

David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer

INTRODUCTION: WHY DAVID STRAUSS?

By all appearances, *David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer* (DS) is an unprovoked and unhinged attack on one of the most influential theologians of the nineteenth century. Like many of Nietzsche's works, however, first appearances are in this case deceiving. Fifteen years after the essay was published, Nietzsche said in *Ecce Homo* that his purpose in writing it was not to attack the man featured in its title. Instead, his intention was "merely [to] avail myself of the person [David Strauss] as of a strong magnifying glass that allows one to make visible a general, but creeping and elusive crisis [*Notstand*]." ¹ Just as Nietzsche had used Socrates to make visible the crisis of scientific rationalism in *The Birth of Tragedy*, so he uses Strauss in the first Untimely Meditation to make visible a crisis confronting German—and indeed modern—culture. ² The character of this culture and its crisis are made explicit through a lengthy critique of Strauss's final book, *The Old and New Faith*. The book was a best seller among the cultured class in Germany in the early 1870s, and Nietzsche reports that he wrote his critical review of it so that he could "catch this cultured class in the act" of believing their pseudo-culture to be authentic. ³ In *Ecce Homo*, he observes with pride that his critique of *The Old and New Faith* achieved "extraordinary success" among German intellectuals. ⁴ It was the only work in his corpus that was widely read during his lifetime. ⁵

By placing Strauss and his book beneath a powerful magnifying glass, Nietzsche intentionally distorts both to make a broader point about the impoverished state of German culture. Over the course of twelve bombastic sections, he argues that the book (which was hailed by the German cultured class as a new intellectual Bible) was written by an “unintelligent fanatic” whose prattle about religion, science, art, and politics, amounts to the “beer hall gospel” of a “cultivated philistine” who was pretending to be a philosopher.⁶ Nietzsche’s critique of Strauss was untimely because it accused a man who was thought by many to be “the foremost German free spirit” of being a phony, and of publishing a book whose popularity stemmed from its false portrayal of an anemic culture as healthy and robust.⁷ In the first sentences of *The Old and New Faith*, for example, Strauss had praised Bismarck’s “great politico-military movement” and predicted that an enrichment of German culture would follow the recent expansion of German territory in the Franco-Prussian War.⁸ The first sentences of Nietzsche’s critique, by contrast, argue that warlike nations inevitably descend into barbarism because maintenance of a strong military requires “qualities that have nothing to do with culture.”⁹ Stated more bluntly in *Twilight of the Idols*: “power makes stupid.”¹⁰ The new German culture Strauss and his contemporaries venerated was for Nietzsche “without meaning, without substance, without aim: mere ‘public opinion.’”¹¹

Scholars searching for contextual motives for Nietzsche’s harsh critique of Strauss have traced the origin of the essay to his early infatuation with Richard Wagner.¹² Wagner and Strauss were embroiled in a public quarrel prior to the publication of *The Old and New Faith*, and an entry from Nietzsche’s notebooks reveals that it was indeed Wagner’s encouragement—combined with the desperation Nietzsche felt on account of the struggling Bayreuth project—that instigated the attack.¹³ Wagner’s encouragement of Nietzsche to engage in a polemic with his public rival sheds valuable light on the reasons Nietzsche chose such an unlikely target for his second major publication. The question it does not fully answer, however, is why Nietzsche criticized Strauss in the *manner* he did—as a foolish “confessor” and incompetent “writer” whose flaws Nietzsche enlarged through a magnifying glass to call attention to a cultural crisis. This question is important because *DS* spawned three sequels and marks the starting point of a book Nietzsche said was critical for understanding his intellectual development. Seeing why Nietzsche wrote the first Untimely Meditation in the manner he did could help clarify his

purpose in writing the other three, to say nothing of the light it may shed on his claim that the essays are crucial for understanding the development of his mature philosophy.

Several passages in Nietzsche's early notebooks hint at why he thought the Germans' admiration of Strauss was symptomatic of a cultural crisis. In so doing, these passages also suggest a deeper motive for his negative portrayal of Strauss "the confessor and the writer." In the year leading up to the publication of his essay on Strauss, Nietzsche sketched plans for a new book titled *The Philosopher as Cultural Physician*.¹⁴ Although this book was ultimately abandoned for the *Untimely Meditations*, many of the themes explored there found their way into the latter book in new forms.¹⁵ One notebook entry examines "the relationship between the people and the genius," and concludes that "what must be shown is the way in which the entire life of a people reflects in an unclear and confused manner the image [*Bild*] offered by their highest geniuses."¹⁶ Another entry speculates that "imitation [*Nachahmen*] is the means employed by all culture" to inculcate certain types of behavior. It argues that "types" or natures of human beings are created when "the greatest and most powerful specimens" among a people are imitated by the rest.¹⁷

These and other notebook entries from the early 1870s show Nietzsche developing a framework for the creation of culture in which geniuses project an image [*Bild*] of a spiritual ideal onto their people. This image serves to cultivate [*Bildung*] in an indirect way those who embrace and imitate it. The cultural framework Nietzsche explores here is at once a continuation and modification of the "cult of genius" theories articulated in earlier decades by Hegel, Heine, Schleiermacher, Menzel, and even David Strauss himself.¹⁸ In *DS*, Nietzsche frequently and loudly laments the fact that the Germans have begun to venerate Strauss as a cultural genius who deserves to be mentioned alongside Goethe and Lessing, and he takes pains to show that Strauss is anything but the genius he is mistaken for. "Absolutely no spirit would speak in the manner [Strauss] does," he says, "least of all a true genius."¹⁹ Near the end of the essay, he even says that "when I suppose that young men might be able to endure, indeed, might even treasure [Strauss's] book, then I must abandon in despair my hopes for their future."²⁰ Bubbling under the surface of the first *Untimely Meditation* is thus the question of what kind of decayed culture and base people would stoop so low as to christen David Strauss, whose "theatrics with the mask of genius inspire hatred and laughter," as a cultural paragon.²¹

WHO WAS DAVID STRAUSS?

Before looking more closely at the text and the deeper meaning of Nietzsche's critique of Strauss as a pseudo-genius, it will be useful to say a brief word about who Strauss was and what his intention was in the book Nietzsche placed in his crosshairs, *The Old and New Faith*.²² Born in 1808 in Ludwigsburg, Strauss was thirty-six years older than Nietzsche and much more well-known to the German public. In Karl Barth's review of the most important protestant thinkers of the past two centuries, Strauss is called "the most influential theologian of the nineteenth century in non-theological and non-church circles."²³ To feel the full audacity of Nietzsche's critique of Strauss, readers of the essay should keep in mind that Nietzsche wrote it when he was an unknown twenty-nine-year-old professor with one critically panned book (*The Birth of Tragedy*) to his name. Strauss, on the other hand, was a founding member of the young Hegelian movement and its famous Tübingen School who had acquired widespread fame (and infamy) in 1835 for writing what was perhaps the most controversial book of its time: *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*.²⁴ The book followed the neo-Hegelian pattern of thought which viewed criticism of religion, politics, and metaphysics as the primary task of philosophy in the age of empirical science and enlightenment.²⁵ Over the course of almost a thousand pages, *The Life of Jesus* painstakingly examined the four Gospels and underscored their contradictions and inconsistencies. Strauss argued that his analysis of these sacred texts was more accurate than those of other theologians because he prohibited himself from departing from "the seriousness of science," and thus he could state without reservation that "all which was once sacred history for the Christian believer is, for the enlightened portion of our contemporaries, only fable."²⁶ Strauss concluded on the basis of his historical-scientific investigations that the accounts of Jesus's miraculous deeds in scripture were not historical at all, but rather myths invented after Jesus's death to give him the appearance of the Messiah alluded to in Jewish prophecy. Since Isaiah had spoken of the advent of the Messiah as a time when the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf would be opened, Strauss maintained that the biography of Jesus was consciously and unconsciously embellished into an unbroken chain of miracles meant to establish his place as the true redeemer of man. Jesus was not the son of God, but a cultural genius whose life was a work of art.²⁷ Strauss summarized his findings from *The Life of Jesus* thirty-seven years later in *The*

Old and New Faith. In the latter book, he maintains that “the numerous stories of miracles in the Bible and especially in the Gospels are founded not on fraud but on misconception, [because] natural occurrences are sometimes considered miracles by eye-witnesses or historians, and the reader at other times puts a miraculous interpretation upon circumstances which the narrator did not intend to relate as prodigies.”²⁸

The Life of Jesus Critically Examined was so controversial that it destroyed Strauss’s theological reputation and cost him a chair in theology at the University of Zürich. The controversy also spurred young Hegelians like Bruno Bauer to attack him in print and to banish him from their ranks because they held that Christianity was a rational world-view compatible with Hegel’s philosophic system.²⁹ When Nietzsche was a twenty-year-old theology student at the University of Bonn, he read an abridged version of Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* and listed it among the causes for his loss of faith.³⁰ The second Untimely Meditation’s examination of scientific history’s hostility toward “illusions” that promote life may be a reflection on this episode. In the seventh section of that essay, Nietzsche takes scientific historians like Strauss to task for debunking religion and destroying its salutary benefits through excessive historical investigations like the one featured in *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. “A religion [...] that is supposed to be transformed under the rule of pure justice into historical knowledge,” Nietzsche says, “a religion that is supposed to be understood scientifically through and through, will be destroyed as soon as it reaches this goal.”³¹ The second Untimely Meditation is a proper sequel to the first because it deepens Nietzsche’s critique of Strauss’s thought and its inability to foster a myth-affirming, and hence life-promoting, culture.³²

While *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* was meant primarily for scholarly audiences, Strauss’s *The Old and New Faith* (1872) was explicitly addressed to the German bourgeois who had begun to doubt the authority of Christianity in the age of Bismarck and Darwin. Published three decades after its predecessor, *The Old and New Faith* aims to present in plain language the startling social and religious implications of recent advances in historical and empirical science. The book had gone through six editions by the time Nietzsche wrote his critique of it, and it consists of four chapters titled “Are We Still Christians?,” “Have We Still a Religion?,” “What is Our Conception of the Universe?,” and “How Do We Regulate Our Lives?” The first two chapters argue that the old Christian faith is so fantastical as to be unbelievable in modern times.

The last two attempt to replace the old faith with a “new faith” that modern science can guide humanity to greater heights. Two appendices featuring revaluations of classical works of German literature and music round out the volume and lend it the air of having been written by a cultural authority.

A cursory familiarity with the major themes of *The Old and New Faith* is required to properly grasp Nietzsche’s philosophic intention in *David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer*. Although a comprehensive summary of the book is beyond the scope of this volume, a broad overview of its contents will be helpful for contextualizing the interpretation that follows.

