Nietzsche: Writings from the Late Notebooks (review)

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analyzed early Christianity. The main force behind the early Christian attitude toward Judaism was a reactive force against the Church, against institutions in general, against learning, order, wealth, hierarchy, and privileges—that is to say, a disbelief in the “higher men.” Because that was all that remained of the Judean nation, the revolt was an apolitical revolt, an anarchist revolt that was based on love. So Weber engages with the a-cosmism of early Christian attitudes and valuations. Brotherly love, love of one’s fellow man, amounts to what Baudelaire called the “sacred prostitution of the soul”: thus, to step in the divine realm induces dissolution of individuality, from which nothing that can endure can be born. The early Christian community was a countercommunity, a kind of “political happening,” but with a difference: the Christian would be (well-)paid in the future, so he renounced temporal goods in order to receive everlasting ones. These two features, undifferentiated unity in love and heavenly community, account for the conflict between Christianity and the world. The course of history would be the story of Christian accommodation to the world.

In the third part of his book, Gomes Filipe discusses the concept of power in politics. Like Nietzsche, Weber thinks that reality is power and not that power exists in reality. The problem lies in the configuration of power, in its legitimization. This view presupposes a disenchanted way of considering power, something in itself “beyond Good and Evil.” In this sense, all power can be good if it is life enhancing; this is perhaps the only true legitimization of the state. But now the state is a cold monster, a diagnosis shared by Weber, who evaluates democracy very critically but also in a disenchanted manner—we have nothing better.

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Without question, the chief obstacle for English-language Nietzsche researchers is the absence of a reliable translation of the Nachlass corpus and the late writings in particular. Since 1967, English-only readers have been reliant on Kaufmann’s translation and edition of The Will to Power, itself based on the 1906/1911 “Taschen” edition published by Naumann. As Kaufmann himself recognizes, this edition was arranged systematically, under the false and untenable perspective of it being Nietzsche’s philosophical “Hauptwerk,” and with massive and violent editorial intervention by Nietzsche’s sister and his friend Peter Gast. Rather bizarrely, Kaufmann justifies his use of the false systematic arrangement on practical grounds (WP xv), as if we could just overlook the misleading relations it establishes between the texts. He also believes that with the help of the notes, added by the editor Otto Weiss to the 1911 edition, he can correct editorial distortions. But as Montinari puts it: “Die Anmerkungen widerlegen den Text” (KSA 14: 10); nor are the notes by any means complete (see KSA 14: 392 f.). Add to this Kaufmann’s inclination toward tendentious, strongly interpretative translations, and it is clear that there is a need for a new translation of the late Nachlass.

In Nietzsche: Writings from the Late Notebooks, the editor Rüdiger Bittner does not, however, improve on Kaufmann’s reliance on an unreliable edition by supplying a good translation of the best available edition, namely, that in the Colli-Montinari edition. Instead, Bittner supplies us with another selection drawn from KGW (VII and) VIII/KSA 12, and 13. If the long and twisted editorial
history of the notebooks teaches us anything, it is the need for extreme caution in selecting the material. Indeed, one could even go so far as to say: Do not select at all. Even the Colli-Montinari edition has been subject to critical scrutiny for its selection principles. Despite their scrupulous efforts at carefully controlling omissions, there are sufficient questions to warrant a new diplomatic edition of the notebooks that are the basis for the selections in KGW VII-3, VII-4.2, and VIII (KSA 11: 423 ff., 12, 13). The ongoing KGW Abteilung IX offers differentiated transcriptions of the actual manuscripts (reproduced in facsimile on a CD-ROM) without any selections whatsoever. While it is worthwhile checking specific notes in the critical edition against the transcriptions in KGW IX and especially against the corrections (Berichtigungen) listed in its Nachbericht sections, the critical edition remains a pretty reliable and far more practical basis for research. Still, the lesson is: select with extreme caution, if select you must. The texts themselves are well translated and a welcome, if only partial, complement to Kaufmann’s translations in The Will to Power. But as we will try to indicate below, the edition is fundamentally flawed because Bittner offers a purely personal selection based on dubious claims about what is and what is not philosophically relevant. Worst of all, his selection leaves out numerous texts that would problematize the interpretation of the late notes he offers in the introduction. The result is that we get a weak interpretation of Nietzsche’s late thought, supported by a misleading selection of the notes.

