

What is ‘the Meaning of our Cheerfulness’?

Philosophy as a Way of Life in Nietzsche and Montaigne

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Abstract: Robert Pippin has recently raised what he calls ‘the Montaigne problem’ for Nietzsche’s philosophy: although Nietzsche advocates a ‘cheerful’ mode of philosophizing for which Montaigne is an exemplar, he signally fails to write with the obvious cheerfulness attained by Montaigne. We explore the moral psychological structure of the cheerfulness Nietzsche values, revealing unexpected complexity in his conception of the attitude. For him, the right kind of cheerfulness is radically non-naïve; it expresses the overcoming of justified revulsion at calamitous aspects of life through a reflective, higher-order affirmative attitude. This complex notion of cheerfulness turns out to have roots in Montaigne himself, and it must (according to both philosophers) be cultivated through practice, as a kind of second nature. Understanding the meaning of cheerfulness thereby sheds important light on the conception of philosophy as a way of life in both Nietzsche and Montaigne.

‘The cheerfulness of artistic creation ... is merely a bright image of clouds and sky mirrored in a black lake of sadness.’ [Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 9]

‘Reasoning and education ... can hardly be powerful enough to lead us to action, unless besides we exercise and form our soul by experience to the way we want it to go.’ [Montaigne, *Essays* II, 6, ‘Of practice’; F 267]

Although the nature of philosophy itself belongs among the perennially contested philosophical issues, one point is usually taken for granted: philosophy is a theoretical enterprise, delivering insights on the big questions about truth, goodness, and other fundamental matters. But as Robert Pippin (2010) has recently reminded us, Nietzsche's efforts were not focused on the metaphysical questions and a priori methods traditional in philosophy. Instead, they rested centrally on an interpretive psychology (*BGE* 23).¹ His aim in that domain, moreover, was not so much to grasp the nature of the mind as to probe the bases of evaluative life. Such a psychology makes theoretical claims, of course, but its *diagnostic* rather than speculative tone recalls to mind a different idea about what philosophy is. Since the point seems to be acquiring practically relevant information about our evaluative situation, philosophy can be seen from this vantage as a practical enterprise, aimed in the first instance at *self-cultivation*, rather than truth.² That conception held an important place within the ancient tradition, where philosophy was often understood as a *way of life*.³ While the 'way of life' formulation suggests that one's entire life, or even the very self, is the appropriate target, leading to a conception of philosophy as self-fashioning (Anderson and Landy 2001), such an ambitious conception is not mandatory. Practical philosophy as self-cultivation can also pursue more modest ends—for example, working to produce a single affect, like cheerfulness.

The initial provocation for this paper was a remark from Pippin's recent book on Nietzsche's psychology and the French *moralistes*: 'For all his aspirations..., Nietzsche never succeeded in writing with the kind of "cheerfulness", "*Heiterkeit*", and balance of Montaigne' (Pippin 2010: 121). Pippin's diagnosis of Nietzsche's 'Montaigne problem' (Pippin 2010: 23) is that his writing is dominated by a harsh negative critique of philosophical theory in a way Montaigne's never was—for Montaigne, after all, 'the surest sign of wisdom is constant cheerfulness' ('Of education' I, 26; F 119).⁴ Pippin also connects the point to his larger ideas about modernism: Nietzsche was troubled by the timidity and smallness of an

emerging bourgeois world whose contours Montaigne could not yet see, and Nietzsche felt the cultural threat from that world with a visceral force that gives his writing a tone of indignant outrage that can be hard to hear as ‘cheerful’. Fair enough. Still, Nietzsche often *claims* to have attained cheerfulness already: for instance, in the quotation used in our title (from *GS* 343), he is neither hoping for cheerfulness nor plotting to obtain it, but asking what ‘*our*’ (actual) cheerfulness means.⁵

The initial puzzle quickly makes way for a deeper question. It is tempting to assume that the cheerfulness Montaigne had and Nietzsche lacked was a simple and entirely *natural* affect—a fortunate side-effect of Montaigne’s happy psychological constitution. The temptation is reinforced by another feature of Pippin’s interpretation: according to him, Nietzsche conceives the problem of nihilistic despair not as a loss of belief or lack of will, but as a failure of *desire* (Pippin 2010: 33, *et passim*; see also 1997: 351-71). What is lacking is a direct, pre-reflective and pre-volitional, affective connection to things (Pippin construes it as *love*), which could support our carings and thereby restore us to a life animated by values. That thought encourages the idea that Montaignean cheerfulness is similarly natural, direct, and pre-reflective—proper to instinctive emotional life and not to a class of more artificial attitudes produced by philosophical self-cultivation. Now, however, Nietzsche’s strenuous efforts to achieve equanimity might seem doomed in advance by paradox: if what is wanted is an unreflective affective attachment to the world and to life, then any deliberate effort to attain it through philosophy must be bound to fail. The very fact that Nietzsche is *trying so hard* to become cheerful undermines his efforts, because the detached, knowing posture involved in standing back to identify the desired attitude, and then determining how to cultivate it, extinguishes the very possibility of the naïve affective bond with life that we seek.

The prospect of such a paradox should lead us to ask just what sort of attitude Nietzsche took cheerfulness to be, which brings our title quotation back into view. That text seems to envision some *special kind* of cheerfulness (‘*ours*’), rather than cheerfulness in general. Moreover, it is clearly *not* supposed to be obvious what that cheerfulness is: Nietzsche asks after its ‘meaning’, or more colloquially,

‘what’s up with’ our cheerfulness. Apparently, only a special explanation can clarify what this affect involves, how it figures in life, and perhaps even that (or how) it is a form of cheerfulness at all.

We aim to show that the tempting inferences from Pippin’s observation are incorrect, and that cheerfulness in Nietzsche’s sense was never intended to be an unmediated, pre-reflective and non-deliberative attitude.⁶ Our results will vindicate the conception of philosophy as self-cultivation, but they also provoke reconsideration of Pippin’s original observation. For it turns out that Montaigne was engaged in a similar philosophical practice, and that his cheerfulness, too, is best understood along Nietzschean lines—not as a direct, ‘natural’ attitude, but as part of a cultivated *second nature*. Such ‘second-natural’ cheerfulness, as we will call it, does belong to *affective* life, and as such it participates in the ‘automaticity’ of emotions, which afford immediate responsiveness to evaluatively salient features of the world without relying on the subject’s reflection and volition in the moment. In their second-natural versions, however, such affects can acquire their automaticity only through special strategies: in particular, we must put them into place by *practicing*—training our own psyches, as it were.⁷ Thus, they are not radically *pre*-reflective and *pre*-deliberative in the sense deployed to generate the paradox. On the contrary, they can be products of deliberate self-cultivation, and as such, second-natural affects remain deeply responsive to the will and endorsement of the philosopher. In our view, it is only such ‘knowing’ and *essentially cultivated* attitudes that carry philosophical significance and thereby special value of the sort Nietzsche attached to his kind of cheerfulness.

As an initial way into the domain, we turn to section 343 of *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche raises his question about ‘the meaning of our cheerfulness’. The themes and images advanced in that section open out into a broad vein of Nietzschean texts that together constitute a sustained exploration of the nature, etiology, content, and structure of the attitude of cheerfulness.

1. Non-naïve cheerfulness and redemption of catastrophe in GS 343

Section 343 opens the Fifth Book of the *The Gay Science* ('We Fearless Ones'), which Nietzsche added to the second edition as a major retrospective reassessment of the work. Its title is a loose idiomatic expression, '*Was mit unserer Heiterkeit auf sich hat*'. Kaufmann translates it as '*The meaning of our cheerfulness*', but it might be rendered more closely as '*What's going on with our cheerfulness*'. The gesture opens up a broad terrain, encompassing the character of our cheerfulness, the reasons for it, and its wider significance. But the immediately following sentence appears to have nothing to do with cheerfulness: 'The greatest recent event—that "God is dead", that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable—is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe'. In case the 'shadows' image was insufficiently ominous by itself, he continues: 'For the few at least, whose eyes—the *suspicion* in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some sun seems to have set and some ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt'. These few alone know '*what* this event really means'—namely, a 'long plenitude and sequence of breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm'.

Only after this somber set-up does Nietzsche get back to the title question: 'why is it that even we look forward to the approaching gloom without any real sense of involvement and above all without any worry and fear for *ourselves*'? He offers this explanation:

Are we perhaps still too much under the impression of the *initial consequences* of this event—and these initial consequences, the consequences for *ourselves*, are quite the opposite of what one might perhaps expect: They are not at all sad and gloomy but rather like a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration [*Erheiterung*], encouragement, dawn. 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 343]

‘Our’ cheerfulness arises in reaction to the same somber circumstances highlighted in Nietzsche’s set-up. At least for ‘us’, cheerfulness is apparently supposed to be an apt response to a *catastrophe*—a ‘collapse’, ‘breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm’ affecting the evaluative bases of European culture. No wonder Nietzsche suggests that his kind of cheerfulness requires special explanation. Initially, it seems that the intended account will turn on particular features of the in-group answering to Nietzsche’s first-person plural; while the ‘collapse’ is catastrophic *for most people*, ‘we’ find it ‘exhilarating’ and ‘amazing’ because of ‘our’ idiosyncratic commitments (notably, for these ‘philosophers and “free spirits”’, a deep-going investment in free inquiry). But this first-pass reading remains partial and superficial. Wider reading suggests that the privileged ‘we’ fully well apprehend the catastrophic aspects of the ‘collapse’, so that their cheerfulness itself must be a complex affair.

The images in GS 343 tie it into a network of other sections of *The Gay Science*. Most obviously, the connection of the ‘death of God’ with the image of an open sea recalls the juxtaposition between GS 125, in which a ‘madman’ proclaims that momentous death to an audience that has not yet caught even a glimpse of it, and the immediately preceding GS 124, where Nietzsche also deploys the ‘open sea’ image (albeit with a tone completely different from GS 343):

In the horizon of the infinite. — We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage! Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom*—and there is no longer any ‘land’. [GS 124]

Notably, ‘We fearless ones’ of *GS* 343 do not react to the prospect of the infinite open sea like the ‘poor bird’ of *GS* 124; nor do they take up the death of God in the spirit of *GS* 125’s ‘madman’. The madman is preoccupied by a horrifying prospect of massive disorientation. He fears that European life and culture are condemned to drift aimlessly (‘straying through an infinite nothing’) once they have lost the traditional foundations that supported moral values capable of providing ultimate goals of action (‘Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?’; ‘What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?’). When Nietzsche speaks for himself and his fellow cheerful free spirits in *GS* 343, he must be perfectly aware of this ‘cataclysm’; after all, he placed its declaration into the mouth of a character he created (in *GS* 125). But he distances himself from the madman’s distress—asking ‘who could guess enough of it today to be compelled to play the teacher and advance proclaimer of this monstrous logic of terror, the prophet of a gloom and an eclipse of the sun whose like has probably never yet occurred on earth?’ (*GS* 343), as if he had not already taken up the role of ‘teacher and advance proclaimer’ in *GS* 125. Nietzsche knows everything the madman knows, but he responds differently: not with dread and horror, but with ‘exhilaration [*Erheiterung*]’.

So, what *is* going on with this cheerfulness? The first-pass interpretation began from Nietzsche’s coy rhetorical question: ‘Are we perhaps still too much under the impression of the *initial consequences* of this event?’—namely, that ‘[a]t long last the horizon appears free to us again... the sea, *our* sea, lies open again’ (*GS* 343). But this just pushes the question back; why should ‘we’ react to the infinitely open sea with cheerfulness rather than the fear and homesickness warned of in *GS* 124? One of the ‘consequences for *ourselves*’ points toward an answer: ‘all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again’. The phrase resonates with another section of *The Gay Science*, which evokes the notion of philosophy as a way of life that is our wider concern:

In media vita.—No, life has not disappointed me. On the contrary, I find it truer, more desirable and mysterious every year—even since the day when the great liberator came to me: the idea that life

could be an experiment of the seeker for knowledge—and not a duty, not a calamity, not trickery. —
And knowledge itself: let it be something else for others; ... for me it is a world of dangers and
victories in which heroic feelings, too, find places to dance and play. ‘*Life as a means to
knowledge*’—with this principle in one’s heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh
gaily, too. [GS 324]

Here, the pursuit of knowledge is presented as a way of life, and the courage and ‘daring’ of that life are
explicitly connected with cheerfulness in a way that explains the free spirits’ reaction to the ‘open sea’.
“‘*Life as a means to knowledge*’—with this principle in one’s heart’, one views the open sea not as
overwhelming or disorienting, without constraints to guide willing and acting, but instead as inviting, a
place of unlimited opportunity for inquiry and experimentation.