Near the beginning of the book Strauss states that he wrote it to foster the “inward preparation” of the German people for putting their faith in modern science as a social and spiritual guide.³³ This inward preparation begins in the first chapter (“Are We Still Christians?”) which restates the argument in *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* that historical science has debunked the old faith as a fiction. In response to the question of whether he and his followers are still Christians, Strauss concludes that “if we would speak as honest, upright men, we must acknowledge that we are no longer [believers].”³⁴

The explicit denial of Christianity in the first chapter is followed by a second chapter (“Have We Still a Religion?”) in which Strauss unexpectedly argues that religion must continue to play a role in modern life because “the capacity for religion is a prerogative of human nature.”³⁵ Instead of worshipping the old faith’s anthropomorphized God, however, Strauss declares that “religion with us is no longer what it was with our fathers.”³⁶ The proper object of man’s religious veneration in the age of science is the “cosmological conception” of the universe which has been “painfully educed from continued scientific and historical research.”³⁷ This new cosmological conception of the universe is different from the old conception because it features no notion of providence, makes no promise of eternal life, and demands no ceremonies.³⁸ Its “faith” is a faith in the power of reason and science, but it retains what Strauss calls the “essence” of religion because it satisfies the “sentiment of [man’s] unconditional dependence” on external forces. These external forces are not divine, but rather the physical and biological laws that govern matter and motion.³⁹ In Nietzsche’s critique of *The Old and New Faith*, he argues that Strauss’s attempt to replace divine law with scientific law while retaining the notion of religion is the product of a man who lacks the intellectual fortitude to rid himself of his hope for

providence and confront the atheistic implications of the modern science he deifies.⁴⁰

The third chapter of *The Old and New Faith* (“What is Our Conception of the Universe?”) features an overview of the science and philosophy that underpin Strauss’s faith in the goodness of the cosmological conception of the universe. Much of the chapter summarizes accounts of the origins of life found in the writings of authors like Kant, Darwin, and German naturalist Moritz Wagner. Darwin plays an especially prominent role. His theory of evolution poses a formidable challenge to the old faith’s explanation of creation, and Strauss predicts that “everyone who knows what miracles imply” will one day praise Darwin as one of the “greatest benefactors of the human race.”⁴¹ The third chapter’s overview of the scientific underpinnings of the new faith concludes by dispelling any illusory notion that a universe in which evolution occurs has a discernable purpose. Instead, Strauss says that the universe consists merely of “the more definite shape of matter infinitely agitated, which by differentiation and integration, developed itself into ever higher forms and functions and described an everlasting circle by evolution, dissolution, then fresh evolution.”⁴² Near the end of the chapter, Strauss confesses that the crux of his view of the universe amounts to a “pure unmitigated materialism” which draws its ultimate consequence at every moment.⁴³ The views he expresses here fit firmly within what Frederick Beiser has termed “the identity crisis” of philosophy in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ After the death of Hegel and the rise of the empirical sciences in Germany, skepticism arose about the self-evident principles, a priori constructions, and dialectical methods that had guided philosophy since Kant. A “materialism controversy” erupted when empirical science—fueled in part by the rapid ascent of Darwin—demanded more tangible standards for what could be considered genuine knowledge.⁴⁵

Following Strauss’s sketch of the materialistic nature of the universe in the third chapter of *The Old and New Faith*, he turns in the fourth and final chapter (“How Do We Regulate Our Lives?”) to the question of whether his cosmological conception of the universe can “serve as a basis on which to erect the structure of a truly human life.”⁴⁶ His intention is to prove that the new faith can provide its adherents with the same moral orientation and sense of fulfillment that the old faith did. Nietzsche is critical of the “regulations” Strauss prescribes for life because they take the form of moral and cultural imperatives that he

thinks promote spiritual decline and intellectual softness.⁴⁷ He also argues that Strauss's new rules for living a good life are indistinguishable from those of the old faith whose authority Strauss hoped to discredit. "Ever remember," Strauss counsels, "that you are human, not merely a natural production; ever remember that all others are human also, and, with all individual differences, the same as you, having all the same needs and claims."⁴⁸ Nietzsche responds to Strauss's rules for life by suggesting that they transform human beings into gentle, cosmopolitan, and self-satisfied "cultivated philistines [*Bildungsphilisters*]" who lack spiritual profundity, personal character, and intellectual depth. Part of his task in later *Untimely Meditations* will be to issue new cultural rules for life that counter Strauss's, and thereby to pave the way for the emergence of a higher type of human being who lives for a higher cultural purpose than the cultivated philistine does.⁴⁹

STRAUSS'S READERS AND NIETZSCHE'S READERS

Since a reading of *DS* depends more heavily on an understanding of Nietzsche's context than other *Untimely Meditations*, it may be helpful to say a word about the social and political predicament that confronted German readers during the period of its composition in the early 1870s. The readers for whom Nietzsche wrote the essay would have had several important agreements and disagreements with the readers for whom Strauss wrote *The Old and New Faith*. Rapid changes in the political and religious character of the German state meant that readers of both books were profoundly aware of a new cultural dawn in Europe. The tremendous commercial success of *The Old and New Faith* showed that many Germans had already begun to perceive and embrace the fact that the scientific revolution of the late nineteenth century posed a fresh challenge to the traditional authority of the church.⁵⁰ "On every side," Strauss wrote, "people are at least stirring, speaking out, preparing for conflict."⁵¹ Bismarck's modernization of German politics, his *Kulturkampf* with the Catholics, and his renovation of the German educational system created a social climate in which the tension between the new scientific progressivism and the old religious dogmatism could not be released by compromises. Nietzsche made a similar observation fifteen years later in *Beyond Good and Evil*, when he wrote that a fight was brewing in Europe against the "Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia," which had created "a magnificent tension of the spirit the like of which has never

yet existed on earth.”⁵² Bismarck’s challenge to the authority of religion was beginning to have a profound impact on Germany’s spiritual future, and Strauss and Nietzsche both wrote their books for audiences on the vanguard of this change.

Throughout *The Old and New Faith*, Strauss refers to those who were enthusiastic about these changes using the first-person plural pronoun “we [*Wir*].” This “we” is understood to signify those progressive minded Germans (like Strauss himself) who had begun to perceive that a spiritual conflict was brewing in which the old ways of living and thinking were rapidly giving way to new ones.⁵³ “If I say we,” Strauss remarks, “then I know that I am entitled to do so [because] the ‘We’ I mean no longer counts only by the thousands.”⁵⁴ Strauss says that his “we” are “no longer satisfied” with the old church, and “regard a change, a modification, as an urgent necessity.”⁵⁵ They come from all walks of life, including:

members of the most various professions, and by no means exclusively consist of scholars or artists, but of military men and civil employees, of merchants and landed proprietors, nor is the female sex underrepresented among us [...]. In recent years we have taken a vivid interest in the great national war, and the reconstruction of the German state, and each after his manner has participated in it, and we have been greatly exalted by the unexpected and glorious course which events have taken for our much tried nation. To the end of forming just conclusions in these things, we study history, which has now been made easy even to the unlearned by a number of attractively and popularly written works. At the same time we endeavor to enlarge our knowledge of the natural sciences, where there is no lack of sources of information; and lastly, in the writings of our great poets, in the performances of our great musicians, we find satisfying stimulus for the intellect and the heart, and for fancy in her deepest or most sportive moods. Thus *Wir* live and go our way in bliss.⁵⁶

The introduction to *The Old and New Faith* invites this progressive “we” to reflect on the book’s argument that the old faith is in decline, and to judge “on which side there exists more obscurities and insufficiencies unavoidable in human speculation: the side of the ancient orthodoxy or on that of modern science.”⁵⁷ Strauss insists that he is not inviting his audience to make this judgment so that they will be inspired to establish a new “humanitarian or rationalistic” church on the model of the old. On the contrary, his writings are meant to foster what he calls “a mutual understanding” among his readers concerning Germany’s future

as an enlightened nation guided by science. He instructs his audience to spread this mutual scientific understanding by means of the enlightenment itself, specifically “the inspiriting power of free speech,” and “above all” the press.⁵⁸

Readers of Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations* familiar with his later writings will have observed that he also addresses his books to an enlightened “we.” In the *Gay Science*, this “we” consists of “we philosophers and ‘free spirits’ [who] feel, when we hear the news that ‘the old God is dead,’ as if a new dawn shone on us.”⁵⁹ In *Beyond Good and Evil*, they are “we *whose task is wakefulness itself*,” “we *good Europeans* and free, *very* free spirits,” “we opposite men,” “we scholars,” “we [who] have a different faith,” and “we [who] sail right *over* morality, we crush, we destroy perhaps the remains of our own morality by daring to make our voyage there—but what matter are *we*!”⁶⁰ The *Untimely Meditations* also address a Nietzschean “we,” and they are perhaps the first of Nietzsche’s published works to do so. *The Use and Disadvantage of History for Life* and *Schopenhauer as Educator*, for example, are both explicitly addressed to the young, and specifically to “we [who] have our task and our sphere of duties” and “we [who] know what culture is.”⁶¹ In response to Strauss’s plan to gather together a progressive “we” to advocate for the new enlightenment, Nietzsche summons a young and ambitious “we” in the *Untimely Meditations* whose task is to counter Strauss’s influence and pave the way for a new understanding of culture.⁶² He makes a subtle overture to this “we” in the eighth section of *DS*. After describing his disgust for Strauss’s audience, he asks his own audience “what kind of lantern one would need in order to search for human beings who would be capable of fervent self-immersion and pure devotion to genius?”⁶³ The *Untimely Meditations* themselves would seem to be that lantern. A more explicit overture appears in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, where Nietzsche says that the “task” of those like him who recognizes “the unreason characteristic of the nature of this age” is to “introduce Schopenhauer [i.e. a true philosopher and genius] to the free spirits and those who profoundly suffer from the age, to gather them together, and produce by means of them a current strong enough to overcome that ineptitude nature commonly evinces in its utilization of the philosopher.”⁶⁴ Like *Beyond Good and Evil*, the *Untimely Meditations* are addressed to intellectual risk takers and free spirits who long to see philosophers—as Nietzsche understands them—become sovereign again. Whereas Strauss’s intended audience consists of scholars and progressive spirits who are invigorated

by the possibility of Germany's scientific future, Nietzsche's consists of youths and free thinkers who are troubled by his argument that science and life are incompatible, but tantalized by his suggestions that philosophy and life are not.

INTERPRETATION OF *DAVID STRAUSS THE CONFESSOR AND THE WRITER*

The following interpretation adheres to Nietzsche's organization of *David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer*.⁶⁵ The first part of the interpretation examines sections 1–3, in which Nietzsche chides the German people for esteeming their culture far too highly after their victory in the Franco-Prussian War. He also describes the ascension of “cultivated philistines” to the seat of cultural power in Germany. To see more clearly the influence cultivated philistines have exerted on German life and culture, he places David Strauss—the “the philistine chieftain”—beneath a critical magnifying glass in the remaining sections of the essay.⁶⁶

The second part of the interpretation examines sections 4–7 of the piece. In these sections, Nietzsche reviews and criticizes *The Old and New Faith* (which he calls “the handbook of German philistinism”), and uses the book as a platform for describing and disparaging the cultural ideal that Strauss represents and that his new faith venerates.⁶⁷ When *The Old and New Faith* is read carefully, Nietzsche argues that the book presents a “cynical confession” of Strauss's own spiritual weakness and the weakness of those who follow him.⁶⁸ A wide (and occasionally questionable) variety of intellectual and rhetorical tactics are employed to demonstrate that Strauss is an “unintelligent fanatic” who “[does] not stimulate, [does] not elevate, and who yet holds out the prospect of being [the] guiding light of our lives [...] and dominating the future.”⁶⁹ Nietzsche's purpose is to prove beyond doubt that Strauss is not a genius, and that he is neither capable of guiding German culture nor competent to create an ideal on the basis of which the Germans should live.

The third and final part of the interpretation briefly examines sections 8–12 of the essay. Here, Nietzsche concludes his critique of Strauss as a spiritual and philosophic “confessor” and puts Strauss the writer on trial. His assessment of Strauss's writing begins in section 8 with a critique of the German scholars and scientists who judge that

writing to exhibit elegance and “classical” style. This leads Nietzsche into a long but important digression in which he describes his frustration with academic scholars and scientists, and reveals his hope or plan for the emergence of a new kind of science that can “pave the way” for culture instead of obstructing it with scholarly clumsiness. For the purposes of this interpretation, Nietzsche’s digression on science is more important than his critique of Strauss’s writing because it prepares the way for both the second *Untimely Meditation*’s criticisms of historical science, and the third’s portrait of philosophy as a science that can be inspirational for culture.

