On Evolution and Exceptionality: Nietzsche and Chomsky, or Philosophers, Artists, Saints, and Syntax

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Abstract: This article looks at Nietzsche's bases for what makes humans unique. It then discusses the psycholinguism of Noam Chomsky and the capacity for generative language that is innate and uniquely human. It would be difficult to imagine two thinkers of the Western canon more dissimilar than Friedrich Nietzsche and Noam Chomsky, but both embraced categories of human exceptionality, an issue that lies at the heart of contemporary posthumanism. In his essay, "Schopenhauer as Educator," Nietzsche presents the Philosopher, Artist, and Saint as human paragons, and the qualities that make these distinct as categories also make them distinctly human as superlatives. I conclude with the view that, although humans can never be separated from or considered a type set apart from nature – and although Nietzsche categories ultimately fail as distinctions of kind (as opposed to degree) – our capacity for generative grammar (and therefore, abstract ideas whose formulation and expression rely on this fundamentally creative form of language), does make humans distinctive among living species.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Chomsky, psycholinguism, generative grammar, universal grammar, human exceptionality, posthumanism.

> What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god! The Beauty of the world; the paragon of animals… (Shakespeare 1623, 1974, 1156)
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> … now the history of mankind is only a continuation of the history of animals and plants; even in the profoundest depths of the sea the universal historian still finds traces of himself as living slime… He stands high and proud upon the pyramid of the world process.[1] (Nietzsche 1873, 1983, 107-108)
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> When we study human language, we are approaching what some might call the "human essence," the distinctive qualities of mind that are, as far as we know, unique to man… (Chomsky 1968, 2006, 88)

Introduction: Nietzsche and Human Exceptionality

One of Nietzsche's most conspicuous achievements is his contribution to the freeing of human values from a metaphysical base while salvaging the possibility

[1] A modern biologist would disagree with Nietzsche assessment that humans stand at or near the top of 'the pyramid of the world process.' Nature makes no such suppositions. On the other hand, no other animal possesses universal grammar. Humans are more complex in their intelligence and social behavior than any other animal, yet have fewer genes that a tomato.

of human exceptionality.[2] His reply to the implications of the modern void that followed in Darwin's wake, is among the most powerful. Despite its indifference, Nietzsche says 'yes' to the world with qualification, but without surrender. His answer to the moral abyss is one of aristocratic existentialism rather than the alternative of nihilism. In some respects he seems to have been on the right track, although later developments in biology and linguistics suggest that he got some of the details wrong.

Nietzsche's Philosophy

Nietzsche's life and career reflect the aesthetic duality of the *Apollonian* and *Dionysian* modes he introduces in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy.* He began his career under the metaphysical influences of Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner, and his early books, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Untimely Meditations,* are fairly typical academic works – dry and scholarly. He comes into this own in the 'experimental' aphoristic works of his middle period, *Human All Too Human, The Dawn, and The Gay Science*. Inspired, or rather, challenged, by the naturalism of Paul Rée, in these measured works his view is characterized by the abandonment of metaphysics while maintaining a broad view with cool detachment, as he works toward his mature philosophy.[3]

Beginning with *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche declares that the great individual, and by extension, the great civilization, must embody a synthesis, a dialog, between two archetypes, two distinct and antithetical aesthetic modes. These are the calm and rational self-overcoming of the *Apollonian* and the passion,

[2] British philosopher, John Gray, has criticized Nietzsche for this, along with modern humanistic attempts to distinguish humans from the rest of the living world. Gray believes that distinctions between humans and animals are not only artificial, but delusional, prejudicial, and misleading. He also believes that Nietzsche's preoccupation with transcendence, albeit of a terrestrial sort, places him within the Western Enlightenment and even Christian traditions, rather than as an "outside the box" nihilist or apostate of traditional morality. Rather than metaphysical transcendence, Gray believes that Nietzsche seeks terrestrial transcendence in the idea of human exceptionality. Nietzsche scholar and biographer, R.J. Hollingdale, believes otherwise. (Gray (2002, 2003, 44-47, 94, 136; Hollingdale 1973, 7-8). Evolutionary biologist, Ernst Mayr, believes that the human brain, and, like Noam Chomsky, our capacity for syntax, make us fundamentally different from other animals. (Mayr 2001, 252-55) The question is whether we can preserve a basis for morality without some kind of humanism. As Sartre, Camus, and others have observed, humans must act in a world without intrinsic meaning. Without deontological morals, we are left with humanism and nihilism, and nobody acts on a basis of nihilism.

[3] Nietzsche's friendship with Rée marks the shift from the metaphysical approach to values of his early period, to the naturalistic period of *Human, All Too Human,* and beyond. Nietzsche himself references his shift to "Réealism" during this period in *Ecce Homo* (Nietzsche 1888, 2005, 119-20). He also refers to *Human, All Too Human,* as "the monument to a crisis," the crisis of his split from Wagner and the ideas of Schopenhauer. (Nietzsche 1888, 2005, 115-20). See generally Robin Small (2007) as well as Small's excellent introduction to Rée (2003, xi-liii).

exuberance, and spontaneity of the *Dionysian.*[4] As one might expect, Nietzsche's most 'integrated' work – that which best integrates the *Apollonian* and *Dionysian, On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), is also the most succinct expression of his mature philosophy (one could argue that, temperamentally, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), although written before *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), are more in keeping with the excited, *Dionysian* works of 1888). It is in the *Genealogy* where he speaks out against the barbarism of passion untempered with reason (the "blond beast") as well as what he regards to be the shallow and reductive empirical and utilitarian psychology of the period ("these English psychologists").[5] Here, at his most balanced (i.e. balanced between his *Apollonian* and *Dionysian* phases), he shows himself to be neither an irrationalist nor a follower of the superficial psychology of his day.[6] By contrast,

