “driving force”—that is, the “quantum of energy” ready to press forward into the future—the “directing force”—that is, the goal—has nothing to direct. Hence, we can set as many goals as we like, and order ourselves to stick to them, but if we harbor in our bodies, psyches, or “souls” impeding needs, injuries, or even lethargy, the goals and our self-commands will do virtually nothing for us.

So, while Nietzsche in some places stresses the importance of “great goals” for overcoming humanity as it is, in other places, he claims that goals are no more than “little accidents.” Bringing these two positions together, we can conclude that, for Nietzsche, the orientation of one’s energies does indeed matter, but also that one’s ends are often more implicit (the direction in which one is moving) than explicit (the specific point at which one hopes to arrive); that orientation alters and goals evolve as one travels; and that, in the absence of a driving force (energies generated within a healthy self), a directing force (a goal or purpose) has nothing to direct. Nietzsche’s redescription of the roles and powers of goals calls attention to the taut bow and the flexed arm and shoulder, which we are likely to overlook due to our concern with the target and our focused eyes.

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386 *The Gay Science* V:360, pages 315-316.
In breaking the false dichotomy of goal-directed activity versus aimless wandering by describing transformation as having direction, a trajectory, but an end that may be unseen, may change as one goes along, and is powerless to motivate without the energy and health that moves one toward a goal, Nietzsche helps us understand the biographies of many white people who eventually end up with an awareness of white privilege and racial injustice and a commitment to work against them. For example, Chris Shuey, a white man who works as an Environmental Health Specialist advocating for American Indian communities in the Southwest, explains that it was not a prior ideological conviction about Indian-U.S. relations that led him into this work. His interaction with Indian communities began when he was working as a reporter covering a proposed reservoir to be built on Indian land.

I was...just trying to be a dutiful reporter. I believed that the major metropolitan newspapers were giving short shrift to the Indian side of the story. So it really wasn’t politics that was initially driving the story for me; I just wanted to report the other side. / But that started an educational process for me and began to help me understand why there wasn’t an automatic trust between Indian people and white people. Over and over again I have had to learn about this. It’s taken me years and years of work, with all kinds of people of color and communities, for me to understand the distrust that people of color carry today, and will always carry, because their dealings with the white dominant culture over the last five hundred years.\footnote{White Men Challenging Racism, ed. Thompson et al, 267.}

Shuey was led into Indian communities, in other words, by purposes other than what has kept him there. His growing interaction with these communities created a new awareness, new commitments and convictions, a new life—and, of course, new goals.

Jason Wallach, an activist in Mexico and the U.S., reports an even less considered entrance into activism. Though he had participated in protests before, it was one
particular event that really established his commitment. Wallach was sitting in a bar one day, and he was bored. So when someone burst into the bar and announced that the organization Earth First! needed people to go help with a protest against logging on land sacred to Indian communities, Wallach decided to jump in the guy’s van and go along.

Before I knew it—I had never made a conscious decision that this is what I was going to do….—I found myself on a mountainside in the middle of Oregon, putting dead wood in the middle of the road and digging up the road as a barricade to block the logging trucks. I remember it being pouring rain, with me having no rain gear, nothing but the clothes that I had brought on my back.  

Eventually the Indians and environmentalists who were present had a confrontation with police. As things escalated, Wallach reflects, “I found myself in this surreal place. Twelve hours before I was in a bar, and it wasn’t luck and it wasn’t coincidence that I was there; it was a very special thing that I was there.”  

When the police cuffed him, he collapsed and let his weight fall to the ground (a common practice in the tradition of nonviolent protests). The police dragged him through the mud toward their vehicles. In the midst of this, Wallach recounts,

I was thinking to myself, “I should be the most miserable person on earth. I’m being arrested; I’m handcuffed; these guys are wrenching my arms behind my back; I’m freezing. But I feel like I’m exactly where I should be and want to be.” Calvin, the guy who had offered them [the police] the pipe [as a sign of respect for the land], was standing nearby. He looked down at me, I looked up at him, and he says to the cops, “That’s the most beautiful man I’ve ever seen in my life.” When he said that, this energy shot through me. It was electrifying. The cops threw me into their van, and I just lay there shivering. Fortunately the next person they arrested was this big Indian woman, and I swear it was her body warmth that kept me from getting hypothermia.

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Wallach started out in a bar feeling bored. Yet clearly within him was an energy that was growing and pushing outward but had not yet found its direction. He had what Nietzsche called the “powder,” but not yet the “match.” But when a source of ignition came, he was ready for it. Wallach explains how the direction of his life changed after this event:

That experience still has a huge impact on me. Just telling the story, I get shivers up my spine. I’m not so egotistical as to think that I’m the most beautiful man that Calvin’s ever seen; the intent of his comment was to challenge power at that moment. But what I saw was that the powers that be in this country are willing to do anything and put anyone out of their way in defense of this racist, oppressive system that has really scourged this land for more than five hundred years now. At that moment, we were denying the ability of that system to continue to do what it is designed to do. I remain very committed to acting like that.\textsuperscript{391}

This deeply meaningful and influential experience is something that Wallach fell into almost accidentally—but not purely accidentally, for he was ready for something like this, something within him was searching for it. Reflecting on this unplanned path, Wallach says, “[y]ou don’t know that you’re going to be in a certain place, but all of a sudden you find yourself there and ask, ‘Wow, how did I get here?’ You aim toward something, but you don’t know what you’re headed toward. You allow yourself to go in that direction.”\textsuperscript{392}

The Nietzschean picture of transformation I have provided (built up from the core of “self-overcoming”) stands in opposition to popular understandings of change as progress. While progress is guided by an idea—namely, what is to be accomplished—Nietzschean transformation is motivated by questions, driven by curiosity, and shaped by

\textsuperscript{392} White Men Challenging Racism, ed. Thompson et al, 317.
exploration. Progress is carefully planned while Nietzschean transformation is experimental. Projects carried out in the name of progress are usually divided into two stages—first the investigating, deciding, and planning phase, then the execution—whereas Nietzschean transformation involves continual reevaluation which means new ideas are constantly generated, ideas that could not have emerged if one had not already begun transforming. While progress is exemplified by steady, linear movement toward the established end, Nietzschean transformation may wander, may involve various paths or trajectories, may jump from here to there, may pursue something for a time and then give it up, may follow paths toward ends that wind away toward different ends, may meet swells and plateaus, and may fall away from an end instead of moving toward it without necessarily thwarting transformation. Finally, Nietzschean transformation is a continual revaluation of values; just as goals are themselves overcome, so are one’s specific criteria of evaluation. This means that we have no static criteria by which to judge and measure transformation, which in turn means that we cannot chart a steadily improving path to “the good” or to some final perfection. The movement of progress, in contrast, requires a single evaluative framework capable of showing clear improvement (or failure to improve). Progress may indeed be a more orderly movement than Nietzschean transformation, but Nietzschean transformation may be more profound. “Like trees we grow…not in one place only but everywhere, not in one direction but equally upward and outward and inward and downward; our energy is at work simultaneously in the trunk, branches, and roots…”393

393 Gay Science V:371, pages 331-332.
As the Nietzsche passage leading this chapter says, when a person transforms, “…vital energies…are growing and shedding a skin.” Exactly what Nietzsche means by “vital energies” is difficult to say since the term defies the categorization of the self into thought, body, and emotion. It is a general term indicating the dynamism of a self, a term that reunites humans with other living (“vital”) things. It indicates Nietzsche’s refusal to view humans as most essentially rational creatures who organize (by means of thought) and control (by means of will) all “lesser” forces within them. Vital energies are intrinsic to all living things, but wax and wane depending on the health of the organism. At its most vital, an organism changes shape continually, frequently needing new “skins.” As an organism declines, it may need a hardened and reinforced shell rather than a new skin—a more vehement and unyielding opinion rather than a new idea. When we change through vital growth, our opinions don’t fit anymore, and so we shed them, and new opinions, like a fresh new skin, reveal themselves. Our new skins “belong” to our new bodies, our new selves. Breaking through a hardened and reinforced shell is, of course, difficult—which means in more concrete terms that if one’s beliefs have been used defensively for some time, his potential transformation has a lot to overcome.

\[394\] The phrase in German is: “…lebendige treibende Kräfte in uns da sind, welche eine Rinde abstossen.” A very literal translation would be: “living (vital, energetic), growing (driving, propelling) powers that exist in us which shed their bark.” “Treibende” (driving or propelling), in the context of plant growth, can mean the spouting of a seed or the leafing out of a tree. The English translator may have chosen the non-literal translation “skin” rather than the literal “bark” (Rinde can also be the crust of bread or the rind of cheese, but not skin) because not many plants actually shed bark as they grow. In my discussions, I refer to a snake shedding its skin (rather than a tree shedding its bark), a more accessible metaphor in my view.
This vital energy is palpable in the biographies of many white, anti-racist activists. For example, Bonnie Kerness speaks of her entrance (in the 1960s) into anti-racist activism almost as a matter of energies determined to grow but too confined within the shell of her home: "'[at the age of 19 to 20,] I was…moving instinctively, less out of an intellectual desire to help my fellow man than just an instinct that I needed to move away from my home to grow. Away from my childhood to grow. Just the affirmation does wonders to the internal psyche.'"  

Writing about Kerness, Becky Thompson attributes Kerness’ lifelong dedication to an energy: “Her ability to work consistently as an activist in the 1970s and 1980s despite the isolation she and many other activists faced due to the country’s turn to the right also speaks to the energy and life force nurtured during the civil rights years.” Growth of vital energies and self-change can be stimulated in various ways. In some cases, vital energies need a supportive environment in order to grow—an environment that nourishes and heals. But in other cases, vital energies need some degree of challenge and hardship to illicit a response and encourage them to grow in new directions. No formula can determine to what degree any one person needs nourishment and to what degree challenge. However, understanding that both are necessary to growth, we can pay attention to them, look for potential in both cases, and experiment with both.

Like challenge and hardship, destruction and loss—not only creation and gain—are aspects of transformation. Old structures of the self need to be broken down in order for energies to redirect themselves or for new energies to emerge. Ofelia Schutte

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396 Thompson 6.
explains the point like this: “...the formula ‘self-overcoming’ captures the Dionysian unity of creation-in-destruction and of destruction-in-creation. The self is that which creates and that which is destroyed. Indeed, it is that which destroys itself in order to create something beyond itself.”

Rigid structures of the self must be broken down so that new pathways can be established. Nietzsche is particularly emphatic about this point in discussing a change in a person or culture’s highest ideals: “…whoever wants to be a creator in good and evil, must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the greatest goodness: but this is—being creative.”

To create a new “good,” a new ideal, a new self, one must turn against and undermine former “goods,” ideals, and selves. As we saw in chapter three, Nietzsche identifies “evil” as the negative pole of resentful moralities which he sees prevailing in his time. In his revaluation of values, Nietzsche often embraces the beliefs and actions and values that the prevailing morality considers evil. In celebrating what is “evil,” Nietzsche sometimes seems to be cashing in on shock value, but also uses the term to make an important philosophical point about the revaluation of values: if one is stepping outside of social moral norms in an attempt to revalue values and create a “new tablet of values,” he will be considered “evil” according to the standards of the prevailing system of values. “What is new...is

397 Beyond Nihilism 33.
398 Ecce Homo “Why I am a Destiny” 2, page 327; Nietzsche is loosely quoting his Thus Spoke Zarathustra II “On Self-Overcoming,” page 228. See also Genealogy of Morals II:24, page 95, and Thus Spoke Zarathustra I “On the Thousand and One Goals,” page 171. Gooding-Williams emphasizes the close relationship between self-overcoming and “revaluation”: “…Zarathustra argues that to overcome man is to liberate him from Christian-Platonic values and to transform him…[H]e equates the process by which selves overcome themselves with the destruction of old values and the creation of new ones....[Zarathustra] seem[s] to identify value-change with self-change and suggest that to change values is to remake the self by fixing anew the value of the self’s already valued characteristics. To revalue these characteristics is, in Zarathustra’s view, to produce a new self with new virtues and thus new bodily states of elevation” (119).
always evil, being that which wants to conquer and overthrow the old boundary markers and the old pieties….”