Once the framework for the cultural science of the future has been laid, Nietzsche proceeds in sections 9–12 to detail why he thinks Strauss’s writing is “extremely bad.”⁷⁰ For many readers, his attack on Strauss’s writing is likely to appear out of place and somewhat pretentious, especially in a piece devoted primarily to philosophic critique. In truth, however, Nietzsche’s critique of Strauss’s writing deepens his philosophic criticisms inasmuch as it argues that a person who cannot write properly has no potential to enhance the culture of a nation whose literary and philosophic traditions are among the richest in world history.

SECTION I: THE PROBLEM OF GERMAN CULTURE

Looking back on *David Strauss: The Confessor and the Writer* fifteen years after publishing it, Nietzsche called the essay an untimely attack on an over-proud German culture [*Bildung*] that had “no point, no substance, [and] no goal” because it was animated by public opinion.⁷¹ In light of his tepid evaluation of public opinion’s power to sustain genuine culture, it is fitting that the first words of the essay are “public opinion [*Die öffentliche Meinung*].”⁷² When these first words are contrasted with the essay’s last words—“speaking the truth [*die Wahrheit zu sagen*]”—a frame appears around the piece which depicts an ascent from the popular opinions that degrade culture to the truths that foster and promote it.⁷³

By speaking the truth about contemporary German culture, Nietzsche’s intention in his essay on Strauss was to lend a measure of sobriety to a people whose writers and rulers had flattered them into believing that their culture was great. “Public opinion in Germany,” he begins, “appears almost to forbid one to speak of the deleterious and dangerous consequences of war, especially of a war that ends in victory; as a result, the populace at present is all the more willing to listen to those writers who know of no opinion that is more important than public opinion [...]”

When Nietzsche published his essay a year after the last shot was fired in the Franco-Prussian War, the German people believed they were at the height of their cultural power. The piece is untimely because it begins with critique of the Germans' celebrated military victory and its cultural consequences. Unlike his contemporaries, Nietzsche thought military successes often precede a people's decline instead of their ascent. This insight is untimely, but it is not new. Thucydides (upon whom Nietzsche lavishes praise in *Twilight of the Idols*) made a similar observation in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*.⁷⁴ When the Athenians experienced a string of military victories in the early phases of the conflict, he observed that they became so intoxicated by the victory that they thought "nothing could withstand them, and that they could achieve what was possible and what was impracticable alike, with means ample or inadequate it mattered not." The cause of their confidence was their "extraordinary success, which made them confuse their strengths with their hopes." Like Thucydides and the Athenians, Nietzsche traces the Germans' newfound confidence to what he calls their "abuse of success," the cause of which is attributed in the second Untimely Meditation to their obsession with Hegelian philosophy's "idolatry of success."⁷⁵

Nietzsche was troubled by the reversal of cultural and military values in late nineteenth-century Germany because it threatened to make obtuse a people who were once profound. "Of all the deleterious consequences of the recently fought war with France," he says, "the worst is perhaps one widely held, even universal error: the erroneous idea harbored by public opinion and all public opinionators that in this struggle German culture also came away victorious."⁷⁶ The erroneous belief that German culture is richer than French culture because the French were defeated in war is said by Nietzsche to be an "extremely pernicious delusion," yet he is careful to emphasize that a delusion's perniciousness does not stem from the fact that it is a lie. On the contrary, he remarks in passing that he does not object to a people being under the influence of certain kinds of delusions because some are "of the most salutary and blessed nature." In the second Untimely Meditation, he will argue that properly utilized delusions can strengthen a people's culture instead of eroding it.⁷⁷ The Germans' particular delusion about the health of their culture is dangerous because it hides the fact that cultural victories are won through mind instead of might.⁷⁸ The "extirpation of the German spirit," Nietzsche declares, has been perpetrated at the hands of the

German Reich. The Reich's imperial lust compromises the very culture that the German unification was established to preserve, and a powerful fighting force had become an end instead of a means for the state. In the late nineteenth century, the Germans sought greatness through politics, but Nietzsche observed that the political regimes of great peoples often change, their militaries fall, and their empires crumble.⁷⁹ A great culture, on the other hand, had the power to leave a lasting mark on humanity that the more transitory power of great politics simply could not match.⁸⁰

The German people were in danger at the time Nietzsche wrote his first Untimely Meditation because they were falsely convinced that the "finest seeds of culture" had been sown by their army, and they believed these seeds were now "pushing up their green shoots or even standing in full flower" in the writings of authors like David Strauss. In Nietzsche's telling, writers like Strauss had exploited the wave of popular optimism about Germany's future, and they had conspired to "take control" of the modern human being's mind by appropriating his "'cultured moments [*Kulturmomente*]' [and] drugging him by means of the printed word." In the introduction to *The Old and New Faith*, Strauss encouraged his readers to further his ideas about a progressive German culture by means of the printing press, and he claimed that his book was written for those who peruse "popularly written works" of science in their leisure time.⁸¹ To Nietzsche, the Germans appeared "drugged" because their writers had led them to the erroneous belief that a people's level of culture should be measured by the quantity of the knowledge they have acquired through research instead of the significance and utility of that knowledge for life. In contrast to his contemporaries, Nietzsche argued that it was not knowledge but "life [that] is supposed to bear witness to the character of cultivation [*Bildung*]." The first section of the first Untimely Meditation introduces the theme of the second Meditation because it argues that the pedagogical artistry required to use knowledge moderately for the proper cultivation of a soul is different from the scholarly determination required to collect and collate knowledge as lifeless information.

Nietzsche attributed the primary cause of the contemporary overvaluation of German culture [*Kultur*] and cultivation [*Bildung*] to the fact that the Germans had lost sight of "the pure concept of culture [*Kultur*]." Culture is not "vast knowledge and pedantic learning" as Strauss and others believed. Rather, it is what Nietzsche called

“the unity of artistic style [*Einheit des künstlerischen Stiles*] that manifests itself throughout all of the expressions of life of a people.”⁸² The paintings, poetry, pottery, and sculpture of peoples like the ancient Greeks, ancient Egyptians, and ancient Chinese exhibit a unity of artistic style and a shared conception of meaningful forms and *Geist* that makes each civilization’s culture uniquely recognizable.⁸³ When we walk through a museum, we are instantly aware when we have entered a corridor exhibiting artworks and artifacts from one of these civilizations. Their origins are readily identifiable because of their distinctive artistic and thematic unity. In the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche shows that the early Greeks had one of the richest and purest cultures in human history because a unified tragic awareness and “pessimism of strength” pervaded their artistic expressions of life.⁸⁴ These Greeks shared common conceptions of the meaning of human existence, the ideals of beauty, and the limits of human knowledge, and they were reared in this conception through myth, drama, and art.

Cultures of modern peoples, by contrast, do not typically possess the cultural unity exhibited by ancient cultures. It is on account of this disunity that Nietzsche wonders whether modern “peoples” are peoples at all. The second Untimely Meditation makes clear that the defect of modern culture is that it identifies intellectual cultivation with the presentation of a vast and diverse worldview that exhausts human life through infinite choice instead of invigorating it through a deliberate and directed pedagogy. Nietzsche calls modern peoples “barbarians” compared to ancient ones because the most distinctive feature of modern culture is the “chaotic hodgepodge [*chaotischen Durcheinander*]” of artistic styles that results from the pursuit and collection of knowledge for its own sake. Our music, clothing, food, literature, drama, and other artistic institutions exhibit a “grotesque” jumbling of cultural sources that muddle our thinking instead of enriching it.⁸⁵ Nietzsche’s critique of German culture is, therefore, a critique of what he calls the “modern as such.” It remains untimely and highly controversial in our own time because it attacks multi-culturalism for failing at the cultural task of cultivating wild and coarse minds into minds that are beautiful and functional because of their order and discipline.

SECTION 2: THE “CULTIVATED PHILISTINE”

The Germans live under the illusion of being a cultivated people when they are actually cultural barbarians because they have allowed the type of human being David Strauss represents to ascend to the seat of cultural

power. "What *species* of human being must have risen to power in Germany," Nietzsche asks in section 2, "that they are able to forbid, or at least prevent the expression of [German culture's defects]? Let me call this power, this species of human being, by its name—they are *cultivated philistines* [*Bildungsphilister*]." ⁸⁶ The "cultivated philistines" featured in the second section of *DS* are the closest approximation in Nietzsche's early writings to what his Zarathustra famously calls the "last man" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. ⁸⁷ These "philistines" represent the low ideal Nietzsche thinks Strauss encourages his readers to imitate in *The Old and New Faith*. Strauss himself serves as a model for this type of human being, and Nietzsche baptizes him the "typical" cultivated philistine and the "philistine chieftain." From section 2 onward, *DS* can therefore be read as Nietzsche instructed in *Ecce Homo*. ⁸⁸ Strauss and his book represent ideals of philistinism, and Nietzsche places both under a magnifying glass in the remainder of the piece to expose the crisis of German culture.

Nietzsche begins his discussion of the "cultivated philistine" by noting that the word "philistine" has long been a slang term used by university students to mock their uncultivated peers. The difference between the old university philistine and the new cultivated philistine, however, is that the former's lack of cultivation merely harmed his reputation among his friends, whereas the latter's harms the culture of the German people as a whole. University philistines admit their philistinism with shame and blushing, and they work hard to avoid further mockery. The *cultivated* philistine, on the other hand, refuses to admit his lack of cultivation and "fancies himself to be a son of the muses and a cultured person [in] an incomprehensible delusion that makes evident he does not even know the difference between the philistine and its opposite." He is harmful to German culture because he exhibits a "total lack of self-knowledge" in which he mistakes himself for a person of high culture and inverts the meaning of the culturally noble and base. ⁸⁹ Just as Zarathustra's last men "have something of which they are proud" called "culture" which is said to be worthy of the contempt of truly cultivated men, cultivated philistines are said to be proud of their apparently high state of culture even though it is really what Nietzsche calls a "phlegmatic insensitivity to culture." ⁹⁰ Like last men, moreover, cultivated philistines are convinced that they embody a genuine culture because "everywhere [they] encounter cultured people of this same type." All institutions for education and art in modern Germany are said by Nietzsche to turn

people into cultivated philistines who harbor “the triumphant feeling of being worthy representative[s] of present-day German culture, making [their] demands and laying [their] claims as a consequence.”

The stylistic contradictions cultivated philistines perpetrate on behalf of their degraded concept of culture defy the standards of true culture and appall its proponents. A true culture requires a unity of artistic style, but the hallmark of modern philistine culture is its disunity. In order to give the appearance of a genuinely unified culture, modern philistine culture is said by Nietzsche to manufacture the dubious claim that it consists in “diversity brought together in the harmony of a single style.” According to Nietzsche, however, a diversity of styles or approaches to the cultivation of the human mind can never produce the kind of harmonious or vigorous mind which is the goal of an authentic culture.⁹¹ Modern culture’s multifarious approach to cultivation amounts in truth to an “exclusion and negation” of unity that resembles a sophisticated brand of barbarism. Cultivated philistines have “warped” their minds to convince themselves that they are cultured even though they have replaced genuine culture with a “system of non-culture” whose unity consists only in its consistent violation of true culture’s standards. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the cultural barbarism of the last man is said to stand in the way of the coming into being of the overman and all that this superior type represents. Similarly, in *David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer* Nietzsche calls the cultivated philistine “an impediment to all who are powerful and creative,” “leg irons to all those pursuing higher aims,” and a “parching desert to the German spirit seeking and thirsting for new life.” Cultivated philistines not only inhibit the emergence of higher culture, they inhibit the emergence of higher man because they are content with current culture and the types of human beings it produces. They believe man has reached the pinnacle of his development in modern times, and they think it is impossible to attempt more.