[4] Nietzsche's duality may be seen as an optimistic transformation or recasting of Schopenhauer's categories of *Will* and *Representation.* (Schopenhauer, 1819, 1995; Russell, 1945 753, 755-59) It could be argued that Socrates is a problem for the Nietzschean dichotomy expressed in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and does not fit into either the *Apollonian* or the *Dionysian* categories, but rather constitutes a distinct third category. Walter Kaufmann discusses Nietzsche's ambivalence toward Socrates in *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist,* University of Princeton Press, (4 th ed.), chapter 13, "Nietzsche's Attitude toward Socrates." See also Karl Jaspers (1936, 1997, 35, 141, 183, 202, 335, 407, 417, 450f,) and R. J. Hollingdale, (1965, 1999, at 74, 77f, 84f, 135). Regarding Nietzsche's view of Socrates as the destroyer of life-giving myths, see Julian Young (2010, 170). Nietzsche discusses Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols* (2005, 162-66).

[5] For the "Blond Beast," see *On the Genealogy of Morals.* (Nietzsche 1887, 1996, 26). For "these English psychologists," see Nietzsche (1887, 1996, 11). Here too Nietzsche links, or rather lumps, Rée with the "English genealogists of morals," in section four of his preface (Nietzsche 1887, 1996, 5-6).

[6] *On the Genealogy of Morals* is brilliant as a work of analytical criticism in an area often not amenable to such analysis, ethics. In "Essay One" of the *Genealogy,* Nietzsche ruthlessly exposes the inconsistencies and shortcomings of Judeo-Christian ethics as founts of the slave morality. Although his view is perceptive, it is also somewhat limited in both its critique of traditional morality and its exposition of a new natural ethic based on a singular motivation, the Will to Power. This essay is striking in its persuasive force – Nietzsche builds his argument like an attorney with a strong case. But we also may notice that the picture he paints presents an incomplete view of both the traditional values he criticizes and the aristocratic values he espouses. He is reductive. His thesis, that the slave ethos reduces its opponents through cleverness and subterfuge, while the aristocrat acts forthrightly, is both original and insightful, and while it is persuasively argued, it is also narrow and does not do justice to the scope and complexity of the ideas or the members of both categories. Examples of the "English psychologists" Nietzsche criticizes, would include John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham (see the editor's endnote in Nietzsche 1887, 1996, 139). Examples of evolutionists that Nietzsche criticizes, include Herbert Spencer and his onetime friend and associate, Paul Rée, a philosopher and psychologist with a pessimistic, naturalist outlook (Rée, 1875, 1877, 2003; Nietzsche 2005, 146, 213; Nietzsche 2003, 150). In some respects, Rée's work has more in common with modern sociobiology than with the social Darwinism of his own time. I believe that Robin Small's assessment of Rée's importance on Nietzsche's development is correct and that Rée's

his later books, the 'excited' works of 1888, despite frequent flashes of brilliance and energy, are the least constrained, reveal an increasing abandonment of rational balance, and suffer from *Dionysian* bombast, excess, and overstatement. In these books the once rational scholar of 1872, writes like a manic or drunken poet.

But Nietzsche was a philosopher who sought to liberate values from metaphysics while not relinquishing that which is uniquely human to the tide of Darwinian naturalism that undermined the transcendent bases of traditional ethics and theology. In this sense, he is both a radical and a conservative. Even though Darwinian natural selection had freed human values from their metaphysical moorings, evolutionary theory was as much of a threat to Nietzsche's secular belief in human exceptionality as it was to traditional religion. Thus his assertion, "God is dead" – far from being the boast or battlecry of a nihilist – is potentially as much of a source of despair for a naturalist or modernist as it had been for believers in traditional religion.[7] In one sense it is the empirical

sociobiology, as an extension of the evolutionary theory of the time (Darwin, himself references ideas that Rée explores, like morality being a byproduct of multilevel selection. See Darwin, 1871, Ch. 5), constitutes a whetstone, upon which Nietzsche sharpens the blade of his mature philosophy. In this respect. Rée deserves more credit that he is sometimes given in stimulating Nietzsche's post-metaphysical outlook beginning in the mid-1870s. In *The Gay Science, Beyond Good and Evil, On the Genealogy of Morals,* and *Twilight of the Idols,* Nietzsche denigrates Darwin and Malthus as examples of the English thought of the day. However, Nietzsche's writing also reveals that he took Darwin's ideas more seriously than one might infer from his diatribes against English thinkers. (Kaufmann 1950, 1974, 167; Young 2010, 198). It should be noted that Nietzsche did not like earlier philosophers of the Anglo tradition either. In *Beyond Good and Evil,* he inveighs against Bacon, Hobbes, Hume, Locke, and Carlyle, stating that certain German thinkers "rose up" in a "struggle against the English-mechanistic stultification of the world." (Nietzsche 1886, 1973, 183-84) Even though Nietzsche scoffs at them, there were of course many important thinkers in the naturalist tradition including the Chevalier de Lamarck (1809), Thomas Robert Malthus (1798, 1993), the American Darwinist and philosopher of science, Chauncey Wright (1877, 1971; Duggan 2002; Madden 1963), and of course Darwin, himself.

