

# Nietzsche's Best Life: The Ten Greatest Attributes of the *Übermensch*, & a Comparison to Aristotle's Virtuous Person

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## Abstract

The paper first outlines the 10 primary attributes of the *Übermensch*, Nietzsche's ideal person, with numerous quotations. Those attributes are self-determination, creativity, becoming, overcoming, discontent, flexibility, self-mastery, self-confidence, cheerfulness, and courage. The paper then compares Nietzsche's *Übermensch* with Aristotle's virtuous person. Nietzsche describes more of an attitude towards life and a process of living which are similar to a means as compared to Aristotle's objective character traits which are goals or ends in themselves. The paper concludes that Nietzsche does a better job of describing the best human life—one that is dynamic, passionate, and unique; consisting of self-growth and creativity; and filled with new experiences, insights, and adventures.

## Keywords

Nietzsche, *Übermensch*, Aristotle, Aristotle's Virtuous Person, Best Life, The Good Life, Attributes of the *Übermensch*, Nietzsche and Aristotle

## 1. Introduction

There are numerous compelling reasons why Nietzsche is one of the towering figures of philosophy. Among others, these include his original takes on perspectivism<sup>1</sup> and nihilism;<sup>2</sup> his unrelenting condemnation of Christianity<sup>3</sup> and

<sup>1</sup>"No, facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations." (WP, III, 3, 481: p. 267) All underlining in the quotations is my own in order to add emphasis. Words in italics were put there by either Nietzsche or the other authors of the quoted texts. I cite Nietzsche's texts using the standard English-language acronyms: *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT), *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (HL), *Human, All Too Human* (HATH), *The Gay Science* (GS), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z), *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE), *On the Genealogy of Morals* (GM) *Twilight of the Idols* (TI), *The Anti-Christ* (A), *Ecce Homo* (EH), and *The Will To Power* (WP).

<sup>2</sup>"Conscious of the truth he has once seen, man now sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence." (BT, 7: p. 60)

<sup>3</sup>"Because sickness belongs to the essence of Christianity ..." (A, 52: p. 181)

Western morality;<sup>4</sup> his assault on the Enlightenment's privileging of reason over human instincts, appetites, and emotions;<sup>5</sup> his innovative conceptions of the Will to Power<sup>6</sup> and Eternal Recurrence;<sup>7</sup> his take-no-prisoners style which targeted some of the greatest philosophical minds, such as those of Socrates, Hegel, and Kant;<sup>8</sup> his novel view of how history should be practiced;<sup>9</sup> his aggressive atheism;<sup>10</sup> and his later notoriety as both one of the founders of Existentialism and as the layer of the foundation for the Post-Modernist movement.

Yet, it is Nietzsche's musings on one of the most fundamental and oldest of philosophical topics, namely, his outline of the best life for a human being to live, which is at least as important in distinguishing him from the other great thinkers. This will be my focus.

Nietzsche's *ubermensch* is his ideal person—the person who represents the best or most well-lived life. This is the person who should be appreciated and admired—Nietzsche's "higher" man. We should note that Nietzsche introduced the term "*ubermensch*" in what he considered to be his best book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but hardly mentioned the *ubermensch* by this name thereafter. In that book he is referring to the future—to the direction which we can take human evolution if we consciously choose to do so.<sup>11</sup> The German word *ubermensch* is sometimes translated as "overman" or "superman" to depict the person who is over or beyond or superior to any current human beings—the ideal person of the future.

There is no reason, however, to limit our examination to the future, for the *ubermensch* represents a set of human attributes or qualities that Nietzsche believed would not only make life worth living, but would constitute a life that would be so incredible and fulfilling that one would be willing to live it over and over again for all eternity (Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence).

Most critics agree that the *ubermensch* is one of Nietzsche's solutions to his version of nihilism. Specifically, in a world where God does not seem to exist,

<sup>4</sup>"There are no moral facts whatever. Moral judgment has this in common with religious judgment that it believes in realities which do not exist. Morality is only an interpretation of certain phenomena—more precisely a *mis*interpretation." (TI, VII, 1: p. 66)

<sup>5</sup>"Rationality at any cost ... in opposition to the instincts, has itself been no more than a form of sickness ..." (TI, II, 11: p. 44)

<sup>6</sup>"What is good?—All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. (A, 2: p. 127)

<sup>7</sup>"This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it ... how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?" (GS, IV, 341: pp. 273-274)

<sup>8</sup>"Kant became an idiot." (A, 11: p. 134); "Socrates was a misunderstanding." (TI, II, 11: p. 44); "... it smells offensively Hegelian..." (EH: p. 726)

<sup>9</sup>"... it depends on one's being able to forget at the right time as well as to remember at the right time; on discerning with strong instinctual feelings when there is need to experience historically and when unhistorically." (HL, 1: p. 10)

<sup>10</sup>"Why atheism today?—'The father' in God has been thoroughly refuted ... he does not hear—and if he heard he still would not know how to help. Worst of all: he seems incapable of clear communication: is he unclear?" (BGE, III, 53: p. 256)

<sup>11</sup>Nietzsche had earlier made this point in *Human, All Too Human*: "But men can *consciously* decide to develop themselves forward to a new culture, whereas formerly they developed unconsciously and by chance." (HATH, 1, 24: p. 30)

where there is not any absolute right or wrong nor absolute good or evil and therefore there are no clear standards from which to judge actions as moral or immoral, and where there is no clear purpose, meaning, or aim to life, how is one to conduct their life and view it as meaningful and important?

“God is Dead” ... and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it; for example, the whole of our European morality. (GS, V, 343: p. 279) Imagine a being like nature, wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time; imagine indifference itself as a power—how *could* you live according to this indifference? (BGE, I, 9: p. 205)

Although the *ubermensch* is one of Nietzsche’s answers, it is far from his only answer because his ideal person takes different forms in his various books. For example, the master or nobleman of *Beyond Good and Evil*, the sovereign individual in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the character Zarathustra in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the Dionysian combined with the Apollinian in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the free spirit in *Human, All Too Human* are additional descriptions of the person whom Nietzsche suggests we strive to become. The philosopher, too, is at times portrayed as this ideal person. I will view the character traits which Nietzsche deemed desirable and as enunciated throughout his books as portraying the multiple attributes of the *ubermensch*, the ideal or higher person whom he only occasionally referred to by this name.

In two of his books Nietzsche expressly sets forth several virtues. However, we should probably not take these lists too seriously because they are not only inconsistent with each other, but also are quite short and do not seem to be intended to be comprehensive. Robert Solomon explains as follows:

Nietzsche himself offers us two short lists of virtues, one in *Daybreak*: “Honesty, courage, generosity, politeness”, the other in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “Courage, insight, sympathy, solitude”. We should not be surprised that they are not consistent (with each other or with what he says elsewhere in his work), for he penned them at different times (and no doubt in different moods). And, as always, it is not clear how serious he may have been on either occasion. I am sure he did not intend either list to be complete and exhaustive. The only virtue that is included in both lists is courage. (Solomon, 2003: pp. 145-146)

In their book *What Nietzsche Really Said*, Solomon and Kathleen Higgins tackled the project of assembling a list of Nietzsche’s virtues and found 23 (Solomon & Higgins, 2000: pp. 181-182).<sup>12</sup> This list is so comprehensive and

<sup>12</sup>Solomon, in his later book again came up with 23 virtues, and discusses each one. Both lists contain the following 21 virtues: aestheticism, courage, courtesy, depth, egoism, exuberance, fatalism, friendship, generosity, hardness, health, honesty, integrity, justice, playfulness, pride, responsibility, solitude, strength, style, and temperance. In their earlier book, Solomon and Higgins included “the feminine” and “presence”, but Solomon’s later book eliminates these two in favor of “wittiness” and “risk-taking”. (see Solomon, 2003: pp. 147-173)

long that I think it makes it difficult for us to “see the forest from the trees”, as the saying goes. Indeed, such a long list makes it harder to recognize the unity in Nietzsche’s thinking.<sup>13</sup> The primary purpose of this paper is to solve this problem. The next section of this paper discusses what I consider to be the ten most prominent Nietzschean virtues, namely, self-determination, creativity, becoming, overcoming, discontent, flexibility, self-mastery, self-confidence, cheerfulness, and courage. It is my hope that this list, which contains attributes which are interrelated, overlapping, and complementary, presents us with a more coherent and thus understandable picture of Nietzsche’s view of the best human life to live.

For the most part, this paper will not consider the many possible criticisms of Nietzsche and the attributes Nietzsche gives to the *ubermensch*. For example, self-determination or independence achieved by means of an extreme and incessant questioning of a society’s practices and values can be isolating and counterproductive. Arguably, Nietzsche did just that. The author Herman Hesse apparently thought Nietzsche paid a significant price for this,<sup>14</sup> and Nietzsche himself addresses his loneliness.<sup>15</sup> This article, instead of carrying out a careful critique of Nietzsche’s views of the *ubermensch*, will focus on Nietzsche’s ideas which might aid us in our own lives. As such, this paper could be viewed as an unbalanced treatment of Nietzsche’s views about the *ubermensch*, but that is in keeping with Nietzsche’s philosophical approach—as he was anything but balanced when tackling his subjects.