In the extreme case of avowed racists, we can clearly see that from this point of view, a white person attempting to overcome racism is clearly doing something wrong, something of which these white racists disapprove. According to their system of values, this anti-racist individual is immoral or “evil.” But even among white people who profess more liberal viewpoints (“well-meaning” whites or “colorblind” whites), those activists who “go too far” are scorned. They exceed proper decorum and stir up trouble. They may be accused of unethically creating problems where none exist. They may be making the moral mistake of “seeing” race when they are supposed to be good, colorblind liberals. They may be supporting reverse racism in the eyes of whites supposedly committed to neutrality in terms of race. They may be seen as harming white people, being disrespectful, even coming down on victims. They may be demonized for criticizing individuals, organizations, or corporations who claim to uphold ideals of justice. After all, not many people covering over their racism or participation in white privilege want it to be exposed, and if it is, they may well react by trying to cast the accuser as the immoral one. When threatened with the loss of white privilege, even those white people who won’t admit to any racist convictions may react with daunting displays of power and even violence. So, while it may seem too melodramatic to use the religious terminology of “evil” in reference to those combating racism and white privilege, from certain perspectives, such individuals are indeed doing something very wrong, something

399 Gay Science 1:4, page 79. For other passages on the contingency of good and evil, see Daybreak 1:38, page 26, and 1:76, page 45.
that should not be done. From the point of view of resisters, of course, the prevailing social morality needs to be violated, and a major goal in their transgressions is to revalue that entire system of values.

Many white anti-racists experience the destruction and loss in transformation as alienation from family or community who disapprove of their activities and lifestyles. Joan Browning, for example, was cut off from her family because of their moral disapproval of her activist work in the 1960s. She says, decades later, “[b]eing ‘written out of my family’ has scarred and shaped my life ever since.”

Despite the enormous gains of the transformation she underwent, the pain of what was lost when she stepped over into “evil” remains with her. Discussing tangled dynamics of loss and gain, reward and censure, Jim Hansen says:

It’s very easy to surround yourself with people that you’re comfortable with. They’ll just reinforce what a great guy you are all the time, and you’ll start to believe it. But you’ve got to break through that and constantly be building new relationships with people who will question that leadership and will challenge the perspective of that inner circle and make you feel uncomfortable. Mostly you have to struggle with that inner circle, who doesn’t want that to happen.

While it may seem that, as overt racism has declined, those who continue to work against racism and white privilege will appear more acceptable to society, the opposite can sometimes occur. As James Loewen explains, “Precisely because the causes of racial inequality are now less visible, those who combat them may appear less reasonable” — and less appropriate morally speaking.

400 “Shiloh Witness” in Deep in our Hearts,” 71.
White people also experience self-alienation as they come to understand what their white identity means. Unable to step outside of whiteness, yet recognizing what a white identity entails in a white supremacist society, many people go through a loss of self-respect. As Robert Jensen expresses, “Part of why I hate part of myself is simple: I can feel the lingering traces of racism in my own body.”

While mainstream society may look at one’s new self as evil, one may, in reverse, come to see her old self (pieces of which inevitably linger) as evil. A loss of moral certitude (self-justification), a loss of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and alienation from family and community may all be among the difficult aspects of “destruction” in self-overcoming. The risk of an ultimately enervating loss is always present in transformation, but, knowing that we must let some parts of ourselves go as we grow and change, we can be less despairing and more open to the possibility of loss as a part of growth.

While destruction and loss are indeed very difficult experiences, they open up the space for creativity and profound transformation. As Pratt says (as we saw at the beginning of this chapter), “…the old constriction is sloughed off with difficulty, but there is…an expansion, some growth, and some reward for struggle and curiosity.”

While recognizing destruction and loss as aspects of transformation, Nietzsche says that the sometimes difficult negations are for the sake of affirmations: “[w]e negate and must negate because something in us wants to live and affirm…. ” When we hold on desperately to convictions, we are attempting to confine ourselves within skins that have grown too tight—it is an attempt to halt the vital energies that are pushing ever into new

403 “Black and White” 145.
directions. In order to let that growth free, we have to go through the often difficult process of shedding a skin—that is, of negating what we once loved as a truth. This process can be a painful separation, but ultimately leads to an exciting expansion and growth.\(^{404}\)

As white people transform, there is much they must negate in order to affirm something else; the path to a joyful anti-racism travels through many distressing transitions. In her entrance into anti-racist activism, Anne Braden’s “…motives were not sympathetic or other-directed as much as they involved curing what felt like a sickness inside her.”\(^{405}\) Although Braden, in her search for a cure for this sickness, never cut off contact with her parents despite their strong disapproval of her, she did have to negate a great deal of her upbringing and her past in order to resist racism, a process which she found very difficult but ultimately life-affirming. As biographer Catherine Fosl explains, Braden “…underwent a personal and political transformation…that she later described as ‘turning myself inside out.’” Looking back, Braden said, “‘I had come to terms with the fact that my whole society—one that had been very good to me—my family, friends, the people I loved and never stopped loving—were just plain wrong—wrong on race. It’s a searingly painful process, but it’s not destructive, because once you do it, you are free.’”\(^{406}\) It is a negation, in other words, for the sake of an affirmation. After the difficulty comes the joy. Nietzsche describes the feeling that comes with newly opened


\(^{405}\) Fosl 108.

\(^{406}\) Fosl 108.
horizons: “…we philosophers and ‘free spirits’ feel, when we hear the news that ‘the old god is dead,’ as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation….[T]he sea, our sea, lies open again….”

In seeing how a negation makes the space for a creative affirmation, we have arrived at the cusp of Nietzsche’s understanding of health and vitality, the topic of the following chapter. We will there see what constitutes health and vitality and will gain a view of the elastic, affirmative, creative personality that is ripe for Nietzschean transformations.

Conclusion

From a Nietzschean point of view, transformation is less about arguments and evidence than about “vital energies,” these nebulous forces of a bodily, psychological, cognitive, and social self that Nietzsche cannot define precisely but that determine the health (or sickness) of the self. It is not a “mind” that is changing itself (nor a mind that is changing the whole person), but a self and a life that are enacting and undergoing transformation. What manifests as a collapse of a conviction is actually the collapse of a self and a life. The “unreason” that crawls out of the debris is a rejected self and life, a self and life overcome. A person sheds an opinion or redefines a goal because the opinion or goal does not fit her self and her life anymore; she does not alter her self to fit into a new opinion or goal. We see this in the personal histories of white people who

have made significant changes in their relations to their racialized society: these changes are not a result of sitting in one’s Cartesian armchair and thinking carefully through arguments about race. Persuasive arguments are only those that engage with a changing life, a changing sensibility, changing affects, a changing body.

After having looked at transformation against the grain of race-related problems through a Nietzschean lens, what have we gained? Taking a Nietzschean approach to transformation does not give formulaic answers and clear instructions for how to proceed, does not promise efficiency and order; however, it does significantly change our orientation in our efforts to change ourselves or encourage others’ change—and this shift in orientation is necessary if we wish to address the subject of transformation as described by Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones. With a view of Nietzschean transformation before us, we do not seek more accurate beliefs, but seek to create and promote a new form of life, finding our efficacy more and more in resistance to racism and white privilege and less and less in complicity. We create an efficacy—in alliance with others—rather than accepting the path that has already been cleared. Treating each new thought, each new sentiment, each new habit as a “step,” we dare ourselves to overcome what we are, grateful for contradictions, turning on ourselves with curiosity and openness. We negate and we create with our bodies and our affects as well as our intellect, and we develop with all three a historical and psychological understanding of ourselves, others, and our societies rather than adopting an abstract ideology. Instead of viewing ourselves or others strictly or primarily on the level of professed beliefs and the arguments purportedly supporting them, we look at ourselves and others in terms of needs, strengths and weaknesses, desires, and the overall spiritual, affective, and bodily
energy of the self. This does not mean that we ignore beliefs and reasoning—instead, we look at them as symptoms that can offer valuable insight, if not clear-cut diagnoses, into one’s vital energies and potential for growth and change. Rather than relying solely or primarily on arguing and attacking lines of reasoning, then, we can imaginatively consider possibilities for nourishment of and challenge to the self, being sensitive to wounds, illnesses, and tender spots while simultaneously seeking out dormant or latent energies that could withstand discomforting and disconcerting challenge. As we will see in chapter five, this Nietzschean orientation clears the way for an understanding of transformation against the grain of race-related problems as a vibrant, creative activity of growth rather than a moral duty pushed grudgingly forward by guilt.
CHAPTER FIVE

A New Normativity: Health and Vitality

Several threads in previous chapters have led us up to an account of health and vitality—in particular, the critique of morality in chapter three and the account of transformation, especially the spirit of transformation, in chapter four. To review, I argued in chapter three that guilt is generally an unhelpful force in anti-racist change. As Nietzsche claims (in a more general context), guilt—or the bad conscience—can sap the energy from a person, leaving one ill-prepared to work for change. My goal in this chapter, then, is to develop a normative framework for transformation that fosters energy for personal change and the strength needed for social change. Rejecting moralities caught up in resentment, whether resentment of the other or of oneself, and moralities that use guilt as a force to constrain the self or others according to a supposedly universal ideal, Nietzsche points us instead toward a normativity that emphasizes creativity and experimentation as one cultivates vitality and reaches beyond oneself.

In the Nietzschean account of transformation in chapter four, we saw that goals, aims, and purposes are insignificant in the absence of the energy of a healthy self. This “vital energy” is a bodily, psychological, affective, intellectual, and social energy. As these energies grow within us, we shed our old skins and fresh skins appear again and again. After the often difficult event of shedding, we experience “…an expansion, some
growth, and some reward for struggle and curiosity.” Communicating the joy and excitement of growth and change, Nietzsche says that when a new horizon opens before us, “…our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation…” A healthy self may have much to negate, but negation is done so that one may then create and affirm.

Pulling these threads together in this chapter, I develop a Nietzschean normativity in terms of health, vitality, and “the expansive self” that can guide transformation against the grain of race-related problems and take the place of a potentially resentful moral framework dependent on concepts of guilt, responsibility, and atonement. I present transformation in a spirit of curiosity and joyfulness rather than as the obligation to answer to white guilt, as not a turning in on oneself but a growth beyond oneself, as not a piecemeal attack on the symptoms of white privilege but an openness to a deeper transformation. After first explaining what Nietzsche means by “health” or “vitality” and indicating where I depart from him, I show how viewing transformation through the lens of health and vitality creates a more effective and desirable account of transformation in the context of white people and race. Having a grasp of vitality, we can see what sort of self this Nietzschean normativity aims toward. Since Nietzsche and I disagree on how vitality is best fostered, our ideals will not be identical, though the “expansive self” I advocate is derived from a Nietzschean description of the ideal self.

409 Gay Science V:343, page 280.
Health and Vitality

Because Nietzsche is so strident in his critique of morality and even goes so far as to call himself an “immoralist,” many assume that he dispenses entirely with normativity, and many would therefore question the statement that Nietzsche seeks an alternative philosophy of “shoulds.” But this is a mischaracterization of his view. Nietzsche indeed wishes to overcome the prevailing morality—the morality he sees all around him in popular culture and in the mainstream of philosophy—but simultaneously seeks to find a conceptual space between moral objectivity, on the one hand, and the complete collapse of normativity into relativism, on the other. Criticizing those who see no options beyond this binary, Nietzsche says of “historians of morality,”

[t]heir usual mistaken premise is that they affirm some consensus of the nations, at least of tame nations, concerning certain principles of morals, and then they infer from this that these principles must be unconditionally binding also for you and me; or, conversely, they see the truth that among different nations moral valuations are necessarily different and then infer from this that no morality is at all binding. Both procedures are equally childish. ⁴¹⁰

Nietzsche attempts a revaluation of values,⁴¹¹ not a jettisoning of values. The latter, in fact, would not even be possible: “…life itself forces us to posit values; life itself values through us when we posit values.”⁴¹² As Nietzsche’s Zarathustra proclaims, “…all of life

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⁴¹² *Twilight of the Idols* “Morality as Anti-Nature” 5, page 490.
is a dispute over taste and tasting. Taste—that is at the same time weight and scales and weigher; and woe unto all the living that would live without disputes over weight and scales and weighers!"  