The cultivated philistine’s contentment with modernity originates in the spell of satisfaction that Hegel’s philosophy of history cast over Germany in the early nineteenth century.⁹² Nietzsche tells the story of Hegel’s influence more fully in the second Untimely Meditation, in which he argues that there has been “no more dangerous turn in German cultivation in this century that did not become more dangerous” due to Hegel’s influence.⁹³ The first Untimely Meditation introduces this theme by attributing the intellectual narrowness of cultivated philistinism

to Hegel's theory that "the rational is real," or that what is real in the world is the result of the rational development of history which has culminated in the creation of the modern German state.⁹⁴ Nietzsche is skeptical of Hegel's theory of history, but he says that all public doubts about it have been silenced by writers like David Strauss and Friedrich Vischer who came under its influence as university students.⁹⁵ German scholars from a wide variety of disciplines have reinforced general contentment with German state by transforming "all those fields of study from which disruptions of their contentedness might yet be expected—especially philosophy and classical philology—into historical disciplines."⁹⁶ The historicization of these disciplines means that the search for truth is no longer considered an unfinished and perhaps unfinishable quest. On the contrary, truth is assumed to be the reward of a historical process in which the thinkers of the past were unconscious participants in a narrative of progress that has finally culminated in the reality of the present.

The belief that the rational endpoint of historical progress manifested itself as real in contemporary Germany plunged the German people into a dangerous spiritual complacency that hastened their cultural and intellectual decline. After Hegel's declaration of the end of history, the philistine mind "fled from wild experimentation into the idyllic, and opposed to that unsettlingly creative drive of the artist a certain contentedness, a contentedness with [its] own narrowness, [its] own untroubledness, indeed, even with [its] own limited intelligence." Great spiritual discoveries were no longer thought possible in Hegel's aftermath, and the artistic and philosophic geniuses who were responsible for advancing the world spirit in the past were no longer needed in the age of epigones. The mantra of cultivated philistine culture in Germany thus became "we should seek no further," and authentic intellectual life came to a standstill. The formerly high ambitions of the German mind were reduced to "reflecting a little, doing a little research, waxing aesthetic." New literature, music, and philosophy were produced, but only under the provision that "whatever is rational, whatever is real—that is whatever is philistine—was to remain unassailed." Artists and intellectuals gained fame if their works were pleasing and easy to comprehend, and any artistic or intellectual endeavor that demanded actual effort or thought from the observer was considered too exhausting to engage in. Culture in Germany gradually became synonymous with various forms of entertainment and amusement instead of a premeditated and deliberate education or cultivation. The German concept of culture was

finally segregated from what Germans thought were the most “serious things in life”—that is, profession and business, together with wife and child.” Nietzsche’s disturbing portrait of cultivated philistines as intellectual voluptuaries thus evokes Strauss’s description of his audience in *The Old and New Faith* as “members of various professions” who read popular works of science and literature only when they are in “sportive moods.”⁹⁷

SECTION 3: DAVID STRAUSS THE GENIUS?

Nietzsche urges those interested in the spiritual decay of modern culture to listen carefully when thinkers like Strauss articulate their deepest held beliefs in writing. The degeneracy of the cultivated philistine as a cultural ideal becomes explicit when an embodiment of that ideal confesses his own spiritual weakness to his peers. “The more often and more cynically he admits [this weakness],” Nietzsche says, “the more clearly he betrays his sense of self-importance and superiority.”⁹⁸ Since Strauss’s confession in *The Old and New Faith* offers a convenient summary of the foundational principles of cultivated philistinism, Nietzsche devotes sections 4–7 of *DS* to a critical analysis of it. As he stated in *Ecce Homo*, his intention is to provide a picture of the “crisis” of modern culture by placing Strauss’s thought beneath a critical magnifying glass.⁹⁹ This crisis consists of the fact that the cultivated philistine (who Strauss represents and writes for) has become the cynical ideal that modern culture cultivates. Thirteen years after writing his essay on Strauss, Nietzsche said in *Beyond Good and Evil* that “the long and serious study of the *average* man” and “cynic” constitutes a “necessary part of the life history of every philosopher.”¹⁰⁰ His study of Strauss the “philistine chieftain” would seem to constitute the part of his own philosophic history in which he understood himself to be studying an average man and cynic.¹⁰¹

Before examining Strauss’s confession, however, Nietzsche pauses in the third section of the essay to reflect on what Strauss’s eagerness to transform his personal beliefs into cultural standards reveals about his vanity.¹⁰² The fact that Strauss judges his personal beliefs worthy of publication indicates that he holds himself in extraordinarily high esteem. Not only does he think these beliefs are worthy of being disseminated in print, he also thinks they are worthy of his readers’ emulation. Nietzsche admits that anyone who has reached his fortieth birthday has a certain right to compose an autobiography since even

an “insignificant person” can have interesting experiences. Confessing one’s *beliefs*, however, is an incomparably vainer task because it presupposes that the confessor ascribes value not merely to what he knows, but even or especially to what he opines. Scholars and historians far superior to Strauss have not overstepped their bounds and “entertain[ed] us with their beliefs rather than with their scholarly knowledge,” yet Strauss considers even what he has “half dreamily thought up” to be worthy of public consumption.

Strauss’s admiration of his own beliefs is symptomatic of what Nietzsche thinks is his underlying intellectual narcissism. Nietzsche speculates that Strauss’s examination of Jesus as a cultural genius in *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* may have led him to envision himself as a modern Jesus in *The Old and New Faith*. For Nietzsche, Strauss speaks as though he were a holy man whose thoughts, beliefs, and utterances are valuable to posterity, yet “no intelligent spirit would speak [in Strauss’s] manner, least of all a true genius.” A true genius, for instance, would likely refrain from explicitly referring in his writings to “my genius,” as Strauss sometimes does.¹⁰³ Later in the essay, Nietzsche complains that “Strauss the genius runs through the streets [impersonating] a ‘classical author’ dressed in the clothes of a scantily clad goddess,” and he berates Strauss for being a pretender whose “theatrics with the mask of genius inspires in us hatred and laughter.”¹⁰⁴ As discussed in the introduction to this interpretation, Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations* reflect his early interest in cults of genius and his concerns with the role that geniuses play in inspiring and shaping culture. Part of his motivation for attacking Strauss was that the German people hailed him as a genius, and their collective “life” was beginning to reflect Strauss’s “image” of cultivated philistinism.¹⁰⁵ In *Schopenhauer as Educator* and *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, Nietzsche will present portraits of men he believes are true geniuses, and who can serve as alternative sources of ideals for German culture.¹⁰⁶

Precisely because Nietzsche dreads the effect that the popular imitation of Strauss’s “image” could have on Germany, he takes pains to portray Strauss as a thinker whose books have “no effect” and who is “taken by no one to be a philosopher.”¹⁰⁷ “Imitation,” he wrote in his notebooks, “is a means employed by all culture, and by this means instinct is gradually produced. [...] Thus arise types which strictly imitate the first, merely similar specimens, i.e., what are copied are the greatest most powerful specimens.”¹⁰⁸ In the person of David Strauss,

modern Germany had found its most “powerful specimen” of genius in a pretender who thought so highly of his own beliefs that he aspired to incorporate them into a new religion.¹⁰⁹ Although Strauss maintains that “the time does not yet appear to me to be ripe [for a new religion]” and that “it has not even crossed my mind to seek to destroy any church,” Nietzsche insists that Strauss’s affected modesty is merely a rhetorical device employed by a “coquettish religion founder” who secretly longs for disciples. He judged *The Old and New Faith* to be a “catechism of modern ideas” which would ravage the German spirit with a religion of cultivated philistinism if left unchecked.

SECTIONS 4–5: THE PHILISTINE’S CONCEPTION OF HEAVEN AS EASYGOING ENLIGHTENMENT

Nietzsche begins his critical analysis of *The Old and New Faith* by urging his readers to “preserve a certain degree of caution” when confronted with Strauss’s religious zeal for cultivated philistinism.¹¹⁰ Since Strauss’s *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* contained a careful study of the methods of Jesus, Nietzsche suspects Strauss of being skilled in the arts of “noble, intelligent fanatics” who know how to “stimulate, elevate, and even have a historically enduring influence.” Strauss’s study of Jesus, in other words, has made him a master fanatic capable of wooing others to his side. The difference between Strauss and Jesus is that Jesus was (by Strauss’s own account) a true cultural genius, whereas Nietzsche says that Strauss is merely an imitator and “unintelligent fanatic” whose teachings “do not stimulate, do not elevate, and [nevertheless] hold out the prospect of [...] dominating the future.”¹¹¹ The only way to stop the spread of this kind of fanaticism is to interrogate it with what he calls “controlling reason” and expose it as baseless. In the remainder of *DS*, Nietzsche subjects Strauss’s “new faith” to precisely this kind of rational scrutiny. Despite Nietzsche’s frequent criticisms of science, then, his rational critique of Strauss reveals that he is not above using science to destroy the scientific culture and redeem art. In the first Untimely Meditation, science is turned against science to debunk “faith” in science and save Germany from further decline into scientism.¹¹²

Nietzsche’s plan is to seek answers to three lines of inquiry in his rational examination of *The Old and New Faith*.¹¹³ First, he wants to

know how believers in the new faith conceive of their heaven since a religion's depiction of heaven exposes the character of its adherents' souls and their deepest longings (sections 4–5). After arguing that the philistine's conception of heaven reflects the baseness of the philistine soul, Nietzsche turns to a second line of inquiry which investigates the nature of the courage the new faith purports to cultivate in its believers (sections 6–7). He concludes that Strauss's attempt to found a religion for people who are intellectually, strong, courageous, and coldly scientific is an utter failure. Far from making believers intellectually or spiritually strong, the new faith's metaphysics and ethics soften the harsh conclusions of modern science instead of confronting their terrifying implications for the significance of human life.¹¹⁴ Once Nietzsche has argued that the new faith is a religion for cowards who are unable to stomach the tragic conclusions of science, he concludes the essay with a third line of inquiry which examines Strauss's bad writing and what his unfortunate deification as a literary genius portends for the future of German culture (sections 8–12). "Strauss the confessor will answer the first and second questions [on heaven and courage]," Nietzsche says, "and Strauss the writer the third."

Once the plan is outlined, Nietzsche commences his first line of inquiry into the new faith's conception of heaven. Strauss's enthusiasm for modern science and materialism would appear to rule out the existence of an afterlife, but Nietzsche argues that this does not mean the new faith lacks a conception of heaven. On the contrary, it merely means that *The Old and New Faith* is likely to contain a hidden account of a "heaven on earth."¹¹⁵ Nietzsche locates the "single paradisiacal page" in the book (on which Strauss describes his ideal state of "bliss") in the conclusion to the fourth chapter. The page in question contains Strauss's description of his audience as "members of the most various professions," whose greatest pleasure consists in browsing "generally comprehensible study aids," "attractively and popularly written works," and "historical studies" in the fields of politics, natural science, and music.¹¹⁶ This recreational search for enlightenment gives Strauss and his readers what he calls "satisfying stimuli for the intellect and the heart," on the basis of which they can "live and go our way in bliss." The Straussian conception of heaven or paradise consists therefore in the conception of culture as amusement that Nietzsche criticized in section 3.¹¹⁷ The heights of human satisfaction are achieved through a recreational pursuit of an intellectual universality which appears to cultivate the

mind, but which Nietzsche thinks produces a culture of entertainment and intellectual decay.¹¹⁸ He says that the only historical study Strauss's readers actually engage in is the reading of the morning newspaper with their coffee. They claim to participate in politics and to care about "the establishment of the German state," but this is merely a euphemism for their "daily visits to the beer hall." The study aids that supposedly help them understand nature are simply their leisurely "strolls through the zoo." In contrast to the old faith's conception of heaven, which cultivated moral seriousness and turned the mind to questions about the purpose of existence, the new faith's conception makes no intellectual or spiritual demands on its adherents and they expect nothing serious or profound from it in return.