[7] For "God is dead," see Nietzsche (1882, 1974, 108, 343; Nietzsche 1883, 1995, 12). Nietzsche was not the first German writer to declare the death of God. On natural selection as the primary liberating agent of values, see Hollingdale (1999, [1965], 72-73). Hollingdale underscores the double-edged nature of the Darwinian moral void by juxtaposing the pessimistic naturalism of Paul Rée to the exultant modernism of Nietzsche. For Rée, the "senselessness of existence was a source of despair; for Nietzsche, on the contrary, it became the ground of freedom. 'What would there be to create if gods existed'." (Hollingdale 1965, 1999, 91) The Darwinian debates and controversies of the late 19th century have been described as a "tempest in a Victorian teapot." The British logical positivist, A.J. Ayer, is just as frank in stating that the recognition of a world without an objective moral basis is nothing more than an acceptance of fact. As Ayer's biographer, Ben Rogers, notes, "Where [modernists like] Camus went wrong was in supposing that things could somehow have been otherwise – that life might have had some transcendent purpose independent of what we give it, and the other existentialists with him, had mistaken what is a logical necessity – the absence of transcendent meaning – for an empirical disaster." (Rogers 1999, 197). While Ayer is obviously correct, it is important to remember that in a social sense, the debunking of the basis of two millennia of religions belief was and is significant. In

acknowledgment of a state of affairs as well as a moral condemnation of modernity. The implications of the undirected order and progress of natural selection through chance and accident, had killed God in both a literal (thus underscoring the distinction between metaphysical and naturalistic explanations) and anthropomorphic sense. In doing so, it also removed humankind from its central position as His supreme creation and as a distinct category set apart from the rest of the living world. If the differences between animals and humans are ones of degree rather than of kind, then the idea of human uniqueness would be wrecked beyond repair. Humans would no longer be intermediary between the natural and supernatural – between animals and angels – or a distinct category unto ourselves – but only a better version of a simian.[8]

This then frames the twofold dilemma of naturalistic and modernist ethics: first, if there is no objective, rational, or deontological grounding for values, then what basis, if any, is there, to guide our actions and provide a model for how to live? Nietzsche develops his answer to this (his noble ethos) across his oeuvre, stating it most succinctly in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals.* Second, if human beings are naturally-evolved creatures, then any distinction or demarcation from the rest of the natural world must be artificial. This Darwinian observation and the controversies that arose from its implications may seem little more than "anthropomorphic conceit" to a modern philosopher (Gray 2002, 2003). But given traditional beliefs about the nature of human beings – to say nothing of our mental capabilities relative to those of even the most intelligent animals – such concerns are understandable.

In his intellectual biography, *Nietzsche, Psychologist, Philosopher, Antichrist,* Walter Kaufmann writes that Nietzsche resolved the first question by addressing natural selection, not in terms of its literal truthfulness, which he accepts, but

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Britain, the debates over evolution also had huge social ramifications. (Desmond 1994). The political pushback against science in our own time, suggests that the Victorian 'tempest' has become a reactionary hurricane in the modern United States. For a 19th century American perspective that embraces evolution, but which cannot relinquish conventional religious beliefs – and therefore sought to combine the two – see generally, Asa Gray (1963). To illustrate how deeply people felt about the undermining of the basis for objective morals, we need only consult a character as intelligent and rational as Sherlock Holmes (no doubt speaking for Arthur Conan Doyle). In *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box,* Holmes exclaims: "What is the meaning of it, Watson? What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend toward some end, or else our universe is rules by chance, which is unthinkable." (Doyle 1893, 1979, 213; Hollingdale 1973, 5). This shows the great detective to be a moral conventionalist and a man of his time. It is also striking to see Holmes beg his own question. As regards Nietzsche, we must remember that although he was a modernist, he loathed modernity and longed for an earlier, more aristocratic time. To him the modern was characterized by the leveling of Christianity, democracy, and science, which he believed resulted in human decadence and mediocrity. To Nietzsche, to level was to destroy what was great in human life. (Nietzsche 1886, 129-31)

[8] Along these lines, Mark Twain famously quips, "I believe that our Heavenly Father invented man because he was disappointed in the monkey." (Twain, 1987, 87).

rather as a potential hindrance, an obstacle to be faced, acknowledged, accommodated, and surmounted by devising a bold new frame. (Kaufmann 1974, 174-75, Hollingdale 1965/1999, 72-73; Young 2010, 197-98) In this sense, the severing of ethics from metaphysics provides an opportunity for Nietzsche to devise a program that not only would overcome the ethical implications of evolution, but would also be a source of liberation that would allow for greater actualization while preserving human exceptionality.

To Nietzsche evolution by natural selection might yield 'the fittest' in certain practical respects, but such individuals would not be exemplars of the qualities that make humans distinctive and superior.[9] The Darwinian 'fittest' would most likely be clever and able thugs that are exceptional at mere survival and the aggregate of lowly essentials and activities that would not be of interest or concern to the most exceptional individuals in more civilized circumstances. Unliked the enthusiastic social Darwinists of his time, Nietzsche does not equate evolution with 'progress.' To the contrary, he believes that it would be less likely to produce individuals who represent the higher human qualities. As Kaufmann observes:

> Nietzsche] grants that natural selection takes place, but he denies that it operates for 'progress.' Mediocrity seems more apt to survival than 'the singular higher specimens' – 'that which is more unusual, more powerful, more complicated.' Hence natural selection will not generate bigger and better philosophers, artists, or saints, only bigger and better brutes. (Kaufmann 1974, 1950, 174)[10]

Unlike a creature in nature, mere survival is not as important to the Nietzschean aristocrat as living well – acting on one's own prerogative as a part of the Good Life. From this it is fair to postulate that it is more desirable not to live at all, if one could not live well, or if one were suddenly thrust into a situation where the cultivation and actualization of his or her potential intrinsic qualities, was impossible.[11] As for resolving the question of what sets humans apart from the

[9] Nietzsche discusses the idea of great individuals as our highest examples in the second and third of his *Untimely Meditations,* as well as in *Beyond Good and Evil, On the Genealogy of Morals,* his *Later Notebooks,* and numerous other places. For interpretation of this the Nietzschean higher individual, see Kaufmann (1974, 1950, 311-314; Hollingdale (1965, 1999, 102-103).