While moralities of good and evil, according to Nietzsche, rest heavily on using guilt to discipline people into an archetypal form and chastising and punishing them for their deviations, Nietzsche urges people to seek and cultivate the resources, practices, and environments that will encourage and energize their creative potential. Showing the difference between emphasizing negation primarily and emphasizing affirmation primarily, Nietzsche says:

At bottom I abhor all those moralities which say: ‘Do not do this! Renounce!…’ But I am well disposed toward those moralities which goad me to do something and do it again, from morning till evening, and then to dream of it at night, and to think of nothing except doing this well, as well as I alone can do it. When one lives like that, one thing after another that simply does not belong to such a life drops off. Without hatred or aversion one sees this take its leave today and that tomorrow, like yellow leaves that any slight stirring of the air takes off a tree. He may not even notice that it takes its leave; for his eye is riveted to his goal—forward, not sideward, backward, downward. What we do should determine what we forego; by doing we forego—that is how I like it, that is my \textit{placitum} [principle]. But I do not wish to strive with open eyes for my own impoverishment; I do not like negative virtues—virtues whose very essence it is to negate and deny oneself something.

Nietzsche’s philosophy is certainly not without self-discipline\textsuperscript{415} and not without negation, but both operate in service to affirmation, creativity, and an as-yet-to-be-determined goal. In place of the turning in on oneself in acts of surveillance and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[413] \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra} “On Those Who are Sublime,” page 229.
\item[414] \textit{Gay Science} IV:304, page 244.
\item[415] Nietzsche seeks to create a “new concept of self-discipline” and says that to prepare the way for the “new philosophers” of the future, we need to “…prepare great ventures and over-all attempts of discipline and cultivation…” (\textit{Ecce Homo} “The Untimely Ones” 3, page 280, and \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} V:203, page 117). Furthermore, one of the German terms translated as “self-overcoming” has connotations of self-discipline (see chapter four).
\end{footnotes}
constraining discipline, Nietzsche urges individuals to release their potential and to look beyond themselves in search of new, creative possibilities. Explaining the constraint on creative potential that excess discipline enacts, Nietzsche says:

Those moralists who command man first of all and above all to gain control of himself thus afflict him with a peculiar disease; namely, a constant irritability in the face of all natural stirrings and inclinations—as it were, a kind of itching. Whatever may henceforth push, pull, attract, or impel such an irritable person from inside or outside, it will always seem to him as if his self-control were endangered. No longer may he entrust himself to any instinct or free wingbeat; he stands in a fixed position with a gesture that wards off, armed against himself, with sharp and mistrustful eyes—the eternal guardian of his castle, since he has turned himself into a castle. Of course, he can achieve greatness this way. But he has certainly become insufferable for others, difficult for himself, and impoverished and cut off from the most beautiful fortuities of his soul. Also from all further instruction. For one must be able to lose oneself occasionally if one wants to learn something from things different from oneself.\textsuperscript{416}

While excessive self-control, in other words, may help one achieve an already established form, a transformation beyond oneself into a shape not yet seen or known may requires a loosening of constraints. One then experiments, cultivates energy, and grows upward and outward, instead of pushing and pruning oneself according to a clearly envisioned ideal.

In trying to explain this difference between life-affirming and nihilistic moralities, Nietzsche sometimes refers to “natural” and “anti-natural” moralities:

Every naturalism in morality—that is, every healthy morality—is dominated by an instinct of life; some commandment of life is fulfilled by a determinate canon of ‘shalt’ and ‘shalt not’; some inhibition and hostile element on the path of life is thus removed. Anti-natural morality—that is, almost every morality which has so far been taught, revered, and preached—turns, conversely, against the instincts of life: it is condemnation of these instincts, now secret, now outspoken and impudent.\textsuperscript{417}

\textsuperscript{416} Gay Science IV:305, pages 244-45.
\textsuperscript{417} Twilight of the Idols “Morality as Anti-Nature” 4, pages 489-90.
Again we see Nietzsche’s distinction between valuations that free up energies and fuel growth and valuations that seek refinement toward an ideal by means of restriction and inhibition. While Nietzsche may risk falling into a binary here, if we keep in mind the usefulness of some discipline, some cultivation, some constraint, some pruning—even as a way of supporting and encouraging growth—we can use Nietzsche’s distinction as a way of valuing that encourages an expansion beyond oneself and that is ready to question rather than conform to popular ideals. As an alternative conception of normativity arises out of Nietzsche’s contrast between nihilistic and life-affirming moralities, he begins to speak of “shoulds” in terms of health and vitality.

Nietzsche speaks frequently of “health”\(^{418}\) and “vitality”\(^{419}\) (or “vital energies”\(^{420}\)) but nowhere explains just what health and vitality are. He relies on our common understanding of physical health and biological growth to give his concept substance. Drawing on this common understanding, we could say that health includes an absence of major illness or injury; abilities and capacities (bodily, cognitive, psychological, emotional, communicative, etc.); strength and endurance (so that one may prevail against a variety hardships); flexibility; the resources to fight illness or injury and recover;

\(^{418}\) For example, see *Gay Science* “Preface to the Second Edition” 2, pages 32-35; *Gay Science* V:382, page 346; *Genealogy of Morals* II:24, page 96; *Ecce Homo* “Why I am so Wise” 1-2, pages 223-25; *Ecce Homo* “Why I am so Clever” 10, page 257; *Ecce Homo* “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” 1, page 298. The German is Gesundheit.

\(^{419}\) For example, see *Twilight of the Idols* “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 37, pages 538-39, and *Ecce Homo* “Why I am so Wise” 1, pages 222-23. The German is usually Vitalität, but occasionally Lebenskraft, which could be translated as “life force.”

\(^{420}\) For example, see *The Gay Science* IV:307, page 246, and *Genealogy of Morals* II:14, pages 81-82. The German in the latter passage is Energie, and in the former is lebendige Kräfte, which again is close to “life force”—lebendige could be “living,” “energetic,” or “vital,” and Kräfte could be “powers,” “forces,” or “energies.”
neither extreme anxiety nor lethargy; stimulating, nurturing, and non-traumatic interaction with one’s many environments; the creative independence to question social strictures when needed; and a combination of joyfulness and seriousness. Vitality is similar to psychological health, if the latter is very broadly construed. If, in contrast, one thinks of psychological health as separate from and clearly distinguishable from bodily, “spiritual” (in the non-metaphysical, Nietzschean sense), affective, or cognitive well-being, then vitality is more encompassing than psychological health. Vitality has to do with energy, capacity, and enthusiasm, and contrasts with weariness, despair, and self-destruction.

However, health, for Nietzsche, is not a state, but rather something “…that one does not merely have but also acquires continually, and must acquire because one gives it up again and again, and must give it up.” Health, in the long term, actually requires bouts with illness and injury. Nietzsche sometimes places poor physiological conditions in parallel with poor vitality as symptoms of poor vitality (rather than positing poor physiological conditions as a cause of poor vitality). Using himself as an example, he says, “[m]y eye trouble…, though at times dangerously close to blindness, is only a consequence and not a cause: with every increase in vitality my ability to see has also

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421 For passages on relations between the physical and the psychological, spiritual, cognitive, and/or affective, see Genealogy of Morals III:15-16, page 127-129; Ecce Homo “Why I am so Wise” 1, pages 222-23; and Ecce Homo “Why I am so Clever” 1, page 237.
422 Gay Science V:382, pages 346-47. Nietzsche also quotes this passage in Ecce Homo “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” 2, page 298.
increased again.”  

Just above this passage, Nietzsche describes vitality not as independent of physiological condition, but as possible despite a plaguing physiological condition. Again using himself as an example, he reflects back on an early work, *Daybreak*, saying “[t]he perfect brightness and cheerfulness, even exuberance of the spirit, reflected in this work, is compatible in my case not only with the most profound physiological weakness, but even with an excess of pain.”

The surest sign of a basically healthy self, according to Nietzsche, is that it can bring itself through illness and injury and flourish again with new strengths. Using himself, of course, as the prototype of the fundamentally healthy individual, Nietzsche says,

> [a]part from the fact that I am a decadent, I am also the opposite. My proof for this is, among other things, that I have always instinctively chosen the right means against wretched states; while the decadent typically chooses means that are disadvantageous for him. As *summa summarum* [overall], I was healthy; as an angle, as a specialty, I was a decadent….I made myself healthy again: the condition…is *that one be healthy at bottom*….For a typically healthy person..., being sick can even become an energetic *stimulus* for life, for living more….I it was during the years of my lowest vitality that I ceased to be a pessimist; the instinct of self-restoration *forbade* me a philosophy of poverty and discouragement.

Since Nietzsche’s understanding of health thus goes beyond a simplified medical or psychological definition of disease and pathology, we need not conclude that, according to Nietzsche, anyone with a physical illness, any disabled person, or anyone with episodes of psychological struggle is necessarily unhealthy or not vital. It is likewise quite possible to come across a person who has never been diagnosed with a medical or psychological problem who is, nevertheless, not particularly healthy and vital. And

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424 *Ecce Homo* “Why I am so Wise” 1, page 223.
425 *Ecce Homo* “Why I am so Wise” 1, page 223.
426 *Ecce Homo* “Why I am so Wise” 2, page 224.
Nietzsche’s formulation here is not so far-fetched: when we identify someone as strong and possessing a true *joie de vivre*, we rarely pick out an individual who has never seen a bit of struggle. But, on the other hand, illness and injury can indeed be devastating, and while Nietzsche says with bravado, “[w]hat does not destroy me, makes me stronger,” this is certainly not a universal principle. And since injury, illness, struggle, and suffering are widespread, we certainly should not conclude, from the premise that many who have suffered are vital, that we *should encourage* suffering. Strenuous challenges to the self are easily found for most people, and deliberately providing them for others is very rarely worth the risk of imposing devastating (rather than ultimately life-affirming) suffering.

Further qualifying his notion of health, Nietzsche says that *feeling* healthy is not the same as *being* healthy. This claim risks invoking an authority—a “philosophical physician,” as Nietzsche aims to be—who diagnoses and prescribes tyrannically. On the other hand, it is a useful reminder that we can be wrong about ourselves, that we are not self-transparent, in other words. By making this distinction, Nietzsche allows for the possibility of one who thinks she is charging forward with vigor on a path to happiness and well-being, only to discover later the path of self-destruction she has charted. Or, less dramatically stated, Nietzsche allows for the possibility of not really knowing what would be best for ourselves.

Finally, health is not about a non-porous body, but has to do also with environment and “nutrition.” Discussing the “question of place and climate,” Nietzsche

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427 *Twilight of the Idols* “Maxims and Arrows” 8, page 467.
428 *Genealogy of Morals* III:16, page 129.
says, “[n]obody is free to live everywhere….The influence of climate on our *metabolism*, its retardation, its acceleration, goes so far that a mistaken choice of place and climate can not only estrange a man from his task but can actually keep it from him: he never gets to see it.”\(^{429}\) While Nietzsche may here be working with an inaccurate idea of the physiological effect of climate and also has in the background a falsely simplistic idea of how certain people are suited to certain climates, he makes a legitimate point that environment—from the most literal notion of weather and surrounding ecosystem to the more metaphorical notion of social environment—has a great deal to do with our health and vitality and the degree to which we can use our energies productively and creatively. Nietzsche also says that “…the ‘salvation of humanity’ depends…on…the question of *nutrition*.”\(^{430}\) While Nietzsche is concerned with nutrition in the literal sense—one’s food intake affects one’s vitality—he is also speaking about nutrition metaphorically (he refers to eating “morally speaking”).\(^{431}\) His point here is that we should be attentive to what we take in as it has a lot to do with who we become.\(^{432}\)

It is likely apparent by now that Nietzsche’s idea of health or vitality is vague and inexact. It is my contention that it is intentionally so, that the looseness of this idea is not a philosophical failing on Nietzsche’s part. Recall (from chapter three) that Nietzsche is

\(^{429}\) *Ecce Homo* “Why I am so Clever” 2, page 240.
\(^{430}\) *Ecce Homo* “Why I am so Clever” 1, page 237.
\(^{432}\) In *Revealing Whiteness*, Sullivan creates a robust account of the relationship between an organism and its environment (widely construed), using this to demonstrate the simultaneously individual and social aspects of whiteness as well as the potential for change.
striving to develop a normativity opposed to supposedly universal moralities built on a binary of “good and evil.” “Health,” as Nietzsche uses the term, allows for a variety of interpretations and offers no criteria for a state of perfection—“perfect health,” “one hundred percent healthy.” No clear line of demarcation can be drawn between health and its opposite (whether “sickness” or “decadence”). On this issue, Lawrence Hatab says, “I would caution against drawing too bright a line between ‘healthy’ and ‘decadent’ because this prompts a binary thinking that should offend a Nietzschean predilection for a commixture of constitutive differences.”