This article will further make generous use of quotes from Nietzsche—for to explain Nietzsche’s positions without a heavy dose of his actual words would be to miss the essence and brilliance of the man and his writings. Specifically, the

<sup>13</sup>I think that Solomon’s own words portray the danger that such a comprehensive list presents: “So what does this package of the virtues, when assembled, tend to look like? I suggested before we began that it would look a lot like a Cubist portrait: misshapen, ‘unnatural’, bizarre, but at the same time insightful in a way that a simple snapshot cannot be.” (Solomon, 2003: p. 173)

<sup>14</sup>Hesse wrote in his celebrated book *Steppenwolf* as follows: “A nature such as Nietzsche’s had to suffer our present ills more than a generation in advance. What he had to go through alone and misunderstood, thousands suffer today.” (Hesse, 1929: p. 104) Later, when referring to his character Harry, who apparently is the personification of Nietzsche, Hesse writes, “With this was bound up his need for loneliness and independence. There was never a man with a deeper and more passionate craving for independence than he ... But in the midst of the freedom he had attained Harry suddenly became aware that his freedom was a death and that he stood alone.” (Hesse, 1929: pp. 107-108) Nietzsche agreed: “I needed their company at the time, to be of good cheer in the midst of bad things (illness, isolation, foreignness, sloth, inactivity).” (HATH, Preface, 2: p. 5)

<sup>15</sup>Another potential criticism is that the *ubermensch*, which supposedly is an ideal for which everyone can strive, seems to be at odds with Nietzsche’s undemocratic elitism. Christine Daigle makes a noble attempt to reconcile Nietzsche’s political elitism with the universally beneficial qualities possessed by the *ubermensch* by suggesting that similar to how Nietzsche was not against all morality, but rather called for a reevaluation of morality, he was likewise calling for a reevaluation of democracy so that instead of the leveling down for which Nietzsche believed it was guilty, it could be refashioned to bring a flourishing for everyone (Daigle, 2006: pp. 11-15). I think education might be a good example. Nietzsche could support universal education at the lower levels in order to help us see where a person’s talents lie, and simultaneously support government spending more money for those exceptional students entering the higher grades—as we do to some extent today by the awarding of academic financial scholarships to those who have exhibited the most mental prowess. In other words, all people would be given an initial opportunity to become an *ubermensch*, but only those with the most potential will receive the extra support required for becoming one.

discussion of each attribute will close with five illustrative quotes.

The concluding section of this paper will make some comparisons between Nietzsche's *ubermensch* and Aristotle's virtuous person. It will explore how the two ideals line up with each other, and briefly discuss which philosopher ultimately does a better job of outlining the best life for a human being to live. This brings us two additional purposes for this paper: By contrasting Nietzsche's view with Aristotle's, we will see how Nietzsche's perspective on the best human life is unique and where it uniquely fits into moral theory, and further, we will begin an assessment or evaluation of Nietzsche's outlook.

## 2. The Ten Greatest Attributes of the *Urbemensch*

### 2.1. Self-Determination

By self-determination I mean the "authenticity" of which Heidegger writes where the person breaks away from the mainstream traditions and thoughts of their society—meaning that one truly has their own views, ideas, perspectives, judgments, opinions, and values for reasons which they have considered and questioned. One does not just follow the majority view of their community, state, or religion, or as Nietzsche puts it, employing a term earlier used by Kierkegaard, one does not merely go along with the "herd". They explore many of the possible perspectives, and question any and all outlooks. In order to achieve this one necessarily must question and assess the dominant viewpoints of their society, including and maybe especially those of one's religion. Even the basic structure and accepted morality of their society is open to question.

After one does this and gives a fair hearing to even unpopular ideas, then they can properly claim that their views are truly independent and their own, not just the attitudes and judgments of their parents, their culture, their community, their society, their country, or of the world. To do anything less is to be a follower. Nietzsche especially disapproved of beliefs based primarily on faith, as such beliefs had no allegiance to the "truth" or to what serves life best. This was indeed one of Nietzsche's principal accusations against Christianity, which he viewed as breeding conformity instead of promoting inquiry.

Because sickness belongs to the essence of Christianity, the typical Christian condition, "faith", *has* to be a form of sickness, every straightforward, honest, scientific road to knowledge *has* to be repudiated by the Church as a *forbidden* road. Even to doubt is a sin ... "Faith" means not wanting to know what is true ... *Compulsion to lie*—in that I detect every predestined theologian. (A, 52: p. 181)

Nietzsche's self-determining person is autonomous, freethinking, and fiercely independent. At times, and possibly quite often, he will be a non-conformist and iconoclast. In fact, Nietzsche himself was the epitome of the iconoclast: one who attacks or ignores cherished beliefs and long-held traditions due to the belief that they are based on error, superstition, or a lack of creativity. One's free-thinking must eventually challenge and grow beyond even their teacher, nicely put by

Nietzsche when he says that “one repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil”. (Z, I, 22: p. 78)

It is surprising to me that Solomon did not include self-determination or something similar in his list of Nietzschean virtues. He states that he considered autonomy, but was concerned that the word autonomy had already been co-opted by Kant and his followers and was used by them in a different way than intended by Nietzsche. Nonetheless, Solomon affirms that “autonomy in the sense of *independence* is surely central to Nietzsche’s powerful sense of individuality (versus ‘the herd’).” (Solomon, 2003: p. 155)

Nietzsche’s first words in the Preface to *Human, All Too Human*, make the centrality of self-determination quite clear.

Often enough, and always with great consternation, people have told me that there is something distinctive in all my writings ... All of them, I have been told, contain snares and nets for careless birds, and an almost constant, unperceived challenge to reverse one’s habitual estimations and esteemed habits. (HATH, Preface, I: pp. 3-4)

In some sense the blind following of others and the failure to question society’s ideas and values make us less than human—for it is the human capacity to question and to be truly unique which makes life both interesting and fulfilling, or so Nietzsche believed. One should be “sovereign” over their beliefs, free from the common and often counterproductive ideas and values of others, and stand apart from or beyond conventional morality, what Nietzsche calls “supramoral”. He expresses this when he describes the sovereign individual as “liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for ‘autonomous’ and ‘moral’ are mutually exclusive) ...” (GM, II, 2: p. 495). Additionally, the *ubermensch* has no hardened convictions since convictions likewise stifle one’s self-growth and self-determination.

- To lure many away from the herd, for that I have come. (Z, I, 9: p. 23)
- A man is called a free spirit if he thinks otherwise than would be expected, based on his origin, environment, class, and position, or based on prevailing contemporary views. He is the exception: bound spirits are the rule. (HATH, V, 225: p. 139)
- *Who is most influential*—When a human being resists his whole age and stops it at the gate to demand an accounting, this *must* have influence. Whether that is what he desires is immaterial; that he *can* do it is what matters. (GS, III, 156: p. 198)
- One should not let oneself be misled: great intellects are sceptics, Zarathustra is a sceptic...Grand passion uses and uses up convictions, it does not submit to them—it knows itself sovereign ... The man of faith, the “believer” of every sort is necessarily a dependent man—such as cannot out of himself posit ends at all. The “believer” does not belong to *himself*; he can only be a means, he has to be *used*, he needs someone who will use him. (A, 54: p. 184)
- More and more it seems to be that the philosopher, being *of necessity* a man

of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, has always found himself, and *had* to find himself, in contradiction to his today: his enemy was ever the ideal of today ... By applying the knife vivisectionally to the chest of the very *virtues of their time*, they betrayed what was their own secret: to know of a *new* greatness of man, of a new untrodden way to his enhancement ... today the concept of greatness entails being noble, wanting to be by oneself, being able to be different, standing alone and having to live independently. (BGE, VI, 212: pp. 327, 329)

## 2.2. Creativity

Because Nietzsche's nihilistic views left humans in the position of having no single or overarching purpose that applied to all people, he believed that each of us would have to create the meaning and purpose for our own life. The creation of meaning and purpose, the creation of our character through our own authentic views and morals, the creation of our personality and style, and the joy of artistic and other creations was a constant theme for Nietzsche. Nietzsche declares that the "noble type of man ... is *value-creating*". (BGE, IX, 260: p. 395) Walter Kaufmann affirms the importance Nietzsche places on creativity: "Nietzsche's philosophy is indeed a sustained celebration of creativity—and all genuine creation is, as we have tried to show, a creation of new values and norms." (Kaufmann, 1974: p. 414)

It is the human ability to create which sets him apart from other beings, and the more creative one is the more they deserve to be admired. As Brian Leiter said about Nietzsche, "he ultimately admired creative individuals the most: in art, literature, music, and philosophy ..." (Leiter, 1997: p. 265) Great historians, too, display creative artistry. They do not merely record objective facts; rather, they pick and choose among many occurrences and perspectives and create and fashion them into a unified picture which elevates the historical events into an artistic and perhaps transformative story.

History ... its value is just this, to describe with insight a known, perhaps common theme, an everyday melody, to elevate it, raise it to a comprehensive symbol and so let a whole world of depth of meaning, power, and beauty be *guessed* in it. But this requires above all a great artistic capacity, and creative overview ... the genuine historian must have the strength to recast the well known into something never heard before ... and only if history can bear being transformed into a work of art, that is, to become a pure art form, may it perhaps preserve instincts or even rouse them. (HL, 6, 7: pp. 36, 37, 39)

The *Übermensch* sees the world every day with new eyes, and gives the world and its events new interpretations. It is man who creates the ideas that a sunset is beautiful or that a spider is ugly. Nietzsche recognizes as such when he declares: "Man believes that the world itself is filled with beauty—he *forgets* that it is he who has created it. He alone has bestowed beauty upon the world—alas! Only a



very human, all too human beauty.” (TI, IX, 19: p. 89)

Once we move on from accepted moralities, such as European and Christian morality, we have an “open sea” to create new moralities, as the last quotation in this set indicates.