This form of knowledge-seeking and moral exploration has some practical aims—at GS 289, e.g.,
Nietzsche directs it toward an ‘overall philosophical justification of [a] way of living and thinking’⁸—but
the activity that yields these practical consequences remains a pursuit of *knowledge* (GS 324, GS 343).
In that vein, Nietzsche repeatedly depicts value creation as a two-step process, involving a moment of
knowing, and (only) then a moment of valuing: the philosopher first needs to survey the possibilities for
valuing, including the historical record of previous values and the results of their adoption, before,
second, hammering out a new system, using materials borrowed from past value-systems that have
produced desirable effects, together with what is new.⁹ The ominous-sounding death of God is a
precondition for *both* steps. Obviously, creating and establishing new systems of values was impossible
while the Christian worldview still held a complete monopoly on the very concept of ‘morality’. But
even the more strictly cognitive and exploratory first component of the process was hindered by that
worldview’s former hegemony, because it induced would-be ‘moral genealogists’ to assume that ‘the
altruistic mode of evaluation’ was equivalent to ‘moral evaluation *as such*’ (GM Preface, 4), and thus to
seek the origins and goals of Christian (altruistic, ascetic) morality not in recorded history but in

speculative prehistory. They thereby overlooked the documented existence of substantially different modes of valuing (e.g., the good/bad structure of Greek ethics), as well as blinding themselves to the question Nietzsche considers most crucial: that of the *value* of altruistic morality (*GM* Preface, 5).

Thus, this massive exploratory project—mark how ambitious it is supposed to be in the closing note to *GM I*—will only become possible once the death of God has sunk in throughout European culture, and its thinkers have realized that the moral horizon is wide open, so that human beings are free to (or forced to) frame their own goals. That is, the ‘cheerfulness’ of Nietzsche and his free spirits depends essentially on the widespread arrival of the looming catastrophe. For that reason, it is not quite right to say that Nietzsche, et al., are cheerful on their own behalf *in spite of* the cataclysmic effects they foresee. In the important sense, they are cheerful *because of* them. If the death of God were not such a ruinous event, it would not present such a great opportunity for discovery, invention, and cultural renewal. By appearing as a necessary condition of this great opportunity, the catastrophe is, in a Nietzschean sense, *redeemed* by it.¹⁰

The cheerfulness of *GS 343*’s free spirits must therefore be a more complex attitude than it first appeared. It is not some simple, natural reaction to an unexpected boon, for its instigator is a calamity and is understood as such by the cheerful themselves. Their cheerfulness must therefore involve both recognition of the catastrophe with its costs and an appreciation of its liberating ‘consequences for *ourselves*’, together with an affirmative affective attachment to the whole. Given that their happiness is rooted in the love of knowledge, moreover, these cheerful ones are bound by the demands of truthfulness to own up to the calamitous aspects of these developments. Thus, even their affirmative affect cannot remain naïve and unmixed, but must be ‘knowing’, in the sense that it acknowledges the gloomy portents of this ‘eclipse of the sun’ (*GS 343*).

These conclusions receive confirmation from the remarkable parallels between *GS 343* and the themes and images worked out in the *The Gay Science* Preface (added to the second edition along with

Book V). One goal of the Preface is to introduce readers to the concept of *gay science*, so it is unsurprising that it (like *GS 343*) should treat cheerfulness.¹¹ The Preface explores the interconnected ideas of cheerfulness and gay science by means of a meditation on *convalescence* from serious illness:

This whole book is nothing but a bit of merry-making after long privation and powerlessness, the rejoicing of strength that is returning, of a reawakened faith in a tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, of a sudden sense and anticipation of a future, of impending adventures, *of seas that are open again*, of goals that are permitted again, believed again. [*GS Preface*, 1, our emphasis]

Here, as in *GS 343*, the open sea appears as an image of the restoration of energy and possibilities for action. The Preface connects the thought to the return of health after illness, making another suggestive link to *GS 343*. Just as Herr Nietzsche has recovered from a long illness (*GS Preface*, 1-2), so, one might say, *GS 343* depicts European civilization emerging from the long cultural sickness of Christian morality.¹² What is more, just as *GS 343* focuses on notions of suspicion, doubt, loss of trust,¹³ the Preface ties these same themes to sickness and convalescence:

And as for sickness: are we not almost tempted to ask whether we could get along without it? Only great pain is the ultimate liberator of the spirit, being the teacher of *the great suspicion* [*Verdaches*] that turns every *U* into an *X*, a real, genuine *X*, that is the letter before the penultimate one.¹⁴ ...

The trust [*Vertrauen*] in life is gone: life itself has become a *problem*. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one gloomy. Even love of life is still possible, only one loves differently. It is the love for a woman that causes doubts [*Zweifel*] in us.

The attraction of everything problematic, the delight in an *x*, however, is so great in such more spiritual, more spiritualized men that this delight flares up again and again like a bright blaze over all the distress of what is problematic, over all the danger of uncertainty, and even over the jealousy of the lover. We know a new happiness. [*GS Preface*, 3]

These manifest thematic and figurative parallels indicate a shared moral psychological framework

uniting *GS* 343 and the Preface: in both loci it is a problematic of *trust* and *doubt*, with important connections to a prior state of *suspicion*¹⁵ and to consequences that appear *gloomy*, but surprisingly yield a condition of *happiness* (*GS* Preface, 3) or *cheerfulness*, expressed through the image of an open sea (*GS* 343; *GS* Preface, 1, 4).¹⁶ The distinctive feature of the common framework is the knowing, internally complex characterization of cheerfulness (or gaiety, joy, happiness) that we first identified in *GS* 343. Likewise in the Preface, ‘gloom’, ‘doubt’, and ‘suspicion’ prove integral to gay science and cheerfulness itself, for *Fröhlichkeit* belongs to convalescence. That is, it is a special kind of cheerfulness depending essentially on the prior pain of sickness.

Moreover, the relevant form of happiness by no means leaves sickness behind, but instead incorporates recognition of the pain and loss incurred on the way: sickness is something we ‘could not get along without’. Tellingly, the passage identifies ‘great pain’ as ‘the ultimate liberator [*Befreier*] of the spirit’, recalling Nietzsche’s earlier use of the same term (‘the great liberator [*Befreier*]’) to describe ‘the idea that life could be an experiment of the seeker for knowledge’ (*GS* 324). In the Preface, too, ‘great pain’ liberates precisely by activating the will to knowledge—by ‘teach[ing] *the great suspicion* that turns every *U* into an *X*’. Then, in their turn, this will to knowledge and its accompanying suspicion operate to redeem the pain that provoked them: pain and sickness destroy the trust in life, or in God, or in universal objective norms; and the principle of ‘*Life as a means to knowledge*’ turns the potentially crippling doubt into an opportunity for new discovery—life itself becomes an *experiment* (*GS* 324).¹⁷ Such a move incorporates the pain and doubt right into the resulting ‘delight [*Freude*]’ or ‘cheerfulness [*Heiterkeit*]’; after all, Nietzsche closes with the remark, ‘We know a *new* happiness’ (emphasis added). What makes the happiness novel is that the process of sickness and its redemption not only contributes to its causal origin, but is part of its *intentional object*: the convalescent is happy *about* the opportunity for thought (indeed, the demand for thought) presented by the problems with which suffering has confronted her.

Thus, Nietzschean cheerfulness is not the simple and natural affection of the naïve, whose lack of

experience attaches them directly to life as an unalloyed good, because it depends on the ability to see ‘life itself’ as ‘a *problem*’ (*GS* Preface, 3)—an insight that only suffering can confer. It is in just that sense that the ‘new happiness’ is distinctively that of convalescence, and not blithe, unblemished health (see also *GS* 382). The love of knowledge (‘the delight in an *x*’, *GS* Preface, 3) enables the convalescent to love life again, not *in spite of*, but *because of* its problematic character. One hallmark of Nietzschean redemption of misfortune is that one does not wish it had never happened; on the contrary, one feels that one’s life is better for it. Accordingly, Nietzsche writes, ‘You see that I do not want to take leave ungratefully from that time of sickness whose profits I have not yet exhausted even today’. This non-naïve (or perhaps better, *anti-naïve*) conception of happiness thereby renders cheerfulness ‘knowing’ in two respects: it is bound up with the activity and attitude of knowledge, and it is also worldly-wise, ‘burned’, ‘*profound*’. Its love of life is not the natural first love of enthusiasm; after facing real suffering, ‘one loves differently’, with ‘the love of a woman who causes doubts in us’.

These parallels permit us to cash a promissory note from our introduction by making explicit what we suggested above (pp. 9-10) on the basis of *GS* 343—namely, that Nietzschean cheerfulness is complex not only in its etiology (having been the *product* of prior sickness or recognition of calamity), but also in its *structure* and *content* as an attitude. For this cheerfulness incorporates *both* 1) an affirmative attachment to one’s life and the world; *and* 2) a justified revulsion at their calamitous aspects; together with 3) a knowing, higher order recognition of the mutual dependence of 1) and 2) (a convalescent’s understanding that her happiness is *that of recovery*); and finally 4) an encompassing, self-reflective affirmation of the whole complex, which recovers one’s affirmative relation to life *in* its recognized connection with loss or catastrophe. It is the complex structure of the resulting attitude that permits an overall affirmative stance toward its (avowedly) evaluatively ambivalent content, or intentional object—life or the world loved in and through its problematic character. For all the complexity, however, Nietzsche’s trenchant example of attachment to a beloved ‘who causes doubts in

us' reminds us that such attitudes are not at all beyond the ken of ordinary life; on the contrary, in such cases we feel all too clearly how the emotional risk and suffering involved are essential components within the joy of our love.

In sum, the 'meaning of our cheerfulness' in *GS* 343 is something special precisely because 'our' cheerfulness is radically *non-naïve*. It knowingly combines attachment to life with a deep-going recognition of its problematic character. In connection with the practical conception of philosophy as self-cultivation, a question now arises: Is this kind of cheerfulness something that simply *happens* to a person, or can it legitimately be *produced* through philosophical activity?

2. 'Of practice' and the meaning of Montaigne's cheerfulness

We saw that Nietzsche's cheerfulness was a *derived* happiness, dependent on an essential relation to some prior shock or sadness, of which it represents the (more or less difficult) overcoming. This dependence of cheerfulness on its opposite arrives onstage through the etiology of the attitude, but the process also introduces complexity into its structure and content. Interest in this complex conception of cheerfulness goes back all the way to the beginning of Nietzsche's philosophy, when, if anything, he was even more explicit about distinguishing his kind of cheerfulness from simple contentment; one clear example appears already in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, 2:¹⁸

Schopenhauer has a second quality ... : a cheerfulness that really cheers. *Aliis laetus, sibi sapiens* [Cheerful for others, wise for himself].¹⁹ For there are *two very different kinds of cheerfulness*. The true thinker always cheers and refreshes, whether he is expressing his seriousness or his humor, ... surely and simply, with courage and strength, perhaps a little valiant and hard, but in any case as a victor: and it is precisely this that it cheers one most profoundly to see—the victorious god with all the monsters he has combatted. By contrast, the cheerfulness one sometimes encounters in mediocre writers and brusque [*kurzangebundenen*] thinkers makes us miserable to read: how I felt, for example,

from David Strauss's cheerfulness. One feels downright ashamed to have such cheerful contemporaries, because they compromise our time and the people in it before posterity. Such cheeries [*Heiterlinge*] simply do not see the suffering and the monsters that they purport to see and combat as thinkers... [*SE 2*; in *UM*, p. 135; our emphasis]

Nietzsche's remarks are intended to provoke, or at least surprise: Schopenhauer, the notoriously grumpy pessimist, is to be singled out for *cheerfulness*?²⁰ But for our purposes, what matters is the contrast between 'two very different kinds of cheerfulness'. Nietzsche's account of the positive form remains largely at the level of metaphor ('victory' over 'monsters'), but the Schopenhauerian context together with the contrast against 'brusque' but 'mediocre' cheerfulness indicate the intended point. The 'monsters' to be slain must arise from the fact that the world is radically inhospitable to our values, raising a threat of pessimistic nihilism. By contrast, the cheer of David Strauss and his ilk is false because it fails *even to see* the evaluative challenges that a real cheerfulness would overcome; it is a bad faith rush to conclude the deal and declare that all is well before what is really amiss can even emerge into view.²¹ The complexity of Nietzschean cheerfulness is thus already on display: any cheerfulness that fails to *remain aware* of the 'monsters' thereby degenerates into the mediocre, superficial form. True cheerfulness cannot be simple happiness. It is essentially an equanimity restored.