So, while we can speak of a lack of health (which could mean an overall depression of energies, or a conflict of drives that thwart each others efforts, or an inability to respond to illness and injury), there are no precise criteria, no set of rules, to tell us definitively in any case whether we have a case of health or lack of health—it is a very contestable concept. There are no purely healthy people (even Nietzsche, whose claims to great health reach an extreme in *Ecce Homo*, does not pretend to have pure health) and no purely unhealthy people, but only people with various degrees and forms of good health and poor health. Nietzsche has not given us an empty concept, but also not a carefully delineated concept. He has given us a very malleable concept that plays upon our everyday understandings and which he qualifies not in order to add clarity and precision but in order to complicate and add subtlety and flexibility.

433 “Time-sharing in the Bestiary” 36. Hatab similarly claims that “[t]hroughout Nietzsche’s texts, the meaning of strength and weakness…is anything but clear and unequivocal” (39).
Health and vitality, then, do not represent a universal morality, as health and vitality may be quite different for one person in contrast to the next. Nietzsche states this quite explicitly:

…”your virtue is the health of your soul.” For there is no health as such, and all attempts to define a thing that way have been wretched failures. Even the determination of what is healthy for your body depends on your goal, your horizon, your energies, your impulses, your errors, and above all on the ideals and phantasms of your soul. Thus there are innumerable healths of the body; and…the concept of a normal health, along with a normal diet and the normal course of an illness [must] be abandoned by medical men. Only then would the time have come to reflect on the health and illness of the soul, and to find the peculiar virtue for each man in the health of his soul. In one person, of course, this health could look like its opposite in another person.434

In place of “the good,” we have here “healths” and “goods for x.” Nietzsche deliberately invokes such a malleable normative concept as a way to avoid the prohibitive, disciplinary, authoritarian, and restrictive characteristics of the morality of good and evil.

Shifting from a morality of good and evil to one of health and vitality, we also have the advantage of not being capable of easily demonizing and condemning those we consider unhealthy or not very vital. Health is neither completely subject to one’s free will nor fully determined by factors beyond one’s choices. We commonly hold people to task in some ways for taking care of their physical and psychological health and overall well-being, but we also recognize the force of biology, situation, chance, and other people in relation to the individual in question. The same holds for communities—we rarely find them fully responsible for their struggles nor totally free from responsibility. So, just as when we ask about responsibility for participation in white privilege (see chapter three), when we begin asking questions about responsibility and health—is this

434 Gay Science III:120, pages 176-77.
person’s poor health his own fault?—the answer seems nearly always to come down to “yes and no,” and no definitive delineations can be established. Yet when we shift the question and ask instead if there is something this person could be doing in order to become healthier or respond to his difficulties in a more vitalizing way, the answer is almost always “yes.” This lack of blaming and demonizing inherent in a normativity of health and vitality represents a significant departure from the moralities of good and evil that Nietzsche critiques, in which clear lines are drawn between the good and the evil, and in which the evil—the sinful—are believed to have dug their own graves just as the good have reached their elevated status by their own doing (even when one has had help from God, she can praise herself for seeking and accepting that help and dedicating herself henceforth to God—and then she can even attribute her good fortune afterwards to the fact that God is watching out for her, implying that she is a favorite before God).

So, using health and vitality as terms for evaluation, we can indeed make evaluations, and can, more importantly, chart out and aim for something better, but without founding our normativity on an oppressive (and potentially resentful) binary of “us” (the good) and “them” (the evil).

As I will show in the following section, much of Nietzsche’s normative philosophy can be very helpful in the context of white people and anti-racist change. However, there are also aspects of his normative philosophy that could be detrimental to the project. Three issues in particular need to be addressed: Nietzsche’s remarks on health and race, his conviction that an isolated existence is healthiest (he especially promotes isolation from the sick), and his frequent association of health with violence,
war, and cruelty. As I argued in chapter two, such problematic themes within Nietzsche’s philosophy need more than a quick dismissal. Without shying away from these problems, we can address them effectively by clarifying and rejecting some of Nietzsche’s underlying assumptions, taking advantage of the ambiguity in Nietzsche’s philosophy, and playing Nietzsche against himself.

As we saw in chapter two, Nietzsche believes that some races are healthier than others; he also says that at least the short-term result of a mixing of races is sickness due to “physiological inhibition,” or contrariness within one person of the drives of one race and the drives of the other.\footnote{Genealogy of Morals III:17, page 130; see also Gay Science “Preface to the Second Edition” 2, page 35.} Nietzsche’s understanding of the science of race is easy enough to dismiss. Thanks to both genetic research and Critical Race Theory, we have today the advantage of accounts of race as a social construction (though constructed out of bodies, as I argued in the introduction), which can help us provide an explanation better than Nietzsche’s of what race may have to do with health and vitality. Race may indeed play a role in health and vitality, but not because there is a set of physiological or genetic factors that determine both race and health. Race is constructed out of bodies using the tools of social narrative and social, political, and economic arrangements; since one’s social, political, and economic positioning can feed into one’s health and vitality, so can, correspondingly, one’s race. Should we conclude, then, that a socially empowered person or race is necessarily healthy and vital and that a socially oppressed person or race is necessarily unhealthy and not very vital? Not at all. Especially given Nietzsche’s statements about the benefits of struggle, we cannot equate having a
disadvantageous social positioning with being unhealthy. While oppression can certainly decrease the vitality of a community and the individuals who are a part of it, there is no strict determining logic here, as evidenced by the many individuals throughout history who have done great things or become great people through their responses to oppression and their self-creation despite oppressors’ understanding of them as incapable of such. On the flip side, we cannot by any means assume that because white people have prevailed and are empowered relative to others that they must be healthier. As I have suggested in chapter three, many of the common forms of life of white people display a great deal of resentment and/or guilt, both of which Nietzsche sees as fairly clear signs of illness or distress, even though resentment and guilt may be used to attain social and political domination (as Nietzsche believes they have in his time). We could say more generally that oppressors are more often a sick than healthy population. This is easy to see in extreme cases—those who commit torture, for example, most often end up quite psychologically disturbed or come across as sociopaths (seriously ill in terms of emotion and intersubjectivity). So, while Nietzsche does equate strength and aggression with health (about which I’ll say more below) and weakness with illness, even on his own terms, health cannot be equated with social-political power. Given this, and a more nuanced understanding today of the interface between biology and the social category of race, we can clearly conclude that the relation between one’s race and one’s health is anything but a simple, singular determining logic.

I have already critiqued, in chapter four, Nietzsche’s glorification of the independent, isolated individual and his hermetic prescriptions, and I have argued that joining diverse, vital communities can be an excellent way to encourage one’s own self-
overcoming. But what about sick or distressed communities? Should we steer clear of them in the interest of our own goals of self-overcoming? Nietzsche would say that we should. And yet, just as nurses, doctors, and care-providers often report that caring for the medically ill is a life-affirming, vitalizing activity, many people also report that being a part of or working with a “sick” community is an invigorating thing to do. One example of this is being a part of or working with a community stressed by poverty or natural disaster. Another example is a white person going to white communities in order to urge transformation within them.436 These efforts toward vitalizing a community can vitalize the individuals striving in this way. As Nietzsche himself says, making oneself healthy again is what health is really about—why wouldn’t this also be so on a communal level? To grow, especially after stress (like a plant grows after hail has pummeled its leaves or erosion has exposed its roots) is joyous, vitalizing, and life-affirming, and to be a part of that on an interpersonal or communal level is likewise joyous, vitalizing, and life-affirming. Nietzsche may be right that to care for others as the “ascetic priest” does—with pity and with an attention to wounds that is more likely to spread infection than heal—is an activity of diminishment, for all involved.437 But to enter into stressed or unhealthy communities, or to find oneself a part of one, with an eye to vitality is potentially, for those with the strengths and capacities to vitalize, a very “healthy” thing to do. There are situations where one’s involvement in a community is defeating and

436 In the late ’60s, many black activist groups encouraged interested white people to do just this—to go work with white populations, to get white populations to change by working within, instead of working with black populations.
437 Because Nietzsche does not equate physiological well-being with vitality, even caring for the terminally ill, where healing is not a possibility, could be a vitalizing, life-affirming activity. It is not unusual for people at the end of their lives to express a kind of joy for life and an appreciation for each experience. Not everyone, in other words, falls to despair at the end of life or ignores this life to focus on an afterlife.
pathological, in which case one needs to cut her ties, but this is not the only possible relation between an individual and a stressed or ill community.

The third major problem with Nietzsche’s understanding of health and vitality is its association of joy and the affirmation of life with violence and antagonism. For example, Nietzsche refers to health and vitality in the following ways: “…a powerful physicality, a flourishing, abundant, even overflowing health, together with that which serves to preserve it: war, adventure, hunting, dancing, war games, and in general all that involves vigorous, free, joyful activity”; and “…rude, stormy, unbridled, hard, violent beast-of-prey health and might.” Nietzsche even considers cruelty to be invigorating:

To see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more: this is a hard saying but an ancient, mighty, human, all-too-human principle….Without cruelty there is no festival: thus the longest and most ancient part of human history teaches….With this idea, by the way, I am by no means concerned to furnish our pessimists with more grist for their discordant and creaking mills of life-satiety. On the contrary, let me declare expressly that in the days when mankind was not yet ashamed of its cruelty, life on earth was more cheerful than it is now that pessimists exist….Today, when suffering is always brought forward as the principle argument against existence,…one does well to recall the ages in which the opposite opinion prevailed because men were unwilling to refrain from

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440 Genealogy of Morals III:15, page 126.
making suffer and saw in it an enchantment of the first order, a genuine seduction to life. 441

These aspects of Nietzsche’s notion of health and vitality are in need of revaluation.

Critiquing the values supposedly operative in his society, Nietzsche says, “…I am opposed to the pernicious modern effeminacy of feeling….”442 To Nietzsche, I say, “I am opposed to the pernicious Nietzschean masculinity of feeling”—and here I mean not some essence of masculinity, not masculinity redefined in a liberatory and inclusive way, but masculinity in one of his worst cultural formulations. (A psychoanalyst could have a field day with all of Nietzsche’s references to the importance of being “hard.”443) So, part of my disagreement with Nietzsche here is a matter of espousing different values, believing that a different set of values will best contribute to health.

I have already argued above that caring for others and working toward community uplift can be a vitalizing activity; in other words, many of the values commonly found within feminist philosophy may be life-affirming values.444 But there is still one argument to be made regarding one of the sources of Nietzsche’s understanding of human interaction and his aggressive values, that source being “nature.” Drawing on “nature,”

441 *Genealogy of Morals* II:6-7, page 67. For more on cruelty, see *Beyond Good and Evil* VI:229, pages 158-59. For other passages on the supposed benefits of inflicting suffering on others, see *Gay Science* III:200, page 207, and IV:325, page 255.