- Far from the market place and from fame happens all that is great: far from the market place and from fame the inventors of new values have always dwelt. (Z, I, 12: p. 52)
- One thing is needful—To “give style” to one’s character—a great and rare art! (GS, IV, 290: p. 232)
- New ears for new music. New eyes for the most distant things. A new conscience for truths which have hitherto remained dumb. (A, Foreword: p. 125)
- ... let the value of all things be posited newly by you. For that shall you be fighters! For that shall you be creators! (Z, I, 22: p. 77)
- Indeed, 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. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again. The sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an “open sea”. (GS, V, 343: p. 280)

### 2.3. Becoming

Nietzsche, similar to Socrates and Confucius, sets forth as one of the driving forces of a good life that of continual self-growth, or as Nietzsche puts it, a life of becoming instead of just being. This involves pushing one’s limits and going further than one has gone in the past. Nietzsche declares in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “With you I broke whatever my heart revered; I overthrew all boundary stones and images.” (Z, IV, 9: p. 274)

For many if not most people, life falls into a routine and stagnates. Nietzsche, similar to the Buddha, notices that the world is always changing, and that impermanence characterizes life. As such, we should likewise change. Nietzsche asserts that we should “revolt against everything which already *is*, which is no longer *becoming*”. (TI, IX, 45: p. 111)

The connection between self-determination and becoming is evident since questioning one’s society will result in one’s changing themselves. However, people are often afraid to do so, and become comfortable in living a rather monotonous life with virtually the same ideas, values, opinions, judgments, goals, and actions as they had when they were relatively young. They have ceased becoming, they are just existing. They have lost the joy of self-growth, the joy of letting go of one’s past to create a new future and a new self, the joy of becoming by “self-overcoming”.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, part of creation involves destruction, for it is from the destruction

<sup>16</sup>Several commentators, such as Alan Schrift, have concluded that “becoming” is the predominate characteristic of the *Übermensch*. (Schrift, 2001)



of our own viewpoints that we can start anew and create new ones.

- ... *to realize in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming—that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction*. (TI, X, 5: p. 121)
- You shall become the person you are. (GS, III, 270: p. 219)
- I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself and thus perishes. (Z, I, 17: p. 65)
- What is life?—Life—that is: constantly shedding something that wants to die. (GS, I, 26: p. 100)
- All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming; thus the law of life will have it, the law of the necessity of “self-overcoming” ... (GM, III, 27: p. 597)

## 2.4. Overcoming

Nietzsche believed that each of us needs challenges. While some religions and philosophies teach us to seek peaceful and contented lives, and to avoid competition, contention, hardship, heartache, and hindrances, Nietzsche believed that it is through overcoming challenges that the human spirit soars. That is how we become greater and better than we were before. Indeed, overcoming obstacles is needed for our self-growth, and the bigger the obstacle the more potential there is for personal growth. It is through our attitude and will that we can overcome the challenges in our lives.

The importance of this attribute cannot be overstated as Nietzsche specifically described his own life in these terms: “My humanity is a constant self-overcoming”. (EH: p. 689) Furthermore, when Nietzsche introduces the *ubermensch* the first attribute he associates with him is overcoming.

One important example of overcoming presented by Nietzsche are the “sovereign individuals” who keep their promises even if they have to overcome seemingly impossible obstacles to do so. They will overcome circumstances, other people, and even fate itself in order to keep their word.

These acts of overcoming will make a person more resilient, more formidable, more dependable, and more accomplished. They are no longer subject to the will of others or of bad luck; rather, through challenges they become masters of their environment and of themselves. They no longer live with excuses, for it is the challenges which make them who they are. They overcome not only the outside world, but themselves in the sense that they must overcome their own fears, self-doubts, and prior limitations. We can here see the connection between becoming and overcoming, as one’s becoming is a self-overcoming.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Schrift puts it this way: “The greatest obstacle to self-overcoming is thus not to be found in others. Instead, it is the self that one already is that stands as the greatest obstacle to future overcomings (cf. Z, I:17, ‘On the Way of the Creator’). Which is to say, in conclusion, that the lesson Zarathustra teaches, in the teaching of the *Uebermensch*, is that to become what will become means becoming-*other* than what one is.” (Schrift, 2001: p. 59)

Bernd Magnus emphasizes two to the four attributes we have already mentioned: autonomy and self-overcoming: “The elective affinity, family resemblance, between *Uebermensch* and master is plain enough. His type represents ascending life, self-overcoming, self-possession, autonomy and is to be contrasted with decadence, decomposition, dependency, and weakness.” (Magnus, 1980: p. 274)

- What is happiness? The feeling that power *increases*—that a resistance is overcome. (A, 2: p. 127)
- He exploits bad accidents to his advantage; what does not kill him makes him stronger. (EH: p. 680)
- ... the *sovereign individual* ... all those who promise like sovereigns ... give their word as something that can be relied on because they know themselves strong enough to maintain it in the face of accidents, even “in the face of fate” ... (GM, II, 2: pp. 495-496)
- *I teach you the overman*. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? (Z, I, 3: p. 12)
- The free man is a *warrior*—How is freedom measured, in individuals as in nations? By the resistance which has to be overcome, by the effort it costs to stay *aloft*. (TI, IX, 38: p. 104)

## 2.5. Discontent

In Taoism the goal is to blend with nature, your surroundings, your situations, and the people you encounter; in Buddhism the goal is to obtain inner peace through the extinction of desires; and in Christianity at least one goal is to be thankful and contented for all God has provided you. Nietzsche’s recommendation is a radical departure from these age-old wisdoms. He tells us to never be contented and to continually strive for more, to embrace and pursue many of our desires, to triumph over the situations and people who would stand in the way of our life-affirming goals, and to welcome chaos and discontent within ourselves—for it is this discontent which spurs us on to do the unusual, to achieve the exceptional, to make great discoveries, and to literally create a new world. Nietzsche makes this point in his typically jarring way when he declares, “Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself.” (Z, prologue, 5: p. 17)

Dissimilar to the age-old and supposedly wise classical teachings, Nietzsche believed that contentment is not a worthy goal for a human being. Rather, seek to make your mark, to grow as a person, to achieve what was once thought to be unachievable, to create what does not yet exist, and to change yourself and the world so that it moves in a new direction, with a new purpose, and to a “higher” place. As Nietzsche wrote, “What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end.” (Z, I, 4: p. 15)

- I say unto you: One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. (Z, I, 5: p. 17)
- *Not* contentment, but more power; *not* peace at all, but war. (A, 2: p. 128)
- ... always prepared to risk all—festively, impelled by the longing of undiscovered worlds and seas, people and gods ... (GS, IV, 302: p. 242)
- He, the great experimenter with himself, discontented and insatiable, wrestling with animals, nature, and gods for ultimate dominion ... (GM, III, 13: p. 557)
- Nothing has grown more alien to us than that desideratum of former times

“peace of soul”, the *Christian* desideratum. (TI, V, 3: p. 54)

## 2.6. Flexibility

Nietzsche believes that one should not live by inflexible rules handed down by society. Rather, as an autonomous and self-determining being one would create their own ideas, standards, and goals by which to live and guide their lives. These guidelines would be provisional so they could change and evolve over time—as the person and the situations change.

Nietzsche’s biggest concern is the inflexibility he sees in Western morality and religion. According to Nietzsche, Christianity has imposed rules and restrictions that do not serve life and which the Church itself does not follow,<sup>18</sup> and has exhibited an inflexibility that stifles individual creativity and freedom—in part by trying to inflict guilt and shame on those who refuse to follow or fail to live up to Church teachings and rules. Nietzsche believed that many Christians self-righteously cling to their faith and convictions and thereby lose the flexibility that life demands. Nietzsche concludes: “The words ‘conviction’, ‘faith’, the pride of martyrdom—these are the least favorable states for the advancement of truth.” (WP, II, 457: p. 251)

Additionally, since people and cultures differ so dramatically, Nietzsche believed it is counterproductive that moral standards should be the same for all people. Just as there are many different kinds of people and societies, so there should also be many different acceptable moralities.

Moreover, the accepted moral systems impose human judgments onto reality, but those judgments themselves are not facts. It is people who impose their views of morality onto those actions. For example, it may be a fact that you lied, but it is not a fact that your lying is moral or immoral. This would be a judgment. As such, Nietzsche claims: “*There are no moral facts whatever.* Moral judgment has this in common with religious judgment that it believes in realities which do not exist.” (TI, VII, 1: p. 66)

Inflexibility is not limited to morality and religion. In fact, philosophers and intellectuals are also often guilty of coming up with systems which are both rigid and oversimplify the world in a way which contradicts our own experiences. For example, the one-lined tests for determining right from wrong action as proposed by Mill’s Utilitarianism and Kant’s categorical imperative could not possibly be sufficient for the complex and myriad of situations which we face, and these inflexible tests often end up with immoral results. Kant tells us to avoid lying even when the intention is to save an innocent life, while Utilitarianism would sacrifice an innocent person for the amorphous greater good.

- I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of

<sup>18</sup>For example, Christianity tells its followers to be kind, nice, and charitable, and yet condemns those who have different beliefs to a hell—and forever. “They say ‘Judge not!’ but they send to Hell everything that stands in their way.” (A, 44: p. 170) “‘I am just’, it always sounded like ‘I am just—revenged’. With their virtue they want to scratch out the eyes of their enemies ...” (Z, II, 5: p. 95) Further, Christianity preached that wealth and power were not important, but the Church became the most powerful and richest institution the world had ever known.

integrity. (TI, I, 26: p. 35)

- “This is *my* way; where is yours?”—thus I answered those who asked me “the way”. For *the* way—that does not exist. (Z, III, 11: p. 195)
- A virtue merely from a feeling of respect for the concept ‘virtue’, as Kant desired it, is harmful. ‘Virtue’, ‘duty’, ‘good in itself, impersonal and universal—phantoms ... (A, 11: p. 133)
- Avoid all such unconditional people. (Z, IV, 13: p. 293)
- Freedom from conviction of any kind, the *capacity* for an unconstrained view, *pertains* to strength. (A, 54: p. 184)

## 2.7. Self-Mastery

Although the *Übermensch* is a free spirit in that he or she is unconstrained by conventional views, the *übermensch* at the same time exercises self-discipline. This enables one to overcome obstacles, to create a new self and a new world, and to achieve one’s goals. Freedom of thought is accompanied by disciplined thoughts, freedom of action is accompanied by disciplined actions, and the freedom to dream is accompanied by the discipline necessary to achieve those dreams.

Self-mastery will produce a life of achievement—a life of which one can be proud because one has demonstrated the self-discipline to overcome both idleness and excuses. The *Übermensch* takes responsibility for his or her life because their self-mastery allows them to overcome the hardships and challenges that deter and discourage others. They triumph in spite of life’s many tests, and they often rise above the barriers or walls that others would find impenetrable.