The problem for those reliant on English translations is compounded by delays in the Stanford University Press translation of the KSA, the project titled The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche. This means that Bittner’s volume is not just one selection from the late Nachlass among others that can be compared against the best available critical edition. Until the publication of the Stanford translations of KSA 11, 12, and 13, currently projected for 2013, Bittner’s selection could well become the edition through which the next generation of anglophone readers first encounters the late Nachlass. With this in mind, the selection and the introduction take on a significance that gives a special kind of responsibility to the editor. What rationale can there be—apart from the vagaries of the market or series editors—for a selection from the late Nachlass, when English-language readers do not have the best available edition in translation? We are not given a satisfactory answer to this important question. Instead, Bittner begins his introduction with a confusing account of the relation between Nietzsche’s published works and his unpublished notes and between his writings before and his writings after Also sprach Zarathustra. According to Bittner, the distance between Nietzsche’s published work and his Nachlass notes becomes unbridgeable after the publication of Zarathustra in 1885. As evinced by a letter to Overbeck, Nietzsche realized from that moment on that his philosophy was no longer communicable. Writing his thoughts down in notes, on the other hand, seemed less impossible. Even if they were not communicable, Nietzsche could at least express himself in the notes, Bittner writes, adding that this is why editors have always considered the late notes publishable material.

Bittner justifies the starting point of his selection by emphasizing the significance of the gap between the pre- and post-Zarathustra Nietzsche: “The reason for drawing the starting line at the seventh part, manuscript 34 is the fact that this manuscript marks the beginning of the post-Zarathustra phase, which differs markedly, both in substance and in style, from Nietzsche’s previous writing” (xiii). Because of the noncommunicable nature of Nietzsche’s thought, we must have recourse to the notes following Z: “[I]t is the post-Zarathustra Nietzsche whose philosophical projects, no longer finding adequate expression in his published writing, have to be gathered from the notebooks” (xiii).

It is true that the noncommunicable character of Nietzsche’s philosophy is a theme that plays a large role in his work. As Bittner says, this theme does indeed come up somewhat more emphatically in the late period of Nietzsche’s work. But to make such a radical distinction between the texts prior to Z and those thereafter, as Bittner does, seems too strong, especially because he makes no effort at all to explain what exactly could make Nietzsche’s thought incommunicable after Zarathustra (in his own eyes). Do Zur Genealogie der Moral and Jenseits von Gut und Böse really
differ radically, “both in substance and in style,” from *Morgenröte* and *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft? Naturally, differences can be pointed out, but a univocal, rigid distinction is not to be made.

Even more problematic is the distinction Bittner makes between the published work and the notes from the *Nachlass*. In his search for the right reader, Nietzsche does indeed sometimes state that he is understood by no one. But does this mean his thought is completely noncommunicable in published works? Nietzsche kept the hope alive that he would—even if only in a distant future—find appropriate readers. More importantly, if his thought was not communicable in his published work after *Z*, would the same not apply even more to the *Nachlass* notes, seeing as they were not even intended for publication? That Nietzsche can *express* himself in them does not make them more *communicable*, yet that is presupposed by the editorial decision to publish them. That Bittner wishes to emphasize the importance of the (late) *Nachlass* notes is well and good. But the distinction he makes between published work and the *Nachlass* is not to be made in a hard and fast way. The question of which texts, published or *Nachlass*, offer more insight depends on the particular theme in question and must be judged case by case. The *Nachlass* can give us insight into the network of related and underlying thoughts, or into Nietzsche’s motives for choosing to publish a given thought in a different form, or not at all. This would have been a much more persuasive way to account for a translation of the *Nachlass* work than the dubious “starting line” Bittner draws.

There are also problems with Bittner’s account of the proportion of material he selected and his criteria for selection. He claims that the translated materials are equal to about one-third of Nietzsche’s *Nachlass* material from the relevant period (xiii). This is far too high an estimate considering that Bittner’s selection takes up 276 pages and the *KSA* material (a selected portion of the *KGW*) for this period consumes 1,517 pages (the books have more or less the same typeface). As for his selection criteria, Bittner claims that he concentrated only on philosophically relevant notes. The problem with this justification is, of course, that it must be shown that what has been selected is more philosophical than what has been left out—that it is more than just a personal selection. Nietzsche’s reflections on his own person and life, for instance, are left out (xiv). That is perhaps defensible from a specific definition of what philosophy is. But if we consider the importance Nietzsche gives to the relation between thought and life, between philosophy and personality, and that he views this relation as a philosophical theme, it becomes harder to justify. A remark to this effect would have been appropriate.