442 *Genealogy of Morals* “Preface” 7, page 20. See also *Ecce Homo* “Why I Write Such Good Books” 3, page 364: “All ‘feminism,’ too—also in men—closes the door…. [O]ne must have acquired hardness as a habit to be cheerful and in good spirits in the midst of nothing but hard truths.”

443 *Gay Science* V:346, page 286; *Beyond Good and Evil* III:62, page 76; III:59, page 71; IV:210, page 134; VI:212, page 137; *Genealogy of Morals* III:15, page 126; *Twilight of the Idols* “The Hammer Speaks,” page 563; and *Ecce Homo* “The Untimely Ones” 3, page 280. To quote just one passage, Nietzsche says, “[t]he imperative, ‘become hard!’ the most fundamental certainty *that all creators are hard*, is the distinctive mark of a Dionysian nature” (*Ecce Homo* “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” 8, page 309).

444 Ofelia Schutte likewise “revalues” Nietzsche’s philosophy and shows how more feminist values can be life-affirming. See *Beyond Nihilism*. 
or “the organic world,” or simply, “life,” Nietzsche views change, no matter how vitalizing, as an act of violence. While in some cases he may simply be emphasizing the point that in order to create new values, old values must be destroyed, he also goes beyond this point and views change as one force subjugating or appropriating another. For example, he says that “…whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a becoming master…”

Similarly, he claims that

…life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation.…’Exploitation’ does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function.…

In other words, Nietzsche sees the “organic world” as fundamentally hostile, as characterized exclusively by predator-prey relationships and parasite-host relationships. Thus he concludes that developments in the human world must also occur as conquering and subjugating, or as one sector of society feeding parasitically off of another. His description of the origin of “higher culture” is telling here:

Let us admit to ourselves…how every higher culture on earth so far has begun. Human beings whose nature was still natural, barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, men of prey who were still in possession of unbroken strength of will and lust for power, hurled themselves upon weaker, more civilized, more peaceful races…or upon mellow old cultures.…

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445 Genealogy of Morals II:12, page 77.
446 Beyond Good and Evil IX:259, page 203.
447 Beyond Good and Evil IX:257, page 201.
Speaking prescriptively, Nietzsche promotes aristocracy and claims that the better humans should use and feed off of the lesser ones:

The essential characteristic of a good and healthy aristocracy…is that it experiences itself not as a function (whether of the monarchy or the commonwealth) but as their meaning and highest justification—that it therefore accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, for its sake, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments.448

The closest Nietzsche comes to positing a friendly relation between humans is in his depiction of the regard and respect that strong, independent individuals have for each other. Yet what such individuals supposedly appreciate most in each other is a worthy opponent, so that even this relation remains antagonistic. Nietzsche may think that enemies serve to propel each other higher in agonistic competition (rather than pulling each other down), but they remain enemies, and it is only through combating each other than they rise higher.449 At one point, Nietzsche does say that “…[r]efraining mutually from injury, violence, and exploitation…” might be appropriate, but only if the two individuals in question are “…similar in strength and value standards….450

Nietzsche is wrong to see all developments in individuals and societies through a lens of competition, combat, violence, and exploitation. Even if we grant Nietzsche that developments in individuals, societies, cultures, meanings, and purposes reflect the dynamics of “the organic world,” still, we can point to many instances in the organic world that lend themselves to the interpretation “cooperation” more readily than to

448 Beyond Good and Evil IX:258, page 202, see also VII:239, page 169.
449 While I appreciate much of Lawrence Hatab’s interpretation of Nietzsche, I do not follow him in thinking that the agon stands as a good ideal for a multicultural democracy. See A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy.
450 Beyond Good and Evil IX:259, page 203.
“subduing” and “becoming master.” We can find not only predator-prey relationships and parasitic relationships, but also *symbiotic* relationships and complex *ecosystems* of interdependency. The former relationships may be more spectacular to human observers, but the latter certainly invalidate Nietzsche’s claim that “*all* events in the organic world are a subduing, a becoming master.” And other than his assumption of aggression in the organic world, Nietzsche has no basis for rejecting the possibility of self-overcoming as the dynamism characteristic of an ecosystem in transition. He has no grounds for rejecting the possibility of symbiosis as life-affirming, healthy, and vitalizing. Creation may indeed entail destruction, but transformation is not necessarily a movement of violence in which one party emerges victorious and the others defeated. One’s own health, in fact, is dependent upon one’s “symbiotic” partners and one’s surrounding “ecosystem.”

I have here addressed three significant problems with Nietzsche’s understanding of health: his statements about the health of various races, his belief that quarantine is essential for good health and that relations to communities of ill health can be nothing other than contagion, and his characterization of health in terms of violence and subjugation. It is also worthwhile to keep in mind the problem I addressed in chapter three—namely, Nietzsche’s diagnostic arrogance. Because of this diagnostic arrogance, Nietzsche’s notion of health and vitality as criteria for evaluation has the potential to take on characteristics he critiqued in prevailing moral systems (restrictiveness, universality, inflexibility, and a dichotomous structure). To avoid the unnecessary closure of “health” and “vitality,” we must leave room for doubt in any diagnoses we offer, avoid universalizing a narrow conception of health and vitality, emphasize the importance of
multiple perspectives, and avoid closing the door on any individual or group, proclaiming their case terminal and their future hopeless. Holding up a philosophical modesty as one of our virtues, we can use a Nietzschean notion of health and vitality (but not exactly Nietzsche’s notion) as a normativity that escapes the problems of guilt-ridden moralities of good and evil. Extending that modesty, we can admit (as Nietzsche himself would have in his better moments) that even the normativity of health and vitality is not a timeless universal—it too will need to be overcome in time.

Health and Vitality in Transformation Against the Grain of Race-Related Problems

As I argued in chapter three, in creating a normative framework for transformation against the grain of race-related problems, we want to avoid moralities of good and evil—moralities built on dichotomous concepts of right and wrong that resentfully demonize an other and moralities that rely on guilt (resentment turned inward) as a motivating, disciplining force. Because the attempt to impose guilt most often strengthens one’s defenses or overwhelms and immobilizes a person, it leaves one without the strength and energy for self-overcoming and efforts toward social change. Invoking questions of responsibility that are nearly impossible to answer, guilt encourages an obsessive self-focus and is especially pernicious when there is no possibility of atonement (as is true in the case of racism and white privilege). Attempting to avoid these pitfalls with a new normativity in terms of health and vitality, my goal here is not to let white people off the hook, but to develop a conceptual framework to guide
transformation that will energize rather than inhibit real self-change and foster the strengths and joyfulness needed to engage in social activism.

Through the lens of health and vitality, self-overcoming is no longer seen primarily as a moral obligation, as something one must do in order to avoid feelings of guilt; instead, it is seen as a vital activity, something that is good (healthy) for the self. While all but hardened racists can understand that racism and white privilege have been unhealthy for non-white people, this new normative framework urges us to see how it has also been unhealthy for white people. As many Critical Race Theorists have noted, whiteness is a conceptual creation meaning “not all the others” and has very little meaning other than this “not,” other than its practices of exclusion and its demonization and denigration of others.⁴５¹ In this sense, white supremacy and complicity with white privilege, as forms of life, are guided by a normativity of resentment.⁴５² In contrast, “anti-racism,” despite the oppositional structure of its name, is not a resentful establishment of self as “not other,” but an affirmation of people, of diverse forms of life, of creative potentials—all of which call for the negation and destruction of the ideology and practice of racism and white privilege. Transformation against the grain of race-related problems, then, is undertaken for the sake of the vitality of oneself, others, and society, in the hopes of trading in resentment for affirmation.

When we look at racism, white privilege, and white supremacy in terms of health and vitality, a fundamental shift occurs. Instead of seeing whiteness only as a valuable

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⁴５¹ Ruth Frankenburg describes the establishment of white identity in this way: “‘We are not that, and within being ‘not that,’ we are this’” (“When We are Capable of Stopping, We Begin to See” 8).
⁴５² As mentioned in chapter three, Jeffrey Nealon characterizes white male anger as the resentful declaration “you are evil, therefore I am good” (page 275).
possession that benefits white people, we see it also as a source of dis-ease, a sickness that plagues individuals and societies. Racism and white privilege have negative effects even on complicit white people (as we will see, additional negative effects arise as white people move away from complicity). Epistemologically speaking, a racist, white-dominated world-view is very limited—it is a narrow and distorted knowledge of society, politics, culture, arts, and the self. Racism and white supremacy, we could say, keep one from achieving greater objectivity in the Nietzschean sense (seeing from as many perspectives as possible). Racism and white privilege also create an unnecessary sense of danger and threat among white people, promoting fear of non-white people, communities, organizations, and neighborhoods. Relationships, that could otherwise have been fulfilling, may be impossible or strained because of racist views or white ignorance—the latter can interfere not only in relationships between white and non-white people, but also in relationships where both people are white (tension may be created when one person expresses racist views or when the other expresses support for minorities).  

Perhaps most significantly, racism and white supremacy suppress the contributions, talents, and resources that nonwhite people have to offer a community and nation. To understand this, we can look at a fictional example that Lani Guinier uses in her arguments regarding college admissions and the consideration of race. Guinier asks her audience to imagine a college admissions board considering three candidates, only two of whom can be admitted. Each took a test; candidate A got 7 out of 10

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453 Each of these costs of racism to white people is documented by Spanierman and Heppner (page 251) and Kivel (page 64).
454 Lecture delivered at The University of Richmond, April 2, 2008.
questions right, candidate B got 6 out of 10, and candidate C got 4 out of 10. According to traditional criteria of individual merit, the first two candidates should be admitted. But Guinier advocates a shift to admitting candidates based on improving and strengthening the university community (as well as society at large as graduates leave the institution). So, she says, suppose that the four questions that candidate C got right are exactly the questions that candidate B got wrong and also include the three questions that candidate A got wrong. This means that candidates A and B have very similar sets of knowledge, and candidate C has a different one. If we admit A and B, we still have three questions unanswered; but if we admit C along with either A or B, our institution has a larger pool of knowledge from which to draw. Guinier’s point here is that when we create narrow criteria for admittance (into any institution, organization, or community) and choose based on individual merit as determined by our own narrow criteria, we deny our institutions, organizations, and communities a wealth of knowledge, talent, and resources. The point more broadly is that discrimination not only harms those subject to it, for example, by denying many of them a quality education, but also harms the entire society by suppressing diverse knowledges and failing to support the full development of the talents and abilities of a vast sector of its population.

As white people begin to broaden their awareness of race, racism, and white privilege—as they begin transformation—the negative effects of racism and white privilege on them are well documented: guilt, shame, sometimes even self-loathing, embarrassment, self-consciousness and social awkwardness, sadness, anger,
hopelessness, and helplessness. From this perspective, the costs of racism for white people are clear. When coming to understand what it has meant for her to be white and complicit in a racist society, Minnie Bruce Pratt reports feeling that “…in myself is a disintegrating, rotting nothing: that the values that I have at my core, from my culture, will only be those of negativity, exclusion, fear, death.” The solution to this situation, though, is not to go back to white ignorance, as racism also has its costs for complicit white people. Ignorance, we could say, is not blissful. The solution instead is to see transformation as a movement away from sickness and toward better health. Coming to terms with the illnesses one has experienced is difficult, but the movement toward greater health is vitalizing.

While the psychological effects of racism (guilt, shame, etc.) are generally discussed only in relation to white people who are developing greater awareness and understanding, I would argue that psychological dis-ease is also common, on a subconscious level, for those who have not (or not yet) confronted racism and taken steps to reject white privilege. Even among some of those most resistant to acknowledging it, the violent history of racism can be haunting. A subconscious recognition of the sickness of racism battles constantly with a powerful sensor, and this repression has its costs. Seeing the disease of racism with a view to both psychology and history, Mab Segrest asks,

What therapist would tell us to read history, would help us see how this fetishized racism circulates within white families? We wash it down with gin and violence. It surfaces as anger or depression, passed down and down and down, refracted for

455 Spanierman and Heppner 251 and Kivel 47.
456 “Identity” 39.
generations to children who inherit sometimes houses and land but always jumbles of terror and anger.\textsuperscript{457}

This subconscious gnawing that provokes destructive defensive reactions is a sign of the unhealthiness of racism even for racists.