Casual readers of Nietzsche are often taken by Nietzsche’s concept of will to power, and sometimes mistakenly interpret his philosophy as essentially advocating the use of brute force or power against others. This, however, is to fail to understand what Nietzsche was trying to convey to us. The will to power’s most important use is to aid us in mastering ourselves. The importance of this idea of self-mastery was well said by Bernd Magnus:

It is not a question of mastering others, of overcoming the herd by overpowering it. The herd to be overcome is the herd in ourselves. Mastery and overcoming are to be understood as self-mastery and self-overcoming primarily. (Magnus, 1980: p. 276)

After one has learned to have mastery over themselves, then this mastery necessarily manifests itself in one’s relations with others and the outside world.

- How this mastery over oneself also necessarily gives him mastery over circumstances, over nature, and over all more short-willed and unreliable creatures ... this power over oneself and over fate ... (GM, II, 2: pp. 495-496)
- One has to learn to *see*, one has to learn to *think*, one has to learn to *speak* and *write*; the end in all three is a noble culture ... Learning to *see*, as I understand it, is almost what is called in unphilosophical language “strong will-power ...” (TI, VIII, 6: p. 76)

- Every attainment, every step forward in knowledge, *follows* from courage, from hardness against oneself ... (EH, Preface, 3: p. 674)
- The most spiritual human beings, as the *strongest*, find their happiness where others would find their destruction: in the labyrinth, in severity towards themselves and others, in attempting; their joy lies in self-constraint. (A, 57: p. 190)
- The noble human being honors himself as one who is powerful, also as one who has power over himself, who knows how to speak and be silent, who delights in being severe and hard with himself and respects all severity and hardness. (BGE, IX, 260: p. 395)

## 2.8. Self-Confidence

One of the driving forces of Nietzsche's philosophy is his repudiation of the Christian emphases on guilt and sin—which cause people to feel ashamed of who they are. They are made to feel they are not worthy of love or success. These ideas drain the self-confidence of an individual. One needs this self-confidence to not only achieve things, but also to feel happy and fulfilled.

The first three chapters of Nietzsche's book *Ecce Homo* are titled: "Why I Am So Wise", "Why I Am So Clever", and "Why I Write Such Good Books". I do not think he wrote these chapters because he was an egomaniac, or narcissistic, or conceited, or arrogant. It seems that his purpose is to let the reader know that we are more productive when we feel good about ourselves, and further, that it is beneficial for one to be proud of their victories, accomplishments, creations, and triumphs. As Nietzsche said, "*The noble soul has reverence for itself.*" (BGE, IX, 287: p. 418) Along these lines, it is counterproductive to be ashamed of thinking and acting as humans naturally think and act: we need not feel guilty for being lustful or revengeful or angry, nor for wanting to lead or even dominate others. These are normal human instincts and attributes.

Nobody who has ever read Nietzsche could avoid noticing his obsession with the Christian virtue of pity. Nietzsche did not like pity because he believed it sapped both parties strength. When someone expresses pity to you, the tacit message you receive is that you are lesser and inadequate, that you cannot be successful on your own, and that you cannot rise above the temporary circumstances of your life. Instead of helping that person, the pitied are emotionally scarred because they feel poorly about themselves. They lose any self-confidence they may have had. Moreover, the one who gives pity is spending time in an endeavor which not only does not help the other person, but is simultaneously both taking them away from the path of self-growth and also weakening them. Nietzsche states: "Christianity is called the religion of *pity* ... One loses force when one pities. The loss of force which life has already sustained through suffering is increased and multiplied even further by pity. Suffering itself becomes contagious through pity." (A, 7: p. 130)

Indeed, without self-confidence it becomes almost impossible to achieve and therefore to be proud of yourself. Nietzsche's *ubermensch* feels good about him

or herself, and believes that their life is turning out well and will continue to do so. They believe so because of their attitude about themselves, and because they have the confidence that they will overcome the challenges they face. The *ubermensch* exudes self-confidence. Nietzsche makes this clear when referring to those of a noble nature: “In the first case, when the ruling group determines what is ‘good’, the exalted, proud states of the soul are experienced as conferring distinction ...” (BGE, IX, 260: p. 394) They are happy to stand out from the mainstream as they view themselves in not only a good light, but in a superior light.

- ... the will to be oneself, to stand out ... characterizes every *strong* age. (TI, IX, 37: p. 102)
- In the foreground there is the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension ... (BGE, IX, 260: p. 395)
- He believes neither in “misfortune” nor in “guilt”. (EH, I, 2: p. 681)
- For one thing is needful: that a human being should attain satisfaction with himself ... (GS, IV, 290: p. 233)
- Everything *must* turn out for his best. (EH, I, 2: p. 681)

## 2.9. Cheerfulness

The *ubermensch* is characterized by a cheerful attitude toward life. Nietzsche does not mean by cheerful that one is always smiling; rather, he is recommending that we welcome life and its challenges with open arms—that we appreciate the experiences and opportunities which life offers. As he puts it, the *ubermensch* says “yes” to what comes their way, not deterred by society’s rules and prohibitions which would keep one from fully living and appreciating life. Like a child, one should explore life with wonder and awe, not deterred by societal judgments.

The *ubermensch* appreciates both all that life has to offer and all aspects of themselves. They are able to maintain this cheerfulness in spite of the challenges and tragedies that enter their lives. Because they accept life as it is, they can appreciate the hardships as much as the joys. Both contribute to their personality and resilience. Both help make them the person who they are.

While Christianity, with its notion of heaven, and Hinduism and Buddhism, with their notion of achieving nirvana and thereby going into an existence where the self or individual is extinguished, focus on the other-worldly, Nietzsche taught us to keep our focus on this world and this life—as that is all we can be sure that we have. Be appreciative and cheerful here and now.

As an atheist, Nietzsche felt that even a life with much suffering was preferable to a life of eternal nonexistence, and therefore the most productive attitude was to appreciate everything. The pain you feel means you can still feel; the hardships you endure means there is a you to endure and overcome them; and the tragedies that confront the living means that they are still alive to rise above and transcend those tragedies. Nietzsche stated: “Pain is *not* considered an objection to life: ‘If you have no more happiness to give me, well then! *You still have suf-*

*fering.*” (EH: p. 753) To approach this gift of life in other than a positive manner is to not understand the gifts of consciousness, of feeling, of love, and of the bodily sensations. The *ubermensch* opens his eyes and his heart to all of creation—even in its harmful or evil manifestations—and finds a way to maintain a cheerfulness which welcomes and appreciates each day.

Moreover, because the *ubermensch* does not feel restricted by society’s ideas, morals, beliefs, opinions, and rules, they are able to say “yes” to things which are forbidden to others. They are free to explore, to learn, to encounter, and to experience things that others feel constrained or forbidden to pursue. They can say “yes” to all of existence, and take delight in discoveries which were not open to those who follow the herd. This, too, brings cheerfulness into one’s life.

- To stay cheerful when involved in a gloomy and exceedingly responsible business is no inconsiderable art: yet what could be more necessary than cheerfulness? (TI, Foreword: p. 31)
- We others, we immoralists, have on the contrary opened wide our hearts to every kind of understanding, comprehension, *approval*. We do not readily deny, we seek our honor in *affirming*. (TI, V, 6: p. 56)
- The most spiritual human being, as the strongest, find their happiness where others would find their destruction ... They are the most venerable kind of human being: this does not exclude their being the most cheerful, the most amiable. (A, 57: p. 190)
- The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred “Yes”. For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred “Yes” is needed. (Z, I, 1: p. 27)
- I am still *looking* for a German with whom I could be serious after my fashion—how much more for one with whom I might be cheerful! (TI, VIII, 3: p. 73)

## 2.10. Courage

The *Urbemensch* is not reluctant to be a leader, to face challenges, to dominate situations and people, or to effectuate change. This takes courage and strength and is exhibited through the exercise of one’s will to power.

All successful people and leaders know how to wield their will to power. They conquer, achieve, overcome, dominate, and emerge victorious by the fearless exercise of their strength, by the powerful exercise of their will. They dare to dream when others have abandoned hope, they dare to push forward when others have surrendered, they dare to overcome when others have capitulated, and they dare to succeed when others have failed. They explore new ideas—often upsetting the majority when they do so. They put their ideas, their dreams, and sometimes their lives in jeopardy.

I think it is easy to misread Nietzsche and misunderstand his focus. He is primarily concerned with spiritual or internal courage, not with the mundane virtue of courage in physical battle. Nietzsche is recommending we create and manifest the spiritual courage to pursue what we believe is important even when,



and perhaps especially when, our beliefs go against those in the majority. Courage is not mainly about the physical conquering of others; rather, it is about the courage to think and do what you consider to be valuable even when forbidden or restricted by those in power—sometimes knowing that there will be personal consequences. It is the courage to be a truly self-determining individual who is not reluctant to go against the dominant views of one's society, the courage to become and thereby to transform oneself, and the courage to overcome obstacles no matter how daunting they may seem or be.

Think how courageous Nietzsche had to have been to have taken on Christianity and European morality. Think what courage it took for him to label himself an “immoralist” (because he dared to question conventional morality, not because he did immoral acts). Consider what it would have been like for Nietzsche to announce that he was an atheist and that the Christian conception of God was not believable. We can recognize the overwhelming scorn and criticism he must have faced.<sup>19</sup> In these respects, Nietzsche displayed a spiritual courage rarely seen in the world.

We can think of courageous people such as this: Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr. They did not shy away from the formidable challenges they faced. They displayed their courage with enormous demonstrations of their will to power, and thus were able to change the world. In some sense, they imposed their will on the rest of the world. They set the agenda. They shaped and determined their society's values. As the words at the start of every Star Trek episode declared, they dared to “boldly go where no man has gone before.”