[10] Henry Adams (1839-1918), an American historian and a contemporary of Nietzsche's, writes that U.S. presidential history suggests de-evolution, or a weakening of the breed, rather than the perfecting of desirable qualities. (Adams 1918, 266) Like Nietzsche, Adams saw through the optimistic Victorian notions of progress in general.

[11] Nietzsche regarded the great individual to be the product and subset of civilization of a given time and place. All great human achievement, therefore, is the result of a collective effort of both the great figure with a large supporting cast. In this sense, Nietzsche's view of history, is both elite and austere, inclusive and exclusive. All persons play a part and may be rightly proud, but it would be inaccurate to say that all individuals are of equal ability or contribute equally to the larger events of history. Given this, one can only wonder what would become of a potentially great individual born into circumstances in which actualization is not possible.

rest of the animal kingdom, the task for Nietzsche is simply to identify and isolate those characteristics that make humans different from other animals, determine the bases for such things, and identify the types that exemplify those qualities.

For Nietzsche the utility of the great individual is irrelevant relative to his intrinsic qualities. (Young 2010, 197) The times create the great individuals who then justify the historical and human context that created them. The purpose of a society is to bring fourth the great individual. (Nietzsche 2003, 181; Kaufmann 1974, 1950, 313-16; Russell 1945, 762) The only "utility" in history therefore, is not the "greatest good for the greatest number," but for the production of human excellence by "innumerable men who… have been suppressed and reduced to imperfect men, to slaves and instruments." (Nietzsche 1886, 1973, 193) In the shocking overstatement that characterizes much of *Beyond Good and Evil,* these ordinary people are the "foundation and scaffolding upon which a select species of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and in general to a higher *existence…*" This view of history as a process to enable excellence at the cost of all else seems ridiculously wasteful and illiberal relative to systems that allow people to rise on a basis of ability. Nietzsche also believes that the great individual must also be self-actualized. (Hollingdale 1973, 97) John Gray, takes the idea of singular self-realization/actualization to task, observing that there are any number of paths a person might meaningfully walk in life. (Gray 2013, 108-12). John Kaag also challenges Nietzsche idea of actualizing one's singular, "authentic self," one's "immutable essence." (Kaag 2018, 219-21).

There is a key distinction to be made between the Nietzschean aristocrat and the great man of hero worshipers, like Thomas Carlyle. The great individual to Carlyle is important because of what he or she *does,* whereas in Nietzsche's model, greatness is an intrinsic quality and need not have historical utility or practical manifestation. The Nietzschean individual is great because of who he *is* (and it Nietzsche's model, the great individual is usually a 'he'), regardless of instrumentality. Utility and success have nothing to do with the matter in his model, where the great individual is more than a high-level functionary. Once again we see Nietzsche's preference for a nuanced internal model over an external result-oriented one. For a discussion contrasting Nietzsche's model with that of Carlyle, as well as how civilization creates the individual whose intrinsic greatness justifies his times, see Kaufmann (1974, 1950, 313-16). Kaufmann succinctly expresses Nietzsche's disdain for accomplishment alone by noting "Worldly power alone may thus cloak the most abysmal weakness; value cannot be measured in terms of 'success'…" (Kaufmann, 1974, 1950, 280). In a more modern context, we should also distinguish between the Nietzschean aristocrat and the high-functioning careerists portrayed in the novels and philosophy of Ayn Rand. What matters most then to Nietzsche, is human experience as lived by exemplars of human excellence and the development of intrinsic qualities with the help of a large supporting cast of his historical context. In this sense, the great live greatly in a direct sense, while the ordinary people, who have individually and collectively contributed importantly, live vicariously. This is the value of history to him. In Nietzsche's scheme, aristocrats acts, not for results, but for the nobility of the action itself as a reflection of their noble nature. Nietzsche knew that every human life was puny – we live on a speck of dust for the blink of an eye in a cosmos without inherent meaning. Therefore, our actions cannot save us and utility is of no great import. By contrast, all acts are unique. If a life is dictated by the nobility of one's actions, then those actions live on eternally as points fixed in time and space. This would also be a plausible basis for Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence, even if the idea of living one's life numerous or an infinite number of times is not literally true. The idea is to make one's acts, one's life, stand as an eternal monument. As one can see, Nietzsche's mature thought on the great individual is closely tied to his vision of the Good Life. (Kaufmann 1974, 279-280). This is the life of forthright action on one's own prerogative, the life of the aristocrat of virtue outlined in *The Genealogy of Morals.*