Bittner also names a number of further criteria for his selection: the many title pages intended for future publications are left out; earlier versions of notes that Nietzsche later worked out further are, with a few exceptions, left out; Nietzsche’s excerpts from other authors and a number of other themes that Nietzsche goes into are also excluded as philosophically irrelevant. As an example Bittner names Nietzsche’s thoughts on the relation between men and women and those about the fatherland and Germans. Bittner thinks that these thoughts are completely uninteresting. What is more, he tells us, they are chauvinistic (xv). Here we see the disturbing assertiveness with which Bittner pronounces his judgments, and these are especially disturbing considering the first-time reader takes the editor to be an authority. Nietzsche’s thoughts on the relation between men and women and his critique of feminini(sm)have generated enough interest to have several books dedicated to them. Nietzsche can perhaps be called chauvinistic in some texts, but in many others, which Bittner has not taken up in his selection, his tenor is decidedly antichauvinistic.

In the rest of the introduction Bittner sketches the themes about which Nietzsche does have something illuminating to say. According to Bittner, Nietzsche sets himself the task to “translate man back into nature.” He wants to engage in a polemic with the tradition from a naturalistic angle and expose the misinterpretations of man. Nietzsche’s naturalism consists, according to Bittner, of understanding “basic phenomena of human existence in terms of life” (xxv). This perspective, he argues, explains Nietzsche’s rejection of mechanistic interpretations. What Bittner fails to point out is that, besides the criticisms of the mechanistic model, Nietzsche also *defends* a mechanistic interpretation at times (e.g., *KSA* 11:34[204]; cf. *KSA* 11:34[76]). These notes are not included in Bittner’s selection.
Nietzsche’s task is, then, to explain what the concept “life” entails. According to Nietzsche, “life” is “will to power,” and so Bittner offers a critical analysis of this concept. Why “will to power”? he asks. At times, he thinks, Nietzsche means “will *for* power” when he writes “will *to* power.” In addition, it provides Nietzsche with a counterweight to Schopenhauer’s “will to life.” At times, Bittner contends, this formula also carries the meaning of the “wherefore” or “to what end” of human life. As such, this notion of Nietzsche’s serves to prevent life from being seen as meaningless, as evinced in *GM III:28* (xviii). This interpretation is incorrect. The tenor of the passage in *GM* is to offer a critique of the need to justify life in one way or another. One could argue that in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* Nietzsche is concerned to find a justification of the value or meaning of life, but for the late Nietzsche that certainly does not apply, as can be seen from various late *Nachlass* notes, many of which were omitted from Bittner’s selection. He goes on to contend that this meaning of the will to power is inadequate: “‘To what end human existence?’ [. . . ]: this will is not in vain, because it is a will to something, namely to power. The reasoning is doubly fallacious: meaning and purpose, may or may not coincide and, above all, purpose and content are two different things” (xviii). Bittner thus criticizes a dubious interpretation, to say the least. Further on we will see that the understanding of the will to power as a goal in this sense is inadequate.

How, then, is the pronouncement that “all that happens in the organic world is an overpowering, a becoming master,” as Nietzsche writes in *GM II:12*, understood by Nietzsche? Bittner asks. According to him, Nietzsche gives two possible answers, neither of which he really could have meant. The first is that he wanted to distinguish what things appear to be from what they really are. Seeing as Nietzsche criticizes precisely this distinction in several places, he cannot possibly defend it. But if we look to *GM II:12*, we have to concede that Nietzsche subscribes to this perspective. Another interpretation does not seem possible (xix).

In the second place, Nietzsche’s formulation could be understood as a pointer toward the inner world of force in order to correct the mechanistic conception of the physicists. But this interpretation cannot be correct either, following Bittner’s view, because the will to power in the sense of overpowering cannot be an inner world; “overpowering” is an “outer event” (xix). Even the version of Nietzsche’s formula in *Z* is inadequate, Bittner claims. There Nietzsche says: “[W]here I found a living thing, there I found will to power.” This meaning is too weak because “power” here is merely a quality that can be found next to many other qualities. Bittner finds the satisfying answer in *KSA* 13:14[121], where “will to power” is not presented as a “uniform character, but as a uniform kind of source of whatever happens in the organic world.” All living beings strive not for happiness but, rather, for power. This “source” can then be understood as an inner world: “It is not that the living only do things of a certain sort. Rather, they do things—a great variety of things—with an intention of a certain sort; and if anything can be called inner, it is an intention like this.” This at least makes Nietzsche’s thesis intelligible, Bittner thinks, but it is nonetheless untrue, for life and striving for power remain two different things (xix).