The cultivated philistines' conflation of culture with entertainment has the additional adverse effect of teaching them to dismiss true geniuses as mere entertainers. Nietzsche says that this dismissiveness reaches its absurd culmination in the two appendices of *The Old and New Faith* entitled "On Our Great Poets" and "On Our Great Musicians." Here, Strauss insouciantly criticizes some of the greatest artists in German cultural history. These criticisms are said to confirm Strauss's status as "the purest specimen of the philistine type" because they present an uncultivated man masquerading as a cultural authority, and passing critical judgment on cultural exemplars. Goethe is called talentless and unoriginal because his plays fail to make use of the "drastic, thrilling devices" needed to entertain and stimulate jaded modern audiences.¹¹⁹ Beethoven's quartets are called sugarcoated "confections," and many of his greatest symphonies are accused of sounding uninspired and formless. For Nietzsche, the composers and writers Strauss discusses in his appendices are "droll apparitions" of their true selves, who "seem to us, as long as he speaks of them, to be falsely identified." Strauss's criticisms of Germany's cultural titans are made all the more offensive because he portrays *himself* as "the darling of the muses" as he levels them. The fact that the German public raises no objections to "the most wretched philistinism making such a spectacle of itself" indicates how degraded German culture has become.

On the occasions when Strauss praises cultural geniuses instead of denigrating them, his acclaim only serves to cheapen what is high. He honors Lessing as an exemplar of intellectual "universality," but Nietzsche chastises him for affiliating Lessing's comprehensive mind with the cultural dilettantism characteristic of cultivated philistines.

Nietzsche observes that Lessing did not pursue knowledge for the sake of recreation like Strauss and his readers do, but rather because he felt a “compulsion” to defend the pursuit of truth in the face of the very philistinism Strauss represents. In fact, Nietzsche thinks Lessing died too early because he spent his life engaged in “incessant” polemics with men like Strauss who failed to understand him because they took him too lightly. “How can you [philistines] possibly even think of this Lessing,” he says, “whence it was precisely your numbing effect, the struggle against your ridiculous clods and gods, the deplorable state of your theaters, your scholars, your theologians, that destroyed him before he could dare even once that eternal flight which was his purpose in life?” Not only does Strauss fail to measure up to the standards of genius, but he and his type have inhibited the emergence and development of true genius for hundreds of years. Nietzsche will attempt to solve this problem in the third and fourth *Untimely Meditations* by outlining a plan to foster the production of new geniuses through a new understanding of culture. He previews this plan near the end of the fourth section of his essay on Strauss when he says that Germany must find a new Lessing to continue the old Lessing’s fight against philistines who “have done nothing to further the life’s work of your geniuses.” The new faith’s notion that heaven means taking serious things lightly threatens to destroy the possibility of cultural greatness both past and future. This is why Nietzsche concludes that heaven for the cultivated philistine consists in “dwelling in the works of our great poets and composers like a maggot that lives by destroying, admires by consuming, and worships by digesting.”¹²⁰

SECTION 6: STRAUSS’S UNCOURAGEOUS OPTIMISM

Once the inquiry into the new faith’s conception of heaven is complete, Nietzsche turns his attention to a second inquiry which examines the spiritual courage the new faith inspires in its believers.¹²¹ The majority of the inquiry appears in an analysis of Strauss’s moral teaching in the seventh section of the essay. The sixth section prepares the way for the seventh by arguing that Strauss’s view of the universe is rooted in a cosmological optimism whose foundations he never proves. This optimism underpins his moral teaching and is mistaken for courage by his readers because it makes the universe appear so hospitable to human beings that courage is no longer required for life. According to Nietzsche, Strauss’s

sunny view of human existence is actually a by-product of his inability to cope with the sobering conclusions of Schopenhauerian pessimism on one hand, and modern science on the other. Much of the sixth section thus consists of a Nietzschean defense of Schopenhauer and the courage his philosophy inculcates in comparison to Strauss's soul-softening optimism. Nietzsche understands Strauss's optimistic critique of Schopenhauer to be another instance in which Strauss parades before his audience as though he were a genius and "triumphant hero," flaunting his superiority to past geniuses. If the Germans take Strauss's optimistic cosmological worldview as their new religious polestar, Nietzsche fears they will become a spiritually soft people whose culture does not prepare them to reflect on—or deal with—the vagaries of human life in a hostile world.

Nietzsche's critique of Strauss's optimism begins with the observation that Strauss frequently retreats from the sobering conclusions of modern science in a way that lends his apparently hard-nosed scientism a tinge of intellectual cowardice. When Strauss outlines his conception of the universe, for instance, he characterizes it in a scientific way as an indifferent "machine made of iron toothed cogs, heavy pistons, and rods." But to avoid frightening his readers with a picture of a universe that is ultimately indifferent to their happiness, he adds the puzzling remark that the universe also consists "not merely in the movement of these pitiless cogs, but it also gushes *soothing oil*." How the universe can be an indifferent and pitiless machine that is also soothing is not explained. Strauss merely takes a pessimistic conclusion of modern science (that the universe is indifferent to human life) and gives it an optimistic spin (that the universe is also somehow comforting to human beings). He never grounds this optimism in the science he venerates, and his softening of scientific conclusions betrays what Nietzsche thinks is his intellectual cowardice.¹²² Strauss retreats from the findings of astronomy when determining the nature of his attitude toward the cosmos, and instead determines it arbitrarily or emotionally by playing a school girl's game of "he loves me—he loves me not." Despite his scientific proclivities he calls the universe a generous caregiver in whose arms we should "surrender ourselves in loving trust," yet he never reconciles this conclusion with his earlier claim that the universe is an indifferent machine.¹²³

Nietzsche thinks the most telling sign of the groundlessness of Strauss's optimistic portrait of the universe is the fact that he "reacts religiously" when it is challenged or questioned. Strauss attacks Schopenhauer,

for example, for “slapping our idea [of a loving cosmos] in the face” with a pessimistic view of the world, yet his attack relies more on conviction and bluster than reason. His procedure for criticizing Schopenhauer is to punish himself by reading Schopenhauer’s pessimistic books, and then anesthetizing the pain these books inflict by embracing a salutary but unscientific optimism. When Schopenhauer makes a pessimistic observation that Strauss finds difficult to refute, Nietzsche says that the champion of science “reacts religiously” by “reviling [Schopenhauer], accusing him of absurdities, blasphemies, and infamies, and even pronouncing that [Schopenhauer] is out of his mind.” This procedure makes Strauss appear courageous to his readers because it involves standing up to Schopenhauer, who was well-known for his own name-calling and bluster. In reality, however, it reveals that Strauss’s new faith is no more scientific than the old faith it aims to replace, and is equally rooted in a longing for the world to conform to irrational hopes.

The most egregious example of Strauss anesthetizing the pain caused by Schopenhauerian pessimism by means of a questionable argument appears in the fourth chapter of *The Old and New Faith*. Here, Strauss argues that Schopenhauer’s claim that “things would be better off if the world did not exist” is unthinkable. His reasoning is that a philosophy like Schopenhauer’s “that declares the world to be bad, also declares itself to be bad [because it exists in the world]. But if thought that declares the world to be bad is bad thought, then the world, in fact, is good.”¹²⁴ Pessimistic philosophy, in other words, denies its right to exist when it denies the world because it denies the world in which it exists. Optimistic philosophy, on the other hand, is the only kind that can be true according to Strauss because it is the only kind whose affirmation of the world justifies the activity of philosophizing. Although Nietzsche never states why he thinks Strauss’s position on philosophy is full of “the most untenable sophisms,” his objection seems to stem from the fact that Strauss never considers that it might be possible to maintain philosophy’s goodness without maintaining at the same time the unqualified goodness of the entire world. A world which allows for the possibility of philosophy could still be judged good, even if the insights philosophy provides into human existence are not always joyful. Indeed, such a position is not far from the one Nietzsche takes in his mature writings. The pessimistic thought that man may not be able to obtain a fulfilling happiness in this world is certainly painful, but it is not necessary to conclude on the basis of this

thought (as Strauss does) that for a philosophy to be true it must come to optimistic conclusions about the nature of human existence.

In the paragraphs that remain of section 6, Nietzsche uses Strauss's regard for Kant to challenge the new faith's confidence in the authority of reason and its optimism about the possibility of knowledge. Nietzsche had planned to write his dissertation on Kant's teleology in the late 1860s, and he suggests that Strauss would have benefitted from studying that teleology and its limits in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹²⁵ Strauss lavishes praise on Kant at every turn, but his new faith violates the fundamental tenants of Kantian philosophy because it presumes that absolute knowledge is possible as the "hard won achievement of persistent historical and natural scientific investigations." What Strauss fails to realize, Nietzsche says, is that his faith in the authority of scientific reason is undermined by Kant's insights into "the fundamental antinomies of idealism and the extreme relativity of all knowledge and reason." A careful study of Kant's *Critique* would have eroded Strauss's faith in science by showing him "how little reason can discern about the in-itself of things." Strauss's new faith fails to provide its adherents with intellectual courage because it fails to present them with an accurate picture of the limits of reason, thereby instilling a false confidence in the certainty of science. Nietzsche blames Strauss's faith in the power of reason on the influence of Hegel. Although Strauss had long since broken with the Hegelian school, he is said to have remained "absolutely dependent" upon Hegel's optimistic theory that knowledge is possible at the end of spirit's sojourn through history.¹²⁶ This critical assessment of Hegel's historical teleology—and its corruption in the hands of thinkers like Strauss—is the subject of the second Untimely Meditation, in which Hegel is cast as the most "dangerous" cultural thinker of the nineteenth century.¹²⁷

SECTION 7: STRAUSS'S UNCOURAGEOUS ETHICS

According to Nietzsche, the new faith fails to cultivate courage in its believers because its spiritual architect is an intellectual coward who has placed his doctrine on an indefensible intellectual foundation. In section 6 of the essay, Strauss's optimistic theory of the universe and his unquestioned faith in reason were shown to be symptoms of his intellectual timidity. The seventh section subjects Strauss's ethical doctrine to similar criticisms and comes to a similar conclusion. The primary problem with Strauss's ethical theory is that it is inconsistent with his conception

of the universe. That account praises Darwin as one of humanity's "greatest benefactors" for discovering that the stronger members of a species are privileged by natural selection. His ethical theory, by contrast, wholly rejects privileging the strong, and this leads Nietzsche to criticize Strauss for "frivolously jumping over" his earlier Darwinian principles.¹²⁸ Instead of embracing Darwinism as the foundation for a new morality, Strauss's ethics teach that strength and individual differences are irrelevant in ethical considerations because all men have "identical needs and claims."¹²⁹ The "essence of morality," Strauss says, is that "all men are the same as you and have the same needs and demands as you." Statements like this compel Nietzsche to conclude that Strauss's ethical teaching "is constructed independently of his answer to the question: how do we conceive of the world." In other words, Strauss's ethics downplay the importance of strengths and individual differences among members of the same species, but his cosmology and biology emphasize the importance of both.¹³⁰

Strauss could have answered Nietzsche's charges of moral inconsistency with the argument that it is neither necessary nor prudent to expect the laws of natural selection to operate smoothly in a civil society where justice is demanded. Unfortunately, he never makes this argument, and Nietzsche insists that the burden of proof remains on him to explain why his ethical theory fails to harmonize or even reckon with the otherwise Darwinian foundations of the new faith. If human beings evolved by "constantly forgetting that other creatures possess the same rights, [and] by feeling [themselves] to be the stronger," then why should they pretend that there are no differences of physical or intellectual strength among them?¹³¹ If Strauss wants his egalitarian ethics to remain consistent with his Darwinian cosmology, Nietzsche demands that he derive the phenomena of kindness, compassion, love, and self-denial from physiological and biological premises. A more courageous thinker could use Darwin's insights to develop what Nietzsche calls "a moral code for life" that privileges the strong, but Strauss shirks from making his doctrine consistent because he does not want to frighten his audience with an ethical theory that would challenge or upset their bourgeois bliss. Instead of courageously thinking through his doctrine to its conclusion, he "shuns every occasion on which he might be required to move from words to grim earnest."