Nietzsche's Categories: the Philosopher, Artist, and Saint

In his 1874 meditation, "Schopenhauer as Educator," Nietzsche, building on Hegel, identifies three human categories, or types, founded on superior qualities that are unique to human beings. (Nietzsche 1876, 1983; Kaufmann 1974, 175-76) These exemplars of human distinction are the Philosopher, the Artist, and the Saint, and the qualities they embody are the capacities for abstract thought, aesthetics, and self-control, or rather things that presumably make us human, and which make humans exceptional.[12]

The Saint – a category we might expect to be problematic for Nietzsche, a man who toward the end of his career self-identified as the Antichrist – is held up as an ideal of *Apollonian* control, and is superior in his or her capacity for self-restraint, inner strength, and discipline in overcoming (or sublimating) animal passions when such motivations are not called for. These are the qualities found in the Nietzschean idea of 'self-overcoming,' and stand apart from the supposedly spiritual qualities that form the basis of more conventional admiration for the ethos, faith, and insights of the Saint (Nietzsche 1886, 1973, ch. 2). Nietzsche shows in his middle works that those things which have been traditionally regarded as being metaphysical qualities are in fact "human, all too human," and

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[12] Regarding the Saint as a paragon of certain Nietzschean virtues, see Nietzsche (1876, 1983, 156-61) and Kaufmann, (1950, 1974 152, 164, 172, 175-176, 196, 203, 252, 280-281, 285, 311-312, 322.). For a short, cryptic reference, see Nietzsche (1881, 1997, 297, aphorism 294). See also Nietzsche's references to the Saint in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.*

Although some of the themes of Nietzsche's corpus remain consistent, his ideas evolved over a short but intense career. It should be noted that the model of the Saint, while always an ideal, was not in Nietzsche estimate, the most powerful of men – something that became apparent to him as his views came to favor a more Dionysian outlook. Kaufmann explains that the persons who live the good life are the most powerful and need not live the Saint's life of acetic denial. The greatest individual then, is the passionate man who controls his passions, ''sublimate" them, to use Kaufmann's word, into a great style and character. (Kaufmann, 1974, 279-281, 316)

Curiously, another American contemporary of Nietzsche's, and a thinker to whom he is sometimes compared, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841-1935), writes that he had once believed that the highest achievement of the universe, "was that it made possible the artist, the poet, the philosopher, and the man of science" – categories that are nearly identical to Nietzsche's. This belief was superseded in Holmes's mind by the view "that the chief worth of civilization was that it makes the means of living more complex," that "more complex and intense intellectual efforts mean a fuller and richer life. They mean more life. Life is an end in itself, and the only question as to whether it is worth living is whether you have had enough of it." See Holmes's speech to the Bar Association of Boston, March 7, 1900 (Holmes 1995, 499).

It is interesting that, although Nietzsche mature view of history prescribes that society be geared toward cultivating the great historical actor (note 11), in "Schopenhauer as Educator," he states that "It is the fundamental idea of *culture,* that insofar as it sets for each one of us but one task: *to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist and the saint within us and without us thereby to work at the perfecting of nature.* (Nietzsche's italics) (Nietzsche 1876, 1983, 160) In both instances, we see Nietzsche endorsing a model of history aimed at accentuating the qualities of our 'highest specimens.' See also "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." (Nietzsche 1876, 1983, 57-123)

therefore answers Camus's question of whether it is possible to have a saint without God in the affirmative.[13] With the example of the Saint, Nietzsche embraces what is human – and greatly human – after having conceded that the metaphysical base of its more usual interpretation to be illusory.

What was it that makes the Artist and Philosopher both uniquely human and superior in Nietzsche's estimation? The Artist has aesthetic prowess and the insight and power of feeling. He or she expresses the sensibilities of a civilization and is where the integration of the *Dionysian* and *Apollonian* takes place. The Philosopher is the truth-sayer, the instructor-by-example and critic who lays bare the untruths, dogmas, and lazy orthodoxies of civilization. He is the prophet to be embraced by a "very few" "free spirits" that were perhaps not "yet alive" doing Nietzsche's productive career (Nietzsche 1876, 1984, 5-6; Nietzsche1888, 2000, 1-2) Nietzsche sees science as an extension of philosophy, and his aphoristic philosophy is fundamentally experimental. (Nietzsche 1878, 1984, 7-8; Jaspers 1936, 1997, 180-81; Kaufmann 1950, 1974, 85-89, 182, 187, 217, 295, 362; Hollingdale 1965, 1999, 77) As Nietzsche graphically notes, the philosopher, in his estimation, is to be the remorseless "vivisectionist" of traditional values. (Nietzsche 1886, 143-44; Kaufmann 1950, 1974, 108-109, 111, 181, 187, 404, 414)

Jaspers sees the role for the Saint as problematic and one that Nietzsche could not have embraced for himself. (Jaspers 1936, 1997, 22, 125) Rather, Nietzsche sees himself in the terms in which he sees the Philosopher, as educator by example. He is the thinker in touch with future trends and who is willing and able to expose and cut out the misunderstandings of the present-day values. (Nietzsche 1886, 1973, 143-44)

In the same paragraph that he he introduces the Artist, Saint, and Philosopher, he writes, in criticism of Schopenhauer:

> To climb as high into the pure icy Alpine air as a philosopher ever climbed, up to where all the mist and obscurity cease and where the fundamental constitution of things speaks in a voice rough and rigid but ineluctably comprehensible! (Nietzsche 1876, 1983, 159-60)