While communicating to white people that racism and white privilege have negative consequences for white people is an important intermediate step, a further goal would shift the terms of the debate once more. We have gone from an understanding of racism as harmful for non-white people to an understanding of racism as also harmful—in different ways, of course—for white people; next, we would need to move to a view of racism as bad \textit{for the group}, whether we are talking about an institution, an organization, a community, a society, or international relations. Thus we move from a consideration of individual health to that of communal health (which is not to say that considerations of individual health completely disappear—it will be always important to acknowledge the different ways that racism and white privilege affect various groups and individuals). We may bring white people into anti-racist work by showing how it affects them, and we may also in this way cure white people of the temptation to see themselves as noble heroes working on behalf of unfortunate others, but in the end, we do not want to spread the message that white people should be interested in racism \textit{only} because it negatively affects white people. In a sort of dialectic, we move from “racism is bad for other people so good white people should help them” to “racism is also bad for white people, so white people should engage in antiracism out of self-interest,” to, finally, “racism is bad

\textsuperscript{457} \textit{Memoir of a Race Traitor} 4.
(unhealthy) for communities and all people have an interest in revitalizing their communities.”

From the vantage point of health and vitality, we are more prepared to distinguish between, on the one hand, those elements of white privilege that are more like “rights” than “privileges” that, were they extended to all people rather than just white people, would contribute to a better (healthier, more vital) society and, on the other hand, those elements of white privilege that, from the point of view of health, are really more like “infections” than “privileges” that we’d be best off eradicating rather than preserving or extending to anyone. For example, many Critical Race Theorists who discuss white privilege would include all of the follow as privileges white people have:

A) little concern that you will be unjustly accused, convicted, or sentenced because of your race

B) little need to wonder if people around you are thinking that you’re not qualified for your job (or college) and only got it because of practices of race-based preference

C) little or no need to establish pride in your racial identity and self-esteem to counter powerful social messages

D) little or no need to teach your children (unless you are part of a mixed-race family) about racism and dangers to which he or she may be subjected because of race

1) societal and institutional support of cultural narratives and histories that glorify people of your group and denigrate or ignore other people and their perspectives

2) being able to live in a racist society with little awareness of your racialization or the history of race relations

I am here following Lewis Gordon who claims that the bulk of what makes up white privilege is not a set of privileges that should be denied white people but a set of rights that should be extended to all people (“Critical Reflections” 174-77).
3) (for most but not all whites) benefiting from a long legacy of brutal economic injustice

4) a sense that you deserve the good fortune you have had and that if others have not achieved what you have it is probably their fault

“Privileges” A-D are more like rights that, if we were to extend them to all people, would contribute to a healthier society. “Privileges” 1-4 are more like diseases that, ultimately, do not promote health and vitality for individuals or society, even as they offer, on the surface, advantages and benefits for some individuals. These are the “privileges” likely to wreak psychological damage in all sectors of society and create an internally hostile and underdeveloped society. So, in shifting the terms of the debate from, on the one hand, anti-racist work as the moral obligation of “good” people to, on the other hand, anti-racist work as working toward communal and societal health and vitality, I am challenging white people to look beyond advantages and benefits of white privilege (and indeed, white privilege does confer certain advantages and benefits) to see the pathology behind many of these “privileges,” to see that some advantages and benefits are really plagues on us all.

A white person who can really see white privilege more as *a burden disguised as a privilege* is ready to work with others for the enhancement of us all. Seeing racism and white privilege as illnesses that infect us all—albeit in very different ways—and affects our communities, we form a stronger basis for alliance and friendship. A white person can no longer go to a non-white community thinking, “I am here in self-sacrifice to help you because I am a good person.” She instead enters various communities working for change thinking, “*we* have a problem affecting all of us; I see that you’ve been working against it; I would like to join you and contribute to the work.” With this approach to
encountering non-white and/or diverse communities, one avoids reinscribing the arrogance and self-enclosure of white privilege. At the same time, when this white person encounters other white people who appear to be more complicit with white privilege than she is, she need not think, “you are bad and immoral; you should atone for what you’ve done” (unless perhaps she does encounter a case where questions of responsibility are clear and atonement is possible). Instead, she can enter with the attitude of, “let me show you a different form of life and tell you about why I think it’s a healthier way to live.” With this approach to white communities, one can hope to avoid provoking reactions of strengthened resolve and tougher defenses and to elicit responses of more openness.

It is certainly true that one could develop a normativity in terms of health and vitality that does not guarantee a commitment to anti-racism. But since that is also true of more common normative frameworks, as I showed in chapter three, it is not a strong criticism of this Nietzschean normativity. The advantage of the latter is its lack of claims to objectivity, universality, and precision. As a very contestable notion, “health” is open to interpretation, discussion, debate, and reformulation. It is not a constrictive ideal set in stone and meant to be imposed in a specific formulation on all people. So, like most normative frameworks, it holds no guarantees, but unlike most, it doesn’t pretend to either. It instead invites examination and open dialogue. As such, it does not lend itself to being a good shield of justification, as many other moral frameworks have served to justify racism and violent oppression.

A crucial advantage of a normativity in terms of health and vitality in this context is its rejection of guilt as its powerful enforcer. Admitting that episodic bouts with guilt
can give way to a vital new growth, we nonetheless steer away from guilt as festering self-resentment, recognizing that it diminishes the self and leaves the self unprepared for creative change and social engagement. Reactions to the attempt to impose guilt (as we have seen) tend to be either a strengthening of defenses—in this context, perhaps a deeper declaration of one’s innocence or a renewed conviction that reverse discrimination is the real problem—or immobilization—in this context, being so overwhelmed by white guilt that one feels hopeless and does not know where to begin the work of transformation or how to be open to undergoing a transformation. It is not that we need to “sell” anti-racism as a fun, exciting project, but neither do we need to present it with a stern brow and an iron fist. Recalling Nietzsche’s argument that punishment, as the attempt to impose guilt, risks destroying the vital energy of a person and leaving her in prostration and self-abasement, we can—in our self-projects, our support of allies or potential allies, and our attempts to persuade—aim to foster strong, energetic, committed anti-racists and resist the urge to take revenge of some kind on our former selves or others.

While a morality heavily reliant on guilt encourages an obsessive focus on the self (as I have shown), the values of health and vitality encourage us to see beyond ourselves and seek out new creative possibilities. I certainly do not mean to say that no self-examination at all is necessary—only that self-examination must be paired with a curiosity to see more, to learn something from what is different. This curiosity differs from exoticism since it is a curiosity that invites a challenge. From the point of view of vitality, it is not always or only difficult to find out that one was wrong, but also exciting. Having one’s perspective unbalanced means that new perspectives open up, the world
seems richer and more complex. And, as this is not a happy-go-lucky health, it is not only lovely cultural artifacts like dance and food that pique one’s curiosity; new perspectives on politics, justice, morality, history, society, poverty, power, and race-relations also give the feeling that one’s world is widening, that one is no longer stuck in a narrow perspective. We feel

…the jubilant curiosity of one who formerly stood in his corner and was driven to despair by his corner and now delights and luxuriates in the opposite of a corner, in the boundless….Thus an almost Epicurean bent for knowledge develops that will not easily let go of the questionable character of things; also an aversion to big moral words and gestures; a taste that rejects all crude, four-square opposites….459

New perspectives bring new perspectives on the self too, so that self-examination is in dialogue with curious ventures beyond oneself.

When we view self-change in terms of health and vitality, change is not a matter of atonement for past sins. Change will involve looking into the past (in a genealogical investigation), but for the sake of understanding oneself and one’s society in order to envision new possibilities for self and society. We may, then, not only review our own pasts, but also read the stories of both those who have changed significantly in anti-racist directions (like those I discussed in chapter four) and those who have not. We read in order to see from more perspectives, not in order to discover a single, universal path toward a precise ideal. We may also try to analyze and understand common attitudes—or forms of life—of white people (as examined in chapter three), not in order to chastise and punish ourselves when we find these tendencies in ourselves, but in order to see our way through them to new, healthier forms of life.

Because Nietzsche’s understanding of health includes bouts with illness and injury and sees “making oneself healthy again” as a central practice of health, we don’t need to suppose that Nietzschean transformation against the grain of race-related problems is a light-hearted or consistently joyful process. It is undoubtedly fraught with difficult moments, difficult “negations.” It may include guilt as a phase out of which the self must find its way. But the overall view of transformation will not be a picture of giving up a good, content life for a strenuous, upsetting life out of moral obligation. As the striving toward one’s own vital well-being and that of others and that of communities, transformation is, on the whole, an exciting process filled with new understandings and discoveries of new possibilities.

Since health, as Nietzsche says, has to do with “climate” and “nutrition,” we need to think about our environments and “intake” as we try to fuel self-overcoming. However, this does not imply that we can only be around people we identify as healthy. As I argued above, care-giving can be a life-affirming activity, as can attempts to vitalize distressed communities. As we saw in chapter four, white anti-racist activists have various stories to tell about family and home communities who did not support their activist work. Some activists found interaction to be pathological and felt it necessary to sever ties. Others were rejected by their family and home communities. Still others maintained ties and eventually had an influence on family and friends. Finally, others maintained ties and never came close to seeing eye-to-eye, yet found enough nurture within the relationships to sustain them. Relationships to sick or distressed communities are complicated, and no set of rules can tell us when it is finally necessary to cut all ties. It is worth noting, too, that many white people undergoing transformation begin to take
tentative pride in their new, anti-racist identities that can unfortunately lead them to be very critical of other white people also in the midst of transformation. While criticism offered in a generous spirit can be helpful, criticism in the spirit of exclusion is a waste, as one thereby cuts off a potential ally willing to contribute to the health and vitality of a community. In other words, we not only need to think about our own environment and input, but also about the environment we create for others—our “output.” While it may be more obvious that relationships between anti-racist white people and non-white people deserve careful, caring attention within activist communities, so too do white people need to be attentive to relationships with other white people, supporting and encouraging each others’ self-overcoming.

A normativity of health and vitality, in sum, helps avoid many of the problems with moralities of good and evil that Nietzsche identified. In the context of white people and transformation against the grain of race-related problems, this normativity keeps debate and discussion open because of its flexible and contestable nature; creates a better basis for alliance and friendship; helps us distinguish between “privileges” we want to extend to all and “privileges” that really are plagues we’d like to eradicate; decreases the potential that others will react by hardening defenses; fosters the vitality of the self rather than overwhelming and immobilizing the self; advocates not just self-examination but also a curious and joyful look beyond oneself; and encourages us to take up the vitalization of distressed communities.
What sort of self is ripe for vital transformation? If a person wishes to overcome herself, to see and understand something different from herself, to create a new form of life for herself, what kind of person should she aim to be? Nietzsche gives some indications. While there are aspects of Nietzsche’s ideal[460] that are not helpful (such as the cold, hard warrior and other distortedly masculine values that I critiqued above), other aspects are very much applicable to the case of transformation against the grain of race-related problems.

As we saw above, according to Nietzsche, “…one must be able to lose oneself occasionally if one wants to learn something from things different from oneself.” He similarly claims that “…we have learned to love all things that we now love. In the end we are always rewarded for our good will, our patience, fairmindedness, and gentleness with what is strange; gradually it sheds its veil and turns out to be a new and indescribable beauty. That is its thanks for our hospitality.”[461] “Hospitality” for what is “strange”—that is a skill of the self ready for transformation. Playfulness, curiosity, and the art of “living experimentally”[462] are also strengths of the ideal self. If we cannot determine in advance just what our path of transformation will be (or even our

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[460] In using the word “ideal,” I am not referring to the ideal as opposed to the real. Dismissal of the real for a supposed ideal is something Nietzsche strongly criticizes (see, for example, Genealogy of Morals, I:14, pages 46-47; Twilight of the Idols “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” 6, page 484; Twilight of the Idols “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable,” pages 485-86; and Ecce Homo “Why I am so Clever” 1, page 237). I am using “ideal” in an everyday sense, where the ideal self is simply the best self, or the self one aims to be. Nietzsche uses the term (in German, Ideall) in just the same, non-metaphysical way in Gay Science V:382, page 347 (“Another ideals runs ahead of us…”).


destination), our journey will have to be an exploration and our stance not one of dogged determination but of openness and curiosity.