The ethical doctrine of *The Old and New Faith* culminates in the moral maxim that the men of the future should strive to live in accord

with the “*idea* of the species” in order to bring themselves into “abiding concord with the destiny of mankind.”¹³² European man’s future depends, in other words, on the practical realization of a high human ideal. This statement is significant because Strauss contradicts his earlier claim that individual differences among members of a species are ethically irrelevant. It seems such differences are relevant after all, so relevant in fact that the highest types of human beings are ideals for the rest of the species. More significant than this, however, is what Strauss’s imperative to live in accord with the “idea of the species” indicates about the structural similarity between his and Nietzsche’s approaches to cultivating or elevating man. In the fourth chapter of *The Old and New Faith*, Strauss says that nature has always aimed at “an unceasingly progressive improvement” and “continuous emergence” of increasingly developed beings, especially humans.¹³³ Nietzsche makes a similar remark in *Schopenhauer as Educator* when he says that the goal of the human species is to evolve to “that point at which it reaches its limit and begins the transition to a higher species.”¹³⁴ Both writers agree, in other words, that “nature” (whatever this term means) has been working for millennia to push humanity beyond the boundaries of the merely human. Strauss says that nature endeavored “not merely to exalt but to transcend itself” when it developed the human being because it wanted to create “something more, something better” than animals.¹³⁵ Nietzsche takes a similar position in later *Untimely Meditations* when he argues that nature aims at the production of philosophers, artists, and saints because these high human types go beyond mere men and are “no longer animals.”¹³⁶ Even more surprising than their agreement about the malleability of human nature is their agreement about the means by which that nature should be shaped. Just as Strauss declares that men can shape themselves by living in accordance with the idea of humanity, Nietzsche encourages readers of *Schopenhauer as Educator* to “get in touch” with, and “foster the production of” what he calls the “great ideal” of the human species (i.e., geniuses like Schopenhauer).¹³⁷ Fostering the production of this ideal requires “discovering what is hostile to its development and sweeping it aside.”¹³⁸ Nietzsche and Strauss seem to agree, therefore, that human nature can be gradually transformed into something higher by living in accord with a higher standard. For Nietzsche’s part, this is why culture plays such an important role in human life. A people’s culture cultivates them by providing a unified ideal and style of life toward which they can aspire.

Nietzsche's agreement with Strauss ends with the notion that an ideal must be posited and adhered to in order to cultivate man's nature anew and transcend his animal origins. In fact, their greatest disagreement stems from their differences concerning the character, content, and source of precisely this ideal. In the fourth chapter of *The Old and New Faith*, Strauss argues that the source of this ideal lies in modern science, democracy, and cosmopolitanism. The decline of the old faith has shown that life-promoting myths and narrow religious worldviews are no longer tenable in the age of enlightenment. Reason and research are man's only trustworthy guides to his own development. The ideal of the species is the progressive, moderately educated, democratic man—the "cultivated philistine" of Nietzsche's nightmares. Nietzsche, on the other hand, goes to great lengths in the last three *Untimely Meditations* to show that the source of the human ideal lies not in reason, but in world historic geniuses and their creations. The inspiring works of philosophers like Schopenhauer and artists like Wagner can help us "find ourselves" by shaping the way we think about the world or creating artistic representations of the virtues we should imitate.¹³⁹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* could be read as Nietzsche's own attempt to compose such a work, and doing so may account for his claim in *Ecce Homo* that the Schopenhauer and Wagner featured in the *Untimely Meditations* are "in one word, Nietzsche."¹⁴⁰

Disagreements about the source of the ideal of the future lead Nietzsche and Strauss to further disagreements about its content and the precise means by which it should be realized. Nietzsche calls Strauss's imperative to live in accord with the ideal of the human species "thoroughly useless and powerless" because it is too vague to provide meaningful guidance. "Under the concept of [Strauss's] human being," Nietzsche says, "one can yoke together the most diverse and manifold things, from the Patagonian savage to Master Strauss [himself], and no one will dare to say with equal justification: 'live like a Patagonian savage!' and 'live like Master Strauss!'" The geniuses he describes in the third and fourth *Untimely Meditations* are the "ideal expression of the human species" he refers to in passing here. He explicitly tells readers of *Schopenhauer as Educator* that they are not geniuses, but that their task is to take practical steps to help establish the social and political conditions in Germany that will make the emergence of these ideal humans (and their creation of cultural touchstones) more likely.¹⁴¹ *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* provides a blueprint for the kind of institution Nietzsche hoped would oversee this task. Although he gradually became disillusioned with

Bayreuth, he nevertheless understood that in order for ideals to influence culture there must be an institutional pathway to their dissemination and realization.¹⁴² Strauss, by contrast, is said to have “never learned that a concept alone can never make human beings better and more moral.”

The shortcomings of Strauss’s ethics and the flimsy ideal they aim to erect over Germany reinforce Nietzsche’s broader argument that the new faith does not make human beings courageous enough to live in a tragic world. The concluding pages of section 7 restate this argument and indict Strauss for claiming that the universe is a “laboratory of the reasonable and good” which is ordered in an “absolutely reasonable and purposive manner, and hence embodies a revelation of eternal goodness itself.”¹⁴³ Nietzsche traces Strauss’s judgment of the universe as “good” to his “Hegelian devotion to the real as the reasonable.”¹⁴⁴ Strauss falsely assumes that a universe which is rational must also be benevolent, but Nietzsche observes that Strauss’s rational universe is also the source of “all ruin, all unreason, and all evil” among mankind. *The Old and New Faith* seems to overlook the destructive side of the universe so that its audience of casual scientists are not made uncomfortable by rigorous science. They are told, for example, that the universe is worthy of “religious veneration” and of being addressed by the name “God,” but Strauss’s conception of the universe as a “God,” a “he,” and a “power” to which “we should surrender ourselves in loving trust” contradicts his previous claims that the new faith’s scientific awareness prevents it from conceiving of God as a “personality.”¹⁴⁵ The new faith initially promised to liberate its adherents from the expectation of obtaining benefits from a provident God, but Nietzsche argues that in fact Strauss “does not dare tell [his audience]: I have liberated you from a compassionate and merciful God, and the universe is nothing but a rigid mechanism.”¹⁴⁶ Instead, Strauss’s fear of the science he venerates compels him to resort to “a sorceress, namely to metaphysics,” and to entangle himself in scientific-religious contradictions from which there is no rational escape. The new faith retains just enough of the old faith to keep readers in “good humor” by occupying a gray area between a religion that inspires hope, and a science that demands sobriety.

In defense of Strauss’s failed attempts to fuse science with metaphysics it is worth noting in conclusion that Nietzsche seems to attempt a similar fusion in the later *Untimely Meditations*.¹⁴⁷ In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, he says that nature needs philosophers—the highest type of scientific men—for a “metaphysical purpose,” namely to interpret nature “in its metaphysical

meaningfulness” so that human life acquires a “sense and significance” it lacks in the absence of the philosophic transfiguration of the world.¹⁴⁸ In *The Use and Disadvantage of History for Life*, moreover, he concludes that modern science’s attempt to understand the world “objectively” does great harm to human beings because human life requires precisely the kinds of metaphysical illusions he had earlier accused David Strauss of being unable to free himself from. Perhaps what the young Nietzsche objects to most in the writings of Strauss is not the metaphysical marriage of science and religion.¹⁴⁹ It is the marriage of them which, as he says in section 8, never asks itself “what a preoccupation with science bodes for the culture at large.”¹⁵⁰

SECTIONS 8–12: STRAUSS’S WRITING AND A PRELUDE TO THE SCIENCE OF THE FUTURE

Once Nietzsche has completed his theoretical inquiries into the new faith’s conception of heaven and its capacity to inspire courage, he turns in the final part of *DS* to a literary critique of Strauss’s writing. Since these literary criticisms are not as important for demonstrating the unity of the *Untimely Meditations* as their theoretical counterparts, my interpretation does not treat them in depth. In general, it can be said that Nietzsche’s critique of Strauss’s writing is meant to provide additional evidence for his claim that Strauss is not the genius of German culture his contemporaries have mistaken him for. Five tendentious sections make the case that *The Old and New Faith* is illogically organized, that “new faith” is a misnomer because Strauss’s position “has less to do with faith than with modern science,” and that Strauss often oversimplifies his writing in order to gloss over subjects he does not understand.¹⁵¹ The essay concludes in the twelfth section with a list of nearly seventy stylistic and grammatical errors Nietzsche claims to have identified during his reading of Strauss’s book.¹⁵² The list demonstrates Strauss’s failure to master the German language, which is in turn meant to evince both the mediocrity of his mind and his inability to act as the steward of a true culture. A short aphorism in *Human, All Too Human* entitled “Improving One’s Thoughts” helps illuminate Nietzsche’s intention in these five sections. It states that “to improve one’s style means to improve one’s thoughts and nothing else!”¹⁵³ Sharp writing is a product of sharp thinking, and the same is true of clumsy writing and clumsy thinking. Schopenhauer takes up this point in his essay *On Authorship and Style*, which states that “style is the physiognomy of the mind and hence more infallible than that of the body.”¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche follows

Schopenhauer and criticizes Strauss's style to show that the poor quality of his mind is betrayed by the poor quality of his writing.¹⁵⁵

For our purposes, the most significant part of Nietzsche's criticism of Strauss's writing occurs in section 8 of the essay when he vilifies scholars and scientists for praising Strauss as a "classical" writer.¹⁵⁶ Strauss insists that *The Old and New Faith* is intended primarily for a popular audience, but Nietzsche reports that the book has also achieved respect in German universities where it is hailed as a "Bible" for scholars (*Gelehrten*) and scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) minds. Never one to go easy on intellectuals, Nietzsche surmises that scholars are attracted to the book because there is a "compatibility that links the class of scholarly laborers to philistine culture."¹⁵⁷ Like the cultivated philistines described in the second section of the essay, scientists and university scholars are said to be "tasteless, thoughtless, and aesthetically crude." The source of their crudity lies in modern science's alarming disinterest in—and inability to answer—meaningful human questions. Nietzsche says that most scientists and scholars avoid confronting difficult questions about the purpose and nature of human existence and instead prefer mind-numbing pursuits like "counting the filaments of a flower."¹⁵⁸ Speaking from his experience as a professor of classical philology, he calls scholarship an "affliction" and universities "factories" that are full of "exhausted laborers" producing meaningless research. The first sign that *The Old and New Faith* is a badly written book is that German scholars—with their "numbed thought organs" and stilted writing styles—hail it as a new classic.