[13] In *The Plague* Albert Camus writes "Can one be a saint if God does not exist?." (1948, 230-231). Nietzsche provides an answer to this question in the 1880s, and it is a qualified "yes." As Hollingdale notes, the value of the Nietzschean Saint comes not from the correctness of his or her metaphysical beliefs, but rather the strength that allows the saint to live up to her or her beliefs as assertions. In his *Notebooks 1942-1951,* Camus writes, "Heroism and saintliness, secondary virtues. But one must have stood the test." (Camus 1965, 98)
In his *Nietzsche, an Introduction to the Understanding of his Philosophy,* Karl Jaspers notes that Nietzsche's admiration of the Saint comes from the dissatisfaction of the later that forces him to look elsewhere (Jaspers 1997 [1936], 125-126). As Jaspers, quoting from *Zarathustra,* observes, the "religiosity was a misunderstanding on the part of those higher natures who were tormented by the ugly image of mankind" (Jaspers 1997 [1936]). Ironically, Kierkegaard, both a Christian and the first existentialist, does not believe in saints and in fact disparages them.

The solitary existence of the philosopher and Alpine imagery expressed here sounds very much like his later writings on the role of the philosopher (Nietzsche 2005, 72). In *Zarathustra* we also also see Nietzsche's preoccupation with the role of the philosopher as the "the proud and lonely truth-finder," *the Wanderer.* (Nietzsche 1883, 1995, Chapter 10). As several critics have observed, Nietzsche's character of Zarathustra, is actually a mostly fictional rendering of the Pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus, and his haughty tone is reminiscent of the earlier thinker. (Hollingdale 1965, 1999, 75-77; Hollingdale 1973, 172, 212; Russell 1945, 42, 761; Young 2010, 166-67) In *Ecco Homo,* Nietzsche writes that he "generally feel[s]warmer and in better spirits in [Heraclitus's] company than anywhere else." (Nietzsche 1888, 2005, 110). It is curious that the character of Zarathustra in some respects resembles a secular saint, and the old man he encounters on his descent from the mountains early in the story is referred to as "the saint." (Nietzsche 1883, 1995, 11).

Chomsky and Generative Grammar

But despite his insights into the moral and intellectual qualities of the Philosopher, Artist, and Saint, there are things we now know that Nietzsche did not, things that might have altered his choices or at least the terms or criteria by which we frame and evaluate them. For instance, modern biology has shown what many people have long suspected, that in addition to sentience, many animals have forms of social intelligence and morality (it is fair to say that social mammals, like dogs, are moral agents), volition/will, an intuitive understanding of ideas, a sense of humor, and even aesthetic appreciation. Certainly, some animals show a great capacity for discipline, self-control, patience, and the tolerance and overcoming of pain.[14] In

[14] The highest human category in Nietzsche's later philosophy – the *Ubermensch* – is an individual who embraces passion but who willfully overcomes base animal impulses, one who walks the line of the good life between hedonism and self-negation, using his control to avoid both extremes (self-overcoming). John Gray dismisses this concept as "the ridiculous figure of the Superman." (Gray 2002, 2003, 48). Sentient animals also have volition – a will (although it is more instinctual or "hardwired" than that of humans). Packs of wolves engage in power struggles very much like hardball politics and even war. Animals with strong volition – the alpha males and females of certain social creatures, again – vie for power, for dominance. Similarly, some animals exhibit impressive self-discipline and show resilience and determination allowing them to rise above their nature in a way that is identical to self-overcoming. For a discussion on biological mechanisms to account for the will, see Edward O. Wilson (Wilson 1978, 76-77).

On a side note, the Will to Power, is one of the central concepts of Nietzsche's psychology, and yet on close examination it is a problematic term. Although there is some degree of truth to this idea, if defined as the drive to get what we want or to assert our will, then as a motivation, we see its conceptual limitations. Quite simply, it is so broad that without further refinement and definition, it has limited explanatory power. Rather than a singular will, human beings are subject to a wide range of drives, impulses, and motivations often pulling in different directions, and which we somehow balance-out to make decisions. As Whitman observes, we "contain

other words, some animals have the characteristics of the Philosopher, Artist, and Saint. Although humans have these qualities to a greater degree, the distinction is just that, a matter of degree. The characteristics on which Nietzsche's exclusive human club is based, is not as exclusive as he believes. What then, if anything, constitutes a demarcation between animals and humans? Other than activities dealing with the world of abstract ideas (especially numeracy), the trappings of civilization, and morphological structures like the opposable thumb, there is one, and it makes the first two of these possible. Animals have some understanding and other cognitive functions, but they are intuitive or simple learned functions and not abstract or ideational in a sense that requires advanced external expression and formulation as in math and science. Nietzsche is right in that human beings can be distinguished from animals by identifying activities that are abstract as the basis for such a distinction. What is it that allows us to create (and discover), formulate, express, understand, and utilize abstract ideas? The answer is language based on generative grammar.

Here too animal science would at first glance appear to provide a foil to human uniqueness. Gorillas can be taught to sign and gray parrots can learn an impressive spoken vocabulary and can ask for things they want or need. Both can relate their inner mental states to a degree. The fact that cats, and especially dogs, have learned to accurately read human gestures and body language is well corroborated.[15] Many mammals, birds, and even some social insects like honey bees communicate with others of their species.[16]

But the existence of language in some animals is misleading. (Chomsky 1968, 2006, 60-61) Even though biologists can teach some animals a vocabulary of hundreds of words or signs, and dogs can read the human 'tells' of their masters better than people can, there is something that nobody will ever be able to teach them: recursion, or the innate capacity to be able to generate an unlimited number of meaningful sentences. In other words, while animal vocalizations always mean

multitudes." (Whitman 1855, 1959, 85), and Hume described the nonunity of the self more than a century earlier. See Hume, "Of Personal Identity" in his *Treatise* (Hume 1739-40, 1888, 251-63) And yet all of these disparate drives, as an aggregate, comprise 'the Will,' but it is hardly singular. In our post-Freudian world, the idea of a monolithic motivation like the Will to Power seems simplistic and incomplete. In addition to the qualities shared by humans and animals mentioned in the text, there is one other – humor. Biologists who work with octopi and many people who own dogs know that some intelligent animals do in fact seem to have a sense of humor. On the intelligence and emotions of animals, see generally Frans de Waal (2016 and 2019), and Carl Safina (2015). On animals and creativity, see David Obon (2013), and Predrag B. Slijepcevic (2023).