It is therefore entirely apt for Nietzsche to criticize superficial Straussian cheerfulness as something dishonest ('his cheerfulness vexes because it lies', *SE 2*; in *UM*, p. 135), but this also reminds us that honesty was the first virtue Nietzsche had listed in *SE 2*'s encomium for Schopenhauer. In fact, Nietzsche sets up his surprising claim for Schopenhauer's cheerfulness through a (perhaps equally surprising) affinity between Schopenhauer and Montaigne, traced to the *combination* of these two virtues:

I know of only one writer whom I would compare with Schopenhauer in respect of honesty: Montaigne. That such a man wrote has truly augmented the joy of living on this earth. Since getting to know this freest and mightiest of souls, I, at least, have come to feel what he felt about

Plutarch: ‘as soon as glance at him I grow a leg or a wing’.²² If I were set the task, I could endeavor to make myself at home in the world with him. [SE 2; in *UM*, p. 135]

The previously quoted passage about cheerfulness picks up directly from this point, ‘Schopenhauer has a second quality in common with Montaigne, as well as honesty: a cheerfulness that really cheers. *Aliis laetus, sibi sapiens*. [etc.]’. Nietzsche takes Montaigne’s honesty to be related to the cheerfulness noted by Pippin (2010: 121): Montaigne is Schopenhauer’s sole compare in honesty, and ‘That such a man wrote has truly augmented the joy of living on this earth’. So honesty produces cheerfulness, just as we saw that genuine cheerfulness requires honesty.

Of course, even at his most skeptical, Montaigne was no pessimist, so we cannot understand his honesty as a matter of facing up to ‘hard truths’ about a catastrophically inhospitable world, as we did with Schopenhauer. Nevertheless, Nietzsche is entirely right that truthfulness is a core animating stance of the *Essays*. As he reminds us in his Preface, Montaigne’s central goal is to present himself as he really is, warts and all:

If I had written to seek the world’s favor, I should have bedecked myself better. . . . I want to be seen here in my simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice; for it is myself that I portray. My defects will be read here to the life, and also my natural form, as far as respect for the public has allowed. Had I been placed among those nations which are said to live in the sweet freedom of nature’s first laws, I assure you I should very gladly have portrayed myself here entire and wholly naked. Thus, reader, I am myself the matter of my book; you would be unreasonable to spend your leisure on so frivolous and vain a subject. So farewell. [‘To the Reader’; F 2]

Almost whenever he reflects on this project of self-portraiture, Montaigne emphasizes that uncompromising honesty is the foremost rule of the game he has set himself. Indeed, that is his central defense against the (quite natural) charge of presumption against the whole project.²³

The light tone of such passages can create the impression that Montaigne’s confluence of honesty

and good cheer is an entirely simple and easy matter, as if (in his hands) to write honest self-examining prose were no graver thing than making jokes about unfair European judgments on South Americans ('All this is not too bad—but what's the use? They don't wear breeches', 'Of cannibals' I, 31; F 159). But it would be a mistake to conclude that only cheerful matters were ever up for consideration. Montaigne is under no illusions about the horrors of the South American conquest, and in his mind, the real issues of his own book also could not be more serious:

And if no one reads me, have I wasted my time... by taking stock of myself so continually, *so carefully?* For those who go over themselves only in their minds and occasionally in speech do not penetrate to essentials in their examination as does a man who makes that his study, his work, and his trade, *who binds himself* to keep an enduring account, *with all his faith, with all his strength*. ['Of giving the lie' II, 18; F 504, our emphases]

Montaigne called his writings 'essays' because he came to see them as *trials* of his judgment. Thus, when he writes about smells (I, 55), or names (I, 46), or whether or not a leader under siege should go out to parley (I, 5), the point is not to convey information or advice, but to test himself, and in particular 'my judgment ... of which these are the essays' ('Of presumption' II, 17; F 495). It is *through* trying out his judgment on this or that topic (essaying) that he portrays who he is—he exhibits his judgment in action, as it were—including to himself. Self-portrayal is inseparable from self-examination and self-discovery. More, for him such essaying is simultaneously a form of self-*shaping*. As he put it just before the passage about 'taking stock of myself',

In modeling this figure upon myself, I have had to fashion and compose myself so often to bring myself out, that the model itself has to some extent grown firm and taken shape. Painting myself for others, I have painted my inward self with colors clearer than my original ones. I have no more made my book than my book has made me—a book consubstantial with its author, concerned with my own self, an integral part of my life; not concerned with some third-hand, extraneous purpose, like

all other books. [‘Of giving the lie’ II, 18; F 504]

With this, Montaigne locates himself squarely within the tradition of philosophy as self-fashioning (see Nehamas 1997: 101-27),²⁴ and even seems to dismiss any other kind of philosophy as ‘third-hand, extraneous’. Clearly, such a project must be truthful if it is to concern Montaigne’s actual life, but what can it tell us about his cheerfulness?

When Montaigne retreated from public life into philosophizing, he was not just pulling away from Bordeaux, and Parlement, and lawsuits and politics; he was also heading *toward* something—in the inscription he had painted onto the wall of the small room off his library he said he had ‘retired to the bosom of the learned Virgins’.²⁵ But the goal was not yet some definite, preconceived literary project; the fact is equally attested by the previous non-existence of the very genre in which he came to write and by the long process through which Montaigne finds his voice across the earlier written chapters of the *Essays*. Rather, his apparent intention was simply to spend his days with the library he inherited from Etienne de La Boétie, using it to support his reflection and so attain the mental ‘rest and seclusion’ (‘Of idleness’ I, 8; F 21) his career in Parlement had prevented. La Boétie himself, of course, is the subject of the powerful chapter ‘Of friendship’ (I, 28), occupying the central place in Book I of the *Essays*, where Montaigne groped for a way to do some justice to the loss of such a friend with those beautiful lines: ‘In the friendship I speak of, our souls mingle and blend with each other so completely that they efface the seam that joined them, and cannot find it again. If you press me to tell you why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I’ (‘Of friendship’ I, 28; F 139).

Montaigne not only loved La Boétie but also admired him, particularly the courage with which he endured his final illness and faced his too-early death.²⁶ In the spirit of that admiration, a good deal of early work within the *Essays* focuses on confronting death²⁷—enough, in fact, to make it obvious that much of Montaigne’s reflection in his tower aimed at becoming ‘philosophical’ about death, and thereby

living up his friend's example. From this standpoint, there can hardly be any doubt that Montaigne's retreating into his tower with La Boétie's *library* was for him a way—the lone, if hopelessly inadequate, way available—of returning into communion with the friend himself, which is why so many readers have received the *Essays* as a poignant memorial to La Boétie.

With this, we see that Montaigne's cheerfulness can no more than Nietzsche's be understood as just an instinctive affective response to being 'at home in the world'. It, too, is an equanimity restored. It had to be restored after grievous loss—of his friend, of the sanity and peace of his country,²⁸ and eventually of his own blithe health and strength²⁹—a restoration effected not only in the face of, but *through facing* the magnitude of what had been lost. Nietzsche's suggestion in *SE* is correct: in Montaigne, a hard-headed honesty and cheerfulness are deeply interpenetrating. Montaigne understood that a cheerfulness worth having—one that *actually* makes us at home in the world instead of merely pretending to—cannot paper over our losses, but must be rebuilt in their aftermath through the honest recognition of what was lost. His cheerfulness was of the non-naïve variety.

Moreover, Montaigne was the author of his own restoration. By trying and re-trying his judgment, he shaped it, and thereby his life and himself, into a pattern he could live with.³⁰ He managed to 'paint my inward self with colors clearer than my original ones' (F 504), until in the end he could *honestly* say, 'For the rest, I hate that accidental repentance that age brings. ... In my opinion, it is living happily, not, as Antisthenes said, dying happily, that constitutes human felicity. ... I want to present myself uniformly throughout. If I had to live over again, I would live as I have lived' ('Of repentance' III, 2; F 619-20).

But if Montaigne's honest cheerfulness is to be counted as a product of philosophical self-fashioning, have we left him open to the paradox with which we began? If cheerfulness arises from philosophical reflection, must it not be something too detached to support our affectively charged caring for the world? If Montaigne could deliberately use philosophy to shape his attachment to life, couldn't

he (just as deliberately) take it all back? Not at all. Montaigne himself gives us the tools we need to think about the matter in the essay ‘Of practice’ (II, 6; F 267-75).

In his early philosophical reflections on that old chestnut of ancient philosophy—the question how to confront death—Montaigne already recognized that philosophy’s contributions on this score would be entirely useless if they remained an exercise of abstract reasoning carried out at the level of explicit believing and willing. With inimitable irony, he sums up his first exploration of being ‘philosophical’ about death like this: ‘Well then, why, out of so many arguments which in various ways persuade men to despise death and endure pain, do we not find a single one that will do for us?’ (‘Taste of good and evil’ I, 14; F 47). While it is possible to read this remark as a simple rhetorical question setting up his closing summary of philosophy’s ‘unanswerable replies’ (F 47) to our weakness, its exhortative tone gives the lie to the power of argument alone in this domain. We need to be *exhorted* each to ‘apply to himself the one [argument] that best suits his humor’ (F 47) precisely because the arguments fail to take effect automatically, by the irresistible force of rationality. With that recognition in place, we can hear the quoted question in a more plaintive (also more insightful) spirit: Why isn’t there a *single one* of these arguments that will work for *me*?³¹

In his account of practice, Montaigne finds something to answer to that question: It is because what is needed is not so much a *reason* as an *affect*—an affect belonging to a cultivated *second nature*. He makes the key point already in the first sentence of ‘Practice’:

Reasoning and education, though we are willing to put our trust in them, can hardly be powerful enough to lead us to action, unless besides we exercise and form our soul by experience to the way we want it to go; otherwise, when it comes to the time for action, it will undoubtedly find itself at a loss. [‘Of practice’ II, 6; F 267]

It is a simple, homespun insight. To act effectively, we need to practice. The context of action demands timely reactions to complicated features of the situation, where circumstances often leave no time to

reason out from first principles what is to be done. We need to be able to act with a high degree of automaticity to advance our aims through intelligent behavior. In many cases, we rely on things we have learned rather than innate, pre-programmed responses, and if prior learning is to be effective, the relevant insights must not only have been apprehended and understood, but also ‘incorporated’ into our (more or less) automatic responsiveness. We effect such incorporation by practicing. So much is obvious to anyone who has ever learned to do anything the least bit complicated (riding a horse, playing a musical instrument, reading a book). But while the idea is modest and familiar, the context to which Montaigne applies it is somewhat extraordinary—for the target is the activity of *dying*.

Montaigne hints at the bent of his thoughts by noting that philosophers have long drawn the consequence that *virtue* must be practiced:

That is why, among the philosophers, those who have wanted to attain some greater excellence have not been content to await the rigors of Fortune in shelter and repose, for fear that she might surprise them inexperienced and new to the combat; rather they have gone forth to meet her and have flung themselves deliberately to the test of difficulties. [F 267]

There follows a string of exempla from the exercises employed by the ancients to train up ‘the firmness of their soul’. And what of dying—that most important test of virtue, according to the philosophers themselves? Here we run into trouble: ‘But for dying, which is the greatest task we have to perform, practice cannot help us’. We die only once, and those who try it ‘have not come back to tell us news’. So it seems we are stuck: ‘we are all apprentices when we come to it’ (F 267).