Scholars and scientists venerate Strauss because *The Old and New Faith* reproduces their view of the world and packages it for easy public consumption. The new faith's Testament relies heavily on modern science and scholarship, which in turn makes university researchers its prophets. Nietzsche is troubled by the way the Germans have entrusted to the scholarly class "supreme judgment over all questions of culture" because he thinks that very few Germans have stopped to reflect on the question of "what a preoccupation with science [*Wissenschaften*] bodes for the culture at large." Although an explicit answer to this question is never provided, an implicit answer is contained in Nietzsche's larger criticism of *The Old and New Faith*. A preoccupation with modern science bodes ill for the culture at large because modern science does not cultivate strong, deep, or unified minds. The spiritual shallowness of scholars, the intellectual timidity of cultivated philistines, and the shortcomings

of Strauss's ethics and cosmology all demonstrate science's inability to guide or give rise to a culture that fosters a strong unity of character or artistic style. Modern science can answer questions about the universe with impressive causal explanations, but Nietzsche judges these questions to be important only to people "already certain of eternal life." When it comes to answering questions about love, justice, and other matters of pressing concern to mortals, science's sterility makes it appear awkward and even inhuman.

Given Nietzsche's criticisms of science in section 8 of the essay, it is surprising to find a cultural defense of science in this same section. The modern natural science treated in the first Untimely Meditation, and the modern historical science treated in the second, are inadequate foundations for culture because they fail to cultivate or unify, yet the inadequacy of modern science does not mean that science as such is culturally impotent. On the contrary, Nietzsche thinks a properly constituted science could invigorate culture instead of ruining it. "What is science [*Wissenschaft*] supposed to be *at all*," he says, "if it has no time for culture? Please tell us at least where science is going, whence it is coming, and what its purpose if not to *pave the way* for culture?"¹⁵⁹ The character and activity of a science that paves the way for culture instead of obstructing culture is not elaborated in the first Untimely Meditation. Subsequent chapters of this book will argue that Nietzsche's intention in the final three essays is to sketch the broad outlines of precisely such a science. This new science—which appears in the form of a new kind of philosophy—takes its bearings from older philosophy, history, and art.¹⁶⁰ It does not directly create culture, but it provides the insights that shape the art, literature, and music that do. A notebook entry written the year before Nietzsche published the first Untimely Meditation describes the purpose and limits of a philosophic science that would promote culture instead of inhibiting it. The entry appears in the context of an analysis of the cultural power of the pre-Socratic philosophers, and it employs the same language used in the Strauss piece:

Result: philosophy cannot create a culture
 but it can pave the way for one
 or sustain one
 or moderate one.

For us: this is why the philosopher is the supreme tribunal for the schools: paves the way for genius: for we have no culture. [...]

Culture can always only issue from the centralizing significance of an art form or a work of art. Philosophy unwittingly will pave the way for the view of the world propagated by this work of art.¹⁶¹

The chapters that follow suggest that *Schopenhauer as Educator* and *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* reconceptualize the meaning of philosophic science by reestablishing the relationship between philosophy, culture, and art in the manner Nietzsche alludes to here.¹⁶² These two published essays make self-conscious or witting a power of philosophy which the aforementioned notebook entry states has been “unwitting” heretofore.¹⁶³ “The philosopher should *recognize what is needed*,” Nietzsche says in another entry, “and the artist should *create it*.”¹⁶⁴ Nietzsche’s reconceptualization of philosophy will illustrate how a philosopher like Schopenhauer can unwittingly pave the way for an artist and culture creator like Wagner, who was heavily influenced by Schopenhauerian pessimism.¹⁶⁵ *David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer* lays the groundwork for this new conception of philosophy by arguing that modern science is not sensitive enough to the demands of human life to serve as a steward of true culture. True culture promotes life and even welcomes the delusions that science purports (but often fails) to dispel. It requires a unity of artistic style forged through a unity of artistic and philosophic genius, but German culture is not a true culture and David Strauss is not a true genius.

NOTES

1. *EH*, Wise 7; Young (2010, 168).
2. *BT* 12–15. Nietzsche continued to employ this method in his later writings, using men like Wagner, Schopenhauer, and Jesus as expressions of decadence and nihilism. See *DS* 2 for Nietzsche’s claim that German culture represents “the modern as such.” See Taylor (1997, 5) for an analysis of Socrates’s role in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Golder (1990, 5–6) argues that Nietzsche’s attack on Strauss was intended as a critique of German culture more broadly.
3. *EH*, Wise 7. Nietzsche says that the book had gone through six editions by the time he published his essay on it.
4. *EH*, Books, *Untimelies* 1.

5. Schaburg (1996). Also see Gray (1995, 407), who observes that Nietzsche devotes by far the most space to *DS* in *Ecce Homo*, but *DS* is “largely ignored by Nietzsche scholars.”
6. *DS* 3.
7. *EH*, Books, Untimelies 2.
8. Strauss (1997, 1).
9. *DS* 1.
10. *TI*, Germans 1 and 4.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Large (2012, 90), Gray (1995, 401–402), Golder (1990, 4–5), and Young (2010, 168).
13. Gray (1990, 402).
14. Breazeale (1990, xix).
15. *Ibid.*, xviii–xxiii. Breazeale observes that some of these notes found their way into *Schopenhauer as Educator*.
16. *Ibid.*, 3. In another note from this period, Nietzsche concluded that “the sum total of Greek culture” and “the whole of Greek history” could be understood as “the reflection of the image which shines forth from its greatest luminaries.”
17. *Ibid.*, 49–50.
18. For a history of the development of the “cult of genius” theories in the 1830s and Strauss’s contribution to them, see Massey (1983, 114–141). Massey shows that the third edition of Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* made a substantial contribution to the notion of the “cult of genius.” In fact, Nietzsche’s concern with the power and cultural potential of genius is highly derivative of Strauss’s thought. In *DS*, Nietzsche turns the conception of genius featured in the third edition of Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* against him in order to illustrate that Strauss is not the genius his own works venerate.
19. *DS* 3.
20. *DS* 7.
21. *EH*, Wise, 7; *DS* 10.
22. For a comprehensive treatment of Strauss’s life and thought, see Harris (1973).
23. Barth (1959, 364–365).
24. See Massey (1983) for a thorough overview of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* and its place in German intellectual history.
25. For an overview of Strauss’s philosophical context, see Beiser (2014, 22–27). Massey (1983, 19; 64; 104) has explicated Strauss’s relationship to Hegel.
26. Strauss (1872, 776).

27. Massey (1983, 126–133) gives a thorough overview of Strauss's conception of Jesus as a genius in the third edition of *The Life of Jesus*. It is fruitful to compare her portrait of Strauss's ideal genius to Nietzsche's descriptions of the genius in *SE* and *RW*.
28. Strauss (1997, 41–42); Massey (1983, 14).
29. For an account of Bauer's response to Strauss, see Landry (2011, 4–5). Also see Massey (1983, 89–12).
30. Young (2010, 56–57).
31. *HL* 7.
32. See Taylor (1997, 74–75, 78) for an account of the life-promoting role of myth in Nietzsche's early thought. Also see Young (2010, 170) and Massey (1983, 13–17) for accounts of Strauss's attitude toward myth.
33. Strauss (1997, 9–10).
34. *Ibid.*, 107.
35. *Ibid.*, 108–115.
36. *Ibid.*, 161.
37. *Ibid.*, 10.
38. *Ibid.*, 10, 124.
39. *Ibid.*, 164.
40. *DS* 6–7.
41. Strauss (1997, 205). Darwin had a wide reception in Germany. See Kelly (1981) and Engels and Glick (2008).
42. Strauss (1997, 34). There are several important similarities (and differences) between Nietzsche's view of nature and Strauss's.
43. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 19.
44. Beiser (2014, 15–45, 53–89). The materialism controversy and the epistemological crisis it caused prompted Nietzsche to reexamine the possibility of knowledge—and indeed the meaning of “nature” itself—in *Schopenhauer as Educator*.
45. Strauss's account of the universe bears many similarities to that of philosopher Herman Lotze, although Lotze's teleological idealism held that the universe had a purpose, whereas Strauss's cosmological conception did not.
46. Strauss (1997, 12).
47. *DS* 2.
48. Strauss (1997, vol. 2, 52–54).
49. See *SE* 5–6. Yack (1986, 317) argues that “Nietzsche's indignation at the existence of the *Bildungsphilister* expresses something more than an aesthete's longing for great art and cultural genius. It expresses a longing to overcome what appears to be the pervasive dehumanization of man.”
50. Strauss (1997, 5).
51. *Ibid.*, 3.

52. *BGE*, Preface.
53. See Strauss (1997, 3–4).
54. *Ibid.*, 3.
55. *Ibid.*, 4.
56. *Ibid.*, 119.
57. *Ibid.*, 11.
58. *Ibid.*, 7.
59. *GS* 343, and the title of *HA*.
60. *BGE*, Preface, 44, 203, 23, and the title of the sixth and seventh main parts.
61. *SE* 1, 5, 8; *HL* 10. Also consider Nietzsche's frequent appeals to the youth in *HL*.
62. It is tempting to infer that Nietzsche borrowed his plan to address his writings to a group of "free-spirits" or a "We" from David Strauss, especially since free spirits are not mentioned in *The Birth of Tragedy*. There is evidence, however, that Nietzsche flirted with the idea of gathering together a Nietzschean "we" at least a year before he read about Strauss's "we" in *The Old and New Faith*. In his lectures *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* delivered in Basel in March of 1872, Nietzsche discusses and praises the *Burschenschaft* student associations that formed in the German universities in the wake of the Wars of Liberation. These associations took the form of secret societies whose aim was to revive the German spirit, and Nietzsche laments that these associations "did not find the leader they needed," and that "there was in all of them a lack of overshadowing genius in their midst." He says that this lack of leadership ultimately led the *Burschenschaft* societies to perish from a lack of purpose and organization (*EL*, 114–117). As I show in my interpretations of the second and third Untimely Meditations, the young Nietzsche seems to have fancied establishing himself as the intellectual leader of a group of ambitious youths with similar longings to those that found their expression the *Burschenschaft* societies. His lectures on the German educational institutions (written well before the essay on David Strauss) represent his first attempt to invite these youths to consider his philosophic ideas. Since Nietzsche's letters indicate that he did not read David Strauss's book until February of 1873 (nearly a year after the education lectures were delivered in the spring of 1872), he does not appear to have borrowed the idea of establishing himself as the leader of a "we" from Strauss. If anything, Nietzsche wanted his "we" to counteract Strauss's for fear of what Germany might become under the influence of Strauss and his followers. It is also worth noting that it was Richard Wagner who first persuaded Nietzsche to read Strauss, and that Wagner harbored his own

well-known ambitions to establish a cultural cult or “we” at Bayreuth. Although Wagner and Strauss’s respective plans to gather their followers together must have influenced the young Nietzsche, he seems to have had his own project in mind long before he decided to discuss theirs in the first and fourth *Untimely Meditations*.