[15] For a popular treatment on how dogs read human body language, see Rob Stein's article "How Did He Learn to Speak Volumes with a Look?" *The Washington Post*, section A8, July 21, 2003. Given that dogs are fluent in interpreting human body language, but their cousins in the wild are not, it would seem that some aspects of the ability to learn language can evolve very quickly.

[16] There is an abundance of material on animal language in scientific journals and the popular media, in respect to honeybees. See also Karl R. Popper and John C. Eccles, (1978, 58-59, 308).

the same thing, human language is inherently creative. The structures of syntax of generative grammar, or the word order and innate understanding and use of sentence structure is what allows for the formulation of abstract ideas.

The demarcation between humans and all other living animals – the category of what we are capable of and what they are not – grows out of the impossibly complex functions of our psycholinguistic matrix. It is that which is distinctly human – which Chomsky calls our "human essence" – and which links us all together as a closely-related, even inbred, species. (Chomsky 2006, 1968, 88) I do not use 'impossibly complex' lightly here – the basis for human language is perhaps the most complex system that science has come across anywhere, and there is still no explanation of how it developed through the trial and error of natural selection. (Chomsky 1968, 2005, 59-61, 176)

There is an old trope stating that a monkey pounding randomly on a typewriter would eventually produce the play, *Hamlet.* While it seems possible that the monkey might eventually type a line from Hamlet, he will never be able to produce the whole play (although, given that Shakespeare was a human being – a simian – in a sense, a 'monkey' *has* already produced *Hamlet,* but it was hardly by a random process). Simply put, the neurophysiological structures that allow for human syntax are more complex than the alphabetical and syllabic arrangement that forms the play *Hamlet.* How could it have evolved so quickly? The difficulties suggested by this question does not mean that a naturalistic explanation or mechanism will not be found within a Darwinian framework, but as of now it eludes evolutionary explanation.[17] This impressive obstacle to the model that Nietzsche sought to address – Darwinian naturalism – is also what makes us distinct among living animals. As Noam Chomsky writes,

[17] Although the existence of natural selection is undeniable – we have witnessed it in the mutations of the AIDS and COVID-19 viruses and in strains of drug-resistant bacteria as well as with newly mutated species of fruit flies – very complex structures, attributes, and abilities like human language still defy evolutionary explanation.

The structure of the eye was once believed to be too complex to be accounted for by natural selection. There are several reasons for this. First, in order for something as complicated as the eye to function, there has to be a long sequence of enzymes and if any one of them is missing or malfunctions, the whole structure would fail. Despite the fact that certain primitive animals have photosensitive cells, it does not seem likely that a complex eye would have developed piecemeal and accidentally. In a curious case of convergent evolution, the eye of chordates, like humans, is very close in structure to the eyes of squid and octopi, even though the closest common ancestor was around a half-billion years ago. For a discussion of the homologies in the evolution of the eye, see Gould (2002, 1123-34). For the genetic commonalities of eye structures across the evolutionary tree, see Mayr (2001, 204-06)

Still, for the human psycholinguistic matrix to have developed solely through fortuitous mutations over perhaps a little as 50,000 years, seems impossible. It is anybody's guess where this debate will go. Near the end of *Language and Mind,* Chomsky refers to the "Great Leap Forward" theory, in which human language emerged with a single change around 100,000 years ago. (Chomsky 2006, 184).

> It is almost universally taken for granted that there exists a problem of explaining the 'evolution' of human language from systems of animal communication. However, a careful look at recent studies of animal communication seems to me to provide little support for these assumptions rather, these studies simply bring out even more clearly the extent to which human language appears to be a unique phenomenon, without significant analogue in the world. (Chomsky 1968, 2006, 58-59).

The means by which humans acquired its universal grammar remains a mystery. Perhaps other human species, like the Neanderthals and Denisovans, had something like it.[18] Moreover, if it evolved once, something like it could possibly happen again, and other animals could conceivably develop a similar capacity. But Chomsky is emphatic that no gradualistic evolutionary explanation exists, and that human language is both distinct and fundamental to our uniqueness as a species. He writes:

> When we study human language, we are approaching something that might be called the 'human essence,' the distinctive qualities of the mind that are, so far as we know, unique to man and that are inseparable from any critical phase of human existence, personal or social. (Chomsky 1968, 2006, 88)

Language is therefore not an invention or 'technology,' it is not an peripheral cognitive system or an external system or game that we learn the way we learn other things, but a fundamental part of what we are as conscious beings.[19] It is a thing internal and intrinsic to us. Just as we are inescapably moral beings (i.e. we could not escape morality even if we wanted to; to deny the existence of morality is still a moral statement), we are also fundamentally linguistic creatures.