But Montaigne sees a way out: ‘It seems to me, however, that there is a certain way of familiarizing ourselves with death and *trying it out* [our emphasis] to some extent’, for ‘in my opinion’, a shock-induced faint must be ‘very close to seeing death’s true and natural face’ (F 268). There follows the story of an accident that befell Montaigne. ‘During our third civil war, or the second (I do not quite remember which)’ (F 268), he was riding with a party of his men a couple of miles from home, when one

came bearing down on Michel at full speed ‘like a colossus’, causing a terrific collision which threw Montaigne twelve paces off his horse and knocked him cold. His men took him for dead and he remained unconscious for more than two hours as they carried him back toward his house. When he finally came to, he ‘threw up a whole bucketful of clots of pure blood’—a purgation repeated several times along the difficult road. After this story of what happened, Montaigne offers the remarkable claim that ‘This recollection, which is strongly implanted on my soul, showing me the face and idea of death so true to nature, reconciles me to it somewhat’ (F 269).

The surprising reconciliation proceeded from Montaigne’s experience of the swoon, which brought him no pain or agitation, but just a sense of ‘letting myself go’ (F 269)—‘in truth not only free from distress but mingled with that sweet feeling that people have who let themselves slide into sleep’ (F 270). Back in his youth, Montaigne had debated with La Boétie about whether the fitful motions or groans of people who are ‘prostrate’ near death are really expressions of anguish, or just random, basically automatic behaviors of the body, with Montaigne taking the latter view: ‘I have always thought, I say, that their soul and body were buried in sleep’ (F 270). Since the accident, ‘Now I have no doubt, now that I have tried this out by experience, that I judged this matter rightly all along’ (F 271).

So far, though, Montaigne’s description shows only that being knocked unconscious is not as bad as it might seem, which is neither any ringing endorsement of the experience nor any dispositive insight about *death*. The grand philosophical stakes laid out at the beginning remain to be addressed. The chapter does not end with Montaigne’s account of the accident—it runs on for another quarter of its length—but in the remainder, he appears to change the subject entirely, riffing into a defense of the literary project of writing self-exploratory essays. Any reading of ‘Practice’ therefore confronts two puzzles: first, it should explain how the story of the accident is supposed to bear on the chapter’s primary themes of practice and the philosophical attitude toward death; and second, it must account for the connection between the story (the bulk of the essay) and the closing coda, which Montaigne added after

the published editions.

Consider Montaigne's original (1580) ending for the chapter:

The account of so trivial an event would be rather pointless, were it not for the instruction I have derived from it for myself; for in truth, in order to get used to the idea of death, I find there is nothing like coming close to it. Now as Pliny says, each man is a good education to himself, provided he has the capacity to spy on himself from close up. What I write here is not my teaching, but my study; it is not a lesson for others, but for me. [F 272]

If it were just a matter of knowing that one does not feel much (and so does not feel very bad) while in a swoon,³² Montaigne admits, nothing much would have been gained; the value comes from some further 'instruction I have derived from it for myself'. The story of his accident is more than trivial only because Montaigne took up the experience into his reflection 'in order to get used to the idea of death'. For as the ancient philosophers were well aware, a good deal of what is terrible about death rests on the fear it provokes, as a fate inevitable but radically unknown and implacably resisted by all the instincts; it is terrible for us because of the terror it provokes. The goal of a 'philosophical' attitude toward death—what La Boétie had so remarkably attained, in Montaigne's estimation—was some degree of *mastery* over this terror. But precisely because our *instincts* are what is at stake, the traditional *argument* that death involves a privation of consciousness, and so cannot be felt, and so cannot be felt as bad, does little to support self-mastery—or so Montaigne reports. What is needed is not a bit of reasoning, but a retraining of those instincts *through practice*. For the obvious reasons, we cannot practice dying itself (F 267), so he turned to the next best thing—not repeating his accident over and over (a pointless and unnecessary danger), but reliving the experience in meditation, as a way to train his instincts to expect the lack of feeling (or even pleasant, peaceful feelings) he experienced then.

What counts as 'reliving' the accident in such a spirit of self-training? Nothing other than *writing the essay* itself—hence the closing refrain, 'What I write here is not my teaching, but my study; it

is not a lesson for others, but for me'. Montaigne does not write 'Of practice' to teach others that death is not so bad, but *as a way of practicing* that judgment, training himself to expect that death can be confronted courageously, and that the loss of consciousness is less to be feared than it seems. This newly trained expectation will be *legitimate*, for after all, he has now 'tried this out by experience' (F 271). On the basis of his 'study', Montaigne forms a new configuration of his instincts and comes not merely to think, but to *feel* about death in a new way. As he reminded us in the beginning, 'Reasoning and education, though we are willing to put our trust in them, can hardly be powerful enough to lead us to action, unless besides we exercise and form our soul by experience to the way we want it to go' (F 267). In this sense, the essay 'Of practice' is not just *about* practice; it *constitutes* practicing.³³

So the particular 'exercise' and 'experience' that Montaigne meant to deploy in 'Of practice' was self-examination in the form of essay writing itself. He is trying to 'spy' on his soul 'from close up' (F 272), so 'What I chiefly portray is my cogitations It is all I can do to couch my thoughts in this airy medium of words' (F 274). The question then becomes: Did this practice of portraying his cogitations succeed (where 'reasoning and education' alone could not) to 'form [his] soul . . . to the way we want it to go' (F 267)? By the evidence of the essay's new conclusion—the sustained defense of essayistic self-portrayal—Montaigne's retrospective judgment was yes. Saying that much is not even enough; probing oneself is not just good and useful, but excellent and indispensable: 'What does Socrates treat of more fully than himself? To what does he lead his disciples' conversation more often than to talk about themselves, not about the lesson of their book, but about the essence and movement of their soul?' (F 273). And Montaigne is surely correct. If the aim of philosophy is to improve 'the essence and movement of the soul', we stand no chance at getting better without close attention to who we are and how our judgment moves. *Not* to take this care is an *abdication* of the most important activity in our charge: 'It is many years now that I have had only myself as object of my thoughts. . . . There is no description equal in difficulty, or certainly in usefulness, to the description of oneself' (F 273). After all,

‘My trade and my art is living’ (F 274),³⁴ and if he is to ply that trade well, he must practice. The form such practice took for him (as he demonstrates, precisely by this way of closing ‘Of practice’) was the writing of his book, which was also just the formation of himself: ‘I have no more made my book than my book has made me—a book consubstantial with its author, concerned with my own self, an integral part of my life’ (‘Of giving the lie’; F 504).

Of course, some will insist that in speaking so much of himself he is cherishing himself too much, but like his hero Socrates, Montaigne officially disclaims any attainment of virtue: ‘But some will [recommend that] we speak only our self-accusations. Then we speak everything; for our very virtue is faulty and fit for repentance’ (F 274). Again like Socrates, though, Montaigne is being ironic, if honestly so.³⁵ For when it comes time to pass final judgment on his practice in pursuit of self-knowledge, he lets the chapter close with these words: ‘Because Socrates alone had seriously digested the precept of his god—to know himself—and because by that study he had come to despise himself, he alone was deemed worthy of the name *wise*. Whoever knows himself thus, let him boldly make himself known by his own mouth’ (F 275). And so closes Montaigne’s defense of devoting his life to the *portrayal of himself*.

To our ears, this is an equanimity restored in fact. It was, moreover, restored through practice—self-training (i.e., repetition, with assessment, (self-)correction, and eventually incorporation) under the aegis of a philosophical project. This cheerfulness involves a new, re-trained *affective* stance toward life, on which the practiced philosophical attitude toward death ineluctably depends. It is not a decision he makes or a conclusion he pursues through inference; on the contrary, Montaigne’s cheerfulness is a feeling of being ‘at home in the world’ operating independently of his deliberation and reflection in the moment. Nevertheless, the attitude had to be trained in, since it is complex, reflective, and self-referential. Montaigne’s cheerfulness was *self-produced* via the activity of philosophical writing: ‘we go hand in hand and at the same pace, my book and I’ (‘Of repentance’ III, 2; F 611-12).

3. *Aesthetic attachment, practice, and Nietzsche's cheerfulness*

Montaigne's example indicates that philosophical practice can 'exercise and form our soul by experience to the way we want it to go' ('Of practice' II, 6; F 267)—in our case, toward the development of cheerful self-acceptance and equanimity. Our exploration of cheerfulness in Nietzsche uncovered similar ideas about philosophy as *practice*: the 'new philosophers' he promotes are '*experimenters* [*Versucher*]' (BGE 42), and their trials are clearly meant to include experiments in living (for them, recall, life itself becomes 'an experiment', GS 324).³⁶ In the context of *The Gay Science*, this particular experiment has immediate bearing on our title question, since as we saw, cheerfulness belongs to an interconnected field of moods and attitudes that includes the *gaiety* of gay science itself. In exploring that notion, Nietzsche's concern is not with scholarship in the large (recall the critique of *mere* scholarship in BGE VI, 'We Scholars'), but instead with a *specific form* of intellectually disciplined life carved out by its qualification as *fröhlich*.

At least part of the special *Fröhlichkeit* of gay science derives from a connection to *art*. For consider, in a key section exploring the various capacities and instincts that had to be put into place for a truly scientific sensibility to emerge originally, he closes with this pointer toward the more specific scientific ideal he is trying to sketch:

And even now the time seems remote when artistic energies and the practical wisdom of life will join with scientific thinking to form a higher organic system in relation to which scholars, physicians, artists, and legislators—as we know them at present—would have to look like paltry relics of ancient times. [GS 113]

The suggestion is that what makes the looked-for gay science special (i.e., distinct from the scientific spirit in general) is some interaction with art and philosophy, capable of combining 'artistic energies' and 'the practical wisdom of life' with scientific discipline in something like the way science itself is supposed to have combined 'the impulse to doubt', a drive to collect, and so on, into a unified way of

thinking. The same moral about the centrality of art for gay science follows from other indicators, as well: for example, the phrase '*la gaya scienza*' alludes to the artistic practice of the Provençal troubadour poets, which Nietzsche claims as an ancestor for his ideal, and Book II (largely devoted to the arts) closes with a famous section that aims to capture art's special value by reconceiving the governing maxim of Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*: the new formulation claims that 'As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us' (GS 107).³⁷

Our target notion of cheerfulness returns fully into view through a consideration of the way art is supposed to make things '*bearable*'. In GS 107, what is at stake is the power of artistic reframing to redeem the imperfect: 'We do not always keep ourselves from rounding off something and, as it were, finishing the poem; and then it is no longer eternal imperfection that we carry across the river of becoming—then we have a sense of carrying a *goddess*' (GS 107; see also GS 78, 299). The role of art thereby evokes one main feature of the non-naïve cheerfulness outlined in section 1, an association with the redemption of loss. The same passage also highlights the rigors of *intellectual honesty* as an especially salient source of the need for artistic redemption, echoing the interactions between cheerfulness and honesty we discovered in sections 1 and 2.³⁸ What remains to show, though, is how artistry renders the scientific sensibility itself somehow *fröhlich*.

The crucial contribution comes from two interacting features of the aesthetic attitude. First (at least in the redemptive guise Nietzsche emphasizes), aesthetic appreciation involves a powerful *attachment* to its object; it 'makes things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us' (GS 299). This affirmative affective charge underwrites Nietzsche's conviction that incorporating it into the scientific sensibility could yield something like gaiety. But then second, through the very same non-self-conscious, affective attitude, it affords us a distinctive sense of *detachment*, an 'artistic distance', that Nietzsche credits with providing a certain '*freedom above things*' (GS 107).³⁹ In this internal complexity, the aesthetic attitude is structurally analogous to non-naïve cheerfulness. It involves a

compelling affective attachment, together with a moment of distance, or detachment.