63. *DS* 8.
64. *SE* 7.
65. See the opening lines of *DS* 3, 4, and 8 for Nietzsche’s account of the organization of the essay.
66. *DS* 7. Large (2012, 91) calls Strauss the “prize specimen of what [Nietzsche] means by the “Bildungsphilister.”
67. *DS* 8.
68. *DS* 2–3.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *DS* 11.
71. *EH*, Books, *Untimelies* 1.
72. All quotations in this section appear in *DS* 1 unless otherwise noted.
73. *DS* 1, 12.
74. Thucydides (1998, 4.65.3). Also see *TI*, *Ancients* 2.
75. *DS* 1, 7; cf. *HL* 8.
76. Taylor (1997, 69) explains how the French have been culturally victorious over the Germans because the Germans have always drawn the model for their culture from the French.
77. *HL* 1–3; Taylor (1997, 73).
78. Taylor (1997, 68–69).
79. See *TI*, *Germans* 4.
80. *Ibid.* When the older Nietzsche predicted in *Ecce Homo* that “the notion of politics” would one day “completely dissolve into a spiritual war,” he seems to have had in mind the sorts of spiritual or cultural conflicts he is concerned with in his essay on Strauss (see *EH*, *Destiny* 1). Also see Abbey (1998, 92–95).
81. Strauss (1997, 119, 7).
82. The meaning of the term “culture” in Nietzsche’s writing is a subject of much scholarly debate. See Yack (1986, 338): “Without a shared conception of meaningful forms, culture becomes the knowledge of culture which, Nietzsche complains, replaces real culture in the modern world.” Taylor (1997, 66–67): “In the broadest sense, *Kultur* for Nietzsche is similar to, if less inclusive than, ‘civilization.’ McGinn (1975, 78): “[culture is] either an aspect of or identical with a social unit’s Geist, and as such, manifested itself in various forms of human activity.” Also see Church (2015, 83–206).

83. See Taylor (1997, 70): “Here Nietzsche identifies *Kultur* with ‘unity of style,’ a condition exemplified by the presence of harmony, coherence, and proportion in the external manifestations of a people—in their architecture, customs, apparel, mores, art, and language. Nietzsche assumes that many premodern cultures were distinguished by this condition. Such unity, he implies, was the product of a people’s capacity to develop and sustain a fairly limited set of artistic and cultural forms [...]” Also see Leddy (1995, 554–556) for an account of how the term “unity of style” should be understood in the context of the cultivated philistine.
84. *BT*, Self-Criticism 4.
85. Yack (1986, 325) and Taylor (1997, 70) make similar observations.
86. All quotations in this section appear in *DS* 2 unless otherwise noted.
87. *TSZ*, Prologue 5. Yack (1986, 313–322) also argues that the outlines of the last man are visible in the first Untimely Meditation.
88. *EH*, Wise 7.
89. This statement reinforces Nietzsche’s remark in part one that although delusions “can be of the most salutary and blessed nature” because they make a certain sort of cultivation possible, they can also be harmful to cultivation. To put the problem another way: not all delusions can be said to be life-promoting because delusions about one’s culture (the latter of which is responsible for producing life-promoting delusions among a people) are life denying.
90. *TSZ*, Prologue 5. Yack (1986, 317) argues that “modern culture produces the *Bildungsphilister* as its crowning achievement.”
91. See Nietzsche’s remarks on the “alpine” man in *HL* 1. Also see *SE* 1 for Nietzsche’s remarks on the cultivation of the mind.
92. For an elaboration of this point, see Yack (1986, 314–315; 340). I consider Nietzsche’s relationship to Hegel more fully in my interpretation of *HL*.
93. *HL* 8.
94. Hegel (1991, 20; 379–380) and Young (2010, 169).
95. Vischer’s aesthetics attempted to apply Hegel’s dialectic to art. For an account of Vischer’s significance and Strauss’s relationship to him, see Yack (1986, 316) and Massey (1983, 64–68).
96. See my interpretation of *HL* for a brief account of the historical context of this movement. Also see Beiser (2014 and 2015).
97. Strauss (1997, 119).
98. *DS* 2.
99. *EH*, Wise 7.
100. *BGE* 26. In this aphorism, Nietzsche says that the study of “cynics” can provide shortcuts for philosophers who wish to acquaint themselves

with average men. In *DS* he calls Strauss's book a "cynical philistine confession."

101. Nietzsche calls Strauss the "philistine chieftain" in *DS* 6 and 7.
102. All quotations in this section appear in *DS* 3 unless otherwise noted.
103. *DS* 10.
104. *Ibid.*
105. Breazeale (1990, xix; xviii–xxiii; 3; 49–50).
106. See *SE* 4 where Nietzsche discusses how Rousseau, Goethe, and Schopenhauer have provided images for culture.
107. See the final sentences of *DS* 3. At first Nietzsche simply declares that Strauss's writings have no effect, but then he immediately prescribes a regimen for reading Strauss's latest book in order to insure that it has no effect. The regimen confirms Nietzsche's fear that Strauss's writings will have a catastrophic effect if they go unopposed.
108. Breazeale (1990, 49).
109. Consider Nietzsche's claim in *Ecce Homo* that: "there is nothing in me of a founder of religions—religions are for the rabble; I need to wash my hands after contact with religious people...I don't *want* any 'disciples': I think I am too malicious to believe in myself; I never address crowds...I have a terrible fear of being declared *holy* one day [...]" (*EH*, *Destiny* 1).
110. All quotations in this section appear in *DS* 4–5.
111. Massey (1983, 115).
112. Nietzsche employs a similar approach in the second *Untimely Meditation* when he argues that the Germans must use history to save German culture from further decline into historicism. See *HL* 2–3, 8–9.
113. When reading Nietzsche's critique of *The Old and New Faith*, it is worth considering whether his attack on Strauss's new faith means that he understands himself to be a defender of the old ones (he indicates in section 9 that there are multiple old faiths).
114. See Golder (1990, 8–14) for an account similar to the one I present.
115. See Leddy (1995, 561) for a similar account of how Strauss understands heaven.
116. Strauss (1997, vol. 2, 119).
117. Yack (1986, 315) gives a similar interpretation of this passage.
118. See Leo Strauss (1988, 236; 1989, 5).
119. Many of David Strauss's harshest criticisms of German artists invoke those of literary critic Georg Gervinus, whose *Geschichte der Deutschen Dichtung* featured heavy reproaches of Goethe and Schiller. Nietzsche treats Gervinus as another exemplar of cultivated philistinism, and in *The Birth of Tragedy* he judges him musically and culturally incompetent. See *BT* 21–22.

120. *DS* 6.
121. All quotations in this section appear in *DS* 6 unless otherwise noted.
122. Taylor (1997, 75) explains Nietzsche's claim that science erects its own optimistic illusions on the ruins of myth.
123. Strauss (1997, 161–168).
124. Strauss (1997, 167).
125. The notes for the dissertation have been collected and translated under the title "On the Concept of the Organic in Kant." See Padderborn (2010, 86–110).
126. See Leo Strauss's remarks on Nietzsche's relationship to "decayed Hegelianism" (1989, 25). David Strauss is perhaps guilty of thinking that infinite future progress is possible.
127. *HL* 8. Nietzsche's remarks on Kant, Hegel, and the limits of reason are important for understanding not only the unity of the *Untimely Meditations*, but the unity of his philosophic project as a whole. Their significance stems from what they reveal about his early view of the possibility (or rather the impossibility) of knowledge. In all four Meditations, to say nothing of his unwritten dissertation, Nietzsche was exploring problems with the relativity of knowledge and the status of teleology that would animate much of his later thought. See Leo Strauss (1989, 25–26). Also consider the will to power hypothesis in *BGE* 36, the claim in *BGE* 9 that philosophy is "the most spiritual will to power, to the creation of the world," and the claim in *BGE* 6 that all philosophy is the "personal confession" of its author. The Meditation on history grapples with the intellectually paralyzing effects of the "extreme relativity of all knowledge" when it affirms the "true but deadly" doctrines of "sovereign becoming" and of the "fluidity of all concepts, types, and species" (*HL* 9). In many ways, Nietzsche's criticisms of Strauss and Hegel constitute his first exploration of what he would later call the "historical sense" (*BGE* 224). The Meditation on Schopenhauer adds to this narrative by hinting at the possibility of non-teleological conceptions of nature and philosophy that are strikingly consistent with statements made about these themes in books like *Beyond Good and Evil* (*SE* 5; *BGE* 6, 9, 36). The Meditation on Wagner even goes so far as to claim that "the most important question in all of philosophy is the extent to which things possess an unalterable nature and form" (*RW* 3). If Nietzsche found a partial solution to this question in the doctrine of the will to power, the *Untimely Meditations* may mark the most nascent stages of the development of that doctrine.
128. All quotations in this section appear in *DS* 7.
129. Strauss (1997, vol. 2, 51–55).
130. Young (2010, 170).

131. This is Nietzsche's paraphrasing of Strauss and Darwin.
132. Strauss (1997, vol. 2, 51–54).
133. Ibid., (1997, vol 2, 55).
134. *SE* 5.
135. Strauss (1997, vol. 2, 57).
136. *SE* 5.
137. *SE* 5.
138. Ibid.
139. *SE* 1.
140. *EH*, Books, Untimelies 1.
141. See Nietzsche's remarks on the ordinary person's relationship to the genius in *SE* 5: "we are not those human beings toward which all of nature presses onward for its own salvation."
142. Also see *SE* 5–6 where Nietzsche describes the "chain of fulfillable duties" that will lead to the production of the genius.
143. Strauss (1997, 161–168).
144. See *DS* 2 for Nietzsche's other Hegelian criticism of Strauss.
145. Strauss (1997, 161–168) and Young (2010, 170).
146. See Strauss (1997, 168) for Strauss's claim that he has "severed" himself from the old concept of God.
147. See Löwith (1964, 186): "Nietzsche's 'atheism' also underwent readjustment and finally proclaimed a new faith."
148. See *SE* 5.
149. The older Nietzsche would have objected more fervently to this marriage. See his "Attempt at Self-Criticism" in the *Birth of Tragedy*.
150. *DS* 8.
151. *DS* 9–10.
152. *DS* 12.
153. *HA*, Wanderer 131.
154. Schopenhauer, *On Authorship and Style*, sec. 282. Large (2012, 92) understands the significance of Nietzsche's criticisms of Strauss's writing in a similar way.
155. Nietzsche's critique of Strauss's writing is also meant to illustrate the decay of the German nation. Fichte observed in his 1808 Addresses to the German Nation that language has an "immeasurable influence on the whole human development" because it "unites within its domain the whole mass of men who speak it into one single and common understanding." When a people's language is alive and appreciated, Fichte said that a "spiritual culture influences life" which cultivates a unified national worldview. When a people's language is decaying, on the other hand, spiritual or intellectual culture fails to cultivate a common worldview and a "nation" exists only in name. Nietzsche thought

Strauss's writing style embodied the decay of the German nation because Strauss was praised as a classical writer even though his language lacked the beauty of a classic.

156. All quotations in the remainder of this section appear in *DS* 8 unless otherwise noted. Large (2012, 91) argues that section 8 is "the heart of [*DS*]" because it features Nietzsche's strongest objections to Strauss's attempt to turn science into a religion.
157. Taylor (1997, 68) identifies cultivated philistines, the scientific class, the commercial capitalist class, and the state as the four common enemies of true culture in Nietzsche.
158. See *BGE*, "We Scholars" for an expansion of the criticisms featured here. Also see Taylor (1997, 75): "As such, science can only ask and answer questions about empirical phenomena. Science does not even touch on life's most importance matters [...] much less provide them with answers. Moreover, science cannot provide mankind with *goals* [...]."
159. The second set of italics are mine. See *HL* 1: "History, conceived as a pure science and accorded sovereignty, would be for humanity a kind of conclusion to life and a settling of accounts."
160. Taylor (1997, 77) also identifies an artistic redemption of science in the early Nietzsche.
161. *UPW* 120, [23] 14. Cf. Nietzsche's remark on the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles in *SE* 3.
162. For additional support for this point, see the notebook entries in Breazeale (1992, 19). Golder (1990, 3–4) also connects Nietzsche project in *DS* to his work on pre-Socratic philosophy.
163. See Taylor (1997, 81–83) for a similar argument.
164. Breazeale (1992, 8).
165. It is even suggested that Wagner philosophizes through art in *RW* 9.



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