There is a good deal to be said in opposition to Bittner’s analysis: to begin, consider Bittner’s claim that in *GM II:12*, Nietzsche defends a dualism between what things appear to be and what they really are. Nietzsche’s goal in this text is not to show that things in reality have an essential characteristic, namely, power or will to power; rather, it is to show that what things are is always an expression of changing constellations of power. The proposition that all things have different meanings under different conditions serves to undermine precisely the assumption that they have a fixed meaning, an essence. Nietzsche illustrates this thought by way of the concept of punishment but very soon extends his reflections to cover the shifts and changes in meaning for all things (*GM II:12*). This is also set out in the late *Nachlass*, for example, in *KSA* 12:2[82], which is not taken up in Bittner’s selection either. A detailed discussion of this thought is to be found in Werner Stegmaier’s *Nietzsches “Genealogie der Moral.”*

Bittner’s second possible interpretation of the will to power is equally unconvincing, namely, that the will to power cannot be taken as an inner world because overpowering is always an outer event.
Processes of subjection certainly can manifest themselves in outer appearances, but that does not mean that the directedness toward or the striving for subjection cannot be conceived as an inner striving. Bittner’s own most satisfying interpretation also comes to this point of view, namely, that the will to power is a kind of intention. His subsequent rejection of this interpretation on the grounds that life and striving for power are different things is based on a misunderstanding. Nietzsche states that all life is will to power. That is not the same as claiming that all life has its ground in will to power or that all life strives for power as an external goal. Life is not “something” that strives for “something else.” The will to power, and therewith all life, is a process without a beginning in a cause and an end in a goal. The zur Macht does not so much add something to the concept of will as underline that willing is always directed toward the subjection of another will. “Striving” is always “wanting to be master.”

Völker Gerhardt in his Vom Willen zur Macht has gone to great lengths to make this clear. Moreover, the examples that Bittner gives in order to show that Nietzsche failed to see this distinction are not convincing. Consider the following: “If, say, relief from the constant stress in your office is what you are after, then even when you have achieved it this will not count as having subdued it; and thus neither did you strive to subdue it before you had achieved it” (xxii). Could wanting to relieve yourself from stress not be understood as wanting to reorganize the economy of your drives so that you are no longer bothered by stress? And could this reorganization not be understood as wanting to regain control or power over the household of your drives? Bittner’s interpretative imagination is seriously limited by his commonsense, literal understanding of “overpowering” as a purely external, physical phenomenon.

The lack of insight into the particular character of Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power also explains Bittner’s misinterpretation of it in Zarathustra. He reads “where I found a living thing, there I found will to power” far too easily as though it says, “where I found a living thing, there I found, possibly alongside other things, will to power.” Few things are clearer than that Nietzsche does not conceive the will to power as one among other possible qualities. In the rest of that text Nietzsche does not go on to name other qualities that can be found but, rather, develops the claim that life is “essentially” will to power. That also comes out very clearly in the Nachlass from the time of Zarathustra, such as KSA 10:5[1] and KSA 10:13[10], which were not taken up in Bittner’s selection. We find this thought again in many notes from the late Nachlass, such as KSA 12:2[190], KSA 12:7[9], and KSA 12:7[54]. In this regard it is notable that Bittner has sometimes taken up only part(s) of a note in his selection, as is the case in KSA 12:7[9].

The inadequacy of Bittner’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s thesis is confirmed yet again by his identification of Nietzsche’s “will to power” with Schopenhauer’s “will.” In his expansion of “all organic things are will to power” to “all reality is will to power,” Nietzsche, according to Bittner, follows in the footsteps of his great master Schopenhauer such that Schopenhauer’s “will” is replaced by “will to power” (xxi). Bittner fails to recognize that Nietzsche’s “will to power” is, in contrast to Schopenhauer’s “will,” no fixed principle or essence but, in fact, implies variability, multitude, and relationality, as evident in BGE 19 and KSA 10:9[39] (see also the earlier KSA 7:19[132]). This is also shown in later notes that Bittner omits, such as KSA 11:7[4], KSA 11:38[1], and KSA 12:1[58]. Bittner’s objection that “different people, and the same people at different times, and indeed the same people at the same time, strive for different things” (xxii) does not at all stand in contrast to Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power. On the contrary, it is supported by Nietzsche’s thesis. Here we see again that Bittner first gives an inadequate interpretation of Nietzsche, which he then uses as an argument against Nietzsche. Wolfgang Müller-Lauter’s interpretation is an attempt to explain precisely this feature of Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power. It is telling that this author, who can be seen as one of the most important Nietzsche scholars of the last four decades, is completely absent in Bittner’s foreword and in the list of books that Bittner names in the paragraph “Further Reading.” Bittner’s aggressive self-assertion is accompanied by a refusal to engage with, or even mention, conflicting interpretations, however influential they have been.