If Chomsky is right, then Nietzsche is also right in the sense that it is our use of the combination of abstract and aesthetic ideas arising from our linguistic abilities – the intellectual qualities of the Philosopher and Artist – that makes us unique. Language is more than a "tool" that we use, and we use it for far more than simple communication. (Chomsky 1968, 2006, 60) It makes us who we are. But

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[18] See Ljiljana Progovac, "What Kind of Grammar did Early Humans (and Neanderthals) Command? A Linguistic Reconstruction."
http://evolang.org/neworleans/pdf/EVOLANG_11_paper_p1.pdf
See also Dan Dediu, Stephen C. Levinson, "On the Antiquity of Language: The Reinterpretation of Neanderthal Linguistic Capacities and its Consequences," Frontiers of Psychology, 2013, 5:4 397, *https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00397/full*.

[19] Chomsky believes that the human capacity language is not directly related to other forms of intelligence noting that it is "a species specific human possession, and even at low levels of intelligence, at pathological levels, we find a command of language that is totally unattainable by an ape that may, in other respects, surpass a human imbecile in problem-solving ability and other adaptive behavior." (Chomsky 1968, 2006, 9).

Nietzsche could not have known about the theories of modern scientific linguistics.[20]

Conclusion

Nietzsche, like Freud, Jung, and Adler (not to mention Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Zeno) is noteworthy in being a historical thinker whose ideas are still productive and the objects of ongoing debate and discussion.[21] Because of this, the scholar has the luxury of treating him as a man of his times when his ideas are dated and outdated (such as his insufferable comments about women), and as a thinker whose work is of continuing relevance. Much of Nietzsche still strikes us as highly original and modern, and, 135 years after his collapse on a street in Turin, even shocking. It is at times easy to forget that he was, chronologically at least, a man of another time.

Although Nietzsche's categories of human distinction, of what sets us apart, are impressive, they are still assertions based on observation and interpretation rather than on a set of transcendent values that exist by metaphysical or rational necessity. They are judgments. Still, they are suggestive of objective, naturalistic distinctions. Chomsky, it would seem provides much of the bases for these distinctions.

Nietzsche was ahead of his time in opposing a purely empirical approach to psychology (even though the thought of his friend, Paul Rée, is noteworthy in anticipating modern sociobiology and in inspiring Nietzsche in opposition (Small "Translator's Introduction" in Rée, 1875, 1877, 2003). These descriptive, empirical schools would flourish and persist in psychology. As regards linguistics, a 20th century development of this empirical approach, behaviorism, would fall out of favor with the rise of the theory-laden program of Noam Chomsky and others.[22] In a similar vein, the sociobiology of scholars such as Edward O. Wilson

[20] Chomsky was obviously not the first to suggest that deep grammar was innate or "hardwired." Although theories on innate ideas, to include language, had been around for centuries – they were a mainstay of European rationalist philosophy – there is no way that Nietzsche could have known about modern theories of generative grammar. An example of a pre-20th century tradition claiming that language is innate is the "Cartesian linguistics" of the Port Royal school of 17th century France. Theories on innate ideas and language were suggested, not only by Descartes, but by Leibniz, Rousseau, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and others. (Chomsky 1968, 2006, 5-6, 9-12, 15, 18, 62, 66-67, 71-73, 89, 153, 154, 159-167; Matthews 1997, 2007, 48, 179, 309). See also Leibniz's discussion of innate ideas and the deep structure of language. (Leibniz, 1690, 1996, 48-53, 57, 70, 109-11, 140, 330, 447, 480).

[21] It should be noted that Nietzsche desired "To overcome his age, to become 'timeless.'" See the preface to *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* Nietzsche 2005, 233).

[22] In spite of its limitations as an explanatory program, behaviorism was both important and productive in putting psychology into a rational, quasi-scientific frame (Matthews 1997, 2007, 39). It still finds followers.

has done much to illuminate how human ethics might have developed from an innate animal social intelligence.[23]

A mechanism for the evolution of universal grammar continues to elude science, but it is something that humans have that no other living animal has. It is difficult to think of two more dissimilar thinkers of the Western canon than Friedrich Nietzsche and Noam Chomsky. And yet we should regard Chomsky's revolutionary ideas as corroboration of Nietzsche's belief that there are characteristics that make humans a category set apart, even if how they came into being remains a mystery. And while this unique capacity should never be used to artificially separate us from the rest of nature or as an appeal for delusional mythologies and outlooks, to include humanism (a necessary assertion or fiction rather than a scientifically-based program), nor can we deny that this single distinction is real and unique, but not transcendent.[24]

We can hardly blame Nietzsche for not identifying the specific characteristic or its basis that accounts or our uniqueness, but the fact remains that he sensed it and was therefore on the right track in a more general sense.

Of course if human exceptionality is real, then it is also a mixed bag. The characteristics that make us unique, and which allow for science, math, and the arts, have also enabled us greatly as a plague species and help drive the success that has resulted in human overpopulation and the related crises of the environment. If solutions are to be found to these existential problems, they will likely be the product of our unique qualities as well.

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[23] In spite of apparently agreeing with the psycholinguism of Chomsky in his Pulitzer Prize - winning *On Human Nature* (1978, 63), in one of his later books, Edward O. Wilson expresses a view of language suggesting that Chomsky and behaviorists like B.F. Skinner are both partially correct, that language is both hardwired and learned. (Wilson 2012, 225-35). It should be noted that in spite of his importance as a sociobiologist, Wilson is not a linguist.

[24] On humanism as a non-scientific belief, see John Gray (2003, xi-xv, 3-4)

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