- “But courage and adventure and pleasure in the uncertain, in the undared—*courage* seems to me man's whole prehistory ... courage, finally refined, spiritualized, spiritual, this human courage with eagles' wings and serpents' wisdom—*that*, it seems to me, is today called—‘*Zarathustra!*’” (Z, IV, 15: p. 303)
- “... courage for the *forbidden* ...” (A, Foreword: p. 125)
- Certainly he has also dared more, done more new things, braved more and challenged fate more than all the other animals put together ... (GM, III, 13: p. 557)
- Hungry, violent, lonely, godless: thus the lion-will wants itself. Free from the happiness of slaves, redeemed from gods and adorations, fearless and fear-inspiring, great and lonely: such is the will of the truthful. (Z, II, 8: p. 103)
- ... the intoxication of feasting, of contest, of the brave deed, of victory, ... intoxication in destruction...finally the intoxication of the will, the intoxication of an overloaded and distended will. The essence of intoxication is the feeling of plenitude and increased energy. (TI, IX, 8: p. 83)

<sup>19</sup>Surveys indicate that even today Americans view atheists as the most distrusted group of people because they believe them to have no moral compass and that they therefore cannot be trusted—even though statistics indicate that atheists commit less crimes and give more time and money to charitable causes than do religious believers.

### 3. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* vs. Aristotle's Virtuous Person

Both Nietzsche and Aristotle devote a considerable amount of their writings to the question of what is the best life for a human being. Initially, two points should be noted. First, although Walter Kaufmann argued that Nietzsche's ethics was significantly influenced by Aristotle, specifically comparing Aristotle's proud man who has "greatness of the soul" (*megalopsychia*) to the *übermensch*,<sup>20</sup> most scholars, such as Bernd Magnus, Lester Hunt, Christine Daigle, and Frank Cameron,<sup>21</sup> disagreed with this and contend that Nietzsche's *übermensch* is a significant departure from Aristotle's virtuous person.

Second, although there is some disagreement as to whether Nietzsche had in general an ethics at all since he doggedly attacks morality as we know it,<sup>22</sup> most experts interpret Nietzsche as attacking the accepted deontological, consequential, and religious ethical systems—primarily Kant's duty ethics, utilitarianism, and Judeo-Christian ethics, and not all of ethics.<sup>23</sup> He is against conventional morality, not morality in general. He specifically calls for a reevaluation of values, not an elimination of values. He speaks of higher moralities, such as master mo-

<sup>20</sup>See Kaufmann, W., (1974).

<sup>21</sup>See Magnus, B. (1980), Hunt, L. (1991), Daigle, C. (2006), and Cameron, F. (2002) For example, Magnus states: "I shall argue in what follows that Aristotle's ethics—even his conception of pride—has *very* little to do either with Nietzsche's moral philosophy, or with his conception of *Übermenschen* ... Nietzsche's attempted transvaluation of values is dominated by his understanding (or misunderstanding) of Plato and Socrates: not Aristotle." (Magnus, 1980: pp. 262-263). Cameron concludes: "Most notably, there are few references to Aristotle's ethics in Nietzsche's writings ... Since Nietzsche regards Aristotle's ethics as anti-Dionysian ... one can conclude that Nietzsche did not feel a moral kinship with Aristotelian ethics despite the fact that both emphasize 'human excellence' ... Nietzsche's 'good' man is beyond good and evil, and would likely find Aristotle's great-souled man too moralistic. It was Machiavelli, not Aristotle, who inspired Nietzsche's views on virtue and nobility ... Clearly, then, Nietzsche does not belong to the classical Greek tradition of virtue ethics with its emphasis on reason and moderation." (Cameron, 2002: pp. 146, 154, 156, 157)

<sup>22</sup>For example, both Brian Leiter and Thomas Nagel seem to interpret Nietzsche as standing against all ethical systems, not merely the predominating ones of Western society. Leiter states as follows: "For what distinguishes Nietzsche, I will argue, is that he is a genuine critic of morality as a real cultural phenomenon, while recent Anglo-American writers are only critics of particular *philosophical theories of morality*." (Leiter, 1997: p. 252) Nagel states "This is Nietzsche's position ... The view is that if, taking everything into consideration, a moral life will not be a good life for the individual it would be a mistake to lead it." (Nagel, 1986: p. 196)

<sup>23</sup>Richard Schacht makes this point about Nietzsche as follows: "But he also thought that the result should be, not the elimination of all morals, but rather moral renewal—albeit with significant modifications in form, substance, and understanding ... Nietzsche's main 'contribution' to moral philosophy is generally taken to be his attack upon the kind of morality that seemed to him to have come to be taken for granted in the Western World ..." (Schacht, 2001: pp. 152-153) Solomon makes this point in more detail as follows:

Nietzsche does not reject morals but rather only one version of Morality, which has as its instrument the universalizable principles formalized by Kant, the ancestries of which go all the way back to the Bible ...

Nietzsche calls himself an "immoralist" (although it is doubtful that he ever did anything truly immoral in his life), and his rejection of what was typically called "morality" was certainly caustic and contemptuous. He declared Judeo-Christian morality and even the ethics of Socrates "anti-life". He considered Kant's second *Critique* something of a subtle "joke", and he thought that utilitarianism was simply "vulgar". But Nietzsche's "immoralism" consisted of something other than unethical behavior and the rejection of Morality. He advocated a different way of thinking about ethics, one that encouraged living life to the fullest and cultivating a rich inner life. (Solomon, 2003: pp. 135-137)

ralities compared to slave moralities, and higher types of persons, and thus endorses some conceptions of morality.<sup>24</sup> In fact, being similar to Aristotle, Nietzsche seems to espouse a virtue ethics in which he focuses on character rather than rules, and on specific situations instead of universal principles and tests to determine right from wrong.<sup>25</sup> As such, it seems appropriate to compare the two views as competing systems of virtue or character ethics.

It is hard to avoid seeing that Nietzsche's ideal person of the *ubermensch* and Aristotle's ideal of the virtuous person look like radically different types of people. After all, Aristotle emphasized that the best life is one lived in accordance with reason, and Nietzsche regularly rails against an overemphasis on reason. Nietzsche famously declares, "If one needs to make a tyrant of *reason*, as Socrates did, then there must exist no little danger of something else playing the tyrant." (TI, II, 10: p. 43)

Furthermore, Aristotle seems to be focused on virtues which will aid society and which most successful societies have championed, while Nietzsche is more concerned about the individual as a self-determining being who willingly questions their society's accepted virtues.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, listing the attributes of Nietzsche's *ubermensch* next to a list of the attributes of Aristotle's virtuous person makes it apparent that the lists are significantly different. While Aristotle emphasizes such virtues as temperance, generosity, truthfulness, friendliness, and mildness (in between anger and being irascible), Nietzsche reveres self-determination, becoming, overcoming, discontent, and creativity.

The two lists remind me of the old quip I heard when I was a trial attorney: After hearing the opening statements by the opposing attorneys, the jurors would sometimes ask: "Are these two attorneys talking about the same case?" Indeed, when we look at the attributes of the Nietzsche's *ubermensch* and Aristotle's virtuous person, we might well ask whether these two philosophers are writing about the same type of person or life. However, I think upon a closer examination, the two ideals do have some not insignificant areas of congruence, although overall they have much larger areas of divergence.

In general, there are three primary ingredients which make up Aristotle's virtuous person: intellectual excellence, moral excellence, and external goods.

<sup>24</sup>Nietzsche's endorsement of a higher type of man suggests that he does in fact have some standard by which to judge actions. He states: "In another sense there are cases of individual success constantly appearing in the most various parts of the earth and from the most various cultures in which a *higher type* does manifest itself: something which in relation to collective mankind is a sort of superman." (A, 4: p. 128) (See also, for example, Nietzsche, 1886, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 202)

<sup>25</sup>See Daigle who well argues for the position that Nietzsche can properly be seen as a virtue ethicist. (Daigle, 2006)

<sup>26</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre finds this to be a fundamental difference between the two philosophers. He states that Nietzsche's *ubermensch* "finds his good nowhere in the social world" and describes the gulf between the two as follows: "... the crucial moral opposition is between liberal individualism in some version or other and the Aristotelian tradition in some version or other." (MacIntyre, 1981: pp. 257, 259) I think, however, that MacIntyre overly magnifies the difference between the two and is somewhat guilty of a false dichotomy because Nietzschean virtues need not make the *ubermensch* anti-social nor must they be injurious to society. Arguably, they will help a society thrive. One could argue that the Western democracies have largely embraced Nietzsche's "liberal individualism" to produce open and healthy societies where innovation plus freedom of thought and speech are encouraged.

Virtue too is distinguished into two kinds in accordance with this difference; for we say that some of the virtues are intellectual and others moral, philosophic wisdom and understanding and practical wisdom being intellectual, liberality and temperance moral. (Aristotle, 1103a: p. 27)

Yet evidently, as we said, it needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the luster from happiness—good birth, goodly children, beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance and ill-born or solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy, and perhaps a man would be still less likely if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death. (Aristotle, 1099a-b: p. 17)

Let us start with external goods. I see no reason why Nietzsche would not agree that external goods, much of which we cannot control, are part of a fulfilling life. Let us take one example: beauty and its counterpart ugliness. In the past before cosmetic surgeries, one's appearance was a matter of luck which one could do little about. Aristotle recognizes what modern studies have verified: There are advantages to being beautiful. If one is attractive they are more likely to be successful in life, such as by getting the job or attracting a mate.

But Nietzsche, too, recognized this. When attacking Socrates for elevating reason above all other human traits, including human instincts, appetites, and emotions, Nietzsche disparages Socrates for being ugly.