Nietzsche’s theory of the will to power is, according to Bittner, no different from the theories that Nietzsche repudiates and marks as “mummification” and “Egypticism.” Bittner suggests that this
might explain why Nietzsche is sometimes reserved in his claim, as, for example, in "BGE 36, in which he designates his doctrine of the will to power as a hypothesis (xxii). Against Bittner’s suggestion, it should be recalled that Nietzsche’s doctrine is not directed at fixating or mummifying reality, but, rather, at doing justice to its dynamic richness. Nietzsche’s characterization of his theory of the will to power as a hypothesis does not exclude this idea; rather, it includes it—the notion of the will to power is not a hypothesis in the positivist or Popperian sense of a truth claim that can be empirically verified or falsified, because all conditions that have to be fulfilled to establish a proposition as true or false are themselves expressions of will to power.17 There are no general, unconditional conditions that have a neutral status outside the game of power relations. The hypothetical character of the notion of the will to power signifies that every interpretation, every determination of reality, is or can be continuously questioned by opposing powers, that other interpretations always remain possible.18 Nietzsche’s statement that all reality is will to power does not lead to the negation of the diversity and richness of the world but, indeed, to the affirmation of it.19

Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power is, Bittner concludes, not significant if it is understood as “the world’s ‘intelligible character’ (BGE 36) or ‘the innermost essence of being’ (14[80])” (xxiii). It is significant, he claims, because it provided Nietzsche with the conceptual basis, although much too narrowly, for a reinterpretation of human existence in terms of life. The significance of that interpretation lies not in its originality (Bittner thinks it is not an original idea) but in its radicality. Bittner does concede that Nietzsche’s attempt to “translate man back into nature” on the basis of the notion of the will to power can function as a model for attempts that nowadays can be taken up.

This conclusion is quite bizarre. Why should a false, totally inadequate attempt to “translate man back into nature” function as an example for current research? In spite of his unmitigated disqualification of Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power, Bittner does not draw the most obvious conclusion, namely, that Nietzsche’s thesis is not significant at all. At least that would be consistent with the interpretive framework he elaborates.

Returning to Nietzsche’s reinterpretation of basic phenomena of human existence in terms of life, Bittner discusses, first, cognition and then religion and morals; art and history are left aside “for reasons of space” (xxiii)—which is, of course, never a sufficient justification for selecting what is to be left aside. In Bittner’s view, Nietzsche regards knowledge as believing that something is such and such. Such belief is always false because the world is becoming, and in becoming there is no being that is such and such. We do not find being; rather, we postulate it because not believing in its existence would make life impossible. We take issue with several important facets of Bittner’s comments on this idea (xxvi).

Bittner states that Nietzsche is not defending a pragmatic theory of truth here but, rather, is aligning himself with the tradition of the transcendental philosophy of Kant. Nietzsche does not adopt the pragmatic theory that holds that a statement is true if it fulfills certain needs or desires. For him knowledge is only possible insofar as we project our judgments into the world. The difference between Kant and Nietzsche is that for Kant without this projection the world would be unknowable, whereas for Nietzsche without this projection it would be unlivable (xxvi).