The solidity, unity, or groundedness of a self can actually be the self’s greatest impediment to change. Rather than seeking to be a coherent, single-minded self focused on a single, sensible goal, one who desires transformation must be “…rich in internal opposition….” One needs within himself a “pathos of distance”—that is, “…the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself…. Only with difference, distance, and contradiction does the soul become alive with motion and activity, capable of doing more than merely reacting to external stimulus. While contrary forces within the self can stifle each other and lead to something like a stalemate of the soul, having no contrariness within would be as—perhaps more—unhealthy.

Nietzsche says that our philosophical goal should be “…to see with many different eyes…” to “…employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations…” Nietzsche treasures “…chaos in oneself…,” “…contrary capacities…,” “…a tremendous variety…,” and “…a soul that craves to have experienced the whole range of values and

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464 *Beyond Good and Evil* IX:257, page 201; see also *Ecce Homo* “Why I am so Clever” 9, page 254. Nietzsche claims in *Beyond Good and Evil* that the pathos of distance within the soul would not have developed except for a pathos of distance in society, “…that pathos of distance which grows out of the ingrained difference between strata—when the ruling caste constantly looks afar and looks down upon subjects…” (IX:257, page 201; see also *Genealogy of Morals* I:2, page 26). But even if Nietzsche is correct that a social “distance” is the foundation for a “distance” within the self, it is not at all clear why this social distance would need to be a difference in rank, in class or status, rather than difference per se. Within one of his characterizations of the social pathos of distance, Nietzsche gives the requirement of “the plurality of types” (*Twilight of the Idols* “Skirmishes” 37, page 540). It seems that society with such a plurality should suffice to create a plurality within the soul, and that neither an aristocratic society (nor slavery in any sense) would be required.
465 For more on the pathos of distance within the self, see Diprose.
466 *Beyond Good and Evil* VI:211, page 136.
467 *Genealogy of Morals* III:12, page 119.
The “healthy” self, in other words, is not a quiet, undisturbed self, but a creative, lively self with “discussions” and “arguments” within its many-souled body that are fueled by and productive of vital energies. The values of opposition to what is, openness to what one does not know, and multiplicity of perspectives, affects, and interpretations are especially important when one wishes to overcome herself, her social identity, and the values she has absorbed. The very contradictions about race held within an affective, cognitive, bodily, social self can be productive energy giving way to new perspectives and capacities—they need not be taken as faults that ought to be suppressed and ignored.

To be ripe for self-overcoming, one must strive to embrace becoming and resist the urge to conserve or “mummify” ideals. “Those were steps for me,” Nietzsche says, “and I have climbed up over them: to that end I had to pass over them. Yet they thought that I wanted to retire on them.” Similarly, Nietzsche ends Beyond Good and Evil by expressing how his writing has failed to capture his dynamic and fleeting thoughts; writing, he says, “immortalizes” thoughts and cannot capture the spirit with which they arrived. It is as though Nietzsche’s thoughts are already “outdated” by the time he writes them down. This willingness to “outdate” oneself rather than immortalizing a value, a theory, a belief, a state, an identity, represents an affinity for self-overcoming. Nietzsche claims that an artist “…arrives at the ultimate pinnacle of his greatness only when he comes to see himself and his art beneath him”—when he knows how to laugh at

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469 Twilight of the Idols “Mixed Maxims and Opinions” 42, page 472.
470 Beyond Good and Evil IX:296, pages 236-37.
himself.” Pride, then, need not come from knowing all about race and being right on all the issues, but in one’s ability to see ever more, from ever more points of view. In discussions about race, “victory” may not be about winning the argument, but learning something new, seeing with new eyes. This different source of pride and different orientation to discussion can be even more invigorating and strengthening than a strong commitment to one’s ideals and staying the course.

Those who seek new knowledge, Nietzsche says, require “…the good will…to declare themselves at any time dauntlessly against their previous opinions and to mistrust everything that wishes to become firm in us….” This does not mean that Nietzsche advocates an unstable self without rhyme or reason. Instead, he is warning against allowing aspects of the self (tendencies, beliefs, activities) to harden into ruts that prevent us from venturing out in new directions. Nietzsche makes this point in his discussion of his relation to habits:

I love brief habits and consider them an inestimable means for getting to know many things and states, down to the bottom of their sweetness and bitterness…. / Enduring habits I hate. I feel as if a tyrant had come near me and as if the air I breathe had thickened when events take such a turn that it appears that they will inevitably give rise to enduring habits…. / Most intolerable, to be sure, and the terrible par excellence would be for me a life entirely devoid of habits, a life that would demand perpetual improvisation. That would be my exile and my Siberia.

473 The Gay Science IV:295, pages 236-37. Nietzsche makes a similar point in The Gay Science V:375, page 337, and in Antichrist 54, page 638, where he first says “[c]onvictions are prisons” and then identifies “[c]onviction as a means: many things are attained only by means of a conviction. Great passion uses and uses up convictions, it does not succumb to them.”
Brief habits are capable of doing transformative work, whereas enduring habits (whatever other benefits they could possibly contain for a self) establish a rigidity that thwarts the work of transformation. Opposing and distanced brief habits can communicate, interact, and interfere with each other, stimulating development and preventing ossification. It is in this sense that even those forms of life I critiqued in chapter three (such as colorblindness and exoticism) could be transformative. If they are brief habits bridging a racist form of life and a future, resistant form of life, they may be serving a very useful function. It is when one settles into such a position and uses her convictions to defend against what is unfamiliar that these forms of life become tyrannical, suffocating, and inimical to the health of an individual. Even the ideals of health, vitality, or the expansive self could become tyrannical and suffocating, and would then need to be overcome.

For a white person characterized by the kind of ignorance that Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones describe (an ignorance that, as in part affective, unconscious, social, and even bodily, cannot be ameliorated by the simple introduction of knowledge), the values of openness, curiosity, and hospitality for what is unfamiliar; the willingness to let go of ideals and “outdate” oneself; playfulness; yearning for multiple perspectives; and an appreciation for “brief habits” have the potential to help one move beyond negation (not this, away from that) into new regions, new forms of life. Whatever value a firm resolve and a refusal to compromise might have in another context, here it is values of flexibility, undermining, and overcoming that support our loosely-formed goals. By valuing the contradictions within and the insights they may someday offer up, a white person can hope to escape a cultural solipsism and narrow arrogance. Sensing the
excitement of transformation—of the expansion of the self—she embraces change and aims for vitality.

For Nietzsche, unfortunately, the ideal self is not only playful and joyful but also “hard,” cruel, and warrior-like as I’ve said above. Nietzsche’s free spirit entertains the “dangerous maybe” often in solitude, as it is vigilant against the temptation to feel pity for others and fearful of the commonness that can supposedly rub off when one mixes too much with society. In place of Nietzsche’s ideal, I promote what I am calling “the expansive self.” This self, like Nietzsche’s ideal type, has the capacity to take in diverse experiences and incorporate them into itself. But whereas Nietzsche’s type is likely to do this by battling something (whether a person, a culture, even an idea), conquer it, and feed parasitically off of its energies, the “expansive self” would be able to affirm what is different and challenging without conquering. Instead of growing to become the ultimate parasite, the “expansive self” fosters its own growth through symbiotic relationships, relationships of mutual care and generous challenge. She expands not in the fashion of colonization—where the self grows larger and edges out what is other—but through “hospitality” for what is unfamiliar, making room in her life for what is different to enter in and change her.
Conclusion

My Nietzschean account of transformation against the grain of race-related problems serves as a bridge between, on the one hand, the rich descriptive and analytical work done by theorists such as Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones, and, on the other hand, the constructive, strategic work of persuading, guiding, and encouraging white people that has just begun in Critical Race Theory. This account of transformation lends greater insight to that constructive, strategic work. Its roots are in the accounts of white tendencies that Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones offer, extending and building on those accounts. It leaves us on the cusp of specific, concrete suggestions for white people and conjures up many issues for consideration as we formulate such strategies.

The extension of Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ work that Nietzsche accomplishes begins with a critique of rationality. Together, Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ accounts already contain a critique of rationality and show how powerful other dimensions of the self can be. Nietzsche’s critique of rationality shows his affinity with these four theorists and adds new insights—especially the idea that rational beliefs are meaningful as symptoms (even if we cannot make firm diagnoses), suggestions of the purposes beliefs may serve, and his insistence that it is not a shame that we humans are not so rational. This insistence rids us of the temptation to “cure” our lack of rationality with rational measures. Nietzsche extends Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ claims that much of who we are is not rational by adding, “and that in itself is not the
problem.” As we look for routes out of what we consider problematic (in this case, complicity with racism and white privilege), we need not view the journey as a process of replacing the irrational with the rational, but can instead let all parts of the self be caught up in and work to energize transformation.

Along with extending Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s, and Lugones’ critiques of rationality, Nietzsche adds new dimensions to their critical descriptions of whiteness through his critique of morality and here begins pointing the way beyond the problems these four theorists describe. Nietzsche first makes us suspicious of moral frameworks. We need not banish normativity altogether, he says, but we also cannot trust moral frameworks to serve our purposes well. With the Nietzschean idea of moralities serving particular purposes, we can see how moral rhetoric has often been used to further rather than overcome racism, oppression, and inequality. As he follows his suspicions of moral frameworks, Nietzsche highlights the problems of dichotomous moralities of good and evil, those problems being the resentful demonization of an other and the self-directed resentment known as guilt or the “bad conscience.” Nietzsche suggests that the harsh, self-focused dynamics of guilt diminish the self’s energies and prevent the outward expansion of the self beyond its current limitations. Promoting change with guilt as a tool, he indicates, may lead to stagnancy, so that we’d be better off advocating and persuading with an eye to cultivating energy.

Nietzsche’s warnings about the path forward are helpful given many of the descriptions of white people that Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones give. These theorists describe the many blocks and defenses that most white people have, thus recognizing that we (Critical Race Theorists, social activists, or educators) must think
carefully about how we might find our ways through, around, or beyond these walls without provoking people to dig in their heels and reinforce their walls. Since much of what Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones reveal about white people is not exactly flattering, we need, as Nietzsche suggests, a way to face problems with an eye to self-overcoming; this means that we need a sense of energy and vitality rather than the hopeless defeat that overwhelming guilt can bring about. While Nietzsche may not be concerned with egocentrism or ethnocentrism per se, he does at least remind us of the importance of seeing beyond oneself if one wishes to change, and thus unintentionally reveals the harm of self-focus, one of the common consequences of feelings of guilt. Nietzsche thus provides a welcome addition to Critical Race Theory, showing us that we need to expose whiteness without promoting obsessive self-focus, demonizing an other, or moralizing in a way that promotes guilt or shame.

The idea of Nietzschean transformation, built up around the concept of self-overcoming, provides an alternative to the idea of change as progress implemented through rational thinking. Mills’, Sullivan’s, Alcoff’s and Lugones’ accounts implicitly demand such an alternative idea, as the notion of change as progress would clearly not fit with accounts of humans as shaped strongly by non-rational forces, as epistemically limited, and as fortifying their vulnerabilities with defenses. Since so much of the self is caught up in so many different ways in one’s racialized form of life—even in discordant and contradictory ways—we cannot expect change to proceed in an organized, linear path of steady improvement. Self-overcoming is a looping-back movement, rather than a linear increase, and thus aptly characterizes the unraveling of what is not fully conscious and the disruption of what is habitual. Self-overcoming is self-reflexive, but not self-
enclosed, recognizing that the look beyond oneself is at least as important as the look at oneself. While Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones insist on the importance of self-reflection (“seeing” and “revealing” whiteness functioning in society and one’s own whiteness), they also recognize the importance of interrupting a closed circuit and seeing beyond—expanding one’s horizon, escaping destructive habits, stretching ignorance into awareness, seeing other people in their worlds and seeing oneself in other worlds. The looping back and stretching outward of self-overcoming thus gives us a model of change that appropriately emphasizes working on oneself without limiting itself to a working on oneself and that allows for sudden breakthroughs as well as slow digestion. Finally, the complexity of self-overcoming allows for a wide variety of paths that move from various forms of complicity to various forms of resistance. This flexibility is important since Alcoff and Lugones in particular emphasize that social identities are complex; that racial identities intersect in complicated ways with other social identities; that no one is purely resistant or purely complicit with racism and white privilege; that there are many ways of being complicit and resistant; and that one may be complicit in some ways while being resistant in other ways. Self-overcoming does not force an oversimplification or universalization of social identities and routes through complicity to resistance.