Socrates belonged, in his origins, to the lowest orders: Socrates was rabble. One knows, one sees for oneself, how ugly he was. But ugliness, an objection in itself, is among Greeks almost a refutation. Was Socrates a Greek at all? Ugliness is frequently enough the sign of a thwarted development, a development *retarded* by interbreeding. Otherwise it appears as a development in *decline*. Anthropologists among criminologists tell us the typical criminal is ugly ... Was Socrates a typical criminal? ... Everything about him is exaggerated, *buffo*, caricature, everything is at the same time hidden, reserved, subterranean. (TI, II, 3, 4: pp. 40, 41)

Let us ignore Nietzsche's typical hyperbole and questionable scientific conclusions. Of importance is that Nietzsche is making the case that ugliness is often such a disadvantage that it can warp and distort one's personality and perspective—and in this case, according to Nietzsche, Socrates' ugliness caused him to make significant philosophical blunders.

Indeed, the external good of beauty as an ingredient of the best life for a human being seems to have been recognized by both Aristotle and Nietzsche. There is no reason to believe that the other external goods listed by Aristotle would not have been similarly approved of by Nietzsche.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup>I leave it to the reader to look at the other external goods as this paper would become far too lengthy to go over each one of them.

What about intellectual excellence—would Nietzsche agree that this is an important ingredient in the best human life? Again, I see no reason to believe that Nietzsche would not find intellectual excellence important. Nietzsche himself was certainly intellectually excellent. Furthermore, in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche repeatedly extols the virtues of intellectual excellence and knowledge. He says that “schooling has no more important task than to teach rigorous thinking, careful judgment, logical conclusion.” (HATH, V, 265: p. 162.); “The higher stage of culture, which places itself under the rule of knowledge ...” (HATH, IV, 195: p. 121); “Whoever seriously wants to become free ... his will desires nothing more urgently than knowledge, and the means to it ...” (HATH, V, 288, p. 173); and “free-spirited people, living for knowledge alone ...” (HATH, V, 291: p. 173).

Moreover, even though he at times disparaged science, overall Nietzsche clearly appreciated and endorsed the intellectual excellence and experimentation manifested by and through science and the scientific method:

The farther his distance from the other animals (the more he appears as the genius among animals), the nearer he will come to the true essence of the world and knowledge of it. This he does indeed through science ... (HATH, I, 29: p. 33)

The Italian Renaissance contained within itself all the positive forces to which we owe modern culture: namely, liberation of thought, disdain for authority, the triumph of education over the arrogance of lineage, enthusiasm for science and men’s scientific past ... (HATH, V, 237: p. 146)

All in all, scientific methods are at least as important as any other result of inquiry; for the scientific spirit is based on the insight into methods, and were those methods to be lost, all the results of science could not prevent a renewed triumph of superstition and nonsense. Clever people ... do not have the instinctive mistrust of the wrong ways of thinking, a mistrust which, as a consequence of long practice, has put its roots deep into the soul of every scientific man. (HATH, IX, 635: pp. 264-265)

Additionally, a substantial part of both intellectual and moral excellence is practical wisdom, and Nietzsche certainly believed in practical wisdom. Indeed, Nietzsche’s proposed standard for judging the best life to live is not truth or happiness, but rather is what best serves, promotes, and cultivates life—the most practical of standards. Nietzsche proclaims as follows:

The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment; in this respect our new language may sound strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating. (BGE, I, 4: p. 201)

One might argue that Aristotle’s intellectual excellence requires the use of one’s reason, but Nietzsche continually belittles reason. In Aristotle’s famous function argument, he concludes that the best life of a human is when the soul is engaged in activity that expresses or obeys reason. Although Nietzsche attacked this reverence or privileging of reason above other human qualities, it is hard to

believe that Nietzsche was not both mindful and appreciative of the importance and proper use of reason in a good human life. He himself certainly used his reasoning ability to dissect the shortcomings of the dominant beliefs of his age. Moreover, his writings continually tell us to affirm and use all the parts of ourselves.<sup>28</sup> As Magnus concludes, “Note again that it is not reason per se of which Nietzsche wishes to dispose. It is rather, to be *absurdly* rational.” (Magnus, 1980: p. 287)<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, Nietzsche’s diatribes against reason were not meant to convey the idea that reason had no function; on the contrary, Nietzsche was concerned that reason was being used to repress the other parts of us. He did not want us to be ashamed of our instincts, emotions, and appetites, as they should be appreciated as natural and important parts of each of us. Though he did not think reason should be elevated over these other parts of us, Nietzsche believed that reason had an important role to play—to give guidance and perspective to our passions, which in the following passage Nietzsche makes clear do in fact need such guidance, though not elimination, to avoid their “folly”.

To *exterminate* the passions and desires merely in order to do away with their folly and its unpleasant consequences—this itself seems to us today merely an acute form of folly. We no longer admire dentists who *pull out* teeth to stop them from hurting. (TI, V, 1: p. 52)

Nietzsche’s endorsement of reason is demonstrated when he condemns, with the use of irony, the ascetic priest for ignoring reason:

To renounce belief in one’s ego, to deny one’s own “reality”—what a triumph! Not merely over the senses, over appearance, but a much higher kind of triumph, a violation and cruelty against *reason*—a voluptuous pleasure that reaches its height when the ascetic self-contempt and self-mockery of reason declares: “*there* is a realm of truth and being, but reason is *excluded* from it!” (GM, III, 12: p. 554)

Now we come to the area of the apparently largest divergence between Aristotle and Nietzsche—that of moral excellence or virtue. Even here the differences may not be quite as vast as imagined. Let us take one of Aristotle’s virtues, that of honesty or truthfulness. Nietzsche makes some unsettling comments which might lead one to think that he devalues honesty.

Suppose we want truth: *why not rather* untruth? And uncertainty? Even ignorance?...For all the value that the true, the truthful, the selfless may deserve, it would still be possible that a higher and more fundamental value

<sup>28</sup>For example, Nietzsche declares that “man needs what is most evil in him for what is best in him ...” (Z, III, 13: p. 218)

<sup>29</sup>Kaufmann also affirms Nietzsche’s recognition of the important role of reason: “Rationality, on the other hand, gives man mastery over himself ... Reason is the ‘highest’ manifestation of the will to power, in the distinct sense that through rationality it can realize its objective most fully ... Reason is extolled ... because these skills enable it to develop foresight and to give consideration to all the impulses, to organize the chaos, to integrate them into a harmony—and thus to give man power: power over himself and over nature.” (Kaufmann, 1974: p. 230)

for life might have to be ascribed to deception, selfishness, and lust. (BGE, I, 1 & 2: pp. 199, 200)

Too cowardly to tell lies. (TI, I, 32: p. 36)

We should note that when we put these quotations into context and consider Nietzsche's entire body of philosophy, these claims become quite reasonable. In fact, Nietzsche is quite clear that he generally values honesty and despises dishonesty. For example, in comparing the master morality of Greece which Nietzsche generally endorsed to those who practice the contemptible slave morality, Nietzsche has this to say about the master's view of the common man:

The begging flatterers, above all the liars: it is part of the fundamental faith of all aristocrats that the common people lie. "We truthful ones"—thus the nobility of ancient Greece referred to itself. (BGE, IX, 260: p. 395)

In keeping with this, Nietzsche tells us that the sovereign individual can be trusted to keep his promises, and the character Zarathustra declares: "Take good care there, you higher men! For nothing today is more precious to me and rarer than honesty." (Z, IV, 13: p. 289) It is not dishonesty that Nietzsche recommends, rather, it is the flexibility to be able to tell a lie when that would best serve life. After all, wouldn't lying be the right and moral thing to do if it would save an innocent life? Nietzsche clearly values honesty as long as it is tempered by and geared to the situation at hand. He explains that "ultimately the point is to what *end* a lie is told." (A, 56: p. 187) The following three quotations, one of which is a more complete version of one of our earlier quotes, demonstrate that although honesty is generally good, at times the best choice is to lie.

It does indeed make a difference for what purpose one lies: whether one preserves with a lie or *destroys* with it. (A, 58: p. 192)

Our honesty, we free spirits—let us see to it that it does not become our vanity, our finery and pomp, our limit, our stupidity. (BGE, VII, 227: p. 346)

Hatred of lies and dissembling may arise out of a sensitive notion of honour; the same hatred may arise out of cowardice, in as much as lying is *forbidden* by divine commandment. Too cowardly to tell lies. (TI, I, 32: p. 36)

So honor, a generally good attribute for Nietzsche, would normally lead us away from being a liar, but courage might carry us in the direction where the better choice would be to lie. Similarly to how he treats honesty, Nietzsche would undoubtedly insist that Aristotle's list of virtues be viewed as a general guideline from which there will be exceptions.

We might also recognize that Aristotle's virtues lie in a mean between excess and defect. So, for example, courage lies in the mean between the deficiency of cowardice and the excess of rashness as when someone foolishly rushes into battle with no realistic prospects of survival and victory. This is at least somewhat in keeping with Nietzsche's virtue of self-mastery or self-discipline—avoiding the



extremes in order to achieve one's ends.

I see no problems in Nietzsche's general acceptance of the other virtues listed by Aristotle—Courage, Generosity, Temperance, Proper Pride, Good-tempered, Witty, Friendly, Modest, Proper Indignation, and Justice. Our *ubermensch* list and Aristotle's list coincide on the virtue of courage (although Nietzsche is more concerned with spiritual courage), Nietzschean self-confidence seems to match Aristotelian proper pride, Nietzschean self-mastery could certainly include Aristotelian temperance, Nietzschean cheerfulness loosely corresponds to the Aristotelian good-temper, and Nietzsche was certainly supportive of the virtues of generosity, wit, and friendliness. Moreover, surprising to some, in at least one of his writings Nietzsche lists "sympathy" as one of the four key virtues (BGE, IX, 284: p. 416). So we can see that Nietzsche seems to support many of our common notions as to which actions are virtuous, and has significant overlap with Aristotle's ideas on good character.