Once again, we come up against an oversimplified and generalizing critique on Bittner’s part. He presupposes that there is such a thing as a pragmatic view and reduces pragmatism to the popular idea that for a pragmatist “a statement is true just in case it fulfills certain needs or desires” (xxvi). In the first place, when Nietzsche refers to knowledge claims concerning needs or desires, he usually does so in order to draw strong skeptical conclusions concerning the radical disjunction between (what is useful for) life and what could make a claim to truth. In the second place, this is an interpretation of pragmatism that is ascribed to William James under the influence of Bertrand Russell’s History of Western Philosophy. Not only is James’s theory much more sophisticated, Charles S. Peirce, the originator of pragmatism, distances himself explicitly and radically from this form of pragmatism.20 Whether and in what sense Nietzsche could be called a pragmatist require a much more meticulous examination than Bittner’s.
He goes on to state that “this understanding of cognition in terms of life does not feature the will to power[...]. Instead, Nietzsche’s argument turns on our seeking to preserve ourselves” (xxvi–xxvii). Nietzsche has good reasons for this, according to Bittner; the idea that the world of becoming can be transformed in a world of things as such and such by sheer exuberance of force is not credible: “the origin of a world made to be is not ecstatic overflowing [... but need]” (xxvii). Once again Bittner proves himself to be a bad Nietzsche reader. The greatest mistake that he makes is that if one takes self-preservation as the main principle, then one already presupposes a pre-given world as such and such; there already has to be some-thing that you want to preserve. Being, every form of being, however, is for Nietzsche something that has to be constituted continuously. The notion of the will to power is an attempt to understand the “mechanics” of this continuous constitution. Bittner’s claim that Nietzsche replaces his principle of the will to power with the principle of self-preservation is, therefore, not right. The notes found in KSA 12:7[9], KSA 12:9[98], and KSA 13:14[121], for example, show that clearly.21

Nietzsche’s concept of life, like his interpretation of basic phenomena in terms of life, is, according to Bittner, ambivalent: “The fullness of life manifests itself in boundless unbelief and ‘freedom of the mind’ (9[39]), in denying anything to be this way rather than another (9[41]). On the other hand, in 9[91] ‘life is founded on the presupposition of a belief in things lasting and regularly recurring,’ and ‘logicising, rationalising, systematising’ are taken ‘as life’s resources’” (xxvii). Nietzsche failed, according to Bittner, to make up his mind about which kind of life he meant.

Again Bittner draws his conclusion too quickly: the positions that Bittner mentions need not exclude each other. That a rich life consists in a process of continuously liberating oneself from fixed and static structures does not change the fact that one cannot live without fixating oneself continuously. Indeed, is freedom not an abstract and empty word if the element of fixation and regularity is not presupposed? Moreover, fixating oneself is also the effect of a will to power. This interpretation can be reconstructed on the basis of, for example, materials published as KSA 11:35[68], KSA 12:9[151], and KSA 12:2[90].22 Is life not indeed characterized by an ambivalent disposition of, on the one hand, the willingness and necessity to identify oneself with different positions and, on the other hand, the continuous desire to free oneself from fixed identifications?

The central premise of Nietzsche’s argument is, according to Bittner, neither justified nor self-evident (xxvii). Nietzsche states that our world is a world of becoming that cannot be known; all that is enduring is the product of projection. People, however, generally assume, according to Bittner, the opposite: they experience durability and endurance as pre-given, and they do not think that we have to trim things into such shapes for the sake of preserving ourselves; “why could they not just be right?” (xxvii). Is it not much simpler to presuppose this view? Bittner asks. Why should the world not be intelligible for humans? Nietzsche is unnecessarily “bracing himself for an epistemological worst case scenario” (xxviii).

This is a very strange critique, especially when it comes from a Kant specialist who has moreover just pointed at similarities between Kant and Nietzsche. Following the neo-Kantian movement, Nietzsche does indeed dispute the possibility of objective knowledge and executes in his more radical way the “subjective turn” (see KSA 10:24[13], 12:9[98], 12:10[19]). That the world of becoming cannot be known means above all that there is no pre-given, objective world but only a “subjective” one, which continuously has to be established from a particular perspective in a struggle with other perspectives. That there is no durable world means above all that there are no eternal meanings. Nietzsche shows with his genealogical method in a convincing way that in the history of humankind “things” are continuously ascribed different meanings. What Nietzsche means by “becoming” is above all this process of continuously ascribing different meanings to the world (cf. GM II).

Nietzsche’s project of “translating man back into nature,” says Bittner, required perhaps more than anything a reinterpretation of religion and morality. The notebooks, he contends, offer us a subtler and more credible view on these topics than we can find in the published works (note how Bittner here ignores the radical distinction he made between the published and unpublished material!). The
unpublished notes show us more clearly that Nietzsche does not repudiate morality tout court but only a particular morality, namely, the morality of his time. Indeed, Nietzsche accentuates that we need morality: morality is the self-interpretation and self-justification of a community for the sake of its own preservation and growth. Morality is a product of life and supports and enhances it. Bittner contends that, by calling the morality that was dominant in his time and cultural sphere simply “morality,” however, Nietzsche falls prey to a “short-sightedness similar to the one he deplores in ‘most moral philosophers’” (xxxi). It is also unclear, according to Bittner, what Nietzsche exactly criticizes in the dominant morality of his time. Moreover, if morality arises from the way we live, if it is a product of life, how can it turn against life? How can there be such a thing as a morality hostile to life?