In self-overcoming, as we saw, one’s goal is often quite vague at first (perhaps just a “not this”) and the goal of self-overcoming is itself overcome as it is pursued. Since Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones describe white people in terms of ignorance and epistemic limitation, clearly such people will not be able to posit an initial goal based on any depth of understanding of race and resistant whiteness. But, as their epistemic limitations are overcome and their insights gain depth, these people emerging from layers
of ignorance will be able to reformulate their aims. Their very ways of valuing and evaluating will transform, as must be the case given the dramatic broadening of their epistemic horizons.

Nietzsche suggests that contradictions, while sometimes aim-inhibiting, can also be productive, especially as things shift during the movement of self-overcoming (new ways of valuing clash with old, or new ways of evaluation reveal deep-seated contradictions in the self as one overcomes oneself). Nietzsche thus indicates that even the irrational aspects of ourselves (not only the rational or non-rational) can be sites of transformation. Since Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones do indeed posit a great deal of irrationality and contradiction within white people’s tendencies, Nietzsche’s point is a welcome reminder that such irrationality and contradiction does not necessarily imply stagnancy or the lack of any hope for change. Even in those areas where a person seems most stuck, there may be potential to give way to movement and growth.

Nietzsche’s normativity of health and vitality shows us how we might avoid the hang-ups of guilt, shame, and defensiveness against guilt and shame. Nietzsche thus indicates how we might make use of the sharp critiques of whiteness such as Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones provide without being tempted to use this criticism in service of guilt-ridden moralizing and shaming. By presenting transformation as an exciting, vital expansion of perspective and capacity—as an affirmation of life in all its differences—Nietzsche (as I take him up, that is) shows clearly why a white person supposedly the beneficiary of great privileges and advantages would ever want to give up that way of life. Some white philosophers, especially feminist theorists, beginning to take Critical Race Theory into account emphasize how “painful” coming to awareness
and changing is. Yes, it is difficult, often uncomfortable, even psychologically distressing at times (as Nietzsche would say, creation generally comes with destruction, and with destruction, loss). But “pain” is not by any means the only part of this story. Anti-racist transformation is exciting, interesting, and joyful. It is a movement of new insights, different friendships, intriguing possibilities. It is the life-affirming activity of vitalizing one’s communities, tending to social illnesses, and celebrating communal health when it is experienced. Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones certainly do not promote a view of change as a largely painful process that white people must go through for the sake of others, but we could imagine someone else taking their critical work and deciding that the route out of white privilege must be terribly difficult and must come with great psychic costs. With the intervening of a Nietzschean normativity, however, we foreclose the possibility of this mistaken conclusion and present transformation in a spirit that in the end is likely much truer to Mills, Sullivan, Alcoff, and Lugones.

A Nietzschean account of transformation, as the bridge between prescriptive work and constructive, strategic work, not only extends work that Critical Race Theorists have already done, but also suggests many considerations that will be important as the field moves on to create specific, concrete suggestions and strategies for white people. With a knowledge now of how change may happen in this context and what forces may get in the way of change, this Nietzschean account of transformation opens up many lines of inquiry for future research and theory, whether in the field of philosophy, psychology, political science, history, or education, and also poses important questions for community organizations and activist groups. In what follows, I offer some preliminary insights,
arising from the Nietzschean account of transformation I have given, that could guide constructive, strategic work in the realms of both theory and practice.

Given the limited effectiveness of rational arguments that Critical Race Theorists and Nietzsche have together shown, we clearly need other methods of persuasion (in addition to rather than instead of rational argumentation). Mills, Alcoff, Lugones, and especially Sullivan discuss the need for white people to find indirect means to disrupt their own unconscious habits since direct access is blocked.\textsuperscript{474} Nietzsche is helpful in showing us where to begin in looking for indirect routes into other people’s unconscious habits. Reminding us that the convictions people proclaim are often symptoms, Nietzsche implicitly suggests that, in conversations where persuasion is our goal, debating the beliefs people express may not always be the best approach. While we may almost never be able to make confident, specific diagnoses of others (or ourselves, for that matter), we can consider, instead of presenting contrary arguments and evidence, asking questions that may help get to the psychological, emotional, or social condition of which the expressed beliefs may be symptoms. In other words, instead of either endorsing another’s convictions or immediately combating them, we may want to pose questions that keep the conversation going and help the other explore some of the historical, emotional, and social bases for his or her convictions.

Through Nietzsche’s critique of morality, many considerations and questions about promoting transformation arise. Nietzsche warns against resentful, dichotomous moralities of good and evil that demonize a particular group of people. So, in promoting

\textsuperscript{474} See especially Sullivan, \textit{Revealing Whiteness}, 9-10 and 143-44.
anti-racist transformation, we should first avoid demonizing a certain sector of the white population, presenting them as the true evil ones from whom other whites can distinguish themselves (it is not uncommon, for example, for wealthy whites to be demonized in critical race literature and for poor and/or uneducated whites to be demonized as the real racists in popular culture). We also need ways to address some white people’s resentment of minorities and recognize its deep psychological roots. We can continue to present evidence of the continued disadvantages minorities face (attempting to dispell the myth that whites are significantly victimized by reverse discrimination and political correctness)—but, to address the deep, emotional roots of resentment, we also need to do more than present evidence. Perhaps psychologists can bring more light to the dynamics of resentment and, when common threads are uncovered, either through writing for non-academic audiences or through therapeutic practices can help resentful white people get to the real root of whatever is causing them distress. If white people who claim victimization and blame minorities could begin to see alternative perspectives on their struggles, it would be beneficial also if authors and community organizers could help such people find ways of taking action and addressing these problems, as the inability to act, Nietzsche says, is a key ingredient of resentment.

As we offer suggestions to white people, we will need to ask whether our suggestions implicitly drive toward imposing guilt and thus risk provoking defensiveness or immobilization. We need to be able to describe race-related problems and show how white people are complicit with them without falling into the unhelpful practice of shaming. Recognizing the importance of self-reflection while simultaneously valuing the look *beyond* which Nietzsche so often celebrates, we must not only encourage self-
examination but also show white people something different, something beyond. We can aim for a balance between two aims: first, demanding that white people really look at white privilege and their own complicity with white privilege and second, encouraging white people to look not only at themselves and to be concerned with more than simply assuaging their negative feelings about themselves. Since guilt comes easily to those whose defenses make room for it, we need not promote it; on the other hand, if guilt can be minimally effective (as Nietzsche admits it can), we should also think about how we can encourage people to make the most of it when it arrives but also avoid drowning in it.

An understanding of Nietzschean transformation teaches us not to expect immediate results. Digestion may be slow; contradictions may take time to unravel. The first exposure white people get to new analyses of racism and white privilege may not sink in or make it through defenses and stubborn patterns. But these new perspectives may nevertheless be cycling on some level—they may be caught up in the looping-back motion of self-overcoming—and may produce some kind of movement or growth later on. Educators (formal or informal) need to take others’ reactions into account as evaluations of the pedagogy while simultaneously recognizing that initial reactions of disinterest or hostility may evolve into something quite different over time. Keeping our expectations flexible in another way, we (theorists, educators, activists, or simply anti-racist members of society) must remember that there is no one anti-racist path, that people will grow and change in different ways and at different rates. We must also keep in mind that even the goals of transformation change, so that one who is just beginning to step out of much of the socialization of whiteness will not aim for the same goals as one who has been intimately concerned with race and transformation for several years. When
we discover that we may have insights that others do not, we can offer them in a modest spirit of sharing and make a point of not only challenging people to reach farther but also expressing support, appreciation, and excitement about whatever steps a person has managed to take. As an example, we might actually support another’s shallow multicultural interest before or even at the same time that we challenge it, since, as I claimed, such an attitude is not pure complicity, but has the possibility of being a transitional phase. We want people to take pride in their anti-racist transformations (without going so far as to reinscribe the arrogance of empowered people or frame anti-racist whites as heroes saving minorities) instead of simply feeling ashamed by the prospect of how much farther they have to go.

Since self-overcoming is, in part, bodily, we should think about how to encourage self-overcoming on a bodily level. We could begin by advocating a mindfulness of body that would help people access (rather than ignore or repress) bodily sensations such as anxiety, comfort, hesitance, eagerness, avoidance, warmth, etc., in situations that are racially charged for the person in question and those situations that are not. Although Nietzsche was no Buddhist, he does express (in passages quoted in previous chapters) a mindfulness of his bodily conditions, processes, and activities and their intimate connection to the psychological and spiritual spheres. He may lose out on some of the potential benefits of mindfulness when he cuts attentiveness short with eager self-diagnoses, but he nonetheless makes the connection between mindfulness of body and self-overcoming. Further connecting the bodily to the cognitive and spiritual, Nietzsche
advocates philosophizing while walking outdoors or dancing. How should anti-racist work be done, bodily speaking? White people can use their bodies in protests and demonstrations (as we saw in the example of Bob Zellner). Less obviously, white people, as I claimed, use their bodies all the time to forge race relations by simply being white and occupying various spaces. We could, as theorists, think about how to encourage more subversive uses of one’s racialized body.

In providing suggestions and strategies for white people, we want to attend to the difficulty of destruction and loss without letting them overshadow the vitality of transformation. We want to encourage people to acknowledge the difficulty, discomfort, even psychic pain that transformation can bring—not to feel the need to repress these feelings—but to see also what a joyful, interesting, exciting, fulfilling voyage it is too. As we communicate this sense of excitement in transformation, however, we want to avoid promoting exoticism. We need to present transformation as neither a drudging moral obligation, nor as a consuming-colonizing movement. We want to imbue our strategizing with a simultaneity of seriousness and playfulness, sobering awareness and delightful discovery.

To encourage selves ripe for transformation, we would do best to posit something like the “expansive self” as our ideal rather than, for example, the puritanical, morally upright person who never “flip-flops,” who holds steadfast and never changes his mind. With an aim toward encouraging this type of self that explores and experiments, we should encourage white people to be grateful for others’ perspectives of them, even those

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perspectives one doesn’t end up accepting as legitimate or fair. We want to convey an appreciation for Nietzschean “objectivity” (seeing from as many perspectives as possible). We also need to teach patience with what is unfamiliar, an acceptance of shifting ground, and a willingness to forbear discomforting transitions.

Finally, if we ourselves (Critical Race Theorists) have not crossed some finish line and reached enlightenment (whatever our race may be), we should ask ourselves what our role is in advising others. We need to find ways to approach constructive, strategic work in a spirit of experimenting and sharing and not in an authoritarian, “I see the light but you’re still blind” attitude. We need to share what we’ve learned while retaining philosophical modesty, a sense of our own fallibility, and a willingness—an eagerness—to “outdate” ourselves, to overcome ourselves.


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• Cognitive Development Trainer for middle school students (summer 2008)

Awards and Honors
• RGSO Grant (Spring 2008)
• Graduate Scholar Award (Fall 1999-spring 2003)
• University Graduate Fellowship (Fall 1999-spring 2000)
• National Merit Scholarship (Fall 1995-spring 1999)
• Buntrock Scholarship (Fall 1995-spring 1999)

Languages
• German: reading knowledge, conversational fluency
• French: reading knowledge
• Spanish: reading knowledge