However, in spite of my arguments that the ideal persons as set forth by Nietzsche and Aristotle are not as radically divergent as they might first appear, we should not overlook the very real differences in what the two philosophers emphasize, commend, exalt, and revere. As stated by Alasdair MacIntyre when comparing Nietzsche and Aristotle in his influential book *After Virtue*, "what confront each other are not in any case merely two theories, but the theoretical specification of two different ways of life." (MacIntyre, 1981: p. 118)

Indeed, we do not want to overstate the similarities between the two because there does not seem to be anything in Aristotle's list of virtues which correspond to the first six character traits which I have attributed to the *ubermensch*, namely, self-determination, creativity, becoming, overcoming, discontent, and flexibility.<sup>30</sup> Comparing the lists of attributes side by side, my list of the primary attributes of the *ubermensch* looks fundamentally different than Aristotle's list of intellectual and moral excellences. Solomon similarly acknowledged that the majority of the 23 Nietzschean virtues which he identified have no counterpart in Aristotle's list of virtues.<sup>31</sup>

When looking at the attributes on each list, we might say that Nietzsche's virtues fundamentally focus on an approach to life based on excellent *processes* and *attitudes* to embrace—processes and attitudes to transform one's existence from the mundane to the extraordinary, instead of Aristotle's virtues which can be characterized as objectively morally excellent attributes which are the goals in themselves. As such, one way to distinguish the two philosophers is that while Aristotle is focused on character as an end, Nietzsche treats his virtues as means.

Aristotle believed that the best life is one which exhibits moral and intellectual excellence, and further, that Aristotelian virtues, such as telling the truth, are

<sup>30</sup>That is not to imply that Aristotle would not approve of these attributes. He may well have so approved, but we can say with confidence that these were not among his most prominent ideas regarding the best life to live.

<sup>31</sup>Specifically, Solomon divides Nietzsche's 23 virtues into three categories as follows: 10 Aristotelian-like virtues, 8 distinctively Nietzschean virtues, and 5 crypto-virtues—crypto because it is arguable if they even are virtues (Solomon, 2003: pp. 147-173).

good in themselves because they are the components of the best kind of life. This is not true for Nietzsche. So, for example, Nietzsche did not believe that telling the truth was a proper end in itself; rather, at times honesty would be an effective means to achieve one's goals or ends, but at other times deceit might be the most effective means to achieve that end. For Nietzsche, the specific end is not known until the actor posits it for himself.

Indeed, Aristotle believed that the Aristotelian virtues are constitutive of the best life, while for Nietzsche there are no character traits that in and of themselves constitute the best life. They are not already set, as truth-telling and the other virtues are for Aristotle.

Accordingly, for Nietzsche there is no one type of "best" life; instead, there are many "best" or excellent lives, and the Nietzschean virtues are the means to achieve such lives. The processes of questioning (self-determining), creating, becoming, and overcoming, coupled with the life orientations or attitudes of cheerfulness, discontent, self-confidence, self-mastery, flexibility, and spiritual courage are the means one uses to achieve their ends or goals—goals which are often changing as circumstances and situations change, and as the person is changing, growing and transforming.

We can now see where Nietzsche's moral philosophy fits into ethical theory: While he clearly is neither a consequentialist nor a deontologist, he espouses a character or virtue ethics that is quite different than those of both ancient moral systems, such as the Aristotelian, Buddhist, and Confucian ethical frameworks, and of more modern versions of character ethics, such as that proposed by Hume—all of which provide us a list of supposedly objective morally excellent attributes. Instead, Nietzsche's character ethics focuses on processes and attitudes as a means to live a fulfilling life, but which are themselves neither the goal nor constitutive of the best or good life.

Nietzsche's focus on life as a process to be approached with certain productive attitudes seems to be more in keeping with the modern-day idea that the meaning of life is to be found in the journey itself—not in the end results of the journey. When one focuses on means and not ends, then greater flexibility will prevail and possibilities will abound, while when traits of character are viewed as objective goals in themselves then possibilities of both actions and goals become confined and limited. Nietzsche supports this point in the following quotation, and while Aristotle is not specifically named, Aristotle's "man of strong character" can be viewed as Nietzsche's target:

The man of strong character lacks knowledge of the many possibilities and directions of action: his intellect is unfree, bound, because it shows him in any given case perhaps only two possibilities; between these he must necessarily choose, in accordance with his whole nature, and he does so easily and quickly because he doesn't have to choose among fifty possibilities. (HATH, V, 228: pp. 141-142)

Additionally, even though a character ethics, such as the one set forth by

Aristotle, is inherently more flexible than systems which have tests to determine right from wrong or a list of commandments to follow, Aristotle's system was not flexible enough for Nietzsche's liking. Kant's categorical imperative with its exceptionless maxims, Utilitarianism with its principle of happiness maximization which can violate the autonomy and dignity of individuals for the greater good, and the onerous 613 mitzvot or commandments of the Old Testament, present inflexible ethical systems which Nietzsche rails against. Likewise, but to a lesser degree, Nietzsche believed that Aristotle's system suffered from a lack of adequate malleability. Why?

First, Aristotle's moral system comes up with a set of virtues that apply to all people even though people and societies vary greatly. Nietzsche's disdain for this approach is clearly expressed as follows:

Let us consider finally what naivety it is to say "man *ought* to be thus and thus"! Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the luxuriance of a prodigal play and change of forms: and does some pitiful journeyman moralist say at the sight of it "No! Man ought to be *different*?" He even knows *how* man ought to be ... (TI, V, 6: p. 56)

Second, the kinds of virtues and vices which Aristotle emphasizes seem to imply that there are specific types of actions to follow or avoid as an expression of one's character. So, for example, the virtue of honesty implies one should tell the truth and avoid untruths, and charity implies that those with means have a moral obligation to give some of their wealth to others. In general, Nietzsche's virtues have no such requirements. Becoming, overcoming, creating, and self-mastery do not so easily translate into specific actions that one must take in a given situation. As such, they inherently maintain a greater flexibility than Aristotle delivers.

In the following passage Nietzsche addresses these alleged shortcomings in Aristotle's ethics as he calls out the central Aristotelian ideas of "happiness", "temperance", and "the mean", and he condemns Aristotelian morality by name near the end of the passage.

Could it be that moralists harbor a hatred of the primeval forest for the tropics? ... In favor of the "temperate zones"? In favor of temperate men? Of those who are "moral"? Who are mediocre?—This for the chapter "Morality as Timidity".

All these moralities that address themselves to the individual, for the sake of his "happiness", as one says ... they address themselves to "all", because they generalize where one must not generalize. All of them speak unconditionally, take themselves for unconditional ... or that tuning down of the affects to a harmless mean according to which they may be satisfied, the Aristotelianism of morals ... (BGE, V, 197-198: p. 299)

To be fair to Aristotle, his moral system has a not inconsiderable degree of flexibility built into it. Aristotle was certainly much more flexible than Kant, who concluded that certain types of actions were always off limits, and Mill, who

concluded that only the consequences (regarding happiness) ultimately mattered. Aristotle's ethical system allows the virtuous man to consider both the type of action and the consequences. Additionally, Aristotle concluded that the virtues are to be done "to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way" (Aristotle, 1109a: p. 45). In other words, Aristotle recognizes that each situation must be separately assessed, and therefore the virtues have room for exceptions as when, for example, it would not be right to tell the truth to this person, at this time, with this motive, or to this extent or in this way. Indeed, although Kant's inflexible ethics was a bigger target of Nietzsche's criticisms, Aristotle's more flexible ethics was still too rigid for Nietzsche.

Another dissimilarity between the two which we have previously mentioned is Aristotle's reliance on reason as the driving force behind the best life, which is squarely at odds with Nietzsche's belief that reason should not be elevated over one's instincts, appetites and emotions. As Christine Daigle writes, "Magnus rightly points out that Aristotle's good life could not appeal to Nietzsche because it is too intertwined with the contemplative or rational activity of the soul." (Daigle, 2006: pp. 2-3)

Nietzsche's attitude about how one acquires a virtuous character also seems to differ from Aristotle's. Aristotle claims that moral excellences are a result of habit, but Nietzsche places no similar emphasis on habit. For example, Nietzsche asserts that generosity is a natural consequence of the *ubermensch's* strength—it is an outpouring or overflow of a confidence and superiority that radiates from the accomplished person and thereby is bestowed upon those less powerful. So, for example, when Bill Gates set up his charitable organization, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which is the largest private foundation in the world with an endowment of over 44 billion dollars, it was not as a result of habit, but instead was an overflow of his power—a tacit demonstration of his superior accomplishments.

... the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power. (BGE, IX, 260: p. 395)

... your virtue is insatiable in wanting to give. You force all things to and into yourself that they may flow back out of your well as the gifts of your love. (Z, I, 22: p. 75)

When we put these points together, we see how differently the virtues work for Aristotle and Nietzsche, as even in character traits they both admire, their analysis differs. Where Aristotle views the virtues as the result of restrictions put in place and executed by reason to limit our natural tendencies, Nietzsche sees them as a natural outpouring from a superior person. Nietzsche declares of the *ubermensch*: "He flows out, he overflows, he uses himself up ..." (TI, IX, 44: p. 109) So, for example, Aristotle sees courage, at least in part, as reason's constraining one's natural tendency toward fear, while Nietzsche sees it as an outpouring of determination by the *ubermensch*. Similarly, while Aristotle views

temperance as reason's restricting or tempering one's natural tendencies toward the pleasures of sex and food, Nietzsche sees it as an overflow of self-mastery. Likewise, Aristotle sees truthfulness, to some extent, as reason's prohibition against lying, while Nietzsche sees honesty as a natural overflowing of one's own thoughts, observations, and knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

We might say that one approach is somewhat constricting, while the other is expansive. Nietzsche believed that Aristotelian ethics was guilty, although to a lesser degree than Kantian or Christian ethics, of unnaturally denying and shaming important parts of the individual, including our instincts and appetites, and Nietzsche's retort to this position is that "I do not like negative virtues—virtues whose very essence it is to negate and deny oneself something." (GS, IV, 304: p. 244) Nietzsche specifically criticizes Aristotle for recommending that people purge or purify parts of themselves: "Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems ... not so as to purify oneself of a dangerous emotion through its vehement discharge—it was thus Aristotle understood it—but ..." (TI, X, 5, p. 121)

For Nietzsche, we need not fight against ourselves; rather, the *ubermensch* merely needs to let their power overflow from their self-confident being. Similar to how a person's bubbly personality seems to spill out of them in a very natural way, Nietzsche believed that the power and self-mastery of the *ubermensch* poured out of his being in a way that manifested a superior character. Again, however, to be fair we should note that Aristotle's virtuous persons no longer have to restrict or fight against their natural tendencies because they have worked on themselves so that the moral thing to do has become natural for them to do. But for Aristotle, it has become natural by the habitual exercise of one's reason which has ruled over and often overruled one's emotions, instincts, and appetites—the "tyranny of reason" which Nietzsche finds so distasteful.<sup>33</sup>

We should again note that Aristotle places the highest value on the state/society, and assigns the individual lesser importance.<sup>34</sup> As such, Aristotle's virtues seem to have a more direct positive impact and benefit on society than do Nietzsche's virtues. In fact, one could argue that the *ubermensch's* incessant questioning of society's values may well undermine society instead of fostering a strong bond among individuals which will help hold the society together into a functioning whole. For Aristotle, when individual's exhibit moral excellence the state will benefit as a whole. Nietzsche, on the other hand, views the individual as the end in itself, not the state, so the best state is not the one that is made up of the most

<sup>32</sup>I have borrowed this point and examples from Solomon (see Solomon, 2003: pp. 148-154).