Although Nietzsche is certainly aware of this problem, according to Bittner, his solutions are not adequate. He tries to solve the problem in two ways: first, he claims that “the reason that we have a morality which denies us great and noble humanity is either to prevent us from getting too excited or to shake us out of being too lethargic; both dangers stemming from our degeneration” (xxxii). This is, according to Bittner, not a solution: morality in this case would not be hostile to life after all. It would help life, albeit by painful means, and so there would be no reason to get rid of it. On the contrary, we would have to embrace it. Nietzsche’s other attempt to solve this problem is, according to Bittner, more promising: our morality is not hostile to life, but it no longer matches the way we live now. We no longer need a common morality; everybody needs to adopt a morality that fits with his or her individuality. But Nietzsche is in Bittner’s view not radical enough in this critique: human beings “translated back into nature” do not need even a morality of their own; “[o]ne might expect such human beings just to do their human things, rather than subject themselves to any form, self-given or not” (xxxiii–xxxiv). Bittner thinks Nietzsche even seems to support this idea at times.

Bittner’s critical remarks raise an important and well-known issue concerning Nietzsche’s confusing use of the word Moral. It is especially pronounced in the unpublished writings (giving the lie to Bittner’s communicability thesis) and predates the starting point for his selection in KGW VII/KSA 11.23 The question is whether an editor ought to respond to this issue by trying to squeeze Nietzsche into the corner of those he criticizes, as Bittner does, or whether he ought to draw attention to the difficulty and to the need for a close study of Moral, die Moral, moralisch, and related terms across all of Nietzsche’s writings, with a view toward determining and distinguishing the different meanings of the terms. The latter approach, which is the ambition of the ongoing Nietzsche-Wörterbuch project, offers the only hope of bringing some precision to our interpretation of Nietzsche’s writings, a hope that must surely be shared by all editors.

Bittner’s claim that Nietzsche only criticizes the dominant morality of his time is certainly false. Nietzsche repudiates not only the dominant morality of his cultural sphere but all morality that declares itself absolute, that proclaims itself to be the only possible morality. Richer life-forms can be developed only by virtue of a struggle between different value orientations. When a value orientation pronounces itself to be unconditional and does not give other possibilities the chance to prove themselves, it necessary results in the destruction of the richness of life. For Nietzsche, the dominant morality of his time was characterized to a high degree by this destructive tendency (cf. GM II:24; KSA 9:11[44], 12:2[13]).

One of the major problems with Bittner’s analysis is that he does not take into account the notion of struggle, which plays a very important role in Nietzsche’s philosophy. That prevents him repeatedly from coming to an adequate interpretation of Nietzsche’s thinking. This is confirmed perhaps most clearly by his interpretation of Nietzsche’s critique of morality. That does not mean that the questions that Bittner raises are irrelevant or unimportant. The question of how morality, being a product of life, can be hostile to life is an interesting and difficult problem, and it is absolutely central to Nietzsche’s later philosophy. But without taking the notion of struggle (and other relevant notions, such as organization) into careful consideration, this problem cannot be understood adequately, let alone addressed. For a better attempt at elaborating and dealing with this and other related problems we refer above all to the work of Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, in which the concept of struggle plays an important role.
Finally, it has to be said how very strange it is that Bittner, despite his devastating critique of Nietzsche’s philosophy, perhaps one should say antipathy, was willing to collaborate in such a translation project. Bittner’s text contains hardly anything positive about Nietzsche’s thinking. Why then should he be prepared to introduce and edit an English translation of (a selection of) Nietzsche’s unpublished notes? It would have made more sense for Bittner to publish his text in a journal (assuming he could find one that would accept it) with the message that he is done once and for all with Nietzsche’s philosophy. Bittner’s introduction offers many assertions that are forcefully made, yet ill-founded and utterly unpersuasive; he offers hardly any thoughts that are not doubtful. Nietzsche is approached with the analytic razor, and although there is nothing against this, Bittner neglects to apply this razor to his own reasoning. Nietzsche’s unpublished work deserves a better introduction in the English-speaking world.

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Notes

1. The book also includes an introduction, a short chronology, a very short bibliography, an index of names, and an index of subjects. The book does not include a concordance with Kaufmann’s edition, so the reader must use a combination of the KGW concordances (if moving from Bittner to Kaufmann) and Brian Domino’s concordance in the Journal of Nietzsche Studies 9–10 from spring–autumn 1995 (if moving from Kaufmann to Bittner).