Especially when considered in light of Montaigne on practice, Nietzsche's account of aesthetic attachment helps explain the distinctively affective character of non-naïve cheerfulness as an attitude. Montaigne's equanimity was affect-like in a specific sense; his feeling of being 'at home in the world' operated psychologically in independence of contemporaneous volition and reflection, and could thereby serve to *orient* willing or believing (e.g., about death), rather than following along in their train as a *product* of evaluative reasoning or choices. For just that reason, we could not attain such an attitude by 'reason or education' alone; we had to fall back on *practice* to 'train it in'. The necessary reliance on practice thus counts as a decisive mark of the primarily affective character of the attitude.

Aesthetic attachment as Nietzsche understands it exhibits the same features. For him, we *succumb* to the attraction of the beautiful, and when we do, it is not because of something we decided or discovered through abstract reflection.⁴⁰ On the contrary, the role of practice—training a 'second nature' into our responsiveness—reappears here as a decisive criterion of the attitude's affective character. Exactly this kind of attachment, Nietzsche insists, is something that must be *learned* through strategies involving more than 'reason and education' alone:

This is what happens to us in music: First one has to *learn to hear* a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate it and delimit it as a separate life. Then it requires some exertion and good will to *tolerate* it in spite of its strangeness Finally, there comes a moment when we are *used* to it, when we wait for it, when we sense that we should miss it if it were missing; and now it continues to compel and enchant us relentlessly until we become its humble and enraptured lovers who desire nothing better from the world than it and only it. [GS 334]

This is neither the natural response of immediate (pre-volitional, pre-deliberative) instinct, nor the reasoned conclusion of detached evaluative deliberation. It is a product of learning, based on a slowly developed *understanding* of what the figure is and how it works, so it cannot be merely instinctual. But

at the same time, the need for habituation via repeated exposure shows that we are dealing with the training of a second-natural affect, not explicit reasoning or volition. The love we come to feel for our favorites arises through a kind of *practice* in their appreciation over the course of which our attraction gradually becomes ‘incorporated’ (cp. *GS* 110) down into our automatic responsiveness. Nietzsche does not intend this account to be limited to music as some unique case; on the contrary, music is just an example of a perfectly general aesthetic phenomenon:

But that is what happens to us not only in music. That is how we have *learned to love* all the things we now love. In the end, we are always rewarded for our good will, our patience ... with what is strange; gradually, it sheds its veil and turns out to be a new and indescribable beauty. That is its *thanks* for our hospitality. Even those who love themselves will have learned it this way; for there is no other way. Love, too, has to be learned. [*GS* 334]

With these last sentences, Nietzsche returns attention to the main concerns of this paper. The suggestion is that practiced aesthetic attachment is a proper model for understanding the distinctive type of self-affirmation that Nietzsche means to include in his ideal of gay science—the very stance that lies at the heart of his thought experiment about the eternal recurrence of life, introduced only a few sections later (*GS* 341). If that ideal is to live up to the billing of its name, it should be truly *fröhlich*, where that means (in significant part) that its attachment to life is not a cool, rational evaluative *judgment* that on balance life (or its return) is better to have than not. Instead, ‘life affirmation’ is supposed to rest on a thoroughly affective basis—not merely judged, but *felt*, with an emotional charge that helps *guide* our overall evaluative commitment. Aesthetic attachment, in the strongly affective form in which it approximates love, has the right features for this role: it is affective and felt, but it is also the second-natural product of deliberate practice, which enables it to carry the complex structure and reflective content demanded by non-naïve, philosophical cheerfulness. The affection we develop through ‘learning to love’ (*GS* 334) combines clear-eyed recognition of what was ‘strange’, or even

problematic, in what is loved, together with a strong affective attachment to it—a combination made possible by the self-consciously pursued training through which we *learned* to love.

Nietzsche's closing sentences suggest that this kind of aesthetic attachment should be extended to understand the *love of life* itself, which can be identified with cheerfulness as a general 'being at home in the world' of the sort found in Montaigne: life may have struck us at first (like the unfamiliar melody) as discordant, breaking the rules not of traditional harmonization but of traditional morality; but we can learn to see it as beautiful, to apprehend it as an 'aesthetic phenomenon' rather than remaining fixated on the moral/practical objections to existence. From this standpoint, our newfound, practiced love of life appears to be just an *instance* of second-natural cheerfulness.

Perhaps, though, it is *merely* an analogy. Can the feeling of aesthetic attachment really ever *amount to*, or give rise to, cheerfulness in the sense of section 1? And if so, could that attitude really be produced by philosophical self-cultivation? We think so. Recall how frequently Nietzsche returns in *The Gay Science* to insist that the decisive source of his interest in these ideas about aesthetics is not the internal domain of art criticism, but their application to the old Socratic question of how best to live. 'What one should learn from artists' is how to *extend* artistic redemption and aesthetic attachment to our *life*: 'all this we should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them this subtle power usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; but we want to be the poets of our life' (*GS* 299).

As it turns out, moreover, this 'extension' from art to life does involve self-cultivation. In the most famous passage advocating the extension, Nietzsche connects it explicitly to the formation of a second nature through philosophical practice of the Montaignean sort:

To 'give style' to one's character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight [*entzückt*] the eye. Here a large mass of

second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed—both times through long *practice* and daily work at it For one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself, whether it be by this or that poetry and art . . . [GS 290; first emphases ours] Here equanimity and satisfaction with oneself are ‘*attained*’ through artistic–philosophical activity. That activity, moreover, involves (or even *just is*) a kind of practicing. According to GS 290, our drives and affects, ‘strengths and weaknesses’—in short, our ‘nature’—must be something *malleable*: pieces of ‘original nature’ can be removed, and ‘second nature’ added. This is done through ‘long practice and daily work at it’, which we have seen to be the key mark that we are dealing with second-natural emotional attitudes, not self-consciously reflective ones. Finally, the result of this process is ‘satisfaction with oneself’—something very like the cheerful equanimity that is our target.⁴¹

Those inclined to resist strong interpretations of Nietzschean self-creation may harbor a doubt about this last conclusion. While GS 290 does unambiguously speak of deliberate, practiced efforts toward formation of a ‘second nature’, the connection between such practice and the ultimately needful ‘satisfaction with oneself’ is less explicit in the passage. Meanwhile, others in the literature have offered more immediately ‘natural’, less self-cultivated, interpretations of Nietzschean cheerfulness, which might seem to support a narrower reading of GS 290. For example, Jessica Berry (2010), who reads Nietzsche as a skeptic in the spirit of Sextus Empiricus, emphasizes the importance of cheerfulness (in the form of skeptical *ataraxia*, or better, Democritean *euthumia*⁴²), but in ways that eliminate any associated sense of philosophical self-making. On her picture, it would compromise the thoroughgoing suspension of judgment proper to the skeptical attitude if cheerfulness were something normatively endorsed, or even *recommended*, by the philosopher. Instead, the skeptic simply *observes*, as a descriptive claim about her life, that *ataraxia* tends to follow once skeptical practice has revealed equipollent arguments and provoked a suspension of judgment (Berry 2010: 134-5, *et passim*). A related conception of Nietzschean cheerfulness might seem to permit a more conservative reading of GS 290, allowing equanimity to arrive

on the scene as the person's *response* once her character is formed, rather than tracing it to purposeful cultivation as a second natural attitude by the philosopher herself.⁴³

But on more careful consideration, the text of *GS* 290—especially read together with *GS* 334 on learning to love—turns out to *demand* our stronger reading that Nietzschean cheerfulness is produced by *active self-training*, and thus that it is responsive to the endorsement and will of the philosopher through a process of self-cultivation. For, first, the 'needful' attitude of self-satisfaction envisioned in *GS* 290 results from the person's appreciation of the way her character has been shaped by 'an artistic plan', so it has to be understood as aesthetic appreciation. Then, second, we know from *GS* 334 that such aesthetic attachments must be learned through practice, both in general and in this particular case: 'Even those who love themselves will have learned it in this way; for there is no other way' (*GS* 334). Hence, it is *both* essentially affective—a love-like attachment—and cultivated rather than innate. Third, it is the *person's own* taste that must be activated to produce self-satisfaction, so it belongs within the self being shaped. Clearly, *GS* 290 does not suppose that reshaping one's character must revolve around satisfying an entirely fixed taste—as though that aspect of the person's psychology were somehow immune from the general malleability of her 'nature' presupposed by the section as a whole. On the contrary, Nietzsche explicitly recommends one artistic style or another depending on what can be accomplished with a given person's character: for example, 'weak characters without power over themselves', who are incapable of extensive self-reshaping, are 'well advised' to *cultivate* a taste for the 'wild, arbitrary, fantastic, disorderly, and surprising' precisely because 'it is only in this way that they can give pleasure to themselves' (*GS* 290). Thus, in *GS* 290 as well as *GS* 334, one's aesthetic responsiveness must be at least as trainable as the rest of one's nature, and the *trainable affects* that constitute the needful self-satisfaction belong as part and parcel to the self under construction. The process involves a mutual adjustment between one's taste and the shape of one's character, in which one's positive aesthetic reaction to the stylized character is itself among the attitudes that must (all together) find their places

within the overall ‘artistic plan’. In consequence, one’s cheerfulness is not simply *found* once once’s character emerges as an object of reflection, but is itself *made*, together with that character, through the process of self-fashioning that lies at the heart of Nietzsche’s concerns in *GS* 290.

One more step will close the circle. Recall that Nietzsche’s fundamental reason for relying on the aesthetic attitude as an exemplar and repository of value in *The Gay Science* was its remarkable capacity to reframe the imperfect and undesirable: what we learn from artists is ‘how to make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us *when they are not*’ (*GS* 299; our emphasis); they earn our ‘gratitude’ because they show us how to ‘deal with some base details in ourselves’ (*GS* 78); within an ‘artistic plan’, even ‘the ugly that could not be removed’ can be ‘reinterpreted and made sublime’, and ‘even weaknesses delight the eye’ (*GS* 290); so that in the end, existence is rendered ‘bearable’ by the aesthetic redemption of the imperfect (*GS* 107). In short, through the aesthetic attitude, we ‘learn to love’ precisely where that is most needed, when we face a calamity, shortcoming, or setback. Thus, in *content* as well as structure and role, this affirmative attachment to life matches the cheerfulness described in section 1—the complex, non-naïve cheerfulness that is the distinctive response to the successful redemption of loss or catastrophe. The form of satisfaction we have seen to be a product of philosophical self-cultivation in *GS* 290 is nothing other than an instance of the cheerfulness Nietzsche placed at the center of his project in *The Gay Science* overall.

Nietzschean cheerfulness thus turns out to be a second-natural attitude that *calls for* practice. But Pippin’s worry was that as a matter of fact Nietzsche did not practice (or attain) it. Here too, the example of Montaigne, who practiced in large measure by writing, suggests something to be said in reply. As Nehamas (1985) argues, Nietzsche fashioned a compelling, unforgettable persona through his published works. More, the story Nietzsche tells in *Ecce Homo* suggests that it was by becoming the person who wrote those books, the person who expressed such wise and novel thoughts in such vivid and evocative language, that he came to love himself, as he claims in *GS* 334 one must learn to do.⁴⁴ By

spending time with his thoughts, as Montaigne did, perhaps Nietzsche ‘got used to’ himself in the way one must get used to a strange musical phrase; by honing those thoughts into sparkling, crystalline prose, he proved to himself (and future readers) the attractiveness of his own mind, following the prescriptions of *GS* 290 and 299. And despite the irascible or even despairing tone that does sometimes characterize Nietzsche's writing, we would argue that it was (partly) through his writing that Nietzsche cultivated a cheerful attitude toward the world as a whole. Throughout his works, Nietzsche offers interpretations of evaluatively ambiguous phenomena that work to *redeem* them. To be sure, he sharply condemns slave morality, the ascetic ideal (including the unconditional will to truth), and the incarnation of these things in Christianity. But he clearly took some cheerful pleasure from these expressions of Schopenhauerian wrath,⁴⁵ and more important, he also finds reasons to be grateful to these phenomena for the ways they have *deepened* European culture, despite sickening it (see, e.g., *GM* I, 6 and *GS* 357). One might even imagine that by taking the time to hone these expressions of gratitude into published form, Nietzsche practiced genuinely feeling these phenomena as ambivalent, rather than as unqualified disasters.⁴⁶

4. Conclusion: Freedom and second-natural cheerfulness

We have now argued (section 1) that Nietzsche’s conception of cheerfulness is internally complex, and not a simple, innate affect; this result suggests that it might *conceivably* be a target of philosophical self-cultivation. And we have seen (section 2) that the cheerfulness Nietzsche found in Montaigne was the same complex species, produced in fact through practiced self-cultivation. His example provided a *proof of possibility* for second-natural cheerfulness—and one that served Nietzsche as a model (*SE* 2). Now (section 3) we have seen that Nietzsche himself was invested in a similar conception of a practice-produced second nature, and that the cheerfulness involved in his ideal of a gay science should be understood along such lines.