<sup>33</sup>Although one could say that Nietzschean attributes such as self-mastery are acquired through habit, I think it is better to use a word other than habit in order to distinguish his thinking from Aristotle's. Nietzsche emphasizes that attributes are realized by a power of the will more than through the exercise of reason. One "becomes" and "overcomes" not through the reasoned habit of doing so, but through more of an instinctual willing that naturally flows out of a self-confident individual.

<sup>34</sup>In Book I chapter 2 of *The Nicomachean Ethics* the primacy of the state over the individual is alluded to as follows: "For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete whether to attain or to preserve; though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more god-like to attain it for a nation or city-states." (Aristotle, 1094b, 1980: p. 2)

Aristotelian morally excellent people, but rather is structured to allow individuals the most freedoms and opportunities to strive for excellence. Nietzsche declares the primacy of the individual over the herd or society as follows:

*Basic error:* to place the goal in the herd and not in single individuals! The herd is a means, no more! But no one is attempting to understand the herd as an individual and to ascribe to it a higher rank than the individual—profound misunderstanding!!! (WP, III, 766: p. 403)

Kaufmann sums up Nietzsche's position quite well:

For Nietzsche, the overman does not have instrumental value for the maintenance of society; he is valuable in himself because he embodies the state of being that has the only ultimate value there is; and society is censured insofar as it insists on conformity and impedes his development. (Kaufmann, 1974: pp. 313-314)

In many respects, Nietzsche's *ubermensch* and Aristotle's virtuous person are quite different people.<sup>35</sup> It is only natural to ponder which portrait presents the most compelling human life?<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche's portrayal certainly seems to be more original. Instead of a somewhat obvious list of virtues which include uncontroversial character traits such as honesty, friendliness, and courage, Nietzsche focuses on becoming and overcoming, on self-determination and creativity, on a

<sup>35</sup>The picture which I have painted of the *ubermensch* is closer to the following description given by Arthur Danto, a characterization which is significantly at odds, due to its focus, with any depiction we would expect from Aristotle regarding the virtuous person.

The *Urbemensch* ... is merely a joyous, guiltless, free human being, in possession of instinctual drives which do not overpower him. He is the master and not the slave of his drives, and so he is in a position to make something out of himself rather than being a product of instinctual discharge and external obstacle. (Danto, 2005: pp. 181-182)

We see no mention of the Aristotelian virtues of charity, temperance, friendliness, or honesty in Danto's description. We can recognize the similarities between the characteristics of the *ubermensch* mentioned by Danto with my own list: "Joyous" corresponds to "cheerfulness", "guiltless" corresponds to "self-confidence", "free" corresponds to "self-determination", "master" of "his drives" corresponds to "self-mastery", "make something out of himself" corresponds to both "creativity" and "becoming", and not being a product of "external obstacle" corresponds to "overcoming" and "courage". Only "discontent" seems to not be implied in Danto's description.

Leiter's following description of the *ubermensch*, which likewise has some overlap with my list, similarly exposes Nietzsche's significantly different focus from that of Aristotle: "Higher types are also described by Nietzsche as nonreactive, creative, self-disciplined, and resilient." (Leiter, 1997: p. 265)

<sup>36</sup>I am ignoring a vital difference between the two where Nietzsche's views are much more attractive: While Aristotle supported the racist and nationalistic ideology of Greek superiority, Nietzsche quite clearly stood strongly against any notions of such superiority—and to a greater extent than most other Germans of his time. For example, Nietzsche writes that "the word 'German' is constantly being used nowadays, to advocate nationalism and race hatred ... For that we are too open-minded." (GS, V, 377: p. 339) For a good discussion on this, see Kaufmann, especially his chapter entitled "The Master Race" where Kaufmann explains how the Nazis distorted and manipulated Nietzsche's philosophical views, often with the use of partial quotations and by taking his comments out of context to completely change the meaning and intent (see Kaufmann, 1974). In fact, Nietzsche abhorred anti-semitism, and specifically condemns his sister's husband for espousing such views. In 1887 he writes in a letter to his sister: "It is a matter of honor to me to be absolutely clear and unequivocal regarding anti-Semitism, namely, *opposed*, as I am in my writings." (Kaufmann, 1974: p. 45)

discontent that will foster accomplishment, on self-mastery and self-confidence, and on a spiritual courage to question and transform—done with flexibility and a cheerfulness that appreciates all life has to offer. Nietzsche’s *ubermensch* approaches life with the disposition and attitude that “what does not kill me makes me stronger”. While Aristotle’s virtuous persons would be reliable and valuable members of the community due to their intellectual, moral, and emotional strength and excellence, Nietzsche’s *ubermensch* is more likely to be inspirational due to the emphasis on creativity, growth, and self-transformation.

I think the life as outlined by Nietzsche is the more exciting, the more interesting, the more accomplished, the more dynamic, and the more adventurous. Nietzsche poetically describes the moment when the bound spirit moves toward becoming the free spirit: “a violent, dangerous curiosity for an undiscovered world flames up and flickers in all the senses.” (HATH, Preface, 3: p. 6) While Aristotle emphasizes appropriate behavior, Nietzsche emphasizes a passionate life of extraordinary experiences, creative enterprises, and personal triumphs.<sup>37</sup>

Aristotle asks us what type of life is the most fulfilling or flourishing for a human being. Aristotelian intellectual and moral excellences will likely shield one from major criticisms and shame, and may well bring one respect and dignity. However, it is Nietzschean excellences which seem to me to allow one to best flourish—as the individual is pursuing a life of continual self-growth, though I would add the caveat that one cannot question their society and others to such an extreme that it will end up isolating them—as it seems to have done to Nietzsche.

One possible criticism of Nietzsche’s *ubermensch* is that Nietzsche’s ideal person is too obsessed with power, as expressed in his central idea of the will to power. As earlier stated, however, this term is often misunderstood. The words seem to imply that the will is the means to achieve the goal of power, and Nietzsche certainly makes statements to this effect. The reader is naturally tempted, then, to view power as oppression over others. This was not, though, the primary thrust of Nietzsche’s notion of will to power.<sup>38</sup> I think a productive perspective is to read the “will to power” as the means to effectuate whatever goal one wishes to achieve. One uses their will to power to accomplish their

<sup>37</sup>Solomon sums this up quite well:

What would Nietzsche make of us? I think that he would have us similarly passionate and enthusiastic, about thinking and the joys of philosophy, about our animal natures and the excitement of being alive, about the great works of artistic creativity that, even if we are not capable of producing them ourselves, nevertheless enrich our experience and the world and make human life well worth living (Solomon, 2003: p. 174).

<sup>38</sup>Kaufmann likewise views the “power” of the “will to power” as very different than the words might seem to convey. Kaufmann concludes that “‘Power’ means something specific for Nietzsche: ‘self-overcoming’.” (Kaufmann, 1974: p. 261) Kaufmann describes Nietzsche’s will to power as follows: “Why did Nietzsche call his basic principle a ‘will to power’ rather than, say, an ‘*instinct of freedom*’, considering that he did equate the two? ... *First*, the will to power is a striving that cannot be accurately described either as a will to affect others or as a will to ‘realize’ oneself; it is essentially a striving to transcend and perfect oneself ... This point is best understood in terms of the contention that the will to power is essentially a creative force. *The powerful man is the creative man.*” (Kaufmann, 1974: pp. 246, 248, 250)



ends. Read in this way, power need not be the goal. The goal might be artistic achievement, the writing of an inspiring book, the helping of others, or a myriad of other ends. The will to power, then, is about how to accomplish one's dreams, not about how to dominate others in order to feel better about oneself.

Indeed, instead of focusing on restrictions, which to some extent Aristotle's virtues do, Nietzsche more fully spotlights possibilities. Instead of being good, Nietzsche stresses getting better. As Nietzsche so poignantly put it:

The most concerned ask today: "How is man to be preserved?" But Zarathustra is the first and only one to ask: "How is man to be overcome?" (Z: IV, 13: p. 287)

Nietzsche certainly poses the more thought-provoking question. It is his ability to challenge us to explore, to think outside the box, to question our beliefs, and to ultimately be courageous enough to lead lives that may be far from the societal norm, which make his philosophy both unique and uniquely valuable. As such, I believe that Nietzsche, when properly understood, has done the better job of outlining the attributes for the human life which is best lived. It is an ideal that pushes our boundaries. It is an ideal that encourages us to be more and better than we were. It is an ideal which does not allow us to become complacent. It is an ideal which reminds us to seize life and the opportunities which present themselves, and more importantly, to pursue our dreams and to continue to create new ones.

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