3. Colli and Montinari omitted “letter outlines and plans, notes and remarks with external and contingent content, e.g. indications of financial questions, calculations, notes concerning prices, journeys, walking routes, visits and such like” (KSA 14, 18–19). Most controversial are the preparatory notes (Vorstufen and Vorarbeiten) to texts published by Nietzsche or elaborated in the Nachlass in a complete (ausgearbeitet) form: they were omitted in cases where they “differ from the later version in purely formal terms” with the promise that they would be “evaluated in the commentary” in KSA 14. This commentary is, however, far from adequate. While many of its defects have been made good by the Nachbericht volumes of KGW, Montinari did not manage to publish a Nachbericht to KGW VIII.

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Abteilung IX: Der handschriftliche Nachlaß ab Frühjahr 1885 in differenzierter Transkription, ed. Marie-Luise Haase, Martin Stingelin, and Michael Kohlenbach (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001–).

5. There are instances where we would go along with Kaufmann against Sturge—e.g., with his “trained” over her “bred” for gezüchtet in KSA 11:37[8] (= WP 957); there are also cases where we would go against both, e.g., with “ought” instead of their “shall” for soll in KSA 12:2[90] (= WP 511); but it is immensely helpful to have this new translation to compare with Kaufmann’s.

7. Bittner actually writes “less impossible” in quotation marks, as if he were quoting further from the letter, which he is not. The letter in question says nothing about the advantages of note writing. In the line Bittner does quote, moreover, there are two errors: “My philosophy” is placed by Nietzsche (but not Bittner) in quotation marks—this alone should give us pause to ask what exactly is no longer communicable—and “no longer” is underlined by Nietzsche but not by Bittner: an inauspicious start.


10. This is shown clearly in Götzen-Dämmerung, where Nietzsche states “dass der Werth des Leben nicht abgeschätzt werden kann” (“Das Problem des Sokrates” 2). We can find a good many texts with a similar tenor in the late Nachlass, especially in the context of Nietzsche’s critique of decadence, such as, for example, KSA 13:14[134], KSA 13:17[4], and KSA 13:17[7]. These notes are omitted from Bittner’s selection.

11. Cf. also KSA 11:34[113], which is included in Bittner’s selection.


13. In Nietzsche’s words, “[D]ie einzige Kraft, die es giebt, ist gleicher Art wie die des Willens: ein Commandiren” (KSA 11:40[42]); “Streben ist nichts anderes als Streben nach Macht” (KSA 13:14[82]).


15. Nietzsche distances himself very early on from Schopenhauer’s notion of the will, as can be seen in a text from 1867–68 called Zu Schopenhauer (KGW 1-4, 418–27).


18. Cf. BGE 36; KSA 11:40[37] (it is unclear why Bittner did not include this Nachlass text in his selection). See also the preface of GM, in which Nietzsche contrasts the kind of hypothesis that he adopts with the hypotheses that are presupposed by the English Moralgenealogen.

19. For an extensive analysis of Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power and its radically pluralistic character in particular, see Ciano Aydin, “Nietzsche on Reality as Will to Power: Toward an ‘Organization–Struggle’ Model,” this issue.


As a response to false interpretations of his notion of pragmatism, Peirce introduces the term pragmaticism, “which is,” as he says with sarcasm, “ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers” (Collected Papers of C. S. Peirce, vols. 1–6, ed. Ch. Hartshorne and P. Weiss [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931–35], vol. 5, 414).

21. The last two notes are included in Bittner’s selection in uncut form.
22. The first note is not included in Bittner’s selection, although the others are.
23. A good example is the following note from KSA 10, where Nietzsche appears to claim both that we no longer need morality and that we do need morality:

“Just as we no longer have need of morality [die Moral], so—also no longer of religion. The ‘I love God’—the only[,] ancient form of the religious—has been transposed into the love of an ideal—has become creative—nothing but God-humans.

Morality [Moral] is needed: according to what will we act, since we must act? And that which we have enacted, we must appraise—according to what?

Demonstrating [an] error of genesis is not an argument against morality [die Moral]. Morality [Moral] is a condition of life. ‘You ought’ […]”


Moral ist nöthig: wonach werden wir handeln, da wir doch handeln müssen? Und was wir gehandelt haben, müssen wir schätzen—wonach?


(KSA 10:4[90]; cf. KSA 10:1[2], 1[32])