By way of closing, it is worth asking why Nietzsche attributes such *value* to second-natural

cheerfulness. Given the apparent risk that its internal tensions could devolve into outright conflict, why not prefer a simpler, genuinely *natural* form of attachment to life and the world instead? Or on the other side, as long as he is prepared to sacrifice a natural, instinctive form of attachment, why does he not ‘go all the way’ and prefer some more purely *rational* (non-affective) form of reflective self-endorsement?

We think the answer lies in the value Nietzsche attached to *freedom*. Of course, Nietzsche has many things to say about freedom—not all of them obviously positive or obviously consistent with one another. For present purposes, we note simply that Nietzsche does often seem to hold up freedom (in some sense) as an important value, and that this value plays a special role for those ‘philosophers and “free spirits”’ (GS 343) who have been at the center of our investigations.⁴⁷ Where it is advocated, the value of freedom stands in tight, mutually reinforcing relation to the work of philosophical self-cultivation. Such activity forms the free spirit in accordance with ideas *of her own*, rendering her autonomous, and the value of that autonomous condition underwrites the value of the resulting life: ‘We, however, *want to become those we are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves’ (GS 335).

That such a condition might be valuable from Nietzsche’s standpoint is readily comprehensible, if you consider one obvious way it might be compromised. A fettered spirit is someone who *accepts* her values from some other (in Kantian ‘tutelage’⁴⁸), or worse, absorbs them passively from the surrounding society in general. From this point of view, the mediocrity and smallness of the world of bourgeois modernity, whose disturbing prospect Pippin emphasized, has less to do with any lack of *intensity* in the affective life of the ‘last men’ than with the problematic *source* of their commitments. After all, their pursuit of ‘*comfort and fashion*’ (BGE 228) might be arbitrarily intense without in the least losing its mediocre aspect.⁴⁹ Nor is there a problem with the ‘naturalness’ of what is desired; they are just pleasure-seekers (see GS Preface, 4). No, what is disturbing is how conventional and unimaginative their valuing and their consequent ideals are. They unthinkingly adopt the values and commitments of just

anyone, *because* they are the values and commitments of just anyone and so are perfectly ready to hand. What these mediocre people lack is not intensity of desire, nor naturalness in their affects, but *independence*, creativity, thinking for themselves—in a word, *freedom*.

It now becomes clear why Nietzsche should prefer second-natural cheerfulness over its alternatives. Unlike those in the grip of a fully ‘natural’, instinctive form of the affect, the cheerful ‘philosopher and “free spirit”’ (GS 343) attains a distinctive form of *distance* from her second natural affects that renders her *free* in their possession. She is not at their mercy; on the contrary, they are at her disposal in that she has trained them into place. Her affective life is a malleable domain that can be (and has been) shaped by her own activity. She has attained *vis à vis* these states a stance Nietzsche associates with the quintessentially *noble*: ‘To have and not to have one’s affects, one’s pro and con, at will; to condescend to them for a few hours; to *seat* oneself on them as on a horse, often as on an ass—for one must know how to make use of their stupidity as much as of their fire’ (BGE 284; cp. also GM III, 12 and TI V, 1-3). So far from being destabilizing, a freer, more ‘knowing’ relation to our cheerfulness even promises enhanced stability. Only the kind of cheerfulness that is *re-trained* into oneself as part of overcoming loss, and that incorporates a recognition of that loss, can satisfy the free spirit’s demand for *honesty* in the face of the problematic aspects of the world (see BGE 39, 227-30). This open-eyed honesty makes second-natural cheerfulness far less vulnerable than naïve cheer to being shaken by an encounter with the darker facets of life; it takes these in its stride already.

On the other side, from a Nietzschean viewpoint at least, second-natural cheerfulness is preferable to any (more Kantian) mode of self-endorsement rooted in reflective, deliberative ratiocination and volition that is innocent of affect altogether. For Nietzsche is keenly suspicious about the ease with which our reasoning itself can be hijacked by alienating cultural influences. If we abandon the guidance of the affects altogether, we are ‘reduced to [our] “consciousness”, [our] weakest and most fallible organ’ (GM II, 16), and leave ourselves vulnerable to following out patterns of reasoning and willing foisted

upon us by the morality of others, against our own better instincts (to choose the words deliberately). In light of such suspicions, reliance on a trainable, second-natural cheerfulness has two distinct advantages. First, having been trained into my affective structure *shields* the attitude I have determined to adopt from being as easily swayed by manipulative rhetoric as the conclusions of reason, and thereby supports my living it out effectively: one must ‘push consciousness back’, if one is ‘to attain the perfect automatism of instinct—that presupposition of all mastery, of every kind of perfection in the art of life’ (A 57).⁵⁰ Then, second, if I have trained the affect into myself, I acquire a deep-going *responsibility* for it that implicates not just some beliefs of mine that could have been shaped (or misshapen) by my cultural world, but a broad swath of my psychological capacities, which will have been brought into consensus with this cheerfulness through my own acts of training. In that sense, my relation to my cheerfulness will be autonomous, non-alienated, even *sovereign* (cp. GM II, 1-2).⁵¹

We take it as a final confirmation of the present interpretation that such a position, in which the value of non-naïve, second-natural cheerfulness is founded on its connections to our freedom, is just the one texts like GS 107 suggest. As we saw, Nietzsche’s free spirits do need a genuinely affective, aesthetic attachment to things if existence is to be at all ‘bearable’ for them, given their honest appreciation of its problematic character and the consequent knowingness of any cheerfulness they might hope for. They are therefore indebted to art. But they are indebted for another reason, as well—namely, a certain ‘artistic distance’ from their own commitments, including not least the commitment to that very honesty: for ‘it would mean a *relapse* for us, with our irritable honesty, to get involved entirely in morality and, for the sake of the over-severe demands that we make on ourselves in these matters, to become virtuous monsters and scarecrows’. To maintain the proper stance, we ‘need a rest from ourselves’, ‘to look *down* on ourselves’, and even ‘laugh *over* ourselves’. So far from being corrosive of wholehearted attachment, Nietzsche finds the somewhat ironic, detached perspective of non-naïve, cheerfulness *simply indispensable* to becoming finally at home in the world—for without it, we would

‘lose that *freedom above things* that our ideal demands of us’ (GS 107).⁵²

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Notes

¹ Citations to Nietzsche's texts will be made parenthetically, using the NANS system of abbreviations (as listed at the head of the References) to refer to the titles of works; we have made use of the translations and editions detailed there. We occasionally depart from the translations, and such departures are noted when they make a significant difference to our point.

² The diagnostic and self-examining character of the relevant psychology should not be read as exclusively individualistic. Nietzsche is also (famously) quite interested in wider cultural and communal phenomena and *their* psychological basis, which he is just as keen to diagnose and address.

³ This strand of ancient philosophy has been fruitfully explored by Hadot (1995 [1981]), Frede (1997), and Cooper (2012). But it is Nehamas's (1997) version that has most influenced our thinking, and he also treats certain modern inheritors of the ancient tradition, including both Nietzsche and Montaigne. Jessica Berry (2010) highlights this side of Nietzsche's interest in ancient philosophy with a focus on the skeptical way of life. The skeptical stance controlling her interpretation leads to interesting differences between our interpretation and hers on the nature and role of Nietzschean cheerfulness, to which we return in section 3.

⁴ Of course, Montaigne's *skepticism* could be understood as a negative judgment on ambitious claims of traditional philosophy, but Pippin is surely correct that it is not offered with the harshness of Nietzsche's attacks on the tradition. When he offers skeptical arguments in the 'Apology' (II, 12), for example, it can be hard for the reader to shake the suspicion that many of the considerations are offered only in good fun, and that Montaigne doesn't entirely stand behind them himself. (References to Montaigne's *Essays* are made parenthetically in the text. We refer to the pagination of the Frame translation (listed among the references) using the abbreviation 'F', and also provide the book and chapter numbers for a given

chapter using roman and arabic numerals, respectively. Unless it is obvious from context, we also give a short title of the chapter from which the quotation is taken.)

⁵ The same puzzle emerges from the opening gesture of *Ecce Homo*: section 1 of the Preface bemoans ‘the disproportion between the greatness of my task and the *smallness* of my contemporaries’ (*EH* Preface, 1), but the very next section forswears all moralizing over that, so as to express Nietzsche’s rejection of moralism ‘in a cheerful and philanthropic manner’ (*EH* Preface, 2). Rather than hearing such shifts as the product of Nietzsche’s failure to write in the spirit he sought, we take them to indicate previously unappreciated complexity within his notion of cheerfulness itself—a result that separates our reading not only from Pippin’s, but also from Brian Leiter’s (1998) idea that Nietzsche’s cheerfulness must be just a simple, natural outgrowth of the fatality of his essence, rather than a mood shot through with an inner complexity that arises from its having been *self-made*.

⁶ However natural and tempting given Pippin’s wider commitments, it is a further question whether this extension was intended by Pippin himself. He does clearly insist that the fundamental attitudes carrying our commitment to values are radically ‘prevolitional and prereflective’ (Pippin 2010: 28), which suggests the extension mooted in the text, but he also holds that Nietzschean psychology is ineliminably historical, so that ‘psychic functioning is always a *second nature*’ (Pippin 2010: 31; our emphasis), which seems to leave room for something like the more Nehamasian, more actively self-fashioning model we endorse below (see Nehamas 1985, 1997).

⁷ For an insightful exploration of various strategies by which philosophical and literary writing can induce such ‘training’ effects, see Landy (2012). Space does not permit any substantial exploration of the nature of practice here, but it is worth noting that *repetition* of activity alone is clearly not sufficient. In addition, practicing must involve at least 1) some form of *correction* of performances (either through a teacher/coach or by experience), 2) a developing *judgment* by the agent capable of separating better from worse performances, and finally, 3) the *internalization* of performance skill into the agent’s (more or less)

automatic responsiveness. In many cases, genuine practice will also involve 4) the capacity to do some *task analysis*, breaking down the practiced activity into sub-routines that can themselves be practiced.

⁸ In that section, Nietzsche also figures the aim's practical significance by deploying solar imagery that echoes *GS* 125 and 343 (where the idea was to capture evaluative *disorientation*): whereas the death of God 'unchained this earth from its sun' (*GS* 125) and induced the sense that 'some sun seemed to have set and some ancient and profound trust ... turned to doubt' (*GS* 343), once the new philosopher has restored some 'overall philosophical justification' to a person's way of life, 'he experiences it as a sun that shines especially for him and bestows warmth, blessings, and fertility on him' (*GS* 289).

⁹ *BGE* 211 makes this two step process explicit. See also *GS* 7 and 380, *GM* P, 6, and *A* 57 on the need for extensive knowledge about the range of possible value systems adopted throughout history and around the world, as well as their consequences for individual health and cultural achievement, in order to successfully create values.

¹⁰ On this conception of redemption, see Anderson (2005) and (2009).

¹¹ Nietzsche explicitly equates these two notions in the Preface to the *Genealogy* (also from 1887), where he speaks of 'cheerfulness—or in my language, *gay science*' as the 'reward' for 'taking [the problems of morality] seriously' (*GM* Preface, 7). And indeed, Nietzsche begins his wrap-up of the *GS* Preface with the conclusion: 'We know better afterward what is needed above all for this: cheerfulness, any cheerfulness, my friends' (*GS* Preface, 4). The notions of gaiety (*Fröhlichkeit*), cheerfulness (*Heiterkeit*), and joy (*Freude*), are central to the *GS*'s overarching theme, and Nietzsche repeatedly returns at key junctures to play with their overlapping semantic fields—also activating related notions of laughter, comedy, exuberance (*Übermüthigkeit*), and the like. To focus attention only on sections with special relevance, consider, in addition to the Preface, *GS* 1, 107, 153, 324, 340, 343, and 382.

¹² This is a common suggestion for Nietzsche. For talk about the cultural effects of Christianity in terms of disease, and similar thoughts, see also *BGE* Preface; *GM* III, 13-21; *TI* VII, 2; *EH* IV, 8; *The Antichrist*.

¹³ When speaking of those first to glimpse the approaching shadows of the calamity, Nietzsche said, ‘For the few, at least, whose eyes—the *suspicion* [*Argwohn*] in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some sun seems to have set and some ancient and profound trust [*Vertrauen*] has been turned into doubt [*Zweifel*]...’ (*GS* 343, original emphasis).

¹⁴ That is, an ‘x’ in the sense of a variable standing in for the unknown. Nietzsche hereby means to connect the sickness/convalescence dynamic to the knowledge-seeking ideal at the heart of his notion of a gay science.

¹⁵ We take it as reasonable in this context to regard ‘*Argwohn*’ and ‘*Verdacht*’ as more or less synonymous (with Kaufmann); for example, Kaufmann (1974) seems entirely correct to translate both by ‘suspicion’ even when they occur in close proximity, as in *GS* 350: ‘[*die*] *böseren und argwöhnischeren Menschen, die mit einem langen Verdachte über den Werth des Daseins... brüteten*’ becomes ‘[the] more evil and **suspicious** human beings who brood with an enduring **suspicion** about the value of existence...’ (our emphasis).

¹⁶ In both section 343 and the Preface, Nietzsche denies that the suspicious minds who perceive their own loss of trust are depressed by it: in *GS* Preface 3, he stresses that regarding life as a problem need not make one into a ‘*Düsterling*’, or gloomy little creature; in *GS* 343, he specifies that the consequences of ‘the approaching gloom [*Verdüsterung*]’ for his philosophers and free spirits are ‘not at all sad and gloomy [*verdüstern*]’.

¹⁷ In parallel fashion, the fact that the philosophers of *GS* 343 already had enough ‘suspicion in [their] eyes’ to grasp the problem of the death of God suggested that they, too, had suffered; but their love of

knowledge redeemed the suffering by enabling them to see the catastrophe as just one more path to new knowledge and philosophical experiments in living.

¹⁸ We have made minor alterations to the translation of the quoted passage. (It is worth noting that non-naïve cheerfulness is already a major concern in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche's first book, as indicated by the epigraph at the head of this paper.)

¹⁹ A likely source for this proverb is Emerson's essay on the 'Conduct of Life' (Emerson 1983: 1089); Emerson himself treats it as a proverb, but its currency and power for him doubtless owes something to its deployment in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. For a wide-ranging exploration of connections between Emerson and Nietzsche around perfectionist themes, see Conant (2001), which itself is harvesting fields sown by Cavell (1990).

²⁰ However surprising the claim, Nietzsche does have a point, if one has ears for Schopenhauer's *tone* as a writer. Despite the gloomy content of his pessimistic message, Schopenhauer regularly manages to puncture the pieties of optimistic claptrap with rhetoric sufficiently high-spirited to be a reliable source of mirth in undergraduate lecture halls even in our time—a feat that could never be credibly claimed for the likes of Kant or Leibniz, to say nothing of Hegel. That tone of the writing, surely, played a part in Nietzsche's own immediate reader-response: 'I am one of those readers of Schopenhauer who when they have read one page of him know for certain that they will go on to read all the pages and will pay heed to every word he ever said. I trusted him at once' (*SE* 2; in *UM*, p. 133).

²¹ Nietzsche's characterization of these thinkers as '*kurzangebundenen*' is richer and more evocative than our translation of the term by 'brusque' might indicate. (Hollingdale opts for 'bluff and abrupt', *UM*, p. 135.) The expression '*kurz angebunden sein*' is an idiom for being curt, or brusque, in the sense of cutting off one's interaction with someone, but the underlying verb ('*anbinden*') means to tie on, or tie up, or wrap up, and can also be used to capture the activity of contracting a loan, or by extension, concluding

a deal. To our ear, Nietzsche means to suggest that these *kurzangebundenen Denker* are rushing to seal a quick deal by closing off the discussion before we have time to notice where the genuine difficulties lie.

²² As Hollingdale notes (at *UM*, p. 135n), Nietzsche here misquotes Montaigne (who speaks of ‘pulling’ a leg or wing, not ‘growing’ them). The fuller context makes the point clear: ‘He [Plutarch] is so universal and full that on all occasions ... he makes his way into your work, and offers you a liberal hand, inexhaustible in riches and embellishments. It vexes me that I am so greatly exposed to pillage by those who frequent him. I cannot be with him even a little without taking out [*tire*] a drumstick or a wing’ (‘On some verses of Virgil’ III, 5; F 666). Whereas Nietzsche apparently takes the pulling of wing and leg as a reference to drawing strength or freedom from the author (‘this freest and mightiest of souls’), Montaigne means to refer to pillaging Plutarch for quotations (too tasty to resist) to embellish his own prose.

²³ The *locus classicus* for the defense is from the chapter ‘Of presumption’:

From these lines of my confession you can imagine others at my expense. But whatever I make myself known to be, provided I make myself known such as I am, I am carrying out my plan. And so I make no excuse for daring to put into writing such mean and trivial remarks as these. The meanness of my subject forces me to do so. Blame my project if you will, but not my procedure. At all events, I see well enough without others telling me how little value and weight all this has, and the folly of my plan. It is enough that my judgment is not unshod, of which these are the essays ...
[‘Of presumption’ II, 17; F 495]

Along similar lines, see, for example, ‘Of practice’ II, 6; F 273, 274 (discussed below); ‘Of giving the lie’ II, 18; F 503, 504; ‘Of repentance’ III, 2; F 611-12, 621; ‘Of the art of discussion’ III, 8; F 703, 721; ‘Of vanity’ III, 9; F 749; and ‘Of physiognomy’ III, 12; F 808-9, among other loci.

²⁴ As we remarked above (note 3), this tradition was especially prominent across the schools of Hellenistic philosophy that provided such influential source material for Montaigne, but Nehamas (1997)

shows in detail that such a conception goes all the way back to Socrates himself, and that it has also attracted some modern adherents, including both Montaigne himself and Nietzsche. Beginning from the idea that philosophy is a way of life, the key marker of this conception is that the intended (or at least, the main and controlling) product of philosophical activity is not a body of theory, but something like the life of the philosopher/sage. For general discussion, see Millgram (2002), Anderson and Landy (2001).

²⁵ The entire inscription, which remains on the wall to this day, runs as follows (in Frame's translation): In the year of Christ 1571, at the age of thirty-eight, on the last day of February, anniversary of his birth, Michel de Montaigne, long weary of the servitude of the court and of public employments, while still entire, retired to the bosom of the learned Virgins, where in calm and freedom from all cares he will spend what little remains of his life now more than half run out. If the fates permit he will complete this abode, this sweet ancestral retreat; and he has consecrated to it his freedom, tranquillity, and leisure. [qtd. in Frame (1965: 115)]

²⁶ See the analysis of Montaigne's letter describing La Boétie's final illness and the discussion of his reaction to the loss in Frame (1965: 77-84).

²⁷ To focus only on the most obvious cases, consider, for example, 'That the taste of good and evil depends in large part on the opinions we have of them' (I, 14); 'That to philosophize is to learn to die' (I, 20); 'To flee from sensual pleasures at the price of life' (I, 33); 'Of Cato the younger' (I, 37); 'Of age' (I, 57); and 'A custom of the isle of Cea' (II, 3)—all written in the early years of work on the *Essays*. 'Of practice' (II, 6) is of course another obvious case in point, and we discuss it in detail below.

²⁸ Some characteristic comments on the civil wars can be found in the chapters 'Of custom' (I, 23); 'Of cruelty' (II, 11); and 'Of physiognomy' (III, 12), but in truth, Montaigne rarely misses the chance to allude to the astounding and heartbreaking corruption of civic life which he and his contemporaries had to endure because of the wars of religion (see, for example, the remark on 'what the license of the times allows' at F 612).

²⁹ See, for example, ‘Of age’ (I, 57); ‘On some verses of Virgil’ (III, 5); ‘Of vanity’ (III, 9); and ‘Of experience’ (III, 13), as well as ubiquitous offhand references to Montaigne’s health, his efforts to cope with ‘the stone’, and so on (and compare Nietzsche on this strand of Montaigne, at *GS* 22). On Montaigne’s previous good luck in this department, recall from ‘Of practice’: ‘I have spent a good part of my life in perfect and entire health; I mean not merely entire, but even blithe and ebullient. This state, full of verdure and cheer, made me find the thought of illnesses so horrible that when I came to experience them I found their pains mild and easy compared with my fears’ (II, 6; F 268).

³⁰ Our moves here from Montaigne’s *trying* his judgment to *shaping* it, and then from shaping his *judgment* to shaping *himself*, may be thought controversial. As a matter of philosophical theory, surely they are: any necessitarian or fatalist position holding that each person has an immovably fixed nature must deny the legitimacy of those moves. It should *not* be controversial, however, to attribute them to *Montaigne*: that he took his essaying to have shaped his judgment over time (in addition to revealing it) is manifest in the important ‘colors clearer’ passage at F 504 (qtd. above), and he could not have counted as identical his projects of essaying his judgment and of making a *self*-portrait (as he manifestly does in that and several other loci) unless he took his patterns of judging and his personality to be deeply intertwined. We will have more to say about the general philosophical issue below in connection with the Nietzschean idea of a ‘second nature’. (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressure on this point.)

³¹ To our ears, that tone ironizes the ‘unanswerability’ of philosophy’s replies to devastating effect.

³² Montaigne emphasizes that once he came fully back to consciousness, he did have quite a bit of pain: ‘When I came back to life and regained my powers, ... which was two or three hours later, I felt myself all of a sudden caught up again in the pains, my limbs being all battered and bruised by my fall; and I felt so bad two or three nights after that I thought I was going to die all over again, but by a more painful death; and I still feel the shock of that collision’ (‘Of practice’ II, 6; F 272). His point, however, is that

had he in fact died from the initial fall or in the immediate aftermath on the road or in his bed, he would have felt none of this: 'It would, in truth, have been a very happy death' (F 272).

³³ This conclusion is reinforced by the very fact that he wrote a new conclusion for the essay concerning the value of essay-writing. The existence of that conclusion is evidence that even years later, he was still returning to practice the pattern of thinking in 'Of practice', and he took the trouble to add new reflections to his own copy of the *Essays* about the value of doing so.

³⁴ '*Mon métier et mon art, c'est vivre.*' The line is, of course, among the most famous maxims from the *Essays*.

³⁵ By calling the irony of Socrates and Montaigne 'honest', we mean that it is not of the usual sort, which means the opposite of what it says and is (willfully) confused with dishonesty by its targeted out-group. Socrates and Montaigne are being ironic when they disclaim all virtue, but it does *not* follow that they thereby claim the opposite, namely, that they *are* virtuous. One can ironically assert something that one (also, separately) believes—for example, because one does not endorse it in the *way* that one knows one's audience will expect—and it is in something like that sense that they are 'honestly' ironic. To focus on this example of the claim to lack virtue, the two genuinely believe that they lack the virtue that a perfect person would have. But of course, they *also* believe that they are closer to virtue than they would be if they tried to live according to their conventional audiences' conceptions of virtue (and their disclaimers are ironic in that respect)—and more importantly *also* that this very belief (about their lack of virtue) is itself a marker of their being closer to true virtue. The last point is clearly activated in Montaigne's closing invocation of the old story about the oracle's identifying Socrates to be the wisest man in Athens. For further reflections on irony of this sort, see Nehamas (1997, chapters 1-3) and Anderson and Landy (2001), discussing the Nehamas view.

³⁶ Consider also,

A thinker is now that being in whom the impulse for truth and those life preserving errors clash for their first fight [T]he ultimate question about the conditions of life has been posed here, and we confront the first attempt to answer this question by experiment. To what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question; that is the experiment. [GS 110]

³⁷ In *BT*, of course, Nietzsche had appealed to art's '*justification*' of existence as a kind of ultimate metaphysical bulwark against the despairing, world-denying consequences of radical pessimism, but by the time of *GS* he is ready to dial back the metaphysical stakes from a grandiose claim about the objective value of being in general to the more modest question of whether we can develop a sustainable ('*bearable*') evaluative posture toward life, given our particular circumstances.

³⁸ With the reference to problems of truthfulness on the table, we can see that the artistic sensibility is supposed to carry a *twofold* value. It has power to redeem—a thought also explored elsewhere (esp. *GS* 78, 299). But in addition, strict honesty is supposed to threaten 'nausea and suicide', so we are separately indebted to 'art as the *good* will to appearance'—as a 'kind of cult of the untrue'—for showing that and how genuine good can arise from suspending the will to truth for once, and finding value in a domain (the aesthetic) where the claims of truth and honesty are beside the main point (*GS* 107).

³⁹ The notion of some kind of aesthetic 'distance', or 'detachment', is of course a famous idea in German philosophy because of Kant's conception of 'disinterestedness' in aesthetic experience. Nietzsche has some skeptical things to say about the Kantian account (*GM* III, 6). But as his reliance on the general notion of detachment in the quoted passages makes clear, he did not mean to deny the phenomenology at the basis of the Kantian theory. (On the contrary, he expressly admits that phenomenology in Schopenhauer's case.) The Nietzschean critique is directed primarily at the Kantian/Schopenhauerian *account* of the phenomenology, which treats the experience of detachment as a distinctively *cognitive* response, and drains it of what Nietzsche takes to be its own special affective character. A full interpretation of Nietzsche's account of the aesthetic attitude will have to await another occasion; here it

is enough to observe that it must be taken to combine a powerful affective attachment to its object with this characteristic experience of distance, or detachment (carrying its own affective coloring). Its reconciliation of the apparent tension between these two sides is responsible for a good part of its interest, from Nietzsche's point of view.

⁴⁰ It is for just that reason that he is taken with the Stendhal-type theory of the beautiful—that it is 'a promise of happiness' (*GM* III, 6)—a view Stendhal himself develops in the context of an account of the special part played by beauty in the affect of love. (Stendhal advances this conception of the beautiful in *De L'Amour*, chapter 17; see Stendhal 1975 [1822]: 66.) For an extended development of a theory of the beautiful with this structure, as well as illuminating commentary on both Stendhal and Nietzsche, see Nehamas (2010).

⁴¹ Those skeptical of our Nehamasian line of interpretation, with its focus on self-fashioning, are likely to balk just here on philosophical grounds. They might pose their doubts as a dilemma: if the idea of self-fashioning is to be taken *literally* as an appeal to self-making, the view is vitiated by a paradox similar to that attending any *causa sui*; but if appeal to self-fashioning is just a metaphor for ordinary self-control, the interesting-sounding consequences about the way an agent's psychology is shaped by her own activity will not follow. Such an objection strikes us as tendentiously uncharitable to the Nehamas line. While the notion of self-creation (and more generally, Pindar-style 'becoming yourself') does have a paradoxical ring, paradox is self-consciously deployed for rhetorical effect in these contexts. As Nehamas (1985: 170-99) already indicated, the aura of paradox is easily defused through a distinction between an idealized self (which is under construction) and the ordinary self on the way to self-improvement (see Anderson 2012: 229-30 for a brief statement of the relevant move). The attitude of dismissal attending the weaker horn of the alleged dilemma rests on the assumption that changes to the psychology and attitudes of the person do not amount to (or count as) any change/transformation of her *self*. But what could motivate such a view? Apparently the doctrine that a person's self is the

unchanging underlying substrate that preserves her identity across all (superficial) changes in her psychic economy. Exactly that thesis is (rather relentlessly) denied by Nietzsche at every turn. For him, there is no such underlying self. Therefore, changes to a person's psychology effected by her own activity *do* count as 'self-shaping', and in an extended sense, self-creation (see again Anderson 2012). Finally, the talk of constructing a 'second nature' for oneself in *GS* 290 provides as clear an indication as one could wish that Nietzsche is in fact committed to such a possibility. (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressure on the point.)

⁴² By its privative formulation, skeptical *ataraxia* focuses attention on the *absence* of disturbance or troubles, and as such, it is a fairly clear instance of the sort of negative conception of happiness that Nietzsche regularly resisted (e.g., at *GS* 45 and 370, in the similar, Epicurean version). Moreover, *ataraxia* is bound to lack the kind of internal complexity and ambivalence we have identified as essential to Nietzschean cheerfulness: the whole point of *ataraxia* is to *free oneself* from the effect of troubles, whether through detachment, suspension, Stoical training, or Epicurean rationalization, rather than to embrace them as part of the complicated reality one is cheerful about. Thus, Berry's emphasis on Democritean *euthumia* is welcome, since it (at least potentially) admits the kind of internal complexity essential to Nietzschean cheerfulness—the key idea being the notion of *resilience* Berry (2010: 161-3) finds in Democritus fragment 191. But while this idea can be given a Nietzschean flavor, the fragment's emphases on moderation, on resistance to any hint of *pleonexia*, and on taking comfort in one's relative flourishing through meditation on the ill-faring of others (cf. *GS* 276 and 321!), all stand in tension with Nietzsche's evaluative stance.

⁴³ Aside from considerations about the proper interpretation of *GS* 290, discussed in the text below, we doubt that Nietzsche was a committed skeptic in the ancient (practical) sense. Berry's (2010) reading has the merit of making clear what such a commitment would amount to; see also Bett 2000. But in our view, that very result creates a steep slope for the friend of Nietzsche-as-skeptic. In particular, Berry's

treatment shows how Sextan skepticism operates as an *all or nothing* interpretive stance. (It is essential to the consistency of the skeptical position and its resolution of self-referential worries that the *practice* of suspension of judgment is thoroughgoing; the idea is to recuperate any apparently negatively dogmatic statement as just one more argument, offered *within* the skeptical practice, that is strategically opposed to others on the way toward equipollence.) But the attribution of such a global skeptical stance is plausible only if the philosopher makes it clear that such a practice is controlling; otherwise the more natural interpretation will be that the philosopher is locally skeptical about some questions, but undertakes commitments on others. The evidence from Nietzsche on this point is unconvincing. For example, Nietzsche's advocacy of (a kind of) skepticism in *BGE* 209 is immediately followed by the remark (in *BGE* 210) that this characterization of his 'new philosophers' is *not* to be understood as a global practical strategy but 'still designate[s] only one feature [of them] and not them as a whole'. This 'whole' is then supposed to include some qualities of the critical philosopher 'which distinguish the critic from the skeptic; I mean the *certainty of value standards* [etc.]...' (our ital.). If anything, the suggestion here is that Nietzsche's skepticism is to be understood as operating only within the scope of his criticism (and both within the scope of the philosopher's 'value creation', *BGE* 211), rather than the other way round.

⁴⁴ Our present suggestion that Nietzsche accomplished this through practicing (i.e., by learning to feel the right way in the sense of *GS* 334 and by shaping for himself a second nature in the sense of *GS* 290) obviously sets our interpretation of *EH* completely athwart the one offered by Leiter (1998), for whom Nietzsche's self is fated in all important respects and could only by *found* not *made*, in the sense we contemplate. *Ecce Homo* is a complicated, rhetorically challenging work, and anything like a sufficient defense of our reading over Leiter's exceeds our scope here.

⁴⁵ Compare note 20.

⁴⁶ Nehamas (1985: 231, 234) suggests that Nietzsche's writerly project is even structured so as to redeem his physical illnesses and ailments, and some considerations support such a view. Even aside from the

explicit discussion of convalescence (from the *GS* Preface) we took up in section 1, one could argue that Nietzsche's writing doubly redeemed his own illnesses, in the following sense. First, as he describes in *Ecce Homo*, it was his illness that forced him to write quickly, and thus to develop the brisk, allusive style of his short essays and aphorisms (to write *gāngāsrotagati*, as *BGE* 27 puts it, or to treat problems like cold baths, per *GS* 381) (see Nehamas 1985: 231). But then, second, *by writing down* this account of redemption in his unforgettable prose style, Nietzsche made the connection between his illness and his philosophical and literary achievements seem necessary and natural—the best interpretation of the events of his life rather than *just* a comforting story he might tell himself (compare the *EH* Frontispiece).

⁴⁷ For a more fully developed defense of the claim made by this sentence (and a survey of a range of secondary literature exploring the possible positions about freedom that might be attributed to Nietzsche), see Anderson (2013). The papers collected in Gemes and May (2009) are a particularly rich source of ideas down this line.

⁴⁸ The reference is to ‘What is Enlightenment’ (at Ak. 8: 33–42), where Kant famously defined enlightenment as a person’s ‘*emergence from self-incurred minority*’, or (as other translators have it) ‘tutelage’ (*‘Unmündigkeit’*) (Ak. 8: 35).

⁴⁹ Indeed, to say that much is not even quite enough. The more intensely a person desires *that* (i.e., whatever small-minded, trivial objects led us to the judgment that these desires express troubling mediocrity), the more shockingly she betrays her pettiness.

⁵⁰ Paradoxically but convincingly, Nietzsche identifies this kind of ‘automatism’ as a further sign of *freedom*: ‘all there is or has been on earth of freedom, subtlety, boldness, dance, and masterly sureness... has developed only owing to the “tyranny of... capricious laws”’ (*BGE* 188). This, too, is to be learned from artists, who ‘know only too well that precisely when they no longer do anything “voluntarily” but do everything of necessity, their feeling of freedom, subtlety, full power, creative placing, disposing and forming reaches its peak’ (*BGE* 212). Both in the domain of skill and in that of acquired affect, such

‘necessity’ is really the product of automaticity, which, as we saw in the case of Montaigne, is essential for the capacity to respond appropriately under strange or challenging circumstances.

⁵¹ None of this is to claim that second-natural affects are intrinsically inalienable for the agent who has trained them in, or that such training can *guarantee* the freedom (*sensu* Frankfurt 1988 [1971]) or the normative authority of the second-natural affect. Of course, it is possible for an agent to *become* alienated from an affect that she has trained into herself, if (in Nietzschean vocabulary) a new set of drives becomes dominant, different from the one that was in charge when she undertook to cultivate it. Still, in several respects the agent will be in a better position when trying to uproot a second-natural affect than a simple natural affect. First of all, the agent has had experience with training an affect *in*, which should afford suggestions toward a strategy for training it back *out*—at the very least it assures her that modifying her affective structure is possible. Second, the agent’s prior experience with the affect provides her with knowledge about its particular psychological basis and the kinds of tricks or ‘lines of reasoning’ to which it may be responsive. By contrast, the motivational structure involved in the natural affects with which we just *find ourselves* is more likely to be opaque, and to require more trial and error to unravel. Finally, even though the agent may have become *alienated* from the attitude, it will not appear as something wholly *alien*: she can attribute its presence to her past self, and she likely has a memory of the reasons for which she decided to cultivate it, even if she rejects those reasons now. Meanwhile, a natural affect that she disavows may present itself as coming from entirely outside her, and part of the distress it causes is that she cannot explain how or why she finds herself with this repugnant affect. (Thanks to Jorah Dannenberg for a line of questions and objections that led us to see the importance of these issues.)

⁵² This is a co-authored paper, and the authors take joint responsibility for its theses and arguments. The initial idea for the paper came from RLA, and RC did the preliminary research. We divided the initial drafting of sections, with RC taking section 1 and RLA taking the introduction and section 2; each author

drafted material for sections 3 and 4, and eventually ideas and argumentative moves from both of us were incorporated into a later draft following the broad structure of RLA's first attempt. All sections were extensively revised by the authors in collaboration. The authors thank Joshua Landy, Katherine Preston, and an anonymous referee for *EJP* for comments on earlier drafts, and audiences at Stanford University and Boston University for helpful critical pressure. (From those occasions, comments from Jessica Berry, Jorah Dannenberg, Joshua Landy, and Robert Pippin led directly to identifiable improvements in the paper.)